

Hope Against Hope

A MEMOIR

*Nadezhda
Mandelstam*

HARRISON E. SALISBURY says of this book:
"NO WORK ON RUSSIA WHICH I HAVE RECENTLY READ
HAS GIVEN ME SO SENSITIVE AND SEARING AN INSIGHT
INTO THE HELLHOUSE WHICH RUSSIA BECAME UNDER
STALIN AS THIS DEDICATED AND BRILLIANT WORK
ON THE POET MANDELSTAM BY HIS DEVOTED WIFE.

(Continued on front flap)

Nadezhda Mandelstam

HOPE
AGAINST
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A MEMOIR

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Translated from the Russian by

MAX HAYWARD

With an Introduction by Clarence Brown

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to see him regularly and always kept him informed of developments. I didn't do this only to have the benefit of his advice, but rather from the need to maintain contact with one of the last people in those confused times to keep a sense of law and to fight stubbornly, if vainly, against the use of brute force.

Though he did, in fact, have some good advice for me as well. It was he who told me to persuade M. to take things as easily as possible, not asking for a transfer to another place, for example, or drawing attention to himself in any way—in other words, to keep mum and show no signs of life at all. “Don't sign any more pieces of paper. The best thing is to let them forget all about you.” In his view, this was the only way to save oneself, or at least to keep alive a little longer. Vinaver could not follow his own advice because he was already far too exposed. He disappeared during the terror of 1937. There are rumors that he lived a double life and wasn't what he seemed to be. I do not believe this and never will. I hope his name will be cleared by posterity. I know that stories of this kind are put around by the secret police themselves to compromise people who have fallen foul of them. Even if there are documents in the archives that show him in a bad light, this would still not be proof that he betrayed his visitors to the police. Even if Peshkova was led to believe Vinaver had been attached to her as a police spy, that is no reason for us to believe it. It is easy enough to fabricate documents; people signed the most incredible statements under torture, and nothing would have been easier than to put alarming ideas about police spies and provocateurs into the head of an old woman like Peshkova. But how will the historians ever get at the truth if every minute grain of it is buried under huge layers of monstrous falsehoods? By this I mean not just the prejudices and misconceptions of any age, but deliberate and premeditated lies.

7 *Public Opinion*

AKHMATOVA also played her part in all these moves. She managed to get an interview with Yenukidze, who listened to her carefully but said not a word. Next she went to Seifullina, who at once rushed to the phone and rang a friend of hers in the secret police. His only comment was: “Let's hope they don't drive him out of his

mind—our fellows are very good at it.” The next day this “friend in the secret police” told Seifullina that he had made inquiries, and that it was better not to get involved in the case. When she asked why, he didn't reply. Seifullina was discouraged—as we always were, beating a hasty retreat when advised not to “get involved” in some case or other.

This is an extraordinary feature of our life: none of us ever submitted petitions and pleas, expressed our opinion about something or took any other action before finding out what people thought “at the top.” Everybody was too conscious of his helplessness to try and assert himself. “I can never get anywhere with these things,” Ehrenburg used to say in explanation of his refusal to help people over such matters as pensions, housing or residence permits. The trouble was that though he could ask for favors, he could never insist. Nothing could make things easier for the powers-that-be. Any initiative from below can be halted by the mere hint that it will meet with disapproval “at the top.” Both the middle and the higher reaches of the bureaucracy turned this attitude to their advantage and declared certain questions “untouchable.” From the second half of the twenties the “whisper of public opinion” became fainter and fainter until it ceased to be the prelude to action of any kind. All cases involving somebody's arrest were, needless to say, “off limits,” and only relatives were supposed to try and do anything about them—that is, visit Peshkova and the office of the public prosecutor. It was quite exceptional for an outsider to involve himself in activity on behalf of a prisoner, and anybody who did deserves all due credit. Since M.'s poem had given cause for offense to the most awesome person in the land, there was very good reason to keep right out of the whole business. I was grateful to Pasternak, therefore, when he volunteered to help. He came to see me with Akhmatova and asked me whom he should approach. I suggested he see Bukharin, whose attitude to M.'s arrest I already knew, and Demian Bedny.

I had good reasons for suggesting Demian Bedny. Through Pasternak I was now able to remind him of a promise he had made in 1928. In that year M. had learned from a chance conversation in the street with his namesake Isaiah Mandelstam that five bank officials, specialists left over from the old regime, had been sentenced to death by shooting for embezzlement or negligence. Much to his friends' and his own surprise, and despite the rule against intervening in such matters, M. raised such a hue and cry all over Moscow that the five old men were spared. He mentions this episode in his “Fourth

Prose." Among his "integral moves" was an approach to Demian Bedny. Their meeting took place somewhere in the backyard of the "International Bookstore," which, as a passionate book-lover, Demian was always visiting. He probably also used it to meet his friends—people living in the Kremlin no longer dared invite anybody there. Demian refused point blank to intervene on behalf of the old men. "Why should you worry about them?" he asked when he realized that they were neither relatives nor friends of M. But at the same time he promised that if anything ever happened to M. himself, he would come to his help without fail. For some reason M. was very gratified by this promise, though at that time we were firmly persuaded that "they'll neither touch nor kill us." When M. came down to join me at Yalta shortly afterward, he told me about this conversation with Demian. "It's really very good to know. He won't keep his word, you think? I think he will." This was why in 1934 I advised Pasternak to speak with Demian Bedny. Pasternak called him on the day after M.'s arrest, the day on which our trunk was examined for a second time, but Demian seemed to have got wind of the case already. "Neither you nor I can get involved in this," he said. Was it that he knew of the poem about Stalin, with whom he was already in trouble himself, or was he simply responding with the usual Soviet formula on the need to avoid those stricken by the plague? Whichever it was, Demian was in any case in disgrace himself. It was his passion for books that had got him into trouble: he had been unwise enough to note in his diary that he didn't like to lend books to Stalin because of the dirty marks left on the white pages by his greasy fingers. Demian's secretary had decided to curry favor by copying out this entry in Demian's diary and sending it to Stalin. Though the secretary apparently gained nothing by his treachery, Demian was reduced to dire straits for a long time and even had to sell off his library. By the time his works began to appear in print again, the fifteen years required under law before anyone can inherit had gone by, and I myself have seen his heir, a puny youth from his last marriage, going to Surkov and trying to beg a little money in his father's name. I also heard Surkov refuse outright—as though visiting a final insult on Demian through his offspring. What had he done to deserve this? Nobody ever worked so wholeheartedly for the Soviet regime. With me it was a different matter: I could scarcely be surprised if I was trampled on from time to time. What else could I expect?

In the middle of May 1934, Demian and Pasternak met at some

"Things were different before. When Osip was arrested, for instance, some were against it, and others thought it was all right. And now look what's happening: they're arresting their own people!"

One must admire the way Lida put it. With Spartan bluntness she was simply defining the basic moral law of those who were supposed to constitute our intelligentsia and were, hence, presumably the foundation of public opinion. The distinction between "one of us" and "not one of us" (or "alien elements," to use the phrase then current) went back to the Civil War with its iron law of "Who whom?"* After victory and the surrender of the other side, the winners always claim rewards, decorations and privileges, while the defeated are subject to extermination. But it soon becomes evident that the right to count as "one of us" is neither hereditary nor even granted for life. The right to style oneself thus is a matter for constant struggle, and has been from the beginning. A person who was yesterday "one of us" can be degraded with lightning speed to the opposite status. What is more, by the very logic of this division, you become "not one of us" from the moment you lose your footing and start to slip downward. 1937 and all that followed were possible only in a society where this division has been taken to its logical conclusion.

The usual reaction to each new arrest was that some retreated even further into their shells (which, incidentally, never saved them) while others responded with a chorus of jeers for the victim. In the late forties my friend Sonia Vishnevski, hearing every day of new arrests among her friends, shouted in horror: "Treachery and counterrevolution everywhere!" This was how you were supposed to react if you lived in relative comfort and had something to lose. Perhaps there was also an element of primitive magic in such words: what else could we do but try to ward off the evil spirits by uttering charms?

* Lenin's famous phrase summarizing the issue between the Bolsheviks and their enemies.

8 Interview

Two weeks later a miracle happened, the first of several: the official interrogating M. rang me and suggested a meeting. A pass was issued to me with unprecedented speed. I went up the broad staircase of the Lubyanka,* then along a corridor and stopped at the interrogator's door, as I had been instructed. Just as I got there something quite extraordinary happened: I saw a prisoner being led along the corridor. The guards had evidently not expected to run into an outsider in this inner sanctum. I saw that the man was a tall Chinese with wildly bulging eyes. I had no time to observe any more than his fear-crazed eyes and the fact that he had to hold up his trousers with his hands. Seeing me, the guards made a quick movement and they hustled the prisoner into a room. I just had time to get a glimpse of the faces of these members of the "inner" guard who were a very different type from those on the outside. It was a fleeting impression, but it left me with a feeling of horror and a strange chill running down my spine. Ever since I have always felt the same chill and a trembling sensation at the mere approach of such people, even before seeing the look on their faces: they follow you with their eyes, never moving their heads. Children can get this look from their parents—I have seen it in schoolboys and students. I know, of course, that it is a purely professional mannerism, but with us, like everything else, it has been taken to horrible extremes, as though everybody with this sleuth's look were a model pupil eagerly trying to show teacher how well he has learned his lesson.

I had only a momentary glimpse of the Chinese, but whenever I hear of people being shot, I see his eyes again. How was this meeting possible? According to all accounts, the most elaborate precautions are taken to prevent such mishaps. The corridors are supposedly divided into separate sections, and guards are alerted by a special system of signals if the way ahead is not "clear." But do we really know what goes on in these places? We lived on rumors and trembled. Trembling is a physiological response which has nothing in common with ordinary fear as such. But Akhmatova was angry when I once said this to her. "What do you mean, it isn't fear? What is it, then?" She said it was not just a physical reflex, but a result of holy terror of the most ordinary and agonizing kind—she had suffered from it

* Political prison and headquarters of the secret police in Moscow.

through all the years right up to Stalin's death.

Stories about various kinds of special technical equipment in the prisons—apart from the signaling system in the corridors—stopped only at the end of the thirties when methods of interrogation were simplified and became so comprehensible in their old-fashioned way that there was no more call for myths. "Everything is straightforward now," to quote Akhmatova again. "They stick a fur cap on your head and send you straight to the taiga."* Hence the line in "Poem Without a Hero":

There, behind the barbed wire,
In the very heart of the dense taiga
They take my shadow for questioning.

I just don't know what section it was—the third or the fourth—to which I was summoned for this meeting, but if it was the one that dealt with literature, the interrogator certainly had a name hallowed in Russian literary tradition: Christophorovich.† Why didn't he change it, if he worked in the literary section? Perhaps the coincidence appealed to his fancy. M. was always very angered if one even pointed such things out: he was very much against the frivolous mention of anything connected with Pushkin. Once, when I was ill, we had to spend two years in Tsarskoye Selo and we actually took one of the apartments in the old Lycée,‡ which were quite good and comparatively cheap. But M. was terribly upset by what for him was almost sacrilege, and at the first pretext he insisted we clear out and revert to our usual homeless existence. So I was never able to summon up the courage to discuss the name of his interrogator.

Our meeting took place in the presence of Christophorovich—I have to refer to him by this taboo patronymic because I have forgotten his last name. He was a large man with the staccato, over-emphatic diction of an actor of the Maly Theater school, and he kept butting into our conversation, not to tell us things in a normal way, but to read us pompous little lectures. To all his sententiousness there was an ominous and threatening undertone. The effect on me as a person from the outside was to arouse disgust rather than fear.

* Taiga: virgin forest.

† Christophorovich was the patronymic (middle name) of the notorious Chief of Police and head of the Third Section under Nicholas I, Count Alexander Christophorovich Benkendorff (1783–1844). Benkendorff was responsible for the official persecution of Pushkin and Lermontov.

‡ Famous school for the sons of the aristocracy created by Alexander I at Tsarskoye Selo ("Czar's Village"), the Imperial summer residence near St. Petersburg.

But two weeks without sleep in a cell and under interrogation would have radically changed my attitude.

When M. was brought in I at once saw that he was as wild-eyed as the Chinese, and that his trousers were slipping down in the same way. This is a precaution against suicide—belts and suspenders are taken away and all fasteners are removed.

Despite his distraught appearance, M. immediately noticed I was wearing someone else's raincoat. He asked whose it was, and I told him: Mother's. When had she arrived? I told him the day. "So you've been at home all the time?" At first I didn't understand why he was so interested in this wretched raincoat, but now I saw the reason: he had been told that I was under arrest too. This is a standard device used to break the prisoner's spirit. When prisons and interrogations are as shrouded in mystery as in this country and there is no possibility of public control over them, such techniques work without fail.

I demanded an explanation from the interrogator, but the futility of demanding anything in such a place is self-evident. One could only do it out of naïveté or extreme anger. In my case it was both. But of course I got no answer.

Thinking we should not meet again for a long time, if ever, M. hastened to tell me the things he wanted me to convey to the outside world. We are all exceedingly well "prison-trained"—whether or not we have actually been in jail—and we know how to seize "the last chance of being heard"—a need which in his "Conversation About Dante" M. attributed to Ugolino. To us it comes naturally, and you are bound to bring it to a fine art if you have to live our sort of life. I have several times had this "last chance of being heard" and tried to take advantage of it, but it so happened that the people I was talking to didn't catch the implication of my words and failed to register what I was trying to convey. They evidently thought that our acquaintance, only just begun, would go on forever and that there would be plenty of time to learn, gradually and at leisure, everything they wanted to know. This was a fateful mistake from their point of view, and my efforts to communicate went for nothing. During our meeting M. was in a better position—I was very well prepared to take in his meaning. Nothing had to be elaborated and not a word was wasted.

M. managed to tell me that his interrogator had the text of his poem about Stalin and that it was the first draft with the word "peasant-slayer" in the fourth line: "All we hear is the Kremlin

mountaineer, the murderer and peasant-slayer." This was a very important clue to the identity of the person who had denounced M. to the police. Next, M. was eager to tell me how the interrogation was being conducted, but Christophorovich constantly interrupted him and tried to take advantage of the occasion to intimidate me as well. By listening carefully to the heated words passing between the two, I tried to glean every scrap of information that would be of interest to people outside.

The interrogator described M.'s poem as a "counter-revolutionary document without precedent," and referred to me as an accessory after the fact. "How should a real Soviet citizen have acted in your place?" he asked. It appeared that in my place any real Soviet person would immediately have informed the police, for otherwise he made himself liable to be charged with a criminal offense. Almost every third word uttered by the interrogator was "crime" or "punishment." I discovered that I had not in fact been charged only because they had decided "not to proceed with the case." Then, for the first time, I heard the phrase "isolate but preserve": such was the order that had come down to him, the interrogator implied, as a supreme act of clemency from the very highest level. The sentence originally suggested—that M. should be sent to a forced-labor camp on the White Sea Canal*—had been commuted, by this same supreme authority, to exile in the town of Cherdyn. Christophorovich added that I could accompany M. if I wished. This was a further unprecedented act of clemency, and I naturally agreed at once. But I am still curious about what might have happened if I had refused.

What a rush there would have been if—say, in 1937—all who wanted had been told they could go into voluntary exile with their families, children, belongings and books! All would have flocked to wait in line—wives side by side with their husbands' lovers, daughters with their stepmothers.

But maybe not. People only keep going because they don't know their future and hope to avoid the fate of others. As their neighbors perish one after the other, the survivors take hope from the famous question "What were they arrested for?" and discuss all their indiscretions and mistakes. It is the women, as the real mainstays of the household, who are always the most frantic in their efforts to keep the small flame of hope from going out. In 1937 Lilia Yakhontov, for instance, said after a visit to the Lubianka: "I shall always feel safe as long as that building stands." Her pious expression of devo-

* A showpiece built by forced labor in the 1930's.

tion may even have delayed her husband's end for a few years—he later threw himself out of a window in a fit of wild fear that he was about to be arrested. And in 1953 a Jewish woman biologist, a true believer, tried to convince another Jewish woman (who had come from the West and was therefore completely shaken by what was going on) that nothing would happen to her "if you have committed no crime and your conscience is clear." Then there was the woman I met in a train in 1957 who explained to me that one must be very careful about rehabilitated persons, since they were being released on humanitarian grounds, not because they were innocent: "Say what you like, there's no smoke without fire." Causality and expediency are the basic articles of faith in our ready-made philosophy.

9 *Theory and Practice*

THE gist of what I had learned by the time I went home from the meeting was that the interrogator had charged M. with the authorship of the poem on Stalin, and that M. had admitted it, together with the fact that about ten people in his immediate circle had heard him recite the poem. I was angry that he had not denied everything, as a good conspirator might have done. But it was impossible to think of M. in such a role: he was too straightforward to be capable of any kind of guile. He was utterly without deviousness. Besides, I am told by people of experience that in our conditions it is essential to admit to some basic minimum, otherwise such "persuasion" is applied that the prisoner, at the end of his tether, will incriminate himself in the most fantastic way.

In any case, how on earth could we be expected to behave like good conspirators? A political activist, a revolutionary or a member of an underground organization is always a person of a special outlook. But although that kind of activity was just not for us, we were constantly forced by the circumstances of our life to behave like members of a secret society. When we met we spoke in whispers, glancing at the walls for fear of eavesdropping neighbors or hidden microphones. When I returned to Moscow after the war, I found that everybody covered their telephones with cushions, because it was rumored that they were equipped with recording devices, and

the most ordinary householders trembled with terror in the presence of the black metal object listening in on their innermost thoughts. Nobody trusted anyone else, and every acquaintance was a suspected police informer. It sometimes seemed as though the whole country was suffering from persecution mania, and we still haven't recovered from it.

I must say that we had every reason to be afflicted in this way: we all felt as if we were constantly exposed to X-rays, and the principal means of control over us was mutual surveillance. "There is nothing to fear," Stalin had said, "one must get on with the job." So the employees of all Soviet institutions duly took their offerings to their superior, to the secretary of the Party cell or to the personnel department. In the schools a system of "self-government" in the classroom, with monitors and Komsomol representatives, made it very easy for the teachers to get everything they needed out of their pupils. Students were instructed to spy on their professors. The penetration of the world at large by the secret police was organized on a grand scale. In any institution, particularly in the universities and colleges, there is always a large number of people whose careers have begun in the security service. They are so superbly trained that they have no difficulty getting promotion in any field of activity. When they are given "study leave," they receive all kinds of incentives and are often allowed to stay on and do graduate work. Another link with the secret police is maintained through informers who are even more dangerous because, merging with the rest, they are indistinguishable from their colleagues. To advance themselves, they are quite capable of framing people—something the professionals rarely do. This was part of our everyday life, a dreary routine relieved only by a neighbor telling you at dead of night how "they" had summoned him to bully him into working for them, or by friends warning you which other friends to beware of. All this happened on a vast scale and affected everybody indiscriminately. Every family was always going over its circle of acquaintances, trying to pick out the provocateurs, the informers and the traitors. After 1937 people stopped meeting each other altogether, and the secret police were thus well on the way to achieving their ultimate objective. Apart from assuring a constant flow of information, they had isolated people from each other and had drawn large numbers of them into their web, calling them in from time to time, harassing them and swearing them to secrecy by means of signed statements. All such people lived in eternal fear of being found out and were

consequently just as interested as regular members of the police in the stability of the existing order and the inviolability of the archives where their names were on file.

This system of mass surveillance came into being only gradually, but M. was one of the first to be singled out for individual treatment. His status in Soviet literature was defined as early as 1923, when his name was crossed off the list of people allowed to work for the various magazines, and from then on he was always surrounded by swarms of agents. We learned to distinguish several varieties of the breed. The most easily identifiable were the brisk young men of military bearing who, without bothering to feign interest in the author, immediately asked him for his "latest work." M. generally tried to get rid of them by saying he had no spare copy. They would thereupon offer to type it out for him and return it "with a copy for yourself." With one such visitor M. argued for a long time, refusing to let him have "The Wolf"—this was in 1932. The young man insisted, saying that it was in any case widely known. Failing to get it, he came back the next day and recited the poem by heart. After giving this proof of how "well known" it was, he got the author's copy he needed. Agents of this kind completely disappeared from the scene as soon as they had done their job. The good thing about them was that they were always in a hurry and never tried to "make friends." It was evidently not part of their assignment to spy on the other people who came to see us.

The second type of agent was the "admirer"—generally a member of the same profession, a colleague or a neighbor. In apartment buildings housing members of the same institution, one's neighbors are always colleagues too. People like this would appear without calling beforehand, just dropping in out of the blue. They would stay for a long time, talking shop and attempting minor provocations. Whenever we were visited by one of these, M. always asked me to serve tea: "The man is working, he needs a cup of tea." To ingratiate themselves, they tried all kinds of little tricks. S., for instance, first came to us with tales about the East—he said that he was himself originally from Central Asia and had studied in a madrasah there. As proof of his "Eastern" credentials he brought along a small statuette of the Buddha, which could have been bought in any junk store. It was supposed to bear witness to his expert knowledge of the East and his serious interest in art. The connection between the Buddha and an Islamic madrasah never became clear to us. S. soon lost patience with us and, after making a scene, left us to be taken care of

by someone else—or so it appeared, to judge from the equally sudden appearance of another neighbor who also tried to cultivate our acquaintance by bringing us a Buddha! This time it was M. who lost his temper: “Another Buddha! That’s enough! They must think of something new!” and he threw out the hapless replacement, without even giving him tea.

The third and most dangerous kind of agents we called “adjutants.” These were young devotees of literature, sometimes doing graduate work at the university, who were extremely keen on poetry and knew everything there was to know about it. When they first came they often had the purest intentions, but then they were recruited. Some of them openly admitted to M.—as they did to Akhmatova as well—that they were “called in to report.” After making this kind of admission they generally disappeared from the scene. Others also suddenly stopped coming to see us, without any explanation. In some cases I found out many years later what had happened—namely, that they had been “summoned” by the police. This was the explanation in the case of L., for example, whom Akhmatova told me about. Not daring to approach her in Leningrad, he had managed to see her during one of her visits to Moscow, and he said to her: “You cannot imagine how closely they watch you.” It was always painful when somebody one had become friendly with mysteriously broke off relations, but this, alas, was the only thing that honorable people could do if they refused to play the role of an “adjutant.” “Adjutants” had to serve two gods at once. With all their love of poetry, they were mindful of their own careers as writers or poets, of the need to get into print and find their feet. It was this side of them that the police generally played on. To be on close or friendly terms with Mandelstam or Akhmatova, or to have any kind of truck with them, opened no doors in the world of literature, but an “adjutant” only had to submit a candid report on an evening’s conversation (of the most innocent kind, needless to say) at our apartment and they would help him to get into the coveted pages of the literary magazines. There was always a crucial point at which the young devotee of literature would break down and agree to embark on a double life.

Finally, there were some real lovers of evil who had a taste for their dual role. Some of them were quite famous: Elsberg, for example, who was undoubtedly an outstanding figure in his field. He was active in different circles than the ones we moved in, and I only know about him from what others have told me, but I was struck by

the refinement of the man’s methods when I happened to see an article of his entitled “The Moral Experience of the Soviet Era.” It appeared at a moment when there was a possibility of his being publicly exposed, and by writing an article under this title he was, as it were, suggesting to his readers that, as an authority on the moral standards of our age, he could scarcely be in any jeopardy. In fact there were some revelations about him, but only some time later, and even so it proved impossible to apply such a mild sanction as expulsion from the Union of Soviet Writers. He lost nothing at all, not even the devotion of his research students. It was typical of Elsberg that, after getting his friend S. sent to a concentration camp, he continued to visit S.’s wife and gave her advice. She knew about his role, but was frightened of betraying her disgust: to expose informers was not done, and you paid a very high price for doing so. When S. returned after the Twentieth Congress, Elsberg met him with flowers, shaking his hand and congratulating him.

We lived among people who vanished into exile, labor camps or the other world, and also among those who sent them there. It was dangerous to have any contact with people who still tried to go on working and thinking in their own way; for this reason Alisa Gugovna Usov was quite right not to let her husband visit M. “You can’t go there,” she would say, “they see all kinds of riffraff.” She reasoned that it was wiser not to run the risk: who knew what sort of people you might antagonize in the heat of a literary argument? This caution, however, did not save Usov: he went to a labor camp with his fellow linguists as a result of the “dictionary case.” All roads led there. The old Russian proverb that prison or the poorhouse waits for every man has never been more true, and the verb “to write” took on an additional meaning in the Russian language. The old scholar Zhirmunski once said to me about a group of his best graduate students: “They all write”—i.e., reports for the secret police—and Shklovski told us we should be careful with his little dog because it had learned to “write” from the bright young “adjutants” who came to see him. . . . When Alisa Usov and I later taught at Tashkent University, there was no point in trying to pick out informers, because we knew that everybody “wrote.” And we tried to become adept in Aesopian language. At parties with graduate students we always raised our glasses first “for those who have given us such a happy life,” and both the initiated and the students understood us in the required sense.

It was quite natural for the “adjutants” and all the rest of them to

Seventeen years of persistent indoctrination had been to no avail. These people who collected money for us, as well as those who gave it, were breaking the rule that governed relations with victims of the regime. In periods of violence and terror people retreat into themselves and hide their feelings, but their feelings are ineradicable and cannot be destroyed by any amount of indoctrination. Even if they are wiped out in one generation, as happened here to a considerable extent, they will burst forth again in the next one. We have seen this several times. The idea of good seems really to be inborn, and those who sin against the laws of humanity always see their error in the end—or their children do.

Akhmatova went to the Bulgakovs and returned very touched by the reaction of Elena Sergeyevna, Bulgakov's wife, who burst into tears when she heard about our exile and gave us everything she had. Sima Narbut ran around to see Babel, but did not come back. But all the others kept arriving with contributions and there was soon a sum so large that it lasted us for the journey to Cherdyn and the first two months of our life in Voronezh. Admittedly, we didn't have to pay for our tickets (except for a small supplement on the return journey)—this is the one convenience of being an exile. In the train M. noticed what a lot of money I had, and asked where I had got it. When I explained, he laughed: what a roundabout way of getting the means to travel. All his life he had been eager to travel, but never could because of lack of money. The sum we had now was enormous for those days. People like us had never at any time been rich, but before the war nobody in our circle could even say that he was comparatively well-off. Everybody lived from hand to mouth. Some of the "Fellow Travelers" * started doing quite well as early as 1937, but this was only by comparison with the rest of the population, which could barely make ends meet.

At the end of the day Dligach came with Dina, and I asked him whether he could lend me some money. He went off to get some and left Dina with us. I never saw him again—he vanished for good. I didn't expect him to lend me money, I just wanted to see whether he would disappear like this. We had always suspected that he was an "adjutant," and, as such, it would have been natural for him to clear off when he heard I had been to see M.—for fear that I might have learned about his role. This is indeed what it looked like, but it is still not final proof. He might simply have taken fright—this cannot be ruled out.

* See page 420.

sends a message to the outside world demanding help and calling for resistance. If nothing else is left, one must scream. Silence is the real crime against humanity.

That evening, guarded by three soldiers in the coach to which I had been taken in such comfort, I had lost everything, even despair. There is a moment of truth when you are overcome by sheer astonishment: "So that's where I'm living, and the sort of people I'm living with! So this is what they're capable of! So this is the world I live in!" We are so stupefied that we even lose the power to scream. It was this sort of stupefaction, with the consequent loss of all criteria, standards and values, that came over people when they first landed in prison and suddenly realized the nature of the world they lived in and what the "new era" really meant. Physical torture and fear are not enough to explain the way people broke down and confessed, destroying others in the process. All this was only possible at the "moment of truth," during the madness which afflicted people when it looked as though time had stopped, the world had come to an end and everything was lost for ever. The collapse of all familiar notions is, after all, the end of the world.

But what was so terrible about moving to a small town on the Kama, where, it seemed, we should have to live for three years? Was Cherdyn any worse than Maly Yaroslavets, Strunino, Kalinin, Muinak, Dzhabul, Tashkent, Ulianovsk, Chita, Cheboksary, Vereya, Tarusa or Pskov, in all of which I was cast up in the homeless years after M.'s death? Was this a reason for going out of one's mind and expecting the end of the world?

Yes, I think so. Now that I have regained my sense of despair and am capable once more of screaming, I can say this quite emphatically. And I think that the superb way in which our departure was organized, with the stop at the Lubianka for M.'s suitcase, the porters who didn't have to be paid, and the polite fair-haired escort in civilian clothes who saluted as he wished us a happy journey—nobody had ever gone into exile like this before—was more terrible and sickening, and spoke more eloquently of the end of the world, than the plank beds in the forced-labor camps, the prisons and shackles, and the brutal cursing of policemen, torturers and killers. It was all done with the greatest style and efficiency, without a single harsh word. And there we were, the two of us, guarded by three well-briefed peasant youths, sent off by an unseen and irresistible force to some place in the east, and forced to live in exile, where, as they had seen fit to tell me, M. was to be "preserved." This I had

peers. But mothers prepared their children for life by teaching them the sacred language of their seniors. "My children love Stalin most of all, and me only second," Pasternak's wife, Zinaida Nikolayevna, used to say. Others did not go so far, but nobody confided their doubts to their children: why condemn them to death? And then suppose the child talked in school and brought disaster to the whole family? And why tell it things it didn't need to know? Better it should live like everybody else. . . . So the children grew, swelling the ranks of the hypnotized. "The Russian people is sick," Polia X. once said to me, "it needs to be treated." The sickness has become particularly obvious now that the crisis has passed and we can see the first signs of recovery. It used to be people with doubts who were considered ill.

Mikhail Alexandrovich Zenkevich was one of the first to sink into a hypnotic trance or lethargy. This did not prevent him from going to work, earning money and bringing up his children. Perhaps it even helped him to stay alive and look so utterly normal and healthy. But on a closer look it was clear that he had passed the point of no return: he could not smash the looking-glass. Zenkevich lived in the knowledge that everything he had once lived by was irretrievably lost, gone for good, left on the other side of the glass. It was a feeling that could have been transmuted into poetry, but Zenkevich, the sixth Acmeist,* had firmly decided that there could be no such thing as poetry without the Poets' Guild and all the talk which had so captivated him as a very young man. He now wandered about the ruins of his Rome, trying to persuade himself and others that it was essential to surrender not only one's body, but one's mind as well. "Don't you understand," he said to M., "that it's all finished, that everything's different now?" . . . This argument applied to everything: poetry, honor, ethics, the latest political conjuring trick or act of violence, the show trials, purges, or deportation of the kulaks. . . . It was all justified because "everything's different now." . . . Sometimes, however, he excused himself by saying that he had swallowed so much bromide that his memory had gone. . . . But in fact he had forgotten nothing and was touchingly devoted to M., even though he expressed astonishment at M.'s obstinacy and mad persistence in holding to his own. All that Zenkevich wanted to take with him from the past into his new "life after death" were a few original manuscripts. Begging M. to give him one of his rough drafts, he said: "Gumilev has gone, and I haven't a single page of

* See page 419.

lurking in the pre-revolutionary malaise with all its frantic searchings and false prophecies?

There was a special form of the sickness—lethargy, plague, hypnotic trance or whatever one calls it—that affected all those who committed terrible deeds in the name of the “New Era.” All the murderers, provocateurs and informers had one feature in common: it never occurred to them that their victims might one day rise up again and speak. They also imagined that time had stopped—this, indeed, was the chief symptom of the sickness. We had, you see, been led to believe that in our country nothing would ever change again, and that it was now up to the rest of the world to follow our example and enter the “New Era,” after which all change would cease everywhere. And the people who accepted this doctrine worked sincerely for the greater glory of the new morality which followed from a historical determinism taken to its extreme conclusion. They thought that everybody sent to the next world or to the camps had been eliminated once and for all. It never entered their heads that these ghosts might rise up and call their grave-diggers to account. During the period of rehabilitations,* therefore, they were utterly panic-stricken. They thought that time had gone into reverse and that those they had dubbed “camp dust” had suddenly once more taken on flesh and reassumed their names. They were seized by terror. It so happens that during that time I was able to observe one wretched woman informer who lived next door to Vasilisa Shklovski. She was constantly being summoned to the Prosecutor’s office, where she retracted testimony given many years before, thus clearing the names of persons both living and dead. On returning home, she came running to Vasilisa—whose apartment it had once been her job to watch—and stammered that, as God was her witness, she had never said anything bad about Malkin or anybody else, and that her only reason for going to the Prosecutor’s office now was to say good things about all the dead people so they would be cleared as soon as possible. The woman had never had anything remotely resembling a conscience, but this was more than she could stand, and she had a stroke that left her paralyzed. She must at some moment have got so scared that she really believed these rehabilitations were serious and that all the slanderers and other minions might be brought to trial. This, of course, didn’t happen, but, all the same, she’s better off as she is now—paralyzed and senile. For her, time has stopped once more.

* The period after 1956 when some of Stalin’s victims were officially cleared of the charges once made against them.

And in Tashkent one of the most senior secret-police officials, who was pensioned off after the changes but was occasionally summoned to interviews with former victims who had by some miracle survived and returned from the camps, could not stand it and hanged himself. I was able to read a draft of his suicide letter addressed to the Central Committee. His reasoning was quite simple: As a completely dedicated young Komsomol,* he had been assigned to the secret police and had constantly been decorated and promoted for his work. During all his years of service he had never seen anybody but his colleagues and the prisoners he interrogated; he had worked day and night without pause and it was only after he was retired that he had the time to stop and think about what had been going on. Only then did the thought cross his mind that he might have been serving not the people, but “some kind of Bonapartism.” He tried to put the blame on others: on the people he had interrogated for signing all kinds of bogus confessions, thereby misleading the officials in charge of their cases; on the officials sent from Moscow with instructions concerning “simplified interrogation procedure” and demands that the quotas be fulfilled; and, last but not least, on the informers who volunteered the denunciations which forced the secret police to act against so many people—a secret policeman was prevented by his class consciousness from disregarding information of this kind. . . . He had finally made up his mind to commit suicide after reading Victor Hugo’s “Last Day of a Condemned Man.”

He was buried and the case was hushed up—it couldn’t be otherwise, since he had named all the officials who had come from Moscow to brief him, and the informers who had brought him denunciations. The daughter of the dead man—she was called Larisa, after Larisa Reisner—stormed and raged for a long time, thinking only of getting even with those who had caused her father’s death. Her anger was directed against the ones who had stirred up this nightmarish business. “They should have shown some consideration for the people in official positions at that time! They didn’t start all this, they were just carrying orders.” To this Larisa kept adding that she would not “let the matter rest here,” and she even said she was going to get the whole story out of the country so that people abroad would know how her father had been treated. I asked her what exactly she proposed to complain about. For Larisa it was all quite clear: one could not make such sudden changes because it was so “traumatic.” One could not inflict traumas on people such as her father and his colleagues. “Who is going to sympathize with you?” I

* Member of the Young Communist League.

than that." At the same time he warned me not to place too much hope in mercy from on high: "It might be withdrawn as soon as the fuss has died down," he said. "Does that happen?" I asked. He was staggered by my naïveté. "I'll say it does!" And he added: "Just try not to attract attention. Perhaps they'll forget about you then." But we didn't follow this advice. M. was not one to keep quiet and he went on making a fuss to the very end.

In the train M. said that this merciful sentence to three years in exile meant only that his execution had been put off to a more convenient time—just what Vinaver told me later. I wasn't in the least surprised by this reading of the situation: by 1934 we were already a little wiser about what was going on. When M. said that there was no escape anyway, he was absolutely right—a sober view of the situation could lead to no other conclusion. And when he whispered to me: "Don't trust them," I could only nod in agreement. Who indeed could trust them?

Yet this talk was actually a result of the severe psychotic state to which M. had been reduced in prison. At first, however, it was not M. who appeared unbalanced to me, but the senior guard (called Osip, like both M. and the target of his poem) * when he took me aside and said, his kindly, sheepish eyes popping out of his head, "Tell him to calm down! Tell him we don't shoot people for making up poetry." He had heard us mention the poem in our conversation, and he wanted us to know that people were shot only for spying and sabotage. In the bourgeois countries, he went on, it was quite a different matter: there you could be strung up in no time for writing some stuff they didn't like.

To some degree or another we all, of course, believed what was dinned into us. The young people—whether students, soldiers, writers or guards—were particularly credulous. "No elections could be fairer," a demobilized soldier said to me in 1937. "They put up candidates, and we elect them." M. also fell for it and proved gullible on this occasion: "This is the way they're doing it now, but they'll gradually learn better, and then we shall have proper elections," he said as he left the polling booth, awed by the novelty of the first and last elections in which he was ever to vote. Even we, with all our experience, were not able to form a proper judgment of all the changes, so what could we expect of younger people? . . . I remember how in Kalinin the woman next door who used to bring me milk just before the war once said with a sigh: "At least we get a

* Osip is a form of Joseph.

at night, on a wooden bench flanked by two armed guards. At our least move—we weren't allowed to get up and stretch our legs or change our position in the slightest—the guards at once sprang to the alert and reached for their pistols. For some reason they had put us on a seat right opposite the station entrance, so we faced the endless stream of people coming in. The first thing they saw was us, but they looked away immediately. Even little boys decided not to notice us. We weren't allowed to eat, either, because our food was in our suitcase and we were not supposed to touch our things—it was against the rules. There was no water within reach. Osip didn't dare disobey his orders here: Sverdlovsk was a station not to be taken lightly.

In the evening we were transferred to the narrow-gauge line from Sverdlovsk to Solikamsk. We were taken to some sidings and put aboard a car with ordinary seats, a few rows of which were left empty to separate us from the other passengers. Two soldiers stood next to us all night while a third one guarded the empty seats to keep away passengers who stubbornly tried to sit in them. In Sverdlovsk we had sat side by side, but now we were facing each other by a window of the unlighted car. The white nights had already started, and we could glimpse the wooded hills of the Ural as they flashed by. The railroad went through thick forest, and M. stared out of the window all night long. This was his third or fourth sleepless night.

We traveled in crowded cars and on river steamers, we sat in busy stations swarming with people, but nowhere did anybody pay any attention to the outlandish spectacle of two people, a man and a woman, guarded by three armed soldiers. Nobody gave us so much as a backward glance. Were they just used to sights like this in the Ural, or were they afraid of getting infected? Who knows? Most probably it was a case of the peculiar Soviet etiquette that has been carefully observed for several decades now: if the authorities are sending someone into exile, all well and good, it's none of our business. The indifference of the people around us hurt and upset M. "They used to give alms to convicts and now they don't even look at them." With horror he whispered in my ear that in front of a crowd like this they could do anything to a prisoner—shoot him down, kill him, torture him—and nobody would interfere. Bystanders would just turn their backs, not to be upset by the sight. During the whole journey I tried to catch somebody's eye, but never once succeeded.

Perhaps only the Ural was so stony-faced? In 1938 I lived in Strunino, in the permitted zone a hundred kilometers from Moscow. This

was a small textile town on the Yaroslavl railroad and in those years trainloads of prisoners passed through it every night. People coming in to see my landlady spoke of nothing else. They were outraged at being forbidden to give the prisoners bread. Once my landlady managed to throw a piece of chocolate through the bars of a broken window in one of the prison cars—in a poor working-class family, chocolate was a rare treat and she had been taking it home for her little daughter. A soldier had sworn at her and swung the butt of his rifle at her, but she was happy for the rest of the day because she had managed to do at least this much. True, some of her neighbors sighed and said: "Better not get mixed up with them. They'll plague the life out of you. They'll have you up in front of the factory committee." But my landlady didn't go out to work, so she wasn't afraid of any factory committee.

Will anybody in a future generation ever understand what that piece of chocolate with a child's picture on the wrapper must have meant in a stifling prison train in 1938? People for whom time had stopped and space had become a prison ward, or a punishment cell where you could only stand, or a cattle truck filled to bursting with its freight of half-dead human beings, forgotten outcasts who had been struck from the rolls of the living, stripped of their names, numbered and registered before being shipped to the black limbo of the prison camps—it was such as these who now suddenly received for the first time in many months their first message from the forbidden world outside: a little piece of chocolate to tell them that they were not yet forgotten, and that people were still alive beyond their prison bars.

On the way to Cherdyn I consoled myself with the thought that the dour people of the Ural were simply afraid to look at us, but that every one of them, on returning home, would tell his family about the two people, a man and a woman, being taken somewhere to the north by three soldiers.

I HAD realized that M. was ill the first night, when I noticed that he was not sleeping, but sitting with his legs crossed and listening very intently to something. "Do you hear?" he asked me whenever our eyes met. I listened—but there was only the hammering of wheels and the snoring of passengers. "You have bad hearing. You never hear anything." He really had extremely fine hearing, and he could catch the slightest sounds that I never heard. But this time it was not a question of hearing.

He spent the whole journey listening like this, and from time to time he would shudder and tell me that disaster might strike any moment, and that we must be ready, not be caught unawares. I realized that not only was he expecting to be put to death, but that he thought it would happen any moment—right now, during the journey. "On the way?" I asked. "You must be thinking of the twenty-six commissars." * "And why not?" he answered. "You think our own people couldn't do the same thing?" We both knew perfectly well that our own people were capable of anything. But in his madness M. hoped to cheat his executioners, to run for it, to break away or be killed in the attempt—anything rather than die at their hands. It is strange that all of us, whether mad or not, never give up this one hope: suicide is the last resort, which we keep in reserve, believing that it is never too late to use it. Yet so many people who were determined never to fall alive into the hands of the secret police were taken by surprise at the last moment.

The thought of this last resort had consoled and soothed me all my life, and often, at times when things were quite unbearable, I had proposed to M. that we commit suicide together. M. had always sharply rejected the idea.†

His main argument was: "How do you know what will come afterward? Life is a gift that nobody should renounce." And there was the final and most telling argument: "Why do you think you ought to be happy?" Nobody was so full of the joy of life as M., but though he never sought unhappiness, neither did he count on being what is called "happy."

* The twenty-six Bolshevik commissars of Baku who were shot in 1921, allegedly on British orders.

† *Author's Note:* Georgi Ivanov's story about how M. had tried to kill himself as a young man in Warsaw is, I believe, completely without foundation, like many other romantic tales by this writer.

Generally, however, he dismissed the idea of suicide with a joke: "Kill ourselves? Impossible! What will Averbakh say?" Or: "How can I live with a professional suicide like you?" The thought of suicide first came to him during his illness on the way to Cherdyn as a means of escaping the death by shooting that he believed was inevitable. It was then that I said to him: "Very well, if they shoot us, we shan't have to commit suicide." At this, already ill and obsessed as he was, he suddenly burst out laughing: "There you go again." From then on our life was such that the suicide theme recurred frequently, but M. always said: "Wait . . . not now. . . . We'll see. . . ." In 1937 he even consulted Akhmatova, but she said: "Do you know what they'll do? They'll start taking even better care of writers and even give some Leonov or other a dacha. Why do you want that to happen?" If he had made up his mind to do it then, he would have been spared his second arrest and the endless journey in a cattle car to Vladivostok, to horror and death in a camp, and I should not have had to live on after him. I am always struck that people find it so difficult to cross this fateful threshold. There is something in the Christian injunction against suicide which is profoundly in keeping with human nature—this is why people don't do it, even though life can be far more terrible than death, as we have seen in our times. When M. had gone and I was left alone, I was sustained by the memory of his words "Why do you think you ought to be happy?" and by the passage in the "Life" of the Archpriest Avvakum when his exhausted wife asks him: "How much further must we go?" and he replies: "Until the very grave, woman." Whereupon she gets to her feet and walks on.

If these notes of mine survive, people reading them may think they were written by a sick person, by a hypochondriac. . . . By then all will have been forgotten and nobody will believe the testimony of a witness. One only has to think of all the people abroad who still do not believe us. Yet they are contemporaries, separated from us only by space, not by time. I recently read the following reasonable-sounding words by a foreign author: "They say that everybody was afraid there. It cannot be that everybody was afraid. Some were and some weren't. . . ." It sounds so reasonable and logical, but in fact our life was far from logical. And it wasn't just that I was a "professional suicide," as M. had called me teasingly. Many other people thought about it, too. Not for nothing was the best play in the Soviet repertory entitled *The Suicide*.*

So it was in the train to Cherdyn, traveling under the eye of three

* By Nikolai Erdman.

guards, that M. first thought of killing himself, but this was the result of illness. He was a man who always noted everything in the minutest detail and his powers of observation were extraordinarily acute. "Attention to detail," he noted in one of his rough drafts, "is the virtue of the lyric poet. Carelessness and sloppiness are the devices of lyrical sloth." But now, on the journey to Cherdyn, this feral perceptiveness and acute sense of hearing had turned against him, exacerbating his illness. In the hectic throng of crowded stations, and in railroad cars, he constantly registered each little detail, and, thinking it all referred to him personally—isn't egocentrism the first symptom of mental illness?—he decided it all added up to one thing: the fateful moment was at hand.

In Solikamsk we were put in a truck to be taken from the station to the pier. On the way we drove through a forest clearing. The truck was full of workers and M. was frightened by the appearance of one of them, a bearded man in a dark-red shirt with an ax in his hand. "They're going to behead me, as in Peter's time," he whispered to me. But on the river steamer, in the cabin we had got thanks to Osip, M. started making fun of his own fears and clearly saw that he was frightened of people who were no threat to him—such as the workers in Solikamsk. And he added bitterly that they would lull his suspicions and then "grab" him when he was least expecting it. This is indeed just what happened four years later.

In his dementia M. understood perfectly well what was coming, but when he recovered he lost this sense of reality and began to believe he was safe. In our sort of life people of sound mind had to shut their eyes to their surroundings—otherwise they would have thought they were having hallucinations. To shut your eyes like this is not easy and requires a great effort. Not to see what is going on around you is not just a passive activity. Soviet citizens have achieved a high degree of mental blindness, with devastating consequences for their whole psychological make-up. This generation of people who chose to be blind is now disappearing for the most primitive of reasons—they are dying off—but what have they passed on to their children?

We were glad to see Cherdyn with its pleasant scenery: it reminded one of what the country was like before the time of Peter the Great. We were taken to the local Cheka and handed over to the Commandant together with our papers. Osip explained that he had brought "a very special bird" whom they were ordered to "preserve" without fail. He was evidently very anxious to impress this on

human dignity. For this they had given up any kind of activity, condemning themselves to total isolation and the prospect of an early death. This was undoubtedly passive resistance of a kind, but the movement known by this term in India is by comparison a very active form of political struggle. In a certain sense they had now adopted the idea of self-perfection once proposed by the Vekhi (Landmarks)* group and indignantly rejected by them at that time. It must be said, however, that they had little choice. The only other thing they could have done was to scream, but no one would have heard anyway.

I later heard quite by chance what happened subsequently to the housekeeper at the Cherdyn hospital. She was sent to Kolyma and there told the story of M.'s illness to a fellow prisoner, a woman writer from Leningrad called E. M. Tager. After jumping out of the window, M. went on believing he would be shot, but he no longer tried to run away from it. He had decided that his executioners would come at some particular time, and at the appointed hour he waited for them in fear and agitation. In the hospital ward where we were living, there was a large clock on the wall. One day M. said he expected to be put to death at six o'clock that evening, and the housekeeper advised me to move the hands on the clock without his noticing. She and I managed to do this, and this time M. was not overcome with fear as the fateful hour approached. "Look," I told him, "you said six, but it's already quarter past seven." Oddly enough, this trick worked and he no longer had bouts of terror associated with certain hours of the day.

The housekeeper had remembered this episode in exact detail and told it to E. M. Tager, who was her neighbor in the camp barrack. After twenty years in the labor camps Tager was rehabilitated after the Twentieth Congress † in 1956 and returned to her native city. She was given an apartment in the same building as Akhmatova, and it was there that I met her. And I, who also owe it to chance that I have survived with my memories, recognized the woman who told her the story of the clock as the housekeeper from Cherdyn. It is thus only through a chain of pure chance that I am able to write down (will it ever find its way to other readers?) the story of how the worst expectations of one of our fellow exiles in Cherdyn proved only too true. My nameless Cherdyn sister died in Kolyma from

* See note on Berdiayev in the Appendix.

† A forced-labor camp area in the Soviet Far East.

‡ The Party Congress at which Khrushchev made his "secret speech" denouncing Stalin.

total exhaustion. I have been able to discover nothing about the fate of her children whom she had left behind "to give them at least a chance. . . ." Did they escape the fate that usually befell the children of exiles and prisoners? Did they have to pay the price of prison and camp on account of the parents who had wanted only to preserve their human dignity? And have they themselves kept the human dignity for which their parents paid so dearly?

This I do not know, and shall never learn.

17 Hallucinations

WE WALKED around Cherdyn, talked with people and spent our nights in the hospital. I was no longer afraid of keeping the window open. There was only the sling on M.'s arm to remind me of that first night when I had been left holding an empty jacket. When the secret police came to take M. away for the second time in 1938, I was again left with an empty jacket in my hands: in all the hurry M. forgot to take it.

During the few days in Cherdyn M. became very much calmer. The crisis had passed, but his illness was not over. As before, he was waiting for the death sentence to be carried out, but his mental state had improved to the point where he had regained a certain sense of reality. After the business with the clock he said that there was obviously no escaping the end in store for him, but that there was nothing to be done about it—even committing suicide wasn't so simple, "otherwise nobody would come into their clutches alive. . . ."

His agitation had passed, but he still had auditory hallucinations. They took the form not of inner voices, but of violent and utterly strange ones which seemed to come from without. M. spoke about them almost objectively, trying to understand what they meant. He explained that these voices he was hearing could not come from inside because they used a vocabulary that wasn't his. "I couldn't say such things even to myself"—this was his argument in favor of the real existence of these voices. In a way his ability to analyze them made it harder for him to fight his hallucinations. He couldn't believe in their internal origin because he thought that a hallucination was necessarily some kind of reflection of one's own inner world.

he was threatened not only with arrest, difficulties in his work, the spreading of rumors among his friends and colleagues that he was already a police spy, but also with the "pangs of conscience" he was bound to suffer for all the misery he would bring on his family if he refused to cooperate. This word, occurring in such a specific context in M.'s hallucinations, was a direct indication that they originated in those nighttime interrogations. Neither had M. imagined or dredged up from some obscure recesses of his own mind the idea of a trial with a list of defendants accused of conspiracy against Stalin. During my interview with M. in prison I had myself heard the interrogator allude to this possibility when he told me he was not "proceeding with the case" only on orders from above. But how, he had then asked by way of a rhetorical question, could one explain M.'s whole case except as a conspiracy?

Where is the borderline, in times such as ours, between the normal and the sick? M. and I thought about the same things, but with him they assumed a tangible quality: he not only thought about them, but saw in his mind's eye what they could lead to. He would wake me during the night to say that Akhmatova had been arrested and was at that moment being taken for questioning. "Why do you think so?" I asked. "I just do." Walking round Cherdyn, he would look for her corpse in the ravines. Of course it was madness, but once I had recovered from the torpor that had come over me in the train, I too couldn't sleep at night for wondering which of our friends had already been arrested and what they would be accused of—they would be lucky if the charge was only failure to denounce us, but there was nothing that couldn't be pinned on them. The real madness would have been to believe that the interrogator had meant it when he said he was not going to "proceed with the case." To be so trusting could even be despicable: I remembered, for instance, how I had recoiled from Adalis when she told me how she had been summoned for questioning about one of her husbands and, believing everything the interrogator said, at once disowned him, even though he was totally innocent.

Was I sick when I lay awake during those nights, imagining the way in which all my friends were being questioned and tortured, even if such tortures were as yet only psychological, or at least left no traces on the body? No, there was nothing sick about this—any normal person in my place would have tormented himself with similar thoughts. Who of us has never pictured himself in the office of the interrogator? Who of us has never thought up answers to the

had known the Czarist jails, which were scarcely distinguished by their humaneness, confirmed my suspicion that prisoners held out much better and kept their sanity a great deal more easily in those days.

Many years later, in a train traveling east, I happened to share a compartment with a young woman doctor who had the same kind of bad luck as the one in Cherdyn: she had been assigned to a hospital in a labor camp. Times were not now so terrible—this was in 1954—and the girl started to tell me her troubles: How could she get out of it? It was more than flesh and blood could stand. "The worst is that you're helpless. What sort of doctors are we? We say and do what we're told." By this time I knew only too well that no doctor dares to show independence and is all too often forced to go against his conscience, though some are not even aware of breaking the Hippocratic oath when they refuse to give certificates of illness or disability. But what's the point of picking on the doctors? We all do only what we are told. We all act "on instructions," and there is no sense in closing our eyes to the fact.

18 Professional Sickness

I MAGINE that for a poet auditory hallucinations are something in the nature of an occupational disease.

As many poets have said—Akhmatova (in "Poem Without a Hero") and M. among them—a poem begins with a musical phrase ringing insistently in the ears; at first inchoate, it later takes on a precise form, though still without words. I sometimes saw M. trying to get rid of this kind of "hum," to brush it off and escape from it. He would toss his head as though it could be shaken out like a drop of water that gets into your ear while bathing. But it was always louder than any noise, radio or conversation in the same room.

Akhmatova told me that when "Poem Without a Hero" came to her, she was ready to try anything just to get rid of it, even rushing to do her washing. But nothing helped. At some point words formed behind the musical phrase and then the lips began to move. The work of a poet has probably something in common with that of a composer, and the appearance of words is the crucial factor that

distinguishes it from musical composition. The "hum" sometimes came to M. in his sleep, but he could never remember it on waking. I have a feeling that verse exists before it is composed (M. never talked of "writing" verse, only of "composing" it and then copying it out). The whole process of composition is one of straining to catch and record something compounded of harmony and sense as it is relayed from an unknown source and gradually forms itself into words. The last stage of the work consists in ridding the poem of all the words foreign to the harmonious whole which existed before the poem arose. Such words slip in by chance, being used to fill gaps during the emergence of the whole. They become lodged in the body of the poem, and removing them is hard work. This final stage is a painful process of listening in to oneself in a search for the objective and absolutely precise unity called a "poem." In his poem "Save My Speech," the last adjective to come was "painstaking" (in "the painstaking tar of hard work"). M. complained that he needed something more precise and spare here, in the manner of Akhmatova: "She knows how to do it." He seemed to be waiting for her help.

I noticed that in his work on a poem there were two points at which he would sigh with relief—when the first words in a line or stanza came to him, and when the last of the foreign bodies was driven out by the right word. Only then is there an end to the process of listening in to oneself—the same process that can prepare the way for a disturbance of the inner hearing and loss of sanity. The poem now seems to fall away from the author and no longer torments him with its resonance. He is released from the thing that obsesses him. Io, the poor cow, escapes from the gadfly.

If the poem won't "go away," M. said, it means that there is something wrong with it, or something "still hidden in it"—a last fruitful bud from which a new shoot might sprout. In other words, the work is not finished. Whenever M.'s "inner voice" ceased, he was always very eager to read the new poem to someone. I wasn't enough for this: I witnessed his throes at such close quarters that M. always thought I must also be able to hear the "hum." He even reproached me sometimes for not having caught part of it. In his last Voronezh period (when he wrote the verse in his Second and Third Notebooks) we went round to Natasha Shtempel, or invited Fedia Marants, an agronomist of the utmost charm and integrity who in his youth had studied to be a violinist but had had to give it up when he damaged his hand in an accident. Fedia had some of the inner harmony which comes to people who listen to music, and

Because of his acute sensitivity M. was no doubt easy game for his jailers and they were not, therefore, particularly subtle in their treatment of him. They kept him in a cell for two persons. The interrogator said that solitary confinement was "forbidden for reasons of humanity." I knew this was a lie. If it had ever been forbidden, it was only on paper. At every period we met people who had been kept in cells all alone. But whenever there was a shortage of prison space these tiny cells were filled to bursting point. Generally, however, the second place in a cell for two was used in a way of which in 1934, before M.'s arrest, we had never heard: M.'s cellmate tried to frighten him with the thought of his trial, assuring him that all his family and friends had been arrested and would appear in the dock together with him. He went through all the articles of the criminal code under which M. might be accused, as though giving him "legal advice," but in fact trying to alarm him at the prospect of being charged with terrorism, conspiracy and the like. M. would return from his nighttime interrogation to the clutches of his "fellow prisoner," who gave him no respite. But the man's approach was very crude, and M. once cut him short by asking: "Why are your nails so clean?" He had stupidly claimed to be a "veteran" of several months' standing, but his nails were neatly manicured. Early one morning he returned to the cell, supposedly from an interrogation, a little later than M., who noticed that he smelled of onion—and told him so.

The interrogator, countering M.'s remark at our interview that he was being held in a cell by himself, mentioned the humane ban on solitary confinement and added that M. had been with another prisoner whom it had been necessary to transfer because of M.'s "rudeness" to him. "How considerate!" M. managed to get in by way of the last word in this exchange.

At the very first interrogation M. had admitted to being the author of the poem on Stalin, so the stool pigeon's task could not have been merely to find out something that M. was hiding. Part of the function of these people was to unnerve and wear down prisoners under interrogation, to make their lives a misery. Until 1937 our secret police made much of their psychological methods, but afterward these gave way to physical torture, with beatings of the most primitive kind. After 1937 I never again heard of anyone being held in solitary-confinement cells, with or without stool pigeons. Perhaps people picked out for such treatment after 1937 did not leave the Lubyanka alive.

M. was put through the physical ordeal which had always been

were they caused? There was some talk of the secret police having among their special equipment phonograph records with the voice of a "standard" wife, mother or daughter which were used to break a prisoner's spirit. After these more subtle torments and psychological methods had been replaced by exceedingly primitive ones, nobody complained any more that he had heard his wife's voice. Among the cruder methods, I know, for instance, that they would arrange for a woman prisoner to catch a glimpse of a man hideously beaten up and covered in blood, and then say that it was her son or husband. But there was no more talk of voices coming from a distance. Were there such recordings? I do not know and have no means of finding out. In view of the hallucinations from which M. suffered on leaving prison, I am inclined to think that this woman's voice was of the same order as the inner voices that plagued him in Cherdyn. There are still rumors about a laboratory for experiments with drugs.

Methods like these are possible only if a prisoner's links with the outside world are broken from the moment of his arrest. Apart from the signatures in the receipt book for packages, he is left completely in the dark about the people he has been torn from—and by no means everybody is allowed to receive packages. The first means of pressure brought to bear on a prisoner is the withdrawal of his right to receive packages—the last thread that binds him to the world outside. This is why it is better in our sort of life to have no ties. A man feels so much stronger if he doesn't have to watch out all the time during his interrogation for hints and pretended slips of the tongue about the fate of members of his family. It is harder to unhinge a single man, and he is better able to look after his own interests and conduct a systematic defense of himself. Even though the sentence was decided beforehand, a shrewd self-defense could still make some difference. One friend of mine was able to outwit his interrogator—admittedly a provincial one—in an extraordinary way. After a long battle he agreed to go back to his cell and write down all the nonsense required of him. He was given paper and he put down everything the interrogator wanted, but without signing it. The interrogator was so pleased that he didn't notice this. My friend was obviously born under a lucky star, because about this time Yezhov was dismissed. His case hadn't yet come before the tribunal, no sentence had been passed and he was able to get a reversal on the grounds that his deposition was not valid without a signature. He belongs to those few who were released after Yezhov's fall. But to be born under a

reams of such "typical" remarks. Christophorovich tried some of them out on M., for example: "You said to So-and-so that you would rather live in Paris than in Moscow." The theory was that M., as a bourgeois writer and ideologist of a dying class, must surely be eager to return to its bosom. The name of the person to whom he was supposed to have made such remarks was always a common one, such as Ivanov or Petrov (or, if need be, Ginzburg or Rabinovich). The guinea pig on whom this type of approach was tried out was supposed to quake in his shoes and begin frantically going over in his mind all the Ivanovs or Rabinoviches to whom he might have confided his dream of going abroad. In the eyes of Soviet law, such a dream was, if not an outright crime, at least an aggravating circumstance for which you could even be charged under some convenient article of the criminal code. In any case, an accused person's class nature was fully revealed by his ambition to go to Paris, and in our classless society, account must always be taken of one's class allegiance. . . . Another example of this kind of questioning was: "You complained to So-and-so that before the Revolution you earned much more by your writings than now." M. was obviously not to be caught out by such things. The whole approach was indeed crude, but they had no need of subtlety. Why bother? "Give us a man, and we'll make a case."

Christophorovich had been conducting the interrogation in preparation for a trial, as was implicit in his words "We have decided not to proceed with the case" and similar remarks. By our standards he had more than enough to go on, and a trial would have been a more natural outcome than what actually happened. The interrogator's approach was to seek an explanation for every single word in the poem on Stalin. He was particularly concerned to find out what had prompted the writing of it. He was flabbergasted when M. suddenly told him in reply to this question that more than anything else he hated fascism. M. had not intended to speak so frankly to the interrogator, and he blurted this out despite himself—he was by then in such a state that he just didn't care. As he was in duty bound to, the interrogator stormed and shouted, demanding to know what M. thought was fascist about our system. This question he repeated in my presence during the interview, but, astonishingly enough, he didn't pursue the matter when M. replied evasively. M. later assured me that there was something ambiguous about the interrogator's whole behavior, and that behind his blustering manner one could constantly sense his hatred for Stalin. I didn't believe M., but in

1938, when Christophorovich was also shot, I began to wonder. Perhaps M. had spotted something that a more balanced and worldly-wise person would not have seen—such people are always too conventional in their reasoning. It is difficult to believe that the mighty Yagoda and his awesome organization surrendered to Stalin without a struggle. In 1934, when M.'s poem was being investigated, it was widely known that Vyshinski was intriguing against Yagoda. In our incredible blindness—what better example of conventional reasoning?—we had eagerly followed the rumors of a struggle between the Prosecutor General and the head of the secret police, thinking that Vyshinski, a lawyer by training, would put an end to the excesses and terror of secret tribunals. To think that we believed this—we who knew what to expect from the Vyshinski of the trials in the twenties! For Yagoda's followers, however, and in particular for Christophorovich, it was clear that a victory for Vyshinski would do them no good at all, and, of course, they knew better than anyone else what tortures and humiliations to expect in their final days. When there are two groups fighting for the right to unlimited control over the fate of their fellow citizens, the losers are doomed to die, and perhaps M. really was able to read the secret thoughts of his iron-willed interrogator. But the extraordinary thing about those times was that all these "new people," as they killed and were destroyed themselves, thought that only they had a right to their views and judgments. Any one of them would have laughed out loud at the idea that a man who could be brought before them under guard at any time of the day or night, who had to hold up his trousers with his hands and spoke without the slightest attempt at theatrical effects—that such a man might have no doubt, despite everything, of his right to express himself freely in poetry. As we were to discover, Yagoda liked M.'s poem so much that he even learned it by heart—he recited it to Bukharin while we were still in Cherdyn—but he would not have hesitated to destroy the whole of literature, past, present and future, if he had thought it to his advantage. For people of this extraordinary type, human blood is like water and all individuals, except for the victorious ruler, are replaceable. The worth of any man is measured by his usefulness to the ruler and his henchmen. The skilled propagandists who help to rouse the people to expressions of enthusiasm for the leader deserve to be better paid than the rest. Our rulers may sometimes have bestowed favors on their cronies—they all liked to play the Haroun al Rashid—but they never allowed anyone to interfere in their business, or to have an opinion

of his own. From this point of view, M.'s poem was a real crime—a usurpation of the right to words and thoughts that the ruling powers reserved exclusively for themselves, whether they were enemies or friends of Stalin. This astonishing presumption has become second nature to our rulers. Your right to an opinion is always determined by your rank and status in the hierarchy. Not long ago Surkov explained to me that Pasternak's novel is no good because its hero, Dr. Zhivago, has no right to make any judgments about our way of life—"we" had not given him this right. Christophorovich was no more able to grant such a right to M.

Christophorovich referred to the poem as a "document" and to the writing of it as a terrorist "act." At our interview he said he had never before set eyes on such a monstrous "document." M. did not deny that he had read it to a number of people—eleven all told, including me, our brothers and Akhmatova. The interrogator had extracted their names one after another by going through all the people who came to see us, and it was evident that he really was very well informed about all those closest to us. At the interview M. told me all the names that had cropped up during the interrogation so that I could warn everybody concerned. None of them suffered, but they all got a terrible fright. I do not wish to give all the names here, otherwise someone may be tempted to speculate as to the identity of the traitor. Christophorovich was anxious to know how each of his listeners had reacted to the poem. M. insisted that they had all begged him to forget it and not bring ruin on himself and others. Apart from the eleven named during the interrogation, seven or eight other people, including Shklovski and Pasternak, had heard the poem, but the interrogator did not mention them, and they did not therefore figure in the case.

M. signed the record of his interrogation without even reading it over—something for which I gave him no rest during the next few years. Even the interrogator rebuked him for this in my presence. "I suppose he trusted you," I said angrily. In fact, I believe that in this respect there was no reason not to trust him: by our standards it was a perfectly real case, there was enough material for ten trials and therefore it would have made no sense to invent anything.

At the beginning of the interrogation, M. noticed, the interrogator had behaved much more aggressively than toward the end. He even stopped describing the poem as a "terrorist act" and threatening that M. would be shot. At first he threatened not only M. with the firing squad but all his "accomplices" as well—that is, everybody who had

heard the poem. When we later discussed this softening in the interrogator's attitude, we decided it had been brought about by the instruction to "preserve" M. I did not see Christophorovich in the early stage, when he had used threats against M., but I must say that at the interview his manner still seemed to me monstrously aggressive. But this is in the nature of the job—probably not only in our country.

The interrogator probed into M.'s feelings about the Soviet system and M. told him that he was willing to co-operate with any Soviet institution except the Cheka.

He said this not out of daring or bravado, but because of his total inability to be devious. I believe this quality of M.'s was a puzzle to the interrogator, one he could not fathom. His only explanation for such a statement, particularly when it was made to his face, would have been stupidity, but stupidity of this kind he had never encountered before, and he had a baffled look when he quoted M.'s words at our interview. M. and I recalled this detail at the height of the Yezhov terror, when Shaginian wrote a half-page article in *Pravda* saying how gladly persons under investigation unburdened themselves to their interrogators and "co-operated" with them at their interrogations. This she explained by the great sense of responsibility common to all Soviet citizens. Whether Shaginian wrote this article of her own free will or on instructions from above, it is something that should not be forgotten.

In their depravity and the depths to which they sank, some writers exceeded all bounds. In 1934 already Akhmatova and I heard that Pavlenko was telling people how, out of curiosity, he had accepted an invitation from Christophorovich, who was a good friend of his, to hide in a cupboard, or between double doors, and listen to one of the nighttime interrogations. In the interrogator's room I noticed several identical doors—far too many for one room. We were later told that some of these doors opened into cubby-holes, and others into emergency exits. Premises like these are scientifically designed in the most up-to-date fashion with the aim of protecting the interrogator against prisoners who might try to attack him.

According to Pavlenko, M. cut a sorry figure during his interrogation: his trousers kept slipping down and he had to hold them up with his hands; his replies were confused, incoherent and beside the point, he talked nonsense and was very nervous, squirming "like a fish in a frying pan." Public opinion here has always been conditioned to take the side of the strong against the weak, but what Pav-

that he feared only people's hands. The "fingers . . . fat as grubs" in the Stalin poem are certainly an echo of Demian Bedny's trouble with Stalin (no wonder he was so frightened and advised Pasternak not to get mixed up in M.'s business). The adjective "thin-necked" was inspired by the sight of Molotov—M. had noticed his thin neck sticking out of his collar and the smallness of the head that crowned it. "Just like a tomcat," said M., pointing at his portrait.

The first people to hear the poem were horrified, and begged M. to forget it. For these particular people, its value was also lessened by the self-evident nature of the truth it contained. In more recent years it has been received with greater sympathy. Some people ask me how it was that M. could understand everything so well already in 1934, and wonder whether there is a mistake in the dating. These are people who accept the official story that everything was all right until the Yezhov terror, and that even that wasn't so bad—it was only after the war, when he was in his dotage, that the old man went out of his mind and made a mess of things. This may no longer hold water, but we continue to idealize the twenties and the beginning of the thirties. This is a stubborn legend. The old generation is dying out without having had its say, and there are now old men—including even former camp inmates—who go on talking about the glorious years of their youth as a golden age cut short only by their arrest. What will our grandchildren make of it if we all leave the scene in silence?

Among those who heard the Stalin poem, I noted three different views. Kuzin thought M. shouldn't have written it because it conflicted with his general attitude toward the Revolution. He accused M. of inconsistency: if he had accepted the Revolution, then he should put up with its leader and not complain. There is a kind of blockheaded logic about this, though I do not understand how Kuzin, who knew M.'s verse and prose by heart (though in his old age he forgot about this and even claimed in a letter to Morozov that he had never read "Journey to Armenia"), could not see the ambivalence and constant torment in M.'s work. People evidently find it hard to understand anything that is camouflaged, or even just slightly veiled. They need to have everything said straight out, and I think that is why M. wrote this poem in such plain language—he was tired of the deafness of his listeners who were always saying: "What beautiful verse, but there's nothing political about it! Why can't it be published?"

Ehrenburg does not like the poem, correctly regarding it as un-

typical of M.'s work because of this straightforward, uncomplicated quality.

But, whatever one may think of it as poetry, can one really regard it as incidental to the rest of his work, as a kind of freak, if it is the poem which brought him to his terrible end? It was, to my mind, a gesture, an act that flowed logically from the whole of his life and work. It is true, however, that it is peculiar in that he makes concessions to his readers he had never made before. He had never met them halfway or striven to be understood, regarding every listener or partner in conversation as his equal and therefore not trying to simplify things for him. But he was concerned to make his Stalin poem comprehensible and accessible to anybody. On the other hand, he did his best to make sure it could not serve as an instrument of crude political propaganda (as he even said to me, "That is none of my business"). But he did write the poem with a view to a much wider circle of readers than usual, though he knew, of course, that nobody would be able to read it at the time. I believe he did not want to die before stating in unambiguous terms what he thought about the things going on around us.

Pasternak was also hostile to the poem. He poured out his reproaches to me (this was when M. was already in Voronezh). Only one of these reproaches stands out in my memory: "How could he write a poem like that when he's a Jew?" I still do not see the logic of this, and at the time I offered to recite the poem to him again so he could tell me exactly what it was wrong for a Jew to say, but he refused with horror.

The reaction of those who first heard the poem was reminiscent of Herzen's story of his conversation with Shchepkin, who went to London to ask him to stop his activities because all the young people in Russia were being arrested for reading "The Bell." Fortunately, however, nobody suffered because he had heard M.'s poem. M., moreover, was not a political writer, nor was his role in society in any way like Herzen's. Though who is to say where the distinction lies? And to what extent is one obliged to protect one's fellow citizens? I am surprised that Shchepkin was so concerned about Herzen's young compatriots and wanted at all costs to shield and cloister them from the outside world. As for my own contemporaries, I cannot say that I would want to expose them to any hazards—let them live out their lives in peace and do the best they can in these hard times. It will all pass, God willing, and life will come into its own again. Why should I try to waken the sleeping if I believe that they

will in any case wake up by themselves one day? I do not know whether I am right, but, like everybody else, I am infected by the spirit of passivity and submissiveness.

All I know for certain is that M.'s poem was ahead of its time, and that at the moment it was written people's minds were not ready for it. The regime was still winning supporters and one still heard the voices of true believers saying in all sincerity that the future belonged to them, and that their rule would last for a thousand years. The rest, who no doubt outnumbered the true believers, just sighed and whispered among themselves. Their voices went unheard because nobody had any need of them. The line "ten steps away no one hears our speeches" precisely defines the situation in those days. The "speeches" in question were regarded as something old and outmoded, echoes of a past that would never return. The true believers were not only sure of their own triumph, they also thought they were bringing happiness to the rest of mankind as well, and their view of the world had such a sweeping, unitary quality that it was very seductive. In the pre-revolutionary era there had already been this craving for an all-embracing idea which would explain everything in the world and bring about universal harmony at one go. That is why people so willingly closed their eyes and followed their leader, not allowing themselves to compare words with deeds, or to weigh the consequences of their actions. This explained the progressive loss of a sense of reality—which had to be regained before there could be any question of discovering what had been wrong with the theory in the first place. It will still be a long time before we are able to add up what this mistaken theory cost us, and hence to determine whether there was any truth in the line "the earth was worth ten heavens to us." But, having paid the price of ten heavens, did we really inherit the earth?

36 *Capitulation*

M. HAD a long period of silence—about five years between 1926 and 1930—when he wrote no verse (though he did write some prose during this time). The same thing happened for a time with Akhmatova, and with Pasternak it lasted a good ten years. "It must be something about the air," said Akhmatova—and there

said in my presence—we visited him on our way through Baku in 1921—that he had fled from Moscow and sought seclusion in Baku because he had become convinced that “ideas have ceased to rule the world.” What Dionysian cults did he understand by “ideas,” this teacher and prophet of the pre-revolutionary decade, if he had failed to see, at the time of our conversation, what enormous territories and vast numbers of people had just been won over by an idea? The idea in question was that there is an irrefutable scientific truth by means of which, once they are possessed of it, people can foresee the future, change the course of history at will and make it rational. This religion—or science, as it was modestly called by its adepts—invests man with a god-like authority and has its own creed and ethic, as we have seen. In the twenties a good many people drew a parallel with the victory of Christianity, and thought this new religion would also last a thousand years. The more scrupulous developed the analogy further and mentioned the historical crimes of the Church, hastening to point out, however, that the essence of Christianity has not been changed by the Inquisition. All were agreed on the superiority of the new creed which promised heaven on earth instead of otherworldly rewards. But the most important thing for them was the end to all doubt and the possibility of absolute faith in the new, scientifically obtained truth.

“And suppose it isn’t so? What if people take a different view in the future?” I once asked Averbakh with reference to a literary judgment he had just delivered about M. (“They say he has just returned from Armenia and published some bad verse.”) I asked him how he could know this, and he replied that M. did not have the right “class approach.” He then explained that there was no such thing as art or culture in the abstract, but only “bourgeois art” and “proletarian art”—nothing was absolute and all values were conditioned by class. He was not at all put out by the fact that his own class values were now regarded as absolutes: since the victory of the proletariat was the dawn of a new era which would last forever, the values attributed by Averbakh to the class whose servant he was constituted absolutes. He was genuinely surprised that I could cast doubt on his judgments, which, being based on the only scientific method, were infallible—anything he damned was damned forevermore. I told M. about this conversation, which had taken place in a tramcar. He was fascinated by the monolithic quality of Averbakh’s faith in his own truth and the way he reveled in the peculiar elegance of his logical constructions. This was in 1930, when M. could

science" went out of use at this time—concepts like these were easily discredited, now the right formula had been found.

It was characteristic of those years that all such concepts were treated as pure abstractions, divorced from the actual social and human framework which alone gave them substance. This made it all the easier to dismiss them out of hand: nothing was simpler, for example, than to show that nowhere in the world is there such a thing as absolute freedom of the press, and then to conclude that instead of making do with the wretched substitutes fobbed off on us by liberals, it was better to face up to the situation like a man and abandon all this hankering after "Freedom." Such arguments seemed plausible enough to minds not yet capable of making finer logical distinctions.

Psychological factors that worked in favor of capitulation were the fear of being left out in the cold, of not moving with the times, and the need for an all-embracing "organic world-view" (as it was called) which could be applied to all aspects of life. There was also the belief that the victory was final, and that the victors were here to stay for all eternity. But the main thing was that those who surrendered had nothing of their own to offer. This extraordinary emptiness was perhaps best expressed by Shklovski in his *Zoo*, that sorry book in which he tearfully implores the victors to take him under their wing. Whether this attitude was self-induced or whether it was a bitter reaction to the war and the trenches, the fact is that the desire to be looked after and protected like a child was enormously strong, and only those who shared it were regarded as being in step with the times.

Once, in the editorial office of *Priboi*,* M. refused to sign a collective letter from the writers to the Central Committee, on the grounds that "in literary matters they should appeal to us, not we to them." The letter was a petition on behalf of a certain critic who was being hounded by RAPP for allegedly having reviewed a novel by Liashko without reading it to the end. The writers were now asking the Central Committee to order an end to this persecution, and in support of their appeal they quoted the Central Committee's resolution on literature (1925)† in which the Party had called on the writers to end their squabbles and make common cause in their efforts to fulfill the Party's command.

As usual, there were a lot of people in the *Priboi* office, and they

* Leningrad publishing house for which Mandelstam did translations.

† See page 420.

world in which there would be no more violence, and that no sacrifice was too great for it. Nobody noticed that the end had begun to justify the means, and then, as always, gradually been lost sight of. It was the people of the twenties who first began to make a neat distinction between the sheep and the goats, between "us" and "them," between upholders of the "new" and those still mindful of the basic rules that governed human relations in the past.

The victors might well have been surprised at the ease of their victory, but they were so sure they were right, and so sure they were bringing happiness to mankind, that they only took it as their due and gradually increased their demands on those who had surrendered to them. This was shown by the speedy disappearance of the term "Fellow Traveler" and its replacement by the term "Non-Party Bolshevik." Eventually we had "the true son of the Motherland who ardently loves his People and unhesitatingly serves his Party and Government."

People's memories are such that they remember not actual events but only vague stories or legends about them. To establish the facts, one must shatter the myths, but this can only be done if one first points to the circles in which they have been created. This hankering after the idyllic twenties is the result of a legend created by people who were then in their thirties, and by their younger associates. But in reality it was the twenties in which all the foundations were laid for our future: the casuistical dialectic, the dismissal of older values, the longing for unanimity and self-abasement. It is true that those who shouted loudest were then the first to lose their lives—but not before they had prepared the ground for the future. In the twenties our "punitive organs" were still only gathering strength, but they were already in action. The thirty-year-old iconoclasts fervently preached their faith. At first coaxing, and later threatening, they led their hosts of followers into the coming era, during which all individual voices ceased to be heard.

We do not have—nor can we have—an institute for the study of public opinion, though there is no other way of gauging the undercurrents in people's mental processes. The part of such an institute was once played to some extent by the "punitive organs." In the twenties they even took soundings among the public to find out what it was thinking—for this purpose they had a special network of informers. Later on it was decided that public opinion must be the same as official opinion, and the role of these informers was reduced to reporting any cases in which there was a divergence—these were

dated February 8-9). He summed up his life and work in the last three lines of the poem dated February 12:

And I have accompanied the universe's rapture
As muted organ pipes
Accompany a woman's voice.

Speaking of himself, he used here the "inexorable past tense"—to borrow his own expression from "Conversation About Dante." A few more months were to pass, and he would say to Akhmatova: "I am ready for death." She later used this phrase in her "Poem Without a Hero," which also has a dedication dated December 27, 1938—the date of M.'s death.

But perhaps the high point of the cycle is contained in the following lines, which are the proud words of a man condemned to death, yet still clinging to life:

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.*

The word "shadow" here referred to the man from whom everybody "begged alms"—and a shadow is what he eventually proved to be. Struggling for breath, frightened by everything but afraid of no one, crushed and condemned, the bearded poet thus defied once more, in his last days, the dictator whose power was greater than any the world had ever known.

People who had voices were subjected to the vilest of tortures: their tongues were cut out and with the stump that remained they were forced to glorify the tyrant. The desire to live is insuperable, and people accepted even this, if they could thereby prolong their physical existence. But those who survived at this price were as dead as those who perished. There is no point in mentioning names, but it is safe to say that among all those who continued to play the role of writers in those years, none have come forth as witnesses. They can never overcome their state of confusion, or say anything with the stumps of their tongues. Yet there were many among them who in different circumstances would have found their way in life and said what they had to say.

* From the poem beginning "I am not yet dead, I am not yet alone" (January 1937).

To be sure, M. also, at the very last moment, did what was required of him and wrote a hymn of praise to Stalin, but the "Ode" did not achieve its purpose of saving his life. It is possible, though, that without it I should not have survived either—their first impulse was to destroy me, too, but it was counted in a widow's favor if her husband had made his submission even though it wasn't accepted. M. knew this. By surviving I was able to save his poetry, which would otherwise have come down only in the garbled copies circulating in 1937.

The prayer "May this cup pass from me" can only be understood if you know what it is to wait for the slow, inevitable approach of death. It is far harder to wait for a bullet in the back of the neck than to be stricken down unawares. We waited for the end during the whole of our last year in Voronezh, and then yet another year, moving from place to place to place in the Moscow region.

To write an ode to Stalin it was necessary to get in tune, like a musical instrument, by deliberately giving way to the general hypnosis and putting oneself under the spell of the liturgy which in those days blotted out all human voices. Without this, a real poet could never compose such a thing: he would never have had that kind of ready facility. M. thus spent the beginning of 1937 conducting a grotesque experiment on himself. Working himself up into the state needed to write the "Ode," he was in effect deliberately upsetting the balance of his own mind. "I now realize that it was an illness," he said later to Akhmatova.

"Why is it that when I think of *him*, I see heads, mounds of heads?" M. said to me once. "What is he doing with all those heads?"

When we left Voronezh, M. asked Natasha to destroy the "Ode." Many people now advise me not to speak of it at all, as though it had never existed. But I cannot agree to this, because the truth would then be incomplete: leading a double life was an absolute fact of our age, and nobody was exempt. The only difference was that while others wrote their odes in their apartments and country villas and were rewarded for them, M. wrote his with a rope around his neck. Akhmatova did the same, as they drew the noose tighter around the neck of her son. Who can blame either her or M.?

AT THE beginning of January 1937, just after M. had written his poem "Smile, angry lamb," he was visited by a youth, a real guttersnipe, who sat down in front of us and announced that "writers must collaborate with their readers." This was a familiar tune: he wanted M. to give him his new verse so he could make copies of it. This is what he had been sent for, but he had been badly briefed and was too confused and tongue-tied to explain what he needed.

We are all very long-suffering people and we have one golden rule: if they start badgering you, never resist—just do what they want, whether it is voting in "elections," signing some public appeal or other, or buying State bonds.* When you are talking with a police spy, always answer all his questions, so that he can duly report to his superiors, otherwise you will "never hear the end of it"—and they'll get what they want anyway. The main thing in these situations is to get rid, as politely as possible, of the person sent to badger you. M. also observed this rule, but on this occasion he was so angry that, to use Akhmatova's expression, he "burst his banks." Against the general background of our isolation from the outside world, visitors of this type were utterly unbearable. M. lost patience with our uninvited guest and told him to leave. Later he laughed at himself for being so fastidious and expecting them to send agents who really knew their stuff! But when the next one appeared and turned out, though a little older, to be just as ill-suited for the job, M. no longer thought it funny and—to use Akhmatova's expression—"had an epileptic fit."

It was not done to expose police spies. The agency which sent them would not put up with any attempt to discredit its operations and sooner or later wreaked vengeance on people who did so. Even now, many people who have been in prisons or camps prefer to keep quiet about their "godfathers" †—they know that to be indiscreet about such things is asking for trouble. In those years people were even more careful. The rare exceptions only proved the rule. Everybody knew, for instance, that Marietta Shaginian never allowed any

* Under Stalin, all Soviet citizens were obliged to buy State bonds, "volunteering" at factory and office meetings to subscribe a month's salary. It was a kind of recurrent capital levy.

† Officers of the secret police charged with the surveillance of prisoners.

posed. But it was a vain hope: two or three days later we would have to go through the same business all over again. He wasn't such a fool as to tell his superiors that he had failed—an agent who has been exposed is scarcely worth his salt.

M. was working on the poem about begging alms from a shadow when he suddenly decided to ring the GPU and ask for an interview with the Commandant. Most unusually, his request was granted. The normal thing would have been for him to be told to write out his complaint and leave it in the special box at the GPU office—this is how we are used to communicating with our authorities: by dropping petitions in boxes. I learned about this move of M.'s only after the interview had been arranged, and I went with him to the GPU building (always known in any Soviet city as "the Big House"). After his bout of heart trouble in the summer of 1936, M. never went out alone. He would not have gone out to phone the GPU without me if the telephone exchange had not been very close to our house. Natasha Shtempel later told me that while they had been out walking together M. had gone to phone the GPU to find out whether the interview was going to be granted. He had asked her not to tell me anything about it—he knew I would be against it and argue that, apart from being futile, it was wrong to draw attention to oneself.

After a brief exchange of words in the GPU guardroom, we were given passes for both of us—they knew that M. was sick and couldn't go out unaccompanied. We were received by the Deputy Commandant, who looked like an ordinary Red Army officer. Men of this type are often found in the higher secret-police posts. M. was convinced that people like this were employed specially for relations with the outside world—so that, seeing their broad, open faces, nobody would guess what went on "inside." The one who received us was shortly afterward transferred to the film industry, where, according to Shklovski, he was quite easy to get along with. The same was probably true of Furmanov's younger brother, who had a similar career—the film world is swarming with such people. There are also a great many of them in the universities and institutes, where they work in the faculties of literature, philosophy, economics and so forth. They are always gladly given places on the pretext of what is known as "staff consolidation." I have the impression that as a matter of deliberate policy great numbers of young people are given their early training by the secret police before being let out into the world at large—where they never forget their alma mater. Among

them there were some perfectly decent kids who in a drunken state would tell you amusing tales about their service with the "organs" (as the secret police is often called). I knew one such splendid fellow when I taught at the Chuvash Teachers' Training College. He was writing a dissertation about the "material base" of the Chuvash kolkhozes and complained that it was a subject of which no one could make head or tail. He told me he had gone to work for the "organs" as soon as he left school. He had done so in search of "adventure," but his first job had been to stand for hours, come fair weather or foul, in front of the house where a certain old man lived, with orders to take note of any visitors. But the devil of it was that nobody ever came to see the old man and he never came out himself—the only sign of life he gave was to pull back the curtain and peep out occasionally. My young acquaintance even wondered sometimes whether the old man hadn't been instructed to keep an eye on *him*—making sure he didn't sneak off to have a beer while on duty. His job was the same as that of the "tails" I have already mentioned whom we saw loitering in front of Akhmatova's house—only they had a more cheerful time, because she at least had fairly frequent visitors! The old man, incidentally, had been described to my young colleague as a former Menshevik.

People of this type, sent to work in colleges and institutes by the "organs," were regarded with tolerance by their colleagues. It is said that they were never used as informers—which makes good sense, since they were less suited for the part than certain ladies or young gentlemen with an intellectual or upper-class background who could more easily gain one's confidence. Moreover, these people appointed on the grounds of "staff consolidation" were not frightened of losing their jobs and were therefore less likely to take part in departmental intrigues aimed at getting rid of rivals.

The Voronezh Commandant saw us in a vast office with lots of doors—just like the office of M.'s interrogator in Moscow. He asked what M. had come to see him about, and he looked at us with unconcealed curiosity—perhaps the reason he had broken with custom and decided to receive us was a desire to have a look at this odd bird sitting in his cage. Even men like him had their human weaknesses. But I do not think that M. could have made much of an impression on this Soviet general—he must have had a very different image of what a writer was. Haggard, with sunken cheeks and bloodless lips, M. indeed looked "half alive" (as he said of himself in the poem about the shadow) next to the burly, clean-shaven and pink-cheeked

Commandant, who, though a trifle portly, was still in very good trim.

M. said that he had come on two matters. The first was: How was he to earn enough money to keep himself alive? Exiles were not given work anywhere—anybody who was rash enough to offer a job to someone like M. would be dismissed himself for “lack of vigilance.” There was no such thing as a labor exchange, so how could he exercise his constitutional right to work? At the moment all doors were closed to him, but while he had still at least been able to gain access to people, he had managed to talk with someone in the Regional Party Committee about the question of finding work. Here they had said to him: “You will have to start all over again: get a job as a watchman or as a cloakroom attendant and show what you’re capable of.” But this was hypocrisy—nobody would even give him a job as an attendant for the same reason: fear that they might be accused of “lack of vigilance.” In any case, if an intellectual took a menial job like that, it would be regarded as a political demonstration. No organization, beginning with the Union of Writers, would take any responsibility for him, and there was no question of any of them finding work for him. Evidently, as M. told the Commandant, the only organization which had any responsibility for him was the GPU. Since people sent to the camps were given work, M. asked whether the same did not apply to exiles.

The Commandant replied that the “organs” could not concern themselves with finding work for people: not only would that be “too much of a burden,” but it was also unnecessary, since exiles were free to take any job they liked and, “as is well known, there is no unemployment in our country.” “And what are you doing at the moment?” he asked. M. replied that, not having any regular paid work, he was studying the Spanish language and literature, in particular the work of a poet, Jewish by origin, who spent many years in the cellars of the Inquisition and every day composed a sonnet in his head. When he was released, he wrote down all his sonnets, but he was soon imprisoned again and this time put on a chain. It was not known whether he continued to compose poetry or not. Perhaps, M. suggested, it might be possible to organize a Spanish study group in the local GPU club and put him in charge of it? I can’t be sure, but I think that by this time we had heard rumors of the arrest of the Leningrad Spanish scholars, and this was probably why M. mentioned his Spanish studies to the Commandant rather than anything else. The Commandant was quite taken aback by M.’s proposal for a

Spanish study group and replied that “our fellows” would scarcely be interested in learning Spanish. I doubt whether he got the point about the Inquisition, and imagine that he was simply puzzled by the eccentric character sitting in front of him.

“And why don’t your relatives or friends help you?” he asked suddenly. M. replied that he had no relatives, and that his friends now pretended not to know him and did not answer his letters—“for reasons you understand,” he added.

“We don’t prevent anybody meeting exiles,” said the Commandant with a genial laugh, and asked M. what the other thing was he wanted to discuss.

The second question concerned M.’s verse. M. suggested that in future it might be better for him to mail the Commandant all his new verse—“so you don’t have to waste your men’s time,” he explained. As he told me later, it had been on the tip of his tongue to use the Commandant’s own word for his colleagues and say: “Why should your *fellows* have to waste their time coming to get my verse?” But luckily he refrained from this extremely patronizing turn of phrase.

The Commandant became more and more genial. He assured M. that his organization was not at all interested in his verse, only in counter-revolutionary activity. “Write just what you like,” he said, but he at once went on to ask: “Why did you write that poem that got you into trouble? Upset by collectivization, were you?” In Party circles it was now customary to speak of the mass deportation of the kulaks as past history and to say that it had been carried out so vigorously because it was essential, but that some unstable citizens had been upset by the excesses which had admittedly taken place. M. mumbled an evasive reply to this question.

During our conversation the Commandant’s phone rang and we heard him say to the person at the other end: “Yes, yes . . . That’s slander. . . . Send it along, we’ll attend to it.” We realized that somebody’s fate was being decided, that a warrant was being issued as the result of a denunciation: So-and-so said such and such. This was quite enough for someone to disappear for good. Whatever we said—things that anywhere else but this country might seem quite ordinary—could be produced in evidence against us. After talking with friends, we often joked as we left: “Today we’ve said enough to get ten years.”

We parted from the Commandant in a perfectly amicable way. I asked M.: “Why all this tomfoolery?” “So that he knows what’s

what," M. replied. "But they know in any case," I wailed with my usual female logic. But I was not able to spoil M.'s mood, and for several days he went around cheerfully, remembering the details of the conversation. In one thing he had certainly been successful: the police spies vanished into thin air, and for the rest of our stay in Voronezh we were never troubled by any of them again. And what in fact had been the point of them? All M.'s verse came into the hands of the "organs" anyway—admittedly not in Voronezh, but in Moscow, through the vigilant Kostyrev and the editorial offices of the literary magazines.

The only question is: Why did the Commandant remove his police spies instead of accusing M. of "slander" and issuing a warrant for his arrest? Is it possible that the original order to "isolate but preserve" M. was still in force? Or it may be that since M. was "in the charge of Moscow," the Voronezh branch of the secret police attached their agents to us simply out of excess of zeal—just to show their mettle. A third possibility is that the Commandant was actually displaying a certain liberalism. This did sometimes happen—even secret-police officials were human, and some of them were tired of killing. The only really strange thing is that all this was done by people, the most ordinary sort of people: "people like you and me, with eyes hollowed out in skulls, with as much right to judge as you." How can we understand or explain it? And what is the point of it all?

45 "Hope"

M.'s THREE-YEAR term of exile was supposed to end in the middle of May 1937, but we did not attach too much significance to this. We knew only too well that the length of your sentence was a matter of chance rather than of law—they could always add to it or shorten it, depending on how your luck ran. Experienced exiles, such as the ones we had met in Cherdyn, were always pleased if they were given a few more years without any formal proceedings. Otherwise it meant going through the ordeal of a new arrest and interrogation, after which you would be exiled to a new, unfamiliar place. Nobody knows better than an exile or a camp in-

mate how important it is to stay as long as possible in one place. This is the basic condition of survival, because it means you make friends with people who will help you to come through, and you acquire a few pitiful belongings—in other words, you strike some kind of roots and spend less of your strength on the struggle to stay alive. But this is true not only of exiles: moving to a new place is an intolerable ordeal for anybody in our conditions. No wonder people hang on so grimly to their "living-space." Only an incorrigible vagabond like M., who hated the very idea of being tied to one place, could dream of moving. A change could only bring trouble. But M. was tired of Voronezh.

In April I went to Moscow, but found myself confronted by a blank wall which it was quite impossible to breach. However, to keep M.'s spirits up I wrote to him in Voronezh to say that we should soon be moving, now that his sentence was almost over. M. did not react to my words of encouragement, but my mother took them seriously and went to look after M. in Voronezh for a while so that I could again visit Moscow in search of new hope.

Why, at the dawn of the new era, at the very beginning of the fratricidal twentieth century, was I given the name Nadezhda ["Hope"]? All I now heard from our friends and acquaintances was: "Not a hope!"—not a hope that anybody would help us, or give us work, or read letters from us, or shake us by the hand. By now everybody was too used to thinking of us as doomed. But one cannot live without hope and, however often our hopes were disappointed, we could only go on trying. The head of the local branch of the MGB had generously explained to us that we would not be able to stay in Voronezh unless we got some kind of private help. Since there was no hope of that, we had nothing to look forward to but the prospect of moving to some other place.

On May 16, 1937, we went up to the same window in the MGB office through which three years previously M. had handed over his travel warrant from Cherdyn and had ever since conducted all his business with the State. This was where all exiles had to come to "report"—some once a month, others every three days. There were so many of us, small fry caught in the toils of the State, that there had always been a long line at this window. We did not realize that these crowds of waiting people had been the outward sign that the good times described by Akhmatova as "vegetarian" were still with us. Everything is relative—we were soon to read in the newspapers that under Yagoda the forced-labor camps had been run like "health

resorts." The press unleashed a flood of abuse against Yagoda, accusing him of being soft on all the scum in the camps and in exile. "Who would have thought that we have been in the hands of humanists!" we said to each other.

By the middle of May 1937 the line at the MGB window had dwindled to a dozen or so gloomy and shabbily dressed intellectuals. "Everybody's left Voronezh," M. whispered to me. Despite our isolation, we at once understood the reason: nearly all the old exiles had been re-arrested and no new ones were being sent. The "vegetarian" phase was over. People were no longer being banished, as we had been. From prison one now went either to a forced-labor camp or to the other world. A privileged few were kept in prison. The wives and children of prisoners were no longer sent into enforced residence away from the big cities, but were now also interned in special camps. There were even special institutions for small children, who were seen as potential avengers for their fathers. In 1956 Surkov said to me: "There must have been some case against Gumilev*—if you had a father like that and he was shot! He must have wanted to get revenge for him." It was curious that Surkov should have said this to me, of all people: he was so steeped in Stalin's Caucasian mentality that he thought only men might want to take vengeance.

Until 1937 all such potential avengers had merely been banished and one saw them standing in line in provincial MGB offices, waiting to "report." When we first arrived in Voronezh we saw there the son of Stoletov, who wandered the streets, alone and half out of his mind, complaining that his father had turned out to be a "wrecker." In 1937 the son of a man who had been shot would not have been sent to Voronezh, but would have been put straight behind barbed wire, and no complaints about his father would have been of any avail. Incidentally, neither M. nor I nor anybody else thought Stoletov's son really meant it—but there were sons who sincerely cursed their executed fathers. After M.'s death, when I lived for a time on the outskirts of Kalinin, I met there a few wives who for some reason had been banished rather than sent to camps. They had also sent here a boy of fourteen who was distantly related to Stalin. He was being looked after by an aunt who lived nearby—also in exile—and his former governess. For days the boy went on raving against his father and mother as renegades, traitors to the working class and enemies of the people. He used a formula which had been instilled in him during his very careful upbringing: "Stalin is my father and I do

* Lev Gumilev, the son of Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilev.

not need another one," and he kept referring to the hero of all the Soviet schoolbooks, Pavlik Morozov, who had managed to denounce his parents in time. He was tormented by the thought that he had lost the chance of becoming a second Pavlik by likewise exposing the criminal activity of his parents. His aunt and governess were forced to listen in silence—they knew what the boy would do if they dared breathe a word. The fact that he was allowed to live in Kalinin as an exile was only an exception that proved the rule. By 1937 no more exiles were being sent to Voronezh.

Without any hope or expectations, we stood for half an hour in the much diminished line. "What surprise will they have for us now?" M. whispered as we came up to the window. He gave his name and asked whether they had anything for him now that his term of exile had just come to an end. He was handed a piece of paper. For a moment he couldn't make out what was written on it, then he gasped and said to the clerk behind the window: "Does that mean I can go where I please?" The clerk snapped something back at him—they always snapped at us, they had no other way of talking—from which we gathered that M. was free again. A kind of electric shock went through the people glumly waiting behind us. They began to shuffle and whisper. They suddenly saw a faint gleam of hope: if one had been released, perhaps the same could happen to others as well?

It took us a few days to wind up our affairs in Voronezh. Despite the poverty of our existence, we had accumulated some possessions: buckets, a frying pan, a flatiron (M. wrote to Benedikt Livshitz about how well I ironed his shirts), a cooker, a lamp, a kerosene stove, a mattress, jars, plates and a few saucepans. We had bought all this in the market and it had cost us a lot of money: every purchase was an event. But it would have cost us even more to take it all with us—cab drivers and porters would have ruined us, if that word meant anything in our situation. Some of the things we sold, and others we gave away. What use would we have for buckets in Moscow, where we would get water simply by turning a faucet? We had no doubt that we should be going back to Moscow: if M. had not been given an additional sentence at such a difficult time, it could only mean he was being allowed back to the capital. It suddenly appeared significant to us that for some reason we had been able to keep possession of our Moscow apartment during these three years. Other writers in the building, tired of living only in one room, had often asked to be given more space at our expense and had tried to

place all the poems I had managed to save and put them openly on the table (or, rather, the suitcase which served me as a table). During all those years I had to pretend to be someone else, wearing, as it were, an iron mask. I could not tell a soul that I was only waiting secretly for the moment when I could again become myself and say openly what I had been waiting for, and what I had been keeping all these years.

If the severed parts of my life were to come together in 1956, there could be no question of it in 1937: the trend of the times was not toward mending broken lives, and on that day when we came back to Moscow we were the victims of an optical illusion, a pure hallucination. But, thanks to this hallucination, M. was granted his "one extra day." *

In our sort of life everybody gladly falls for illusions or seeks some belief that gives a sense of reality. If the life around you is illusory, you take refuge in illusory activity, entering illusory relations with others, embarking on illusory love affairs—you must have something to hang on to. Once, long before his first arrest, M. had said to me as we waited at a tram stop: "We think that everything is going along as it should, and that life continues—but that is only because the trams are running." Our empty apartment with its bookshelves was an even greater invitation to delude ourselves than the sight of our overcrowded tramcars. We also cheered each other with reminders of what Stalin, or Stavski, had said—as though we didn't know that such promises were the most terrible illusions of all. But we tried to close our eyes to this—anything to maintain our sense of false security. Instead of sitting down to consider our position soberly, which would only have meant upsetting ourselves with gloomy thoughts, we deposited all our things in the middle of the room and went off to the small gallery in Kropotkin Street to see "the French."

In Voronezh M. had often said to me: "If I ever get back, the first thing I shall do is go and see the French." Maria Veniaminovna Yudinina had noted how much he missed the French painters. Whenever she came to Voronezh, he would ask her about them, even while she was playing to him. She once sent him an album put out by the gallery, but the reproductions were very bad, and they only whetted his appetite. Now, without changing after the journey, pausing only to drink some tea, he went straight to the gallery. He also talked of going to see Tyshler: "I must have a good look at everything while

* Quoted from the end of Mandelstam's "Journey to Armenia."

M.—I still have it. Yakhontov was also hard to re-educate.

Akhmatova knows the Old Testament very well and is very fond of discussing fine points of interpretation with Amusin, whom I introduced to her. M., on the other hand, was rather afraid of the Old Testament God and his awesome, totalitarian power. He used to say (and I later found the same idea in Berdiayev) that, with its doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity had overcome the undivided power of the Jewish God. Undivided power was, of course, something of which we were very afraid.

48 *The Illusion*

THE knowledge of what an illusion is first came to us in the autumn of 1933, when we were still settling down in the only apartment we ever had, in the street once called Nashchokin but later renamed Furmanov in honor of our neighbor there.

Once a man with a rucksack knocked on our door and asked for M.'s brother Alexander. He had an improbably feudal-sounding name with several components (of which one was Dobropalovy), but he preferred to be known by his nickname, "Bublik." I wanted to send him away to my brother-in-law's apartment—I was already tired of people begging to be put up for the night because they couldn't get into a hotel—but M.'s father, who was staying with us at the time, interceded for him. He said he remembered him as a neat, rosy-cheeked schoolboy from the days when he had attended the same classical grammar school as Alexander. "And now look what he's come to!" said M.'s father, almost crying. M. pushed me aside and asked Bublik to come in. To set our minds at rest, he told us that he had been in prison only on ordinary criminal charges, so we needn't worry: there was no suggestion at all of the dreaded Article 58. In those years M. was impressed by the fact that in the West the police were armed with nightsticks, and when he happened to mention this, Bublik just smiled: "If only you knew what they do to criminals here!" In fact we had heard some rumors about what was done to prisoners—and not only criminals—already in the twenties.

Bublik was an incorrigibly cheerful soul and he kept running off

IN HIS youth M. always carefully weighed his words—it was only later that he tended toward levity. In 1919, when he was still very young, he once told me that there was no need at all to have a lot of books, and that it was best to read one book all one's life. "Do you mean the Bible?" I asked. "Why not?" he replied. I thought of the splendid graybeards of the East who read the Koran throughout their lives—perhaps they are the only representatives left of that ancient tribe who read a single book—but I could scarcely picture my light-hearted companion as one of them. "Well, I didn't mean I will, of course," he admitted, "but all the same . . ."

M. did not achieve his own ideal—such single-minded devotion is impossible in the twentieth century—but this remark he made to me in 1919 was not accidental. There are people whose every word flows from a general, integrated view of the world, and perhaps this is always true of poets, even though they vary in the range and depth of their understanding. Perhaps it is this that drives them to express themselves and serves also as the measure of their authenticity. There are, after all, people who write verse as readily as poets, and though there is always something obviously lacking in such verse, it is not easy to define. For this reason it is naïve to talk about poets not being recognized by their contemporaries. A real poet is always recognized immediately—by his enemies as well as by his well-wishers. It seems inevitable that a poet should arouse enmity. At the end of his life this happened even to Pasternak, who for so long and with such skill—the same skill with which he charmed all who met him—had avoided provoking the blind fury of the philistines. Perhaps people are angered by the poet's sense of his own rightness, by the categorical nature of his judgments ("The bluntness of our speech is no mere children's bogey," as M. said in one poem), which in turn derives from the "wholeness" of his vision. Every poet is a "disturber of sense"—that is, instead of repeating the ready-made opinions current in his time, he extracts new sense from his own understanding of the world. People who are content with generally received formulas are inevitably outraged by a new idea when it comes to them in its raw state, still unrefined, with all its rough edges. Isn't this what M. had in mind when he spoke of poetry as "raw material," saying that it was incomparably "rougher" than or-

"They've all sold out." At the end of the twenties and in the thirties our authorities, making no concessions to "egalitarianism," started to raise the living standard of those who had proved their usefulness. The resulting differentiation was very noticeable, and everybody was concerned to keep the material benefits he had worked so hard to earn—particularly now that the wretched poverty of the first post-revolutionary years was a thing of the past. Nobody wanted to go through that again, and a thin layer of privileged people gradually came into being—with "packets,"* country villas, and cars. They realized only later how precarious it all was: in the period of the great purges they found they could be stripped of everything in a flash, and without any explanation. But in the meantime those who had been granted a share of the cake eagerly did everything demanded of them. Once, in Voronezh, M. showed me a newspaper with a statement by Academician Bakh concerning the publication of the *Short Course*.† "Just look what he writes: 'The *Short Course* is a turning point in my life.'" "He probably only signed it," I suggested—people were generally presented with such "statements" and asked to put their signature to them. "That makes it even worse," said M.

But what, objectively speaking, could Academician Bakh have done? Could he have revised the text a little, so that his name would not appear under an obviously official document? I doubt it. Or should he have thrown out the journalist who came to collect his signature? Can one expect people to behave like this, knowing what the consequences will be? I do not think so, and I do not know how to answer these questions. The distinguishing feature of terror is that everybody is completely paralyzed and doesn't dare resist in any way.

But a question one may ask now is: 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. Perhaps we are now witnessing an attempt to regain the values which were then

* Cash emoluments secretly given to officials in addition to their regular salaries.

† *The History of the C.P.S.U.* [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]: *Short Course* was published in 1938, and until Stalin's death it was the basis of all political indoctrination. At first Stalin was proclaimed to be the author only of Chapter 4 (on Dialectical Materialism), but in the post-war years he was credited with having written the whole of it.

abandoned. It is a slow, groping and arduous process. Whether it will be possible to preserve them during the new ordeals that face us, I shall never know.

50 *Tikhonov*

NIKOLAI TIKHONOV, the poet, always talked in loud, self-confident tones. He had great charm and, with his beguiling ways, was good at winning people over. His literary debut was greeted with joy by all those who spoke of him in such glowing terms as a man of the new generation, a wonderful story-teller—and every inch a soldier to boot. Even now many people are still captivated by him, not realizing what he later became. He was first brought to see us by Nikolai Chukovski, and M. took a liking to both of them. “See what a kind person Kornei Chukovski’s son is,” he said. About Tikhonov he said: “He’s all right—though I have the feeling he’s the sort who might come into your compartment in a train and say ‘Let’s see your papers, citizens!’” M. pronounced the phrase in the way it was spoken by the commanders of grain-requisition units during the Civil War when they came through trains looking for black-marketeers. Even so, M. also fell under Tikhonov’s spell—but not for long. We saw Tikhonov in his true colors earlier than other people. I particularly remember the passionate conviction in his voice as he said to us: “Mandelstam will not live in Leningrad. We will not give him a room.” This was after our return from Armenia, when we had nowhere to live and M. had asked the writers’ organization to let him have a vacant room in the Leningrad House of Writers. When Tikhonov refused this in such extraordinary terms, I asked him whether M. would have to obtain the permission of the writers’ organization to live in Leningrad in a privately rented room. He stubbornly repeated his previous statement: “Mandelstam will not live in Leningrad.” I tried to find out whether he was saying this on his own initiative or on somebody else’s instructions, but I could not get any sense out of him. If it was on instructions, it was difficult to account for the depth of feeling in his voice. Whatever the truth of the matter, it boded no good, and we returned to Moscow. What Tikhonov was trying to convey by

When we were in Voronezh, M. sent Tikhonov his poem about Kashchei * and the Tomcat, hoping for some reason that he might be prompted by the lines about gold and precious stones to send some money to a penniless fellow poet in exile. Tikhonov immediately cabled that he would do everything he could. This was the last we were to hear from him. Evidently there was nothing he could do. I reminded him (through Surkov) of this cable at the beginning of the sixties, when the Poets' Library† was desperately looking for someone to write a preface to a volume of M.'s poetry which had been scheduled by the editors. One after another, the people approached had refused to write it—nobody wanted to assume any part of the responsibility for "resurrecting" Mandelstam. If Tikhonov had agreed to write it, the book would probably have come out a long time ago—it was then a propitious moment, just before the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Tikhonov would have been the ideal person to write the preface—the mere fact of his agreeing to would have protected the volume from attacks on it. Such attacks can be fatal right up to the moment of publication. Surkov tried to persuade him to do it, and reminded him of his cable promising to "do everything." But Tikhonov refused outright. "He has turned into a Chinese idol," I said to Surkov, who did not demur.

It is difficult to dismiss entirely the "young Kolia," the youth with the expansive gestures, as we had once known him. "Tikhonov and Lugovskoi," Akhmatova once said to me, "have never done a thing to help anyone, but, all the same, they are a little better than the rest." She also told me how in 1937 she had run into Tikhonov in Leningrad and they had walked along one of the embankments for half an hour or so. Tikhonov kept complaining about how terrible the times were: "He said what we were all saying"—this is the reason Akhmatova still has a soft spot for him. But she was also struck by the way he said it. When she came home, she could not remember a single word of what he had actually said about the terror: everything had been so skillfully camouflaged that even in talking with Akhmatova he had managed not to compromise himself. All he did was to complain in general terms, without saying a word out of place: no one could say that he wasn't highly disciplined! I do not think he can be put in the same category as Lugovskoi, who was a completely different type—he had been scared stiff at the front,

* A figure in Russian folklore.

† Famous series of poetry editions, founded by Maxim Gorki.

never involved himself in the "literary war," and when he was drunk he could say all kinds of odd things. Tikhonov, on the other hand, has always been true to himself and the cause he serves. The last of the Mohicans will come to his funeral to pay military honors to this literary warrior who never forgot that the magazine *Zvezda* was also part of the front line.

They say that Tikhonov's wife used to make toys out of papier-mâché. Tikhonov himself is a papier-mâché figure—scarcely a good repository for values of any kind. I doubt whether he had any to change when he first appeared on the scene at the beginning of the twenties as one of the best representatives of the "new era."

51 The Bookcase

MORE than a quarter of a century ago, during the May Day celebrations of 1938, I returned to Moscow from Samatikha, a rest home near Murom, where M. had been arrested. In the hope of helping him to survive while his fate was decided, I took a few books from our bookcase, sold them in a secondhand bookstore and spent the proceeds on the first and only food package I was able to buy for him. It was returned "because of the death of the addressee." I had always wanted to preserve some of these books which had once helped us create the illusion of an untroubled existence. Apart from this, they also reflected M.'s interests in the thirties. At the time, in order to keep a record of them, I compiled a rough list of all the books I had sold and gave it to Khardzhiev. It was, of course, incomplete: given my state of mind, it could hardly be otherwise. The remainder of the books (that is, those the secondhand bookstore wouldn't take) are now with my brother, Evgeni—I still have no place to put them myself.

We began to buy books when I got my job in the editorial office of *For a Communist Education*, where every month I was given a free "voucher for the acquisition of books"—this was by way of encouraging us to improve our minds. "Get something fundamental," Chechanovski said to me, handing me my first voucher. He particularly recommended the six-volume edition of Lenin and the collected edition of Stalin that was just beginning to come out then.

All my friends already had the "classics of Marxism-Leninism" on their bookshelves—they were by now a standard feature of any intellectual's apartment. Our mentors were very insistent about this. Stalin genuinely believed that if the intellectuals read all these works properly, they would at once be convinced by their irresistible logic and give up all their idealistic preconceptions. Marxist literature has never been in such demand as it was then. The pink-cheeked Chekist who treated us to hard candy from a tin box during the search of our apartment in 1934 was quite taken aback by the absence of Marxist literature in our bookcase. "But where do you keep your Marxist classics?" he asked me. M. overheard him and whispered to me: "This is the first time he's arrested anybody who doesn't have Marx."

In general, we had no "standard editions" or sets of collected works—though such things were always being urged on us. Benedikt Livshitz did, indeed, succeed in persuading M. to buy a Larousse in several volumes, saying that it was "quite essential for a translator." This was in the mid-twenties, when M. had no option but to try and make his living by translating. These fat volumes of Larousse lay untouched, still tied together with string, until they were eventually sold back to the secondhand bookstore after M. had failed to become a translator. Apart from his indifference to standard editions of the classics, he had no interest at all in collecting books. He had no need of "rare editions," nor was he ever concerned to have a complete set of anything. All he needed were those books with which he had already established his own intimate relationship. There were other books he may have valued but was easily able to do without. For instance, he let Katayev take away his copy of Pasternak's *My Sister Life* shortly after it had appeared. "What I need I can remember—he needs it more than I do," M. explained.

M. was rarely enthusiastic about my finds in the bookstores. Once I brought along in triumph a copy of Ivanov's *Cor Ardens* which I had found in a pile of secondhand rubbish, but M. was quite indifferent to it: "Why the same things again?" (This was at a time when I was trying to restore items lost from my own bookcase.) This was something belonging to a past phase, and M. did not want to return to it. On the other hand, he was very pleased with a volume of Bürger—"You always know what I want." (But this was untrue—apart from Bürger, he turned down all my offerings!)

Among the books we had in the thirties there were no twentieth-century poets except Annenski, the two Acmeists, Gumilev and

Our way of life kept us firmly rooted to the ground, and was not conducive to the search for transcendental truths. Whenever I talked of suicide, M. used to say: "Why hurry? The end is the same everywhere, and here they even hasten it for you." Death was so much more real, and so much simpler than life, that we all involuntarily tried to prolong our earthly existence, even if only for a brief moment—just in case the next day brought some relief! In war, in the camps and during periods of terror, people think much less about death (let alone about suicide) than when they are living normal lives. Whenever at some point on earth mortal terror and the pressure of utterly insoluble problems are present in a particularly intense form, general questions about the nature of being recede into the background. How could we stand in awe before the forces of nature and the eternal laws of existence if terror of a mundane kind was felt so tangibly in everyday life? In a strange way, despite the horror of it, this also gave a certain richness to our lives. Who knows what happiness is? Perhaps it is better to talk in more concrete terms of the fullness or intensity of existence, and in this sense there may have been something more deeply satisfying in our desperate clinging to life than in what people generally strive for. I always remember my conversation about happiness with Vishnevski's widow, Sonia. We were trying to draw the balance sheet of everything that had happened to us. How different our lives had been! Sonia summed up: "Mine has been so happy, and yours has been so unhappy." Poor, stupid Sonia! Her husband had an illusion of power: other writers tried to keep in with him because he controlled certain funds and he was able to make the Government's wishes known to his cronies. He had access to the Central Committee and was several times received by Stalin. He drank no less than Fadeyev, greedily breathed in the heady air of State, and permitted himself no more than token expression of fronde—suggesting, for instance, that James Joyce be published, and sending money to exiles (first to a naval officer banished to Tashkent, and then—through my brother—to us in Voronezh). He had a car and a villa in the country which was rather meanly taken away from Sonia after his death. Until her own death, she remained faithful to him, and was angry with Khrushchev for cutting royalty payments to a writer's heirs by half. Many stories were told about Sonia, but she was not a bad sort, and nobody could really hold it against her when she went around shouting that her husband had been killed by saboteurs in the Kremlin hospital. In fact she was very lucky that he died in good time, without managing to transfer his assets to one of Sonia's rivals—that none

the happy heaven above
is but the boundless house in which we live our lives.

Reading *Self-Knowledge* by Berdiayev—one of our best modern thinkers—I couldn't help being struck by the great difference between him and M. in their attitudes toward life and earthly existence. Perhaps this was because one was an artist, while the other was concerned with abstract thought. Furthermore, Berdiayev was inwardly tied to the Symbolists, and though he had his disagreements with them and was even to a certain extent disillusioned with them, he had never broken with them. For M., on the other hand, the revolt against Symbolism was crucial for the whole of his life and art.

For Berdiayev "life is a daily round of cares," and though he was receptive to "the poetry of life and beauty," he thought life was "dominated by prose and ugliness." Berdiayev's idea of beauty is the direct opposite of what I have always found in the poets and artists who rejected Symbolism: they do not look down on ordinary everyday life—on the contrary, it is a source of beauty for them, whether they are poets or painters. The Symbolists—such as Viacheslav Ivanov and Briusov—assumed the role of high priests standing above everyday life, and for them beauty was something apart from it. By returning to earth, the generation that followed them considerably enlarged its horizon, and for it the world was no longer divided into ugly prose and sublime poetry. In this connection I think of Akhmatova, who knew "from what trash poetry, quite unashamed, can grow," and of Pasternak with his passionate defense of the "daily round" in *Dr. Zhivago*. For M. there was absolutely no problem here: he did not, like Berdiayev and the Symbolists, seek to escape into some realm of pure spirit from the earthly confines of our everyday here and now. In his essay "The Morning of Acmeism" he tried to give a poetic justification for remaining attached to earth with its three dimensions: "The earth is not an encumbrance or an unfortunate accident, but a God-given palace." This is followed by a polemical passage about people who, like Berdiayev, cannot wait to get to a better world and regard life on earth as being literally God-forsaken. In the same essay, which was a kind of manifesto, he asked: "What would you think of a guest who, while living at the expense of his host and enjoying his hospitality, actually despises him in his heart of hearts and thinks only of ways to outsmart him?" "Outsmart" here means to escape from time and three-

dimensional space. To M., as a self-styled Acmeist, three-dimensional space and life on earth were essential because he wanted to do his duty by his "host"—he felt that he was here to build, which can only be done in three dimensions. This explains his attitude toward the world of things. In his view, this world was not hostile to the poet or—as he put it—the builder, because things are there to be built from. Stone—the title of M.'s first published collection of poems—is a building material which "seems to crave for another mode of being" and longs to find its place in "a vaulted nave" and thus joyfully interact with others of its kind. M. never talked of "creating" things, only of "building" them. As a young man he already thought of himself as a builder: "From a sullen dead weight I shall one day make something of beauty." He was therefore not repelled by matter, but was very conscious of its "dead weight" as something that predisposed it to be used in building. Berdiayev often speaks of man's higher destiny and his creative powers—but he does not define the nature of this creativity. This is probably because he lacked the artist's sense of things and words as inert matter to be used in building. Berdiayev's experience was that of the mystic and it took him to the limit of the world of things. The artist's intuition is similar to the mystic's, but it reveals the Creator through his creation, God through man. It seems to me that this way of perception is justified by Soloviev's (and Berdiayev's) doctrine of "Godmanhood." Isn't this also why every true artist has the sense of his own "rightness" about which M. spoke?

However much he tried to overcome it, Berdiayev felt contempt for the "man in the street." In this, too, he had common ground with the Symbolists—perhaps they got it from Nietzsche, who had such an influence on them. Berdiayev complains that "we live in a middle-class age" which is antagonistic to the appearance of "strong personalities." Yet Berdiayev himself wanted to be self-effacing. He hated, he says, to "draw attention to his own significance and intellectual superiority." Reading this, I thought of Pushkin's line: "And among all the lowly of the world, perhaps the lowliest is he"—words which were completely misunderstood by the whole Veresayev crowd. All Pushkin was trying to convey was the simple sense of being at one with his fellow men, of being flesh of their flesh—though perhaps not quite as well made as others. . . . It seems to me that this feeling of being the same as everybody else (and even perhaps of envy at not being quite as well formed) is an essential feature of the poet. In his early article "On the Reader" M. has the following to say about

the difference between literature and poetry: "The man of letters as opposed to the poet always addresses himself to a specific audience, to his living contemporaries . . . the content of his writing is decanted into them by virtue of the physical law of unequal levels—which means that the man of letters must be 'above' his contemporaries, 'superior' to the society in which he lives. Literature in this sense is essentially didactic. . . . Poetry is quite different: the poet is linked only with readers sent his way by Providence and he does not have to be superior to his age, or to the people he lives among." M. sincerely believed that he was no better than others, or even not as good ("I walk with bearded peasants, a passerby"). The Symbolists thought of themselves as teachers with a cultural mission—hence the way in which they set themselves above the crowd and the attraction they felt for strong personalities. Even Blok was not free of a sense of his own exclusiveness—though it alternated with the other feeling, natural for any poet, of a common bond with the street, with ordinary people. Berdiayev, being a philosopher rather than an artist, naturally felt superior to the crowd, and in his aristocratic inclinations and liking for strong personalities he was only yielding to the spirit of his times.

M. did not approve of attacks on the "middle class" and its values. If anything, he respected the middle classes—which is why he once described Herzen, who was always attacking them, as an "aristocrat." He was particularly dismayed by the constant attacks on the middle class and bourgeois values in this country. "What don't they like about the middle class?" he said once. "They are the most stable section of the community and everything rests on them." (The only members of the middle class he could not stand were literary ladies who kept salons—and their successors in Soviet times. He could not tolerate their pretentiousness, and the dislike was mutual.) In "Journey to Armenia" there is a passage which at first sight looks like an attack on the middle class, but M. was referring here to our neighbors in the old merchant quarter of Moscow—these were not people who had once enjoyed a stable, bourgeois existence, but a sullen, backward mob who were only too happy to accept a new form of slavery.

In this respect M. agreed with Berdiayev's remark that the First World War had given birth to a new generation that hated freedom and had a taste for authority and force. But Berdiayev was wrong in thinking that this was a consequence of "an age of democracy"—the last few decades of our history have been anti-democratic in the ex-

trepreneur, and it is particularly in this country that the results have been felt most acutely. The love of dictators, which has been the curse of the first half of the twentieth century, is a complete denial of democracy, and Berdiayev, as an émigré, failed to see how ordinary people were ground underfoot, and he was blind to the growth of the secret police's contempt for human rights. Furthermore, it wasn't a question of just one dictator—anybody who had the slightest power, down to the humblest police official or doorkeeper, was also a dictator. We had not previously understood what a temptation power can be. Not everybody wants to be a Napoleon, but people cling desperately to what little power they have and will do their best to get all they can out of it. There has never been such a proliferation of petty tyrants, and our country is still swarming with them. It is only now that they seem to be on the way out at last—people have had their fill of this game.

Like the Symbolists, Berdiayev does not recognize communal morality or the "hereditary principle" because it is not compatible with freedom. Here his idea of freedom comes close to the license that undermined the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. Culture, after all, is not something generated by the upper layer of society at any given time, but an element passed down from generation to generation—a product of the continuity without which life would break up in chaos. What is thus handed down in the community often seems unbearably set in a conventional form, but it cannot be all that terrible if it has enabled the human race to survive. The threat to the human race comes not from its communal morality, but from the extravagant innovations of its more volatile elements. M. defined the poet as one who "disturbs meaning." What he had in mind, however, was not rebellion against inherited order, but rejection of the commonplace image and the hackneyed phrase by which meaning is obscured. This was another way of appealing for an art that faithfully recorded life and living events, as opposed to all that was death-like. It was perhaps in the same sense that he spoke of "culture-as-convention"—in art this evidently referred to the repetition of things already spent and played out, but nevertheless eagerly accepted by people who want no truck with "disturbers of meaning."

Berdiayev's main preoccupation was with freedom, and it was a problem he wrestled with all his life. But for M. there was no problem here, since it probably did not occur to him that there can be people devoid of inner freedom. He evidently thought that freedom was inherent in man as such. In the social sphere Berdiayev was con-

cerned to establish the primacy of personality over society, but for M. it was rather a question of assuring the place of personality in society—just as he fought for the poet's place in society. In other words, he accepted the idea of society, taking it for granted as the highest form of human organization.

Comic as it may seem, even in their attitudes toward women the difference between Berdiayev and M. was that between Symbolist and Acmeist. For the Symbolists, women were "Beautiful Ladies" (as in Blok's poems), high priestesses or, as Akhmatova and I called them, "bearers of myrrh." When I was young there were very many of them, and they were unbelievably pretentious with their grand views about their role as female acolytes. They perpetrated the most fearful nonsense—as witness E.R.'s notes to the *Autobiography*,* where snakes suddenly grow claws, the women have the faces of snakes and the men are fancied to have cloaks and swords. All these women—and relations with them—were quite out of the ordinary. With us things were much simpler.

Berdiayev had no time for the pleasures of life. Although M. did not seek happiness, he described everything he valued in terms of pleasure and play: "Thanks to the wonderful bounty of Christianity, the whole of our two-thousand-year-old culture is the setting of the world free for play, for spiritual pleasure, for the free imitation of Christ." And elsewhere: "Words are sheer pleasure, a cure for anguish."

I would have liked to describe M.'s attitude toward words, but it is beyond my power. All I can say is that he was aware that words have an "inner form," and that he did not confuse words, as units of meaning, with symbols. He was cool toward Gumilev's famous poem about words, but never told me why. Probably he did not share Gumilev's view of numbers either. Incidentally, he was always concerned about the number of lines and verses in a poem, or the number of chapters in a piece of prose. He was angry when I said I was surprised he thought this important. My lack of understanding struck him as nihilism and ignorance. It was not for nothing, he said, that some numbers—three and seven, for example—had magic significance for people: numbers were also part of our culture, a gift which had been handed down to us.

In Voronezh M. began to compose poems of seven, nine, ten and eleven lines. Seven- and nine-line stanzas also began to appear as

* Eugenie Rapp, Berdiayev's sister-in-law, supplied footnotes to Berdiayev's autobiography.

parts of longer poems. He had a feeling that some new form was coming to him: "Just think what they mean, these fourteen-line groups. And there must be some significance in these seven- and nine-line stanzas. They keep cropping up all the time." There was no mysticism about this, it was seen simply as an index of harmony.

Everything I have said about the contrast between Berdiayev and M. applies only to those features of Berdiayev which he shared with the Symbolists. He was by no means identified with them as a philosopher, but some of his views on matters of taste bore the marks of his time. All of us are subject to the influences of our day, and although Berdiayev, like M., used to say he had never been anybody's contemporary, he nevertheless lived in his time. Yet it was Berdiayev who pointed out the main thing about the Symbolists: namely, that they ignored social and ethical questions. It was because of this that M. revolted against the "omnivorousness" of Briusov, against the haphazard way in which they arrived at their values. In everything except matters of taste Berdiayev had overcome the influence of the Symbolists, but he could not quite escape the seductive charm of these great fishers of men.

It is a shame that, though he tried very hard, M. was never able to get hold of Berdiayev's books, so I do not know what he would have made of him. Unfortunately, we were completely cut off from what the world outside was thinking. This is one of the worst misfortunes that can befall a man.

57 *Archive and Voice*

AN ARTIST'S feeling for the world is a tool, like a mason's mallet, and his only tangible product is the work itself," M. wrote in "The Morning of Acmeism."

Some of M.'s poetry and prose is lost, but most of it has been preserved. How this happened is the story of my battle with the forces of destruction, with everything that conspired to sweep me away, together with the poor scraps of paper I managed to keep.

When they are young, people do not bother to keep their papers. How can a young man imagine that his scribblings may one day be thought of value? Though perhaps it's not a bad thing that early

hand, though in a fairly narrow circle of people. M. thought this was a good way of preserving his work: "People will keep it for me." But I felt it was not enough, and time has proved me right. I began to make copies and hide them in various places. Generally I put them in hiding-places at home, but some copies I handed to other people. During the search of our apartment in 1934 the police agents failed to find poems I had sewn into cushions or stuck inside saucepans and shoes. When we arrived in Voronezh, I removed the poem about Ariosto from a cushion in which it had been hidden.

Voronezh marked a new stage in our handling of manuscripts. The idyllic era of cushions was at an end—and I remembered all too vividly how the feathers had flown from Jewish cushions during Denikin's pogroms in Kiev. M.'s memory was not as good as it had been, and with human life getting cheaper all the time, it was in any case no longer a safe repository for his work. It was also becoming harder to find people willing to keep things for us. During the whole of our three years in Voronezh, I made copies of everything and distributed them to such people as I could find, but apart from my brother Evgeni (who in any case kept nothing at his own home) I had nobody I could rely on to take them. Not, that is, until Sergei Borisovich Rudakov turned up.

Rudakov, the son of a Czarist general, had been expelled from Leningrad together with other people of aristocratic origin. His father and elder brothers had been shot at the beginning of the Revolution. He had been brought up by his sisters and had a normal Soviet childhood—he became a member of the Pioneers, distinguished himself in school and even got through the university. He was looking forward to a decent career when suddenly he was struck by the disaster of expulsion from Leningrad. Like many people who had lost their parents, he was anxious to get into step with the times, and he even had a theory that one should only write books that stood a chance of being published. He himself wrote elegant verse (a little under the influence of Tsvetaÿeva) which was popular at the time. He had chosen Voronezh as his place of exile in order to be near M. He first came there while I was in Moscow looking for translation work, and he spent about a month with M. all alone before I returned. When M. came to meet me at the station he told me that Rudakov had appeared, that he was going to write a book about poetry, and what a splendid fellow he was. After his illness M. had probably lost confidence in himself and needed a friendly listener for his new verse.

everything. What the truth of the matter is we just haven't been able to find out. All we know is that she has sold some of Gumilev's manuscripts—not directly, but through middlemen. Akhmatova is furious about it all, but there is nothing she can do. Once we got the widow to come and see Akhmatova on the pretext of trying to publish an essay by her late husband, but it was impossible to get any sense out of her. Khardzhiev had a little more luck—he was able to persuade her to let him copy out everything he needed from Rudakov's letters. But Khardzhiev is a man of great charm and good looks who can get anything he likes. However, in Rudakov's letters—which he wrote every day, carefully keeping numbered copies for posterity—there was nothing of special interest for us. The poor boy was obviously a psychopath. The letters were full of ravings about how the whole of poetry had been present in M.'s room—I've forgotten whether he said “world poetry” or Russian poetry, but he was referring to M., himself and a volume of Vaginov which M. had in his room. He also wrote about how he taught M. to write poetry and explained everything to him, and expressed his horror that all the praise would go to M. and he would get no credit. He compared M. to Derzhavin—sometimes like a god and sometimes like a worm. In one of the letters he spoke of himself as M.'s heir, alleging that M. had said to him: “You are my heir, do what you see fit with my verse.” I am quoting all this from memory, since I have only seen the copies made by Khardzhiev. Reading them, Akhmatova and I understood that the theft of our archives had been part of a deliberate plan on Rudakov's part, and that his widow was only carrying out his will by refusing to return them to us. The selling of original manuscripts—which is very profitable—was being done not only for mercenary reasons, but also in fulfillment of Rudakov's maniac schemes. One wonders what would have happened if I had died much earlier. It is possible that Rudakov would have claimed all M.'s work as his own—though this would not have been easy, since many of the poems were circulating under the name of their rightful author. A similar attempt at plagiarism on the part of Seva Bagritski only ended in a scandal when his mother published M.'s “Goldfinch” poem as a work of her son's. Things would have been even worse if I had listened to Rudakov when he tried to persuade me (through Emma Gerstein, with whom he had become friendly) to hand over all M.'s papers to him. The reason he gave was that it was important for all the papers to be in one place. But Khardzhiev and I argued that, on the contrary, it was safer to disperse them. As a result of

Kablukov. I bought it (for 200 roubles) on account of the variants Kablukov had written in it, and also because of four loose pages written in M.'s own hand—two of these have now vanished. I have also lost a letter to me from Pasternak in which he wrote that the only people in contemporary Soviet literature—this was right after the war—who interested him were Simonov and Tvardovski, because he would like to understand the mechanism by which reputations are created. I imagine that this letter, as well as the two pages written in M.'s hand, were taken by lovers of literature and will not get lost. Be that as it may, I have now stopped keeping anything at home (if where I live can be called a home!) and I again worry constantly about where things have the best chance of surviving.

Despite everything, I have managed to save a good deal of M.'s work, though whether it will ever be published here is another matter—there is still no sign of it. I have had to give up one method of preserving his work—namely, committing it to memory. Until 1956 I could remember everything by heart—both prose and verse. In order not to forget it, I had to repeat a little to myself each day. I did this while I thought I still had a good while to go on living. But time is getting on now.

There are many women like me who for years have spent sleepless nights repeating the words of their dead husbands over and over again. As another example I should like to mention a woman whose name I cannot give because she is still alive. In 1937 there were daily newspaper attacks on her husband, a very high official. He sat at home waiting to be arrested and not daring to go out—the house was surrounded by police agents. At night he wrote a long letter to the Central Committee which his wife memorized. After he was shot, she spent twenty years in prisons and labor camps. When she returned at last, she wrote out the letter and took it to the Central Committee, where I can only hope it has not disappeared forever.

No recordings of M.'s voice have survived. The collection of recordings (including some of M. and Gumilev) made by Sergei Ignatievich Bernstein was destroyed after he was expelled from the Zubov Institute for "formalism." * This was during a period when the remains of dead people were being scattered to the winds. I have managed to keep such photographs as there were—there were not very many—in the same way as the manuscripts, but I never had any control over the recordings of his voice. I well remember M.'s voice and the way he read, but it was inimitable and lives on only in my

* See page 420.

ears. If people could hear his voice, they would understand what he meant by "interpretative reading"—that is, using the text as a conductor uses a score. This could never be properly conveyed by some form of phonetic notation showing where he paused or raised his voice. His treatment of vowel quantity and the timbre of his voice could not be indicated. And what memory could ever preserve all the inflections of a voice that fell silent a quarter of a century ago? Yet something of his voice is preserved in the very structure of his verse, and now, when the years of silence are coming to an end, thousands of youngsters have caught the intonation of M.'s poetry and, unknown to themselves, reproduce it when they recite him. Nothing can be completely scattered to the winds.

Fortunately, this poetry still has not been seized on by actors, professional reciters and schoolteachers. I once happened to hear the brazen voice of a woman announcer on Radio Liberty.* She was reading M.'s "I drink to officers' epaulettes. . . ." This innocuous humorous poem has always been exploited here by such people as Nikulin to cast cheap political aspersions on M., and now, lo and behold, it was being used in the same way by a foreign radio! The woman was reading it in the same odious tone of voice, full of "meaning," as our radio announcers. She must have learned it from them. Sickened and depressed, I switched off.

58 *Old and New*

ON ONE of the first few days after our return from Voronezh, we were given a ride around Moscow by Valentin Katayev in the brand-new car he had just brought back with him from America. He looked at M. fondly and said: "I know what you need: a fixed place of residence." That evening he took us to the new apartment building for writers with the labradorite entry hall which so impressed those who remembered the hardships of the Revolution and the Civil War. In Katayev's new apartment everything was new—including his wife and child and the furniture. "I like modern stuff," he said, screwing up his eyes. But Fedin, who lived on the floor below, went in for mahogany and his apartment was crammed

* An émigré station based in Munich.

with it. The writers had gone wild at having so much money for the first time in their lives. Shklovski had been given a new apartment three floors above Katayev. The floor on which they put you depended on your standing as a writer. Vishnevski had insisted on moving into the apartment allotted to Ehrenburg (who was abroad) because he considered it unbecoming for someone holding his position in the Union of Writers to live right at the top, under the roof. But the official reason he gave was that he was frightened of heights.

Walking around Shklovski's apartment, Katayev asked him: "But where do you keep your suits?" Shklovski still had the same old wife, the same children, and only one pair of trousers—or two at the most. But he had already ordered a suit for himself—the first in his life. It was no longer done to go around in shabby clothes, and you had to look respectable to visit editorial offices or a film studio. The leather jackets and Komsomol blouses of the twenties had completely gone out of style and you were expected to dress in conventional fashion. At the end of the last war, prizes were promised to teachers who could manage to get decent dresses for themselves.

Katayev treated us to Spanish wine and fresh oranges—which were now on sale again for the first time since the Revolution. Everything was just like old times! Except that in the old days there were no refrigerators, such as the electric one Katayev had brought with him from America: the little chunks of ice floating in our wine were the last word of modern luxury. Nikulin came in with his new wife, who had just borne him twins. Katayev was quite astonished that such a promiscuous pair could have children. I remembered something that Nikulin had said a long time before, but it no longer seemed so funny: "None of us is a Dostoyevski—all we need is money." He drank Spanish wine and held forth about the Spanish dialects—he had just been to Spain to take a look at the Civil War.

At the time we left Moscow for exile, the writers had not yet become a privileged caste, but now they were putting down roots and figuring out ways of keeping their privileges. Katayev revealed his own plan when he told us: "Nowadays one must write like Walter Scott." This was not the easiest way—it required hard work and talent.

The inhabitants of this building with the labradorite entrance understood the meaning of 1937 better than we did, because they saw both sides of what it entailed. It was like Doomsday, with some being trampled underfoot by demons, and others having their praises sung. Those who had tasted the delights of heaven had no wish to be cast down into the pit. Who can blame them? The decision taken at

family councils and in discussion with friends was, therefore, that the only way of dealing with the situation which arose in 1937 was to adapt to it. "Valentin is devoted to Stalin," said Katayev's new wife, Esther, who knew from life in her parents' home what it was to be an outcast. And Katayev himself, chastened by earlier experiences, had long since gone around saying: "I don't want any trouble. The main thing is not to upset the powers-that-be."

"Who remembers Mandelstam nowadays?" Katayev asked us ruefully. "My brother and I always mention him when we talk to the younger people, but that's about all." M. was not offended to be told this, since it was quite true that he had been forgotten—though it was certainly not true that Katayev and his brother would ever dare mention him in conversation with strangers.

The new Moscow was now being built up and adopting the ways of the world—people were opening their first bank accounts, buying furniture and writing novels. Everybody could hope for speedy advancement because every day somebody was plucked from their midst and had to be replaced. Of course, everybody was also a candidate for prison and death, but during the day they did not think about it, giving full rein to their fears only at night. The people who fell by the wayside were immediately forgotten, and their wives—if they had been lucky enough to hang on to part of the accommodation shared with their arrested husbands—found that the doors of all "decent" apartments were now firmly slammed in their faces. Actually, by now few wives survived the arrest of their husbands—in 1937 whole families were being wiped out.

M. thought rather well of Katayev and said that he had a "real bandit's charm." We had first got to know him in Kharkov in 1922. In those days he was a ragamuffin with intelligent, lively eyes and had already been in serious trouble (which he managed to get out of). He was on his way to Moscow, which he intended to take by storm. He later used to come and see us there and tell us jokes he had heard in Mylnikov Street, the old Bohemian quarter of Odessa. Many of these stories we were later to read in *The Twelve Chairs*—Valentin had made a present of them to his brother, who came to Moscow from Odessa to get a job as a detective, but on his elder brother's advice became a writer instead.

Toward the end of the twenties, after their early successes, all the prose writers I knew in my youth—with the exception of Tynianov and Zoshchenko—began to churn out fiction in a rather sordid way. In the case of Katayev, thanks to his special blend of talent and cynicism, it was particularly blatant. Right at the end of the twenties

status as a "convicted person." "Where are you going now?" asked the militia official as he handed M. a slip of paper rejecting his application for a permit: he was supposed to enter our next place of residence in our file. "Back to Voronezh," M. replied. "Very well," said the official, "but you won't get registered there either." We now discovered that while as an exile M. had been barred from only twelve towns, as a "convicted person" he was banned from over seventy, and for life at that!

"And what would have happened if I had stayed in Voronezh?" M. asked. The official explained that because "we still have deficiencies in our work" M. might have been overlooked for a while, but he would sooner or later have been expelled. This sort of thing no longer surprises us: we are now familiar enough with the residence permit as a high barrier which only the most agile can clear. Nobody can just go and settle in the town of his choice (unless he has been sent there to work), and there is no question of a residence permit at all without identity papers—which means that vast categories of people—such as collective farmers—cannot move at all. Not everybody realizes, even now, what a great privilege it is to have identity papers. But in 1937 we were learning for the first time about this "progress," as M. called it.

When we came home, M. said to me: "Why don't you try to register without me? You are not a convicted person."

This was the first and only occasion on which he ever suggested we act as separate persons. And—in the hope of saving our apartment—I agreed to try my luck, just this once.

But I, too, was refused a permit. I went up to one of the high-ranking militia officials sitting at desks in the main hall of the Petrovka station and demanded an explanation. "Convicted person," said the official. "I have no conviction," I said indignantly. "What do you mean," the man said, and started looking through my papers. "Here we are: "Osip Mandelstam, convicted person—" "That's a man," I interrupted, "but I am a woman—Nadezhda." He conceded this point, but then flew into a fury: "He's your husband, though, isn't he?" He got up and banged his fist on the table: "Have you ever heard of Article 58?" He shouted something else as well, but I fled in terror, even though I knew perfectly well that his anger was feigned, that he was just following his instructions in refusing me a permit and simply had no answers to my tiresome questions. We all unflinchingly carried out our instructions, and if anybody argued with us, all we could do was shout at them. We were fortunate

My self-control and discipline have now weakened to the point that I am writing these pages—although we have been told to be discriminating in the way we talk about the past. The only approved way is to show that, however bad things may have been for you, you nevertheless remain faithful to the idea of Communism, always able to distinguish the truly important—our ultimate objective—from minor factors—such as your own ruined life. Nobody worries about the inherent absurdity of this approach—it even seems to have been suggested by people who have spent half their lives in the camps, to approving nods from those who sent them there in the first place. I have only once had a personal encounter with someone who shared this point of view. This was a chance companion in a train on which I was traveling from Pskov to Moscow—otherwise I should never have met the man, given the insuperable social barriers that stand between me and people of his type. I had been seen off at the station by a group of friends who were all pleased and excited about news we had heard the day before—namely, that Tvardovski had at last got permission to publish Solzhenitsyn's story* in *Novy Mir*.

"Who is this Solzhenitsyn?" asked the man sitting next to me in the compartment. One look at his frowning face was enough to tell me that the only possible link between us would be like that of connecting retorts in which the liquid can never reach the same level in both halves.

I told him about Solzhenitsyn and he gave his judgment: he should not be published. "Did you read the story 'The Rough Diamond?'" he asked me. "We could have done without that, too, but at least it had educational values."

In reply I said something about the need to tell the truth about the past.

To this he said: "You should realize that it was all a historical necessity."

"Why a necessity?" I objected, "We're now being told it was all a historical accident due to Stalin's bad character."

"You look like an educated person, yet you don't seem to have read your Marx properly," he said. "You must have forgotten what he says about accidents—they also happen by necessity, but people aren't aware of it." What he meant was that if it hadn't been Stalin, somebody else would have sent all those people to the camps.

My companion wore a military tunic without epaulettes, and he had the puffy, sallow face of someone who had spent all his life be-

* "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," published in November 1962.

need. Did that mean they would all get out of control? Evidently his son's friends knew something of his father's past activities.

It was quite clear to me that I was talking to a "relic of Stalin's empire." Was it accidental that his son had revolted against him and that he was so much opposed to anyone probing into the past and scrutinizing the "historical necessity" which he had served with such zeal? Solzhenitsyn's story is like a touchstone: you can judge what a man's past (or his family's) has been like by the way he reacts to it. The past weighs heavily on us and we still have to make sense of it. It is difficult for us to confront it because so many people were implicated, either directly or indirectly, in what happened—or at least silently acquiesced in it. It is perfectly clear what people such as my chance traveling companion would like: they are simply waiting for the moment when they can give their blessing to a new generation of like-minded but more sophisticated heirs to Stalin's empire.

People who were silent or closed their eyes to what was happening also try to make excuses for the past. They generally accuse me of subjectivism, saying that I see only one side of the picture and ignore all the other things: the building up of industry, Meyerhold's stage productions, the Cheliuskin expedition and so forth. None of this, to my mind, absolves us from our duty to make sense of what happened. We have lived through a severe crisis of nineteenth-century humanism during which all its ethical values collapsed because they were founded only on man's needs and desires, his longing for personal happiness. The twentieth century has also shown us that evil has an enormous urge to self-destruction. It inevitably ends in total folly and suicide. Unfortunately, as we now understand, in destroying itself, evil may destroy all life on earth as well. However much we shout about these elementary truths, they will only be heeded by people who themselves want no more of evil. None of this, after all, is new: everything is always repeated, though on an ever greater scale. Luckily, I shall not see what the future holds in store.

shown a weakness for pre-Christian Russia. But we omitted to inquire what was being performed that evening at the Bolshoi Theater and whether, indeed, it had not already been closed for the summer. I am told that in his old age Aseyev was lonely and isolated. He explained his isolation by saying that he had lost his standing because of his fight against the "cult of personality." Friends of Kochetov write articles to say that even he (Kochetov) fought against the "cult of personality." It now seems there were no Stalinists at all, only brave fighters against the "cult of personality." I can testify that nobody I knew fought—all they did was to lie low. This was the most that people with a conscience could do—and even that required real courage.

65 *The Old Friend*

THE fiasco over the poetry reading did not break M.'s will. "We'll have to wait until the fall now," he said. It was already July and Moscow was empty, so we no longer hatched plans of salvation but thought only of how we could hold out till the fall. "We must change our profession—we are beggars now," M. declared, and he proposed we make a trip to Leningrad

It was noteworthy that in this last year M. and I no longer conversed as we had always done earlier, when I had often remembered things he said and the exact words he used. Now we exchanged inarticulate phrases or short interjections ("I'm tired . . . must lie down . . . can't go on . . . must do something . . . Lord, who will they arrest next? . . .")

When life becomes absolutely intolerable, you begin to think the horror will never end. In Kiev during the bombardment I understood that even the unbearable can come to an end, but I was not yet fully aware that it often does so only at death. As regards the Stalinist terror, we always knew that it might wax or wane, but that it might end—this we could never imagine. What reason was there for it to end? Everybody seemed intent on his daily round and went smilingly about the business of carrying out his instructions. It was essential to smile—if you didn't, it meant you were afraid or discontented. This nobody could afford to admit—if you were afraid, then

you must have a bad conscience. Everybody who worked for the State—and in this country even the humblest stall-keeper is a bureaucrat—had to strut around wearing a cheerful expression, as though to say: "What's going on is no concern of mine, I have very important work to do, and I'm terribly busy. I am trying to do my best for the State, so do not get in my way. My conscience is clear—if what's-his-name has been arrested, there must be good reason." The mask was taken off only at home, and then not always—even from your children you had to conceal how horror-struck you were; otherwise, God save you, they might let something slip in school. . . . Some people had adapted to the terror so well that they knew how to profit from it—there was nothing out of the ordinary about denouncing a neighbor to get his apartment or his job. But while wearing your smiling mask, it was important not to laugh—this could look suspicious to the neighbors and make them think you were indulging in sacrilegious mockery. We have lost the capacity to be spontaneously cheerful, and it will never come back to us.

When we arrived in Leningrad, we went straight to see Lozinski, who was living in an isolated dacha near Luga. He immediately gave us 500 roubles so we could return to Savelovo and pay the rent for our room there till the end of the summer. There had never been any stability about money and prices. On a free market the rise and fall of prices is governed by natural trends, but we could never make sense of the constant fluctuation of prices in our planned economy, where prices were always being raised or lowered in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. It was therefore difficult to say what the worth of these 500 roubles was, but there was still a certain magic in denominations of hundreds or thousands, and when Lozinski gave us 500 roubles we no longer felt like ordinary beggars, but like very superior ones who collected their alms wholesale instead of stretching out their hands for kopecks.

We had dinner with Lozinski, who played the fool and joked. Both M. and he laughed as in the old days at the Poets' Guild. Then M. read his poems for a long time. Afterward Lozinski saw us back to the station. The road at first went through woodland, but when we came to streets where there were people about, we did not want him to come any further in case somebody saw him with two suspicious strangers. The worst would have been to run into someone from the Union of Writers who knew M. by sight. We did not want to compromise Lozinski and left him at the edge of the woods.

Born in the nineties of the last century, Akhmatova, Lozinski and

M. found that in the thirties they already constituted the oldest generation of the intelligentsia—their elders had perished, emigrated or completely faded out of the picture. These three were therefore looked upon as ancients, while some of the Fellow Travelers like Kaverin, Fedin and Tikhonov, who were actually only a few years younger, were regarded as mere striplings. Babel stood apart from the rest, and was not thought of as being either young or old. As though to confirm the public attitude toward them, both Lozinski and M. aged very early. In 1929, when M. was working for the *Moscow Komsomol* newspaper on Tverskaya Street, the doorman there once said to me, as I was looking for him: "The old man has gone to the buffet." He was still not forty at the time, but his heart was already giving him trouble. Ehrenburg, incidentally, is wrong when he says that M. was short in height—he was in fact taller than Ehrenburg, and though I myself am of medium height, I scarcely came up to his ears, even when I wore high heels. Neither was M. as frail as Ehrenburg makes him out to be. He was in fact quite broad-shouldered. Ehrenburg remembered him as he was in the Crimea when he was starving, and he was also aiming at a journalistic effect by describing him as a puny, delicate Jewish type like Ashkenazi*—so weak and helpless, and look what they did to him! But M. was not like Ashkenazi at all—he was much more robust.

M.'s heart succumbed to the impossible demands made on it by our life and his own unruly temperament. Lozinski, on the other hand, was stricken by a mysterious kind of elephantiasis—it was like something Biblical and seemed out of place in Leningrad. His fingers, tongue and lips had swollen to twice their normal size. I had first seen him in the middle of the twenties, when he came to see us on Morskaya Street. He seemed to sense the approach of his illness already, and he was saying that after the Revolution everything had become difficult and people tired from the slightest exertion—talking, walking or just meeting someone. Lozinski, like M., had already tasted prison by this time, and he was one of those who always kept a bag packed in case of arrest. He was picked up several times—once because some of his students at a seminar on translation had given each other nicknames. Nicknames made the Cheka unhappy and put thoughts of conspiracy into their heads. The whole seminar was clapped in jail. Fortunately, Lozinski's wife had a good contact in Moscow, and whenever her husband was arrested, she at once rushed to her protector. The same thing was true of Zhirmunski's wife and

* Vladimir Ashkenazi, the Soviet pianist, now resident in the West.

more difficult to raise money for us. But his wife, Liuba, was more encouraging, and said she would go out to Sestroretsk. After lunch she put on a stylish hat and set off. Stenich insisted we stay until her return. Several people looked in on us there, including Akhmatova and Volpe—the same Volpe who had been dismissed as editor of *Zvezda* for publishing M.'s "Journey to Armenia," including the final part about King Shapukh who was granted "one extra day" by the Assyrian. This ending had been forbidden by the censorship. For us, this short time with Stenich was like King Shapukh's "one extra day."

Liuba returned with her booty: a little money and some clothing. Among the other things were two pairs of trousers, one very large and the other exactly M.'s size. We took the very large pair back to Savelovo and gave them to the criminal we had got to know—the one who had said that in such places as Alexandrov people of his kind were "skimmed off like cream." M. was never able to keep a second pair of trousers—there was always somebody whose need was even greater. At that time Shklovski also belonged to the category of people who possessed only one pair of trousers, and his son Nikita could expect no better from life. His mother once asked Nikita what he would do if a good fairy granted him one wish. Without a moment's hesitation he replied: "Get trousers for all my friends." In our conditions a man was better judged by his readiness to give a pair of trousers to a less fortunate friend than by his words—let alone by his articles, novels, or stories. From my observations, Soviet writers are a thick-skinned lot, but in the presence of Liuba Stenich it was not easy to refuse to help an exiled fellow writer.

The day we spent with Stenich seemed calm and peaceful, but reality kept breaking in. Stenich was friendly with the wife of Diki, and both she and her husband had been arrested. Stenich was now waiting his turn, and was worried about how Liuba would get on when she was left alone. In the evening the phone rang, but when Liuba picked up the receiver there was no sound at the other end. She burst into tears—we all knew that the police often checked in this way whether you were home before coming for you. However, nothing happened that evening, and Stenich was not arrested until the following winter. As we said goodbye on the landing, he pointed to the doors of the other apartments and told us when and in what circumstances their occupants had been taken away by the police. He was the only person on two floors who was still at liberty—if it could be called liberty. "Now it's my turn," he said. The next time

we came to Leningrad, Stenich had been arrested, and when we went to see Lozinski, he was very frightened. "Do you know what happened to your Amphitryon?" he asked. He thought that Stenich had been picked up because of the day we had spent with him, and we had to leave Lozinski at once, before we even had time to ask him for more money.

I think he exaggerated the extent to which our secret police went in for ordinary detective work. They were not in the least bit interested in *real facts*—all they wanted were lists of people to arrest, and these they got from their network of informers and the volunteers who brought them denunciations. To meet their quotas, all they needed were names of people, not details about their comings and goings. During interrogations they always, as a matter of routine, collected "evidence" against people whom they had no intention of arresting—just in case it was ever needed. I have heard of a woman who heroically went through torture rather than give "evidence" against Molotov! Spasski was asked for evidence against Liuba Ehrenburg, whom he had never even met. He managed to send word about this from the forced-labor camp, and Liuba was warned—apparently Akhmatova passed on the message to her. Liuba could not believe it: "What Spasski? I don't know him." She was still naïve in those days, but later she understood everything.

In the torture chambers of the Lubyanka they were constantly adding to the dossiers of Ehrenburg, Sholokhov, Alexei Tolstoi, and others whom they had no intention of touching. Dozens, if not hundreds of people were sent to camps on a charge of being involved in a "conspiracy" headed by Tikhonov and Fadeyev! Among them was Spasski. Wild inventions and monstrous accusations had become an end in themselves, and officials of the secret police applied all their ingenuity to them, as though reveling in the total arbitrariness of their power. Their basic principle was just what Furmanov had told us at the end of the twenties: "Give us a man, and we'll make a case." On the day we had spent at Stenich's apartment, his name was almost certainly already on a list of persons due to be arrested—his telephone number would have been found in Diki's address book, and no further information about him was needed.

The principles and aims of mass terror have nothing in common with ordinary police work or with security. The only purpose of terror is intimidation. To plunge the whole country into a state of chronic fear, the number of victims must be raised to astronomical levels, and on every floor of every building there must always be

several apartments from which the tenants have suddenly been taken away. The remaining inhabitants will be model citizens for the rest of their lives—this will be true for every street and every city through which the broom has swept. The only essential thing for those who rule by terror is not to overlook the new generations growing up without faith in their elders, and to keep on repeating the process in systematic fashion. Stalin ruled for a long time and saw to it that the waves of terror recurred from time to time, always on an even greater scale than before. But the champions of terror invariably leave one thing out of account—namely, that they can't kill everyone, and among their cowed, half-demented subjects there are always witnesses who survive to tell the tale.

On the first of our two visits to Leningrad we went out to see Zoshchenko in Sestroretsk (or it may have been Razliv). Zoshchenko had a weak heart and beautiful eyes. *Pravda* had commissioned a story from him and he had written something about the wife of the poet Kornilov, who was refused work and turned away from every door as though she were the wife of an arrested man. The story wasn't printed, of course, but in those years only Zoshchenko would have dared to do anything so provocative. It is amazing he got away with it—though it must immediately have gone down on the "account" which he later had to pay.

On that first trip we went to the station from Akhmatova's apartment and were seen off by her as well as the Steniches. Since we were catching the last train, we left the house after midnight—"the light-blue midnight" of Akhmatova's poem in which she says that Leningrad seemed to her

not a European city with the first prize for beauty
but a terrible exile to Eniseisk, a stopping place on the way
to Chita, to Ishim, to waterless Irgiz and famous Atabasar,
to the town of Svobodny and the plague-ridden stench of
prison bunks,
so it seemed to me on this light-blue night—this city,
glorified
by the first of our poets, and by you and me.*

Is there any wonder that this was how the city looked to us then? We all felt the same way—and that's what the city was: a transit station to exile, except that the places Akhmatova mentions were by that time comparatively well settled and they had almost stopped

* These lines have not been previously published.

tion, there was no lighting at all in Maly Yaroslavets. We walked up the streets, which were slippery from mud, and we saw not a single street lamp or lighted window—nor were there any passers-by. Once or twice we had to knock on windows to ask the way, and each time a fear-contorted face peered out. But when we simply asked the way, the faces were at once transformed and wreathed in smiles, and we were given very detailed instructions with extraordinary friendliness. When we at last arrived at Nadia Bruni's and we told her what had happened when we knocked on windows, she explained that there had been more and more arrests in recent weeks, not only of exiles, but of local people too. As a result, everybody was just sitting at home, waiting with bated breath. During the Civil War, people did not have lights in their windows for fear of attracting the attention of all the freebooters then roaming the country. In the towns occupied by the Germans, people also sat without lights. In 1937, however, it made no difference, since people were picked up not at random, but on individual warrants. All the same, everybody went to bed early, to avoid putting the lights on. Perhaps it was the most primitive animal instinct—better sit in the darkness of your burrow than in the light. I know the feeling very well myself—whenever a car stops outside the house, you want to switch off the light.

We were so horrified by the darkened town that after spending the night at Nadia Bruni's we fled back to Moscow the next morning. We didn't follow Lev's advice because we would have needed the strength of mind of the meek and gentle Nadia Bruni to stand the terror that lay like a pall over the town. It was the same throughout the whole country, of course, but in the villages and small towns it was generally less overpowering.

The next person we consulted was Babel. I do not think he ever lived in any of the apartment buildings reserved for writers, but always managed to find peculiar places of his own. With great difficulty we tracked him down in a strange house that must formerly have been a private villa. I have a vague recollection that there were foreigners living in this house, and that Babel rented rooms from them on the second floor. But perhaps he just said so to astonish us—he was very fond of startling people like this. At that time foreigners were avoided like the plague—you could lose your head for the slightest contact with them. Who in his right mind would have lived in the same house as foreigners? I still remember my astonishment, and still cannot understand it. Whenever we saw Babel

he gave us something to be surprised about.

We told him our troubles, and during the whole of our long conversation he listened with remarkable intentness. Everything about Babel gave an impression of all-consuming curiosity—the way he held his head, his mouth and chin, and particularly his eyes. It is not often that one sees such undisguised curiosity in the eyes of a grown-up. I had the feeling that Babel's main driving force was the unbri-dled curiosity with which he scrutinized life and people.

With his usual ability to size things up, he was quick to decide on the best course for us. "Go out to Kalinin," he said, "Erdman is there—his old women just love him." This was Babel's cryptic way of saying that all Erdman's female admirers would never have allowed him to settle in a bad place. He also thought we might be able to get some help from them—in finding a room there, for instance. But Babel, as it turned out, had exaggerated Erdman's hold over his "old women"—when we went to Kalinin, we found that none of them lived out there with him, and that he had to come into Moscow to see them.

Babel volunteered to get the money for our fare the next day, and we then started talking about other things. He told us he now spent all his time meeting militiamen and drinking with them. The previous evening he had been drinking with one of the chief militiamen of Moscow, who in his drunken state had declared that "he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword." The chiefs of the militia, he said, were disappearing one after another and "today you're all right, but you don't know where you'll be tomorrow."

The word "militia" was of course a euphemism. We knew that Babel was really talking about Chekists. M. asked him why he was so drawn to "militiamen": was it a desire to see what it was like in the exclusive store where the merchandise was death? Did he just want to touch it with his fingers? "No," Babel replied, "I don't want to touch it with my fingers—I just like to have a sniff and see what it smells like."

It was known that among the "militiamen" Babel visited was Yezhov himself. After the arrest of Babel, Katayev and Shklovski said he had visited Yezhov because he was so frightened, but that it hadn't saved him—Beria had had him arrested precisely on this account. I am convinced that Babel went to see Yezhov not out of cowardice but out of sheer curiosity—just to have a sniff and see what it smelled like.

The question "What will happen to us tomorrow?" was the chief

topic of all our conversations. Babel, with his storyteller's gift, put it into the mouth of his "militiamen." M. was generally silent about it—he knew too well what awaited him. Only once did he blurt out something when we happened to run into Shervinski on the street. He was no friend of ours, but M. suddenly told him it couldn't go on like this—"I am right in front of their noses all the time and they must have no idea what to do with me—in other words, they will soon have to pick me up." Shervinski listened to this brief outburst and said nothing at all. After M.'s death I sometimes met him, but he never mentioned it to me. I should not be surprised if he had forgotten—there was so much unpleasantness in our lives that this was the only thing to do.

69 *A Scene from Life*

BABEL was not the only one who knew Yezhov—we too had once made his acquaintance. This had happened in the 1930's when M. and I were staying in a Government villa in Sukhumi. The Yezhov we met then was remarkably like his later portraits and photographs—especially the one where he appears with a broad smile at the moment when Stalin is shaking his hand to congratulate him on some Government award. The Sukhumi Yezhov also had his famous limp, and I remember Podvoiski, who liked to lecture people about the qualities of a true Bolshevik, scolding me for my laziness and telling me to follow the example of "our Yezhov" who danced the gopak despite his lame leg. But there were many Yezhavs and I still find it difficult to believe that the man we saw in Sukhumi was the legendary People's Commissar at the dawn of his brief but dazzling career. It is hard to credit that we sat at the same table, eating, drinking and exchanging small talk with this man who was to be one of the great killers of our time, and who totally exposed—not in theory but in practice—all the assumptions on which our "humanism" rested.

The Sukhumi Yezhov was a modest and rather agreeable person. He was not yet used to being driven about in an automobile and did not therefore regard it as an exclusive privilege to which no ordinary mortal could lay claim. We sometimes asked him to give us a lift into

of whom felt completely at home. The same could not be said for us.

On the day of Mayakovski's death we were working in the garden with a proud and elegant Georgian, a specialist in radio. The guests had all gathered in the dining room for their evening's entertainment—they generally sang songs and danced Yezhov's favorite dance, the gopak. Our companion said: "Georgian People's Commissars would not dance on the day on which a Georgian national poet had died." M. nodded to me and said: "Go and tell that to Yezhov." I went into the dining room and passed on the Georgian's words to Yezhov, who was in very high spirits already. The dancing ceased, but I don't think anybody apart from Yezhov knew the reason. A few years before this, M. had rebuked Vyshinski for laughing and talking loudly while a young poet was reading his verse. This happened in the CEKUBU rest home.

We could not stand sanatoria and rest homes, but went to them very occasionally if there was nowhere else to go. They always smelled of death, for some reason.

70 The Suicide

Who foresaw the disastrous consequences of abandoning humanism in the name of some overriding aim? Who knew what calamities we were calling down on our heads by adopting the principle that "everything is permitted"? Only a handful of intellectuals—but nobody listened to them. Now they are accused of "abstract humanism," but in the twenties everybody mercilessly heaped scorn on them. The standard epithets for them were "puny" and "spineless," and the word "intellectual" itself was always given a pejorative ending (*intelligentishka*). They were constantly caricatured in the press, and the thirty-year-old partisans of the "new era" would have nothing to do with them. The prime task was to hold them up to ridicule in literature, and Ilf and Petrov obliged by writing their savage lampoon on "spineless intellectuals" in *The Twelve Chairs*. The figures in question seem very dated now, and it would not occur to anyone at the present day to see a "typical" intellectual in the pitiful half-wit who pesters the wife who has left him. Read-

ing this immortal work today, one has difficulty figuring out the point of the satire and whom exactly they are making fun of. Something similar has happened with a much more profound work, Erdman's play *The Suicide*, which Gorki found so impressive and Meyerhold wanted to produce. As originally conceived, the play was to feature a crowd of wretched intellectuals in repulsive masks surrounding a man who is about to commit suicide, and whom they want to exploit for their own purposes—as a way of calling attention to the difficulties of their existence, the hopelessness resulting from their inability to find a place in the new life. But a healthy instinct for life wins out in the end, and the man marked down for suicide—despite the farewell banquet and all the liberal speeches in his honor—decides not to die after all and thumbs his nose at the chorus of masked intellectuals who are egging him on.

Erdman, a real artist, couldn't help introducing genuinely tragic undertones into the polyphonic scenes with the masked intellectuals (who were always then referred to as petit-bourgeois grumblers). Nowadays, when nobody hesitates to say quite openly how unbearable our life is, the complaints of the masks in Erdman's play sound not like the whining of "spineless intellectuals," but like a tragic chorus of martyred ghosts. The hero's refusal to kill himself also takes on a different meaning now: life is hideous and intolerable, but one must go on living nevertheless, because life is life. . . . Did Erdman intend this implication, or was his aim much simpler? I do not know, but I believe that, with all its anti-intellectualism, there is an undercurrent of humanity in the play. It is really about why some of us decided to go on living even though everything was pushing us to suicide.

Erdman himself chose to fall silent—anything just to stay alive. In Kalinin he lived in a poky little hole of a room with a bunk to sleep on and a small table. When we came to see him, he was lying on the bunk—the only alternative was to sit on the only chair. He got up, shook himself and took us to the outskirts of the town where there were sometimes rooms to let in privately owned wooden houses. He came to see us quite frequently, but never with his co-author and antipode, Misha Volpin. He evidently visited us only on days when Misha was away in Moscow.

Erdman, as we know, first got into trouble for his fables, which Kachalov was irresponsible enough to recite at an evening in the Kremlin—that is, to the same sort of people as those we had stayed with in the Government villa in Sukhumi, where the companion of

They are few and far between—indeed, almost imperceptible—but they are nevertheless there.

Alas, my faith and optimism are shared by almost nobody: people who know the difference between good and evil are more inclined to expect new misfortunes and new crimes. I realize the possibility of a return to the past, but I still think the general outlook is bright. We have seen the triumph of evil after the values of humanism have been vilified and trampled on. The reason these values succumbed was probably that they were based on nothing except boundless confidence in the human intellect. I think we may now find a better foundation for them, if only because of the lessons we have drawn from our experience. We can see the mistakes and crimes of the past, and the seductive delusions of former times have lost their glamour. Russia once saved the Christian culture of Europe from the Tatars, and in the past fifty years, by taking the brunt on herself, she has saved Europe again—this time from rationalism and all the will to evil that goes with it. The sacrifice in human life was enormous. How can I believe it was all in vain?

I have a certain acquaintance who, though still quite young, is both wise and gloomy beyond his years. The poet he likes best is Blok, because of his frantic presentiment of the end of Russian culture. This admirer of Blok looks down on me for wearing rose-tinted spectacles at my age. He believes that Blok's prediction came true, that our culture has really perished and we are buried under its ruins. This young pessimist fails to notice the changes that have come about since we first met. He came to see me straight after the Twentieth Congress, when people were asking in bewilderment: "Why have they told us all this?" Some would rather not have heard such disagreeable things; others, about to become members of the ruling class, were upset because their task had suddenly been made somewhat more difficult; then there were those who shook their heads sadly at the thought that the old ways of making a career would not work any more and they would have to think of something new.

This was the period known as the "thaw," when some people really believed that they would be granted permission to speak their minds. This hope was not fulfilled, but everybody knows that this is not what matters. What matters is the change in each individual and his way of thinking. The very need for permission from above is a hangover from the past, with its belief in authority and fear of punishment. People trembled with terror at every word of command.

This terror could return, but it would mean sending several million people to the camps. If this were to happen now, they would all scream—and so would their families, friends and neighbors. That is something to be reckoned with.

My young friend first came to see me while I was living in the filthy barracks that served as a dormitory for the teachers of the Cheboksary Teachers' Training College. The stench was overpowering, and the air was thick with soot from the kerosene lamps. It was as cold in my room as it was outside: a plank in the wall on the second floor had slipped, and threatened to fall on the heads of the children playing down below. The wind that blew freely into my room brought the smell of melting snow. My visitor explained that he was an admirer of M. and had been dying to come and see me. He had come quite out of the blue—without any letters of introduction from mutual friends to give me an idea of what sort of person he was. But his whole bearing, and particularly the look in his eyes, inspired confidence.

I asked him to sit down and told him something I would not normally have said to a casual visitor: "When somebody comes and tells me how much he likes Mandelstam," I said, "I know that he is an informer. He has either been sent, or has come on his own initiative so that he can later submit a nice little report. This has been going on for twenty years now. Nobody else ever talks about Mandelstam with me—literary people who used to read his poetry never mention him in conversation with me. I am telling this to you because you make a good impression on me. I trust you. But even with you I cannot talk about Mandelstam and his poetry. Now you understand why."

He went away, but a couple of years later I heard about him again from some mutual friends and I invited him to come and see me. Bewildered by our first encounter, he was obviously reluctant to visit me a second time, but everything was soon forgotten. I do not know whether he ever realized what profound trust I had shown him at our first meeting by speaking to him as I did.

Several years have gone by since then, and I no longer mind talking with anyone who asks me about M.—they are mostly people of the younger generation, though sometimes even the older ones now bring the subject up. Nowadays we talk about a great many things that used to be so taboo that most people in my circle did not even dare think about them. At present, however, we no longer wonder whether something is "forbidden" or not—we have just stopped

bothering and forgotten that kind of thing. But that is not all.

In the twenties, young people of education willingly gathered information for the authorities and the secret police, and thought they were doing so for "the good of the Revolution," for the sake of the mysterious majority which was supposedly interested in the defense and the consolidation of the regime. From the thirties, and right up to Stalin's death, they continued to do the same, except that their motivation had changed—they now acted to benefit themselves, in the hope of reward, or out of fear. They took copies of M.'s verse to the police, or denounced colleagues in the hope of getting their own writings published, or of being promoted in their work. Others did this kind of thing out of sheer terror—not to be arrested or destroyed themselves. They were very easily intimidated, and eagerly seized on any small favors offered to them. At the same time they were always assured that nothing about their activities would ever leak out or become public knowledge. This promise has been kept and the people concerned can calmly live out their days, enjoying the modest privileges their activities have earned them.

But people asked to do such work nowadays no longer have faith in any guarantees. There can be no return to the past for this new generation, which is by no means as terrified and submissive as earlier ones. These young people can never be persuaded, moreover, that their fathers were justified in their actions, nor do they believe that "everything is permitted." This does not, of course, mean that there are no longer any informers, but the percentage is much lower. Earlier I could expect the worst of any young man, not to mention corrupt members of my own generation, but it would now be rather a fluke if a scoundrel wormed his way into my circle of acquaintances—and even then he might hesitate to do anything really despicable, because in the new state of affairs it would not be to his advantage and everybody would turn their backs on him.

Among the new intelligentsia now growing up in front of our eyes, nobody blithely repeats old sayings like "You can't swim against the tide" or "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." In other words, the values we thought had been abolished forever are being restored, and they must be taken account of, even by people who could quite well do without them. This has come as a surprise both to those who never gave up these values and to those who tried to bury them once and for all. Somehow or other they lived on underground, taking refuge in all those hushed homes with their dimmed lights. Now they are on the move and gathering force.

The initiative in their destruction belonged to the intelligentsia of the twenties, which, as a result, ceased to be itself and turned into something different. At the present day we are witnessing the reverse process. It is astonishingly slow, and we are impatient. How can we be patient after all we have gone through?

Nobody can define the intelligentsia or say how it differs from the educated classes. It is a historical term that was first used in Russia and then spread to the West. The intelligentsia has a number of distinctive features, but they don't add up to a neat definition. The history of the intelligentsia is obscured by the fact that the word is often applied to people who do not belong to it by right. How can one use it to refer to technocrats or bureaucrats, even if they have university diplomas, or, for that matter, even if they write novels and epic poems? During the period of capitulation, the real intelligentsia was mocked at, and its name was appropriated by those who surrendered.

What, then, is the intelligentsia? If you take any one of its features, you will find it is shared with some other section of the community: a certain degree of education, the ability to think critically and the sense of concern that goes with it, freedom of thought, conscience, humanism . . . All these are especially important just now, because we have seen how their disappearance means the end of the intelligentsia itself: at the least attempt to change the values it embodies, it will itself lose its character and go under—as happened in this country. But it is not only the intelligentsia that preserves values—the ordinary people kept them alive even during the darkest times, when the so-called cultural elite was repudiating them. It may be that the intelligentsia is simply not very stable and that its values are correspondingly volatile. There is also a tendency to self-destructiveness. The people who made the Revolution and were active in the twenties sprang from an intelligentsia which had given up one set of values in favor of others regarded as supreme. The result was a plunge into self-destruction. What does someone like Tikhonov or Fedin have in common with a real Russian intellectual? Nothing—except perhaps their spectacles and false teeth. But the younger people now appearing on the scene—some of them still in their teens—are a very different matter; you can see immediately that they are true intellectuals, though it is very hard to define the qualities involved. The Danish linguist Jespersen, tired of hearing arguments about how to define parts of speech, once jokingly remarked that ordinary people can always tell a verb from a noun, just as a dog can

tell bread from clay. But the main thing is: these young intellectuals have appeared and the process is now irreversible—it cannot be stopped even by the physical destruction which the representatives of the past would love to visit on them. Nowadays the persecution of one intellectual only creates dozens more. We saw this during the Brodski affair.

The Russian intelligentsia has one feature which is probably not known in the West. Among the teachers of modern languages I encountered during all my years in provincial colleges, I only once met a true intellectual, a woman called Marta from Chernovitsy. She once asked me in great surprise why all those students who thirst after truth and righteousness are always so keen on poetry. This is so, and it is peculiar to Russia. M. once asked me (or himself, rather) what it was that made someone a member of the intelligentsia. He did not use the word itself—this was at a time when it was still a term of abuse, before it was taken over by bureaucratic elements in the so called liberal professions—but that was what he meant. Was it a university education, he wondered, or attendance in a pre-revolutionary grammar school? No, it was not this. Could it be your attitude toward literature? This he thought was closer, but not quite it. Finally he decided that what really mattered was a person's feelings about poetry. Poetry does indeed have a very special place in this country. It arouses people and shapes their minds. No wonder the birth of our new intelligentsia is accompanied by a craving for poetry never seen before—it is the golden treasury in which our values are preserved; it brings people back to life, awakens their conscience and stirs them to thought. Why this should happen I do not know, but it is a fact.

My young friend who loves Blok and nourishes his own pessimism by reading him was for me the first sign of the intelligentsia's rebirth, and I find his pessimism unjustified. The new awakening is accompanied by the copying out and reading of poetry, which thus plays its part in setting things in motion again and reviving thought. The keepers of the flame hid in darkened corners, but the flame did not go out. It is there for all to see.

Moscow drew us like a magnet all the time—we went there for gossip, news, money . . . Each time, remembering where we were, we raced for the last train back to Kalinin, fearful of getting stranded for an extra night in the forbidden city. Occasionally people offered their seat in the train and talked with me in an oddly compassionate way. M. happened to mention this to Piast, who laughed in his peculiar way (it was like a horse whinnying) and said: "That's because they think she's the one, not you." At that time I wore a leather jacket, and Piast meant that I got all this sympathy because I was taken for an exile. As so many people in Moscow avoided us like the plague precisely on this account, the kindness of these working people was an unexpected bounty. The leather jacket, incidentally, was of secondary importance, since I got the same sort of consideration without it.

In the train M. and I always argued about whether or not to take a cab in Kalinin. I thought it was better to go home from the station on foot and save money for another day's upkeep in our Kalinin refuge. M. took the opposite view: one more day in Kalinin made no difference and we would still have to go back to Moscow again "to arrange things." This was a variation on the constant theme in the last year of his life that things "can't go on like this." We talked on such lines all the time in Kalinin, but there was nothing we could do by way of "arranging things."

Every time our argument was resolved quite simply. There were only two or three horse cabs at the station. This was one of the few remaining forms of private enterprise, but most cabbies had already been forced out of business by taxes and "liquidated as a class." They were immediately besieged by a large crowd and quickly drove off with the most enterprising clients, so we had no choice but to walk home.

On the bridges across the Volga and the Tmaka there was always a biting wind—the wind of exile and persecution. On the edge of the town where we had rented a room the streets were impassable because of mud in the fall, and in the winter we floundered helplessly in the snow. People lived here only if they didn't have to go out to work. . . . M. got very breathless and kept on saying we should have taken a cab. I trudged along behind him.

connection I remember a meeting on a train with another relic of "Stalin's empire." This one, unlike the other one I have already described, was all for the Twentieth Congress. This was because he had been in trouble under Stalin—he hadn't exactly been arrested, but it had been a near thing. Now he was enjoying his retirement on a good pension as a former Party official. Not to spend his time in idleness, he had taken on the job of giving political instruction in a Leningrad technical college. As one teacher to another, he began to tell me his troubles. On one election day he had come to the college early to get all the students out to vote, but none of them wanted to. He said they should take an example from people like himself who had "made the Revolution" and told them he had got up at the crack of dawn to go and vote. To this they replied that nobody had asked him to make a revolution and that people had been better off before. This had left him speechless, and the whole of his "revolutionary" claptrap had been to no avail. "What can you make of these young people nowadays? How do you cope with them?" I told him in all honesty that I got on well with them and they never made trouble for me. These are, in effect, Tatiana Vasilievna's grandchildren— though sometimes I wonder whether they have anything in their heads apart from their negative attitude toward everything. . . .

Not long after I had been to see her, the police came to Tatiana Vasilievna's house with a warrant for my arrest. They searched the house from top to bottom, including the attic and cellar, but luckily I had taken everything away with me. They had a photograph with them, and they looked very carefully at Tatiana Vasilievna and the wife of Shchegolev's secretary. I learned all this a year later when I was about to go back to Kalinin to settle there. It was the wife of Shchegolev's secretary who had brought the story to Leningrad. I would have hesitated to return to Kalinin, but my luggage was already on the train when I heard about this, and I decided to risk it. The terror was now not quite as bad, Yezhov had fallen and the arrests were no longer on a mass scale. I lived in Kalinin nearly two years—right till the evacuation after the war broke out—and I was left alone, even though the warrant for my arrest must still have been lying, unused, in my file. It may seem fantastic, but there were many cases like this—the target figures for the man hunt had by now been "adjusted," and people not picked up under earlier warrants came through untouched. Terror was planned, like the economy, and the quotas for life and death were manipulated at will.

The effect the house search had on Tatiana Vasilievna was deva-

me the name and address of some good people there—the man of the house, she said, didn't drink or swear. Then she added: "And the woman's mother has been in jail, so she'll be sorry for you." The people one met in trains like this were always kinder than those in Moscow, and they always guessed what my troubles were—even though it was now spring and I had sold my leather jacket.

Strunino is on the Yaroslavl railroad along which prisoners are taken to Siberia, and I had the mad thought that one day I might catch a glimpse of M. as he went past in the prison transport, so I got out there and went to the address which had been given me. I quickly got on good terms with the people and told them exactly why I needed a place to live in the "hundred-and-five kilometer zone"—though they knew without my having to tell them. They let me have a porch which was not in use, but when it got colder later in the year, they insisted I move inside with them—they screened off a corner of their living room with cupboards and blankets to give me some privacy.

I never hid the fact that I am Jewish, and I must say that among the ordinary people I have yet to encounter any anti-Semitism. In working-class families and among collective farmers I was always treated as one of them, without the least hint of what one found in the universities after the war—and now too, for that matter. It is always among the semi-educated that fascism, chauvinism and hatred for the intelligentsia most easily take root. Anti-intellectual feelings are a greater threat than crude anti-Semitism as such, and they are rampant in all the overstuffed institutions where people are furiously defending their right to their ignorance. We gave them a Stalinist education and they have Stalinist diplomas. They naturally want to hang on to what they feel entitled to—where would they go otherwise?

I made day trips to Moscow from Strunino to hand in parcels for M., and my meager resources—I had to sell off M.'s books—soon gave out. My hosts saw that I had nothing to eat, and they shared their *tiuria* and *murtsovka** with me. They referred to radishes as "Stalin's lard." They made me drink fresh milk to keep my strength up—though they had little to spare, because they had to sell a good deal of what their cow gave to buy hay for it. In return I used to bring them wild berries from the woods. I spent most of my day in the woods and I always used to slow down as I came back to the

* Country dishes. *Tiuria*: bread soaked in kvass. *Murtsovka*: eggs and onion mixed with kvass or water.

a member of the Writers' Union entitled him to. Shklovski now solemnly handed the dog-skin coat over to M. and even made a little speech on the occasion: "Let everybody see that you came here riding inside the train, not hanging on the buffers. . . ." Till then M. had worn a yellow coat made of leather—also a gift from somebody. It was in this yellow coat that he went to the camp later on. . . .

Whenever the doorbell rang, they hid us in the kitchen or the children's room before opening the door. If it was a friend, we were at once released from captivity with shouts of joy, but if it was Pavlenko or Lelia Povolotskaya, the woman police spy from next door—the one who had a stroke when they started rehabilitating people—we stayed in our hiding place until they were gone. None of them ever once caught a glimpse of us, and we were very proud of the fact.

The Shklovskis' house was the only place where we felt like human beings again. This was a family that knew how to help lost souls like us. In their kitchen we discussed our problems—where to stay the night, how to get money, and so forth. We avoided staying the night with them, because of the women who looked after the building—the janitress, the door-woman and the one who worked the elevator. It was a time-honored tradition that these down-trodden but good-natured souls worked for the secret police. They got no extra pay for this—it simply counted as part of their normal duties. I don't remember now how we managed it, but we did go to the Shostakovich concert and stayed the night somewhere else. . . . When I later came by myself to the Shklovskis' apartment, after M.'s death, the women at the door asked me where he was, and when I told them he was dead, they sighed. "But we thought you'd be the first to go," said one of them. This remark showed me the extent to which our fate had been written on our faces, and it also made me realize that these wretched women had hearts after all, and that one needn't be so afraid of them. The ones who took pity on me soon died—the poor women didn't last long on their meager rations—but afterward I always got on well with their successors, who never informed the militia that I sometimes spent the night at the Shklovskis'. But in 1937 we were terrified of being reported and tried not to stay at the Shklovskis' for fear of getting them into trouble—instead, we kept on the move all the time, chasing breathlessly from place to place.

Occasionally, when there was no choice, we stayed the night there nevertheless, sleeping on their bedroom floor on a mattress covered with a sheepskin rug. They were on the seventh story, so you

couldn't hear cars stopping outside, but if ever we heard the elevator coming up at night, we all four of us raced to the door and listened. "Thank God," we would say, "it's downstairs" or "it's gone past." This business of listening for the elevator happened every night, no matter whether we were there or not. Fortunately, it was not used all that often, since many of the writers with apartments in the building spent most of their time in Peredelkino, or in any case didn't come home late—and their children were still very young. In the years of the terror, there was not a home in the country where people did not sit trembling at night, their ears straining to catch the murmur of passing cars or the sound of the elevator. Even nowadays, whenever I spend the night at the Shklovskis' apartment, I tremble as I hear the elevator go past. The sight of half-dressed people huddling by the door, waiting to hear where the elevator stops, is something one can never forget. One night recently, after a car had stopped outside my house, I had a bad dream in which I thought M. was waking me up and saying: "Get dressed—they've come for you this time." But I refused to budge: "I won't get up—to hell with them!" This was a mental revolt against what is also, after all, a kind of collaboration: they come to cart you off to prison and you just meekly get out of bed and put on your clothes with trembling hands. But never again! If they come for me, they'll have to carry me out on a stretcher or kill me on the spot—I'll never go of my own free will.

Once during the winter of 1937 we decided it was wrong to go on taking advantage of the Shklovskis' kindness. We were afraid of compromising them—a single denunciation and they could all land in prison. We were horrified at the thought of bringing disaster on Shklovski and his whole family, and though they begged us not to worry, we stopped going to see them for a while. As a result, we felt more homeless and lonely than ever before. Soon M. could stand it no longer and while we were on a visit to Lev Bruni he phoned the Shklovskis. "Come over at once," said Victor, "Vasilisa misses you terribly." A quarter of an hour later we rang at their door and Vasilisa came out crying tears of joy. I then felt she was the only real person in the whole world—and I still think so. I should mention that I have always felt just as close to Akhmatova, but she was living in Leningrad at that time and was thus far away from us.

been hinted to him that it "wouldn't be advisable." If you approached them for permission to do something, our officials had a nice way of saying with a frown: "Of course, go ahead if you see fit." The frown was equivalent to a refusal, but since the word "no" had not actually passed the official's lips, appearances were saved and the refusal to allow something was made to look like "initiative from below" and thus entirely "democratic." Probably no other regime ever went in for such niceties in the art of bureaucratic control—apart from all its other qualities, it was distinguished by unparalleled hypocrisy. But it is even more likely that Fadeyev, fearing to "get mixed up in something," never raised the matter at all. Nevertheless, at the end of the winter in 1938, running into M. in the Writers' Union, he suddenly offered to put in a word for him "up above" and find out "what they think." He said we should come and see him again at the Union in a few days' time, when he would have the answer, or, rather, some information for us.

To our astonishment, Fadeyev actually kept the appointment on the day and at the hour we had agreed on. We left the premises of the Union with him and he invited us into his car so we could talk on the way to another place we had to go to. Fadeyev sat next to his chauffeur, and we got in the back. Turning around to us, he told us he had talked with Andreyev, but that this had produced no results: Andreyev was quite adamant that no work could be found for M. Fadeyev was embarrassed and upset that he had been turned down "point blank" (to use his own words). M. even tried to cheer him up by saying it didn't matter and everything would work out in the end. We had one good reason not to be too much put out by Fadeyev's failure: just before this M. had suddenly been received by Stavski, who suggested that we should go for a time to a rest home while the question of work for M. was being decided. On Stavski's instructions, the Literary Fund had already issued us vouchers to enable us both to spend two months in a rest home at Samatikha, and this unexpected stroke of luck had made us feel very much better. When we mentioned it to Fadeyev, however, he did not sound pleased: "Vouchers? Where to? Who gave them to you? Where is Samatikha? Why not to the Union rest home?" M. explained that the Union of Writers had no rest homes beyond the hundred-kilometer radius. "What about Maleyevka?" Fadeyev asked. We had never heard of this place, but when we asked about it, Fadeyev suddenly became evasive. "Oh, it's a pretty run-down building they've just let the Union have. I suppose it's being done over." M. then said

ers.* Then also it was a case of tearful farewell embraces after he had signified his formal agreement to their arrest and liquidation—even though the Yiddish writers, unlike Mandelstam, were his friends.

But, unfamiliar as we were with the ways of officialdom in this irrational country of ours, we were just baffled by such duplicity, and certainly didn't understand how on earth a writer could behave like this, even if he held a high post in the writers' organization. We still didn't realize the extent to which people had been corrupted, nor did we know that heads of departments were always required to countersign lists of their subordinates who had been arrested, and were thus deliberately made party to their destruction. In 1938, however, this particular function would have been carried out by Stavski rather than Fadeyev—or so people say. The trouble is that we cannot be certain about anything: the past is still wrapped in mystery, and we still do not really know what they did to us.

Less than a year later, during a party in Lavrushinski Street to celebrate the award of the first Government decorations to be given to writers, Fadeyev learned about the death of M. and drank to his memory with the words "We have done away with a great poet." Translated into Soviet idiom, this meant: "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs."

This is not quite the end of Fadeyev's involvement in our story. Shortly before the end of the war I had a chance encounter with him as I was going up to the Shklovskis' in the elevator. I was just about to close the door and press the button when the doorwoman shouted that someone else was coming—I waited a moment, and in walked Fadeyev. He did not greet me, and, being used to this kind of thing, I simply turned away so as not to embarrass a man who didn't want to recognize me. But as soon as the elevator started to move, Fadeyev bent down to my ear and whispered to me that it was Andreyev who had signed M.'s sentence. Or at least that is how I understood the sense of his words, which were roughly: "The business with Osip Emilievich was handled by Andreyev." Then the elevator stopped and Fadeyev got out. I did not yet know about the three-man tribunal† which operated then, and had imagined that sentences were passed only by the secret police. I was therefore puzzled by this reference to Andreyev. I also noticed that Fadeyev was a little drunk.

Why did he speak to me like that, and was he telling the truth? It

* All the leading Yiddish writers were shot, on Stalin's orders, in 1952.

† Tribunals consisting of three officials which sentenced political prisoners behind closed doors during the terror.

Kalinin to get the basket full of manuscripts we had left with Tatiana Vasilievna. If I had delayed for a few more days, the contents of the basket would have been thrown into a sack (like the stuff from our suitcase in Samatikha) and I myself would have been taken away in a Black Maria—which at that moment I might have preferred to remaining “free.” But then what would have happened to M.’s poetry? When I see books by the Aragons* of this world, who are so keen to induce their fellow countrymen to live as we do, I feel I have a duty to tell about my own experience. For the sake of what idea was it necessary to send those countless trainloads of prisoners, including the man who was so dear to me, to forced labor in eastern Siberia? M. always said that they always knew what they were doing: the aim was to destroy not only people, but the intellect itself.

79 *Gugovna*

I USED to have a book on extinct birds and, looking at it, I suddenly had the thought that all my friends and acquaintances were nothing more than the last members of a dying species. I showed M a picture of a couple of extinct parakeets, and he thought they looked very much like us. I later lost the book, but I have never forgotten this instructive analogy. The only thing I did not realize then was how long-lived exotic birds can be, while the more commonplace specimens die off like crows.

The late Dmitri Sergeyeovich Usov once said to me that M. was more of an Assyrian than a Jew. “In what way?” I asked in astonishment. In reply he said there was an Assyrian quality about the line “grim heliotrope suns turned full in the face.” “That’s why he saw through our Assyrian† so easily,” he added.

Bearded, short of breath and gone to seed, like M., Usov was also afraid of no one, yet frightened by everything. As he lay dying in a hospital in Tashkent, he called for me, but I did not get there in time. I hope I may be forgiven for this. But I was able to make his last days a little easier by reading M.’s poetry to him—he was de-

* See the note on Brik in the Appendix.

† Stalin.

those we had to thank for this "happy life" of ours! The police spies among our graduates were quite flummoxed by this.

Despite her lame leg, Alisa Gugovna was always busily moving around her room, rearranging the piles of Usov's books and creating an effect of home comfort, quite extraordinary for us, by improvising things from broken pieces of china and tattered old blankets that must have gone back to the days of serfdom. Usov and she had a favorite drinking mug nicknamed "The Goldfinch" which nobody was allowed to use unless they could recite M.'s poem by heart. Alisa liked to massage her face with her slender fingers, remarking that Akhmatova didn't look after herself at all. She took very good care of her hands—which was important if you had spent years lighting stoves and scrubbing floors with them—and of her long, almost gray braids. She was secretly very worried that if she didn't "keep her looks" Usov might not recognize her in the next world. She had been just as concerned about her looks when she lived in exile in Kazakhstan, waiting for Usov to finish serving his sentence in the forced-labor camp: she wanted to look as beautiful to him as the night they had parted. After his death she was angry with him for a long time because he had been so thoughtless as to abandon her like this—he had, she felt, deserted her, leaving her to cope all alone with the linguistics she had to teach in order to earn her widow's daily bread.

She was one of the last few people to speak with the accent of the old Moscow aristocracy, and Usov always used to say that she could always, in any circumstances, count on being taken for an honorary Jewess rather than a born one. At the same time, account would no doubt be taken of the work she did before she was exiled: the Lenin Library employed her as a consultant to identify people in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century portraits. She knew all the gossip there was to know about the ladies of that period, and there was no greater expert on the genealogy of the families from which the poets of the time came.

This, then, was how the beauties of my generation ended their lives—as the widows of martyrs, consoled in prison or exile only by a secret hoard of verse stored in their memory.

In those days people who read poetry belonged to a breed apart, like members of a dying species of bird. They were invariably the kindest and most honest people in the world—not to speak of their courage. Will the generation of new readers who are appearing now, in the sixties, be able to match their courage, or, rather, strength of

were made by the head of whatever organization the arrested man worked for, but when writers were involved, the "organs" often required additional reports and were liable to call on any member of the Union of Writers to supply one. In the moral code of the sixties we distinguish between straight denunciations and "reports" made under pressure. Who in those days could have been expected to refuse to give a report on an arrested colleague if asked to do so by the "organs"? Anybody who refused would have been arrested on the spot, and he also had to consider the consequences to his family.

People who wrote reports of this kind excuse themselves now by saying that they never went beyond what had been alleged about the victim in the press. Stavski was no doubt quite familiar with what had been written about M.—the neatly filed clippings would have been produced for him by his secretaries—and all he had to do was add a little by way of personal impressions. M. provided the material he needed during their interview by giving his views on capital punishment. He noticed that Stavski listened very intently when he talked about this—nothing, as we know, unites members of a ruling class more than complicity in crime, of which there was certainly more than enough.

In 1956, when for the first time in twenty years I went into the Union of Writers and saw Surkov, he greeted me with great expressions of joy. At that moment many people thought the revision of the past would be much more thoroughgoing than it actually was; the optimists did not foresee the recoil of the spring carefully provided for by the Stalinist system—that is, the reaction of all the myriads of people implicated in past crimes. As Larisa, the daughter of the Tashkent police official, said: "One can't make such sudden changes—it's so traumatic for people who were in official positions." It was probably about this that she wanted to make her threatened protest abroad. . . .

Surkov at once began asking me about M.'s literary remains: where were they? He kept on telling me that he had once had some of M.'s verse written out in M.'s own hand, but that Stavski had taken it away from him—he couldn't think why, since Stavski didn't read poetry. To put a stop to this senseless conversation, I interrupted Surkov and told him what I thought of Stavski. He did not argue with me.

I later spoke in the same vein to Simonov, whom I went to see in the absence of Surkov. Simonov, great diplomat that he is, suggested I submit a formal application requesting that M. be posthumously

made a member of the Union of Writers; he said I should refer to the fact that before M.'s second arrest Stavski had been proposing to have him formally elected. I rejected the idea and told Simonov what I thought of Stavski's role. He didn't argue either—he knew from his own experience how people in official posts had behaved in those fateful years. Both he and Surkov were lucky not to have been top officials then—so they didn't have to countersign lists of people to be arrested; nor were they forced to write reports on candidates for liquidation. I hope to God they didn't, anyway.

But it is pointless to mention names. Any other official would have done the same as Stavski, unless he wanted to be spirited away by car at dead of night. We were all the same: either sheep who went willingly to the slaughter, or respectful assistants to the executioners. Whichever role we played, we were uncannily submissive, stifling all our human instincts. Why did we never try to jump out of windows or give way to unreasoning fear and just run for it—to the forests, the provinces, or simply into a hail of bullets? Why did we stand by meekly as they went through our belongings? Why did M. obediently follow the two soldiers, and why didn't I throw myself on them like a wild animal? What had we to lose? Surely we were not afraid of being charged with resisting arrest? The end was the same anyway, so that was nothing to be afraid of. It was not, indeed, a question of fear. It was something quite different: a paralyzing sense of one's own helplessness to which we were all prey, not only those who were killed, but the killers themselves as well. Crushed by the system each one of us had in some way or other helped to build, we were not even capable of passive resistance. Our submissiveness only spurred on those who actively served the system. How can we escape the vicious circle?

81 *The Window on the Sophia Embankment*

THE only link with a person in prison was the window through which one handed parcels and money to be forwarded to him by the authorities. Once a month, after waiting three or four hours in line (the number of arrests was by now falling off, so this was not very long), I went up to the window and gave my name. The clerk

turned to normal. As they were being led away, one woman called them "silly little girls," and another said: "We must send ours away before it's too late."

These little girls were exceptional. Children who came and stood in line were usually as restrained and silent as grown-ups. It was generally their fathers who were arrested first—particularly if they were military people—and they would then be carefully instructed by their mothers on how to behave when they were left completely alone. Many of them managed to keep out of the orphanages, but that depended mainly on their parents' status—the higher it had been, the less chance the children had of being looked after by relatives. It was astonishing that life continued at all, and that people still brought children into the world and had families. How could they do this, knowing what went on in front of the window in the building on Sophia Embankment?

The women who stood in line with me tried not to get drawn into conversation. They all, without exception, said that their husbands had been arrested by mistake and would soon be released. Their eyes were red from tears and lack of sleep, but I don't recall anyone ever crying while we stood in line. When they left their homes, they composed their features by some effort of the will and tried to look their best. Most of them came to hand in their parcels during working hours—they got off on some pretext or other—and on returning to their offices they had to be very careful not to show their feelings. Their faces had become masks.

In Ulianovsk, at the end of the forties, I had working for me a woman who lived in a college dormitory with her two children. She had come to the college as a technical assistant and soon made herself indispensable. She was even promoted and allowed to take courses on an extramural basis. She had practically nothing to live on, and her children were literally starving—she said her husband had left her and wouldn't give her anything for their upkeep. People advised her to sue for alimony, but she just cried and said that would go against her pride. She and her children were visibly getting thinner all the time. She was summoned by the director, who told her she should swallow her pride for the children's sake, but she would not budge: her husband had betrayed her, deserted her for another woman in a most despicable fashion, and she would not take money from him or allow him to come anywhere near her children. People tried to influence her through her oldest son, but he was just as stubborn as she. A few years later her husband suddenly appeared on the

who perished in the camps is the publication of their work. Here the obstacles have been manifold. I know nothing about the competition they frighten us with,* but I do know how ruthlessly people fight to keep their entrenched positions. When the first rumors were heard about the rehabilitation commissions established by Mikoyan, many people were very upset—and not only people who had helped to dispose of their competitors. I heard whispered questions about where room could possibly be found for all the ex-prisoners returning from the camps—suppose they all wanted their old jobs back? How many new posts would have to be created in Soviet institutions to accommodate these hordes of “returnees” (as they were known)! But there was no problem: the majority of the returnees were in such poor shape that they had no thought of taking up any kind of active career again. Everything passed off very quietly, and those who had worried about having to make room heaved sighs of relief. But literature is a different matter. The carefully contrived “order of precedence” has to be protected at all cost, if many established reputations are not to collapse. This is why there is so much opposition to the publication of work by those who perished. It must be said that some of the living do not fare any better either.

A volume of M.'s poetry was scheduled by the Poets' Library in 1956. All the members of the editorial board pronounced themselves in favor. I was very pleased by Prokofiev's attitude—he said that M. was simply not a poet and that the best way to demonstrate the fact would be to publish him. Unhappily, he later abandoned this high-minded position and has since fought the proposal tooth and nail. Orlov, the editor-in-chief of the series, didn't at first anticipate any opposition, and started writing me friendly letters, but when he saw what trouble there might be with the volume, he hastily beat a retreat and broke off our correspondence. One could, however, scarcely expect anything else of Orlov, who is a high official and quite indifferent to M.'s poetry into the bargain.

Much more serious is the attitude shown by several people of real authority and independence who are anything but bureaucrats and have a real love of M.'s work. Two of them—both outstanding representatives of the generation that was destroyed—have explained to me that Orlov is right not to publish M., which technically would be quite possible for him: “It might be exploited by his enemies—there

* This presumably refers to editions of Mandelstam abroad, which are used by the Soviet authorities as an excuse for not publishing Mandelstam's work in the Soviet Union.

the occasion of the honor done them by the State. It was now that Fadeyev shed a drunken tear for M.: "We have done away with a great poet!" The celebration of the awards took on something of the flavor of a surreptitious wake for the dead. I am not clear, however, as to who there (apart from Shklovski) really understood what M.'s destruction meant. Most of them, after all, belonged to the generation which had changed its values in favor of the "new." It was they who had prepared the way for the strong man, the dictator who was empowered to kill or spare people at his own discretion, to establish goals and choose whatever means he saw fit for their fulfillment.

In June 1940, M.'s brother Alexander was summoned to the Registry Office of the Bauman district* and handed M.'s death certificate with instructions to pass it on to me. M.'s age was given as forty-seven, and the date of his death as December 27, 1938. The cause was given as "heart failure." This is as much as to say that he died because he died: what is death but heart failure? There was also something about arteriosclerosis.

The issue of a death certificate was not the rule but the exception. To all intents and purposes, as far as his civil status was concerned, a person could be considered dead from the moment he was sent to a camp, or, indeed, from the moment of his arrest, which was automatically followed by his conviction and sentence to imprisonment in a camp. This meant he vanished so completely that it was regarded as tantamount to physical death. Nobody bothered to tell a man's relatives when he died in camp or prison: you regarded yourself as a widow or orphan from the moment of his arrest. When a woman was told in the Prosecutor's office that her husband had been given ten years, the official sometimes added: "You can remarry." Nobody ever raised the awkward question as to how this gracious "permission" to remarry could be squared with the official sentence, which was technically by no means a death sentence. As I have said already, I do not know why they showed such exceptional consideration to me by issuing a death certificate. I wonder what was behind it.

In the circumstances, death was the only possible deliverance. When I heard that M. had died, I stopped having my nightmares about him. Later on, Kazarnovski said to me: "Osip Emilievich did well to die: otherwise he would have gone to Kolyma." Kazarnovski had himself served his sentence in Kolyma, and when he was released in 1944 he turned up in Tashkent. He lived there without a permit

* A district in central Moscow.

and I could not clear this point up, though in trying to establish the date of M.'s death it was very important to know at exactly what moment Kazarnovski left the transit camp.

Kazarnovski was the first more or less authentic emissary I had met from the "other world." Before he actually turned up, I had already heard about him from other people and knew that he had really been with M. in the transit camp and had apparently even helped him in some way. They had occupied bunks in the same barracks, almost next to each other. This was the reason I hid Kazarnovski from the police for three months while I slowly extracted from him all the information he had brought to Tashkent. His memory was like a huge, rancid pancake in which fact and fancy from his prison days had been mixed up together and baked into an inseparable mass.

I already knew that this kind of affliction of the memory was not peculiar to the wretched Kazarnovski or a result of drinking too much vodka. It was a feature of almost all the former camp inmates I have met immediately after their release—they had no memory for dates or the passage of time and it was difficult for them to distinguish between things they had actually experienced themselves and stories they had heard from others. Places, names, events and their sequence were all jumbled up in the minds of these broken people, and it was never possible to disentangle them. Most accounts of life in the camps appeared on first hearing to be a disconnected series of stories about the critical moments when the narrator nearly died but then miraculously managed to save himself. The whole of camp life was reduced to these highlights, which were intended to show that although it was almost impossible to survive, man's will to live was such that he came through nevertheless. Listening to these accounts, I was horrified at the thought that there might be nobody who could ever properly bear witness to the past. Whether inside or outside the camps, we had all lost our memories. But it later turned out that there were people who had made it their aim from the beginning not only to save themselves, but to survive as witnesses. These relentless keepers of the truth, merging with all the other prisoners, had bided their time—there were probably more such people in the camps than outside, where it was all too common to succumb to the temptation to make terms with reality and live out one's life in peace. Of course those witnesses who have kept a clear memory of the past are few in number, but their very survival is the best proof that good, not evil, will prevail in the end.

Kazarnovski was not of the heroic type, and from his endless tales I gleaned only a few tiny grains of truth about M.'s life in the camp. The population of transit camps is, of course, a constantly shifting one, but the barracks in which they had been together had at first been occupied entirely by intellectuals from Moscow and Leningrad sentenced under Article 58. This had made life very much easier. As always in those years, the prisoners appointed to be "elders" in the barracks were chosen from among common criminals—generally the type who had been connected with the "organs" before they went to prison. They were extremely vicious, and prisoners sentenced under Article 58 suffered just as much at their hands as they did from the ordinary guards, with whom they had, if anything, less contact. M. had always been afflicted by a nervous restlessness and paced rapidly up and down if he was upset. In the transit camp, this tendency to run up and down in a state of nervous excitement constantly got him into trouble with the guards. Outside, in the zone around the barracks, he often ran up to the perimeter and was chased away by the sentries, who shouted obscene curses at him. But none of the dozen or so witnesses I have spoken to confirms the story that he was beaten up by criminals—that is probably a legend.

Prisoners were not issued with clothing in the transit camps, and M. froze in his leather coat, which by now was in tatters. According to Kazarnovski, however, the most terrible frosts set in only after his death and he didn't have to go through them. This detail, too, is important for the date of his death.

M. scarcely ate anything, and was afraid to—as Zoshchenko was later. He always lost his bread ration and never knew which was his own mess can. According to Kazarnovski, the transit camp had a shop where they apparently sold tobacco and sugar. But where could M. have got the money? In any case, his fear of food applied to anything he could have bought there, and to sugar as well—which he would take only if it was handed to him by Kazarnovski. One can just picture it: a dirty palm offering this last gift of a piece of sugar, and M. wondering whether to take it . . . But was Kazarnovski speaking the truth? Had he perhaps invented this detail?

Apart from his fear of food and constant nervous restlessness, Kazarnovski noted that M. had a fixed idea that his life would be made easier when Romain Rolland wrote to Stalin about him. This little detail could not have been invented, and proves to me beyond doubt that Kazarnovski really did have contact with M. While we were still in Voronezh, we read about the arrival in Moscow of Romain

like Nazi
camps

their clothing—so that it wouldn't go to waste. There was no lack of corpses, and several were always buried in the same pit, after a tag with a number had been attached to each man's leg.

This would have been by no means the worst way to die, and I like to think that Kazarnovski's version is the true one. Narbut's death was incomparably worse. They say that he was employed in the transit camp to clean out the cesspits and that together with other invalids he was taken out to sea in a barge, which was blown up. This was done to clear the camp of people unable to work. I believe that such things did happen. When I later lived in Tarusa, there was an old ex-convict called Pavel who used to get water and firewood for me. Without any prompting from me, he once told me how he had witnessed the blowing up of a barge—first they had heard the explosion and then they had seen the barge sinking. From what he heard at the time, all the prisoners on board were "politicals" sentenced under Article 58 and no longer fit for work. There are still people—including many former camp prisoners—who even now try to find excuses for everything. Such people assure me that there was only one case like that, and that the camp commandant responsible for this atrocity was later shot. This would indeed have been a touching sequel to the story, but for some reason I am not moved by it.

Most of the people I knew who went to the camps died there almost at once. Intellectuals and professional people did not last long—it was scarcely worth living anyway. What was the point of hanging on to life if the only deliverance was death? What good would a few extra days have been to Margulis, who was protected by the criminals because at night he told them stories from Dumas' novels? He was in a camp together with Sviatopolk-Mirsky, who soon died of total exhaustion. Thank God that people are mortal. The only reason one could have to go on living was to remember it all and later tell the story—perhaps thereby making people think twice before embarking on such lunacies again.

Another person with authentic information about M. was the biologist Merkulov,* whom M. asked, if ever he was released, to go to Ehrenburg and tell him about M.'s last days in the camp—he knew by then that he would not survive himself. I reproduce his account here as it was told to me by Ehrenburg, who by the time I heard

* Mrs. Mandelstam identifies Merkulov only by his initial, but his name is given in full in Ehrenburg's memoirs ("at the beginning of 1952 I was visited by the Briansk agronomist V. Merkulov"), which Mrs. Mandelstam may have seen before publication.

from him on my return from Tashkent had forgotten or confused some details—in particular, he referred to Merkulov as an agronomist, since, wanting to lie low after his release, he had indeed worked as an agronomist. What Merkulov told Ehrenburg substantially bore out what Kazarnovski had told me. He thought that M. had died in the first year, before the opening of navigation to Kolyma in May or June. Merkulov gave a detailed account of his conversation with the camp doctor, who was also, fortunately, a prisoner and had reportedly known M. from previous days. The doctor said that it was impossible to save M. because he was so terribly emaciated. This confirms what Kazarnovski said about his being afraid to eat anything—though camp food was such that people turned into wraiths even if they did eat it. M. was only in the hospital for a few days, and Merkulov met the doctor immediately after his death.

M. did right to ask the biologist to go to Ehrenburg with his story—no other Soviet writer, with the exception of Shklovski, would ever have agreed to see such a person in those years. As for visiting any of those writers who were treated as outcasts—nobody coming from a camp would have dared go near them for fear of being sent back again.

People who had served sentences of five or ten years—which meant they had got off very lightly, by our standards—usually stayed, either voluntarily or because they had no choice, in the remote areas where the camps were located. After the war many of them were put back in the camps, becoming what were known in our incredible terminology as “repeaters.” This is why there is only a tiny handful of survivors from among all those who were sent to the camps in 1937–38—you only stood a chance if you were very young at the time—and why I have found so few ex-prisoners who met M. But stories about his fate circulated widely in the camps, and dozens of people have told me all kinds of legends about him. I have several times been taken to see people who had heard—or, rather, as they always put it, “knew for a fact”—that M. was still alive, or had survived until the war, or was still in one of the camps, or had been released. There were also people who claimed to have seen him die, but on meeting me they generally admitted with embarrassment that they knew about it only from other people (described, needless to say, as completely reliable witnesses).

Some people have written stories about M.'s death. The one by Shalamov, for example, is an attempt to convey what M. must have felt while dying—it is intended as a tribute from one writer to an-

“because of the addressee’s death.” But this is not conclusive: we know of thousands of cases in which parcels were returned for this reason, though in fact, as became known later, they had not been delivered because the addressee had been transferred to another camp. The return of a parcel was firmly associated in people’s minds with the death of the addressee, and for the majority it was the only indication that a relative in a camp might have died. In fact, however, in all the confusion of the overcrowded camps, the officials in military uniform were so brazen that they wrote whatever came into their heads—who cared? People sent to the camps were in any case thought of as dead, and there was no point in standing on ceremony with them. The same thing happened at the front during the war: officers and soldiers were reported dead when they were only wounded or had been taken prisoner. But at the front it was a case of honest errors being made—nobody did it out of callousness, as in the camps, where the inmates were treated like cattle by brutes specially trained to trample on all human rights. The return of a parcel cannot, therefore, be regarded as proof of death.

The date on the certificate issued by the Registry Office also proves nothing. The dates put on such documents were often arbitrary: vast numbers of deaths, for instance, were postdated to war-time. This was a statistical device to conceal the number of people who died in the camps by blurring the difference between them and the casualties of the war period. When the rehabilitations began in the days after Stalin’s death, people were almost automatically put down as having died in 1942 or 1943. How can one possibly take at its face value the date on the death certificate when one thinks of the rumor started for foreign consumption that M. was in a camp in the Voronezh region and was killed there by the Germans? Who launched this story? Clearly, one of our “progressive” writers or a Soviet diplomat, pressed on the matter by some “foreign busybody” (to use Surkov’s expression), had put all the blame on the Germans. What could be simpler?

The certificate also stated that M.’s death had been entered in the register of deaths in May 1940. This entry on the certificate is more convincing as evidence that he had died by then. Though even here one cannot be absolutely certain. Imagine, for instance, that Romain Rolland, or somebody else whom Stalin wanted to keep in with, had approached him with a request for M.’s release. There were cases of Stalin releasing people because of some plea from abroad. Stalin might have decided not to listen to the plea, or he might have found