

Master thesis MA History; Political Cultures and National Identities

Writing by dictation

A study in the Soviet literary policy of the 1930's

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Table of Content:

Preface	page	4
1. Introduction		5
1.1 Introduction		5
1.2 Setting		7
1.3 Literary Policy		9
1.4 Writers		10
1.5 Conclusion		11
2. Seeing like a state		13
2.1 Introduction		13
2.2 Administrative ordering		13
2.3 High modernism		14
2.4 Authoritarian state		15
2.5 Prostrate civil society		16
2.6 Lacking mētis		16
2.7 Critique and model		17
3. Policy		21
3.1 Introduction		21
3.2 Historical background		21
3.3 Literature until 1932		22
3.4 The breach		25
3.5 Maxim Gorky		26
3.6 First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers		28
3.7 The Great Terror		29
3.8 Conclusion		32
4. Writers		33
4.1 Introduction		33
4.2 Anna Akhmatova		35
4.2.1 Overview		35
4.2.2 Reaction to socialist realism		38
4.2.3 Facing censorship		39
4.2.4 Union of Soviet Writers		40

4.3 Isaac Babel	43
4.3.1 Overview	43
4.3.2 Reaction to socialist realism	46
4.3.3 Facing censorship	47
4.3.4 Union of Soviet Writers	48
4.4 Mikhail Bulgakov	51
4.4.1 Overview	51
4.4.2 Reaction to socialist realism	52
4.4.3 Facing censorship	54
4.4.4 Union of Soviet Writers	55
4.5 Osip Mandelstam	58
4.5.1 Overview	58
4.5.2 Reaction to socialist realism	62
4.5.3 Facing censorship	64
4.5.4 Union of Soviet Writers	65
5. Conclusion	68
5.1 Introduction	68
5.2 And so we're back to mētis	68
5.3 Just critique?	73
5.4 Recommendations	74
Literature	76

Preface

In February of 2011 I jumped over the fence. Sometimes it seemed more like a leap. By studying History I entered an entirely new discipline with its own set of rules, a rather different scientific tradition and with distinct methodological approaches. I needed to adjust.

This became even more clear when in one of the first classes I attended I tried to make a point in the discussion. I used language and theoretical notions that were particularly traditional for the social sciences. A student in the class called me up on it by making a remark in which he expressed his aversion to social sciences. Practices used in social sciences in order to grasp historical works was not done. I felt I needed to prove myself and became even more determined to show the value that social sciences could offer to studying history.

Historians in my experience tend to approach a subject as *sui generis* instead of the social sciences' approach of trying to find commonalities in a subject. Unique in its own right, this tendency can sometimes block the expansion of knowledge.

I'm an adamant believer that, to create more comprehension, it is vital to open up to different interpretations. When a person would only be around like-minded people who read the same books, watch the same shows and so on; that person will follow the group. Thinking outside the box will become increasingly more difficult to do.

This thesis is therefore somewhat of a statement. I will make use of the works of a scholar in the field of Political Science & Anthropology whom constructed a theory on grand schemes made by states. Professor James Scott, the scholar whose theory I will be using, invited and advised students to look beyond the borders of their own study field.¹ In this thesis I'll be doing so by taking the example of the literary policy in the 1930's in the Soviet Union and combine it with his book 'Seeing Like a State'. I would hope to create apprehension of the policy structure in itself as well as the details of its effects in practice.

Before starting the introduction to this thesis I would like to emphasize that I am not under any impression that there is a best or single practice in historical research or even in scientific research for that matter. With this thesis I do however try to combine two disciplines in order to show that adversaries can complement each other.

¹ Scott, J. (May 2010). *James Scott on Agriculture as Politics, the Dangers of Standardization and not being Governed*. Date of reference 20 April 2012 at: <http://www.theory-talks.org/2010/05/theory-talk-38.html>

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Starting in the 1930's the Soviet state introduced a singular aesthetic for Soviet literature. The aesthetic was called: socialist realism. This aesthetic was part of the plan to create a homogenous Soviet population that was educated.

The development of the Soviet population into fragmented groups was undesired by the Communist Party. The Soviets wanted to create a model Soviet man, a streamlined version of a populace that completely surrendered to the state. The entire population needed to work together for the greater good; a strong developed Soviet Union. In order to become a highly developed and prosperous nation, the population needed to be educated as well as motivated. The Communist Party understood this perfectly and introduced trainings to increase literacy among the public.² The literature that needed to be read by the populace also came under increased scrutiny.

The Communist Party believed in creation of their utopia by coercion. In the case of the Communist Party during 1930's in the Soviet Union the use of coercive measures is abundantly clear. Their policies reached far. Literature was one of the methods they deployed in order to complete their utopian dream.

Due to the significance that was granted by the Communist Party to the literary policy the question arises whether the policy actually was effective? Effective in the sense that writers conformed to the standards and adhered to the policy. This is of course essential for the success of the policy. How did writers respond to the changes made by the Party? Conformation whether or not compelled by Party measures should in the mindset of the Party lead to Soviet utopian literature, but did it?

All writers were subjected to the usage of the socialist realist template. It became evident however that the literary intelligentsia in Soviet Russia didn't want to conform to this template just like that. Even during the height of Stalin's reign there were writers who deferred from party policy. This in its own right is extraordinary because the Soviet Union at that time could already be described as an authoritarian state. A style of government that concentrates power centrally and that is non-responsive to the people over which it rules. Non-compliance to directives from the state was not accepted. During the 1930's this became even more apparent when the Soviet state introduced 'the Great Terror'.³ The Great Terror refers to the period 1934-1941. In this period party policies were implemented with vigour and defiance of policies was punished severely. Literature was just one of an abundance of fields affected by this policy.

² Kurganov, I. (October 1951). The problem of nationality in Russia. *Russian Review*. Volume 10, no. 4, p. 255.

³ This name of the policy was given by the British historian Robert Conquest in 1968 when he wrote a book on the subject. Conquest, R. (1968). *The Great Terror*. Pelican Books: Middlesex.

The literary policy of socialist realism was set up like a directive. It was a clear instruction on how to work. The realm of the policy would be tremendous. The Soviet state itself was involved up until the highest level with making the policy into a success. No means were spared to achieve this end. Especially in the 1930's this relentless involvement in literature became evident. The scale of influence by the state in literature was of such magnitude that it is to be considered a grand scheme. With the death of Stalin, the Soviet Union was entering a new phase. Not just in the political sense but also in the literary sense.

After Stalin's death the strict implementation of this socialist realism policy was wavering.

The literary intelligentsia engaged in a period that was described as 'the thaw'.⁴ Even though the principles remained in force the writers established a gradual self liberation from them.⁵

The thaw represented a mere temporary situation, however the aesthetic as imposed by Stalin didn't prove to have the ability to remain the single and most influential method as it was designed.

The temporal relaxation came to an end under the leadership of Brezhnev. He placed new emphasis on the ideological character that Soviet literature needed to reflect. When his reign ended in 1982 a new era in Soviet literature dawned as the Union's new leader; Gorbachev allowed more freedom. The literary intelligentsia eagerly took advantage of the situation that resulted in the end of socialist realism as the main strand of literature.⁶ Over half a century socialist realism was the only aesthetic to be used in Soviet literature. By the end of the twentieth century this was no longer the case. The official ideological character of literature would no longer be taken seriously and was deemed completely outdated.⁷

The outset of socialist realism to become the single and most important form of literature had failed. The writers hadn't rolled over and played dead. The ending of the supremacy of the literary policy may have come in the 1990's but the first signs of failure of the policy came in the 1930's already.

Explaining failure in grand schemes is the main focus of a book called: *Seeing like a state*⁸ that offers a clear insight in the development of such schemes. James Scott the author of the book describes the actions of a state in such grand schemes as believers of high modernism. High modernism is the belief that it is possible to shape, change and form society. In essence high-modernism is the conviction that standardization, rationalization are methods to increase the manufacturability of society.

By making use of grand schemes and thus standardizing and rationalizing society the state gained more control over and power to construct society as they deemed fit. Like in the world of science it is often needed to simplify behaviour or developments in order to form a structure or detect a pattern.

⁴ The naming of the period that reflected the temporary levitation of strict implementation policy was named after a book written by Ilja Ehrenburg in 1954: *The Thaw*.

⁵ Brown, D. (1978). *Soviet Literature since Stalin*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p.7.

⁶ Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische Literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.30-32.

⁷ Ibid. p. 32.

⁸ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven.

Looking beyond the details to the bigger picture is necessary if you want to change society. By using grand schemes the state tries to make society legible.⁹ The theory by Scott is similar to that of the Austrian school scholars such as Friedrich Hayek on totalitarianism.¹⁰ However where Hayek focuses on the economy, Scott extends Hayek's view by introducing a more in-depth and causal model to explain the failure.¹¹ The major contribution that Scott offers the pre-existing totalitarianism school of thought is his claim that the actual constructors of the grand schemes (the so-called planners) aren't able to incorporate or react to diversity already in place, even when they recognize the existence of the diversity. Planners don't look for diversity, they simply want to implement. Where they do acknowledge the existence of complexities in place they are unable to respond due to curtailment they themselves are in because of cost-effectiveness and so on.¹² Scott takes the arguments made by the Austrian school and extends their implications as he suggests that the theory is applicable on numerous policy fields. With incorporating empirical evidence and case studies from a variety of countries he makes his theory sound. The question is whether his theory could be applied to literary policies? In his book most of the cases are concerned with the building of cities and agricultural policies. Scott does however take the position that the theory can be applied to many new circumstances and other fields of policies.¹³ It will be interesting to note whether his arguments could hold in this literary policy field as well.

In this thesis his work on grand schemes, and why they tend to fail, will form a sort of framework. This framework will be tested by making use of the accounts of the four writers. The four writers will form the empirical cases to which the theory of Scott will be tested. The writers provide the necessary insight in the practice of the policies. Furthermore they are the ones that will have firsthand knowledge of the lengths to which the Soviet government were willing to go to enforce the literary policy. This brings us to the actual objective of this thesis:

To understand and gain insight in how the literary policies of the 1930's in the Soviet Union actually developed.

1.2 Setting

Before we can go into detail of the literary policy and the empirical cases of the writers, it is important to understand in what type of societal background the policy is set. This background is essential in

⁹ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.2-4.

¹⁰ Hayek, F. (2001). *The Road to Serfdom*. Routledge Classics: London. (first published: 1944).

¹¹ Hardin, R. (2001). 'Books in Review: James C. Scott's *Seeing like a State*.' *The Good Society*. Vol. 10, No. 2. p.36-39.

¹² Scott, J. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.141-142.

¹³ Hardin, R. (2001). 'Books in Review: James C. Scott's *Seeing like a State*.' *The Good Society*. Vol. 10, No. 2. p.39 & Scott, J. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.4.

understanding the reactions of particular groups within society, such as the literary intelligentsia, to policies.

The incredible grip the Communist Party had on society, and the difficulty for individuals to break free from the Party's demands; is almost impossible to comprehend. In the Soviet Union the control of the government, which was the Communist Party at that time; was so extreme that even diaries were to be kept private at all cost. The boundaries between public and private life was non-existent for everything was public life. Nothing was left untouched. Adherence to the government's wishes or better yet demands seemed essential for survival. In case authorities were led to question one's effort for the great communist society one should prepare themselves for the worst.

Denunciations were part of daily life and perceived to be part of a strategic plan during Stalin's reign. Families were broken up due to this struggle. Mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters were sent to Gulag camps, exiled to face nature's most ferocious forces. Family that was left behind needed to choose: break all ties with the family member who was exiled in order to continue day to day life or to plead to the authorities for the return of their family members. The latter case could put them in harm's way. Defiance or even suspicion of not completely aligning with the Soviet's desires could become a question of life or death. The threat of this happening would and did enslave society.

People were to change habits, communication and so on. During the reign of Stalin, the radical use of fear and terror intervened in the Soviet Union's day-to-day public and private life. This would ultimately lead to an entirely new people. In 2007 a name for the people that arose was conjured up by historian Orlando Figes. The Soviet society is captured in the name: 'The Whisperers'.¹⁴ The name is explained by the historian himself on his personal website: "There are two words in Russian for a whisperer: 'shepchushi' for someone who whispers not to be overheard; and 'sheptun', originally a Gulag term, used for those who whisper behind people's backs - informers to the Police. That is why I called the book 'The Whisperers' - because it's about a whole society made up of whisperers of one sort or another"¹⁵.

This explanation clearly shows the effectiveness of the measures and policies of the Soviet rulers. The creation of a society filled with whisperers signifies the place the party had in day to day life.

In the 1930's the entrapment of citizens seemed to be consolidated. Few dared to question or try out the boundaries that the Soviet policies had set. This all was deemed necessary by the Communist Party in order to be able to create the Great Communist Society; in essence a utopian worldview on how the Soviet Union in the future should be organized. Ruling with fear and terror were the means the Soviets used to reach their goals in creating a new Soviet man.

¹⁴ Figes, O. (2007). *The Whisperers: private life in Stalin's Russia*. Penguin Books: London.

¹⁵ Figes, O. (n.d.). *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia: interview*. Date of consultation October 14th 2011 at: <http://www.orlandofiges.co.uk/TheWhisperers.php>

A population that would not protest the state and that would furthermore work for the state in reaching their goals.

1.3 Literary Policy

In creating this population the Soviet state formed a literary policy. The population needed to become literate. This was deemed essential for the other utopian wish of the Communist Party; the aspirations to become a world-power in economic sense.

This required a top-notch sophisticated economy. High end industry and modern agriculture were the tools to make the aspiration reality. Stalin didn't forget the importance of the workforce in this scheme. Their effort was essential for making his aspiration even plausible. This is why motivation was also on the radar of the Soviet leaders.

Policies to raise the level of motivation were to be put in place mostly by making use of the Soviet Union's literary intelligentsia. The literary intelligentsia was considered a tool by Stalin. He made use of them whenever he could. While on the one hand the Soviet people were instructed into becoming literate the Soviet policymakers at the same time developed guidelines for writers as well as controlling organs. The content of the work of writers became under the influence of Soviet's utopia furthermore organizational structures were set in place so that the Soviet bureaucracy could implement and control the adherence of the newly developed policies.

The aesthetic of socialist realism was formed in 1934. It instructed the intelligentsia how to work. Writings, paintings, plays and all other artistic forms (and even academic work) needed to reflect the progress that the Soviet Union under communist leadership had seen. The aesthetic was propagandistic in nature. The aesthetic was reflexive; the communist leadership requested the literary intelligentsia to adhere to a lifelike representation and total realism that reflected a world that had already achieved the utopia.¹⁶ The aesthetic would enable the making of the Soviet man.

Another way for the Communist Party to control what their population would read was actively getting involved in what was to be published.

Censorship before a book was published was common practice as well as withdrawing already published books from bookshops. Selling of the books would simply become forbidden. Writers would also be scrutinized if they didn't implement the aesthetic of socialist realism correctly. This would mean that the writer in question would have had a difficult time in getting his writings published (or worse). A final way in which the literary policy was constructed was by the power given to the central organization the Union of Soviet Writers. The Union of Soviet Writers were capable of assigning houses to writers and giving them financial aid. Writers were made almost dependent of the Union of Soviet Writers. The Soviet state was very much involved in the literary policy. At different

¹⁶ Dobrenko, E. (2011). Utopias of return: notes on (post-) Soviet culture and its frustrated (post-) modernisation. *Studies of Eastern European Thought*. Volume 63, p. 170.

levels in the literary process they had created measures to intervene in the writing of the writers. But the measure that went the furthest was the usage of the means of terror.

The importance that the Communist Party acknowledged to the literary policy is probably most noticeable by looking at the fate of their instruments. The relatively speaking greatest toll during the Great Terror befell the writers. The literary intelligentsia was affected more than any other group.¹⁷

1.4 Writers

In the 1930's Stalin's reign of Terror had become a measure to enforce the grand scheme of creating the utopian communist society he so desired. The Terror itself was a full-scale operation in order to sustain power and create a new nation. Therefore it is even more incredible that there were people who actually choose to defer from party policy. Even if one had chosen not to defer and/or was a party member, their life wouldn't be safe either.

The choices and responses of four individuals will form the test of the literary policy. Deference and/or conformism are the options from which they could choose. Four distinct writers will form the cases of this research. These writers are, in alphabetical order: Anna Akhmatova, Isaac Babel, Mikhail Bulgakov and Osip Mandelstam. These four are, to this day, considered to be among the best literary minds of Russian history. They represent a part of the intelligentsia that remained in the Soviet Union. They were of the same generation of writers furthermore they were exposed because of their popularity among Soviet citizens as well as rulers. The four writers wrote in different styles and genres and furthermore they choose differently between the two options which is most helpful in achieving the goal that was set for this thesis; to understand and gain insight in how the literary policies of the 1930's in the Soviet Union actually developed.

The cases of the writers will be formed so that they can give a clear insight in the workings of the literary policy on different levels. The reaction of the writers to the aesthetic that was imposed on them will form the first level. The second level is the response to censorship practices. The encounters with the Union of Soviet Writers will form the third level of inquiry. The sources that allow this inquiry to be fulfilled will stem from a variety of backgrounds.

By making use of primary sources on the work and life of the four great literary minds it will be possible to reconstruct how they perceived and underwent the literary policy of that time. The primary sources include personal accounts and literary work. In the case of Isaac Babel, for instance, his third wife wrote a book called: 'At his side'.¹⁸ It offers great insight into the last seven years of his life. Due to his third and last wife lots of his writings were preserved as well as her own recollections. The letters Babel wrote to his family abroad and were published by his daughter will also offer a great deal

¹⁷ Conquest, R. (1968). *The Great Terror*. Pelican Books: Middlesex. p.437; Getty, A. & Manning, R. (1993). *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p.228.

¹⁸ Pirozhkova, A. N. (1998). *At His Side: the Last Years of Isaac Babel*. Zoland Books: Cambridge.

of information about the writer. For the poet Mandelstam there are no less than three memoirs. The author of two of them is his wife Nadezdha¹⁹, the third is written by a close friend of the family Emma Gerstein²⁰. In the book by Emma Gerstein she recalls her encounters with Mandelstam and tries to explain his way of reasoning. Her memoirs were welcomed with a shock into Russian literature. The widow of Osip had published her own recollections on the life and prosecution of Mandelstam in the 1970's. The picture that Gerstein painted was very different from her accounts.²¹

The only female poet that is addressed in this research is Anna Akhmatova. Unlike her male counterparts, she managed to outlive Stalin. Her confidant Lydia Chukovskaya wrote a diary on their encounters.²²

The last writer that will be discussed is Bulgakov. A critical biography by Milne formed the starting point.²³ There is no memoir written by Bulgakov or a close relative or friend; however numerous fragments and even entire letters are found in several books. A secondary source that offers us great insight into the authors dealings with the authorities is written by Vitaly Shentalinsky and is called: 'Arrested Voices'.²⁴ He was granted access into the NKVD files concerning the writers and has published a generous amount of the files in his book. Interrogations and letters are included. By combining the primary sources with secondary sources we will be able to reconstruct the actual reflections of the literary intelligentsia to the policy.

1.5 Conclusion

This thesis is focused around the objective; to understand and gain insight in how the literary policies of the 1930's in the Soviet Union actually developed. It was formed as a grand scheme that had several levels of intervening in the literary process of publishing and working. The grand scheme as set up by the Communist Party failed. In order to answer the question why it failed, the book by James C. Scott will form a framework to which the cases of the writers will be tested.

Scott is of the opinion that his theory is applicable on other policy fields than the one he uses in his book. In this thesis we will look if this argument could hold in case of the literary policy of the 1930's in the Soviet Union. In order to do this we will first need to form a clear framework of James Scott's theory. After which we will need to dig deeper in the historical background of the literary policy as well as the practical arrangements that follow from the policy. The cases of the writers will form the ultimate test. On the basis of three distinct forms of encounters between the writers and the literary

¹⁹ Mandelstam, N. (1999). *Hope Against Hope*. Random House Publishing: New York. (First published in 1970). & Mandelstam, N. (1981). *Hope Abandoned*. Scribner: New York.

²⁰ Gerstein, E. (2004). *Moscow Memoirs*. Overlook Press: New York. (First published in 1998).

²¹ Rounding, V. (2004). *Keepers of the Blame*. Date of consultation March 31 2011 at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/may/15/featuresreviews.guardianreview12>

²² Chukovskaya, L. (1994). *The Akhmatova Journals*. Farrar Strauss & Giroux: New York.

²³ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁴ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York.

policy we will be able to finally form a conclusive response to whether the argument of Scott holds. The subjects that will be discussed are: the reaction to the imposed aesthetic, the response to the censorship practices and the encounters with the Union of Soviet Writers .

2. Seeing like state

2.1 Introduction

Scott might offer insight in why the literary policy didn't work out as planned. The writers will form the cases however the theory by Scott could be useful in explaining the workings of the policy.

In his book; 'Seeing like a State', he gives an explanation for the failure of so-called grand schemes. Grand schemes are designed plans by authoritarian state action, which entail the creation of a new status quo in a comprehensive yet influential manner. Grand schemes are based on the notion that society is makeable. In other words you can mould society in any shape or form if you so desired. The book by Scott is based on the aim to "[...] provide a convincing account of the logic behind the failure of some of the great utopian social engineering schemes of the twentieth century."²⁵

According to Scott there are four distinct characteristics that need to be present in order for a grand scheme to fail, these are: administrative ordering, high modernism, authoritarian state and a prostrate civil society. These arguments concur with the earlier work of Friedrich Hayek in his work: 'The Road to Serfdom.'²⁶ Scott however differs from the work of Hayek in that he bases his research on empirical evidence and that he goes into more detail in explaining the explanatory factors of the theory. Scott gives more in-depth explanations as to why planners of grand schemes act as they do. Furthermore where Hayek as a progenitor of the Austrian school struggles with the cartesianism stance for explaining the focus on rationalizing society and the arrogant belief of restructuring society, Scott introduces high modernism.²⁷

In this chapter the theory of James Scott will be explained by first defining the four different characteristics. After which the characteristics of a grand scheme will be compared to the literary policy, this will form the justification for testing the theory.

2.2 Administrative ordering

A grand scheme of arranging a society (or even parts of a society) in a particular way is only possible when information is available. Information of state's subjects is essential if this state is ever wanting to create society as it deemed fit. By creating more knowledge of their subjects the state could make up a standard grid by which it would then be able to centrally monitor and control these same subjects. The state focused increasingly on making society legible and did so by dividing society into measurable units such as age, occupation, living arrangements, income and so on. In other words this means that

²⁵ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* . Yale University Press: New Haven. p. 4

²⁶ Hayek, F. (2001). *The Road to Serfdom*. Routledge Classics: London. (first published: 1944).

²⁷ DeLong, B. (15-3-1999). *Forest, Trees and Intellectual Roots*. Date of consultation June 18, 2012 at: http://econ161.berkeley.edu/econ_articles/reviews/seeing_like_a_state.html ; Hardin, R. (2001). 'Books in Review: James C. Scott's Seeing like a State.' *The Good Society*. Vol. 10, No. 2. p.36-39.

the state wanted to be able to control society. The state could only control society if it knew enough of society which would make it easier to intervene in that same society.

By making society legible the state would be able to standardize and rationalize society as a whole. This process would create more power for the state to enhance its own capacity.²⁸ By ordering society and subjects by means of standardizing the state is able to simplify the complexities within this same society, and even intervene in it. Any substantial state intervention in society requires the invention of units that are visible for the state.²⁹ In the case of standardization in society one could think of the creation of literacy campaigns, standardized legal discourse and the creation of city centres. By methods of rationalization and standardization the state would be able to create a terrain, products or even workforce that was more legible and hence more equipped to be manipulated.³⁰

The manipulation of society is made possible by the ordering of society. By itself standardization can only enhance state capacity. To actually deploy this ability there has to be a belief in the standardization process and the effects that it can have on society. As Ernest Gellner already successfully argued this belief is a prerequisite to any state. As he defines a state is the institution specifically concerned with the enforcement of order.³¹ However this form of order is a too narrow description as to what Scott means with order. The ordering of society is not just to make the state the only one to use coercive force but also to be able for the goals the state sets to be met. For example imagine a box of Lego-blocks that is scattered across the room. Gellner's proposition is that the state can, by ordering, make sure that the blocks form a straight line. In the explanation by Scott, the state can do more than that. If the belief in the standardization process is present, the state can build something constructive with the same blocks; a house for instance.

2.3 High Modernism

This belief in what standardization can bring according to Scott is called high modernism. High modernism is not a definition of a particular time rather than it is a belief system. As Scott explains: "What is high modernism then? It is best conceived as a strong (one might even say muscle-bound) version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and in North America from roughly 1830 until World War I. At its centre was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of

²⁸ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid. p.183.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 2.

³¹ Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca. p.4.

human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws.”³²

Scott references to a period of industrialization but at the same time it doesn't restrict high modernism to this period it does pinpoint the starting point of the ideology that is high modernism. Scott explains a clear link to this period because of the tremendous technological as well as scientific progress that transpired during that particular time. During this period it would not have been hard to imagine a transformation of grand scale in other areas as well. The fact that Scott uses the term 'linear', to describe the direction of the expected progress is a clear signal that supports the increase of belief in ever larger transformations.

High modernism is thus more a belief system; an ideology that largely relies on the legitimacy that was provided by science and technology. Rationality, control and orderly organization form the foundation of the vision of high modernism. The ideas that come with high modernism can be defined as the sky is the limit. With science and technology in their slipstream believers in the ideology of high modernism were convinced of reaching their own utopias. To be able to form these utopias's state action was required.³³

2.4 Authoritarian State

A belief that technological and scientific standardization could lead up to a utopia is in itself insufficient for the actual creation. State action is needed. Because the state has the tools in hand to centrally control and monitor, it is the ultimate actor to enforce large changes upon society. According to James Scott the combination of the two previous elements in combination with an authoritarian type state is “potentially lethal”.³⁴

This type of state has the ability of the usage of a large body of coercive power that it can use in order to follow through on the utopian dreams. The capacity this type of state embodies is essential to actually implement these large scale and far reaching schemes.

Grand schemes are designed to form a new status quo. A break from previous traditional policies or even society is its core. An authoritarian state is a type of state that is particularly concerned with the creation of a new order. By making use of the coercive power, this state type is the most likely candidate to bring about huge utopian changes in people's work habits, living patterns, moral conduct and worldview.³⁵

For an authoritarian state such schemes are even essential because they, in theory, mobilize the people around the governmental goal. The highly centrally organized character of this type of state is another element that would be a rather fertile ground for actually implementing grand schemes. Because of

³²Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p. 89-90.

³³Ibid.. p. 4-5.

³⁴Ibid. p. 5.

³⁵ Ibid. p.5.

this central aspect the level of administrative ordering is most likely far more efficient than a state that is centrally controlled to a lesser extent.

Failing of these grand schemes implemented by an authoritarian state is also lurking in the background due to the coercive power that is used. The use of coercive power to instruct society is mostly necessary because there is a belief that the people will not comply willingly. Their free will would prevent them from joining in the effort. The usage of coercive power undermines this free will but can not banish it out altogether, meaning that there will always be a likelihood that the people would stand up against this coercive power. This can be done actively by protesting or refusal of participation but it can also be done passively by means of an Italian strike for instance. This brings Scott to present a fourth element that is needed for a grand scheme to fail.

2.5 Prostrate civil society

Another element that Scott links to the failing of state plans is the role of civil society. When a state is pushing for a particular grand scheme to be implemented, it can only do so by the willingness of the state's civil society. If this civil society is not in agreement with the propositions by the state, but at the same time is lacking the means to resist them, the schemes will be coerced into action.

A weak civil society due to its own doing or imposed into the position by the state is unable to change the state's way.

Using a strictly top-down approach in order to create a utopia is sidelining the civil society. It downplays the power and knowledge that is incorporated within civil society. With a weakened civil society's resistance to such grand schemes is futile because of the willingness of the authoritarian state to use all of its abilities and coercive power.

The incapacitated civil society thus offers the state a levelled terrain on which they can then start building their utopian visions.³⁶ With little to no obstruction the state can combine the previous three elements and create a grand scheme. The development of a grand scheme is designed on these four mentioned elements, as Scott sums up:

“(..) the legibility of a society provides the capacity for large scale social engineering, high modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the levelled social terrain on which to build.”³⁷

2.6 Lacking mētis

What is striking to note is that a grand scheme is only based on information gathered by the state and created for the state. This narrows the scope of the state and blinds them for other arrangements that might be useful to take into account in order to be able to effectively implement or even create plans.

³⁶ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.89.

³⁷ Ibid. p.5.

In the case of grand schemes the state involved displays a great ignorance. The state approaches society as if it is a *tabula rasa*. A clean slate on which it can write as it deems fit.

With the usage of the right units of information the creation of a future utopia with using standardization processes is attainable, is the core perception. A society is however not as clean as the state would like it to be.

Society is bound by tradition, organizational settings, economic factors, natural resources and so on. By not incorporating these restricting features of society, the state disregards the status quo and tramples on it. The state wants comprehensive units that make society legible yet not more understandable. The administrative ordering is oversimplifying society by not looking into the broader settings of the units. The ideology of high modernism disregards these settings completely. The authoritarian state and the prostrate civil society pave the way for the implementation of disaster.

What grand schemes miss is the expertise of people in the field. These experts have knowledge of the broader settings and are aware of how to work within the boundaries that these settings may form. This particular kind of knowledge is called; *mētis*.

“[*Mētis* is] knowledge that can only be required by long practice at similar but rarely identical tasks, which requires constant adaptation to changing circumstances.”³⁸

Mētis can be defined as practical knowledge. It is aware of and works with the situation at hand which makes this type of knowledge far more adaptable than the rigid structures or grids that the state would like to impose. By disregarding local knowledge the grand schemes are based solely on static knowledge that it oversimplifies situations. Any grand scheme designed to form a new status quo is inevitably more complex than the administrative ordering can devise. Scott argues:

“By themselves, the simplified rules can never generate a functioning community city or economy. Formal order, to be more explicit, is always and to some considerable degree parasitic on informal processes, which the formal scheme does not recognize, without which it could not exist and which it alone cannot create or maintain.”³⁹

Local practical knowledge of insiders is evidently needed to not just impose but make the grand scheme a success. Due to the ignorance of the ideology of high modernism, the ego of the authoritarian state and the tools granted by both a prostrate civil society and the administrative ordering the *mētis* is disregarded. This disregard actually leads up to the failing of the grand scheme. The *mētis* is to be considered the missing link.

2.7 Critique & Model

The theory of Scott is not free of critique though. One of the major critiques of Scott is that he doesn't acknowledge the works of Hayek. He portrays his insights as if he is the first to conjure up this way of

³⁸ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.177-178.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.309.

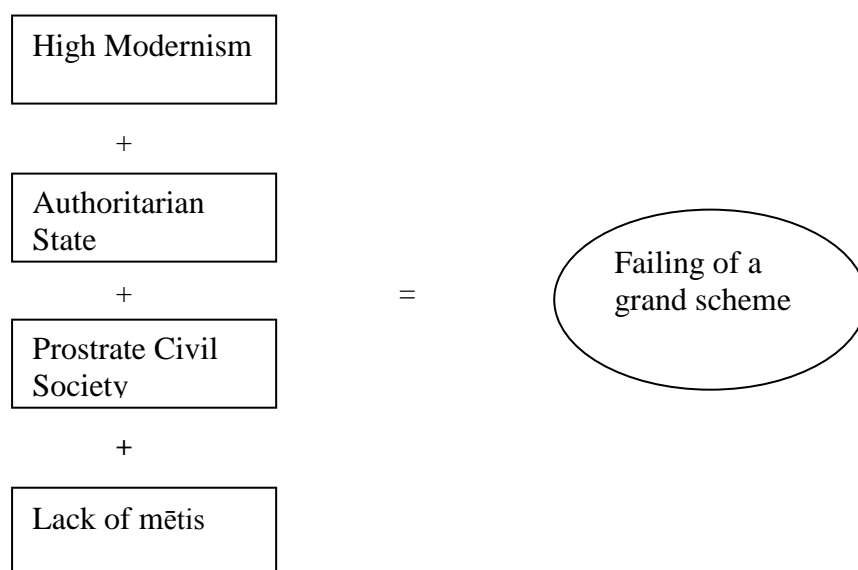
reasoning were it is clear that he owes much credit to the Austrian School in general and Friedrich Hayek in particular.⁴⁰ The second critique focuses mainly on the claim made by Scott that his work can be applied to an extended number of policy fields. By doing so he is making his theory so general that it might be applicable on everything but explain nothing at the same time.⁴¹ Scott doesn't go into great detail of the policies he uses to base his theory on. He might thus miss out on important particular arrangements than could prove to be useful in understanding why a particular scheme fails. The general line might be too much of an oversimplification of events that lead up to the failing of schemes.

In this thesis we will reflect on these criticisms after we have tested the general framework. This is needed in order to understand if the theory is adequate in explaining the failing of the literary policy.

Returning to the assessments of Scott it is necessary to form a framework.

After discussing the explanatory aspects that form the theory it is essential to place them in a model. As we have seen Scott argues that there need to be four elements present in order for a grand scheme to fail. All these elements have to be present at the same time. This is summed up in the figure.⁴²

Figure 1:



Because we want to test the theory of Scott, we need to make sure that all the elements are actually present. Whether or not high modernism is present in the literary policy can be traced back at the most

⁴⁰ DeLong, B. (15-3-1999). *Forest, Trees and Intellectual Roots*. Date of consultation June 18, 2012 at: http://econ161.berkeley.edu/econ_articles/reviews/seeing_like_a_state.html

⁴¹ Hardin, R. (2001). 'Books in Review: James C. Scott's Seeing like a State.' *The Good Society*. Vol. 10, No. 2. p.36-39.

⁴² The figure is composed by the author of this thesis but is derived from the theory of James Scott as presented by him in his book: Seeing Like a State.

early mission statements of the policy. To assess whether or not we are dealing with an authoritarian state we need to investigate how the state is making sure the policy is adhered. The third element can be derived from the reaction of the general public to the policy. And the fourth element, which is considered to be the most important we will investigate by using the experiences as put forward by the writers.

Before we can actually enter into this endeavour we need to make sure that the policy itself is a grand scheme. A grand scheme is an all encompassing standardized policy plan that enables the creation of a utopian dream; an ambitious and pretentious aim to improve the overall human condition. This definition provides us with two definite aspects that need to be present: an all encompassing policy plan and an ambitious aim of this plan.

The bulk of Soviet literary policy in the thirties is concentrated around the formation of an utopian idea of recreating the literary scene. This recreating of the literary scene was designed to improve the overall human condition. The creation of the Soviet man would be the improvement of the human condition. Its establishment would not only be in the best interest of the people itself as well as the creation of a world-power in the even bigger picture according to the Soviet state. This is most definitely to be considered an ambitious aim. The all encompassing policy to actually achieve this aim was also present as different levels of policy implementation can be derived from the literary policy. These elements concur with the elements that Scott identifies in his book.

By enforcing a new aesthetic onto the literary intelligentsia the state formed the standardization needed for a grand scheme. The administrative ordering consisted of the creation of the Union of Soviet Writers, which was able to define writers as single units. The third element the authoritarian state that was willing to use his entirety in coercive force is definitely present in this literary policy. Even though the Great Terror was not solely invented to target the intelligentsia it is clear that they did suffer with a relatively high percentage.

Due to the use of the Great Terror, the state had weakened civil society. A nation of whisperers arose rather than a society that was able to stand up against the designed policies. This makes out the third element of Scott's theory: the existence of a prostrate civil society.



Let books invade every house bringing in light and knowledge

3. Policy

3.1 Introduction

In order to be able to grasp how the literary policy was set up by the Soviets it is crucial to look back. In this chapter a quick overlook of past events will then be followed by going into the formation of the literary policy.

After a summarizing introduction that will explain the overall context, the following paragraph will then zoom in on policies involved with literature. Organizations and main actors of those institutions will not be overlooked. The aesthetic that was to be pursued will furthermore be explained as well as the setting of the entire literary policy in state affairs. This chapter will be concluded with a short recap.

3.2 Historical background

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia was one of the final major countries still ruled by an autocratic monarch. The Tsar held absolute power and wasn't restricted by laws or any other form of institutions. The Russian people were, like many of their contemporaries in other countries, under the influence of the creation of more rights and opportunities across all societal barriers. With increasing discontent with the status quo the Russian people rose up for the first time in 1905. This prevailing crisis of relations between state and society in the Russian towns had encouraged workers to express their long-term grievances about working conditions, security of employment in undercapitalized and primitive industries.⁴³ This time round, their efforts were unsuccessful. Elsewhere in Europe lower classes of society were granted more opportunities, in Russia the candle of reason; as Eric Hobsbawm puts it, wasn't even lit.⁴⁴

The discontent with the social and economical conditions remained. Another attempt to claim more rights and opportunities was made in February 1917.⁴⁵ The Tsarist government was replaced by a provisional government. At that time one of the major opposition leaders to the Tsar; Lenin was in Switzerland. Lenin hurried back to subsequently overthrow the provisional government to gain governmental control himself. Lenin created a Bolshevik state.⁴⁶ This new state made new rules and banished old ones. It created new directives and eventually established an entirely new governmental system. The immensity of changes are captured by the use of the word *revolution*, in the context of the Russian change. Formal guidelines, hierarchies and systems were replaced. One more rapidly than others in order to conform to Russia's new leadership. Not just the government was altered to accommodate the wishes of the Communist Party. The name of the territory over which the

⁴³ Bayly, C. (2004). *The Birth of the Modern World; 1780-1914*. Blackwell Publishing: Malden (U.S.A.). p. 192.

⁴⁴ Hobsbawm, E. (2010). *The Age of Empire: 1780-1914*. Abacus: London. p. 100. (First published in 1987).

⁴⁵ According to the Julian Calendar, which was used in Russia at that time.

⁴⁶ Lenin was the leader of the Bolshevik party which in 1918 opted to rename the party to: Communist.

communists ruled was dubbed the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ This name was conjured up to gain control over all the different nationalities that fell under the roam of the Russian territory. By naming the territory itself a Union the Communist Party set up the belief that all nationalities had rights and were equally important. Whether this actually was the case is debatable. Even though the non-Russian nationalities were bestowed with political, economical power and educational rights, the structure of the Union was set up in such a way that the real power remained centralized in the hands of the Communist Party.⁴⁸

The renaming of the territory was just one way for the Communist to expand their control. This control need not only be over a territory but even more so over society as a whole. Staying in charge governmentally speaking was necessary to create the amount of leverage needed to implement changes beyond the roam of traditional government. The state was deemed a mean to implement and facilitate socioeconomic changes.⁴⁹ These changes constituted the establishment of a new nation.

Class society was officially abolished. Privileges of one group over another contradicted the Communist core beliefs and were thus undesired. Besides this immense breach with the former structures in society, the development of the new nation would become far greater. The Communist Party was in favour of the creation of an entirely new society. It needed to form a new man. Soviets needed to change habits, behaviour and so on. This was all deemed necessary Iso society could eventually resemble the utopian dream the Soviets had for them.

The utopian dream consisted of a society marching towards progress, equality for all and a dictatorship for and by the masses. In the utopian dream the Soviet Union was a world-power complete with wealth, as well as economical and technical leadership. All policies by the Communist Party were to be in coherence with this dream.

3.3 Literature until 1932

In first instance after the October revolution of 1917, the literary society was deemed to be nurtured.⁵⁰ The party policy was build along the lines of winning over the intelligentsia, so they would conform, adhere to and establish a communist society. The old intelligentsia needed to be attracted by the force of argument rather than by the argument of force.⁵¹

On the first of July 1925 the Communist Party in the Soviet Union issued a decree on the policy of the party in the sphere of artistic literature. The Party would promote literature as a significant aspect of Soviet culture however it would also become more and more involved in literature. Active influence in creation of artistic literature as well as in criticism was announced. As the decree stated:

⁴⁷ The territory was renamed in the early 1920's.

⁴⁸ Mazower, M. (2000). *Dark Continent: Europe's twentieth century*. Vintage Books: New York. p. 50-51. (First published in 1998).

⁴⁹ McFaul, M. (January 1995). State power, institutional change and the politics of privatization in Russia. *World Politics*. Volume 47, no. 2., p. 218.

⁵⁰ Kemp-Welch, A. (1991). *Stalin and the literary intelligentsia 1928-1939*. Macmillan: London. p. 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.44

“The Party must completely eradicate attempts at crude and incompetent administrative meddling in literary affairs And must take pains to make careful selection of personnel for the institutions that supervise matters of the press in order to ensure really correct helpful and tactful guidance of our literature.”⁵²

Restrictions placed on the literary intelligentsia were increasing but not really by the hands of the Communist party. The writers organizations had a greater hand in this than the party itself in the 1920's. The Party refers to the institutions that were in place. The decree itself doesn't make a reference to a new to be developed institution. The Party did make clear that so called administrative meddling was undesired, and thus tried to reassure the literary intelligentsia that the Party itself saw no reason to engage in literary matters themselves. The Communist party however did open the door for institutions that were already in place.

The most prominent of these institutions in the 1920's was the RAPP; Russian Association for Proletarian Writers. The association portrayed themselves to be the only real proletarian organization. The RAPP is to be considered the ringleader for creating certain restrictions for writers within the Soviet Union. Before the establishment of the association there was a variety of organizations proclaiming that they were representing the proletarian writers. With the unification of all these organizations the RAPP was able to form somewhat of a monopoly status for itself. The RAPP presumed to be the authority on communist literature and behaved as such. The association was a fierce writers organization that stated that it merely executed the party directives for literature, and thus it tried to create a monopoly in this particular field.⁵³ Even though the RAPP wasn't under direct influence and control of the Communist party its influence was not to be diminished. The RAPP was the initiator of the struggle that would come to an apotheosis in the 1930's. A struggle for what was or what wasn't to be regarded as literature. In the 1920's the struggle focused on the right to be called a writer, a right that was esteemed and highly sought-after in literature-centric Russian, and later Soviet culture.⁵⁴

Under the leadership of Leopold Averbakh the influence of the RAPP grew to the standard of almost a dictatorship on early Soviet literature.⁵⁵ It directed writers to become part of the social Cultural Revolution and not be mere observers but even labourers of the Communist utopia.⁵⁶ By this time the first Five-year Plan was underway and the RAPP foresaw a grand task for Soviet writers to promote

⁵² Gutkin, I. (1999). *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois. p.70.

⁵³ Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.25

⁵⁴ Dobrenko, E. (2001). *The Making of a State Writer; social and aesthetic origins of Soviet literary culture*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California. (translated by: Savage, J.) p.181.

⁵⁵ Averbakh was the leader of the RAPP from 1927 until the organization was finally dissolved in 1932.

⁵⁶ Stacy, R. (1974). *Russian Literary Criticism; a short history*. Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, New York. p.196.

and motivate Communist society into making a success out of this plan. The RAPP directed the theme of the Five Year Plan to be the basis of all Soviet literature.

It is no coincidence that the radicalization of the RAPP came into full swing around the same time that Stalin had officially become the new leader of the Soviet Union. Stalin came into power as a result of a power struggle that had lasted for almost four years after the death of Lenin.

The new leader wasn't about to waste anymore time as the Five-year Plan came into effect in the same year as he rose to power; 1928. Writers found themselves facing a new challenge in that same year when Stalin announced a decree in which he stated that time for relative freedom for writers was over now. As Stalin had signalled in a Central Committee decree:

“Literary art must be developed, its social contents must be made deeper, it must be made completely understandable for the mass reader, its circulation enlarged, etc. We must struggle for the hegemony of proletarian literature.”⁵⁷

Stalin signals a struggle for the hegemony of proletarian literature. With this statement Stalin is referring to the other literary groups that were still in place at this time. All these different factions within Soviet literature was deemed unwanted. There could only be one type of literature: proletarian literature.

In first instance after this decree was issued, Stalin let the RAPP be the organization that carried out the task that he had laid out. By doing so the Communist party at this time acted more as an arbiter that made little effort to form an official literary standard to which writers needed to adhere.⁵⁸ The standard was formed by the RAPP. The association was of the opinion that literature that was not in line with party statements and policies would be difficult to get publicized.

One of the most famous poets at that time; Mandelstam, found that out first hand. In the newspaper *Literaturnaya gazetta* the author David Zaslavky⁵⁹ accused Mandelstam of plagiarism. However at that time, May 1929, Mandelstam was still allowed to respond in the same newspaper stating:

“(..) publication of intentionally false, incomplete, inaccurate or garbled information, and similar publication of any derogatory unfounded statements in the press is called slander.”⁶⁰

The influence of the RAPP however grew tremendously in the following years. This essentially meant that writers could publish only if the association allowed it.⁶¹ The RAPP became the leader and prime executor of social command. Which meant designing specific assignments to be executed by

⁵⁷ Garrard, J. & Garrard, C. (1990). *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*. I.B. Tauris: London. p. 29.

⁵⁸ Matlock, J. (1956). The governing organs of the Union of Soviet Writers. *American Slavic and East European Review*. Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 382

⁵⁹ Zaslavsky was a Stalinist journalist linked to the RAPP.

⁶⁰ Mandelstam cited in: Kemp-Welch, A. (1991). *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia 1928-1939*. Macmillan: London. p.63.

⁶¹ Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.221.

writers.⁶² Writers needed to work for the Five-year Plan according to the RAPP, and this was enthusiastically promoted by the Communist Party as well. As Struve explains:

“Writers were expected to become shock workers to form artistic brigades to join various construction projects and collective farms and describe them in factual sketches.”⁶³ The RAPP became heavily criticized even by outspoken proletarian writers themselves. On April 23, 1932 the RAPP was abolished. Its replacement came in the form of the Union of Soviet Writers. The Union would become the only literary organisation under direct command and control of the Communist Party. It decided on what subject literary figures should write and what style and method they should use. If they didn't or even defied the guidelines posed by the Communist Party, no means were to be held back. This meant that even the death of non-complying literary figures became an option for the Communist Party.⁶⁴

3.4 The breach

After the somewhat calm start of the Communist Party in constructing their policies in the twenties a clear breach came in 1932. This year forms the start of the new era and the formation of a grand scheme. The RAPP was dissolved and so were all the other writers organizations that were still in existence. All of the writers within the Soviet Union needed to be united in a new writers organization that would be under strict influence and control of the Communist Party. The name of the new organization was: The Union of Soviet Writers. This organisation had the function to promote proletarian literature. It would be instructive to all Soviet writers.

By making use of the word union the Communist Party made its plans rather clear; a formation of a singular organization with writers working for the same goal. The goal itself can also be derived from the name. The Union is not just a union of writers it is a union of *Soviet* writers; meaning that the word Soviet implies a certain type of writer.

The particularities that would make out a whether or not a writer was to be considered a Soviet writer were somewhat defined in the decree in which the RAPP was abolished.

The establishment of proletarian writers was complete according to the Party. This newly created intelligentsia that now also included proletarians needed to mobilize even more proletarians; not just to the craftsmanship of becoming a writer but also concerning tasks of social construction. This would mean that the writers and artists that would form the new intelligentsia in the Soviet Union had a task to fulfil for the state. It essentially comes down to employment in the enterprise of the Communist Party.

The decree had two major implications in the field of the literary policy. The first implication being the liquidation of all writers organizations; including the RAPP. The second decision was the replacement of these organizations with one singular organization the Union of Soviet Writers. In the

⁶² Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman p.221.

⁶³ Ibid, p.222.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.282.

decree the second decision was further explained by stating that this development was deemed necessary because Soviet literature would not benefit from a separation of all the different writers into various organizations. This would promote isolation whereas the joining of forces would work in a progressive manner for Soviet literature.

There was however a catch. It would be a Union of writers but they needed to conform to Communist ideology in their works. The writers needed to: “[Uphold] the platform of the Soviet power and striving to participate in Socialist construction into a single Union of Soviet Writers with a Communist fraction herein.”⁶⁵

The time of ambiguity was over the Communist Party had in fact chosen a side. Even though the abolishment of the RAPP came as somewhat of a relief to numerous writers that were constrained due to measures taken by the association, they were soon to be disappointed again.

The RAPP tried to gain a monopoly in telling writers what the content of their work should be. With the creation of a ‘platform’ as the Communist Party named it, changes would be made possible writers hoped. It turned out quite differently. The Union of Soviet Writers became an organ of censorship and was thus part of a vast network of ideological control.⁶⁶

3.5 Maxim Gorky

Stalin himself had by this time wooed the exiled writer Maxim Gorky. As a true believer of the Communist utopia, Gorky had raised money even in the United States to the benefit of the Bolsheviks.⁶⁷ However he became disillusioned with the dictatorship under Stalin and went into exile in 1921 in Sorrento, Italy. Stalin at this time maintained a friendly relationship with him. When Stalin came to power he persuaded Gorky to move back to the Soviet Union. Gorky was a renowned writer and famous in the Soviet Union. Because of his exile he distanced himself from Lenin and his leadership of the state at that time, this too was well known. Other than his writing skills this could benefit Stalin. Societal Stalin never rejected any stances made by Lenin however he was in need to make sure his leadership was to become uncontested. By installing Gorky as the leader of the newly created Union of Soviet Writers Stalin granted Gorky a major role.

As the leader of a new organization he could decide on the direction the organization; set out goals and objectives. Stalin who knew Gorky was aware of his position on literature. Of course he would only let someone loyal to his own agenda for literature fill the position of leader of the Union of Soviet Writers.

Like Stalin, Gorky wanted to dissolve the backwardness of the peasantry. Gorky supported the kulak liquidation, in essence the process of collectivization. He even toured the concentration camps and was

⁶⁵ Olkhovsky, A. (1955). *Music under the Soviets: the Agony of an Art*. Frederick Praeger: New York. p.279.

⁶⁶ Boobbeyer, P. (2000). *The Stalin Era*. Routledge: London. p.198.

⁶⁷ Yedlin, T. (1999). *Maxim Gorky: a Political Biography*. Praeger Publishers: Westport. p.68.

impressed by their re-education programs. At the same time he was under the impression that the RAPP had done too little to elevate the peasantry from their backwardness. The RAPP hadn't offered the best quality of literature to the peasantry and the involvement of peasantry in literature was deemed too little by Gorky.

Maxim Gorky proposed a new style to be adopted by all of the Soviet writers. A style on which he had already published during Lenin's reign. Gorky gives an explanation of this new style of literature. This new type is necessary for Soviet citizens to actually understand the utopia of the communist Party:

"So that the poisonous unbearable nastiness of the past can be brought to light and understood well, we must develop in ourselves the ability to look at it from the height of the accomplishments of the present, from the height of the great goals of the future. This elevated point of view should and will awaken the proud, joyous passion that will endow our literature with a new tone, will help it to create new forms, will create the new direction that we need – socialist realism, which – it goes without saying can be created on [the basis of] the facts of socialist experience." ⁶⁸

Gorky places emphasis on the 'great goals of the future' referring to the utopian dream of the Communist Party. He also states that the inspiration and creative mindset could be derived from current socialist experience meaning that he was under the impression that the Communist Party was well under way in achieving their utopia. Finally he speaks of the usage of facts. Facts by definition should be objective and neutral pieces of information. In the explanation given by Maxim Gorky it is very likely that the writer is of the belief that there can be no other conclusion than that the Communist way is the only way, the only way to a positive future. A difference of opinion in this matter doesn't seem to be possible.

The man that had put Gorky in a place to implement his ideas was in absolute agreement on the new literature for the Soviet Union. After the abolishment of the RAPP in April 1932, a select group of Soviet writers were invited to come to the house of Maxim Gorky himself. At this time Stalin and Gorky were the two most famous men in the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ Getting invited to such an event was an honour as well as an acknowledgement of loyalty.

At this event Stalin was also present. He exclaimed to the writers present what his thoughts were for the future of Soviet literature. Stalin acknowledged great importance to the work of the writers. He told them: "You produce the goods we need. Even more than machines, tanks, aeroplanes, we need human souls."⁷⁰

Stalin referred to the writers that they were the 'engineers of the soul'. With their skills the Communist Party should have the tools in hand to motivate people and to mould them into the desired Soviet man.

⁶⁸ Gorky, M. cited in: Dobrenko, E. (2001). *The Making of a State Writer; social and aesthetic origins of Soviet literary culture*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California. (translated by: Savage, J.) p.363.

⁶⁹ Sebag Montefiore, S. (2003). *Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar*. Orion Books: London. p.96.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 99.

It would come as no surprise that during this meeting with the selected writers both Gorky and Stalin affirmed their belief in a new style in Soviet literature. Socialist Realism was what the Soviet people needed. The aesthetic that it entailed needed further explanation still. The first step to explanation came during the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers that was held in 1934.

3.6 First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers

In August 1934 the first congress that would formally establish the Union of Soviet Writers was held. The first speech to start off the event was held by Maxim Gorky. This speech was quickly followed however by the high representative for the government Andrey Zhdanov. This shows the linkage between the Communist Party that ruled the government and the literary organization. Zhdanov explained the new direction Soviet literature needed to take according to the government.

“Our Soviet literature is not afraid of being accused of tendentiousness. Yes, Soviet literature *is* tendentious, for in the age of class struggle a nonclass, non-tendentious would be apolitical literature does not and cannot exist. And I think that every Soviet man of letters can say to any thick-headed bourgeois, to any philistine, to any bourgeois writer who will talk of the tendentiousness of our literature: ‘Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, and we are proud of its tendentiousness, because our tendency consists in liberating the toilers, the whole mankind from the yoke of capitalist slavery.’”⁷¹

The speech clearly shows that the Communist Party was of the belief that the Soviet writers were instruments in achieving their goal. They should form the pr-system and fuel the motivation of the proletariat so that they would support the endeavours of the Party to liberate its society of capitalist elements. Zhdanov didn’t just refer to the objective of the Party. He also gave a description on how this objective needed to be reached. Just as Stalin had done in the meeting at Gorky’s house with a number of Soviet writers, he reaffirmed the position of the Party in the matter of literary style.

The aesthetic first proposed by Gorky should be adopted by all Soviet writers. To clarify what was actually meant by this so-called Socialist Realism Zhdanov addressed the matter in his speech:

“Comrade Stalin described our writers as engineers of human minds. What does it mean? What duties does this title impose on you?

It means above all, to know life in order to depict it truthfully in works of art, to depict it not scholastically, not lifelessly, not just as objective reality, but to depict real life in its revolutionary development. In so doing, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic depiction must be combined with the task of ideological remoulding and re-education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in fiction and in literary criticism is what we call socialist realism.

To be an engineer of human minds means to stand with both feet firmly planted on the ground of real life. This, in its turn, means breaking away from old-type romanticism, from that romanticism which

⁷¹ Zhdanov, A. cited in: Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.261.

depicted nonexistent life and nonexistent characters, diverting the reader from the contradictions and oppression of life into a world of the impossible a world of utopia. Our literature must not shun romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism. Soviet literature must know how to portray our heroes, it must be able to look into our tomorrow.”⁷²

Zhdanov gave some indication into what the new aesthetic should entail. Literature should be made understandable for all. Through literature the populace of the Soviet Union should be reformed to fit in with the demands of the Communist Party. Writers ought to be concerned with real rather than imaginary life. Zhdanov refers to this imaginary life as being a utopia whereas he actually asks the writers to produce literature that supports the Communist vision of utopia. A utopia that he believes is attainable. In addition to these characteristics the representative of the government says the new literature should have heroes: the heroes of our future. Most likely he refers to the workers. The proletarians that live in the real world, Zhdanov asks the writers to portray. Literature shouldn't be made for the elite. There should be no room for the elite in the new literature. The heroes of the future should be positive and be leading up towards a predestined future. This predestined future was the utopia of the Communist Party.

Zhdanov made the aesthetic Socialist Realism more comprehensible but still left much room for interpretation. “The exact nature and boundaries of socialist realist doctrine remained unclear from the start.”⁷³ There was never a detailed aesthetic with clear definitions. This created room for ambiguity. The socialist realist template orders the writers to produce Soviet literature. The aesthetic remains rather vague. To give some examples: Is it okay to use metaphors? Is it allowed to use an existent character that served in the White Army? What subjects are not considered a portrayal of our Soviet future? What is the Soviet future for that matter? What can be defined as revolutionary romanticism? This room for interpretation will prove to be decisive for the putting into practice of the new literary policy. A policy that restricted writers to adhere to the new aesthetic and become instruments of the Party.

3.7 The Great Terror

The restrictions posed on writers reached further than the imposed aesthetic. To make sure the writers behaved as the instruments the Party needed, censorship became more organized and more state controlled. In the beginning of Bolshevik rule the role of censors was rather limited only focusing on newspapers that were negative in their reports of the new government. The twenties saw an increase in

⁷² Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.262.

⁷³ Zarecor, K. (2011). *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960*. University of Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh. p.121.

censorship activities were expanded into the field of education. In the thirties, starting in 1934 the censors' job changed dramatically for all literature came under Party censorship.⁷⁴

The work of the censors since 1934 took place before and even after publication. The censors could make the decision to withdraw books from circulation or ban plays from performance in theatres. Before publication censors had the ability to make writers change their works in order to accommodate the demands of the Communist Party.

Writers were scrutinized with vigour. Non-compliance became an excuse for the Party to arrest and prosecute writers. If a writer did not follow the instructions the Party had laid down by the introduction of the new aesthetic, the writer could then be considered an enemy of the people.

The writer was in that case not working for the greater good; the creation of the Communist utopia.

Self-censorship was on the rise as well because of these measures.

Repression in the Soviet Union in great organizational skill started in the year 1934. The reason for this repression is to date still contested. In his work: 'The Great Terror', Robert Conquest illuminates the leadership style of Stalin to be the primary cause. He would be paranoia and was afraid to loose power.⁷⁵ A second possible explanation is given by historian J. Arch Getty who in his book: 'Stalinist Terror' sets out to claim that the repression followed a struggle between regional party organizations and the inner Party circle surrounding Stalin.⁷⁶ The regional party officials would have received writings from Stalin in which he would complain about the excessive repression of the Soviet people. Being attacked by the leader of the Soviet Union himself might put the officials in a difficult situation. In order to divert this, they took it upon themselves to implicate others of anti-Soviet behaviour. This would ultimately spiral out of control in a struggle to still be perceived as loyal to the party.⁷⁷ A third explanation lies in the field of pure and simple economics. As the basis of a lot of crises and hardship it is perhaps not far fetched. The economic growth rates of the Soviet Union were beginning to show signs of stagnation in the thirties.⁷⁸ In the 1930's the Soviet administrative-command system was still rather new. It had not had time to "accumulate much experience".⁷⁹ The stagnation the state was enduring was prescribed to sabotage. Everyone who was deemed hostile towards the state would be branded anti-Soviet or even a saboteur.

Even though the three possible causes differ tremendously from one another the result remains the same. The repression of the anti-Soviets grew ever more. It would furthermore become more and more violent. The period that followed the start of the increased repression would become known as the

⁷⁴ Ermolaev, H. (1997). *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1973*. Rowman Littlefield Publishers: Lanham, Maryland. p.259.

⁷⁵ Conquest, R. (1968). *The Great Terror*. Pelican Books: Middlesex.

⁷⁶ Getty, A. & Manning, R. (1993). *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p.51-62.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.51-61.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.116.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.118.

Great Terror, ending in 1941. This name was given by the before mentioned Robert Conquest who drew a comparison with the French Terreur preceding the French Revolution.⁸⁰

During the Great Terror the Communist Party made progress in eliminating non-loyalist figures within the Soviet society. Due to the status of the literary intelligentsia, to which they themselves have contributed, it is of no surprise that this occupation was targeted.

Not adhering to governmental policy was dangerous in the nineteen thirties, especially for writers. Their work put them in harms' way in two ways: the first is the adherence to the aesthetic second with the increase in censorship the content of their work also became scrutinized.⁸¹ Ninety percent of all the writers that attended the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers are suggested to have been repressed. Only 50 of the 700 attending writers would live to see the Second Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1954.⁸² Even taking into account natural deaths this number is alarming.

The Great Terror was implemented so that the Soviet populace would become so terrified that no organized mass resistance could arise.⁸³ No resistance would mean for the Soviet government that it could go forward in making their plans for a Communist future. It did not have to worry about motivating the public; fear was motivation enough to comply.

With the years passing the extent of the Terror grew massively. The society was essentially muzzled. Awareness of the arrests, the prosecutions and the sentences grew among the public. This created a new form of society. Whisperers were the outcome of the Great Terror. Keep your head down or otherwise face the consequences such as exile, Gulag camps, prison or even death.

A law that was created in 1926 would form the legal basis of the prosecution. The article 58 of the criminal code defined counterrevolutionary actions.

Counterrevolutionary was defined as actions that were designed to the overthrow, subversion or weakening of the power of the Communist state. Punishable by death or with mitigating circumstances a sentencing to deprivation of freedom, this law formed a crucial aspect in the Great Terror.⁸⁴ The law itself left plenty of room of interpretation as to what could be considered a counterrevolutionary act. This made the Terror even more random. Writers being placed in the position that they were in, needed to make choices. They were forced to do so by the governmental policy to exterminate counterrevolutionaries; the enemies of the people.

⁸⁰ Conquest, R. (1968). *The Great Terror*. Pelican Books: Middlesex.

⁸¹ Conquest, R. (1968). *The Great Terror*. Pelican Books: Middlesex. p. 437.

⁸² Thurston, R. (1996). *Life and Terror in Sralin's Russia*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.68.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p.xv.

⁸⁴ Berman, H. (1972). *Soviet Criminal Law and Procedure*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts. p.24.

3.8 Conclusion

The RAPP and its successor the Union of Soviet writers were the authority for the writers. They decided on whether or not your work was to be published, which could mean whether you would have food on the table or not. The Union of Soviet Writers went a step further than its predecessor. Under the leadership of Maxim Gorky as well as the influence of Stalin a new aesthetic was formed that constricted writers. Socialist Realism was developed. Positive hero's that ought to motivate Soviet workers to work even harder for attaining the utopian dream of the Communist Party were demanded of the writers. Furthermore the writer needed to subscribe to the ideals of the Communist Party otherwise a writer wasn't a writer because he or she couldn't be a member of the Union of Soviet Writers. Without a membership, publication was out of the question.

Curtailing the literary intelligentsia didn't end there. Censorship before and after publication took place. Due to the room that was left for interpretation that the aesthetic Socialist Realism had left there was enough room for error. Writers were targeted in the thirties more organized than was the case in the twenties. This has to do with the increased involvement of the Communist Party into literary affairs as well as the arrival of the Great Terror. By reigning with fear no resistance or contest to Party proposals was to be expected. The consequences of non-compliance would just be too big.

4. Writers

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will form the basis of our test of the theory set forth by Scott.

The four different writers will all be discussed. This will be done by using a similar structure. First all the writers will be introduced. A brief overview of their life, as well as the literary genre they are representatives of will be sketched. Literary works that are an essential part of the writers' legacy will also be addressed. After this overview we will then focus our attention on three distinct encounters of the writer with:

- a. The aesthetic socialist realism
- b. The censorship practices.
- c. The Union of Soviet Writers

These aspects exemplify the workings of the policy. They all focus on different elements of the policy. The ordering of administration with the first aspect, the standardization is the element connected to the second aspect and the censorship practices is bound to the element of coercive power as seen in the authoritarian state.

After these aspects have been addressed in connection with all four of the writers, the results will be held up against the theory by Scott which will form the conclusion of the thesis.

Anna Akhmatova



4.2 Anna Akhmatova

4.2.1 Overview

Anna Akhmatova was born on June 11th 1889, in a Black Sea resort called Bolshoi Fontan.⁸⁵

Before Akhmatova was one year old the family moved to Tsarskoye Selo a place near Saint Petersburg. In 1903 the first Akhmatova had her first encounter with Nikolai Gumilyov. This meeting would prove to become increasingly more important in the course of her life as Gumilyov fell in love with her. A series of staged encounters followed as Gumilyov pursued Akhmatova. Akhmatova didn't take his courtship serious which led Gumilyov to attempt suicide. Akhmatova subsequently refrained from any contact with Nikolai.⁸⁶

When her parents separated in 1905 she stayed with her mother and relocated to Yevpatoria. She had studied at the Women's gymnasium in Tsarkoye Selo but finished her studies in Kiev after which she enrolled into Law school in Kiev.⁸⁷ At that time Anna was already writing poetry as she herself claims to have finished her first poem at the age of eleven.⁸⁸

The acquaintance with Gumilyov was renewed in 1906 when Anna wrote to Gumilyov.⁸⁹ Following this letter Nikolai proposed to Anna for the first time, but it would not be until 1910 (after four proposals) that Akhmatova did decide to marry Gumilyov.⁹⁰ Gumilyov was himself a poet and introduced Akhmatova to the works of Acmeism. In that same year she consciously decided to align herself with the Acmeist movement.⁹¹ This paved a way for a close and life-long friendship to evolve with fellow acmeist: Osip Mandelstam.

After the first clear literary choices were taken Anna began to publish ever more frequently under the name: Anna Akhmatova. This name was a pseudonym. At birth Anna's official name was Anna Andreevna Gorenko. She disowned her birth name at the age of seventeen when her father warned her not to disgrace his name as he was made aware of her unladylike conduct by aspiring recognition as a poet.⁹²

The aspiring poets' work would be published for the first time in 1907. Due to the fact that Akhmatova wrote in the aesthetic as developed by the Acmeists she attracted the attention of literary

⁸⁵ Wells, D. (1996). *Anna Akhmatova: Her Poetry*. Berg: Oxford. p.3.

⁸⁶ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p. 5.

⁸⁷ Polivanov, K. (1994). *Anna Akhmatova and Her Inner Circle*. Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas: Fayetteville. p.3

⁸⁸ Akhmatova, A. in: Polivanov, K. (1994). *Anna Akhmatova and Her Inner Circle*. Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas: Fayetteville. p.3

⁸⁹ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p. 6.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 5-7.

⁹¹ Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.269.

⁹² Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p. 3.

critics.⁹³ Acmeism as a movement was still in its infancy but was becoming increasingly popular. Acmeism wanted to bring clarity back into poetic work. The movement had the aim to combine both classical and domestic culture.⁹⁴ Typical for Akhmatova's poetry was the theme of love. Especially her earlier poetry is filled with this theme. This theme would later be used by state officials in order to denounce the poet. An exemplifying poem of Akhmatova's work is the following lyric written in 1916:

I yearned for him in vain so many years,
An empty time, like walking in a doze.
But then the never-fading light appeared:
Three years past, on Palm Sunday, it arose.
My words broke off, there was no need for speech-
The longed-for bridegroom stood and smiled at me.

Outside the throng unhurriedly processed
Bearing candles. Oh, that holy time!
April's thin ice crunched beneath their steps
While overheard the bells rang out their chimes
Proclaiming joyous prophecies come true,
And on the flickering flames a dark breeze blew.

The white narcissus blossoms in a vase
And the red wine in a crystal flask
Seemed lit up by a misty dawn's first rays.
My hand, white-spotted by the dripping wax,
Trembled as he raised it for a kiss,
And my blood sang: Now enter Heaven's bliss.⁹⁵

The poetic work of Anna Akhmatova often portrays a heroine in a dual. The poetry of Akhmatova has a central figure that has a passionate desire as well as a more lingering patience side to her. This brought a then heralded critic: Boris Eikhenbaum to describe the literary works of Akhmatova in his book on the poet in 1923 as "(...) half a harlot burning with passion, half a nun able to pray to God for forgiveness."⁹⁶ Unintentionally this praising critique would become part of an infamous attack on

⁹³ Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.269.

⁹⁴ Gifford, H. (1974). Mandelstam. *Essays in Criticism*. Volume 24, Issue 4, p. 408.

⁹⁵ Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p. 20-21.

⁹⁶ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.21.

Akhmatova as a poet. The praise made by the critic Eikhenbaum was misused by Stalin's second: Andrei Zhdanov in 1946.⁹⁷ Zhdanov used the praise to demonstrate that Akhmatova wasn't complying with state policy concerning literature and should therefore be denounced, which subsequently occurred.

It didn't take until 1946 until Akhmatova encountered the wrath of the state. The predicament of the literary intelligentsia would enter her life sooner than that.

After the arrival of their first and only child: Lev Gumilyov, Akmatova and Gumilyov entered in an open marriage, meaning both had affairs.⁹⁸ Akhmatova entered into a relationship with Boris Anrep in the summer of 1915. This relationship ended in 1917 when on the outbreak of the revolution he fled to England.⁹⁹ About this affair Akhmatova wrote a poem in which she described her passion for Russia and why she would not flee the country:

You are a traitor, and for a green island,
Have betrayed, yes, betrayed your native land,
Abandoned all our songs and sacred icons,
And the pine tree over a quiet lake.¹⁰⁰

She saw Anrep as a traitor and states that she can't imagine leaving the country and speaks with almost melancholic nostalgia of the Russian culture as displayed in songs and icons. The referral to 'our' and 'your' in connection to Russia is further evidence of this. After the relationship ended, she met Vladimir Shileiko. This led to her divorce from Gumilyov in 1918 after which she married Shileiko in the same year. The union between the two spouses ended in separation in 1921 that led to divorce in 1926.¹⁰¹

Her ex-husband Nikolai Gumilyov, was arrested and subsequently killed by the Soviets in 1921. Gumilyov was arrested for suspicion of counter revolutionary activities by the Bolshevik regime¹⁰². Without any form of trial he was found guilty. His death shocked the literary world and placed a tremendous stigma on the lives of his ex-wife and son.¹⁰³ Both of them would never denounce Gumilyov, not even when Lev was arrested and sent to prison.

⁹⁷ Boterbloem, K. (2004). *The Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov*. McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal. p.211-212.

⁹⁸ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.15.

⁹⁹ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.22-24.

¹⁰⁰ Feinstein, E. (2006). *Anna of All the Russias*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York. p.12.

¹⁰¹ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.40-47.

¹⁰² Mozjeko, E. in: Eysteinsson, A. & Liska, V. (2007). *Modernism; volume 2*. John Benjamin Publishing: Amsterdam. P. 900-901.

¹⁰³ Kunitz, S. & Hayward, M. In: Akhmatova, A. (1973). *Poems of Akhmatova*. Atheneum Publishers: New York: p. 16. (translated by Kunitz, S. & Hayward, M.)

In 1922 Akhmatova met Nikolai Punin, even though they never formally married she did refer to Punin as her husband on several occasions.¹⁰⁴ The relation between the two would end in 1938.¹⁰⁵ During this final year together, her son Lev; then ‘husband’ Punin and her closest literary friend Mandelstam were arrested.¹⁰⁶ The graveness of the situation became ever more clear.

4.2.2 Reaction to socialist realism

Akhmatova was one of the leaders of the Acmeist movement. Their take on what poetry should entail differed from the state instructed template. A critic described Akhmatova’s work as filled with mysticism and eroticism” while ignoring politics.¹⁰⁷ With the demand for so-called Soviet poetry on the rise, Akhmatova fell silent. That is to say that she produced less poetry in the period 1923 up to 1935 than in the year 1921.¹⁰⁸ Of this period Anna said: “Genuine literature cannot exist now.”¹⁰⁹ Interestingly enough her muse would return in midst of the Great Terror. Akhmatova had already seen friends and family members been arrested, exiled and even executed. In 1936 this prompted her to write on poetry and poets. She paid tribute to her poetic friends and colleagues who either helped her through these times or hadn’t survived. These topics hardly fell in line with the socialist realist stanza. The majority of the poems written in 1936 were on the subject of the social tragedy that had befallen Akhmatova. The poetry had nothing to do with the cheerful and positive view of Soviet life the state instructed the literary intelligentsia to write about.¹¹⁰

To her close friend and confidant: Lydia Chukovskaya, Akhmatova remarked on the template that was implemented by the Union of Soviet Writers. She had received a letter from the Union on May 18th 1939 which read:

“We would be glad to publish...but please send us more to facilitate selection.”¹¹¹

In her diary also wrote down the response of Akhmatova to the letter:

“It’s been like that for 20 years now. They don’t know or remember anything! ‘To facilitate selection!’ Every time, again and again, they are surprised by my new poetry: they hoped that this time, at last, my poems would turn out to be about collective farms. Once, here in Leningrad, they asked me to bring my poems in. I did. Then they asked me to come and have a chat with them. I went. ‘But why are the poems so sad? That’s done with after all...’I replied: ‘Evidently the explanation for such nonsense lies in the peculiarities of my biography.’”¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ Feinstein, E. (2006). *Anna of All the Russias*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York. p.16.

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death’s Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.79.

¹⁰⁶ Harrington, A. (2006). *The Poetry of Anna Akhmatova*. Anthem Press: London. p.17-18.

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death’s Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.45.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p.49.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.49.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p.69.

¹¹¹ Chukovskaya, L. (1994). *The Akhmatova Journals*. Farrar Strauss & Giroux: New York. p.16.

¹¹² Ibid. p.16.

The Union of Soviet Writers was evidently trying to conform her to their template. Akhmatova couldn't be deferred. Akhmatova wouldn't conform to the socialist realist template willingly but was forced to do so anyway when her son, Lev, was rearrested and sentenced to exile. In 1938 Akhmatova tried to convince the authorities of her being a conformist in order for them to spare her son.¹¹³

That Akhmatova as a renowned poet wanted to conform gave her some instant success in the sense that she was able to publish again in 1940. Her revival of being in the state's grace would however not take very long as one of Stalin's close associates would start his attack on Akhmatova's poetry in 1940 leading up to its culmination in 1946.¹¹⁴

4.2.3 Facing censorship

In the late 1920's publishing opportunities became scarce for Akhmatova. Although throughout the twenties Akhmatova was able to publish, it did become increasingly difficult to do so. Her income decreased dramatically by the sheer lack of writings that were allowed to be published by the regime. On this period Nancy Anderson commented: "Her sole income was a tiny, irregular state pension – a sort of half hearted admission by the government of its responsibility for depriving her of her livelihood."¹¹⁵

Sheer poverty drove Akhmatova to sell her collection of books. Her material situation is described as follows: "The interdiction on her poetry had effectively deprived her of the ability to earn her living, and although the state had by way of compensation awarded her a small pension, this was by no means sufficient even for food. (...) She was therefore to a large extent dependent on the support of her friends in Leningrad, particularly since at this time she was also often ill."¹¹⁶

Although Akhmatova was aware if she would confess her sins in the ideological and literary sense her life could be made much easier, she was of the belief that that was too high a price to pay.¹¹⁷

The continuation of the connection with Gumilyov was dangerous as became even more evident in the prosecution of Anna's son. Fortunately the life of Lev was spared but his imprisonment, proved crucial in his mother's defiance. She wrote extensively about the times she stood outside the prison walls in order to hopefully be able to see her son. Her struggle is reflected in letters, poems as well as actions. Anna repeatedly went to Soviet officials to plead her sons' case. Even though it is clear to see that the officials were aware of Akhmatova's noncompliance and protest against the regime, it is amazing to be able to note that she herself never was prosecuted other than by censorship.

Akhmatova wrote the following on the struggle against the Soviet restrictions:

¹¹³ Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.77.

¹¹⁴ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.78; Boterbloem, K. (2004). *The Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov*. McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal. p.211-212.

¹¹⁵ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.49.

¹¹⁶ Wells, D. (1996). *Anna Akmatova: her poetry*. Berg: Oxford. p. 13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p.49.

Courage

We know what trembles on the scales,
and what we must steel ourselves to face.

The bravest hour strikes on our clocks:
may courage not abandon us!

Let bullets kill us - we are not afraid,
nor are we bitter, though our housetops fall.

We will preserve you, Russian speech,
from servitude in foreign chains,
keep you alive great Russian word,
fit for the songs of our childrens' children,
pure on their tongues and free.¹¹⁸

The reference made to the bullets clearly shows the awareness of the poetess of the effects that words could have. The words of the poet were so powerful that in 1925 when the literary policy can be considered rather liberal when compared to what would follow, that a Central Committee resolution prohibited the publication of any of Akhmatova's work.¹¹⁹ It wouldn't be until 1940 when Akhmatova tried to prove herself being a conformist that she would be able to publish again.

4.2.4 The Union of Soviet Writers

Akhmatova was not a member of the Union of Soviet Writers until 1939. She remained wary of the Union as she had also been towards its predecessor the RAPP. Their stance towards the creation of propagandistic literature differed from Akhmatova's belief of what poetry should be about.¹²⁰ As Acmeism was about a nostalgia for world culture, Akhmatova simply couldn't just let the state determine on what to write. The aim to incorporate the classical into modern day poetry was not what the Union of Soviet Writers had in mind as they wanted the literary intelligentsia to write in an understandable manner that provided a positive imagery of the state. The Union of Soviet Writers adopted a template with similar instructions for the writers. Anna could not oblige as she fell silent until 1936 when she resumed in her own method of writing. Akhmatova never wanted to be admitted to the Union but when her son; Lev Gumilyov, was rearrested and sentenced she wanted to form a conformist image of herself and applied for admittance to the Union of Soviet Writers. Akhmatova applied for membership in 1939. In December of that year she had an encounter with what she perceived to be an informer of the Union of Soviet Writers. She told her confidant; Lydia

¹¹⁸ Akhmatova, A. (1973). *Poems of Akhmatova*. Atheneum Publishers: New York: p. 125. (translated by Kunitz, S. & Hayward, M.)

¹¹⁹ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.46.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.52-53.

Chukovskaya, that a young man came to visit her. He wanted her opinion on poems he wanted to recite to her. Akhmatova told him he should take it up with the Union of Soviet Writers and not with her. She tells Lydia that she chased him out of her house quickly but found that he had written on the first page of her notebook: 'To the greatest poet of Russia'. He had done so without her knowledge which proved to her that he was indeed an informer. This caused agitation on the part of Akhmatova but she had to let it go for the sake of her son.¹²¹ Anna was granted membership with great ceremony in 1940.¹²² Anna commented on the gathering arranged in her honour to welcome her to the Union by saying: "There were many people there and all strangers."¹²³

In her comments on the welcome to the Union of Soviet Writers Akhmatova implies that she was not at ease. When a writer praised her work she felt it was inappropriate for him to do so and even took it as an insult.¹²⁴

Akhmatova's membership to the Union was certainly not out of conviction or dedication to their take on literature. It was solely to help her son's case. When she was granted admission to the Union, Akhmatova received financial support. She was back in the official grace as she was given a pension of 750 roubles a month, a lump-sum of 3000 roubles and she was given a flat.¹²⁵ She accepted the money but didn't accept the flat, even though she was living in an uncomfortably small place with too many people sharing it.¹²⁶ She preferred the difficulties in her current household than to live in a communal apartment amidst strangers.¹²⁷ This motive is likely to be sparked out of her experiences in the prosecution of friends and family. Distrust had become a second nature, as is apparent from the accounts of Lydia Chukovskaya.¹²⁸ This of course is not surprising.

¹²¹ Chukovskaya, L. (1994). *The Akhmatova Journals*. Farrar Strauss & Giroux: New York. p.46-47.

¹²² Chukovskaya, L. (1994). *The Akhmatova Journals*. Farrar Strauss & Giroux: New York. p.51.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p.51.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p.51.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p.51.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p.52.

¹²⁷ Anderson, N. in: Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.81

¹²⁸ Chukovskaya, L. (1994). *The Akhmatova Journals*. Farrar Strauss & Giroux: New York.

Isaac Babel



4.3 Isaac Babel

4.3.1 Overview

Isaac Babel is born in 1894 in Odessa. Son of a Jewish merchant. Soon after Isaacs' birth the family moved to a Black Sea port town called: Nikolayev.¹²⁹ It was here that Babel studied Hebrew and the Talmud.¹³⁰ As a Jew in Russia he learned from an early age the meaning of anti-Semitism. Tsar Nicholas II granted a number of civil rights to Jews, and violent pogroms erupted. These pogroms didn't left Nikolayev spared as Babel witnessed them. Babel and his family were unharmed in these pogroms though.¹³¹ Because Isaac Babel used autobiographical details in much of his writings and the fact that he started writing at an early age we can make use of his work in understanding how the writer himself viewed the pogroms. Although his daughter Nathalie Babel insists that the work of her father is a mix of fact and fiction the implicit stance of the author is to be derived from his work.¹³² In "The Story of my Dovecote", Isaac Babel refers to the impact of the pogroms:

"The Tsar Nicholas had granted a Constitution to the Russian people. Orators in threadbare overcoats were mounting the street posts before the Town Hall and making speeches to the people. At night firing was heard in the streets, and my mother did not want to let me go to the game market. On the morning of the twentieth our neighbours' boys flew a kite under the very windows of the police station, and our water carrier abandoning all his work, walked the street, his hair greased and his face red. Then we saw the boys of the baker Kalistov drag out into the street a leather-covered vaulting horse and do gymnastics in the middle of the road. No one stopped them, and the policeman Semernikov even egged on them to jump higher. Semernikov wore a silk handwoven girdle, and his boots were blacked that day more shiningly than they had ever been before: it was this policeman accoutred in this way against all regulations that frightened my mother most of all: and it was on his account that she did not let me go: but I stole out into the street through the back and ran to the game market, which was some distance off on the other side of the railway station."¹³³

This extract of the short story gives a picture of how a ten-year old would view the pogrom, it at the same time gives insight into the state of utter chaos when regulations aren't even upheld by the policeman. The anxiety of the mother of the boy and the hearing of night time shooting demonstrate the frightening situation in which the family was in as well. Even though the family itself wasn't

¹²⁹ Bloom, H. (2004). *Isaac Babel*. Chelsea House Publishers: New York City. p.20.

¹³⁰ Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.278.

¹³¹ Freidin, G. (2001). *Chronology of Isaac Babel*. Date of consultation July 14 2012 at:

<http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/Babel.htm>; Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.279.

¹³² Babel, N. in: Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.xiii-xv.

¹³³ Babel, I. & Mirsky, D. (1931). The Story of my Dovecote: Inscribed to Maxim Gorky. *The Slavonic and East European Review*. Vol. 10, No. 28, p.1-11. p.6.

harmful episode did make an impression as he wrote this story in 1925. The subject of the pogroms of 1905 appears in his story 'First Love' as well.¹³⁴

The fact that Isaac Babel was of Jewish descent was made aware to him a second time round after moving back to Odessa in 1906. He attended school there and started writing stories that were inspired by his liking for French literature. Especially Flaubert and Maupassant inspired the young writer.¹³⁵

When he tried to go to University his request was denied due to a restriction on the number of Jews that was allowed to study there. In 1911 he therefore moved to Kiev where he continued his education at the Institute of Financial and Business studies. It was there that his interest in writing increased.¹³⁶

His earliest known writing is from 1913, but it wouldn't be until 1916 that his literary career could take off. In this year he met writer Maxim Gorky.

Gorky published Babel's first two stories. The stories were full of eroticism which prompted legal proceedings for both the magazine in which the stories were published as well as for Babel. Eroticism in literature was deemed a form of pornography which was prohibited by Article 1001 of the Criminal Code at that time.¹³⁷ Babel was even charged with the offense of writing pornography in 1917 but due to the political turmoil the charge was made mute.¹³⁸

The stories themselves gained favourable critiques and Gorky, who was by then already a celebrated writer in Russia, encouraged him to write more.¹³⁹ Gorky was however unimpressed by the work he produced next and advised Babel to first get to know life before he attempted writing again.¹⁴⁰

Isaac took this advice by heart as his next writing would not appear until 1923. As Babel himself commented: "It was only in 1923 that I learned how to express my ideas clearly and at not too great a length, and then I took to writing again."¹⁴¹

His most popular writings that are bundled under the names: 'The Odessa Stories' and 'Red Cavalry' originate in 1923. Both of these works revived Isaac Babel's literary career.

In the time in between the writings, Babel had married Evgenia Gronfein in 1919. She would emigrate to Paris in 1925. His sister and mother already had emigrated to Brussels in 1924 and 1926 respectively. Throughout his life he would maintain contact by means of letters with his emigrated loved-ones. About his marriage not much is known, Babel does visit his wife in Paris but also has

¹³⁴ Sicher, E. (1995). *Jews in Russian Literature After the October Revolution: Writers and Artists between Hope and Apostasy*. Cambridge University Press: New York. p.79.

¹³⁵ Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.69.

¹³⁶ Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing: New York. p.11.

¹³⁷ Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.70.

¹³⁸ Freidin, G. (2001). *Chronology of Isaac Babel*. Date of consultation July 14 2012 at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/Babel.htm>

¹³⁹ Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing: New York. p.16.

¹⁴⁰ Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.280.

¹⁴¹ Babel, I. in: Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.70

love affairs with other women.¹⁴² In 1926 he would become a father for the first time due to one such affair. His first child born in wedlock is in 1929 with the birth of his daughter Natalie. She would eventually grow up to guard and write about Isaac's literary legacy.¹⁴³

Natalie and her father would see each other for the last time in 1935 in Brussels, plans were made to move the entire family back to the Soviet Union but they fell through.¹⁴⁴ In 1932 Babel had already met Antonina Pirozhkova with whom he would live and be in a romantic relationship with up to his death in 1940. No evidence is to be found on whether this relationship contributed to not materializing the plans of moving back or not, however they did conceive a daughter in 1937.

Antonina met Babel after he was attacked two times over by General Budyonny. Both attacks were directed to 'Red Cavalry'. This assembly of stories was inspired by Babel's time as a war correspondent when he was dispatched to General Budyonny's army.¹⁴⁵ Budyonny was disgruntled with the depiction of his men in the stories. In two articles one written in 1924 the second in 1928 Budyonny reacted to Babel's 'Red Cavalry'. Maxim Gorky that had become Babel's protector replied in his protégée's defence.¹⁴⁶ In his 1928 Budyonny reacted to Gorky's stance:

"Although it is very difficult for me to argue with you on literary matters, nevertheless, since 'Red Cavalry' has come up as a subject of discussion once again, I must say that I cannot agree with you, Alexei Maximovich, despite all my respect for you, and I will try to explain why I criticized 'Red Cavalry' and why I think with good reason. (...) Babel indulges in old women's gossip, digs into old women's garbage, and tells with horror about some Red Army man taking a loaf of bread and chicken somewhere. He invents things that never happened, slings dirt at our best Communist commanders, lets his imagination run wild, simply lies..."¹⁴⁷

Again Gorky came to his defence as he responded to Budyonny's letter that: "Allow me to tell you, Comrade Budyonny, that the abrupt and unjustified tone of your letter visits an undeserved insult on a young writer. (...) A writer is a man who lives by the truth, using the color of imagination in order to generate in his reader a reaction of active love or active hatred."¹⁴⁸

Even though Babel was clearly under the protection of Gorky his literary career did fall rather silent in the 1930's. Most likely this was not due to the criticism of the General. He made a remark on his silent

¹⁴² Freidin, G. (2001). *Chronology of Isaac Babel*. Date of consultation July 14 2012 at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/Babel.htm>

¹⁴³ The introduction for books such as: 'The Lonely Years' and 'You Must Know Everything' as featured in this thesis.

¹⁴⁴ Freidin, G. (2001). *Chronology of Isaac Babel*. Date of consultation July 14 2012 at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/Babel.htm>

¹⁴⁵ Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.71.

¹⁴⁶ Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing; New York. p.43.

¹⁴⁷ Budyonny, S. in: Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.385.

¹⁴⁸ Gorky, M. in: Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.388.

period at the congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934 stating that he became a master of the genre of silence.¹⁴⁹

When his protector: Gorky died in 1936, Babel told his wife Antonina Pirozhkova: “Now they won’t let me live.”¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately his premonition was proven right.

4.3.2 Reaction to socialist realism

With Maxim Gorky protecting Babel as a true protégée, it is no wonder Isaac was allowed to give a speech at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers. In his speech Babel addressed the newly obliged aesthetic implicitly several times over. Commenting on the conference itself Babel starts by stating:

“We have had congresses of engineers, professors, chemists, and builders, but this time it is a congress of engineers of human souls – people who by their very trade are disunited (and they must be disunited because of the difference in their feelings tastes, methods of work). Despite this, I don’t believe that any of the congresses gathered here has ever felt so strongly united as we do. Like the rest of the working class, we are united by a community of ideas, thought and struggle. That struggle doesn’t need many words, but those words must be good words.”¹⁵¹

This remark displays a rather ambiguous stance towards the new aesthetic. He starts off with commenting on ‘the engineers of human souls’ a clear reference to the words of Stalin, in the same sentence however he distinguishes different types within this category. He furthermore states that this disunity within the category is wanted by stating that “they must be disunited.” With this remark he differs with the official stance that all engineers of human souls need to adhere to the same aesthetic. He goes on by somewhat rejecting his earlier stance and claiming that there is a unity within the engineers of human souls. The sharing of the same beliefs would be the basis of this unity, a unity that didn’t exist a sentence earlier: “difference in feelings, tastes, methods of work.” When he remarks on the usage of good words rather than numerous words on the struggle he does seem to align himself with the new aesthetic. The struggle he is referencing to is the struggle for equality and prosperity for all; in essence the communist utopia. Due to the fact that the speech is overseen by Party officials it is likely that the speech is censored by the writer himself. Perhaps this speech is even a fabrication of the writer combining facts and fiction, in other words combining his true beliefs and the state’s desired beliefs. If we look further on in the same speech we can find another reference to the aesthetic. “[The] serious aspect of it is that, in our profession, it is our duty to help the triumph of the new Bolshevik taste in this country. That will be a political achievement of the first magnitude, because it is our luck that it is impossible for us to have an unpolitical achievement.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Freidin, G. (2001). *Chronology of Isaac Babel*. Date of consultation July 14 2012 at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/Babel.htm>

¹⁵⁰ Pirozhkova, A. (1996). *At his side*. Steer Forth Press: South Royalton. p. xvi.

¹⁵¹ Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wollf: New York. p.396-397.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* p.398.

This statement is a showing of clear awareness of the interference of the Party in all affairs. Babel, as is also shown in his short stories, stands favourable to the communist ideology and considers it a privilege to write for the further betterment of the cultural taste. He complies with the progenitors of the socialist realist aesthetic that literary work ought to be infused with politics. He goes on: “The Party and the government have given us everything, depriving us only of one privilege that of writing badly.”¹⁵³

With this statement he essentially abandons his earlier work. His earlier work didn't concern itself with the reaching of the communist utopia. He almost pledges to do better next time round.

4.3.3 Facing censorship

This next time round would not come. Starting in the 1930's Babel fell somewhat silent. This silence could come from two sources: the writer himself not producing or the Union of Soviet Writers not allowing publication. Antonina, in her memoirs of the last years of Isaac Babel, refers to stories he was working on and that had gotten lost.¹⁵⁴ It becomes likely that the silence was not just due to the writer's own doing. Even though the writer is favourable to the communist ideology this doesn't mean he is not critical about assessing its development. For instance his book 'Red Cavalry' which main theme was the struggle during the revolution became somewhat contraband. The main character in the story was a Jewish shopkeeper who questioned the revolution. Although Babel was loyal to the Communist Party he nonetheless was critical of its proceedings as well. A quote from the shopkeeper Gedali in Red Cavalry is the following:

“You shoot because you are the Revolution. But does not Revolution bring joy? And does not joy hate to see orphans in a home? Good deeds are done by good men. Revolution is the food deed of good men. But good men do not murder. So the Revolution is being made by bad men. But the Poles are also bad men. Who then can tell Gedali where lies revolution and where lies counterrevolution?”¹⁵⁵

This assessment of the fine line between what is considered good or bad would be returned to in later life during the trials held by the Communist Party. As Antonina recounts he didn't believe the accusations made against the majority of arrestees.¹⁵⁶ He even asked the head of the secret police: Yagoda¹⁵⁷, on what to do in case of arrest:

“ ‘[Tell] me, how should someone act if he falls in your men's paws?’ He quickly replied: ‘Deny everything, whatever the charges, just say no and keep on saying no. If one denies everything, we are powerless.’ Later on during the mass arrests under Yezhov, Babel remembered Yagoda's words and said; ‘Surely, when Yagoda was in charge, things were still comparatively humane.’”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wollf: New York. p.399.

¹⁵⁴ Pirozhkova, A. (1996). *At his side*. Steer Forth Press: South Royalton. p.69

¹⁵⁵ Babel, I. in: Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing; New York. p.103.

¹⁵⁶ Pirozhkova, A. (1996). *At his side*. Steer Forth Press: South Royalton. p.104.

¹⁵⁷ Head of the NKVD from 1934-1936.

¹⁵⁸ Pirozhkova, A. (1996). *At his side*. Steer Forth Press: South Royalton . p.63.

This awareness of the graveness of the situation plays a great part in the literary career of the writer. In the speech he gave at the Congress in 1934 he distanced himself from his earlier work and pledge to advance in the direction of socialist realism. His silent period had already commenced as in 1933 the expurgation of Babel's work began.¹⁵⁹

Whilst spending time with Maxim Gorky in Sorrento he wrote to his mother on having written a new story and difficulties of getting things published: "As, of course, it does not fit in with the 'general Party line', it can expect rough going, but everyone wholeheartedly acknowledges its artistic qualities."¹⁶⁰ In a second letter dated just 3 days later on May 5th 1933 he writes: "I am really quite pleased with one of them – I only hope that the censors will pass it."¹⁶¹ The play was eventually published in March 1935 but would eventually be banned.¹⁶² It is unclear of how much or even when works of Babel have been exactly banned. The genre of silence did develop quite successfully as only three stories other than his play *Maria*, appeared in publication.¹⁶³ If we look at the correspondence between Babel and his relatives abroad, we can see that he writes more frankly when he is abroad. This could lead us to believe that Babel self-censored, so as not to become under suspicion. In 1935 Babel writes his mother about his writing-situation: "My nice Mama, if I write seldom, it is not because my life is hard – compared with millions of people, my life is easy, happy and privileged – but because it is uncertain and this uncertainty derives from nothing else but changes and doubts connected with my work."¹⁶⁴

In this sentence refers to "changes and doubts" but he doesn't make them explicit. It does give us some insight as to why the writer published less and less. In 1937 when asked by an audience assembled by the Union of Soviet Writers about his silence Babel first commented on his unsuitability to be a writer and would continue on that he holds the Soviet reader in such high regard as to not border him with hurried work.¹⁶⁵

By this time his protector Gorky had already died, leaving Babel to defend himself.

4.3.4 The Union of Soviet Writers

Due to his connection to the head of the Union of Soviet Writers, Babel became a prominent member. In 1932 when Babel wanted to visit his family abroad, he requested assistance in the form of finding him a house to the Union of Soviet Writers. The organization helped to writer by providing him a home in 1932.¹⁶⁶ In August of that same year, Babel was nominated by the Union of Soviet Writers for the membership of the national commission of the International Organization of Revolutionary

¹⁵⁹ Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing; New York. p. 91.

¹⁶⁰ Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.232.

¹⁶¹ Just like in the previous passage Babel is referring to the play 'Maria.' Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.233.

¹⁶² Ibid. p.232.

¹⁶³ Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing; New York. p. 92-97.

¹⁶⁴ Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.283.

¹⁶⁵ Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing; New York. p.97.

¹⁶⁶ Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.207.

Writers.¹⁶⁷ Babel's star was rising concerning his involvement with the Union of Soviet Writers. In 1933 Babel was summoned to come to the aid of Gorky in organizing the first Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers.¹⁶⁸ He would also be a key note speaker on the event itself. With the death of Gorky his status within the Union of Soviet Writers didn't change dramatically. As in 1936 Isaac Babel was assigned a dacha, a country house by the Union of Soviet Writers. This is a privilege shared only by other leading figures in literature. From a distance nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary. Babel however knew it was a farce, as he told Antonina after the death of Gorky; "Now they won't let me live."¹⁶⁹

Vitaly Shentalinsky was granted access to the files of the NKVD and researched the files on writers. One of such files belonged to Isaac Babel and included transcripts of interrogations held after his arrest in May 1939. Babel was charged with being a foreign spy. The link to France and Belgium probably didn't help his case but his long-time friendship with fellow author: André Malraux was the greatest source in fabricating this claim. The evidence on which the case against Babel was built came from "Information from agents".¹⁷⁰ Investigating the nature of these sources Shentalinsky writes: "Babel had been under surveillance since 1934, and not so much by the full-time agents of the NKVD as by a great variety of people including his fellow-writers."¹⁷¹

Although Shentalinsky is not able to give names to these sources, a connection to the Union of Soviet Writers is likely. As we look to extracts of the information given by the sources it becomes evident that the information can only be derived in conversations between people Babel trusted. As we have seen in his correspondence, Babel is careful and cautious concerning criticizing on Party stances. The literary circle of which Babel was part of, show loyalty to the regime and are thus members of the Union of Soviet Writers. No irrefutable evidence is found as of yet to this connection or the role of the Union of Soviet Writers in the arrest of Babel. The silencing of the poet is the region in which lies the most interconnection with the writer.

¹⁶⁷ The international organization was known under its abbreviation: MORP. Babel, I. (1964). *The Lonely Years: 1925-1939*. H. Wolff: New York. p.218.

¹⁶⁸ Freidin, G. (2001). *Chronology of Isaac Babel*. Date of consultation July 14 2012 at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/Babel.htm>

¹⁶⁹ Pirozhkova, A. (1996). *At his side*. Steer Forth Press: South Royalton. p. xvi.

¹⁷⁰ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.57

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* p.57

Mikhail Bulgakov



4.4 Mikhail Bulgakov

4.4.1 Overview

Mikhail Bulgakov was born on May 15th 1891 in Kiev. He was the eldest of seven children born to a professor in theology. His family belonged to the educated classes. The family's traditions included ecclesiastical, educational and medicinal.¹⁷² Like his father, his mother also was in the educational trade as she was a teacher before her marriage and after her husband's death she returned to the profession. Bulgakov's father died in 1907 from the same kidney disease that would cause Mikhail's death. Bulgakov's mother raised the family by herself and encouraged the children to read. There were no restrictions as to what they choose to read.¹⁷³ This freedom in his upbringing resulted in liberal political views to be adopted by Mikhail.¹⁷⁴ These views he would not abandon at any point in his life and would become intrinsically linked to the literary work of the writer. In 1912 when he was a student of the medical faculty of the University of Kiev he met Tatyana Lappa. She would become his wife in 1913. Even though he had some difficulty passing in 1912 he did graduate with distinction in 1916.¹⁷⁵ Almost immediately after graduation Bulgakov signed up with the Red Cross as a volunteer. He was initially placed in a military hospital near the south-west front but was reassigned to a remote rural town that had shortage of medical staff.¹⁷⁶ In the midst of the turmoil the revolution happened. From the onset Bulgakov was wary of this development. At the time deployed as a doctor he witnessed how the city of Kiev would fall alternating into different hands.¹⁷⁷ At one of these changes in power Bulgakov would be a witness to the torture and murder of a Jew.¹⁷⁸ This traumatic experience would form the basis of his first novel: 'The White Guard', that would be published in 1925.¹⁷⁹ In 1926 a play that has its bases in his novel would premiere on stage: 'The Day of the Turbins'. It is rumoured to be Stalin's favourite play. He reportedly saw it 15 times.¹⁸⁰ He established himself by writing 'The White Guard', a story about the family Turbin that lives in Kiev. Their struggle during the difficult period in which several armies fought over the city is described. The story became a major success and was even transformed into a play. This success would however form the basis of sharp criticism against the author.¹⁸¹

At the time the murder on the Jew occurred, Bulgakov was still a full-time doctor with a passion for writing. In 1920 he would however have a breakthrough as he laid down his stethoscope and decided

¹⁷² Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.5.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p.9.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p.10.

¹⁷⁵ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.11.

¹⁷⁶ Weststeijn, W. (2004). *Russische literatuur*. Meulenhoff: Amsterdam. p.283.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p.283.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p.283.

¹⁷⁹ It wasn't published in a bookform. The novel was published in a serie in the literary magazine: 'Russia'.

¹⁸⁰ Sebag Montefiore, S. (2003). *Stalin: the court of the red Tsar*. Orion Books: London. p.101.

¹⁸¹ Alexandrova, V. (1964). *A history of Soviet literature*. Anchor Books: New York. p.38.

to focus solely on the development of his writing career.¹⁸² His first wife Tatyana, acclaims this change of heart due to his stroke with death. In 1919 Bulgakov became diagnosed with typhus and became severely ill, after recovery he would have made this choice.¹⁸³

In his literary work Bulgakov would remain critical of the developments in his country. When reflecting on the times before the revolution Bulgakov writes the following:

“But those were legendary times, those times when in the gardens of our country’s most beautiful city there lived a carefree, young generation. In the hearts of this generation then was born a certainty that the whole of life would pass in white blossom, quietly, calmly, dawns, sunsets, the Dnieper, the Kreshchatik, sunlit streets in summer, and in winter in the snow, not cold, not harsh, but large-flaked and caressing... But it tuned out quite the opposite. The legendary times broke off, and suddenly, and threateningly, history stepped in.”¹⁸⁴

Clearly Bulgakov is displeased with the developments in his country. More particularly he is unhappy with the way in which the country is ruled. This is evident in his statement: “The legendary times broke off”, a clear reference to what has been and can no longer be retrieved.

In 1924 his personal life changes when he leaves his first wife to marry Lyubov Belozerskaya. The year after his marriage to Belozerskaya was one filled with literary achievements. Not only was his novel published, two stories were also published in literary magazines.¹⁸⁵

His fame did put him in the position that the writer organizations and critics would focus on him ever more. Bulgakov’s work was increasingly more difficult to get published. In 1929 he even addressed the highest authority to get his complaint heard. Stalin receives a letter in which Bulgakov describes his misery and even proposes a solution: the writer needed to emigrate. This was not to be granted, but even more extraordinary his act, of what today can only be considered as sheer bravery, never let to an arrest. Throughout his literary career he would nonetheless be censored and criticized.

In 1932 he would divorce Lyubov and marry his third wife: Elena Sergeevna. She would be the guard to his archive after the writer passed away due to natural causes in 1940.

4.4.2 Reaction to socialist realism

Bulgakov didn’t show any loyalty to the Communist Party. He criticized their actions and demonstrated his position in his literary work. Starting with his first novel, Bulgakov takes somewhat of a stance depicting the Whites as heroes and having no Bolsheviks in his story.¹⁸⁶ In his later work

¹⁸² Haber, E. (1998). *Mikhail Bulgakov: The Early Years*. President and Fellows of Harvard College: Cambridge, Massachusetts. p.28.

¹⁸³ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.20

¹⁸⁴ Bulgakov, M. in: Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.11.

¹⁸⁵ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.62.

¹⁸⁶ Bulgakov, M. (2010). *The White Guard*. Random House: New York.

he would not introduce the socialist realist template into it. When Elena Sergeevna, his third wife, asked him why he did not write a story on the Red Army rather than the White he said:

“As you seem not to understand, I should love to write such a play, but I cannot write about what I do not know.”¹⁸⁷

His stance against imposing a template on every Soviet writer however went further than that. It wasn't merely the case that he was unaware of the dealings of the Red Army. He was blatantly against the formation of a template as he is a firm believer of the power and need for satire.¹⁸⁸ He writes: “As every literate person knows, satire can be truly honourable, but one would be hard put to find a single man in the whole world who would be able to offer the authorities a sample of permissible satire.”¹⁸⁹

Bulgakov shows that a writer ought to be free to write on and about whatever he wants for otherwise he can not perform his job. A writer's job is to question authority; to show them the reflection in the mirror. Mikhail even writes a letter to Stalin to inform him about his take on the socialist realist template. He writes his letter before the socialist realist template is made obligatory but he would not abandon his take as we can see in his most prominent work. This work ‘The Master and Margarita’ is without doubt a critic on the Stalinist government. Written in a satiric manner, the story can be seen as an allegory for the Stalinist regime.¹⁹⁰

In his letter to Stalin dated March 28th 1930 he writes: “Any satirist in the USSR must question the Soviet system.”¹⁹¹

He reasserts his earlier claim. In his literary career no evidence is to be found that Bulgakov even tries to implement the socialist realist aesthetic. In his almost opus magnum-like work: ‘The Master and Margarita’, on which he had worked from 1929 up to his death in 1940, he remains critical of the Communist state, or more precisely the Stalinist state.¹⁹² He choose a distinctly different path than the one set out for him by the regime. He defied the template and knew that his opus magnum wouldn't get published. He essentially wrote it only to be put away in a drawer. His wife pledged him on his deathbed that she would make sure that the writing would be published; fortunately she could follow through on that promise.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Bulgakov, M. in: Perova, N. (1993). *Bulgakov & Mandelstam: Two Literary Giants*. Glas Publishers: Moscow. p. 96.

¹⁸⁸ Curtis, J. (2009). *Bulgakov's Last Decade*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. (First published 1987) p.16.

¹⁸⁹ Bulgakov, M. in: Curtis, J. (2009). *Bulgakov's Last Decade*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. (First published 1987) p.17.

¹⁹⁰ Weeks, L. (1996). *The Master and Margarita: A Critical Companion*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois. p.20.

¹⁹¹ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p. 85.

¹⁹² Bulgakov, M. (2011). *The Master and Margarita*. Wordsworth Classics: Ware.

¹⁹³ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.225.

4.4.3 Facing censorship

Bulgakov wasn't spared by the critics even though the most famous admirer of his work was Stalin. The censoring of his plays predates the Union of Soviet Writers. The first sentence in Bulgakov's first letter to Stalin states that all his work had been banned.¹⁹⁴ On part of the censorship he furthermore states that: "It is my duty as a writer to battle against censorship, no matter form it takes and under what regime, as it is my obligation to issue appeals for freedom of the press."¹⁹⁵ This stance gained him a lot of attention. But his struggle starts before the 1930's. In 1928 he was criticized heavily for his work 'Flight'. The play that Bulgakov had written was to be attacked on the grounds that it was "anti-Soviet and Rightist".¹⁹⁶ Bulgakov had one powerful admirer in his corner as Stalin helped him out by writing the following on his behalf:

"It's not good calling literature Right and Left. These are Party words. In literature, use class, anti-Soviet, revolutionary or anti-revolutionary but not Right or Left.. If Bulgakov would add to the eight dreams, one or two where he would discover the international social content of the Civil War, the spectator would understand that the hones 'Serafima' and the professor were thrown away from Russia, not by the caprice of Bolsheviks, but because they lived on the necks of the people. It's easy to criticize 'Days of the Turbins'- it's easy to reject but it's hardest to write good plays. The final impression of the play is good for Bolshevism."¹⁹⁷

The fact that Stalin himself came to his rescue didn't mean the writer would be left alone by the critics. Stalin confirm the beliefs of the censor that concludes that his work is not up to the obligatory standards. With some changes in the text this problem could be overcome. Bulgakov never changed his texts and this led theatres to drop the play from their schedule as to not be implicated in the writer's fall from favour.¹⁹⁸ Bulgakov attained the reputation of being a pre-revolutionary writer. He is depicted as being a 'neo-bourgeois writer' belonging to the 'right wing of Soviet literature'.¹⁹⁹ Both implicated the writer as being anti-Soviet. Bulgakov's critics comment on the depiction that the writer gives of Soviet life as unchanged with the Revolution.²⁰⁰ This was a sheer blow to the writer's status. He would not be able to publish and would only be able to see two of his plays be performed. These plays were the adaptation of Gogol's 'Dead Souls' in 1932 and his own play 'Moliere' in 1936. The adaptation would be performed throughout his lifetime, but was much less linked to the writings of Bulgakov as the second. The play 'Moliere' would or perhaps could only be performed seven times as

¹⁹⁴ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p. 84.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.85.

¹⁹⁶ Sebag Montefiore, S. (2003). *Stalin: the court of the red Tsar*. Orion Books: London. p.101.

¹⁹⁷ Sebag Montefiore, S. (2003). *Stalin: the court of the red Tsar*. Orion Books: London. p.101.

¹⁹⁸ Curtis, J. (2009). *Bulgakov's Last Decade*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. (First published 1987) p.9.

¹⁹⁹ Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.160.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.164

critical attacks became so severe that the play was banned.²⁰¹ The plays with which he had gained his success would be put under a ban: 'The Days of the Turbins' and 'Crimson Island'.²⁰²

For Bulgakov it became ever more clear that his own work would be impossible to get published or be heard. Whilst he worked on translations and adaptations of works to be performed on stage he would also continue to work on his own work knowing it would remain without an audience.

4.4.4 The Union of Soviet Writers

With Bulgakov's aversion to censorship and the socialist realist template it is rather surprising that the writer joined the Union of Soviet Writers and never retracted his membership.²⁰³ Even with his awareness of the uncompromising attacks from critics and the relentless banning of his work did not change this. Bulgakov however did appeal to Maxim Gorky. He made his appeal before Gorky was made head of the Union of Soviet Writers but was already acclaimed as well connected to Stalin. His appeal reads:

"Why force a writer whose work cannot exist in the USSR to stay in the country? To ensure that his death is inevitable? All my plays are banned; not one line I have written is being published anywhere; I have no work ready to sell, and do not receive a single kopeck in royalties; not a single institution or individual replies to my appeals and complaints; in a word, everything that I have written over the last ten years in the Soviet Union has been destroyed. All that now remains is to destroy me as well. I beg them to make the humane decision and let me go!"²⁰⁴

The appeal to Gorky is a description of the unfortunate state in which Bulgakov found himself in. Having little money and being forced to live in a country that doesn't grant him the freedom of press he so desired. With the disbandment of the RAPP and the coming into being of the Union of Soviet Writers, Bulgakov would have been most likely one of the writers that was relieved. Hoping for a bettering of the circumstances would probably have made him want to sign up. Though it must be stated that we haven't found a clear evidence of this. However considering his rather critical stance of the Soviet state and all the administration that goes with it, as he displays in his work, this assumption isn't to be considered far fetched.

The Union of Soviet Writers actually didn't provide the anticipated change. This would prompt Bulgakov to write more letters to Stalin. In the letters Bulgakov asked to be allowed to leave the country in two instances and the return to Moscow of a fellow writer after exile.²⁰⁵ Both requests were never to be granted. However Stalin together with Yagoda did grant Bulgakov the ability to work.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.2.

²⁰² Ibid. p.2.

²⁰³ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press. p.208.

²⁰⁴ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p. 80.

²⁰⁵ Milne, L. (2009). *Mikhail Bulgakov: a Critical Biography*. Cambridge University Press

²⁰⁶ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p. 93.

They instructed the Union of Soviet Writers to give Bulgakov a job. Bulgakov became the assistant director at the Moscow Theatre of Art. His personal work would still not be able to get passed the censors and/or would be banned if it initially did pass.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York, p.93.

Osip Mandelstam



4.5 Osip Mandelstam

4.5.1 Overview

Osip Mandelstam was born in Warsaw in 1891. He attended school and later university in St. Petersburg. He didn't enjoy a joyful upbringing. His father for instance wasn't actively engaged with the raising his children. Osip developed a painful attitude towards his family and his roots.²⁰⁸ He even complained to one of his best friends, Emma Gerstein, about his upbringing. As Emma describes: "Complaints about his difficult childhood and incompetent upbringing: they continued taking him to the women's bathing place for too long; he found it very unsettling to be caned by his governess."²⁰⁹

In September of 1899 young Osip was enrolled at the commercial Tennishev school. The school practiced with innovative pedagogic methods. At the school there was no punishment, no grade journals, attendance of parents was encouraged and attempts were made to approach every student individually.²¹⁰ His first strides into poetry were initiated by a teacher at Tennishev. The teacher; Vladimir Gippius, taught Russian Literature. Mandelstam writes to him on April 19th 1908: "For the longest time I have felt especially drawn to you, at the same time I also felt a special distance separating me from you."²¹¹ He clearly feels some connection to his mentor but at the same time is in awe of his knowledge of literature. He doesn't see his mentor as a friend but rather an expert that he confides in and respects.

In 1910 his first steps in becoming an established poet were taken with the publication of a collection of his poems in the journal: *Apollo*. Osip Mandelstam was one of the leaders of Acmeism in Russia.²¹² Acmeism wanted to bring clarity back into poetic work. Even though the movement itself was created by Nikolai Gumilyov, Mandelstam is considered to be one of the best representatives of this movement. Together with Gumilyov and his wife; Anna Akhmatova, Mandelstam formed the core of the Acmeist movement.²¹³ The movement had the aim to combine both classical and domestic culture.²¹⁴ As one of the main representatives of the movement, Mandelstam succeeded in the combination.

In the years that followed, Russia became victim to turbulent times. The revolution of 1917 formed a definite breaking point with the status quo. Everyone in Russia was affected by this. Choices were to be made, not in the least for the creative minds. Literary figures got inspiration from the new regime and their promises. Although Osip Mandelstam in his youth had belonged to the Social-Revolutionary

²⁰⁸ Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton U.S.A. p.12.

²⁰⁹ Gerstein, E. (2004). *Moscow Memoirs*. Overlook Press: New York. p.380. (First published in 1998). p.10

²¹⁰ Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton U.S.A. p.13-14.

²¹¹ Mandelstam in: Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton U.S.A. p.16.

²¹² Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.185.

²¹³ Holmgren, B. (1993). *Women's Work in Stalin's Time*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington. p.122.

²¹⁴ Gifford, H. (1974). *Mandelstam. Essays in Criticism*. Volume 24, Issue 4, p. 408.

Party; in 1917 he choose a different path.²¹⁵ He described the arising of the new state of affairs as follows: 'From easy life we lost our minds'.²¹⁶

In 1919 Osip met the woman he would later marry and who would prove to be crucial for his literary legacy. Nadezdha Iakovlevna was her name. She would be one of his memoirists and keepers of his poetic work. The widow of Osip had published her recollections on the life and prosecution of Mandelstam in the 1970's. At that time it was impossible for Nadezdha to publish her memoirs in Russia. Literary refuge was sought and found, and her memoirs were published abroad. Nadezdha wrote two volumes of her memoirs. The first was translated in *Hope Against Hope*, whilst the second one was called *Hope Abandoned*.²¹⁷

During the 1920's coinciding with the stricter rules on literary works, Mandelstam's poetic voice is heard less and less.²¹⁸

In his poetic and prosaic work a negative stance towards the development of the Soviet Union became ever more frequent in his poetry.²¹⁹ This change can be contributed to the assessment of Mandelstam on the working of state apparatus at that time. He critically assessed the formation of the new state apparatus, regime and the effect it had on the society. In 1923 he wrote the following poem which gives a great insight into how Mandelstam perceived the reaction of society towards contemporary history and regime:

My time

My time, my savage beast, who
will be able to glance in your eyes
and using his blood as glue
past up the backbones of a pair of centuries?
Blood the builder gushes
from earth-things' throats
but lice living behind the spine
tremble as new days dawn.

While there's life in his lungs, a creature

²¹⁵ Brown, C. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 25 (First published in 1973).
Strakhovsky, L. (1947). Osip Mandelstam-The Architect of Words. *The Russian Review*. Volume 7, Number 1, p.67.

²¹⁶ Strakhovsky, L. (1947). Osip Mandelstam-The Architect of Words. *The Russian Review*. Volume 7, Number 1, p.67.

²¹⁷ *Hope Against Hope* was first published in 1970, *Hope Abandoned* was first published in 1974.

²¹⁸ Strakhovsky, L. (1947). Osip Mandelstam-The Architect of Words. *The Russian Review*. Volume 7, Number 1, p.69.

²¹⁹ Zeeman, P. (1988). *The Later Poetry of Osip Mandelstam*. Rodopi: Amsterdam. p.29.

carries his backbone behind him,
and waves play on
that invisible column.

And earth-time is tender
like a child's bones.

And life's head goes on the block
again a sacrificial lamb.

To tear this time into freedom,
to begin a new world, we
need a flute to tie up
the joints of knotty days.
Our time rocks the waves
of men's anguish
and in the grass an adder breathes
the age's golden measure.

And buds will swell with moisture,
again, green shoots splash out
but oh my beautiful pitiful time
your backbone's broken.
You stare behind you with a senseless
smile, cruel, weak,
like a wounded animal
staring back at his paw-tracks.²²⁰

In the poem Mandelstam gives a great analyses of the ambivalent state in which he perceived society to be in. Although according to Mandestam it must have been obvious to all, that society was in a negative place, nobody dared or perhaps was able to stand up to the leaders. The usage of the words *sacrificial lamb*, *backbone broken*, *wounded animal* all point to the ambivalence and lack of bravery. Mandelstam also points out the direction society could be pulled into: freedom. *Earth time is tender*, Mandelstam writes, cautioning his readers to fragile state of society as well as glimpsing to the changeability of that same society.

Due to these and other critiques and the fact that at that time Mandelstam already established himself in the main stream literary world, he soon got attention from the authorities.

²²⁰ Mandelstam, O. in: Raffel, B. (1973). *Complete poetry of Osip Mandelstam*. State University of New York Press: New York. p. 130-131.

Osip Mandelstam experienced Communist Party involvement to a great extent. The height of the level of involvement came in 1934. Mandelstam had recited an epigram on Stalin to friends on numerous occasions. He actually never had written the text down²²¹ but nevertheless this seditious poem came into the hands of the secret police. It became the main reason for his arrest on May 16, 1934 and his subsequent exile to the city of Voronezh²²². Mandelstam was asked by his interrogator to recite the epigram which Mandelstam did, as well as writing it down:

We live without sensing the country beneath us,
at ten paces, our speech has no sound.
And when there's the will to half-open our mouths,
the Kremlin crag-dweller bars the way.
Fat fingers as oily as maggots,
words sure as forty-pound weights,
with his leather-clad gleaming calves,
and his large laughing cockroach eyes.

And around him a rabble of thin-necked bosses,
he toys with the service of such semi-humans.
They whistle, they meow, and they whine:
he alone merely jabs with his finger and barks,
tossing out decree after decree like horseshoes –
right in the eye, in the face, the brow or the groin.
Not one shooting but swells his gang's pleasure,
and the broad breast of the Ossetian.²²³

During the reciting of the epigram his interrogator had a copy of the poem which was given to him by an informer, which had to be one of Mandelstam friends to whom he had recited the poem. He asked Mandelstam about the third and fourth line which in the reciting by Mandelstam deviated from his copy. Mandelstam responded that it differed because the interrogator had the first version of the epigram.²²⁴ During the interrogation Mandelstam was frank and unapologetic about his work. References to Stalin in the epigram such as facial and physical features; fat fingers and cockroach eyes, the questioning on his paternity with the Ossetian remark are, to say the least, incriminating for

²²¹ Coetzee, J. (1991). Osip Mandelstam and the Stalin Ode. *Representations*. Volume 35, p. 72.

²²² Crowfoot, J. In: Gerstein, E. (1998). *Moscow memoirs*. The Overlook Press: New York. p. xiii.

²²³ Mandelstam, O. in: Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.173.

²²⁴ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.171-174.

the poet. During the interrogation he doesn't give signs of remorse nor does he recant his poem. Mandelstam wrote down his own death sentence and signed it. Mandelstam was sentenced to exile. Three years later Osip was allowed to return to Moscow where he was arrested again.

On May 3rd Osip was arrested, on August 2nd Mandelstam was sentenced to be sent to a labour camp for the duration of five years because of anti-Soviet agitation. The preservation part that was added to his first sentence in 1934 was left out this time.²²⁵ Osip Mandelstam died as a literary martyr in 1938.²²⁶

4.5.2 Reaction to socialist realism

The way in which Osip wrote poetry and the style he preferred in his work, was different from the template that was described by the Soviet state. His linkage with Acmeism made him increasingly vulnerable for critics and censorship. He never renounced his connection to the movement and even defended the aesthetic that it prescribed. When asked in 1930 about what Acmeism actually entailed Mandelstam replied: "Nostalgia for world culture."²²⁷ He would reaffirm this remark in 1937.²²⁸ With this emphasis on 'world culture', Mandelstam effectively deferred from the socialist realist template, that prescribes writers to focus on Soviet culture. Furthermore the pessimism that is apparent in Osip's work is not according to the instructions given by the template that stated that literary works should enhance the positive progress of the state. Mandelstam never really did go into politics in his work. He avoided politics but defied the official literary taste of the Soviet Union.²²⁹ Mandelstam disregarded the official template and continued to use the Acmeist aesthetic throughout his literary career.²³⁰

On May 25th 1934 Mandelstam was interrogated by the OGPU.²³¹ He was asked by his interrogator to describe his political views and their development. As he declares:

"In 1930 a great depression afflicted my political outlook and my sense of ease in society. The social undercurrent of this depression was the liquidation of the kulaks as a class. My perception of that process was expressed in the poem 'A Cold Spring', which is attached to the present deposition and was written in summer 1932 after I returned from the Crimea. By then I was beginning to feel trapped in society and this feeling was intensified and sharpened by a number of clashes of a personal and literary character."²³²

²²⁵ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.191.

²²⁶ VPRO (n.d.). *Osip Mandelstam*. Date of consultation March 31 2011 at: <http://boeken.vpro.nl/personen/31077056/>

²²⁷ Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.55.

²²⁸ Brown, C. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 137 (First published in 1973).

²²⁹ Brody, E. in: Mandelstam, O. & Morrison, R. (1990). *Poems from Mandelstam*. Associated University Presses: Cranbury, New Jersey. p.3.

²³⁰ Holmgren, B. (1993). *Women's Work in Stalin's Time*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington. p.122.

²³¹ Soviet secret police agency, in English it is often translated as: Joint State Political Directorate.

²³² Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.177-178. The answer of Mandelstam is also recited in: Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p.124.

The poem to which Mandelstam refers is the following:

The spring is cold. Crimea, shy and hungry,
As under Wrangler, just as guilty,
Bundles on the ground, patches on tatters,
The vapour, just as sour and biting.
The hazy distance, just as handsome,
The trees, their buds beginning to swell,
Stand like strangers, and only pity,
The Easter folly of almond blossom.
Nature does not recognize its own features.
And the terrible shades of Ukraine and Kuban-
On the felted land starving peasants,
Stand at the gate, but do not touch the latch.²³³

As Mandelstam explained his motives to write this poem were entangled with a negative stance towards state policy in the form of the liquidation of the kulaks. The last sentence of the verse is of especial interest. It clearly describes the process of liquidation and the poet's feelings about it. This is again a clear breach with the socialist realist template that would be introduced in August 1934. Following his arrest and subsequent exile, Mandelstam tried to write an Ode to Stalin in 1937. As an exile he was practicably unemployable and thus depended on friends and family for support. By writing an Ode to Stalin in the socialist realist template he wanted to change the situation. An attempt is all that it remained. The Ode never came.²³⁴

Mandelstam's wife Nadezdha wrote in her memoirs the reason that Osip himself gave for his inability to write in a different style. Osip only wrote verses if they "poured out of him spontaneously."²³⁵ Mandelstam didn't believe in consciously conforming to a particular school or style. It was the private person that makes a poet belong to a certain school. His passions lead the poet, not the other way around. Furthermore Osip was a firm believer of predestination and accepted it just as simply as its subsequent fate.²³⁶ This would in fact explain the frankness in his statements to his interrogators. A true poet can't be conformed by a state to write in a particular way. He conforms himself to a particular style. A socialist realist template can not be enforced. According to Osip Mandelstam it's just not how a true writer can operate.

²³³ Mandelstam, O. in: Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.178.

²³⁴ Brown, C. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 132 (First published in 1973).

²³⁵ Mandelstam, N. (1974). *Hope Abandoned*. Collins & Harvill Press: London. p. 312.

²³⁶ Mandelstam, N. (1972). *Hope Abandoned*. Collins and Harvell Press: London. p. 12-13.

4.5.3 Facing censorship

Mandelstam never made use of the socialist realist template. This made him vulnerable for critique. Censoring the poet pre-dated the 1930's. Osip Mandelstam tried to create a literary movement following the death of his poetic friend Nikolay Gumilyov in 1921. This movement would promote classical poetry but he was restricted in his attempt. The movement would never be established due to the hostile attitude of the Soviet critics and censors.²³⁷ The attitude of the officials connected to the party who had a say over literary matters were very much opposed to Mandelstam. As Mandelstam himself states: "I have been barred from everything but translation."²³⁸

In 1930 Mandelstam was again writing prose and poetry after the second half of the 1920's proved to be of little poetic productivity on Osip's part.²³⁹ The scrutiny of the critics that were loyal to the Communist Party didn't fail to reply to this development. Two clichés were used to describe the work of Mandelstam: 'Master' and 'out of tune with the times'.²⁴⁰

The first is a clear referral to the pre-Revolution era. Before the Communists took over and the proletariat were declared the rulers, society was divided within masters and servers. The reference is clearly undesired by the Communist Party, as is the second cliché. The critics of the loyalists agreed that Mandelstam didn't deliver. Mandelstam was obstructed by officials of the State Publishing House. He wasn't assigned a room or work when he requested this in Leningrad. The official controlling both stated: "Leningrad writers don't want him here", a harsh decision that was likely influenced by the negative critiques his work had gotten over the years.²⁴¹

With the disbandment of the RAPP, the situation seemed to change for the better for Mandelstam.²⁴²

He even found a protector in Nikolai Bukharin.²⁴³ Bukharin secured a life-long monthly pension in 1932 for the poet, which ceased after his exile to Voronezh ended in 1937.²⁴⁴ However in 1933 his last publication in the Soviet press for over thirty years and the last publication he is able to witness alive is printed.²⁴⁵ This last print in the press is; 'Journey to Armenia'. It describes the trip to Armenia that he and his wife undertook in 1930. It was the first major writings of the poet after his period of silence.²⁴⁶ By this time Mandelstam already was considered a pariah and had great difficulty in getting his work published.²⁴⁷ This pariah status was exemplified even more when we look at how 'Journey to Armenia' was received by critics. At this time the Union of Soviet Writers had taken over control of

²³⁷ Strakhovsky, L. (1947). Osip Mandelstam-The Architect of Words. *The Russian Review*. Volume 7, Number 1, p.69.

²³⁸ Mandelstam, N. (1981). *Hope Abandoned*. Scribner: New York. p.163.

²³⁹ Akhmatova, A. (2004). *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.54;

Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p.103.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 103.

²⁴¹ Brown, C. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 125 (First published in 1973).

²⁴² Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p. 118.

²⁴³ A prominent and influential leader within the Communist Party after the death of Lenin; his influence faded starting 1936 which led up to his arrest and death in 1938.

²⁴⁴ Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p. 118.

²⁴⁵ Brown, C. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 130 (First published in 1973).

²⁴⁶ Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p. 114.

²⁴⁷ Holmgren, B. (1993). *Women's Work in Stalin's Time*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington. p.15.

the literary world, which essentially meant that the critics were employees of the Union. On August 30th 1933 following the publication a critique was published in Pravda stating that the essay was nothing more than “(...) a collection of fancy phrases, and Mandelstam, like a typical Petersburg snob, overlooks the new achievements of Socialism in Armenia.”²⁴⁸ This final episode completed the censorship. The ‘Journey to Armenia’ would never be published on its own in a bounded version.²⁴⁹ Mandelstam was muzzled. He was no longer able to publish. A ban was put in place to forbid any publication for Mandelstam, the poet was never told of this decision though.²⁵⁰

4.5.4 The Union of Soviet Writers

Because the ban on publication by Mandelstam has been put in place effectively starting 1933, we can safely assume it is the doing of the Union of Soviet Writers which at that point had total control over literary matters. The Union of Soviet Writers worked as a secret informer.²⁵¹

Mandelstam was very aware of this position. Especially after he had heard off the phone call that had taken place between Boris Pasternak and Stalin.²⁵² The phone call had taken place on June 13th 1934. Stalin called Pasternak and stated that Mandelstam’s case was being reviewed. Everything would be all right, according to Stalin. Stalin questioned why Pasternak didn’t appeal to the writer’s organization, to which Pasternak responded: “Writers’ organizations have not dealt with such matters since 1927 and if I had not been making some efforts you probably would not have known anything about it.”²⁵³

Stalin continued by asking the poet on his personal assertion of the qualities of the poet. “But he is a great poet, isn’t he? A master?”²⁵⁴ Pasternak responded positively: “Yes, but that is not the point.”²⁵⁵

Following this conversation Stalin himself intervened in the sentencing of the poet. He ordered to preserve the poet.²⁵⁶ Due to this direct interference Mandelstam and his wife were allowed to move to Voronezh to stay there for the duration of the sentence. A direct attack on Stalin was not to be forgiven however Mandelstam would be worth more to Stalin alive rather than dead at that particular time because the first Congress of Soviet Writers had to take place shortly.²⁵⁷

During his exile Mandelstam did make contact with the local branch of the Union of Soviet Writers.

²⁴⁸ Brown, C. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 130 (First published in 1973).

²⁴⁹ Fraser, R. (2005). *Moderns Worth Keeping*. Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, New Jersey. p. 65.

²⁵⁰ Hingley, R. (1979). *Russian Writers and Soviet Society 1917-1978*. Weidenfield & Nicholson: London. p.216.

²⁵¹ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.187.

²⁵² Boris Pasternak (1890-1960) famous poet.

²⁵³ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.184.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p.184.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. p.184.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p.183.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p.183-185.

He made the request to be able to work for the writer's organization.²⁵⁸ The response to his request came from a high party functionary who sent Voronezh a letter stating that Mandelstam "[to be] gradually pulled into writers' work and used, to the extent possible, as a cultural force and be given the opportunity to earn a living."²⁵⁹ Mandelstam made an effort to come to grips with the demands of the Soviet state in general and the Union of Soviet Writers in particular. However in 1935 a year after receiving a positive response to his request he was asked by the local branch of the organization to give a lecture on Acmeism. This was deemed necessary so that Mandelstam could distance himself from his earlier erroneous ways. The secretary of the local branch of the Union of Soviet Writers commented on this lecture: "In his speech Mandelstam showed that he did not learn anything, he remains the way he was."²⁶⁰

Nonetheless, Mandelstam did receive some support from the local writers' organization. He was given a position at the Bolshoi Soviet Theatre in Voronezh in 1935. The support didn't last however and he lost his position not even a year later in June 1936.²⁶¹ At the eve of the start of what would become known as the Great Terror, Mandelstam had difficulty in finding work. When friend of the family; Emma Gerstein came to visit in May 1936 he asked her to appeal on his behalf to the Union of Soviet Writers: "He began to instruct me how I should talk to the general secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers. It was quite a hopeless undertaking, because I would not gain admittance to see Stavsky²⁶² and even had I got into the *Novy Mir*²⁶³ offices where he was chief editor, I would have blenched at his first hostile reply: his reaction certainly would have been unfriendly."²⁶⁴

Gerstein never did appeal to the Union of Soviet Writers. The conditions of Mandelstam's life began to deteriorate. He wasn't granted any work by the Union and because of the censorship he wasn't allowed to publish. In 1937 he commented on his situation:

"(..) I am a shadow. I don't exist. I only have the right to die.. It is useless to appeal to the Writers Union. They wash their hands of me."²⁶⁵

In the summer of 1937 an official of the Union of Soviet Writers did grant Mandelstam one act of kindness by allowing him a visit to the construction of the White Sea Channel, in order to inspire Mandelstam to write poetry with a Socialist Realist aesthetic. Mandelstam could not produce this.²⁶⁶ Before heading of the construction site, Mandelstam made a visit to the general secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers who promised him to review his case so Mandelstam would be able to make a living upon his return. Unknown to Mandelstam, the general secretary already sentenced him by sending a

²⁵⁸ Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p.141.

²⁵⁹ Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p.141.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p.142.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p.148.

²⁶² General secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers at the time.

²⁶³ Literary magazine published under the Union of Soviet Writers' direction.

²⁶⁴ Gerstein, E. (2004). *Moscow Memoirs*. Overlook Press: New York. (First published in 1998). p.76.

²⁶⁵ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.185.

²⁶⁶ Brown, C. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 133 (First published in 1973).

letter to the head of the secret police stating that Mandelstam had not mended his ways.²⁶⁷ Mandelstam was deemed an anti-Soviet element and was arrested on May 2nd 1938. In December 1938 Osip Mandelstam died in a transit camp.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p.185-188.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

We have come to the final chapter of this thesis. In order for it to run smoothly we need to have a quick look back at the start of this thesis. We started this thesis by making a combination of social scientific tradition with a historical case study.

By using the model of James Scott to an entirely different field we try to make this combination.

The model shows a causal relationship. According to Scott four elements need to be present in order for a grand scheme to fail. These are: high modernism, authoritarian state, prostrate civil society and *mētis*.

By expanding the scope of this model, which the writer of the theory even invites us to do; we want to find out whether it can still hold.

The case we chose to examine is highly different from the cases that Scott has chosen. In the thesis we take a closer look at the handling of the literary policy of the Soviet Union in the 1930's. This period is burdened with tremendous changes in the Soviet Union. One of the darkest pages of Soviet history transpires in the midst of the thirties when the Great Terror commenced. The literary intelligentsia wasn't left untouched. In fact it was struck hard, relatively speaking. By applying the theory of Scott to this case we needed to make sure that we could speak of a failing of a grand scheme. This was necessary because we needed to work backwards. To look if the theory holds all the elements of the causal model needed to be present, otherwise we would have to adapt or even reject the theory in this particular case. The literary policy fitted the bill when looking at the first three elements. The final element; *mētis*, formed the ultimate case study. By choosing four different writers who all made different choices and were of different backgrounds we set off to investigate the policy. The usage of primary as well as secondary sources helped reconstruct the writers take on the literary policies in place. Their reaction to these policies was most important for this research as it could prove if there was a lack of *mētis* in the construction of the policy. Furthermore their positions and choices could form the ultimate prove of the success of the grand scheme.

Given the importance of the *mētis* we will first look at whether it was present in this grand scheme. After which we will address whether the writers could give proof of the failing of the scheme. Because we can't just get past the criticism that the theory has had, we will address that in the third paragraph. The fourth paragraph will include recommendations for further research.

5.2 As so we're back to *mētis*

The fourth chapter of this thesis contained the actual test phase of this research. The personal positions and choices of the writers provided us an insight into their lives. A mere glimpse of it, for the period is

shrouded in mysteries. The writers with their choices are informing us on the actual status of the policy. Not only could we see whether it failed but if Scott is right in his assertion we should also be able to see why it failed. Writers are the ones closest to the fire. In other words they are the keepers to the practical knowledge concerned with all literary doings. Were they side-stepped or did the state miss some practical insights in formulating and implementing their policy?

By looking at three distinct elements of the literary policy: the aesthetic, censorship and the Union of Soviet Writers, we covered different examples of the workings of the policy. They all focus on different aspects of the policy. The standardization is the element connected to the first aspect and the censorship practices is bound to the element of coercive power as seen in the authoritarian state, the ordering of administration with the third aspect.

The writers all responded differently to the creation of the policy. Mandelstam and Bulgakov were the most outspoken of the four in their criticism to the literary policy. They would both never align with the obligatory policy. Mandelstam died after persecution due to his counter-revolutionary stance. Bulgakov was granted a job, though his own work wouldn't meet a public. Akhmatova never did conform but would attain membership of the Union of Soviet Writers. Her work would never be considered as adhering to the aesthetic set in place by the Soviets.

Babel was connected to the Union of Soviet Writers from the onset. He even held a speech at their first Congress. In this speech he even criticized his own work and pledge to adhere to the new aesthetic. He was however arrested and executed. The reasons for the arrests of Mandelstam and Babel were similar as both were sabotaging the reaching of the communist utopia. Babel was deemed a foreign spy whereas the writings of Mandelstam were counter-revolutionary. Like both Babel and Mandelstam; Akhmatova and Bulgakov also didn't write in the obligatory aesthetic.

In the case of Babel it is not that he didn't want to, as he made clear in his speech. Babel lost his inspiration and entered the genre of silence. The other three writers also couldn't adhere to the imposed aesthetic. Bulgakov even insisted that the obligatory aesthetic shouldn't exist. He simply couldn't oblige as he stated: "Any satirist in the USSR must question the Soviet system."²⁶⁸

He suggests it is the job of the literary intelligentsia to be critical of the state.

Akhmatova takes the stand that you can't tell a writer what to write. When asked why her poems are so sad, and thus do not fall within the boundaries of the aesthetic she responds: "Evidently the explanation for such nonsense lies in the peculiarities of my biography."²⁶⁹

In other words a writer writes from within. What he or she encounters. It can't be imposed.

Mandelstam never did write in the socialist realist template. His wife described his work process best when she that Mandelstam only wrote verses if they "poured out of him spontaneously."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p. 85.

²⁶⁹ Chukovskaya, L. (1994). *The Akhmatova Journals*. Farrar Strauss & Giroux: New York. p.16.

It seems to be not a question of willingness to write in a certain aesthetic rather than it is an impossibility to do so.

To clarify their position we'll make use of an example. Imagine a marathon runner. He has perfected his performance on this distance. He is then instructed to become a sprinter. Even though he might have been the best on the marathon distance he most probably will never reach that same level in the sprint distances. He might be able to become a sprinter but he will never be as good as he was running the marathon. His body isn't equipped for that distance. It is the same for writers. They write in a manner that is befitting to their personal take on things. When the state made the aesthetic obligatory they dictated the writers to start writing in a different manner. A manner to which they were not equipped.

It is no wonder than that the Muses of the writers often left them. This was the case for Akhmatova and Babel. Babel even made a reference to this unproductive status by calling it the genre of silence.²⁷¹

This genre of silence was not just imposed due to the inability of writers to write in a different aesthetic, it was also imposed due to strict censorship practices.

All four writers were facing censorship practices. Akhmatova's work was banned until she joined the Union of Soviet Writers. Mandelstam's work was banned as well. He wouldn't be able to see any publication of his work before in the 1930's. Babel did see a publication in 1935 but it was banned for unknown reasons not much later. Bulgakov was in a similar situation as Babel. He too would see a play of his writing be performed in 1936, but also would see it be banned after only seven performances. Bulgakov wasn't able to publish any other writings during his lifetime. The censorship practices seem random. In the case of Babel and Bulgakov their work was first passed by the censors but would be banned a short while after. Furthermore Akhmatova had seen a ban put in place for so long, but this would be lifted within months as she was able to publish in 1940.

The critics that formed the basis of the censorship practices were often personal attacks. Babel for instance was interrogated about his silence by an assembly created by the Union of Soviet Writers in 1937. He was asked why he fell silent. The writer had no way to get out of answering the question. He knew the critics would criticize him for his genre of silence for it could be seen as an Italian strike. Which is why he tries to justify this in his speech in 1934. His answer in 1937 towards the audience set up by the Union is also one filled with justifications. The critique didn't concern itself with his writing. It concerned with the productivity of the writer. The critics of Mandelstam call the author a 'Master' and 'out of tune with the times'.²⁷² This has nothing to do with what Mandelstam wrote, whether his style was any good. By the usage of these words he was effectively placed outside the realm of the socialist realist aesthetic.

²⁷⁰ Mandelstam, N. (1974). *Hope Abandoned*. Collins & Harvill Press: London. p. 312.

²⁷¹ Freidin, G. (2001). *Chronology of Isaac Babel*. Date of consultation July 14 2012 at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/Babel.htm>

²⁷² Lekmanov, O. (2010). *Mandelstam*. Academic Studies Press: Brighton, Massachusetts. p. 103.

If we look at what the critics said of Bulgakov we can see similarities. He was criticized for being a 'neo-bourgeois writer' belonging to the 'right wing of Soviet literature'.²⁷³ Again this was at best an attack on the personal characteristics of the writer. It doesn't concern his ability to write.

The Union of Soviet Writers, that was given the assignment to oversee the literary process, became a strand of the NKVD. They most likely recruited and instructed writers to act as informants on others. The encounter Akhmatova had with the unknown young man as well as the intimate details on the writings of Mandelstam suggested this. In the speech that Isaac Babel delivered at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, he also shows awareness of the state's secret service presence. And even in the interrogation files held by the NKVD it can be read that the information derived from agents are drawn from fellow writers.²⁷⁴ The usage of the unknown young writer to gain information about Akhmatova also falls in line with this method being used.

The role of the Union of Soviet Writers is dubious. They were instructed to be the single institution that dealt with the writers personally. In the case of Bulgakov they didn't support his work until Stalin himself instructed them to do so. Babel who was a member of the Union and was loyal to the Soviet state was only helped during his days of protection by Maxim Gorky. Akhmatova only gained support after her admittance in 1940. Mandelstam was given a minimal form of aid by the Union of Soviet Writers. But this support didn't last. The randomness in which the Union of Soviet Writers conducted their task is rather strange. It could however provide us some answers. As we have noted the policy of the aesthetic created the genre of silence. A genre that was created due to the loss of Muses on the writer's part and on part of the censorship practices. The aesthetic wasn't implemented by the four authors. This lack of implementation was acknowledged by the writers themselves as well as by the censors. The censors didn't always prove to be right, as censorship even takes place after a decision was made to allow a particular work to be published. In order to understand why this happened we need to look back at what the aesthetic actually entailed. In his speech held at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers Zhdanov explains the aesthetic:

"It means above all, to know life in order to depict it truthfully in works of art, to depict it not scholastically, not lifelessly, not just as objective reality, but to depict real life in its revolutionary development. In so doing, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic depiction must be combined with the task of ideological remoulding and re-education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in fiction and in literary criticism is what we call socialist realism.

To be an engineer of human minds means to stand with both feet firmly planted on the ground of real life. This, in its turn, means breaking away from old-type romanticism, from that romanticism which depicted nonexistent life and nonexistent characters, diverting the reader from the contradictions and oppression of life into a world of the impossible a world of utopia. Our literature must not shun

²⁷³ Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.160.

²⁷⁴ Shentalinsky, V. (1993). *Arrested Voices; resurrecting the disappeared writers of the Soviet Regime*. The Free Press: New York. p.57

romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism. Soviet literature must know how to portray our heroes, it must be able to look into our tomorrow.”²⁷⁵

Writers needed to be political in their choices, positive in their depiction, strip their works of fiction and introduce the topic of revolutionary heroes with a vision for the future Soviet state.

The personal attacks on the writers need to be seen in context of this aesthetic. The aesthetic doesn't distinct the writer from its work. The socialist realist template orders the writers to produce Soviet literature. The aesthetic remains rather vague. There is no clear definition of the aesthetic. To give some examples: Is it okay to use metaphors? Is it allowed to use an existent character that served in the White Army? What subjects are not considered a portrayal of our Soviet future? What is the Soviet future for that matter? What can be defined as revolutionary romanticism?

The socialist realist template is just too vague. It can't be applied even writers had the ability to change their process. Even censors don't quite know what the aesthetic entails given their random behaviour. They focus mostly on one aspect of the aesthetic; taking a political stance. Babel wrote it best in his book 'Red Cavalry': “where lies revolution and where lies counterrevolution?”²⁷⁶ Even though it was written well before the aesthetic it clearly shows the difficulty with implementing the policy.

The Union of Soviet Writers also shows signs of a lacking system. Their response can only be described as arbitrary. They perhaps have difficulty in setting the boundaries of the aesthetic. Their behaviour in the cases of the different writers is illogical. Known opponents of the aesthetic such as the outspoken Bulgakov are somewhat protected, after the intervening of Stalin. Giving Mandelstam a job after he was exiled is another surprising decision as is the decision to remove him from the job not a year later. Granting Babel the usage of a dacha and subsequently aiding in his arrest by providing information. We should also consider Akhmatova, who was obstructed in her work by the emplacement of a ban on her writings but was given a celebrative welcome to the Union after which she soon fell out of the authorities' grace.

The Union of Soviet Writers didn't dictate a clear aesthetic. It didn't display rational behaviour. Its actions were erratic and unpredictable. Could any writer be able to comply with a literary policy they imposed if no one knew what was going to be right tomorrow? The answer would probably be a no.

Because we have the advantage of hindsight we know that the aesthetic the Soviet state wanted, didn't become the single template used. Writing by dictation simply can't happen. If we look back at Scott's theory we need to see whether the lacking of mētis is to blame. Scott defines mētis as follows: “[Mētis is] knowledge that can only be required by long practice at similar but rarely identical tasks, which requires constant adaptation to changing circumstances.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Struve, G. (1971). *Russian Literature on Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. p.262.

²⁷⁶ Babel, I. in: Hallet, R. (1973). *Isaac Babel*. Frederick Ungar Publishing; New York. p.103.

²⁷⁷ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.177-178.

As we already noted the writers themselves are the sole bearers of this type of knowledge. By their own statements we know that they were overlooked. The process in which literature is written is oversimplified. Inspiration can't be dictated. The way in which writers write can't be dictated, not even if they want to be dictated.

We have also seen that the aesthetic didn't provide clear guidelines that could make it possible for any part of the policy to be implemented correctly. Scott refers to this in his theory as well as he states that: "By themselves, the simplified rules can never generate a functioning community city or economy. Formal order, to be more explicit, is always and to some considerable degree parasitic on informal processes, which the formal scheme does not recognize, without which it could not exist and which it alone cannot create or maintain."²⁷⁸

In other words Scott says that people in the field, those that actually have to implement the policy, will need to adapt to the circumstances already in place. Otherwise the policy is doomed from the start. By doing so the original policy will of course differ. Details can't be included in a grand scheme, for a grand scheme only sets out the outline. The disregard of the details and the inability of administrators to react to the circumstances in place results in failure. In this particular case the failing of the creation of a singular aesthetic. This leads us to conclude that there is some evidence that Scott is right that the lacking of *mētis* contributes to the failing of a state. There is however a large but that we will address in the following paragraph.

5.3 Just critique?

Scott has been given some critiques on his theory. The first is not naming his influences, namely Hayek and the Austrian school. This critique is just. As a scholar one needs to be as transparent and open as can be. All the cards need to be laid out on the table in order to justify a theory. It is not simply a kind of courtesy it is recognition of someone's work. Especially when the similarities are so apparent, he needed to name and give credits to the influences of Hayek and the Austrian school. This being said we need to take a close look at the second point of criticism. The second critique focuses mainly on the claim made by Scott that his work can be applied to an extended number of policy fields. By doing so he is making his theory so general that it might be applicable on everything but explain nothing at the same time.²⁷⁹ Scott doesn't go into great detail of the policies he uses to base his theory on. He invited his students to expand their research into other fields. In this research we did just that. We found evidence that his theory could even hold in this grand scheme as well. If the critique to this theory is correct, it is no wonder that we have reached this outcome. In order to assess whether this second critique is also just we need to look at whether Scott indeed oversimplified.

²⁷⁸ Scott, J. (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press: New Haven. p.309.

²⁷⁹ Hardin, R. (2001). 'Books in Review: James C. Scott's *Seeing like a State*.' *The Good Society*. Vol. 10, No. 2.

In the 1930's in the Soviet Union, the literary policy wasn't implemented in a vacuum. In other words the literary policy wasn't the only major thing going on in the Soviet Union. As we have seen in the historical background the Great Terror also occurred in the same time. The literary policy anticipated on this development as well. Although this development isn't covered in the usage of *mētis*, it could fall under the lack of detailing in the grand scheme and the subsequent altering of the policy by people in the field. Every change in the policy can thus be prescribed to *mētis*. This is not correct.

Mētis deals with the knowledge incorporated in people. People that haven't been heard before the policy was introduced. In other words knowledge that is endogenously present within the group the new policy will address. The creators of the new policy have, however, a vast belief in high modernism and the ability to fabricate a society to fit their needs and thus disregard people who do not think alike.

The altering of the policy differs from this type of *mētis*. Altering policy to fit within new circumstances is due to reactions to other exogenous circumstances. It simply isn't *mētis*.

Scott warns for oversimplification in his theory, but he himself is over-generalising. His definition of what could fall under *mētis* is so broad; it could accommodate any change in policy. Change that stem from endogenous or exogenous factors can both fall under his definition. If we stick to the strict definition of *mētis*, we rule out the effects of any exogenous factor. Ironically we would be doing what Scott says determines failure; looking at the grand scheme itself as a *tabula rasa*. The failure of the grand scheme is because we haven't looked at the ground on which we want to place it. A grand scheme can't be imposed as there always are traditions in place. In other words the grand scheme is imposed in a top-down manner, and we haven't looked enough at the down-part before implementation. But if we take the stricter and narrow definition of *mētis* we will however overlook the top-part. To explain further a grand scheme at its own level is also never alone. It is set amongst other plans, policies and circumstances. The broad version of *mētis* does allow for this. It is so general that it provides the ability to ascribe every failure in grand schemes to the theory of Scott but at the same time the theory's explanatory value is weakened.

5.4 Recommendations

Now we have used a theory from the field of political science to look at a historical subject. We have perhaps introduced more questions than answers. Yes we found evidence that could prove the theory of Scott to be correct. However we also found that the critique of the theory also seems to hold. It would be to hastily done to either reject or assume the theory. Further research is needed.

As we have seen in looking at the justness of the critique, we have overlooked the implications of circumstances that are in the top-part of the grand scheme. In this research we have merely touched upon the Great Terror. It is however important to understand the connection between the two. The period of hardship, arrests, exiles and execution would have left a mark on all and everything. There are most likely even more interactions in the top-part to be found. Furthermore Scott doesn't address

the importance of power and command structures as the basis of failure in his theory. Given the fact that Stalin himself on more than one occasion intervened in fates of the writers it will be worth taking a look at this as well. A policy isn't simply imposed by one person, it is part of a structure, and an organization is built around it. If further research into the subject of literary policy in the Soviet Union in 1930 is to be done it is to be recommended to look at the dynamics and psychology of the people in power. The command of a state is build on structures based on particular persons, especially in an authoritarian state, such as the Soviet Union. Their conduct is therefore important in understanding the coming into being of policies as well as their implementation. A final recommendation is to broaden the scope on the writers. In this thesis we have only looked at the personal statements of the writers on the literary policy. If further research is to be done it will be recommendable to look into the status these writers hold, the social status in society that is. The position of writers in the Soviet Union, and even before that in Russia, has always been a rather peculiar one. Their social standing was rather high. This makes one wonder whether a reason for their defiance might be derived from their traditional position.

Although this research can be prescribed as far from complete given the number of recommendations for further research, it does provide us with some answers. Theoretical work from other fields can be used in the discipline of history. One should, however, be aware that it will lead to more questions than answers.

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