Soma Marik
RKSM Vivekananda Vidyabhavan
India, Kolkata

Representing Women in the Struggle for Socialism: Alexandra Kollontai and Lydia Chukovskaia as Alternatives to Socialist Realism

Mainstream Socialist Realism had a fundamentally gender stereotyping of women from the 1930s. By contrast, Alexandra Kollontai in the 1920s (*The Love of Worker Bees*) was socialist, feminist, and realist, but not Socialist Realist. She presented a critique of an emergent new hierarchy, and also challenged the re-inscription of patriarchal norms. Lydia Chukovskaya, writing immediately after the Great Terror, (*Sofia Petrovna*, written 1939-40) produced a text that started in a typical Socialist Realist mode only to reveal the brutality of Stalinist terror and subverted the Socialist Realist structure by positing the possibility that only horizontal solidarity of communities of the oppressed, rather than a top-down party led hierarchy, could provide wider ideas and awareness.

Keywords: Socialist Realism, Class and Gender, Alexandra Kollontai, Critical Bolshevik and Feminist Fictions

Some Theoretical Propositions

In 1934, the activist and writer, Maxim Gorky, officially indicated and proclaimed the establishment of Socialist Realism. Before this there were several independent artistic and literary groups. In 1932, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) ordered that all independent groups be disbanded and ordered for unified arts, also referred to as "State-sanctioned". Gorky's speech of 1934 laid down rigid guidelines for Socialist Realist Art (SR/SRA), where he emphasized, four rules: it must be proletarian and relevant and coherent to the workers reflecting their everyday lives; it must be stylistically Realist; and it must be partisan: it must actively support the aims of the Russian State and the CPSU.

In the hands of Gorky and Zhdanov, entrusted by the Party/leader with overseeing culture, it became a highly propagandistic trend. SR was required to present a highly optimistic image of life in the Soviet State and the ever-righteous Party. This was the crucial distinction between Socialist Realism and Social Realism. The hardship precipitated by Stalinist rule and, indeed, by civil war (1917-22), was not an acceptable subject for critique: authors and artists were pushed towards conformity.

One can think of Konstantin Fedin, who was part of the Serapion Brothers in the early 1920s (Edgerton, 1949), but whose career culminated in the not perhaps globally outstanding, but certainly a very significant Socialist Realist *Early Joys* (1946) and *No Ordinary Summer* (1948)[1]. And of course, when we are speaking of Fedin, we are talking about one of the superior authors. As Katherine Clark (1981, pp. ix-x) says in her work on the *Soviet Novel*, the dominant Western attitude to Socialist Realism was that state interference had disastrous result on literature's natural evolution; that it was a literary tradition that had

[1] For the Fedin novels, I have checked the Soviet Era translations, as my focus is on contemporary Socialist Realism including its reception outside the USSR, and its alternatives.

developed at the cost of much violation of human rights and human suffering; and it was so dull that any study of it, unless enlivened by tales of infamy, would also be dull and irrelevant.

Clark instead of rejecting Soviet mainstream literature as “bad” literature, sought to draw attention to a distinction between European and Russian literature from the 19th Century. She argued that the Russian literary tradition had been distinct, though the revolution could have increased the divergence. Because the Soviet novel performed a different function compared to the Western novel, the methodology for assessment had to be different (Clark, 1981, pp. xi-xii). In a comparatist manner, Clark emphasizes that SR itself was not homogeneous. Different countries and different parties had differing assessments of it. The great merit of her work was to draw attention to concrete practices, and to tease out the meaning of Socialist Realism from the literary productions rather than mainly from formulae in conferences or literary critics’ writings.

My concern, in writing about Socialist Realism as well as any alternatives to it, have stemmed from long years of studies of communist politics and women’s participation or engagement in any form with it (Marik, 2010; Marik, 2013; Marik, 2022). Accordingly, I shall be limiting myself to only one fragment of the various issues that can be discussed in connection with the Socialist Realist works.

From the official standpoint, SR was intended to combine "the most matter-of-fact everyday reality with the most heroic prospects" and create a vision of the ultimate socialist ideal as it should be. Clark suggests that there was a master plot to be followed for most Socialist Realist novels. (Clark, 1981, p.5). But she rejects the view that there was a one-way flow from politics to literature. Moreover, Clark also points out that the formulaic signs of the Soviet novel were utilized even by those who criticized the Stalinist cultural hegemony. (Clark, 1981, p.13). I hope to return to this particular argument when I discuss the work of Lydia Chukovskaia.

Clark makes a detailed case for Stalinist paradigm for Socialist Realism being based on the opposition of spontaneity and consciousness, which she read, as it was then the dominant way, as the Leninist approach to the working class as spontaneous and the party as the embodiment of consciousness. She (Clark, 1981) writes:

Thus, the spontaneity/consciousness opposition is, on the one hand, a defining tenet of Leninism and the locus of the greatest controversies about how to put theory into practice. On the other hand, it catches some of the Russian intelligentsia's obsessive dilemmas. Indeed, Leninism, being itself in large measure a Russian ideology, also reflects the intelligentsia's own ambivalences. (p.23)

Recent research puts one part of Clark’s contention under a cloud. Lars Lih’s analysis of the context of *What Is To Be Done?* along with his new translation, suggests that the spontaneity/consciousness polarity was neither a fundamental tenet of “Leninism”, if by that we mean Lenin’s ideas, nor was it a central aspect of Bolshevik history. (Lih, 2006). Paul Le Blanc, much earlier, had already questioned the idea that the long process of building a revolutionary working class socialist party in Russia could be shown in terms of a few key texts of Lenin. (LeBlanc, 1989) On the other hand, Clark’s work, taking culture as the domain, shows how the Stalin era had completely transformed Lenin’s ideas. Contrary to Lih, who stresses that Stalin was in many ways an orthodox follower of Lenin, Clark’s work highlights how Stalinism stressed the role of the party as the bearer of consciousness.

Clark argues that the genealogy of major or paradigmatic SR novels was brought into existence through the creation of an official definition of SR. Later receptions of these texts, in other words, brought them within a common genre called Socialist Realism.

Mother of 1906 is not *Mother* of 1936; *Chapaev* of 1923 is not *Chapaev* of 1933. Even though almost every one of their authors aspired to write a SR classic, in the sense that he wanted to write a novel that would be a model for writers committed to the Bolshevik cause, the specifically Socialist Realist quality of each novel was not created before 1932. In each novel, the author intended an important contribution to the quest for a kind of writing adequate to the new age, but the "contribution" was never adopted for

Socialist Realism. When these novels were pronounced exemplars, the number of possible features a model Soviet novel might have become more finite, and in each novel those aspects not envisaged in the canon became incidental, not germane to its quality of being Socialist Realist. (Clark, 1981, p.30)

Clark cites Zhdanov who combined "the most matter-of-fact everyday reality with the most heroic prospects" and create a vision of the ultimate socialist ideal as it should be. (Clark, 1981, p.34)

The master plot is traced and examined by Clark. The finalized version of the master plot consists of signs, that were embodied in epithets, stock images and character types, structure of events, and so on. The master plot centres on a positive hero, a "defining feature of Soviet Socialist Realism" and "an emblem of Bolshevik virtue" that the reader "might be inspired to emulate." The positive hero must be both a "typical" person and at the same time adopt a path that will "show the way forward" to an ideal socialist future. The specific types and forms of positive heroes shift at different points in Soviet History, but the basic structure of the hero's journey remains the same. (Clark, 1981, p.46). The hero typically arrives in the small, closed world of a "microcosm," and develops a plan to fix the problem, but soon encounters obstacles, such as obstinate bureaucrats, but when he garners support from other workers, he can begin working towards completing the task. Next comes a period of transition or trials, in which the hero encounters various problems, natural/man-made. The action culminates in a "climax," where the task seems impossible to fulfil: the hero faces death, harm, and/or has a moment of self-doubt. Only when the hero talks to a mentor figure and the mentor figure passes down a "baton" of wisdom is the hero able to undergo an initiation process and fulfil the task. The end of the Socialist Realist novel is more complex, but includes the completion of the task, a celebration of its completion, the resolution of love or some other emotional aspect of the plot, and the hero's acquisition of an extra-personal identity. (Clark,1981, pp. 255-260) The hero's secondary task is thus to acquire this identity by moving from a state of impulsive and emotional spontaneity (*stikhiinost'*) to consciousness (*soznatel'nost'*). One can see how certain earlier novels are then read into the template. For example, Gorky's *Mother*, where Pavel plays the role of the mentor in transforming his mother into a revolutionary. Based on an actual working-class struggle in the town of Somov, Gorky takes up the historic Pavel Zalomov and his mother, transforms them into Pavel Vlasov and his mother, and to heighten the political charge, makes her a martyr at the end, while Zalomov would say later that his mother continued to be active till her 80s.

The New Soviet Man and the New Soviet Woman:

Where did the New Soviet Woman fit in here? As Lynne Attwood argues (Attwood, 1999), following Ehrenreich and English, in industrial/industrialising societies, not just the USSR: two basic positions emerged; the 'rationalist' and the 'romantic' positions. Adherents of the 'Rationalist' approach argued that women were a vital economic resource and should be involved in the public world of production. They saw most differences in male and female personality and behaviour as the product not of nature but of socialisation. Women were innately no less suited than men to work outside the home, and most of the functions they currently performed in the family could be taken over by public institutions. 'Romantics', on the other hand, wanted to keep women in the home, as all male and female differences were rooted in nature. Women were naturally more tender, loving, and nurturing than men. If they ceased to provide domestic services for their own families, in their own homes, for love rather than money, the world would become a cold place, 'without love, without human warmth'. (Ehrenreich and English, 1978, p. 20)

Attwood argues that whereas in the 1920s, within a plurality of positions, one major trend was to try and universalize masculine rationality, this changed in the 1930s. In the 1920s, Arja Rosenholm suggests, more androgynous representations of women were becoming common in the work force. Ultimately, the rational woman's aim was to obtain equality in the workforce and society by striving to perform male tasks at par, leading to a paradoxical duality. This is obtaining male minds with a female body, whose "irrational" nature automatically undermines the maleness of the assimilated New Woman.

During the "Great Retreat", the romantic woman gained quite a bit of visibility over the rational woman. The proper "new Soviet woman" was supposed to be both a fantastic mother, who reared multiple children, and a *stakhanovka/* ideal worker. A woman's labour was to serve as a role model for her children or to help her husband meet his quotas. Thus, the new Soviet woman became domesticized into the private realm under High Stalinism and State social and cultural policies encouraged worship of the cult of motherhood and emphasized, rather than deemphasized, the male-female binary (Attwood, 1999, p.162).

The assumptions of Cold War era Western studies, already shown as being criticised by Clark, should be remembered. These assumptions included the belief that dictations from top created a complete sameness, and a purely turgid style of writing. Neither is valid. Speaking about a totally different literary context, Theodore Sturgeon is reported to have said: "Ninety percent of science fiction is crud. But ninety percent of anything is crud, and it's the ten percent that isn't crud that is important." (Sturgeon, 1937-1940, as cited Gunn, 1995). Studying the fiction of Vasily Grossman, Maria Karen Whittle argued that he brought in "marginal heroes", thereby subverting Socialist Realist conventions while operating within them. Since Grossman sometimes has female characters as heroes, she brings them in too. (Whittle, 2012). However, this is where the argument raised earlier becomes pertinent. Whittle reads even his stories of the 1920s as Socialist Realist or subversion of the same. But prior to 1932, there was no concept, and its full meaning was worked out only by the Writers Congress.

This is why, not all the different viewpoints need to be classified as "dissident". And even when we do have political dissidents, as in the case of Alexandra Kollontai, there is no reason to assume that her fiction is set in conscious opposition to Socialist realism. I would rather look at it as an alternative that was put forward in the 1920s.

Alexandra Kollontai and Critical Bolshevik and Feminist Fiction:

Women Workers' Space within the Party: Workers' Opposition

Alexandra Kollontai was an important and independent minded communist. Starting with taking classes for women workers in 1894, by 1896-97 she was a convinced Social Democrat. Briefly a Bolshevik in 1904, she was a Menshevik for many years. By 1917, she was one of Lenin's strong supporters, when he initiated a drastic line change through his April Theses. She was also an early advocate of organising women workers as a distinct and separate party task, since 1905 revolution. It was therefore not surprising that she became a member of the first Council of Peoples' Commissars after the October Revolution. 1918-1922/3 saw a number of significant changes for women, both by government action and through political mobilizations. However, in 1920-22, Kollontai was to become a leading member of the Workers' Opposition. As a result, she lost her position in the women's centre of the party, and after 1922, increasingly withdrew from open political criticisms.

The second stage of the Workers' Opposition had been concerning the introduction of the New Economic Policy and the introduction of profitability for state owned industry and the peasants had to be paid for the grain beyond the amount they paid as taxes (in grain). This in turn led to the stronger one-man management structure. Kollontai, Alexander Shlyapnikov, and others objected the rise of unemployment since 1922. It affected women more than men, and it was found that the laws protecting female labour were not being observed even in the state enterprises. As subsidies were cut, community kitchens and similar attempts at going beyond the family norms started collapsing, and women found themselves being pushed back into domestic drudgery. Lack of birth control measures combined with easy divorce laws ended up benefitting men who could walk out of marriages leaving children with their mothers.

Withdrawal from Direct Politics

In 1922-25, Kollontai stopped writing or speaking openly about the general direction of the party and the state. With the defeat of the Workers' Opposition, she turned exclusively to issues of women workers

and women in general. By the end of the decade, her withdrawal would be far more complete, and she would separate women's issues from the ongoing debates over party line. However, the novels and stories she published need to be seen as carefully crafted critiques.

In several articles of this period Kollontai turned to a theme she had explored in earlier years, that of the psychological emancipation of women. Unlike a majority of the Bolshevik leaders, she was convinced that simple legal equality and the right to work, or economic freedom, was not adequate. Even more than women workers, it was the *krestianka* (peasant woman) to whom Kollontai drew attention. Isolated from urban radicalism, isolated from collective work, they had been the most backward as well as most oppressed. But war, revolution and civil war had caused a change. Kollontai wanted to utilise the changes to transform the lives of rural women. But for most party members, this seemed one more area where the party regime would come into conflict with the (male) peasantry.

Fictions: Equality and Redefinition of Love

Kollontai's fictions of this period, is simultaneously deeply political and intensely personal. Her first collection of stories was ***Woman at the Turning Point.*** The story "**A Great Love**", one of the stories in this collection, is often thought to be a depiction of the supposed relationship between Lenin and Inessa Armand, but it is actually a reflection on Kollontai's own relationship with the Menshevik ideologue Maslov. (Elwood, 1992; Evans Clements, 1979, p. 229; Stites, 1975, p.89). The story reached the embittered conclusion that relationships with men always end in mutual recrimination, that women must pursue their own careers, and that no man will allow them to do that. With anger much more intense than in her essays, Kollontai declared that marriage was doomed because people did not know how to love. ***The Love of Worker Bees*** was the second set of short stories published by Kollontai in 1923. (Kollontai, 1977). The heroine of the biggest story is a communist woman who chooses to put her commitment and ideology before her husband. Some of the elements of the story, according to Farnsworth, were thinly disguised elements of her own relationship with Dybenko. (Farnsworth, 1980, pp. 325-329). It is however perfectly possible to read it with no idea about that relationship.

In terms of the eventual Socialist Realist model and the function of women in it, no less than the major 20s-way, Kollontai's treatment of Vasilisa Malygina moves away from a party centric, and top-down idea of how consciousness is to grow, and how the proletarian hero could overcome hurdles only through the intervention of the senior mentor who was inevitably a senior party person.

Vladimir and Vasilisa had met during the revolutionary year of 1917, and any courtship had been to the accompaniment of struggles over workers' control over production, over ousting the "social patriotic" traitors from the leadership of the Soviets, and ultimately over making the revolution.

When her husband writes a letter asking for her help, Vasilisa leaves Moscow for the small town where he is director of a factory. Living there, she discovers what being a privileged person in NEP Russia means. What matters to Vasilisa is that she finds Vladimir not merely having fallen in love with someone else, but of keeping her (Vasilisa) as a front for his "respectability". When Vasilisa rejects this, Vladimir tries to commit suicide, not, as Vasilisa initially thinks, out of love and a conflict of emotions, but because he was going to lose face. (Kollontai, 1977, p.145) Beatrice Farnsworth thinks that the love that Vladimir felt for Vasilisa even at this point was genuine. Eventually Vasilisa makes a break with Vladimir, returns to Moscow, and writes a letter to Vladimir's woman friend Nina where she expresses the view that they are better suited, and that the rupture between Vladimir and herself was not caused by the appearance of Nina (Kollontai, 1977, pp. 176-77). Kollontai expects proletarian women, trying to transform themselves and their society, to break free of the construct which makes of woman's life chiefly the purpose of pleasing her man and finding pleasure in that. But this novel shows that this transition from sexual jealousy to unfettered passion demanding respect for the freedom of her own feelings has not been an easy process. More and more, she asserted, the new women were single women. At the same time, this singleness was not bourgeois

individualism. Vasilisa finds, when she leaves Vladimir, that she is pregnant, and her decision is to bring up the child in the commune she lives in, with the other women who live there. Women are neither to become masculine, nor are they to be romanticised. The class, both males and females, had to be self-activated, as parts of the class. If they did so, in the point of production, they could also free themselves from the tyranny of dependence in marriage. Self-emancipation meant not delegating to others the task of building a new society, but doing it oneself. This meant that contrary to the readings of these stories given by many of her critics, she was not confining herself to a narrowly "feminine" writing. She was also disclosing how bureaucratisation was eating into the vials of the party and how it was ruining some of the best elements of the working class. Gender was important, not in any "separatist" sense, but because existing gender imbalance meant that when bureaucratisation and the reappearance of privileges took place, the males became the chief beneficiaries – though only some males, not all. Vladimir has become a director, and Vasilisa is expected to be the Director's wife. Rejecting this, she reaffirms a revolutionary elan of the earlier years, gradually dying out. And there is a flat rejection of *partiinost*. *Soznatelnost* is not arrived at through *partiinost*, not through the gateway of the Stalinist reading of Lenin's *Chto Delat?* It is due to being part of the collective proletariat that consciousness grows, so that Vladimir may be also a party member and higher up in the echelon by state-party norms but projected as one whose consciousness has regressed from proletarian to a bureaucratic/petty-bourgeois level.

An additional point is worth mentioning. Critics in modern times have sometimes charged Kollontai with promoting the cult of the motherhood. (Farnsworth, 1980, pp. 296, 359-60 challenges this). Lokaneeta claims that Kollontai's notion of maternity has no concept of choice. This is based on her claim that Kollontai does not talk about contraception, and that she talks about population and labour power. (Lokaneeta, 2001, pp. 1409-1410)

This is to conflate the later Kollontai, who submitted to Stalinist norms about building Soviet citizens[1], with the Kollontai of 1923. Vasilisa's decision to have the child, and Zhenya's abortion in another story, ***The Love of Three Generations***, are both based on personal choices.

The Love of Three Generations, short story, was to be used to claim that Kollontai was a promoter of promiscuity, or the so-called glass of water theory. This was a supposed defence of promiscuity on the grounds that one should satisfy the sex drive as simply as one satisfies thirst. But one can associate Kollontai with this "theory" only if one assumes that Kollontai takes a stand in favour of propagating Zhenya's standpoint, and if one reduces the writings of Kollontai for this period to **'The Love of Three Generations'**. By setting this story side by side with the essay **'Make Way for Winged Eros'**, one can see a didactic purpose being worked out. Zhenya's life is that of a 'wingless Eros'. But only after much struggles could a new world of communist harmony come into being. Kollontai does not offer ready-made solutions, but nor does she offer Zhenya as a role model for youth. Rather, Zhenya is one possibility in the present.

There were reports coming in to the party that young Bolsheviks were pressuring each other into bed by accusing anyone who resisted of petty-bourgeois morality. The end result was that many women found themselves trapped in unwanted pregnancy and then abandoned by their once ardent comrades. That is why Cathy Porter wonders whether Zhenya symbolises a sexual revolution or whether the chaos of post-revolutionary Russia had created a new generation incapable of entering into deeper commitments at the personal level. (Lokaneeta, 2001, p.1411; Evans Clements, 1979, p.235; Porter, 1977, p. 14). Helen Deutsch offers an explanation, according to which the story should be seen as a cultural and historical document. It shows how women in the first period of the revolution, especially in the fluid situations, viewed their emotional relations, explored new patterns of sexuality, and how they prioritised work over passion. (Deutsch, 1944, p. 358). The contemporary conservative Soviet professor Aron Zalkind took a hostile stance.

[1] As when she wrote, in a 1946 article, "From the very beginning, Soviet law recognized that motherhood is not a private matter, but the social duty of the active and equal woman citizen.". In the same essay she also applauded the bestowal of the title 'Mother-Heroine' to millions of women." (Kollontai, 1972, pp. 183-184).

He termed Zhenya's outlook on life a disease, not a class idea. (Farnsworth, 1980, p.332) Zalkind himself had an extremely reactionary view, praising abstinence and sublimation of sexual drive. Yet, even if we leave aside her non-fiction writings, Kollontai's stories themselves, including Zheniya's deep love for her mother as opposed to the absence of such love to male sexual partners, indicate Kollontai's recurring affirmation that women ought not to make one heterosexual bonding the centre of their lives. All of this puts her fiction, regardless of its other flaws, as a critic of officialese.

Lydia Chukovskaia: Survivor of the *Yezhovshchina*

Lydia Chukovskaya (1907-1996) was the daughter of Kornei Chukovsky, and a close associate of Anna Akhmatova. Her husband, Matvei Bronstein, was a talented physicist, arrested in 1937 and executed in early 1938 after a 'trial' lasting half an hour. Chukovskaya was saved by not being in Leningrad at that time. While living in precarious conditions, she wrote a novel, *Sofia Petrovna*. This was therefore not a first-person memoir but as she writes, "I attempted to record the events just experienced by my country, my friends, and myself." (Chukovskaya, 1988, p.1) So, while it is not a direct memoir, it is, by the author's own admission, about her era, about women like herself. And this was written, not later, but while the events were still a living reality.

Sofia Petrovna and her Initial Illusions

Lydia Chukovskaya's heroine Sofia Petrovna was herself not arrested. Unlike some other women who survived to write about the Great Terror, like Nadezhda Mandelstam, or Evgeniia Ginzburg, Sofia Petrovna stood much lower down. Ginzburg had at least been sufficiently high up. Her husband Pavel Aksyonov was a member of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR (and the mayor of Kazan). So, she had a fair amount of privilege. Sofia Petrovna in the novel was the widow of a doctor, Fyodor Ivanovich. They had had a life together in the pre-revolution period too, when they had employed 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 joined the Komsomol. 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 the doctor friend of theirs who had been Godfather to her son Nikolai, 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.

Terror

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, she discovers what was happening to people sentenced to jail, and to their family members sent off to distant places like Kazakhstan.

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.

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. 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. And 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 in real life but what she refused to do. Possibly, it was easier for a Sofia Petrovna than for Ginzburg. As a teacher, a colleague of a man Stalin himself had condemned, and as a party member married to a high functionary, her 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)

But we need to see what these texts told the first generation that received them – the post-Stalin soviet people, who read these mostly as Samizdat. Luminaries of the Soviet underground from the post - Thaw period like Lev Kopelev, Raisa Orlova[1], Ludmilla Alexeyeva (Alexeyeva, 1993, p.43), Andrei Sakharov, and Roy Medvedev mention Ginzburg's memoir alongside the works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov as having both a profound personal influence on their lives and one of the most worthwhile texts written about the Gulag (Medvedev, 2002, 41).

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 tricks. 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 could not bring herself to write down the testament for fear of informers. In 1956, after Nikita Khrushchev denounced the crimes of Stalin in a "secret speech" to the party leadership, she wrote out the testament for the first time. She appealed to the party leadership for the rehabilitation of Bukharin, though that would happen only in the Gorbachev era. (Larina, 1994)

What is also important, when we look at Sofia Petrovna as a novel, is how the master narrative is taken up and then subverted. In the first part, the politically untutored Sofia begins under the guidance of the local party comrades to become aware. Before the action of the novel begins, it is implied that Sofia Petrovna had little contact with the world beyond her home and family. Though the revolution had encashed on even the middling wealthy, carving up her home into smaller apartments, she managed to maintain a small part of the domestic life of old. But the death of her husband and the need to get her son launched in a decent way is what forces her to set out. As Holmgren points out, even when Petrovna dreams of a future in the early stage, it takes themes of radicalism and twists them. She thinks of owning a dressma-king shop where women will work for ladies. As Holmgren says, Sofia misses the political implications (women's employment, financial autonomy, opportunities for radical education) and focuses on surface images of bourgeois femininity. (Holmgren, 1993, pp. 47-48) Later, employed in a Petrograd publishing house, she has a positive development typical of socialist realism. Her son becomes an active Komsomol member. It is Kolya who is partly the mentor, explaining to her the importance of women doing socially necessary work. But when she does meet the hurdles, the way forward comes not through a mentor who will help her to overcome the problems and merge in the proletarian collectives while also developing the

[1] Kopelev and Orlova were present at Ginzburg's funeral. They share in an afterward they wrote for Whirlwind that they first became acquainted with Ginzburg through an illicit copy of her memoir. (Kopelev and Orlova, 1989: 320)

individual personality. Instead, Sofia gradually learns that the Stalinist system is a fraud, a monstrous regime oppressing the people. Written in a small period in 1939-40, in a school answer book, it had to be kept concealed for a long time. During the thaw, it circulated, and the author even tried getting it published. But in the end the state refused to do so. As a result, she refused to allow anything written by her to be published in the USSR. Only in 1988 was the Russian readership allowed to read the novel in a legal edition.

Kolia's arrest brings the personal dimension of the terror home to Sofia, but she has no answers. She sees only Kolia's arrest as a mistake. Committed to believe and obey, she submits to and suffers from the self-serving manipulations of "bad" characters still enjoying official approval. Watching the destruction of the obedient and the "good", she nevertheless abhors and suspects any form of dissidence. So doomed by the nature of her participation, Sofia Petrovna is driven to a fundamental denial of herself and others. Her fate is the more terrible because it is worked out within and against the possible alternative world of a community of victims, who if they recognise their community, could become the starting point of a resistance. Instead, by subscribing to the official interpretation of her experiences, Sofia Petrovna cannot see all those women as allies. She sees them as wise and mothers of the enemy, as Ginzburg's memoirs show even arrested and tortured party members keeping their distance from those who were non-party, or worse, former members of other parties. As Holmgren remarks: "Renouncing their positive image and association, she is led to distrust her own unofficial response as a loving mother and an intuitive woman and, in the end, yields to the annihilating silence of the torture chamber" (Holmgren, 1993, p. 56).

Conclusion:

I started by arguing that Socialist Realism is less homogeneous and less a one-way dictation from the state than it used to be thought in the Cold War era. In looking at the two texts of opposition, I suggest that there cannot be any image of a homogeneous opposition either. Kollontai tried to remain a communist activist. Natalia Sedova-Trotsky, in her book co-authored with Victor Serge on the life of Trotsky, mentions an event of the late 1920s.

"Before the final blow, Alexandra Kollontai used to visit us quite often. The 1920 Workers' Opposition, of which she had been one of the leaders, was allied to our movement. When she was appointed ambassador to Norway, she came to take her leave of us and offered to take out Opposition documents in her diplomatic bags to hand over to foreign groups. When I took them to her a few days later, I found her completely changed, confused and absolutely terrified. "Really, I can't take anything, I am sorry," she kept repeating ... Soon afterwards, she published a complete refutation of her past in Pravda – the price for keeping her job" (Serge and Sedova Trotsky, 2015, p. 155). My concern is not with the accuracy or otherwise of Sedova's claim about why Kollontai changed her position, but with the testimony that at least till 1927 she had been keeping carefully in touch with the communist opposition to Stalinism.

The fiction she wrote was a part of this stance. It was an attempt to restore the idea of a proletarian collectivity that could not be substituted by a top-down party hierarchy. In its Gothic elements, Vasilisa Malygina also challenged the emerging *Proletkult* line.

By contrast, it is with Lydia Chukovskia that we see the full Socialist Realist model addressed and subverted. By fighting for its legal publication in her own country, she was thereby fighting for a frontal attack on the more dogmatic dimensions of Socialist Realism. While certainly her battle was fundamentally political, in a sense it was also more significantly literary, in a way that Kollontai's was not. Kollontai chose fiction when the opportunity for speaking and writing non-fiction was closing for her. Chukovskaya made literature the site of her struggle, and made a critique of socialist realism her core weapon.

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