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Historians and Literary Studies:
A Study of the Literature of Soviet Women Survivors of the 1930s

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***Abstract*:**

The second half of the 1930s has been called the period of the Great Terror in the Soviet Union. Historians have often focused on quantitative data. This paper looks at women survivor literature, to make sense of the social dimensions of the era.

Nadhezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope* is a story of her loss of Osip Mandelstam, her life thereafter, trying to keep alive his work, while on the run as widow of a "counter-revolutionary". Evgenia Ginzburg's *Journey Into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind* look at how an honest communist's decision to challenge instructions from above led to a crisis, her trial as an enemy of the people, and long years in prison and the Gulag. Lydia Chukovskaya's *Sofia Petrovna* is a witness novel written during the Terror itself by the wife of an executed man. The questions we need to ask are, did the terror affect men and women all in the same way, particularly those who were not executed but imprisoned or lived in exile? What light do the women's writings throw for historians working on the Stalin era?

***Keywords*:** Stalin's Terror; Gender Narrative; Survivor Literature.

The Focus:

This paper examines certain aspects of the impact of the Terror and Purges of the Soviet Union of the 1930s as seen and felt by women foregrounding gender as part of the narrative strategy. Four books have been taken up: *Sofia Petrovna* by Lydia Chukovskaya, is a novel speaking as a testimony of the times for future generations. Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope*, shows how she tried to protect her husband Osip Mandelstam, sent off to the Gulag, where he died. Finally, Evgenia Ginzburg's two volumes (Ginzburg 1995, Ginzburg 1981) showed how a loyal party member arrested and asked to confess to crimes she could not even understand.

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Three Women Survivors of the Great Terror

Nadezhda Mandelstam (1899-1980 hereafter NM) wrote a scathing memoir on the State Terror and the way her husband Osip Mandelstam, one of the outstanding Russian poets, was harassed and tortured to death in 1938 and how she led life of a fugitive in the fringes of the cities of Soviet Russia. Osip's poem on Stalin (1933) portrayed the 'Kremlin mountaineer', who saw every killing as a treat. It reached Stalin. Six months later, he was arrested. And the memoir started from the day when the police came to their apartment in May 1934. The poem was only memorized, so no copy was found. Nadezhda, for all her hostility to all the communists that comes out in the book, did approach Nikolai Bukharin, who made some efforts and got the sentence revised. However, after Genryk Yagoda, the director of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) recited the poem on Stalin to him he realized that he could not do much more. Bukharin's intercession got him shifted to Voronezh from Cherdyn in northern Ural. Their modest survival by getting stray work in the theatre or in the Radio Station etc. came to an end by late 1936.

In Voronezh, in the hope of saving himself, Mandelstam wrote 'Ode to Stalin' (1936). Writing in the 1960s, she refused to omit all references to that poem. For Nadezhda the lived realities made it necessary to lead a double life – an inner one where one spoke one's own truth, and an outer one, where one spoke what the state power wanted to hear. She explains how Osip was writing in two distinct ways and they show a premonition that he was still living under an implicit sentence of death.

> *Unhappy is he who, as by his own shadow,*
> *is frightened by the barking of dogs and mowed*
> *down by the wind*
> *and wretched is he who, half-alive himself,*
> *begs a shadow for alms*. (Mandelstam:204)

In the USSR at that time, the one person from whom all begged alms was the all-powerful dictator. In these lines, the poet was hurling back his own Ode and its message, calling those who bowed to Stalin, unhappy and wretched.

In May 1938, Mandelstam was arrested for the second time. In August he was sentenced to five years in camps for "counter revolutionary crimes". He was sent to a camp

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near Vladivostok, where he died of cold and hunger on 27th December 1938.[2] After the 20th CPSU Congress (February 1956), she started trying to reassemble Osip's poems and publish some of them. For the Soviet readers, Osip Mandelstam's poetic career had culminated in 1928, for he published very little after that. But he had again started composing in the 1930s. It was in Voronezh that they compiled three notebooks of these later poems. Nadezhda writes:

> *I have often been asked about the origin of these 'Notebooks'. This was the name we used to refer to all the poems composed between 1930 and 1937 which we copied down in Voronezh in ordinary school exercise books (we were never able to get decent paper, and even these exercise books were hard to come by) …. which had been confiscated during the search of our apartment….*(Mandelstam: 192-3)

It was in course of her years after Osip, and in particular the years after the 20th CPSU Congress, that she came to write *Hope Against Hope* and *Hope Abandoned* (a play on the Russian word, for *Nadezhda* means hope).

Evgenia Semyonovna Ginzburg (1904-1977) was a communist. In the 1930s she was accused of having failed to denounce her former colleague, Professor Elvov[3], now 'unmasked' as a Trotskyist. Instead of immediately trying to bow, to denounce others, she persistently demanded justice and stuck to her position that she did not commit any crime against the party. This made her visible to the higher echelons of the Party bureaucracy and the NKVD. In 1937 she was arrested after being ritualistically expelled from the party. She

[2] The death of Osip was not something immediately recorded and communicated to his wife. The death certificate said it was due to heart failure, on 27 December, 1938. This was communicated to his brother Alexander. However, through about 20 pages of printed writing, NM attempts to show how she persisted in tracking details from others who had been to the GULAG, and how that raised doubts about the nature and date of death. In the end that remained obscure, because official records were never cleared up. (Mandelstam: 380-401).

[3] Nikolai Naumovich Elvov, Professor at the Teachers Training Institute of Kazan University and an elected member of the Party's regional committee municipal board. His chapter on the events of 1905 in the four volume (edited by Y.Yaroslavsky) *History of the All-Union Communist Party* led to the accusation that his analysis of 1905 was close to Trotsky and he misrepresented Stalin's views on the theory of permanent revolution. As member of the Editorial Board of *Krasnaya Tatariia* (Red Tataria) Elvov was also a senior colleague of Evgenia Ginzburg also worked. (Ginzburg 1995:5-6).

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spent the next eighteen years in prison and in camps, where she heard of the death of her eldest son and husband (she had lost track of him). Here Ginzburg met her younger son after twelve years, and married another prisoner. All this is narrated in the two volumes, *Крутой Маршрут* (*Steep Route*), translated into English as *Journey into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind*.

Lydia Chukovskaya (1907-1996) was the daughter of Kornei Chukovsky[4]. Her husband, Matvei Bronstein, a talented young physicist who wrote popular books on science published by the Leningrad division of Detizdat Publishing House[5], was arrested in 1937 and executed in early 1938.[6] Chukovskaya was saved by not being in Leningrad at that time. While living in precarious conditions, she wrote *Sofia Petrovna* and explains: "I attempted to record the events just experienced by my country, my friends, and myself."(Chukovskaya:1) So, while it is not a first- person memoir, it is, by the author's own admission a novel about her era, about women like herself. And this was written when the events were still a living reality.

Too often, debates about the Terror[7] have been about how justified Stalin was (from his defenders), or about the statistical disputes, about specific areas and Stalin's motives, like the Ukrainian charge about a Golodomor[8] (mass killing of Ukrainians by starvation), and so on. In most cases the human condition, the sufferings of individuals, get erased in the macro-level studies. Herein lies the immense importance of the testimonies and memoirs of survivors. Roy Medvedev's great and painstaking work, *Let History Judge*, was substantially

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[4] One of the most influential Soviet poets who wrote for children and often his popularity was used to help the persons arrested during the Terror.

[5] A publishing house for children's literature, accused of 'sabotaging' the regime by being associated with Chukovskaya, labelled as a former 'anarchist bomber'. See Szarapow's review of Lydia Chukovskaya's *Procherk* (A Stroke of the Pen) .

[6] He was one of some forty thousand who happened to be included in the so called "Stalin's execution lists". Stalin signed the execution list with Bronstein's name on February 3, 1938. Two weeks later, there was a "trial" which lasted half an hour (according to the KGB file) and was followed by the execution that same day, February 18, 1938.

[7] There has been a great deal of work explaining the terror, tracing its origins, its details. There were certain elements of terror built into Bolshevik practice in course of the civil war. However, there was a major shift involved in the nature and quantum of the terror later. The rise of a party-state bureaucracy and the consolidation of its power required total smashing of the old Bolsheviks through the Terror. The Great Terror also strengthened bureaucratic privileges conditions and the total abolition of any democratic right while claiming that socialist democracy had been created. The present author has relied on the following works: Marik; Conquest 2008; Rogovin 1998 and Rogovin 2009; Applebaum; and Medvedev.

[8] Ukrainian post-Soviet writers have claimed that the famine of 1932-33 in the Ukraine led to mass hunger and starvation. See Wheatcroft 2001 for an estimate of total number of population losses to about 6–7 million. See also Conquest, 1986, which clearly assigns formal blame on the party leadership.

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based on material collected from individuals and their memoirs. This text was among the early works of that genre.

A study of the three works enables us to see how women responded differently to the Terror Mandelstam was born in 1899, Ginzburg in 1904, and Chukovskaya in 1907. Moreover, there were differences in their social and political standings. Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova, a great poet of the 20th century (also a friend of Chukovskaya) were both described as "internal emigres" (hostile to the Russian revolution) in *Hope Against Hope*. Mandelstam questioned not just the state, but the integrity of countless intelligentsia (irrespective of political affiliations) members.

Ginzburg continued to see the Stalin era as an aberration. Ginzburg was a young woman at the time of the revolution, and by the time she married Pavel Aksyonov (around 1930) the inner party struggle had been won by Stalin. Aksyonov was fairly high up in the party hierarchy (member of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR and the mayor of Kazan) and Ginzburg was a party member who after 1956 reinstated in the party and continued to have faith in the party and what she saw as its restoration of Leninism.
Chukovskaya perhaps survived the Terror because of her father's influence despite her husband being executed. Later she became a member of the editorial board of *Literaturnaya Moskva* (organ of the Moscow unit of the writers' union).

All three of them suffered persecution at the hands of the Soviet authorities, even in the post-Stalin era. Chukovskaya refused to publish her other works inside the USSR until *Sofia Petrovna* was published in that country. Ginzburg was acknowledged as an inspiration by dissidents like Lev Kopelev. Chukovskaya stood up for Joseph Brodsky[9], Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn [10], and Andrei Sakharov[11]. Through an examination of their three texts, we can get, not the whole truth, as Ginzburg herself acknowledges, but certain truths about women's experiences and their political take, so vital if we are to treat the Terror as something more than statistical records and narration of tortures.

Reactions to the First Threats and Police Actions:

[9] Emerging poet who was expelled from the Soviet Union for his erotic poems in 1964.
[10] Uncompromising anti-communist critique of Soviet Union and the Gulag and forced labour system.
[11] A very eminent nuclear physicist of Soviet Russia who also campaigned for peace and disarmament.

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When did the first threats and pressures come? NM puts it back almost to the years immediately after the revolution. From this time on the intelligentsia was under pressure.

> *"Was there a moment in our life when the intelligentsia could have held out for its independence? There probably was, but, already badly shaken and disunited before the Revolution, it was unable to defend itself during the period when it was made to surrender and change its values."*
> (Mandelstam:234)

When we read her narrative, we are struck by an identification of the entire revolution with brute force and muzzling of independent voices. It is not surprising, given Osip Mandelstam's stature as an Acmeist who was often regarded with deep suspicion by the establishment. But the striking thing is the identification of the nineteenth century with democracy and rationalism, and the twentieth century with dictatorship[12]. And for the decay of intelligentsia, she tries to trace a continuity from the revolution, the Civil War, the NEP, through the dissolution of the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) to the Terror. Yet, scattered through her memoirs there is some evidence that in the 1920s they had a mixed life. All the way to the 1930s, there was a closeness between the Mandelstams and Bukharin. The context of Mandelstam's Stalin poem, the one for which he was arrested, also suggests why such a closeness could exist.

Between 1931 and 1933, nearly 150,000 criminal and political prisoners were sent off to build the White Sea-Baltic Sea canal link. Maxim Gorky was a fervent supporter of this project. Gorky edited a panegyric that concealed the forced labour and gave great praise to the bureaucracy. Contributors included some of the great names of Soviet literature – Viktor Shklovskii, Aleksei Tolstoi and Mikhail Zoshchenko. Mandelstam was disgusted with this whole canal project, Gorky and his collaborators. This was possibly the reason for his poem. This however is mentioned only in a scattered way by Nadezhda Mandelstam(32, 46-47). This is not a paper on Osip, though in Nadezhda's memoirs, he and not Nadezhda is dominant. The poem has been hailed by a wide range of commentators from Isaiah Berlin(1965, 1980) to Adrienne Rich and Salman Rushdie as a touchstone of daring acts of

[12] Ibid., p.257

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witness and resistance to dictatorship. Bukharin too, as it is well known, was not in favour of the Stalin model of industrialization.

Arrested, Osip was put up in the notorious Lubianka and interrogated. The pressures led to an attempted suicide by cutting his veins with a razor (Mandelstam:77). Forms of torture varied from being cut off from all contacts with his family and friends, to being given salty food and too little fluids or to being told that his wife was also arrested. This was as yet a period when actual confessions, however ridiculous, were being sought (Rogovin 1998: 483-499; Rogovin 2009: 7-13, 173-235). So, the poems of Osip Mandelstam were presented as "documents", the writing of which constituted a "terrorist" act. Surprisingly, Osip was naïve enough to confess that he had written the poem about Stalin when some of the lines were recited to him, saying only that they represented the first draft.[13]

Evgenia Ginzburg in 1935 found herself being asked to admit her guilt, by a 'Comrade Beylin', the chairman of the bureau of Party-political control. When she tried to assure him that she had never taken up arms against the Party, he told her that "objectively, anyone who refuses to disarm, when called upon by the Party to do so, gravitates toward the position of its enemies…"(Ginzburg 1995: 14-15). Unable to understand what was being expected Ginzberg went on protesting her innocence. A colleague of Beylin, whom she mentally called Malyuta,[14] used to hurl sexist political abuse at her – Left-right mongrels! Trotskyist abortions! Mangy opportunists!..." (Ginzburg 1995:15). While still a party member with a regular job she was living with her family. Ginzburg narrates that this was the period when she mentally suffered more, than in later years, even when she was kept in solitary confinement or made to chop trees in the forests of Kolyma camp, situated in the far eastern frontier of Russia (Ginzburg 1995:15-16).

The tragic case of Pikovskaya, a loyal party member was an eye-opener for her. She denounced her husband when he was arrested for his 1927 "crime" (for being a former Left Oppositionist). But she lost her job and increasingly found it difficult to get any work, and eventually committed suicide. Seeing this, Ginzburg decided to resist. The result was more deadly than she could have sworn. She was advised by her mother-in-law as well as another

[13] "We live, deaf to the land beneath us,
Ten steps away no one hears our speeches.
All we hear is the Kremlin mountaineer,
The murderer and peasant-slayer"……

[14] After Grigory Lukyanovich Skurakov-Belskiy, better known as Malyuta Skuratov, one of the most notorious henchmen of Tsar Ivan Grozhny.

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person accused of "rotten liberalism", to run away to distant areas, while her husband issued a notice of her death, so that she could keep her head down in the emerging period of Terror. As good communists and rationalists, she and her husband refused to do all this. Her appeal against the penalty issued, resulted in a political commissar, Sidorov, an older era Party member, trying to reduce the penalty. But Beylin, hearing this, appealed to Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, who now accused her of even harsher crimes, such as collaborating with the enemies of the people. She shouted at Yaroslavsky for this. On 7th February 1937 she was expelled from the party. Eight days later she was arrested.

Accused of counter-revolution, Ginzburg was put in the NKVD jail in Kazan's Black Lake Street. Put in a cell with another prisoner, she learnt how prisoners communicated with each other, as well as how prisoners were tortured. She was shouted at, told that she would be shot if she did not sign the record and kept awake at nights. But, as she writes, "Later, I was to learn what a lucky number I had drawn in the political lottery. My investigation was over by April, before the Veverses and Tsarevskys were authorized not only to threaten their victims but to use physical torture."(Ginzburg 1995:69)[15] Later, when she realizes that she will not be sentenced to death, she resolved to stay alive "Just to spite them"(Ginzburg 1995: 174). She also records physical beatings during investigations. Zinaida Abramova, wife of the head of the Council of the People's Commissars of the Tartar Republic, even when she was arrested, was sure it was a mistake, and tried to keep away from others in the cell. But when Zinaida came back from interrogation… "Her lips, bruised and split by a man's fist, trembled like a hurt child's." (Ginzburg 1995:124)

Like Nadezhda Mandelstam, Lydia Chukovskaya's heroine Sofia Petrovna was herself not arrested. Unlike the Mandelstams, or even the family of Ginzburg (sufficiently high up with fair amount of privilege), Petrovna was a humble person. She was the widow of a doctor, Fyodor Ivanovich. Prior to the revolution they had been privileged, employing a maid. But in the new era, with the death of her husband, she had learned typing in order to take on a job. She joined a typing pool. In course of time, she became socially involved, while her son, Nikolai, joined the Komsomol (Chukovskaya:3-12). As he grew older, he became an enthusiastic worker activist. But she was less clear about the twists and turns of politics. So, when in 1937 the full force of the Terror fell, she was unable to understand what was happening. She could not believe that people she had known as good humans, whether

[15] Veverse and Tsarevsky were two of the interrogators.

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the doctor friend of theirs who had been Godfather to her son or the Party Secretary of her workplace, could all turn out to be in the hire of the Nazis or be saboteurs. And then Nikolai's friend Alik comes and informs her that Nikolai has been arrested.

What follows is a description of the harrowing experience of a mother in search of information about her son. The bureaucratic machinery is described in fewer pages, but along lines very similar to what Mandelstam portrays. Sofia Petrovna believes, however, that while Kolya was arrested due to a misunderstanding, the others, including the accused in the second Moscow Trial, were really guilty people. After all, there was so much being written about them in the newspapers.

As she waits for the "error" to be rectified, however, Sofia finds other things happening. Her friend, the typist Natasha, is fired for a simple typing error where she had typed Ret army instead of Red army. Natasha was the daughter of a colonel under the old regime. While still searching for her son, Sofia discovers what was happening to people sentenced to jail, and to their family members sent off to distant places like Kazakhstan.

Surviving Torture at Prisons and Gulags:

There is a surprising dearth of archives-based work on women in the Gulag. Anne Applebaum's *Gulag: A History*, includes a chapter (307-333) on "Women and Children," primarily based on memoirs and interviews.[16] Consequently, experiences of prison, whether one's own experience or those of people close to the narrator, as well as experiences of the camps or the uncertain lives of "relatives of counter-revolutionaries" are crucial for a reconstruction of the human costs of the terror.

Nadezhda's accounts show various forms of torture inflicted on Osip Mandelstam leading to his having hallucinations.

> *"…he still had auditory hallucinations…It could have been the words of guards who had led him along the corridors of the Lubianka when he was called out for interrogation at night. They sometimes winked at each other,*

[16] Of the 115 footnotes for this chapter, 33 refer to published and unpublished documents; the remaining footnotes cite memoirs, interviews based on Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. For printed archival documents see Mironenko, S. V. and N. Werth, Eds.; Bezborodov, A. B., I. V. Bezborodova, V. M. Khrustalev, Eds.: *and* Kokurin, A. I. and N. V. Petrov, Eds. for understanding the experiences of women prisoners.

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snapped their fingers in a symbolic gesture meaning death by shooting, and also exchanged occasional remarks calculated to terrify the prisoner.”

(Mandelstam: 66-67)

Memoirists say that arrested persons were threatened by Article 58 of the Penal Code (introduced in 1927 and modified in 1937) which gave sweeping power to the police and redefined counter-revolutionary activity extremely broadly. Section 10 discussed anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation. Section 14 talked about sabotage and extensively used for the imprisonment and execution of many prominent people, as well as multitudes of non-notable innocents. Ginzburg was “convicted under Sections 8 and 11(Ginzburg 1995: 129), which meant terrorism and membership in a terrorist group, both carrying a minimum penalty of hard labour and a maximum of death.

Sentences were long, up to 25 years, and frequently extended indefinitely without trial or consultation. Inmates under Article 58 were known as "*politichesky*" (*полити́ческий*, short for *полити́ческий заключённый*, or political prisoner).

Torture was used to get confessions. In the light of the memoirs like those of Ginzburg, we know exactly how much torture was inflicted, and why many people broke. Ginzburg herself refused to sign anything, and despite such terrible forms of torture like being sexually assaulted in the solitary underground punishment cell(Ginzburg 1995: 128), hosed down with ice-cold water or interrogated in the conveyor belt system (interrogators taking turns, while the person interrogated is made to stay awake round the clock) (Ginzburg 1995: 79, 83-88). But this was possibly because she had not been broken over the years even repeatedly being made to confess to party crimes.

Sofia Petrovna found herself being written up in an anonymous article as a person hand in glove with saboteurs. She submitted her resignation rather than wait to be thrown out. The next day she discovered that her friend Natasha had consumed poison (Chukovskaya: 82-89).

Her son survived, at least the first year and a few months. And she received a letter from him, where he mentioned how he had been tortured: “Mama dear, Investigator Ershov beat me and trampled me, and now I’m deaf in one ear.”(Chukovskaya:106) When she took the letter to Mrs. Kiparisova, the wife of Kolya’s Godfather, she found the woman packing to leave since, as the wife of a counter revolutionary, she was being deported. (Chukovskaya: 107-8) And

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she advised Sofia not to apply on behalf of her son. To do so would be to draw attention to herself as the mother of a convicted counter-revolutionary. At the same time, it was likely to result in further punishment for her son.

Lydia Chukovskaya therefore gets her principal character to do what Ginzburg had been advised but what she refused to do. Possibly, it was easier for an obscure Sofia Petrovna than for Ginzburg. As a teacher and author, a colleague of a man Stalin himself had condemned, and as a party member married to a high functionary, Ginzburg's visibility was far greater. As Vadim Rogovin shows, there was substantial sympathy for Trotsky's criticism of the Stalin regime in the ranks and even in the leadership of the CPSU, and support for his demands for inner-party democracy, greater social equality and an international orientation to the Bolshevik goal of world revolution. It was this political fact, as Rogovin demonstrates, that accounts for the purge reaching so deeply into the party apparatus, the military, the Komsomol youth movement, and the broader layers of the population (Rogovin 2009: 28-34, 79-91; 129-217) .

In the first period, that is, between the first arrest and second arrest of Osip, the world was closing in. This was a period when people could understand who their friends were, who were courageous under difficulties. In Moscow, Nadezhda tells her readers, "The Shklovskis' house was the only place where we felt like human beings again."(Mandelstam:351) [17] They avoided staying overnight, as the women who looked after the building were under police instruction to report such people.

As they tried to negotiate the bureaucracy, not even realizing that it was no longer a matter of privileges being taken away but death looming, they met numerous writers and semi-intellectual party members. Nadezhda remembered three meetings with Alexander Fadeyev, a founder of the Union of Writers, who honoured Stalin as "the greatest humanist the world had ever known". But in his suicide note he had denounced the Stalinists for having exterminated the best people in Soviet literature.

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[17] This refers to Viktor and Vasilisa Shklovski. Viktor was one of the major figures in Russian Formalism, considered in Stalin era as an elitist theory of art talking about forms of art which has no so-called connection with proletarian masses. In the 1930s Shklovski survived by not writing about formalism. On formalism see Erlich, Victor Erlich, and Bennett, Tony .

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Life in the camps was different from life on the run, as the narrative of Ginzburg reveals. Surviving the extreme terror of Yezhovshchina,[18] Ginzburg with her sentences on, did not know what would happen afterwards. The second volume of her memoirs, *Within the Whirlwind*, begins with life in Kolyma camp. The narrative of survival is a deeply gendered one. Her tree-felling duty was changed to looking after children in other side of the camp when people failed to produce according to quota and the food ration was reduced. (Ginzburg 1981: 4-11) Even when the women were in the tree-felling site, the dominant male figures would turn up and ask for sexual services in exchange for goods.

""I'm the forwarding agent at Burkhala" (one of the most terrible of the gold mines), "so I can put you in the way of sugar, butter, and white bread. I'll give you shoes, felt boots, and a really good padded jacket… we can come to an arrangement with the guards…There's a shack available.""

(Ginzburg 1981: 4-11)

We need to make a distinction between the idea that gender mattered to the women (that is, being a woman had an effect on experience and perspective) and the fact that presentation of the self, did not always deploy categories of gender. This comes out clearly in many of the essays in the collection by Vilensky, *Till My Tale is Told*. Much of Ginzburg's discussion is also told in terms of class and status and gender is often pushed to the background because the subordination of the woman-oriented agenda to a male oriented revolutionary model goes back considerably in the revolutionary tradition in Russia. This however in turn raises a question. For all the attempts at pushing gender to the background, memoirists like Ginzburg do end up presenting some parts of their lives as human beings and as women. Men's memoirs all too often take on such a purely "political (read masculine)" colour, so that the daily lives, the attitudes toward self, family, workplace, etc. do not figure so clearly. So, it is possible to suggest that the gender of the author did have an impact on the structuring of the narrative.

Life in the camps plays an important role in Ginzburg's narrative. The camps strip away ideological assumptions, and allow her to reconsider principles that determined human value.

[18] Worst phase of the terror in 1937–38 under the new NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov.

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In course of the two volumes read as a whole, Ginzburg emerges as a figure who reconsiders principles she had been taught, and emerges due to the camp experience as a morally informed and transformed figure. The first volume tells us that they are the memoirs of a typical communist. The epilogue to the second volume tells us that it is about

> *"the gradual transformation of a naïve young Communist idealist into … a human being who amid all her setbacks and sufferings also had moments (however brief) of fresh insight in her search for truth. It is this cruel journey of the soul and not just the chronology of my sufferings that I want to bring home to the reader."* (Ginzburg 1981: 423)

Nadezhda Mandelstam's two volumes of her memoirs have a parallel in their histories. Both Ginzburg and NM wrote their drafts after the 20th and 22nd Party Congresses of the CPSU. Both found it easier to be read abroad and in Samizdat (Soviet underground literature) than in legal print version in their own country. So, both wrote the second volume with a sense that the past had not been mastered yet – that I, the narrator, had suffered, yet telling that truthfully to the country, getting the truth published and widely circulated, was yet impossible. Interestingly, for all their differences, both Ginzburg and Mandelstam tell their readers that they will be telling the truth, nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth (since neither claimed to know the whole truth about the repression and the system that produced it).[19] In the case of Ginzburg this leads her to a detailed and analytical presentation of the prison and camp system. In the case of Mandelstam, there is a keen look at the intelligentsia. She does look at some of the more courageous figures. For example, Boris Pasternak gets a favourable mention for *Doctor Zhivago*, both as a novel and as an act of courage. But flaws in his character are also mentioned. (Mandelstam:151-55)

Unlike Chukovskaya and Ginzburg, Mandelstam writes as someone who is opposed to the whole communist creed and not just Stalinism. While Chukovskaya is concerned with the impact of Stalinism on ordinary people, Ginzburg examined its impact on the Communist Party and its project. Mandelstam is concerned wholly with the intelligentsia. Ginzburg's keen eyes let her see the lives of different kinds of people – politicals, including non-

[19] Ibid., p. 175, *Within the Whirlwind*, p. 420.

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Communist politicals, people accidentally caught up, different kinds of police and security staff, and so on.

Sofia Petrovna, in order to survive, decided to burn the last letter from Nikolai (Kolya). Was it cowardly? In 1937, at the height of the Terror, survival called for many strategies. Bukharin's widow, Anna Larina, memorised an eight-paragraph long letter, addressed to a future generation of party leaders. For years, while she languished in prison cells and internal exile as a "relative of an enemy of the state."(Larina) But as we will see below, a more complex literary-political motive may have existed for Chukovskaya's plot.

Gender and Genre:

Finally, the generic features of the writings and the nature of gendering in them will be examined. Beth Holmgren's major study shows the gender imbalance in post-World War II Soviet Union was not due solely to the War, but also to the mass execution of male victims. So in many cases, there appears a reversal, and it is the men who appear mute, silent victims, while the women appear to be people empowered at least to lament, and also to remember.

Ginzburg's book suggests that gender may not always be primary. She describes her encounter with the women 'criminals' at one stage in an extremely contemptuous manner, when she was sent to work in a farm as a nurse for the children. Afterwards Ginzburg was given the duty of medical-in-charge of women of a 'production brigade' where she had to spend half the day. Her narrative reveals that these women, all being made to do a huge amount of work, wanted illegal permission slips from her, so that they could avoid working for the day. Obviously, she was not in a position to hand out such sick-leave certificates at random. But there is a certain lack of recognition that these women were also being brutalised by the state. (Ginzburg 1981: 7-8, 54-55).

There are cases where gender does not matter for other reasons, and Ginzburg highlights one such with clarity. She talked about an honest bureaucrat, Vallentina Zimmermann, in the camp disliked by corrupt elements among the camp bureaucracy. But Ginzburg simply sees Zimmermann as an oppressor. "Of what value are virtues such as honesty, moderation, and even incorruptibility, when the person endowed with all these qualities is performing the role of a butcher vis-à-vis others?" (Ginzburg 1981: 75).

It is however in Ginzburg's treatment of Pavel Aksyonov and Anton Valter that we find a gendered narrative. The first volume was written with the hope that her memoirs would be published in the USSR. The second volume was published without such expectation. At the

same time, there is a sharp break. Her relationship with Aksyonov is dealt with in *Journey Into the Whirlwind*. The second volume looks at Valter. In fact, Ginzburg had tried to establish contact with Aksyonov from Kolyma. A considerable number of her letters to him exist in the Research Centre for East Europe in Bremen. (Babenysheva papers) Instead of tracing any decline in the relationship with Pavel, Ginzburg lets the reader feel that it was her belief that he had died, that ended their relationship. (Ginzburg 1981: 316).

Why does this happen? It is worth thinking of the function of the family within the narrative structure. Ginzburg eventually divorced Pavel in 1951. (Duda) This does not appear in the memoirs. Two linked reasons can be advanced for this. At the end of the first volume, full of hope, she records her happiness as a communist, that the great Leninist truths can now come out in this public document for future. So, in this work more for the historian than for personal communications, the breakdown of a relationship for personal reasons apparently could not find space. Kathryn Duda suggests (based on another writer, Natasha Kolchevska) that Ginzburg wanted Valter to be shown as an improved Aksyonov. Using Ginzburg's letters, Duda argues that the failure was due to 'personal' reasons, and therefore does not find space in the narrative. So, the personal is 'not political' here. The relationship with Anton Valter is traced with greater care than the relationship with Pavel Aksyonov, and the emotional bond is shown. The record of the issue of divorce is shown in terms of hesitation over getting a formal divorce since she was not certain whether he had died. The memoir shows the urge felt by Ginzburg for a formal civil marriage with Anton Valter to avoid their being separated, since Valter had been freed and the difference in status could have presented a problem. (Ginzburg 1981: 316-17).

What role does the family play in the narrative structure? It is possible to suggest that there is involved a break from the *partiinost* style imposed by Stalinism. In the first volume, she brings up cases that showed a political culture where family ties were less important than party ties, but family ties were at the same time exploited to obtain confessions (as when she herself was pressurised by being told that Aksyonov had disowned her, so she might as well confess). (Ginzburg 1995:50).

When "Little Anna", a party member arrested by the NKVD, was told by the interrogator that her marriage had been an artificial one at the orders of an anti-Soviet underground, she could confide about her pains only to Evgeniia. She was also afraid of

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accusing communist interrogators and of being overheard by the Social Revolutionary Derkovskaya, a 'class enemy'. (Ginzburg 1995:109, 111).

By making the second volume one about building a family she traced positively her meeting with her younger son by Pavel and her adoption of Tonya. Anton Valter in the second volume is introduced at a much greater length than Pavel in the first. There is a narrative of how a Crimean German, Valter was arrested for supposedly being part of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy, how he got repeated punishments while in camp in 1938. But as doctors were in great demand he survived. (Ginzburg 1981:108-110) The growth of their relationship, from one between doctor and nurse, to friends and lovers, is traced at length (Ginzburg 1981:116-133, 181-195). Her meeting with her younger son Vasya, is also sketched with much display of maternal love. Interestingly, in the first volume, which discusses a period when the children were much younger, she does not display much maternal concern, presumably because, as before, the first book was being written as a public document to expose the "cult of the personality", while the second book is to a much greater extent a personal narrative. Hence the gendered role (mother, wife etc.) can be permitted.

At the same time, these writings have been received, particularly in the USSR and in post-Soviet Russia, not as fiction or personal memoir but as historical testimony.

Chukovskaya portrays the impact of the Terror through the evolution of one woman. And if the reader is aware of the dominant mode of Soviet novels from the 1930s, the Socialist Realist novel, they can see how that genre is subtly subverted. Written within a few months, and kept hidden, in this text we follow two characters. Sofia is a woman with purely domestic values and outlook, who even takes a job only because she needs to ensure that her son Nikolai gets a better education. But there is a transformation as she excels in her work, and finds the workplace itself a positive space. This positive transformation is what Socialist Realism insisted the goal of writers must be. However, when we move beyond the first part of the novel, we are introduced to the Stalinist terror behind the seeming socialist future. Holmgren argues that an imposed patriarchy appears a progression for Sofia, is present. Feminine traits are clearly present in Sofia. "While seeming to liberate herself from assigned gender roles, Sofia Petrovna simply has exchanged one form of subordination for a new one of accepting the masculine state and terror. Kolia endorses a single pattern of political and pragmatic action for both sexes, excluding the very possibilities of a non-public space and a differentiated self".(Chukovskaya:51) Thereby, Chukovskaya set out to subvert the canon.

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The crisis that Sofia Petrovna faces begins with her son being in danger. Having developed no independent frame of thinking, she has accepted the Terror in the official terms. Within that there can exist at best mistakes. So, others are legitimate prisoners, but Kolya alone has been accidentally or mistakenly arrested.

When at the end she receives the letter from Kolya, which says he has been beaten and forced to issue a confession and finally decides to burn the letter. This act of destruction is a symbolic destruction of herself and an acceptance of the state's terror and deception. The private feelings of a mother may not even be saved in secret. So, the terror is shown through a very ordinary citizen, not through prison inmates, not through politically active figures who resist. In Ginzburg's narrative, there do appear politicals. Like communist women from several countries, including refugees from Nazi Germany and Chinese communists, in the chapter titled 'The Whole of the Comintern', or the torture inflicted on an Italian communist, who was being beaten and hosed down with cold water, shouting desperately, "*Comunista Italiana*".(Ginzburg1995: 151-57, 224)

The Russian literary tradition has been distinct from the West European since the 19th century. Memoirs have a not merely personal but deeper philosophical significance. Mandelstam and Ginzburg followed that pattern. Memoirs of political activists were written to inform and enlighten. For women adopting an oppositional stance, this model provided some opportunities. Since the state had punished their personal experience as political, lives that might have been presented as unimportant became important, and could be presented as representative documentation of Stalinist terror at its peak. Nadezhda's books serve simultaneously as history of an era, that will serve to re-establish Mandelstam as the pre-eminent Russian figure in the world of culture for the 20th Century. (Holmgren: 130-38, 119-24).

If Osip Mandelstam is today considered the greatest Russian poet of the twentieth century by many readers and critics alike, it is substantially due to the untiring efforts of Nadezhda Mandelstam in *Hope Against Hope*. There were times, she writes, when she had to get work in a textile factory as the only way to survive, and during the night shift, she would work and mentally recite the poems of Osip. (Brown in Mandelstam:xvii-xxv), But as Ilya Ehrenburg is quoted by Clarence Brown, it is impossible to imagine Osip without her.

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Holmgren saw Mandelstam and Chukovskaya as creative writers who present mourning as a form of resistance. To be silent is, in some sense, to be complicit. Judith Robey, who talks about howling as an act of resistance, suggests that the act of writing turned personal pain into public opposition.(Holmgren: 25-26; Robey: 235-36) In this context, we should look at this passage from Nadezhda Mandelstam:

> *I decided that it is better to scream. … Silence is the real crime against humanity.* (Mandelstam: 43)

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