Universiteit Leiden

‘Stalin is a god, he could come back’

A Case Study: Aleksandr Tvardovsky’s Struggle with his Stalinist Past

Karin Keesmaat
Studentnr.: s1330543
E-mail: k.keesmaat@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Master thesis History
Political Culture and National Identities
Supervisor: Dr. J.H.C. Kern
Leiden University
Word count: 23916
April 2020

Abstract

This master thesis is a case study of Aleksandr Tvardovsky, a famous Soviet poet and chief editor of the literary magazine *Novyi Mir*. This is a research on how Tvardovsky, who had loyally supported Stalin during his regime but later became an important actor in the destalinization, was able to come to terms with having supported Stalin's system of terror. By analysing primary sources like his *Working Notebooks*, autobiographical poems and his brother's autobiography, and by analysing his documented behaviour both during Stalin's regime and after, this thesis will portray how Tvardovsky dealt with the aftermath of Stalin's terror. In doing so, this research will make use of Hellbeck's theory regarding writers' loyalty to the regime despite state violence and the theory of the heroisation-demonisation phenomenon in mass dictatorships. This thesis aims to shed more light on how Soviet citizens adjusted during the Thaw.

Keywords: Aleksandr Tvardovsky; Stalin; heroisation-demonisation; case study; Thaw; Stalinist past; guilt

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Itinerary

1.1: Introduction

'(...) the good writer, by nature of his art, must simultaneously reveal the truth about society, take a correct political stance towards that truth, and also create an [a]esthetically compelling work which would attract, hold, and convince the reader.'[1]

This quote by historian Geoffrey Hosking briefly summarizes a concept by Belinsky, a famous Russian literary critic of the 19th century, of writers having a duty to their society. Although this concept has been subject to debate, the majority of writers in Russia have for a long time taken their role as an activist quite serious. One can claim that Russian literature has exceeded the usual confines of being a purely cultural aspect of society and has gained a role in politics as well, more so than has been the case in many western countries. Literature in Russia has for a long time been politicized, not just by writers, but also by the different political regimes that Russia (as well as the Soviet Union) has known. It is not an uncommon phenomenon that dictatorships or autocratic regimes make use of means like media and literature in order to verify or justify their regimes and to influence society. This was undoubtedly the case in the Soviet Union under Stalin's regime.

Stalin knew that literature could be used to influence the masses, even calling writers 'engineers of the human soul'. He used literature as an instrument to validate his regime, create his personality cult and to help him develop the national identity for the Soviet Union that he strived for. Because Stalin knew the power of written word, he was also bound on confining it with rules and censorship in order to remain in control of it. The dictator, that came into power in 1928, ruled with an iron fist and would become notorious for the shockingly high death rate during the period of his regime. The biggest causes for this high death rate were World War II and the purges. It was a system of terror and many innocent people were arrested or executed in the Soviet Union for supposedly being 'enemies of the state'. Many writers obeyed Stalin's guidelines for literature out of fear of being exiled, sent to a prison camp or being killed. However, there were also writers who actually believed in Stalin and supported his regime out of

[1] G. Hosking, 'The twentieth century: in search of new ways, 1953-80'. In: C. Moser (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 520-594.

genuine loyalty and ideological belief. Regardless of what the writers' motivation was, for years the majority of them produced propaganda and refrained from writing anything that could be seen as criticism or that showed signs of discontent with the regime or Soviet life.

When Stalin died in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev took over power and would soon hold his famous secret speech on the 20th party congress, in which he criticized Stalin for his personality cult and his crimes.[2] These years under Khrushchev's regime, after Stalin's death, were also accompanied by more freedom of speech. This period is often referred to as the Thaw, as some of Stalin's repressive measures were relaxed or reversed. It was in this period that the process of destalinization started as well. Although there were still certain boundaries to the developing freedom of speech, people started to write down their experiences of Stalin's terror. These works still had to go through censorship, but during the period of destalinization it was no longer against the party line to denounce Stalin (although criticizing the Party itself was still a very sensitive off-limits topic). In addition to these new measurements Khrushchev's regime also released many people who had been arrested under Stalin. Not surprisingly, this period put countless Soviet citizens in peculiar situations. Not only were people faced with the difficult task of recovering after such terror, but many citizens were also faced with the realization of having supported a tyrant and sometimes having committed horrible things in his name. Polly Jones argues in her book *Myth, Memory, Trauma* that the Soviet public was struggling to develop an approach to its Stalinist past, debating whether it was to be celebrated or criticized.[3]

1.2: Historiography

The Thaw and destalinization are widely discussed subjects amongst scholars. The majority of researches on these topics and general history accounts on the Soviet Union, which also describe the above-mentioned subjects, are mainly political histories and have a top-down perspective.[4] Although in a lesser amount, there are also quite a few

[2] N. Khrushchev, 'Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.' (February 24-25 1956).
[3] P. Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma. Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven; London 2013), 2-3.
[4] D. R. Marples, *Russia in the Twentieth Century* (Pearson 2011); G. Hosking, *Russian History. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford 2012); E. Shiraev, *Russian Government and Politics* (Hampshire; New York 2013).

researches on the Thaw, and the role that writers played in this period, from a social, cultural and intellectual historical perspective.[5] When discussing these subjects, especially in social, cultural and intellectual historical works, scholars often mainly focus on how Stalin's image changed during this period and how literature either played a part in the destalinization or how writers reacted to the increasing freedom of speech. For instance, in the majority of articles and books on the Thaw there is mention of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and how this book brought to light an aspect of the terror that had taken place under Stalin.[6] The focus is often on the impact that literary works, which give an honest depiction on life under Stalin, had in the process of destalinization. There are significantly less analyses on how the writers, who had supported Stalin during his reign, reacted in the Thaw and reflected on their past. In this thesis I will thus further look into how these writers, who supported Stalin publicly and had helped validate his regime, dealt with having been loyal to him after Stalin had died and was denounced for his terror and personality cult.

1.3: Case Study & Relevance

In order to get a better understanding of what the aftermath of the Stalin era was for these writers, this thesis will focus on a case study of Aleksandr Trifonovich Tvardovsky (1910 – 1971). Aleksandr Tvardovsky was one of the writers whose career flourished under Stalin's regime and had gathered fame in the 30s and 40s with his poems *Land of Muravia* (1936) and *Vasili Tyorkin* (a poem about an optimistic Soviet soldier in World War II, published per chapter in 1941-1945). Tvardovsky supported the dictator on both a personal level as well as on a professional level. His loyalty reached to such an extent that he even denounced his own parents when they had been unjustly arrested and exiled. What makes Aleksandr's case such an interesting one is how his role as a public figure developed after Stalin's death. He became chief editor of the liberal literary journal *Novyi Mir* and used his position as editor and poet to play a significant role in the destalinization. One of the things that Tvardovsky is most well known for, regarding the destalinization, is having published the famous *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by

[5] R. Marsh, *Images of Dictatorship: Stalin in Literature* (London 2017); N. Tyrras, *Russian Intellectual and Cultural History From the Ninth to the Twenty-first Century* (New York 2010).
[6] N. Tyrras, *Russian Intellectual and Cultural History*, 339-342.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Tvardovsky, however, also used his skills as a poet to reflect on the Soviet past.

A significant amount of academic literature that mentions Aleksandr Tvardovsky does so as a brief addition to an analysis on Solzhenitsyn or in an analysis on the relationship between the two men.[7] Other researches tend to have either a focus on what Tvardovsky achieved as chief-editor of *Novyi Mir* or on his poems that were written during Stalin's regime.[8] There are barely any elaborate academic analyses solely focussed on Tvardovsky. The result of only focussing on these certain aspects of Tvardovsky's life is that in many works, Tvardovsky is shown as a flat character and one is left wondering what kind of a person he really was. During my research I did find the short biography of Tvardovsky by Mary Chaffin and *The Whisperers* by Orlando Figes to be useful in giving more insight on Aleksandr's complicated character.[9] Deming Brown also wrote a long paragraph on Tvardovsky's career in his book *Soviet Russian Literature since Stalin*, which gives a good analysis of Tvardovsky's most famous poems throughout his career in the different circumstances.[10] In *The Readers of Novyi Mir* Denis Kozlov does look into 'coming to terms with the Stalinist past' and he does a very good job with his chapter on Tvardovsky in his chief editor days. How Tvardovsky exactly came to terms with the Stalinist past is where this thesis will further look into. This research will add to Kozlov's already insightful research by showing more of Tvardovsky's round character and by going deeper into detail on his loyalty, criticism and guilt. Specifically, the focus of my research is to answer the question of how Aleksandr Tvardovsky came to terms, in the 1950s and 1960s, with having supported Stalin's system of terror.

By analysing how Tvardovsky came to terms with his behaviour under Stalin's regime, we will get a better insight on what the aftermath of supporting Stalin's system

---

[7] D. R. Marples, *Russia in the Twentieth Century* (Pearson 2011), 193; A. Langeveld & W. G. Weststeijn, *Moderne Russische Literatuur. Van Poesjkin tot heden* (Amsterdam 2005), 307; E. Rogovin Frankel, 'The Tvardovsky Controversy', *Soviet Studies* 34:4 (Oct. 1982), 601-615; E. Gilburd & D. Kozlov (eds.), *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto 2013), 485.

[8] Y. M. Brudny, 'Between Liberalism and Nationalism: The Case of Sergei Zalygin', *Studies in Comparative Communism* 21:3/4 (1988), 331-340; A. Brintlinger, *Chapaev and His Comrades. War and the Russian Literary Hero across the Twentieth Century* (Boston 2012).

[9] M. Chaffin, 'Alexander Tvardovsky: A Biographical Study'. In: V. Lakshin, *Solzjenistyn, Tvardovsky, and Novy Mir* (Cambridge 1980); O. Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York 2007).

[10] D. B. Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature since Stalin* (Cambridge 1978).

could entail for the Soviet public. One case study does not suffice as a general reflection of what the Soviet public was going through, but it can help us better understand the circumstances in which many Soviet citizens found themselves at that time. It is relevant to get a better view on the social historiographical aspect of the period after Stalin's regime, in order to get a better grasp of how Soviet society developed itself after the dictatorship.

1.4: Method & Chapter Outline

This thesis will use the method of a biographical approach in order to answer the question of how Tvardovsky came to terms with his support of Stalin, after his death. As Claudia Weber, a professor of contemporary European history, points out in an article, this method has been criticized before for sometimes leading to 'speculation on psychological factors'.[11] I am aware that this is also a potential pitfall regarding this study. Analysing a historic persona remains a difficult and delicate matter. As is almost always the case with humans, just as with history, one cannot simply speak of facts and one clear truth. The biographical method is, however, a very insightful approach when analysing a subject's actions and ideas. In order to get a better understanding of who Tvardovsky was and how he came to terms with his past, it is important to take into account the circumstances that formed him throughout his life.

This thesis has been divided into two sections for the purpose of maintaining a clear overview on the research. In the first section I will focus on Tvardovsky's upbringing and life under Stalin's regime as a loyal soviet writer, which was the period of 1910-1953. The second section focuses on the period after Stalin's death up until Tvardovsky's death, from 1953 until 1971, in which Tvardovsky developed himself into a critic of Stalin's regime. The progression from loyal subject of Stalin to critic of Stalin was a gradual process and can therefore not be pinpointed to one year. For the purpose of this research, however, I will use the year of Stalin's death as the division between the two phases in Tvardovsky's life.

In order to be able to come to a conclusion on how Tvardovsky would later deal with having supported Stalin, it is necessary to first look into Tvardovsky's loyalty to the

[11] C. Weber, 'Disturbing Memories. Coming to Terms with the Stalinist History of Europe'. In: S. Berger & C. Tekin (eds.), *History and Belonging. Representations of the Past in Contemporary European Politics* (New York 2018), 124.

dictator and his actions and beliefs during Stalin's regime. This thesis will analyse why it is that Tvardovsky has been described a loyal subject of Stalin and whether this is accurate.[12] Jochen Hellbeck, a history professor at Columbia University, did a research on diaries written under Stalin and he argues that the writers of these diaries had the 'desire to be involved in the very revolutionary currents of thinking and acting that carried such destructive power for others and for some of the diarists themselves.'[13] He adds that these people had this desire because it promised 'intellectual, moral, and aesthetic fulfilment'.[14] While looking into Tvardovsky's behaviour under Stalin's regime, I will analyse whether Hellbeck's theory also applies to his case. To analyse his loyalty and dedication to the Communist Party and Stalin, this thesis will make use of primary sources like Tvardovsky's short autobiography, poems that he wrote during that time, and sources, which stem from acquaintances or friends of Tvardovsky. For instance, Solzhenitsyn and Tvardovsky's colleague from *Novyi Mir*, Vladimir Lakshin, have both written a lengthy piece on him.[15] To get a better insight on Tvardovsky's life and perceptions I will also use the autobiography of his brother Ivan, which elaborately describes everything that happened between Aleksandr and his family.[16]

After getting a better understanding of how Tvardovsky supported the regime and what his perceptions were of Stalin and the Party, this thesis will then focus on how his perceptions and behaviour changed after Stalin's death in the second part. This thesis will give insight on how Tvardovsky dealt with the realization of having supported Stalin by analysing three of Tvardovsky's poems, segments of his working notebooks, and by researching how he used his position as chief-editor of *Novyi Mir*. For the primary sources I will use the method of close reading. Barry Brummett explains this method as 'the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understandings of its meanings'.[17] As my specialization is History and my knowledge of how to analyse literature is limited, I will approach the poems, two of which are

---

[12] V. Lakshin, *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and Novy Mir* (London 1977), 93, 108.
[13] J. Hellbeck, 'The Urge to Struggle On from *Revolution on my mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin*'. In: R. G. Suny (ed.), *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents* (Oxford 2014), 199.
[14] Idem.
[15] A. Solzhenitsyn, *Het kalf stoot de eik* (1976); V. Lakshin, *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and Novy Mir* (London 1977), 1-89.
[16] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina* (Smolensk 1996).
[17] B. Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading* (Los Angeles 2019).

autobiographical, mainly as historic sources and not focus on its literary value as much. It is very important to note here that these primary sources cannot be seen as a completely accurate and truthful picture of Tvardovsky's perceptions and reality. The difficulty of using these sources is not merely due to *Zeitgeist* or cultural differences; we must also keep in mind that there was a state-imposed censorship during these years and thus also a general tendency of self-censorship. At the same time, however, these sources do tell us something about the years in which they have been written and published, and what Soviet writers were allowed to say. It shows us as well what Tvardovsky wanted to tell the Soviet public.

The three poems that I will be using, amongst other primary sources, to shed light on Tvardovsky's perceptions are *Tyorkin in the Other World* (1963, a satiric and critical piece on Soviet reality), *Brothers* (an unpublished autobiographical work regarding his older brother Konstantin), and *By Right of Memory* (his most bitter autobiographic poem published post-mortem in 1987). In these primary sources I will specifically focus on the themes of personal and public guilt, as well as Stalin and the Soviet reality of the 30s and 40s. These poems will be used to show that Tvardovsky used his position as poet and chief editor to not let the Soviet people forget the terror under Stalin, as a way of coming to terms with remaining silent about it and supporting him. Regarding Tvardovsky's changing perception of Stalin, before and after his death, this thesis will use the insight that is given by Peter Lambert and Robert Mallett's article 'Introduction: The Heroisation-Demonisation Phenomenon in Mass Dictatorships'.[18]

The second chapter will show what formed Tvardovsky into becoming a loyal Soviet writer. It will do so by illustrating the circumstances that Soviet writers were faced with under Stalin and what was expected of them. In doing so, I will also explain Hellbeck's theory and Lambert & Mallett's theory. Furthermore, it will briefly discuss the influence that Tvardovsky's upbringing had on him. In the third chapter I will analyse Tvardovsky's loyalty to Stalin, by looking at his behaviour, reactions to terror, and how he used his public role during the 30s and 40s. The fourth chapter of this thesis focuses on how the circumstances for Tvardovsky as a Soviet writer changed after Stalin's death and how he used his position as chief-editor of *Novyi Mir* to play a role in the

[18] P. Lambert & R. Mallett, 'Introduction: The Heroisation-Demonisation Phenomenon in Mass Dictatorships', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8:3-4 (Sept./Dec. 2007), pp. 453-463.

destalinization. I will also make a short comparison to another famous writer, Aleksandr Fadeyev, who was very loyal to Stalin as well and responsible for arrests of multiple people. This brief comparative study will show how both men dealt with the guilt differently. This chapter will then be concluded by an analysis of segments from *Tyorkin in the Other World,* which criticize the Soviet system. In the last chapter I will research Tvardovsky's personal and public guilt by analysing all three poems mentioned above, in order to get insight on how Tvardovsky reflected on the Stalinist past. In the conclusion I will present the answer to my research question by using my findings regarding the analysis of Tvardovsky's behaviour and poems after Stalin's death.

Part I

A Loyal Subject

1910-1953

Chapter 2: The Making of a Soviet Writer – the Influence of State and Upbringing

2.1: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to 'set the stage' for the rest of this research. It will do so by shedding light on the circumstances that formed Tvardovsky into a loyal Soviet writer. Tvardovsky is a product of his time and therefore this chapter will analyse Tvardovsky's circumstances on a personal level as well as on a state level. I will first discuss what was expected of Soviet writers by the state, the rules they had to obey and further explain Hellbeck's theory of how people had the desire to be loyal to a system of terror. In addition to this I will also briefly describe the heroisation-demonisation phenomenon, as it is important to understand that Stalin did not merely get so much support due to the threat of state violence in case of disobedience. After illustrating the context in which Tvardovsky grew up, this chapter will then continue to briefly discuss how his direct environment influenced Tvardovsky to become a writer and influenced his perceptions of the Communist Party.

2.2: Engineers of the Human Soul

Many Russian writers in the period before the Soviet Union were using their voice to criticize state and society. However, their position would change drastically only a few years later under Stalin's regime.[19] Literature would still play a political role, but now in the sense that there was 'political intervention in literature 'from above' by Stalin'.[20] Whereas Russian writers used to have a significant amount of freedom in what they wrote and published, Stalin's regime took away that freedom and turned literature into an instrument to influence the masses and to validate the regime. Langeveld and Weststeijn write that the regime became the 'employer' of Soviet writers, and that the writers were obligated to follow their 'employer's' commands.[21] Stalin wanted complete control over what was being published, as he knew that literature could influence the masses.

---

[19] A. Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-39* (Hampshire 1991), 1.
[20] Ibid., 45.
[21] Langeveld & Weststeijn, *Moderne Russische Literatuur*, 278-9.

One of the measures, which helped Stalin accomplish full control over literature, was the creation of the Soviet Writer's Union in 1932. People were only able to have the profession of a writer if they became a member. To join this union, one had to be a supporter of the regime and willing to put their pen in service of the revolutionary cause. In addition, joining the union had great benefits. For instance, the Union took care of housing and salary.[22] This was, however, not the only way in which Stalin and his regime exerted control over what was being published. They made use of the already existing Main Directorate for Literary and Publishing Affairs, named *Glavlit*. This was the state's central censorship agency. Any form of written word was first subjected to this censorship before it could be published. It was seen as a crime to publish something without having it censured first. *Glavlit* was also in charge of banning the works of writers who had been branded 'enemies of the state'. As shown here, writers had very little artistic freedom. Furthermore, writers were also expected to follow the guidelines of the new official cultural policy.[23]

Socialist Realism

Both the Soviet Writer's Union and *Glavlit* were used to make sure that writers followed the guidelines of Socialist Realism. The Writer's Union defined this genre as 'the creation of works with great literary and artistic value, which are characterised by the heroic struggle of the global proletariat and by the pathos of victory of socialism'. These works were also supposed to reflect 'the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist Party'.[24] In other words, literature was supposed to revolve entirely around the revolutionary reality and progress of the Soviet Union. Unsurprisingly, these writers were not allowed to express criticism, but were to solely write from a positive and optimistic perspective. Marples explains in his book the two aspects of Socialist Realism, namely *partyinost'* and *narodnost'*. The former meant that writers had to stay true to the official party line, as has been mentioned above. The concept of *narodnost'* signified that the protagonists in literature should be 'the common socialist workers' and that writers were to use language which was easy to understand and simple in style.[25] While describing Socialist

[22] Idem.
[23] D. R. Marples, *Russia in the Twentieth Century*, 116.
[24] Langeveld & Weststeijn, 279.
[25] Marples, 117.

Realism in his book, history professor David Marples even mentions Tvardovsky as an example of a well-known socialist realist writer.

Stalin had implemented this new policy of Socialist Realism as the fundamental way of creating literature and art in the Soviet Union. Therefore, it was no longer allowed to write anything that did not comply with the policy's guidelines. This thus meant that one could only be a published writer if they supported the regime and worked on behalf of it. The implementation of Socialist Realism forced writers to become political. For writers who did not want to support the regime it was no longer possible to keep their profession, as even politically neutral works were not permitted. Literature, by default, had to depict the Soviet socialist reality and in a positive manner. Soviet writers, along with other workers in the cultural sector, had to produce state propaganda. Under Stalin it was no longer possible to make 'art for art's sake'. Stalin called these writers and artists 'engineers of the human soul' as the regime was using them to influence the Soviet public into becoming dedicated socialist workers, also regarded to as the 'New Man'.[26] Unsurprisingly, many writers of the Soviet Writer's Union were genuine ideologists. Despite the purges, which took place mainly in the 30s to protect the Soviet Union from so-called 'enemies of the state', these writers remained loyal to the regime. Important to note here is that their loyalty did not persevere due to ignorance of what was happening during the purges. The majority of these writers, as well as the majority of the Soviet people, had been confronted with the terror in either their personal lives or in their direct environment. This was as well the case with Aleksandr Tvardovsky.

2.3: Jochen Hellbeck

Jochen Hellbeck explains in a chapter of the book *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* the phenomenon of why people had the desire to be loyal to a system of terror. He analysed diaries of people who had either been a victim of Stalin's terror or had been aware of it and yet remained loyal subjects of Stalin. Hellbeck argues that these people felt intrigued by the ideology of communism and wanted to play a part in the 'revolutionary currents'. They felt this appeal as it promised fulfilment on, inter alia, a moral and intellectual level. Moreover, being a part of the revolutionary movement also

[26] A. Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia,* 73; J. Hellbeck, 'The Urge to Struggle On', 205.

gave people the sense of being a valuable asset to society. Hellbeck writes that the state propagated serving 'the needs of society' as the main way of being historically valuable. It gave people a sense of belonging, true meaning and combatted the fear of being useless or 'standing on the side line' as history progressed.[27] On the matter of how the appeal of supporting the regime persevered despite state violence, Hellbeck notes that the writers of these diaries 'regarded violence as a necessary tool to mold society and the self'.[28] Furthermore, the majority of loyal subjects trusted the state to know what the right measurements to take were and what was necessary for the good of all.

2.4: The Heroisation-Demonisation Phenomenon

Lambert and Mallett explain the heroisation-demonisation phenomenon in mass dictatorships in their similarly named article. It adds to Hellbeck's theory in understanding how Stalin was able to maintain so many genuinely loyal subjects. Lambert and Mallett argue, along with many other scholars that they also mention in the article, that heroisation and demonisation are both concepts that often appear in dictatorships. They write that dictatorial regimes often initiated heroisation (the act of depicting someone or something as a hero or heroic) in order to increase their power over the masses. Furthermore, they also argue that many dictatorships, like the one of Stalin, were able to exist because the masses sustained them. The hero-worshipping that happens with heroisation has an almost religious character. Lambert and Mallett write that 'both propaganda *and* adoring masses ascribed transcendental powers to them [the leaders]'.[29] This worshipping of the leader, unsurprisingly, helped in creating a cult, which was often maintained by the dictator through remaining mysterious.

Together with heroisation, there is often also demonisation. This is the act of depicting someone as a villain. By creating a common enemy, a dictator was not only able to unite the masses but he was also able to elevate himself as the hero, who saved the masses from this enemy. Moreover, as quoted in the article, the creation of a hero and an enemy supposedly helped citizens 'with the necessary ideological orientation'.[30] Demonising a person, group or force was also a tool that dictatorial regimes used to threaten people and thus keep control over the masses. Lambert and Mallett point out

[27] J. Hellbeck, 200.
[28] Ibid., 205.
[29] Lambert & Mallett, 'The Heroisation-Demonisation Phenomenon', 455.
[30] Ibid., 458.

that in order to justify and determine who or what was heroised and demonised, Stalin used 'building socialism' as a measurement scale.[31]

As has been explained above, these were the circumstances for the citizens, and specifically for writers, in the Soviet Union. Aleksandr Tvardovsky would watch Soviet society transform while growing up and he grew with it. In order to get a better idea of how the socialist regime influenced Tvardovsky in his personal life and what made him want to become a writer, it is important to also briefly discuss his youth.

2.5: A Rural Upbringing

Aleksandr Trifonovich Tvardovsky was born on the 21st of June in 1910 in a small rural village Zagore in the Smolensk province. Aleksandr Tvardovsky was born into a peasant family. This rural upbringing is a significant detail of his life when analysing his perceptions and works. The majority of scholars, who write about Tvardovsky in a literary or biographical cadre, and acquaintances of Tvardovsky who knew him during his writing career, often refer to his upbringing as the origin of his strong love for the 'simple man' and his own use of rural idiom in his poetry.[32] The focus on the 'simple man' in Socialist Realism was thus undoubtedly appealing to him. Aleksandr's father, Trifon Gordeevich Tvardovsky, was a blacksmith by trade and owned a farm.[33] In Tvardovsky's short biography he mentions that in the official documents of the land it was referred to as 'the farm wasteland *Stolpovo*'. He then continues on to give a short description of how the land was indeed something that one would not envy, for it consisted mainly out of swamps and weeds. The Tvardovsky offspring would, however, grow to appreciate their land and the rural life.[34] Aleksandr would later write about their farm with nostalgia.

Trifon Tvardovsky mostly made a living off of the farm, only sporadically returning to his blacksmith practices in order to keep giving his wife and seven children a comfortable lifestyle. Aleksandr did not consider his family particularly wealthy and

---

[31] Ibid., 460.
[32] N. S. & S. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2* (Pennsylvania 2004); E.R. Frankel, 'The Tvardovsky Controversy', *Soviet Studies* 34:4 (Oct. 1982), 605; M. Chaffin, 'Alexander Tvardovsky: A Biographical Study', 92.
[33] V. Alexandrova, *A History of Soviet Literature. 1917-1964. From Gorky to Solzhenitsyn* (New York, 1963).
[34] A. T. Tvardovsky, *Stikhotvorenija i poemy v dvukh tomakh. Pervyi tom* (Moscow 1957).

wrote about periods in which he experienced poverty, but at the same notes that his family was relatively well off.[35] In the village, to which his father was already a newcomer, their family stood out. This was partially due to their surname having a foreign sound to it, as well as due to Trifon owning his own piece of land and being able to earn a relatively good living. Aleksandr remembers that people in the village would add the suffix 'pan' to their surname Tvardovsky. This suffix referred to having Polish roots, but more importantly it was to emphasize that they differed from the rest.[36] Aleksandr would even walk around barefoot until autumn to appear no more fortunate than the others around them. In the meanwhile his father would still stand out due to something so seemingly insignificant as wearing a hat.[37]

Apart from being a very talented blacksmith, if one were to believe in the objectivity of Aleksandr's opinion of his own father, Trifon was also an intelligent and literate man. They had the luxury of books and Trifon would spend many winter nights reading to his wife and kids from works of well-known Russian authors. As of young, Aleksandr had thus gotten familiar with the Russian literary scene. His father would read works by authors like Gogol' and from famous poets like Pushkin, Nekrasov, Tolstoj, Nikitin and Lermontov. His mother, Maria Mitrofanovna Tvardovsky, was a very sensitive and impressionable woman who was easily captivated and touched by things that surpassed the cadres of her daily occupations.

A Poet-in-the-making

Although Aleksandr does not explicitly say so in his biography, his being brought up with poetry must have surely been a part of what inspired him to start writing poetry. It did not take long before young Aleksandr started composing poetry himself. According to his biography, he realized that it was possible to write his own poetry when a distant relative came to visit them and recited an original poem. The simple words captivated Aleksandr. He was able to recite them many years later when he described how he got into writing, as they were so illustrative and poetic in their simplicity. And so the young poet-in-the-making started writing verses before he even knew all the letters in the alphabet. This both pleased and concerned his parents as they had learnt from books

[35] V. N. Orlov et al. (red.), *Russkie Poety. Antologija v chetyryokh tomakh. Tom chetvertyi* (Moscow 1968), 581.
[36] V. Alexandrova, *A History of Soviet* Literature, 331.
[37] V. N. Orlov, *Russkie Poety Antologija*, 581.

that writers at that time were not bound to gain a good wage.[38] But nor his parents doubts, nor his schoolteacher's ill advise, on how poetry should be incomprehensible, could keep Tvardovsky from continuing on with writing and finding his own style.[39]

Communism

It was during these early shaping years of Aleksandr's youth that communism made its entrance into Russia. The Russian Revolution of 1917, which made an end to the imperial era of Russia and marked the beginning of the Communist era, took place when Aleksandr was seven years old. Mary Chaffin, a researcher on Russian history, argues that 'in his eyes, they were an unquestionably progressive force, bringing literacy and modernization to the backward countryside.'[40] The government of the Soviet Union did indeed make it one of its priorities to eliminate illiteracy. To Lenin, who was the chairman of the Communist Party at that time, literacy was a very important step towards more progress in the economic and political sectors. When reading articles by Lenin from around 1923, one thing that stood out was his reoccurring focus on the necessity of a cultural revolution. He argued that it was necessary in order to create a strong socialist state and a proletarian culture.[41] As mentioned above, the government tried to create a new type of citizen, namely the new Soviet citizen. In order to do so and to be able to organize and include the countryside population in Party meetings and activities, it was crucial to eliminate illiteracy. In other words, as Lambert and Mallett argue, the regime wanted to 'expose greater numbers of citizens to Soviet printed propaganda'.[42] Lenin put the campaign *Likbez* (a Russian abbreviation for 'elimination of illiteracy') into motion in 1919. This campaign was in charge of educating Soviet citizens to read and write and it turned out very successful. It is thus not peculiar that Aleksandr Tvardovsky thought of the Communist Party as a progressive and positive force, for his encounters with the Party's initiatives were positive as well.

In 1924, 14-year-old Aleksandr decided to get involved in matters regarding the communist regime by joining the communist youth organisation *Komsomol*. This was in the same year that Lenin deceased and Stalin slowly started to make his way towards

[38] Idem.
[39] V. Alexandrova, 332.
[40] M. Chaffin, 93.
[41] V. I. Lenin, 'Pages from a Diary' (Jan. 1923).
[42] Lambert & Mallett, 460.

dictatorial power in the Communist Party (although this would still take a few years). Aleksandr started writing small articles about relevant local matters and sent them to editors of newspapers in Smolensk. These articles were published from time to time and Aleksandr claims that this made him a significant member of the *Komsomol* and in his village, for people would come to him with complaints or ideas for other articles.[43] Ivan Trifonovich Tvardovsky (1914-2003), the younger brother of Aleksandr, recalls in his biography that Aleksandr was never very interested in or keen to help around the house or with the work on their farm when growing up. He preferred much more to develop his intellect by reading, writing and going to *Komsomol* meetings.[44]

Becoming a Published Poet

Still at the age of 14, Aleksandr decided to make an attempt at getting his poetry published in the papers as well, in pursuit of a literary career. He sent a small collection of his poems to Mikhail Isakovsky, a poet who was also from a rural background and a Smolensk inhabitant. Isakovsky often gets mentioned in articles on Tvardovsky because he seems to have had a mentoring role in Tvardovsky's literary development.[45] Tvardovsky himself also recognizes that Isakovsky had a very positive and lasting influence on his writing. In his biography Aleksandr explains that when reading Isakovsky's poetry he realized that the subject had to be 'life of the Soviet village surrounding me, my own world of impressions, feelings and sincere attachments'.[46] He also felt the desire, following Isakovsky's example as well, to write poetry about matters that would be interesting to the 'simple' people around him who were not familiar with literary works. Isakovsky, who worked for the newspaper *Rabochij Put'* (The Working Way), helped Tvardovsky by publishing a few of his poems in the paper. Aleksandr was very fond of Isakovsky, even writing in his diary entry of 16 October 1926 that he dreamed of going to the city to see him.[47] This mentorship would later bloom into a friendship.

[43] V. N. Orlov, 583.
[44] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina* (Smolensk 1996), 20.
[45] Chaffin, 92; Alexandrova, 332.
[46] Orlov, 581.
[47] A. Tvardovsky, 'Na Puti K "Strane Muravii" (Rabochie Tetradi Poeta)', *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo, vol. 93* (Moscow, 1983).

These few published poems in the papers, however, did not bring about the breakthrough into the literary world, which he had hoped for. Having finished the village school, Aleksandr moved to Smolensk in 1927. He joined the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), yet did not succeed in enrolling into an institute and rarely succeeded in getting some of his work published.[48] Aleksandr then tried his luck in Moscow, but was met with the same hardships. Looking back at that period, Aleksandr notes that in that time it was not yet easy to get a literary career.[49] He thus decided to move back to Smolensk in 1930. The years that followed had a significant influence on Aleksandr as a person and as a writer. It was in these years that the Soviet government started the initiative of collectivization in its agricultural sector.

[48] Figes, *The Whisperers.* 132; Orlov, 584.
[49] Orlov, 584.

Chapter 3: The Bittersweet Embrace of Communism

3.1: Introduction

Before Aleksandr Tvardovsky became the well-known liberal chief-editor of the literary journal *Novyi Mir* and attained a key role in the Thaw, he first achieved fame as a poet during the 30s and 40s.[50] His life and works during these years were in sharp contrast with his liberalism and critical views on the regime in the 50s and 60s. Still young when communism made its entrance into Russia, Tvardovsky was as much a product of the Soviet times as many other loyal soviet citizens were. In this chapter I will analyse how this loyalty manifested itself. It would not be sufficient to conclude his loyalty merely based on his popularity as a Soviet poet during the 30s, 40s and 50s. By analysing his documented behaviour and reactions to the process of collectivization, which caused the break with his family, and through research on his works and actions during the Great Terror and World War II, we can get more insight on to what extent Tvardovsky's loyalty was also devotion. More importantly, this will also give insight on the kind of past Tvardovsky would later have to reflect on.

3.2: Collectivization & Dekulakization

Collectivization was the merging of multiple independent farms into one collective farm in the 1920s and 30s. It was created and enforced during the very first five-year plan, which was an economical plan implemented in order to stimulate economic progress. With this initiative the Soviet government created two types of farms, namely the *Kolkhozy* (collective farm) and *Sovkhozy* (state farms). The initiative of turning independent farms into collective farms was meant to fix the shortcomings in food production. The state required a certain amount of agricultural products in order to support new developments in the industrial sector and to feed its soldiers and town-based subjects. Many peasants in the late 20s were, however, unwilling to sell their grain if the price was low or if their harvest was barely enough to fulfil their own needs. This shortage eventually lead to Stalin declaring that this was mainly the fault of rich peasants (called kulaks) who were keeping grain for themselves. As Marples argues, these kulaks were only 4 percent of the rural population and thus very unlikely to have

[50] J. & C. Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union* (New York, 1990).

been the cause of this issue. They were, however, seen as class enemies.[51] The purpose of giving peasants this label was, on one hand, to have a scapegoat for if they needed a culprit for the failing of collectivization. On the other hand, labelling peasants as class enemies if they were not cooperating could help the state to pressure the rural population into accepting collectivization.

This initiative of collectivization was at first not mandatory. The state tried to persuade peasants into joining collective farms by raising the taxes for independent farmers and by promising to supply collective farms with up-to-date equipment. Collectivization was an attractive initiative for poorer peasants, for they often did not even own a piece of land. Richer peasants were less keen to join a collective farm, as it would mean having to give up their own land, cattle and equipment. When mass collectivization started in 1929, however, kulaks were rarely allowed into kolkhozes. Because they had been labelled class enemies and were seen as bourgeoisie or connections thereof, the state claimed that the kulaks would only try to sabotage the collective farms if they joined one. Stalin took it even further by declaring that the kulaks were to be eliminated as an entire class, which in some cases also literally meant that they were to be extinguished.[52] This is a clear example of the demonisation phenomenon used by Stalin to strengthen his own position.

The definition of when exactly a farmer could be called a kulak was rather vague.[53] This label generally fell to farmers who were relatively richer than others or were accused of obstructing the process of implementing socialism into the agrarian sector.[54] This substantiates the argument of Lambert and Mallett that Stalin used 'building socialism' as a justification for demonisation. Similar to how the term 'enemy of the state' could easily be applied to people, whether guilty of being counter-revolutionaries or not, 'kulak' also left room for interpretation. Receiving the status of kulak had, although in varying degrees, terrible consequences. With Stalin having declared war against them as an entire class, the majority of kulaks had their properties

---

[51] Marples, *Russia in the Twentieth Century*, 93-4.
[52] A. Kerr & E. Wright (eds.), 'Collectivization', *Oxford Dictionary of World History* (Oxford 2015); Marples, 94-5; A. Bauerkämper & C. Iordachi, *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements* (Budapest; New york 2014), 8.
[53] Bauerkämper, *The Collectivization of Agriculture*, 8.
[54] Marples, *Russia in the Twentieth Century,* 96.

and equipment confiscated by the state. Others were even more unfortunate and got sent to areas like Siberia and the Urals for forced labour or were even executed.[55]

Aleksandr's Personal Experience with Collectivization

The subject of collectivization plays a big part in Aleksandr's life and poetry. In his biography he even writes that it was in these years that his 'poetic birth' took place, writing about the communist matters, which were very close to his heart.[56] It was, as well, during the early and mid 30s that Aleksandr Tvardovsky really started to make a name for himself as a literary persona. He published two poems in that time, *The Road to Socialism* (1931) and *The Land of Muravia* (1934-1936), which both painted a very positive image of collectivization and were both received really well on the literary scene.[57] Such seemingly deep appreciation and dedication to a revolutionary cause is not extraordinary on its own, take any big revolution for instance. What does give Aleksandr's appraisal of collectivization a bizarre twist is that this period was a very dark time for his family. This initiative of collectivization, which was inseparably intertwined with dekulakization, that Aleksandr supported and even 'loved' (as he later wrote in 1939 in a letter to his friend Isakovsky), was responsible for the arrest and deportation of his family. They had been labelled kulaks and were prosecuted for it.

Aleksandr Tvardovsky had already gotten into discussions with his father about their way of living before mass collectivization had even begun and it seems that this had created some distance between them. Although his brother Ivan later recalls that there was no real hostility between the two at that time, he also recalls that Aleksandr's colleague at *Novy Mir* wrote to him that Aleksandr felt quite a lot of resentment towards his father at the beginning. Most of these discussions took place because Aleksandr could not make peace with not being able to go to school in the last years of his life in Zagore and preferred *Komsomol* meetings and his public life over the demanding work that needed to be done at home. Ivan Tvardovsky still points out though that although his father would sometimes curse at Aleksandr for his passivity in the rural work, he still supported him in his writing.[58] It is interesting that Aleksandr wrote many poems about

[55] N. Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton 2010), 54-55, 57.
[56] Orlov, 585.
[57] Figes, 132; D. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir. Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Harvard 2013), 140.
[58] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina* (Smolensk 1996).

rural life and often made his protagonist a simple peasant, while he disliked this lifestyle when still living at home.

Aleksandr was already well on his way with making a name for himself by publishing poems and journalist pieces in favour of the regime and revolution, when his family was being faced with the hardships of dekulakization.[59] Aleksandr was away from home and living in Smolensk at that time. Like many other kulaks in 1930, his father suddenly had to pay a heavy tax for remaining an independent farmer. The amount was too much for the Tvardovsky family to pay. Even if they had sold their land, livestock (consisting of a cow and a horse) and equipment, they would still not have had enough money to pay this tax. With the arrest of kulaks being an often-reoccurring event at that point, Trifon decided to leave Smolensk and tried to find refuge in the Donbas. Konstantin and Ivan, the former being the older brother of Aleksandr, left for Central Asia in search of work as well. Ivan, who would later write a book about their experiences as a family, soon returned to Zagore, only to find out that unlike his older brother Aleksandr, he was no longer allowed to go to school for being 'kulak offspring'.[60] When Trifon returned to the Smolensk region, he got arrested along with his son Konstantin. Soon after, Aleksandr's entire family, with the exception of himself, would be deported to the Urals in 1931 and placed into special settlements for forced labour.

Aleksandr's Loyalty

When discussing Aleksandr Tvardovsky's loyalty, scholars often refer to the period of collectivization as the ultimate proof of this.[61] It does offer itself for a very interesting debate. On one hand there are scholars like Mary Chaffin, who indeed argue that the period of collectivization shows Aleksandr's unwavering loyalty. On the other hand there are scholars like Orlando Figes and Denis Kozlov, who do not necessarily use that period in order to proof him a hardliner Stalinist, but instead focus on the difficulty of the situation that Aleksandr was faced with. Both sides have good arguments and shed light on different perspectives on his debatable 'unwavering loyalty'. Many of Aleksandr's decisions around this time, when analysing these actions in a technical

[59] Figes, *The Whisperers*, 132-3.
[60] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 52.
[61] Chaffin, 93.

manner, do seem to give proof of his loyalty, and thus we will first look at the 'unwavering loyalty' side.

Trifon and Konstantin were reunited with the rest of the family in Yelnya in the Smolensk region in 1931, where they were all put on freight wagons to the Lyalya station in the Urals for deportation. In Novaya Lyalya they were forced to work on various forest sites nearby. Konstantin and Ivan tried to run away but were captured, after which Konstantin was sent to the penal colony and Ivan was sent back to the family. Many attempts at running away followed soon, but they would not get far until they were captured again and sent to other labour sites or camps. Ivan writes in his memoirs that even in these special settlements they were treated badly and without mercy by the locals who were working with them. He said that because Stalin had exclaimed that the kulaks should be liquidated as an entire class, people did not feel obligated to treat them with any kindness or decency.[62]

Trifon and his wife sent a letter to Aleksandr in the hope that he would be able to help them (they already knew that he did not have the means to help them in a financial manner). Although Aleksandr did respond to their letter, it was not the reaction that they were hoping for. At first he promised them that he would try something and this encouraged them. However, soon after, another reply by Aleksandr arrived which, as quoted by Ivan Tvardovsky, sounded:

> 'Dear relatives! I am not a barbarian nor am I a beast. I ask you to hold on, to endure and to keep working. The elimination of the kulak class is not the elimination of people, especially not that of children.'[63]

His letter ended with the request to not write to him again and that he could not write to them either. One can only wonder if Aleksandr knew at that point that many so-called kulaks were being executed. Ivan recalls that Aleksandr most likely did at least not know anything about the hardships that the family faced in 1930-1931 before they were deported, because they were not in contact during that time.[64] None the less, even if he was ignorant of the specific details, Aleksandr was well aware that his family had been

[62] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina*, 68.
[63] Ibid., 61
[64] Ibid., 51.

arrested and deported for being kulaks. With addition of the letter that his family sent him out of exile asking for his help because they were facing a lot of hardships, one would expect Aleksandr's final reply to be a lot different. His remark about the elimination of the kulak class not being the elimination of people, which he makes to people very dear to him who have lost everything because of this liquidation initiative, shows how committed Aleksandr really was to Stalin. His reply hurt the feelings of his family. As Ivan wrote in his memoirs:

> 'It is in hard times that one gets to know his friends. Therefore, as I understand it, nothing can be an excuse for a son who, during his mother's most difficult times, did not come to her [aid].'[65]

At the insistence of a party official I. P. Rumiantsev (1886-1937) and out of fear for ruining his own future as a writer, Aleksandr officially denounced his parents and took his distance from them in 1931.[66] Scholars like Mary Chaffin and Deming Brown argue that this decision proofs that during this time his dedication to the Party and to Stalin did not once falter.[67] What happened later in the year 1931 fortifies this argument. Trifon decided to take Aleksandr's younger brother Pavel (1917-1983) along with him on his escape out of exile and to Smolensk. Even though Trifon knew that Aleksandr had left them to their own with his last letter, Trifon still fostered hope that Aleksandr would feel remorse and empathy if he were to face them personally. Ivan wrote about his father's experience as well, which Orlando Figes translated parts of in his book, and in these excerpts Ivan recalls his father thinking: ' (...) he is my son! He might at least take care of Pavlushka [Pavlik]. What harm had the boy done him, his own brother?'[68] Trifon tells Ivan that he was very anxious when they were waiting in front of the House of Soviets in Smolensk, where Aleksandr had a job helping out in the editorial offices. When the guard had gone to get Aleksandr and he came down to see his father and brother, Trifon 'looked at him in a state of near panic'.[69] Meeting his father and little brother face to face did, however, not cause Aleksandr to react in the way his father had

[65] I. Tvardovsky, 60-1.
[66] Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 139.
[67] Chaffin, 93; Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature since Stalin*, 74.
[68] O. Figes, *The Whisperers*, 133-4.
[69] Idem.

hoped for. When Trifon told Aleksandr about the harsh circumstances in which they had to live and how they were starving and being punished, Aleksandr only curtly asked them if they had run away. The sight of his ill little brother did not awaken enough empathy in Aleksandr to offer them more help than paying for the expenses of a trip back to where they came from. His father asked him to give them a bit of time so they could go to a friend who owed them money and when they would return to Smolensk he could decide on their faith. Aleksandr agreed with this and Trifon left with Pavel. Only a few hours after they had arrived at this friend's house, did the police show up and arrest Trifon and his son.

The Discussion around Figes' *The Whisperers*

It is unclear whether this was Aleksandr's doing, which makes it subject to a discussion. Orlando Figes very clearly states in his book *The Whisperers* that Aleksandr betrayed his father to the police. Figes does this without any further explanation of how he came to this conclusion and simply refers to a biographical piece by Ivan Tvardovsky, called *Stranitsy Perezhitogo* (*Experienced Pages*) in the literary journal *Yunost'* (*Youth*). Peter Reddaway (1939-), a political science professor at George Washington University, and Stephen F. Cohen (1938-), a Russian studies and politics professor at the New York and Princeton universities, disagree with Figes. In an issue of *The Nation* they attack Figes' *The Whisperers* by claiming that it would not get published in Russia due to the numerous of errors and misinterpretations of Russian sources. In this article they point out as well that Figes unjustly accuses Aleksandr Tvardovsky of betraying his father by informing the police.[70]

When reading Ivan's piece *Stranitsy Perezhitogo*, which can also be found in its entirety in Ivan's biography *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, one can understand both sides of the discussion mentioned above. It is important to mention, however, that Reddaway and Cohen were in the right to make the claim that Figes made an error on that account. Assuming that Figes based his claim of Aleksandr's betrayal on Ivan's biography, as this is his only reference for this claim, we can conclude that what he stated as a fact was merely an assumption. As it happens, Ivan does not state explicitly that Aleksandr was the one who informed the police on his father's whereabouts which led to his arrest. It is

[70] S. F. Cohen & P. Reddaway, 'Orlando Figes and Stalin's Victims', *The Nation* (May 23, 2012).

not an entirely strange assumption on Figes' part as Trifon emphasizes in Ivan's biography that he did not talk about his meeting with Aleksandr to anyone and that 'the scoundrel had completely betrayed' him.[71] This last sentence is, however, not at all clearly connected to Aleksandr. It could just as well be referring to Trifon's friend, whom they were visiting. Figes thus seems to have made an error in either translation or interpretation of this Russian source.

The rest of Ivan's chapter does not help Figes' claim either. When Ivan describes the reunion of Aleksandr with his family a few years later, in 1936, he says that he was very curious as to how his father Trifon had reacted to meeting Aleksandr, as they 'all knew about their extremely difficult meeting in Smolensk (…).' He focuses purely on how Aleksandr received them in Smolensk and does not mention anything about what happened after Trifon and Pavel had left Smolensk, nor does he insinuate that Aleksandr had anything to do with the arrest.[72]

3.3: The Complexity behind Aleksandr's Betrayal

Regardless of Figes' claim being a very assumptive and unreliable one, we can still conclude from Aleksandr's meeting in Smolensk with his father that he betrayed his family. It very likely was not betrayal in the sense of having his father arrested but in the sense of turning his family down when they needed him the most. He chose the state, or perhaps even his success, over his own family by denouncing them and turning down their pleas for help. Chaffin and Brown thus make a good point when arguing that the period of collectivization and how he treated his family show well how loyal he was to the state. Although this side of the discussion certainly has a lot of credible arguments, it does have a tendency to overlook the smaller details, which are not necessarily thereby less significant. Nor does it show the complexity of the position and situation that Aleksandr Tvardovsky was in. Another question that also still remains is whether his loyalty was paired by devotion.

This is where Kozlov and Figes step in. Neither of them disagrees with the statement that Aleksandr betrayed his father for the state. They do, however, shed light on why simply putting the label of hardliner Stalinist on Aleksandr does not entirely cover the essence of what really took place. Figes starts with explaining how many kulak

[71] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina*, 88.
[72] Ibid., 107.

children felt the need to distance themselves from their parents because they wanted to be treated as equals by Soviet society and get a chance to achieve success as hard working Soviet citizens.[73] This success was emphatically promised by state propaganda. One can only wonder if Aleksandr acted out of fear for his own life or out of fear of losing his career when turning his back on his family. As will become clearer later on in this chapter, Aleksandr was very dedicated to the Party's ideology, but whether that confirms the image of Aleksandr mercilessly turning his back on his family to ensure his success is still debatable.

Even though Figes does recognize that Aleksandr supported the anti-kulak campaign and even spoke in favour of it at meetings, Figes also points out that it did bother Aleksandr what had happened to his family.[74] It is unknown whether it was because of the letter that Aleksandr's parents had send him about their hardships or if Aleksandr was already bothered by how his family had been treated, but in 1931 he went to the Party secretary Rumiantsev, to talk about their case. Tvardovsky wanted to know if Rumiantsev could change something about their situation or make it easier for them. This was the same meeting in which Aleksandr was told that he would have to choose between the state and his family. Although this does not change anything about the outcome of this meeting, namely that Aleksandr officially denounced his parents, it does slightly change the image of Aleksandr as a cold-hearted hardliner Stalinist. Going to a Party official to talk about his kulak parents was still a risk for him as he had already been facing difficulties for being seen as a kulak sympathizer.[75]

Like Figes, Denis Kozlov also sheds light on the difficulties that Aleksandr Tvardovsky was faced with as a child of a kulak, rather than solely focussing on his betrayal. During the early 1930s Aleksandr was often attacked for supposedly showing sympathy towards kulaks. It was due to these supposed sentiments that Aleksandr was temporarily removed from the RAPP. Other writers criticized him and he was forced to defend himself about his stance towards kulaks. Kozlov argues as well that Aleksandr was very close to having been arrested in the 1930s. This was not only due to the allegations regarding his lack of devotion to the Stalinist ideology, but as well because of his connection to two party officials whom had fallen from grace and had been

[73] Figes, *The Whisperers,* 131.
[74] Ibid., 132-3.
[75] Kozlov, *The readers of Novyi Mir*, 140.

convicted. Kozlov argues that for quite a while it seemed that Aleksandr would be next and that this would continue on until his poem *The Land of Muravia* was published and awarded.[76]

Ivan Tvardovsky writes in his biography that Aleksandr never talked about these hardships to his family, not even during meetings. He also notes that Aleksandr warned him not to come back to Smolensk because 'trouble will be waiting for you at every turn'.[77] Aleksandr himself pressed that it was important for him to stay in Smolensk as people knew him there. Ivan would later understand that this offered Aleksandr some much needed protection. Ivan also quotes a letter of Aleksandr to his friend Isakovsky, sent in 1935, which shows that these attacks were hard on Aleksandr. He wrote that he had to experience one of the most painful things, namely that he had to repent for choosing unsuccessful parents and prove that he was not against the Soviet regime.[78] Whether it was painful to him because he had to once again denounce his parents or because his loyalty to the Party was being questioned, is not clear. It does, however, show Aleksandr's struggle at that time.

Both Figes and Kozlov have successfully shown the complexity of the situation that Tvardovsky was in, around the time in which he betrayed his family out of loyalty to the state. They do not disagree with Chaffin and Brown on the matter of Tvardovsky's betrayal of his family, and thus his loyalty to the state, but by emphasizing the danger that Aleksandr was in himself and his attempt to help his family by going to Rumiantsev, they show a different side of the story. Namely that Aleksandr was not necessarily a cruel heartless man, who did not care for his family.

3.4: The Glorious Years

While his family was met with the terrible consequences of the regime's initiatives, Aleksandr Tvardovsky's life took a turn for the better with the help of party officials. For someone whose last few years at his family home were difficult as his education was cut short while he wanted to develop himself intellectually, an opportunity to study was a dream come true. While living in Smolensk, a party official helped Aleksandr get into a pedagogical institute so he could continue his education. Tvardovsky later recalls these

[76] Kozlov, 139-140.
[77] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 100.
[78] Ibid., 105.

years of studying and working in Smolensk as a period on which he looks back with high elation.[79] This not only strengthened his view of the Communist Party as a progressive force, as has been mentioned before above, but also instilled a feeling of gratitude in him. Tvardovsky felt thankful towards the Party as it was helping him in achieving his dream of starting a literary career.

Aleksandr Tvardovsky did very well at the institute in Smolensk. It was during these years that he worked on *The Land of Muravia*, which he published in 1936. This poem tells the story of an ordinary farmer who does not want to join a kolkhoz and goes on a journey in order to find this ideal place called Muravia, where he can keep his own farm. During his search he meets numerous kolkhoz farmers and eventually the farmer comes to the conclusion that this ideal land of Muravia is actually life in a kolkhoz. During his years in Smolensk and while writing *The Land of* Muravia, Aleksandr often travelled around to visit collective farms. With the poem Aleksandr Tvardovsky really put himself on the map as a promising young poet. Although writing a poem about something so politically related was not without risks, it turned out really well for Tvardovsky. The poem even found favour with Stalin himself, which later resulted in it getting awarded with the Stalin Prize in 1941.[80]

The year 1936 turned out to be a good year for Aleksandr Tvardovsky. As has been mentioned above, Tvardovsky was having a difficult time during the first half of the 30s due to his supposed kulak sympathies and was often attacked for it. The publication of *The Land of Muravia* not only marked a change in these circumstances but also marked the beginning of his most successful years as a Soviet Stalinist poet. The year 1936 was also of significance in Tvardovsky's personal life as it was the year in which he helped move his family back to the Smolensk region.[81] He seemingly felt protected enough by his success at that point that he dared help his 'kulak' family return from their exile.

---

[79] A. Tvardovsky, 'Na Puti K "Strane Muravii" (Rabochie Tetradi Poeta)', *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo, vol. 93* (Moscow, 1983), 360.
[80] A list of the laureates in the literature category of 1941 and a short explanation of the Stalin Prize can be found in C. Zippermann, 'Literary Landmarks of 1941', *Books Abroad* 16:1 (1942), 29-33.
[81] Kozlov, 139.

The Return of his Family

It is not entirely clear whether Aleksandr helped his family out of guilt or if perhaps his meeting with his brother Ivan had made a difference. Ivan eventually decided to look up his brother in Smolensk. Figes writes in *The Whisperers* that Ivan went with the motif to tell Aleksandr what had happened to their family.[82] When reading Ivan's biography, however, Figes seems to once again have made an error in his book. Ivan actually writes that the reason why he went to Aleksandr was because he wished to see him, to understand him and to figure out what his true attitude towards the fate of his family was. Before leaving for Smolensk he also discussed with his parents to which extent he should inform Aleksandr on what had happened to them. They came to the conclusion that he could not talk about everything and that it was better to keep silent about the details. If we are to believe Ivan, his meeting with Aleksandr did, however, awaken feelings of guilt and remorse in his brother.[83] This guilt likely grew when Ivan wrote to him in 1936: '(…) how is it that you, Aleksandr, are not at all interested in the fate of your own family?' He then gives a description of how their mother is sadly staring out of a window because of it.[84] Only about a month later did Aleksandr go to Turek (where the family, with exception of Konstantin and Ivan, was staying) and helped them move back.[85] Kozlov argues that Ivan's biography shows that the relationship between Aleksandr and his family never really fully recovered.[86]

Vasili Tyorkin

Aleksandr showed devotion to the Party by joining it. There is some confusion amongst scholars as to when exactly Tvardovsky became a member, but it seems to have been shortly before World War II.[87] Aleksandr then enrolled into the Red Army, after his

[82] Figes, *The Whisperers*, 134.
[83] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 99.
[84] Idem, 106.
[85] According to Ivan, their mother was very happy when Aleksandr visited them in Turek. When Trifon entered the house, he froze at the sight of his son. Aleksandr stood up and embraced him, saying: 'That is how it is, dad! You do not need to remember.'; I. Tvardovsky, 107.
[86] Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 139.
[87] Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature,* 74; The New York Times, 'Tvardovsky, Liberal Soviet Editor, Dies', *nytimes.com* (19 December 1971); V. Danilenko, *Ot predyazyka – k yazyku. Vvedenie v evolyutsionnuyu lingvistiku* (2017); J. Vronskaya & V. Chuguev, *The*

studies. Although the Soviet Union was not yet involved, World War II had started at that point. Tvardovsky was sent off to partake in the war against Finland. He did, however, not participate as solely a common officer in the Soviet-Finnish war, but as a war correspondent as well. One would not expect many positive things to come from a war, but Tvardovsky's career really profited from the war years, as this was when he created his most popular work. Aleksandr was working together with other war correspondents, and they came up with the personage of Vasya Tyorkin, who was supposed to play the leading role in numerous cartoons. Tvardovsky was in charge of writing the introduction to this persona.

Tvardovsky continued to write poems about this Tyorkin and turned him into Vasili Tyorkin. After the war with Finland, Tvardovsky continued to write about Vasili Tyorkin during World War II. *Vasili Tyorkin* (which Tvardovsky published in parts as a newspaper column) was about a simple common soldier. Tvardovsky wanted to portray someone that the normal soldiers could relate to. As Tvardovsky seemed to do with most of his poems, he based this one as well on the life he was familiar with and surrounded by. For instance, Tvardovsky's love for the rural region and his own origin as a 'simple peasant' were shared by his protagonist Vasili Tyorkin. The collection of poems describes multiple common scenarios, in which the common soldiers could also find themselves, and in which Tyorkin would react with humour, cleverness and discipline.

Vasili Tyorkin was received really well by the masses and did especially well among the common soldiers, which delighted Tvardovsky a great bit as he wanted to write poems which the simple people would read and enjoy. People responded to Tyorkin by saying that he was very realistic and that they either knew people like him or felt resembled by him themselves.[88] Vasili Tyorkin soon became a nation-wide hero and gave Tvardovsky's career a huge boost. Apart from receiving very positive reviews from loyal Soviet supporters, *Vasili Tyorkin* was even praised amongst critics of the regime. Writers like Ivan Bunin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who were both anti-Stalinists, were positive about the book. As Tvardovsky purely focussed on the reality of these common soldiers it is not such a strange phenomenon that both hardliner Stalinists and anti-

---

Biographical Dictionary of the Former Soviet Union. Prominent People in all Fields from 1917 to the Present (1992).

[88] F. D. Reeve, 'A Soldier in Heaven: Poetry as Political Satire', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 19:2 (2013), 135.

Stalinists praised the piece. Quite interesting is that the piece that marks the peak of his career as a Soviet poet does not mention Stalin at all. None the less, *Vasili Tyorkin* even seemed to find favour with Stalin himself. This cannot only be concluded from the poem delivering Tvardovsky his second Stalin Prize but is based as well on the following remark by Khrushchev:

> 'Stalin was deeply moved by a painting depicting Vasily Tyorkin. When he first saw it he immediately proposed: "Let's hang this in the Kremlin." It was hung there at the entrance to the Catherine Hall. If you turned to the left when you came out of the hall, where sessions of the Supreme Soviet were held, you could see Tyorkin standing in a circle of his fellow fighters after a battle.'[89]

It is unclear whether the painting of Tyorkin was later moved out of the Kremlin, but the painting, or a copy, was also hung in Stalin's cottage. Tvardovsky writes about this in his *Working Notebooks,* as Denis Kozlov also quotes in his book, and mentions that he heard it was the only painting in the cottage and was hung there at the personal request of Stalin.[90]

A Devoted Stalinist

While his literary success kept growing, Tvardovsky was growing in his party-career as well. He played a prominent role in the Soviet Writer's Union and was a deputy for numerous convocations of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).[91] His involvement and commitment to the Party vouch for his belief in the regime and his devotion to its ideology. This was as well the image that existed of Tvardovsky in Soviet society. A passage from Ivan's biography displays this rather well. After having spent quite some time in Finland as a prisoner of war, Ivan eventually fled to Sweden to seek refuge. He was sent to a refugee camp:

---

[89] Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev,* 549.
[90] Kozlov, 141; A. Tvardovsky, 'Iz rabochikh tetradei (1953-1960). Predislovie, publikatsiya i primechaniya M. I. Tvardovskoi', *Znamya no. 7* (Moscow 1989), 127.
[91] E. L. Crowley et al (eds.), *Prominent Personalities in the USSR. A Biographic Directory* (1968).

'(…) as soon as it became known among the Russian internees that I was Ivan Trifonovich Tvardovsky, it somehow greatly frightened them and they started to avoid me (…). (…) One of them (…), turning to all Russians, cried out: "What is there to guess?! His brother, the poet Aleksandr Tvardovsky, is a complete Stalinist! And there can be no doubt that he is not here in vain, but arrived on the instructions of the NKVD.'[92]

[92] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 175.

Part II

The Critical Chief Editor

1953-1971

Chapter 4: The Destalinization of a Stalinist – Changing Perceptions During the Thaw

4.1: Introduction

After years of supporting the Soviet regime under Stalin and achieving a lot of success in his career mainly because of this, Tvardovsky gradually left the 'pro-Stalin camp'. Throughout the late 50s and 60s he played an important role in the destalinization and liberalization of literature. He was able to do this through his position as chief editor of the literary journal *Novyi Mir* and through writing poems. Disappointed with the regime and overcome by guilt for denouncing his parents, Tvardovsky started publishing and writing critical pieces on the regime. In this chapter I will discuss the switch that Tvardovsky made from supporting Stalin's regime to criticizing it. I will first shed light on how this change happened and how it influenced his life. In doing so, I will use a brief comparative study. I will then discuss how Tvardovsky used his position as chief editor of *Novyi Mir* to criticize the regime. To conclude this chapter I will analyse how Tvardovsky criticized the Soviet system in his poem *Tyorkin in the Afterlife*.

4.2: Growing Discontent

One of the most interesting features of Aleksandr Tvardovsky's character, as many scholars would surely agree with me, was his ability to reflect on himself and his perspectives, to then change his mind or admit his mistakes. It was because of this ability of his that he eventually started to question whether he was right to so loyally support the regime. From being a 'complete Stalinist' Tvardovsky made a remarkable switch in perspective and played one of the leading roles in the destalinization. Chaffin argues that World War II had made a significant impact on Aleksandr's mental and physical resilience and that he became disappointed by how the regime was functioning, as it was not living up to his expectations. She also adds that the very slow recovery of the country after the war added to his dissatisfaction.[93] Kozlov does not exclude the war as a reason for Tvardovsky's change in perspective but presses more the significance of Tvardovsky having lived for so long with fear of being arrested and him having been witness of the Great Terror of 1937 which eventually led to a change of mind. It is

[93] Chaffin, 93-4.

noteworthy that many scholars do not really go into detail on what made Tvardovsky become critical of the Stalinist regime. Although it is rather peculiar that so little attention has been paid to one of the most significant moments of Tvardovsky's life, it is at the same time not difficult to understand why. With the state censorship in place and the danger of getting arrested for sharing a critical point of view on the regime still very much alive, Tvardovsky's process of getting disappointed and aware of the system's shortcomings was most likely an inner process. We can also assume that the guilt towards his family played a part in his change of perspective on the regime. It was, after all, the regime that had requested of Aleksandr to denounce his family. Many of Tvardovsky's later poems would touch on this guilt of his, as will be elaborately analysed in the next chapter. Although Aleksandr was not very close to his family, as Ivan's biography shows, Aleksandr would still experience the hardships of the Soviet regime second-hand through his father's and brothers' exile.[94]

4.3: A Comparative Study: Aleksandr Fadeyev

Feelings of guilt were not an uncommon phenomenon amongst hardliner Stalinists. Even though many of these Stalinists had made decisions based on their devotion to the Communist Party and out of genuine belief in its principles, the reality of what they had done would sometimes still catch up with them. Another clear example of this phenomenon, other than Tvardovsky's own case, can be found with an at once close friend of his, Aleksandr Fadeyev. What makes Fadeyev a fitting case for a very compact comparative study, in order to give Tvardovsky's case more context, is that both men shared a very similar lifestyle. Like Tvardovsky, Aleksandr Fadeyev was a successful Soviet writer and also received Stalin Prizes for his works. He was also very successful in his Party-career during Stalin's reign. He already played an important role in RAPP (the forerunner of the Soviet Writer's Union) and would later also become the General Secretary of the Soviet Writers' Union. Like Tvardovsky, Fadeyev was very dedicated to the Party and its cause. Fadeyev was heard praising Stalin with statements that declared Stalin 'that mighty genius of the working class' or 'the greatest humanist on earth'.[95]

---

[94] A clear instance of Aleksandr's deteriorated relationships to his family from Ivan's biography can be found in a letter from Ivan's wife, Maria. She wrote that she had a met with Aleksandr and that he had shown very little interest in Ivan. He said: 'I lived with my brothers only shortly, I barely know Ivan'; I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 218.
[95] J. & C. Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union* (New York, 1990), 35.

When the Great Terror began, Fadeyev remained loyal and dedicated. As a very powerful figure in the Soviet Writer's Union in 1937 and as its chairman in the years following, Fadeyev helped with arrests of 'enemies of the state'. The Politburo ordered in 1937 that the leading figures of institutions were obligated to sign or countersign the warrants for arrest of their employees.[96] Fadeyev would thus be (partly) responsible for many of the arrests of his colleagues and even friends. After Stalin's death and the official denunciation of his personality cult, Fadeyev no longer had a higher ideological goal that justified his role in the Great Terror. Although he already had a heavy drinking problem before Stalin's death, which is believed to also be a result of his guilt, the secret speech of Khrushchev that denounced Stalin, is what really forced Fadeyev to face what he had done. Many of the people that Fadeyev had helped lock up were being pardoned and confronted their old chief or friend. Most likely being unable to live with his guilt, Fadeyev ended his life that same year.[97]

Although the consequences of Tvardovsky's dedication to the Party were significantly less than Fadeyev's, Tvardovsky's story could have very well ended the same way. He even shared the same heavy drinking problem. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008), a writer whose debut novella Tvardovsky published and who will be introduced more elaborately later on, mentioned this drinking problem of Tvardovsky more than once in a biographical book of his.[98] Although Solzhenitsyn disapproved of this habit, he later did realize that these moments of drunkenness gave Tvardovsky some much-needed relief.[99] Whereas Fadeyev was supposedly overcome by shame and guilt, which even led to his death, Tvardovsky managed to find a way to adjust to a new reality in which destalinization had started. It was not an immediate switch from hardliner Stalinist to a dedicated supporter of the destalinization. Tvardovsky started to slowly show more disagreement with the regime under Stalin (although most of this would come to light after Stalin's death).

[96] Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*, 57.
[97] Langeveld & Weststeijn, *Moderne Russische Literatuur*, 283; J. & C. Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*, 74-5.
[98] A. Solzhenitsyn, *Het kalf stoot de eik* (1976).
[99] Ibid., 24.

4.4: *Novyi Mir*

Tvardovsky became the chief editor of the literary journal *Novyi Mir* in 1950. He would remain in this position until 1954, at which point he was fired, but would be reinstated in 1958 for the same position. It was under Tvardovsky's guidance that *Novyi Mir* would become known as a liberal journal. Roy A. Medvedev states that *Novyi Mir* 'was the leading anti-Stalinist journal published officially in the Soviet Union in the 1950 and 1960s'.[100] Tvardovsky's growing discontent with the regime did not only leave a mark on early drafts of poems, which would not be published until later, but Aleksandr also used his position as chief editor to introduce a more critical sound by publishing risky articles in *Novyi Mir*.[101] A very good example of this is an article by Vladimir Pomerantsev, which calls attention to the insincerity of Soviet literature of that time. It discusses the different methods in which authors have been insincere in their works, namely by creating fake prosperity, leaving out certain details about Soviet life, and by not touching on the problems of a certain theme. Pomerantsev gave an example of this 'varnishing of reality' in his article, mentioning that there were quite a few movie scenes that depict luxurious banquets at collective farms, which was not a realistic depiction.[102]

Although Tvardovsky was able to get away with publishing multiple articles that did not meet the regime's requirements, it was Pomerantsev's piece that started to cause issues. Chaffin argues that Tvardovsky was also under extra pressure due to the circulation of his unpublished poem *Tyorkin in the Afterlife*, which criticized Soviet society. When Tvardovsky had to defend himself and *Novyi Mir* in front of the Central Committee, as a result of these controversial articles and poem, he had gotten too drunk to do so. It was decided after this that Tvardovsky had to be removed from his post as chief editor. Both Lakshin and Solzhenitsyn argue that Tvardovsky was most likely to not have been fired if it were not for his alcoholism. Tvardovsky did, however, protect his staff by claiming that he alone was responsible for the publication of these controversial articles and took all the blame upon himself.

---

[100] R. A. Medvedev, 'The Stalin Question'. In: S. F. Cohen et al (eds.), *The Soviet Union since Stalin* (London 1980), 47.
[101] Chaffin, 94.
[102] V. Pomerantsev, 'Ob iskrennosti v literature', *Novyi Mir no. 12* (December 1953).

Second Term

It would, however, not mark the end of his career as chief editor at *Novyi Mir*. Four years later, in 1958, Tvardovsky was again appointed this position. It was during his second term that Tvardovsky really made a name for himself as the liberal chief editor. This was mainly due to a writer whose debut novel Tvardovsky published in *Novyi Mir*, namely *One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Having spent multiple years in a Gulag camp, Solzhenitsyn wrote a book describing what a normal day in such a camp looked like. Tvardovsky recognized this manuscript as a masterpiece and was set on publishing it. One of the aspects of the book that made it stand out to Tvardovsky, besides its sincerity, was that Solzhenitsyn used simple language and the book had a 'peasant like style'.[103] Kozlov argues that Tvardovsky was in search of manuscripts that could give a realistic depiction of what really went on during the terror and in these Gulag camps, and for it to be described in realistic, straight to the point language.[104] Tvardovsky managed to get the approval of the Presidium for publishing the book by having well-known soviet writers send approving letters to the Presidium about the book. *Ivan Denisovich* became one of the most important books of the destalinization.

While making *Novyi Mir* a liberal and critical journal, Tvardovsky was also trying to implement sincerity in his own works. He published poems like *Distance beyond Distance* and *Tyorkin in the Other World*, which displayed Tvardovsky's critical opinion of Soviet society and its regime. Someone had read *Tyorkin in the Afterlife* to Khrushchev before it was published and he liked it so much that he ordered it to be published. Chaffin writes that the relationship between Tvardovsky and Khrushchev could be seen as some kind of alliance in the process of the Thaw and destalinization.[105] Khrushchev would, however, be removed from his position and the restrictions of the censorship would tighten again under the new regime. Despite this change, Tvardovsky kept publishing rather daring pieces in *Novyi Mir* and would be criticized because of this. Tvardovsky lost his position in the Central Committee in 1966 and with it a great loss of influence. This still did not change Tvardovsky's mind on sticking to this new course of literature showing a realistic depiction of Soviet life. In these last years of his life Tvardovsky wrote the poem *By Right of Memory*, in which he very openly discusses the

[103] Chaffin, 107.
[104] Kozlov, *The Readers,* 155.
[105] Chaffin, 114.

errors that the Soviet regime and society caused or were passive witnesses of. Although it did not get published in the Soviet Union during Tvardovsky's life, an émigré journal did publish the piece without Tvardovsky's consent. This journal was seen as anti-Soviet and so this, in addition to being responsible for the publishing of so many controversial articles in *Novyi Mir*, put Aleksandr in a tough spot. He very often had to defend his journal and writers that he published. In 1970 the Central Committee forced Tvardovsky to resign by reorganizing the board of Novyi Mir. Tvardovsky would pass away a year later due to lung cancer.

4.5: Criticizing the Soviet System

During that time, in which Aleksandr became critical of the Soviet regime, there seemed to be two principles that Aleksandr kept in high regard. Firstly, he felt it to be his duty to contribute to Soviet literature by writing and publishing high quality pieces. Secondly, Tvardovsky was a strong believer of his generation having a responsibility to speak of its Stalinist past and its flaws. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* met both of these requirements, which came as a welcome surprise to Tvardovsky in 1962, after a long search. However, even as early as 1953, the year of Stalin's death, Tvardovsky was already occupied with the concept of honestly depicting Stalinist history in literature. As has been mentioned above, it was only a few months after the dictator was deceased that Tvardovsky decided to publish Pomerantsev's article *On Sincerity in Literature*. Despite several attacks on the article, Tvardovsky kept defending its message and his journal *Novyi Mir* for publishing critical pieces. In one of his *Work Notebooks* Aleksandr cited the letter that he sent to the Presidium of the Central Committee in order to defend himself against the attacks of P. N. Pospelov on *Novyi Mir* and on his new poem *Tyorkin in the Other World*.[106] In this letter Aleksandr states clearly what he sees as his duty and what is important to him. On the question of sincerity in literature, Aleksandr wrote the following:

> 'There is no, and cannot be, any special 'line' in *Novyi Mir* other than the desire to work in the spirit of the Party's well-known instructions on literature. The Party's instructions on the need to launch bold criticism

[106] P. N. Pospelov was an important member of the Communist Party and chief-editor of the newspaper *Pravda*.

> of our shortcomings, including the shortcomings of literature, obliged and oblige the editors to honestly and conscientiously implement them, to the best of their ability and understanding. Being a participant in the last plenary sessions of the Central Committee of the CPSU, which impressed me in the spirit and tone of direct and fearless criticism of shortcomings, and intolerance of embellishment of reality, I tried to direct the work of the journal in this spirit. I saw and see this as my direct task as a communist writer (…).'[107]

Although Khrushchev was yet to hold his secret speech *On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences*, there had already started developing some new changes regarding literature. Supported by the Party's new instructions, Tvardovsky felt it to be his 'direct task' to become critical of the Soviet Union's shortcomings and the insincerity in depicting Soviet reality, as can be concluded from this letter mentioned above. At this point, Tvardovsky was not so much criticizing the terror of Stalin's regime yet or speaking of his own feelings of guilt, but focussing more on general shortcomings of Soviet politics and life.

Besides publishing critical pieces Tvardovsky was also personally seeking to bring the shortcomings of Soviet life to public attention by writing his poem *Tyorkin in the Other World*. He took his protagonist Vasili Tyorkin, who was very well known and loved within the Soviet Union, and used him to criticize certain aspects of Soviet life. In the poem *Tyorkin in the Other World,* beloved soldier Vasili passes away and goes to the afterlife. This 'other world' resembles in many aspects the Soviet Union and especially the inefficiency of its bureaucracy. Tvardovsky seemed to know that his poem had the potential to cause controversy, and was likely to be criticized, as he actually wrote some kind of foreword within his poem. He cuts in after only a few beginning stanzas with the following words:

> 'And hold up: the mentor [Tvardovsky] is strict
> He intervenes in the first lines…'

[107] A. Tvardovsky, 'Iz rabochikh tetradei', 138-9.

He then proceeds to ask the reader to please read the poem first before punishing him 'cruelly'. One must definitely keep in mind that Tvardovsky was using poetic language and writing in rhyme, but it does show us that Tvardovsky knew his poem would most likely get a negative reaction from the public. In this kind of introductory foreword, Tvardovsky also criticizes the literary critics of that time with these few stanzas:

'Do not rush with a flat guess,
Like a literary critic,
Hearing echoes in everything
Of unlawful ideas.'

Tvardovsky also seems to disagree with how literature was generally being read in that time, as can be concluded from the following lines:

'Do not look for a dirty trick everywhere,
Do not get scared by the unexpected.[108]
Get out of the habit. Not that era –
If you want, not that.'

These stanzas show that Tvardovsky was attempting to bring about a change in how literature was written and received. He took the Party's new instructions, of no longer tolerating that Soviet reality was being embellished in literature, to heart while writing this poem.

When arriving in the afterlife, Tyorkin learns that there are two afterlife worlds and that he has gone to the communist afterlife (as opposed to the bourgeois afterlife). Tvardovsky makes clear in his poem that the afterlife is much like life in the Soviet Union. When Tyorkin asks an old army friend, with whom he rekindled in the afterlife, whether both afterlives are different than the worlds of the living, his friend replies:

'No brother, everything is the same,

[108] The literal translation of this sentence is: 'Do not get scared from behind the bush' indicating that one must not get scared by something suddenly jumping out at them unexpectedly.

How it is in life - here and there.'

Tvardovsky even writes in his poem that the leader in the Soviet Union is the same as in the afterlife, despite this leader still being alive.

The biggest subject of critique in Tvardovsky's poem is bureaucracy. When Tyorkin arrives in the communist afterlife, he is almost immediately faced with bureaucratic obligations. Tyorkin is requested to get his paperwork in order and to get registered in the afterlife. He needs documents and a new photo and even the doctor's signature:

'He did not think, rashly
Stretching out his legs,
That without a doctor's signature
There is no way to eternity

(…)

Tyorkin groaned:
What the hell,
What kind of spectacle:
Well, as if it is a resort
To which I need a ticket!
How much fuss
In their scientific world.'

Tyorkin spends a lot of time going from desk to desk, trying to get everything in order. He has trouble finding even the simplest things like a drink and a bed. While struggling with the grind of bureaucracy, Tyorkin also comes across the office of the afterlife's newspaper. Tvardovsky refers to *Glavlit* in these few stanzas ('Then he gets ticked off, by himself and by Glav and Lit') and describes how the paper '*Grobgazeta'* gets censured (for instance by removing and adding words).[109]

[109] A. Tvardovsky, *Tyorkin na tom svete*.

P. N. Pospelov criticized the poem *Tyorkin in the Other Life* as 'libel to the Soviet reality' and 'a slanderous thing'.[110] Tvardovsky reacted to these accusations in his letter to the Central Committee, as cited in his *Working Notebooks*. Refraining from going into the literary merit of his poem, Tvardovsky writes that *Tyorkin in the Other Life* would benefit Soviet state and society on an ideological and political level.[111] He argues in this letter that his poem can help society as it depicts the 'ugly networks of bureaucracy, formalism, treasury and routine' and how they hinder them (soviet society and state) and make it difficult for them to 'move forward victoriously'.[112]

[110] A. Tvardovsky, 'Iz rabochikh tetradei', 139.
[111] Idem.
[112] Idem.

Chapter 5: A Sorrowful Son – Public and Personal Guilt

5.1: Introduction

In addition to openly discussing the flaws of the bureaucratic system and the insincerity of censorship, Tvardovsky discusses an even darker subject, namely Stalin's terror. He also discusses his own public and personal guilt in poems like *Brothers* and *By Right of Memory*. It was important to Tvardovsky, as his poems and work at *Novyi Mir* clearly show, that the Soviet past of the Great Terror and of Stalin's personality cult would not be forgotten. He felt it was his generation's duty to talk about its past and describe what happened. This chapter will first analyse a passage of *Tyorkin in the Other World* in which Tvardovsky discusses the Gulag camps. I will then discuss what Tvardovsky's perception of the then current Communist Party was during the Thaw to see if Stalin's terror influenced Tvardovsky's perception of the Party itself. Thereafter this chapter will focus on Tvardovsky's guilt. First, I will analyse the 'public guilt'; the guilt that Tvardovsky felt for being part of a society which had remained silent during the terror. This will be done through the analysis of his *Working Notebooks*, and his foreword in *Ivan Denisovich*. Secondly, I will analyse his personal guilt towards his family and regarding his loyalty to Stalin. For this part I will use the primary sources *Brothers* and *By Right of Memory*.

5.2: *Tyorkin* and the Gulag Camps

In *Tyorkin in the Other* World, Tvardovsky seems mainly focussed on the shortcomings of the bureaucratic system. However, he takes his 'sincerity in literature' even a step further:

> '…There, year after year,
> They marched unseen
> Kolyma and Magadan,
> Vorkuta with Narym.'

Tvardovsky mentions four infamous Gulag camps in this part, which is very daring in a time where not too long ago people could have been arrested or executed for writing this. The line 'they marched unseen' more elaborately means that they walked in rows

and that these rows went on for so long that the end of them could not even be seen. With the first two lines Tvardovsky refers to the immense amount of people that were sent to the camps in the years of Stalin's reign.

'Over the line into death[113]
With a little difference,
The permafrost area
Wrote them off into eternity.'

With this stanza Tvardovsky seems to implicate that a lot of people were sent to the camps for even the smallest of things (crossing a line 'with a little difference'). Tvardovsky also points out in this stanza that crossing the line, and ending up in a Gulag camp, often meant crossing the border of life into death as well. The four camps that Tvardovsky mentions here were all located in Siberia, as were most other Gulag camps. Siberia, with its harsh weather conditions, is a permafrost area. With 'writing them off into eternity' Tvardovsky thus meant that prisoners often died in these camps.

'Who, for what, according to whose will –
Explain, science.
No orchestra, no speeches,
Where it was– there was no sound.'

This part seems to point out that many people were arrested during those years without there being any good reason or known reason for it. The last two sentences describe the situation of how there were no official trials for these arrest and allegations and that these arrests happened in secrecy and silence. It also seems to refer to how bystanders would generally keep out of it and not make a sound, knowing they could easily be next for no good reason either. Tvardovsky very daringly touches on a very painful and taboo subject, here especially, and he criticizes it.

Tvardovsky concludes this part of the poem with the following two sentences:

[113] It is difficult to know what exactly Tvardovsky meant by this sentence in the original Russian version. '*Za chertu'* means to cross a line or a border and can also be used to describe crossing the border of life into death.

'Memory, no matter how bitter you are,
Be a notch for the ages!'

These words and the stanza above this last one give a very good understanding of why Tvardovsky ended up playing such an important role in the destalinization. Simultaneously, these words also testify to Aleksandr's ability of self-reflection and admitting his wrong, as only a few years, before he wrote this poem, he was still undoubtedly devoted to Stalin's cause. Tvardovsky sheds light on a very dark page in Soviet history by talking about the labour camps and the arrests that generally took place without good reason.

When comparing it to the case of Fadeyev, one is shown that it must have been a difficult task to confront oneself with the Soviet past and recognize one's own responsibility in its faults. Very shortly before Fadeyev committed suicide he spoke with a friend and asked him if he would be able to live with the knowledge that, because of his doing, many innocent people had been killed.[114] Although the official report stated that Fadeyev killed himself due to alcoholism, his friend, with whom he had spend his last hours with, claimed that Fadeyev had been sober those couple of days. They had spent them talking about their past and thus guilt was what most likely had pushed him over the edge.[115] Although Tvardovsky did share the same tendency as Fadeyev to numb himself with alcohol, he managed to not let the feelings of guilt get the better of him. Instead, he used his position and experiences to ensure that people would actively remember the past in order for such terror to not repeat itself.

As *Tyorkin in the Other Life* did not get published officially in 1954 (only an unofficial version of it was circulating), it is difficult to say whether all these parts were already included in it. It is most likely that the parts that mention the camps were added later on, as Tvardovsky started showing a particular interest in the camps only around 1954-1955, when people started sharing their experiences in private settings.[116] It does, however, show that Tvardovsky did not shy away from the painful and dark aspects of Soviet history, whether it was in 1954 or a few years later when it got officially

[114] R. Medvedev & S. F. Cohen, *An End to Silence,* 115.
[115] Idem.
[116] D. Kozlov, *The Readers,* 146.

published in 1963. It is safe to say, though, that the version of this poem that was circulating in 1954, was daring in its criticism. As has been mentioned above, it was partly because of this poem's circulation that Tvardovsky was supposed to defend himself in front of the Central Committee, which eventually led to his dismissal at *Novyi Mir.*

Tvardovsky's perception of the Communist Party

It is important to make a distinction in what exactly Tvardovsky criticizes or in to which extent. Despite his spending years of pointing out the flaws in Soviet reality, and the personality cult later on as well, Tvardovsky's loyalty to the Communist Party or its ideology did not waver. Solzhenitsyn would later criticize Tvardovsky for his continuing commitment to the Party. Solzhenitsyn portrays Tvardovsky as somewhat arrogant and gullible; he often disagrees with Tvardovsky's point of view and way of acting. Solzhenitsyn repeatedly points out instances in which, according to him, Tvardovsky should have been more brave, critical or humble. Despite Solzhenitsyn's conviction of Tvardovsky's good-intentioned nature and sincerity, he relentlessly criticizes him for remaining loyal to the Party and for turning down manuscripts that give daring criticism on the Soviet state. Solzhenitsyn attributes Tvardovsky's loyalty to the Party to a deep inner desire to strongly belief in something. He writes that Tvardovsky was sincerely and deeply committed to Stalin, despite being witness to the downfall of the peasantry and the suffering of his own family. And despite sincerely mourning for Stalin's death, he then continued to sincerely turn away from Stalin and search for a new truth with Khrushchev.[117] This is obviously a very subjective observation of Tvardovsky's character. However, Tvardovsky himself also displays these deep sentiments of loyalty to the Party in his letter to the Central Committee mentioned here above:

> 'I owe the Party all the happiness of my literary vocation. Everything, that I am able to do to the best of my ability, she taught me. With the name of the Party I associate all that is best, reasonable, truthful and beautiful in the world, for which it is worth living and working. And I will continue to work

[117] A. Solzjenitsyn, *Het kalf stoot de eik* (1976), 41.

and act in such a way, not out of fear but out of conscience, to serve the cause of communism.'[118]

These sentiments that Solzhenitsyn attributes to Tvardovsky are very similar to the 'desire of being part of the revolutionary currents' that Hellbeck discusses in his theory on why people remained loyal to a system despite state violence.

5.3: Describing Stalin's Terror

To Tvardovsky, serving the cause of communism meant, inter alia, to bear one's own responsibility for the terrors that had taken place during Stalin's regime. According to Kozlov, this started to gain importance to Tvardovsky around 1955. As has been mentioned above, it was during this time that people started talking about their camp experiences in private circles. Tvardovsky had to come to terms with the knowledge that many of his acquaintances, as well as friends and family members, had been sentenced to time in the Gulag camps while innocent, and had been subjected to cruelty. As Kozlov writes in his article, Tvardovsky was trying to write a chapter in 1955 about a meeting with a childhood friend who had been repressed somewhere around the time of 1937.[119] Aleksandr even went to former prison camps in order to learn more about what had happened during, as it would later be called, the Great Terror. Despite gaining more insight on the terror that had taken place during the late 30s, it proved to be a difficult task for Aleksandr to find the right words for it. Kozlov mentions how this search for words often reoccurs in Tvardovsky's *Working Notebooks* and argues that this search played a role in creating a language that could be used to describe the Soviet terror.[120]

Just like in *Tyorkin in the Other World* Tvardovsky also wanted to emphasize in this chapter, on his childhood friend, that the protagonist was innocent. On April 17th of 1955 Tvardovsky wrote in his *Working Notebooks* what he wanted to add to the chapter and amongst these points and additions was the stanza:

'I did not become an enemy of the people,

[118] A. Tvardovsky, 'Iz rabochikh tetradei (1953-1960)', 139.
[119] D. Kozlov, *The Readers*, 145.
[120] Idem.

I am only on the list…'[121]

This stanza means to show the reader that this childhood friend of Tvardovsky was condemned while innocent. It is proof of a complicated struggle for Aleksandr in which he had to part ways with his old way of thinking that Stalin was without fault. With accepting the injustice that had happened during Stalin's regime also came an extra sense of guilt for Aleksandr. In the same journal entry as the one mentioned above, Tvardovsky wrote that he wanted to add that he himself 'did not give everything up and did not sit with him etc. (…).'[122] Tvardovsky was going through the same kind of process as Fadeyev where he started to feel responsible for having been part of the system and remaining quiet.

In his book, Kozlov refers to different parts in Tvardovsky's *Working Notebooks* that portray very well what Aleksandr was struggling with while writing this 'childhood friend chapter'. Aleksandr tries to explain his former perspective on the terror under Stalin in one of these entries. He writes that he was convinced that the regime knew best and thus the arrests necessary for the common good. Had he judged the regime it would have felt as if he himself was 'against everything good in the world'. He felt it not to be his place, back then, to have his own opinion on the matter, let alone judge the regime on any aspect.[123] This again, aligns with Hellbeck's theory, in which he argues that many people thought state violence to be necessary. The end of this segment shows how much Tvardovsky's perspective had changed as he admits that during Stalin's regime he accepted that the government knew better what kind of a person his friend was than he himself, despite knowing this friend as well as himself.[124] Kozlov also points out that Tvardovsky had difficulty with creating an ending for the chapter as he did not know how these people were to go on after reintegrating in a society that had let them go through such terror.[125]

[121] A. Tvardovsky, 'Iz rabochikh tetradei', 166.
[122] Idem.
[123] D. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 146.
[124] Idem.
[125] Idem.

Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich*

Tvardovsky's search for words to document the experiences of these 'enemies of the state' was not limited to his own attempts. When Tvardovsky regained his position as chief editor at *Novyi Mir*, he sought for works on this subject to publish. It proved to be a difficult task as people were still hesitant to openly discuss these matters. Whatever manuscripts Tvardovsky did receive, were judged harshly for they had to be written in a sober language, yet simultaneously embody a high literary value.[126] The work that finally met these requirements was Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the life of Ivan Denisovich*. Solzhenitsyn writes in *The Oak and the Calf* that he had been waiting for the right time to come forward with his manuscript. It was the 22nd congress of the CPSU that gave Solzhenitsyn the motivation he needed to try get his manuscript published. Tvardovsky had made a remark that convinced Solzhenitsyn to try his luck with *Novyi Mir*. Tvardovsky had said that 'it had been possible, for a long time already, to publish more daringly and freely but that 'we don't use that opportunity'' as *Novyi Mir* 'simply did not have such works that were more daring and critical [sharp], that otherwise he would be able to publish those'.[127] This testifies to how driven Tvardovsky was in his search for critical, candid works and that he was not afraid to publicly discuss this.

According to Solzhenitsyn it took quite some time for Tvardovsky to write a foreword to *Ivan Denisovich*. As the work was of great significance to Tvardovsky, and he anticipated it to have great significance to Soviet society as well, it is understandable that he took his time trying to introduce it in the best way possible. Once again, Tvardovsky emphasizes in this foreword what he believes is very important:

> 'But whatever the past was like, we in the present must not be indifferent to it. Only by going into its consequences fully, courageously, and truthfully can we guarantee a complete and irrevocable break with all those things that cast a shadow over the past.'[128]

Further along in the foreword, Tvardovsky also speaks of the great artistic value of Solzhenitsyn's work. However, his main focus is on its significance as an honest

[126] A. Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York 1963), xxii.
[127] A. Solzjenitsyn, *Het kalf stoot de eik*, 19.
[128] A. Solzhenitsyn, *One Day,* xxi.

depiction of the past. Tvardovsky's hope for this novel seemed to be that it would help people face the past with courage and honesty so that history would not repeat itself. He would eventually also gather the courage to do this on a personal level, as will become clear later on in this chapter. This approach of Tvardovsky was very much in line with Khrushchev's new policy and speeches, which sought to denounce the abuse of power under Stalin. Tvardovsky points out in this foreword that he agrees with Khrushchev that it is their duty to analyse every aspect of the abuse of power and share the truth.

Just like in *Tyorkin in the Other World* Tvardovsky emphasizes how the prisoners were innocent. He wrote that they were 'the same sort of people' as the people who were 'fighting at the front or working on postwar reconstruction', the difference merely being that they had been 'exposed by fate to a cruel ordeal – not only physical but moral'.[129] This novel undoubtedly hit close to home for Tvardovsky, just like it would for many others, as his father and brothers had spent time in Gulag prison camps while innocent. Tvardovsky writes that one cannot help but feel pain and bitterness at what happened with these prisoners.[130] As someone who had spent years struggling to write about the Great Terror, Tvardovsky was very grateful to Solzhenitsyn for this novel:

> 'The effect of this novel, which is so unusual for its honesty and harrowing truth, is to unburden our minds of things thus far unspoken, but which had to be said. It thereby strengthens and ennobles us.'[131]

5.4: Tvardovsky's Personal Guilt

To the question of what caused the change of heart in Tvardovsky after Stalin's regime, there is no clear answer. It was most likely not one specific aspect but a combination of different factors. It is, however, safe to assume that the guilt of what had happened in his personal life weighed heavily on Aleksandr. Tvardovsky eventually faced his own guilt head on. For years he had been an advocate of not letting Soviet society forget its past and of openly and truthfully examining the flaws and mistakes in this past. More towards the end of his life Tvardovsky also started to apply these same principles to his

[129] A. Solzhenitsyn, *One Day,* xxiii.
[130] Idem.
[131] Idem.

personal life. He even shared these reflections on his life and actions through autobiographic poems like *By Right of Memory*. It might come as a surprise that Tvardovsky's reflection on Stalin and on his loyalty to this dictator will also be discussed in this paragraph. However, Tvardovsky's loyalty and admiration for Stalin were so tightly intertwined with the rest of his personal life, that one cannot separate the two. This will become especially clear later on in this paragraph during the analysis of Tvardovsky's feelings of guilt towards his father.

5.4.1: *Brothers*

Before further analysing Tvardovsky's writings in the 50s and 60s, which touch upon this guilt of his, we ought to first take a look at his unpublished poem *Brothers*, written in 1933. Figes argues that Ivan believed Aleksandr dealt with these feelings of guilt in unpublished poems like this one.[132] The poem itself does not explicitly mention any guilt and wherever Ivan mentions this poem in his autobiography, he does not explicitly state this either. Ivan does, however, add this before citing the poem:

> 'It is curious that the author [Aleksandr] did not have correspondence with Konstantin at that time and merely guessed about his fate.'[133]

This is not to say that Figes was wrong in his statement, as he may very well have based it on another source than Ivan's autobiography.[134] Although the poem does not necessarily show Tvardovsky feeling guilty, it does, however, have an underlying tone of remorse. It thus shows us that even during the early 30s, when Tvardovsky was proving himself to be a loyal believer of Stalin and his policies, he was still voicing his grief over what had happened to his brother Konstantin.

At the time that Aleksandr wrote this poem, Konstantin was separated from the rest of the family and even they, for a while, did not know what had happened to him and worried about him.[135] In the last stanza of this poem, Aleksandr writes:

---

[132] Figes, *The Whisperers*, 134.
[133] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 96.
[134] Figes does not refer to a source regarding this argument, thus making it difficult to check.
[135] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina*, 96.

'Seventeen years ago
We loved and knew each other.
Well, brother?[136]
How are you, brother?
Where are you, brother?
At which White Sea canal?'[137]

In the preliminary stanzas Aleksandr reminisces about the good old days with his brother at their farm to show how much they had grown apart. Aleksandr was worried for his older brother and seemed upset at their growing apart. Probably the most interesting part of this poem, however, is the last sentence about the White Sea canal. This White Sea canal project was initiated by Stalin himself and started at the end of 1931. He wanted a canal to connect the White Sea and the Baltic Sea and he wanted it done within twenty months. Stalin also had the very specific wish to use prison labour for this project. Although using prisoners for labour was not an uncommon phenomenon, nor was a project of such a large scale, there was something unique about the White Sea canal project. The use of prison labour for this project was actually being promoted via Soviet propaganda.[138] This was very unusual as there was a lot of secrecy around the Gulag system under Stalin.

Brothers gives us a bit more insight on the effect that the exile of his family had on Aleksandr. It shows us that even back then it did not leave Aleksandr cold. He was wondering about the whereabouts of his older brother and worried that he would be amongst the prisoners working on the canal.[139] Konstantin later complained to Ivan in 1939 that Aleksandr had not tried to get in contact with him for over ten years. He then corrected himself and recalls that he once asked Aleksandr for a few roubles because he was in extreme poverty (homeless even) and desperately needed help. Aleksandr's reply caused bitterness in Konstantin: 'You need to rely on your own strength'. What the reason for Aleksandr's unwillingness to help his brother was, is unclear but it seems like

[136] This sentence can also be translated as 'what are you, brother' or 'what have you, brother'.
[137] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina,* 96-7.
[138] A. Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York 2007), 67.
[139] Ivan writes in his book that when he met up with Konstantin in 1939 and saw his dire situation, he recalled the questions 'well, brother; how are you, brother; where are you, brother' from Aleksandr's poem, as Konstantin's position was still unenviable.

Aleksandr felt more guilt towards his parents then he did towards his brothers at that time. Later when Aleksandr got in contact again with his family, there was no real hostility, but he would never quite fit in again with either Konstantin or Ivan, judging from Ivan's biography. When the brothers had gotten older, however, they did seem to have grown a bit closer than before.

Although Aleksandr and Ivan had been keeping more in touch over the years, Aleksandr confessed that he barely knew Ivan, as has been mentioned above. He did, however, seem upset that Ivan had not informed him of his return home from prison. Ivan had been a prisoner of war in Finland and when he finally found his way back to the Soviet Union, they arrested him for it and sentenced him to ten years in a Gulag camp (he was, however, released after 4 to 5 years). Aleksandr wrote Ivan this letter upon hearing about his return home later on:

> 'Dear brother Ivan! Congratulations on your return home. It is unfortunate that you, being in Moscow, were unable to contact me. But this is one thing; another [thing] is that it is strange that you did not find it necessary to write to me about your fate, about your return. After all, I simply do not know, but only guess where you were. It is not good to be silent in such matters if you want to keep in touch with me. Write in detail and truthfully about everything, starting from the moment when we, your loved ones, were notified of your death. I have to know everything regarding my brothers. Take your time, calmly do it. How did you get settled, where do you work? Hello to your wife. A. Tvardovsky.'[140]

Aleksandr wrote this letter at the beginning of 1953, when he had already become more critical of the Soviet regime and society. Ivan sent him an elaborate reply, describing honestly all that had happened to him. Although there was no further correspondence about this, the reply undoubtedly had quite some effect on Aleksandr. Ivan wrote in his book that when they met up a year later Aleksandr seemed very interested in an even more honest version of his story. He wanted to know how Ivan's mood was and how he

[140] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina*, 224.

pictured the rest of his life. He asked Ivan questions like, inter alia, whether he still had hope for human joy or if he had become bitter.[141]

An interesting observation here is that Aleksandr wondered about the same things when trying to write an ending for his 'Childhood friend' chapter. He did not know how people were supposed to carry on after having lived through such an awful experience. This question of how people came out of this experience was closely connected to Tvardovsky's personal situation. As one can imagine it was a very strange time around the denunciation of Stalin and the Great Terror for Soviet society. The people who had been victims of Stalin's regime and the people who had strongly supported this same regime, had to start finding a way to peacefully coexist again in the same society. It seemed that by enlightening himself about the Great Terror, Tvardovsky's realization of his own guilt started growing. He wrote in his *Work Notebooks* in 1955 that he does not really know how to address these victims of Stalin's terror or how he was supposed to behave in this strange new reality. When trying to write an ending to the chapter, Tvardovsky wanted to avoid it going like this:

> 'Well alright, you sat [in prison], I remained silent, but now you are free and we are not yet old, so let us continue living and working.'[142]

Tvardovsky then went on to say this, a quote that Kozlov translated in his book:

> 'The theme is dreadful. Once you have taken it up, you cannot drop it. That would be the same as living in a room where, under the floor, the dead body of a family member is dug up, and we all have agreed not to talk about it, and to live well, and not to kill family members any more. The theme is multilayered, multipronged— wherever you go, it touches upon everything: modernity, the war, the countryside, the past— the revolution, and so on.[143]

Whereas Fadeyev found himself to be guilty for having people arrested, Tvardovsky found himself to be guilty by having remained silent while others were suffering and

---

[141] Idem.
[142] A. Tvardovsky, 'Iz rabochikh tetradei', 175.
[143] Kozlov, *The Readers,* 147.

being mistreated. This is why Tvardovsky felt it to be his duty to speak up about what had happened after Stalin's death.

Later in his life Aleksandr seemed worried and remorseful about the state of his relationship with his brothers. In 1956 Aleksandr came to Smolensk and visited Ivan. During one of their days together, Aleksandr was emotional at the sight of a poor old man. He asked his brother what he would do if he saw an old man dressed in ragged clothes coming towards him and would recognize him as Aleksandr. Ivan recalls that Aleksandr was very touched and emotional when he answered that he would be happy to see him alive and would help him with everything that was in his power. One can only assume whether this made him emotional because he did not believe to be deserving of his brother's affection or perhaps because he was simply touched by it. Aleksandr was, however, interested in what Ivan thought of him. In the same conversation Aleksandr asked:

'Are you glad you have such a brother? Well, that is, that I am your brother?'

Whether this question refers to him being a loyal supporter of Stalin in the 30s and 40s or to him being a famous writer is not entirely clear. Ivan wrote that this was a very difficult question for him as he did not want to offend him but did not want to lie either as Ivan and his siblings did not look at their brother as a brother. He thus replied that he was happy for Aleksandr's successes and proud to call him his brother, but that it would do them good if Aleksandr grew closer to them and that this depended on Aleksandr. Ivan writes that Aleksandr looked sad when he heard this. Whether it was due to Aleksandr's success or because of his decisions in the early 30s, to his siblings Aleksandr was hard to reach and to keep in touch with.

Although it is clear that Aleksandr was quite bothered by having grown apart from his siblings, I could not find an explicit statement or a poem that showed he felt guilty towards them.

5.4.2: 'The Son Does not Answer for the Father'

The thing that really ate away at Aleksandr was how he had treated his parents. Ivan describes this rather well:

> 'In the name of his chosen goal, Aleksandr did not stop at anything, right up to the abandonment of his parents. The severity of such an act is hard to suppress, and he could not understand this – he carried this sin in his soul, in silence, throughout his entire life.'[144]

Aleksandr would not, however, remain silent about his guilt forever. As has become clear in the former paragraph, Tvardovsky was of the opinion that only by facing the past fully and truthfully that one could break with it. It must have been a very difficult and painful process to do this with his own past and based on how late in life Tvardovsky wrote the poem *By Right of Memory*, which deals with his feelings of guilt towards his father, it took him quite some years. It is rather unlikely that Aleksandr had spoken about this matter with his father, as Trifon had passed away in 1949, years before Aleksandr would so openly advocate the duty of being honest about one's past. He did, however, deal with his guilt by writing *By Right of Memory*, a poem that would not get published until after Aleksandr's death, as the destalinization had halted after Khrushchev lost power. This poem shows how far Tvardovsky had progressed in facing his past later in life as opposed to when he first saw his father again after the exile and said: 'You do not need to remember.'[145] He barely mentions his mother in this chapter of the poem, as the main focus is how his father was labelled a *kulak*. He did, however, fully support his mother for the rest of her life.

By Right of Memory is an autobiographical poem and a very honest analysis of life under Stalin. R. W. Davies writes that 'Tvardovsky's poem was an act of repentance as well as a memorial.'[146] In this poem the subject of Stalin and Aleksandr's father Trifon are very often closely interlinked with each other. Not only because it was due to Stalin's policy that Trifon was exiled, but also because Aleksandr used to see Stalin, and described him as such in the poem, as the 'universal father'.[147] In the second chapter of his poem, called *The Son Does Not Answer For the Father*, Tvardovsky immediately dives into how Stalin had an impact on the relationship with his real father. He addresses young people in the first few stanzas, explaining to them that the statement 'the son

[144] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 181.
[145] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina*, 107.
[146] R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (2015), 51.
[147] A. Tvardovsky, *Po Pravu Pamyati* (Moscow 1987).

does not answer for the father' came from Stalin himself and meant a great deal to many of them. Aleksandr explained who Stalin was to them at that point:

'Sole ruler of man's fate on earth,
Whom all the peoples, with rejoicing,
Hailed and proclaimed their father dear.'[148]

Aleksandr opens up in this poem about how difficult it was when his father was labelled a *kulak*:

O years of childhood not so pleasant,
The cruel buffeting it meant.
One minute father, the next class enemy.' [149]

Tvardovsky describes how being a son of somebody who had been labelled a kulak put him in a difficult position as well. He was subjected to 'suffering and burning shame' and in danger of being labelled a class enemy. He describes this in order to explain his reaction of relief when he heard Stalin declare that sons would not be held responsible for their father's actions:

'The stigma is now removed from you.
A hundred times happy! There you were,
Neither hoping nor dreaming,
And suddenly – no longer guilty at all.

An end has come to your misfortunes.
Stand up tall, don't hide your head.
Thanks to the Father of the Peoples
That he has now forgiven your dad,'[150]

[148] A. Tvardovsky, 'The Son Does Not Answer For the Father'. In: S. F. Cohen (ed.), *An End to Silence. Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union from Roy Medvedev's Underground Magazine, Political Diary* (New York; London 1982), 63.
[149] Idem.
[150] Ibid., 64.

The poem gives proof that Aleksandr did not speak with his father about his time in exile. He tries to picture how his father must have felt and acted when losing his land and being exiled. As much as this is a poem about his father, it is also a critique on dekulakization and collectivization. Aleksandr does not gloss over details like how his family was transported in a heated 'crowded cattle car' and that his father had been 'abandoned to his fate by Soviet power' despite having supported and fought for it. He also adds that despite Stalin's statement, it would not make Aleksandr's circumstances better until the war broke out and every soldier was named a son of the Motherland. He then adds that after the war these 'sons' could end up passing 'from one *camp* to another. He describes here the situation that Ivan had to endure when he was arrested after the war. Aleksandr criticizes the dekulakization while simultaneously bearing the guilt that he had felt all these years:

'He [Stalin] said to them: Come follow me,
Come leave thy father and thy mother,
Leave all these passing earthly things,
And dwell with me in paradise.

Proud that we did not believe in God,
But in the name of our own sanctities,
We sternly required this sacrifice:
Renounce thy father and thy mother.

Forget the family whence they came,
Remember this, and do not question:
Your love for the Father of the Peoples
By any other love is lessened.

The task is clear, sacred the cause.
For the shortest way to the highest goal,
Betray your brother as you go

And stab your best friend in the back.'[151]

In these four stanzas, it is clearly visible that Tvardovsky had been influenced and had partaken in the heroisation phenomenon under Stalin's regime. Stalin is depicted here as having transcendental powers and as being sacred.

Aleksandr found out in 1954 that in his Party documents he was still registered as the son of *kulak* parents. He did not accept this and wrote a letter to the regional committee of the CPSU explaining why this was incorrect. He explained to them that his father did not meet the 'requirements' to be called a kulak and that this designation was in contradiction with numerous other sources, which had described him as the son of a blacksmith farmer.[152] When it turned out the committee could not help him, Tvardovsky turned to Khrushchev himself with his request. Aleksandr's poem *By Right of Memory,* and this request to change the social status of his parents, are proof of a change in Aleksandr's attitude towards Stalin. During Stalin's regime, Tvardovsky was convinced the regime knew best when condemning people, as has been discussed above. As *By Right of Memory* and his request to Khrushchev shows, however, Tvardovsky now realized that Stalin's regime had unjustly condemned his father and criticized it for this. Tvardovsky also criticized collectivisation as it had destroyed his beloved childhood home in an essay that Ivan refers to in his book.[153]

5.5: Denouncing Stalin

Along with the realization of the terrible things that had happened under Stalin's regime, also came one of the most difficult steps for Tvardovsky, namely the denunciation of Stalin himself. After having spent a lifetime adoring and idolizing this man, as Soviet society had been taught to, the official revelation of the terrible things he had committed and the denunciation of him were hard pills to swallow. Despite all that had happened to his family, Stalin's name had been sacred to Tvardovsky and for a long time he had written high praise of him.[154] It was because of this, however, that Tvardovsky understood very well how dangerous and harmful the personality cult of Stalin had

[151] Ibid., 68.
[152] A. Tvardovsky, 'Iz rabochikh tetradei', 131-2.
[153] I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina*, 249.
[154] Ibid., 218.

been. Later in life, Ivan once asked Aleksandr this question, which for a long time had tormented him:

> 'Sasha [Aleksandr], tell me the truth: how could it happen that you wrote laudatory poems about Stalin while he was alive. How could it happen that you all of a sudden started [writing/thinking] about him, about Stalin, in such a completely different way?'[155]

According to Ivan this question caught Aleksandr off guard and he did not answer immediately. He eventually replied with: 'I felt that way. I obeyed my feelings.' Their conversation was, however, cut short right after that.

In the foreword of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* Tvardovsky writes that Solzhenitsyn's novel 'echoes the unhealthy phenomena in our life associated with the period of the personality cult, now exposed and rejected by the Party.'[156] Just like with writing about the flaws of the Soviet system, Tvardovsky felt it to be his duty to openly criticize what the personality cult had caused:

> '(…)
> Whoever is eager to bury the past
> Won't get along well with what lies ahead.
>
> But I say – we live in different times.
> I no longer have the right to more
> Postponements. The load must come off my chest.
> There is still time, with no further delay,
> To clothe this silent pain in words.
>
> The pain which secretly now and then
> And for long stretches burdened our hearts
> And which we drowned out with the thunder

[155] Ibid., 233.
[156] A. Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, xxi.

Of clapping to honor Stalin the Father.'[157]

In this chapter of *By Right of Memory* Tvardovsky continues to write that they had been terribly mistaken to think of Stalin and Lenin as being of the same 'essence'; that it was vulgar to have linked their names together.[158] Despite all that had happened, Tvardovsky remained a loyal supporter of communism and of Lenin. Deming Brown argues that Tvardovsky always remained hopeful for a democratic communist system.[159] His continuing belief in communism is perhaps also why he ended up playing quite a big part in the destalinization. He felt the duty to criticize the flaws and the personality cult so the future generations would be able to implement a better communist system and not repeat the same mistakes.

Tvardovsky describes in the last chapter of *By Right of Memory* the effect that the personality cult and Stalin's terror had on them:

'[The fear] Impelled us, voiceless as we were,
To yield up to the special section
Our right to think. And since that time,
Like echoes of some ancient pain,
Thoughts hardly every came to us.
Rather we asked for the will supreme.
"Give us the godhead's revelation."'[160]

As has been mentioned above, Tvardovsky felt guilty for remaining silent. That was, however, not the only thing he blamed himself for. He was actually of the opinion that the blame for what had happened under Stalin's regime was to be put on the entire Soviet society. It was not merely the keeping silent which had enabled all the terror, but also the heroisation and hero-worshipping of Stalin that put him in a godlike position. Brown refers to a part in Tvardovsky's poem *Faraways* where he holds the Soviet people responsible for the personality cult:

---

[157] A. Tvardovsky, 'Memory'. In: S. F. Cohen (ed.), *An End to Silence,* 187.
[158] Idem.
[159] Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature,* 75.
[160] A. Tvardovsky, 'Memory'. In: S. F. Cohen (ed.), *An End to Silence,* 187.

'And who did not praise him in his presence,
Did not glorify him - find such a person!

And who of us is fit to judge -
To decide who is right and who is guilty?
We're speaking of people, and don't
People themselves create gods?'[161]

What Tvardovsky tried to teach people, besides the importance of remembering the past, was that they all had to take responsibility for what had happened instead of looking for an easy scapegoat. In *By Right of Memory* Tvardovsky writes: 'we can't just wash our hands of what has happened or will happen.'[162] He very symbolically ends the chapter *The Son Does Not Answer For the Father* with the following sentences:

'The sons have long since grown to fatherhood.
But still we all must answer for this father [Stalin].
As it turns out, we're all being held to account.'[163]

Despite publicly criticizing and denouncing Stalin, it remained a difficult subject to Aleksandr personally for the remainder of his life. Kozlov writes that throughout his *Working Notebooks* Tvardovsky would keep analysing Stalin, even long after the dictator's death. He also kept Stalin's portrait in his dacha (country house) up until his own death.[164] Growing up under Stalin's regime had formed Aleksandr and influenced his beliefs. It must have been a very difficult process to also reflect on himself and remove the unhealthy and flawed ideas, which were put in his head by Stalin. The reason why Aleksandr so harshly criticized the personality cult and fought hard to remind people of the past was because he understood the danger of giving one man so much power. Amongst the concluding stanzas of his poem *By Right of Memory* Tvardovsky wrote this warning:

---

[161] Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature,* 77.
[162] A. Tvardovsky, 'Memory'. In: S. F. Cohen (ed.), *An End to Silence,* 188.
[163] Idem.
[164] Kozlov, *The Readers*, 142.

'(…)

You go ahead and call for Stalin.

He was a god. He could come back.'[165]

[165] A. Tvardovsky, 'Memory'. In: S. F. Cohen (ed.), *An End to Silence,* 188.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to answer the question of how Aleksandr Tvardovsky came to terms with having supported Stalin's system of terror after Stalin's death. Aleksandr consciously witnessed socialism making its entrance into Russia and was raised to become a loyal Soviet subject. The Communist Party was a positive and progressive force in his experience; this was undoubtedly fuelled by state propaganda. Tvardovsky was interested in becoming a writer from an early age on and preferred the intellectual activities, like *Komsomol* meetings and writing for the newspaper, to the labour at his father's farm. None the less, Tvardovsky would develop an admiration for 'the simple' peasant and man and he wanted to write poems that reflected these men. He also wanted these poems to be readable and interesting to common men. This would also be an important guideline of Socialist Realism. Tvardovsky was grateful to the Communist Party, as it had offered him the opportunity to continue studying. Moreover, Tvardovsky was also well aware that he was able to achieve so much success with his literary career due to the help of the Party. He joined the RAPP and later the Soviet Writer's Union and played his part in creating state propaganda by writing socialist realist poetry.

Despite the focus being on how Tvardovsky reacted after Stalin's death, this thesis also quite elaborately analysed Tvardovsky's loyalty to Stalin. This was an important aspect in the process of understanding what he later had to come to terms with. Tvardovsky showed loyalty to the regime by obeying the rules of the Soviet Writer's Union and thus Socialist Realism. This loyalty was put to a cruel test when during collectivization Aleksandr was expected to denounce his 'kulak' parents. Whether he did this to save his own life and career or out of devotion cannot be stated with certainty. However, when looking at how Tvardovsky wrote about this event in *By Right of Memory*, as mentioned in chapter 5, devotion to Stalin definitely played a part in denouncing his parents. In addition to this betrayal of Tvardovsky, his family had to endure arrests, exile and prison camps. Although not fully aware of all the hardships his family was faced with at that time, Tvardovsky knew about their exile. Turning down his father's plead for help and writing laudatory poems about the collectivization shows how dedicated Tvardovsky was to Stalin's cause. As Hellbeck argues in his theory, and as Tvardovsky later also substantiates in his *Working Notebooks*, state violence was seen as

necessary and did not eliminate the great appeal that being part of the revolutionary currents had. Playing a part in this revolutionary community also panned out very well for Tvardovsky's career, making him a well-known Soviet poet.

From the research in the first part of the thesis can be concluded that Tvardovsky did indeed use his public position to support the regime and that he was loyal to Stalin, despite the consequences that this had for his family. It also shows us that Tvardovsky was not an exception in devoting himself to Stalin, but that many others had been brainwashed by state propaganda as well. Understanding the role that Tvardovsky played during Stalin's regime and the painful decisions he made regarding his family out of loyalty, leads up to the research question of this thesis. As has been described in the second part of this research, Tvardovsky became aware, after the dictator's death, of how damaging Stalin's regime had been for the Soviet Union. Tvardovsky's perception of the dictator and the regime changed. Khrushchev had officially denounced Stalin for his personality cult and terror, and Tvardovsky thus had to re-examine his role in sustaining Stalin's regime.

At first Tvardovsky mainly criticized the flaws of the bureaucratic system and the damage that the censorship had done to literature. This was, however, only the beginning of Tvardovsky's personal, yet public, journey of destalinization. With no longer a valid higher cause to justify his actions, Tvardovsky felt guilt, or perhaps finally allowed these feelings of guilt to surface. In this thesis I differentiated two types of guilt that Tvardovsky was dealing with. The first type was 'public guilt' and entailed that Tvardovsky felt guilty for being part of a group that remained silent while so many in Soviet society were suffering under state violence and oppression. He realized, as the article on the heroisation-demonisation phenomenon also notes, that he shared the responsibility for having sustained a system of terror by the hero-worshipping of Stalin and his regime.

The second type of guilt that Tvardovsky felt was on a personal level. He had betrayed his own father for the 'father of the state' and had let his family down when they needed his help. The first step that Tvardovsky took in dealing with both types of guilt was to take responsibility for what he had done. He admitted, rather publicly in his autobiographical poems, that he had turned his back on his family and that he had remained quiet while state violence ran its course. Thereafter, Tvardovsky decided to use his public position to also take responsibility for the consequences of Stalin's rule

and to help Soviet society deal with its past. Firstly, Tvardovsky felt it as his duty to not let Soviet society forget this past. He argued that the Soviet public would only be able to deal with its past and to better itself if it were to confront itself with what had happened. He wrote about the past in his poems and used his position as chief editor of *Novyi Mir* to publish works that described Stalin's terror and personality cult. Tvardovsky hoped that by confronting people with the past, this kind of terror would not repeat itself.

Inseparable with this approach of confronting Soviet society with its past, was the resolution to write truthfully and courageously about the terror. As a way of making up for having remained silent for so long, Tvardovsky wanted to give the suppressed and persecuted people a voice. Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich* mainly meant so much to Tvardovsky for this reason. As a result of striving after honest discussions on the Soviet past, Tvardovsky also felt strongly about Soviet society admitting its responsibility in what had happened. He disapproved of appointing an easy scapegoat and wanted that the Soviet people realized they all shared in the blame for elevating Stalin to a godlike status, thus giving him so much power and sustaining his regime.

Despite publicly criticizing Stalin's personality cult and the flaws of his regime, it was difficult for Tvardovsky to let go of Stalin completely. Throughout his life he remained occupied with re-examining the dictator. With the immense influence that the dictator had had on his subjects, it was not a strange phenomenon that Aleksandr had trouble fully coming to terms with it. Tvardovsky did, however, find a way to come to terms with having supported a system of terror. Whereas he had first used his public position to support Stalin's regime, he later used this same position to criticize Stalin and help Soviet society come to terms with its past. By being useful to society once again, albeit in a completely different way than before Stalin's death, Tvardovsky was able to manage the guilt of having supported Stalin and his regime.

This case study gives insight on a struggle that many Soviet citizens were faced with after Stalin's death. Not only does it help us better understand why many of the Soviet citizens were loyal to Stalin, it also helps us understand what the aftermath of Stalin's personality cult was on Soviet society. As every case study gives more insight on the general history of the Thaw, it will remain a very interesting subject for further research and other case studies. Regarding the case of Aleksandr Tvardovsky, there is also much more new ground left to discover. His *Working Notebooks*, for instance, are elaborate records of his life as a Soviet writer and chief editor. Researching these in

depth could really contribute to a better understanding of his character and, more broadly, of the environment that Soviet writers found themselves in during Stalin's regime and the Thaw.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Images:

Cover photo: https://nl.carolchanning.net/images/publikacii-i-napisanie-statej/za-dalyu-dal-tvardovskij-kratkoe-soderzhanie-aleksandr-tvardovskij-.

Sources:

Khrushchev, N., 'Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.' (February 24-25 1956). Retrieved at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm.

Lakshin, V., *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and Novy Mir* (London 1977), 1-89.

Lenin, V. I., 'Pages from a Diary' (Jan. 1923). Retrieved at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/jan/02.htm.

Orlov, V. N., et al. (red.), *Russkie Poety. Antologiya v chetyryokh tomakh. Tom chetvertyi* (Moscow 1968).

Pomerantsev, V., 'Ob iskrennosti v literature', *Novyi Mir no. 12* (December 1953).

Solzhenitsyn, A., *Het kalf stoot de eik* (1976).

Solzhenitsyn, A., *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York 1963).

The New York Times, 'Tvardovsky, Liberal Soviet Editor, Dies', *nytimes.com* (19 December 1971). Retrieved at: https://www.nytimes.com/1971/12/19/archives/tvardovsky-liberal-soviet-editor-dies.html.

Tvardovsky, A., *Brat'ya* (1939). In: I. Tvardovsky, *Rodina i Chuzhbina* (Smolensk 1996), 96-7.

Tvardovsky, A., 'Iz rabochikh tetradei (1953-1960). Predislovie, publikatsiya i primechaniya M. I. Tvardovskoi', *Znamya no. 7* (Moscow 1989), 124–192.

Tvardovsky, A., 'Na Puti K "Strane Muravii" (Rabochie Tetradi Poeta)', *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo, vol. 93* (Moscow, 1983).

Tvardovsky, A., *Po Pravu Pamyati* (Moscow 1987).

Tvardovsky, A. T., *Put' k sotsializmu* (Moscow 1931).

Tvardovsky, A. T., *Stikhotvoreniya i poemy v dvukh tomakh. Pervyj tom* (Moscow 1957).

Tvardovsky, A. T., *Strana Muraviya* (Moscow 1936).

Tvardovsky, A., *Tyorkin na tom svete* (Moscow 1963).

Tvardovsky, A., *Vassili Tyorkin* (USSR 1975).

Tvardovsky, A., *Za Dalyu – Dal* (Moscow 1953-1960).

Tvardovsky, I., *Rodina i Chuzhbina* (Smolensk 1996).

Literature:

Alexandrova, V., *A History of Soviet Literature. 1917-1964. From Gorky to Solzhenitsyn* (New York, 1963).

Applebaum, A., *Gulag: A History* (New York 2003).

Bauerkämper, A. & C. Iordachi, *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements* (Budapest; New york 2014).

Brown, D. B., *Soviet Russian Literature since Stalin* (Cambridge 1978).

Brintlinger, A., *Chapaev and His Comrades. War and the Russian Literary Hero across the Twentieth Century* (Boston 2012).

Brudny, Y. M., 'Between Liberalism and Nationalism: The Case of Sergei Zalygin', *Studies in Comparative Communism* 21:3/4 (1988), 331-340.

Brummett, B., *Techniques of Close Reading* (Los Angeles 2019).

Chaffin, M. 'Alexander Tvardovsky: A Biographical Study'. In: Lakshin, V., *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and Novy Mir* (London 1977).

Cohen, S. F. & P. Reddaway, 'Orlando Figes and Stalin's Victims', *The Nation* (May 23, 2012). Retrieved at: https://www.thenation.com/article/orlando-figes-and-stalins-victims/.

Crowley, E. L., et al (eds.), *Prominent Personalities in the USSR. A Biographic Directory* (1968).

Danilenko, V., *Ot predyazyka – k yazyku. Vvedenie v evolyutsionnuyu lingvistiku* (2017).

Davies, R. W., *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (2015).

Figes, O., *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York 2007).

Frankel, E. R., 'The Tvardovsky Controversy', *Soviet Studies* 34:4 (Oct. 1982).

Garrard, J. & C., *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union* (New York 1990).

Gilburd, E. & D. Kozlov (eds.), *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto 2013).

Hellbeck, J., 'The Urge to Struggle On from *Revolution on my mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin*'. In: R. G. Suny (ed.), *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents* (Oxford 2014), 198-208.

Hosking, G., *Russian History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford 2012).

Hosking, G., 'The twentieth century: in search of new ways, 1953-80'. In: C. Moser (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature* (Cambridge, 1992), 520-594.

Jones, P., *Myth, Memory, Trauma. Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven; London 2013).

Kemp-Welch, A., *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-39* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991)

Kerr, A. & E. Wright (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of World History* (Oxford University Press 2015). Retrieved at: http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/10.1093/acref//9780199685691.001.0001/acref-9780199685691-e-864.

Khrushchev, N. S. & S. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 2* (Pennsylvania 2004).

Kozlov, D., *The Readers of Novyi Mir. Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Harvard 2013).

Lambert, P. & R. Mallett, 'Introduction: The Heroisation-Demonisation Phenomenon in Mass Dictatorships', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8:3-4 (Sept./Dec. 2007), 453-463.

Langeveld, A. & W. G. Weststeijn, *Moderne Russische Literatuur. Van Poesjkin tot heden* (Amsterdam 2005).

Marples, D. R., *Russia in the Twentieth Century* (Pearson 2011).

Marsh, R., *Images of Dictatorship: Stalin in Literature* (London 2017).

Medvedev, R. & S. F. Cohen, *An End to Silence. Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union. From Roy Medvedev's underground magazine, 'Political Diary'* (Norton, 1982).

Medvedev, R., 'The Stalin Question'. In: S. F. Cohen et al (eds.), *The Soviet Union since Stalin* (London 1980).

Naimark, N., *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton 2010).

Reeve, F. D., 'A Soldier in Heaven: Poetry as Political Satire', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 19:2 (2013).

Shiraev, E., *Russian Government and Politics* (Hampshire; New York 2013).

Spechler, D. R., Permitted Dissent in the USSR. Novy Mir and the soviet regime (New York 1982).

Tyrras, N., *Russian Intellectual and Cultural History From the Ninth to the Twenty-first Century* (New York 2010), 339-342.

Vronskaya, J. & V. Chuguev, *The Biographical Dictionary of the Former Soviet Union. Prominent People in all Fields from 1917 to the Present* (1992).

Weber, C., 'Disturbing Memories. Coming to Terms with the Stalinist History of Europe'. In: Berger, S. & C. Tekin (eds.), *History and Belonging. Representations of the Past in Contemporary European Politics* (New York 2018).

Zippermann, C., 'Literary Landmarks of 1941', *Books Abroad* 16:1 (1942), 29-33.