

THANK YOU, COMRADE STALIN!

**SOVIET PUBLIC CULTURE FROM
REVOLUTION TO COLD WAR**

Jeffrey Brooks

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Literature and the Arts: “An Ode to Stalin”

AT THE FIRST CONGRESS of Soviet Writers in Moscow in August 1934, an ensemble of cultural personalities added their voices to the official choir of approval. It was a time when the leaders may have felt they needed additional powers of persuasion in view of the greatly depressed living standards that resulted from the five-year plan and collectivization. In fact, on June 4, 1934, two and a half months before the congress opened, the Central Committee, when delegating duties of its apparatus among Party secretaries, granted Stalin “Cultural Enlightenment,” a responsibility he retained until November 27, 1938, when it was passed on to Andrei Zhdanov.¹

The writers met in the lull between the Seventeenth Party Congress in January 1934, where opposition to Stalin surfaced, and the assassination of Sergei Kirov in December of the same year, which commenced a wave of repression that engulfed many of the delegates to these two gatherings. The indications of political resistance added urgency to the portrayal of a society unmarred by dissent or doubt.² The Stalinist government insisted that writers and artists adjust their idiom accordingly. When the congress began, Zhdanov warned Stalin of “serious dangers.”³ Two weeks later, when the congress was nearly over, he wrote again to his chief, congratulating himself on its success and not concealing his contempt for participants: “They tried to outdo each other in their ideological spirit and ability to pose deep creative questions, and their speeches had all the extra flourishes.”⁴ “I remember the congress as a big wonderful holiday,” recalled Ilia Ehrenburg years later, adding that he prepared “like a girl prepares for her first ball.”⁵

Pravda published speeches and summations of them, as well as editorials, commentaries, interviews, and illustrations. The paper claimed undisputed authority to define legitimate cultural activity, and an unsigned article was tantamount to an official pronouncement.⁶ “A Holiday of Soviet Culture” read the paper’s headline on opening day, and beside the headline Stalin and Gorky grinned at each other in artist Deni’s quarter-page drawing (Figure 5.1).⁷ The contrast with the paper’s previous coverage was striking. Literature and the arts had occupied only 1 percent of *Pravda*’s total space or a third of an issue a month in the era of the New Economic Policy and well into 1929.⁸ This amounted to barely a page per month in the early and mid-1920s, a page and a

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REQUEST OF THE PUBLISHER**

Figure 5.1. *Pravda*, August 17, 1934. Drawing of Stalin and Gorky by Deni.

half at the decade's end, and two and a half pages in each of the first four months of 1933 and 1934. But *Pravda* granted fifty pages of coverage during the two weeks of the congress. In fact, the paper's size grew on some days from four or six pages to eight or ten, and occasionally as much as half this space went to the congress. And *Pravda* was not alone in its coverage. *Izvestiia*, *Labor*, and even the tabloid peasant newspaper, which appeared every other day at this time, all gave the congress nearly full front-page exposure from start to finish.⁹

Socialist Realism

The congress adopted the term *socialist realism*, with endorsement by the committee that had formed the writers' union in 1932. Once approved, the term was attributed to Stalin, who had told writers and others meeting at Gorky's house in Moscow on October 26, 1932: "The artist ought to show life truthfully. And if he shows our life truthfully, he cannot fail to show it moving to socialism. This is and will be socialist realism."¹⁰ *Pravda* printed a definition from the statutes of the new union on the eve of the congress:

Socialist realism, the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, demands truthfulness from the artist and a historically concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development. Under these conditions, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic portrayal ought to be combined with the task of the ideological remaking and education of working people in the spirit of socialism.¹¹

On the face of it, socialist realism seemed to concern the proper subject and method of portrayal. Of course the authorities had previously prodded artists and writers for positive portrayals, but only haphazardly. Ilia Ilf and Evgenii Petrov mocked these prescriptions in their famous sketch of late 1932 about a writer whose editor insists that he create a truly Soviet Robinson Crusoe, with a party committee and the masses on the island.¹² By 1934 the terms *correctly* and *truthfulness* entered the press's narrative as measures of artists' and writers' success in accommodating themselves to the official portrayal of Soviet life.¹³ Meanwhile censorship tightened, and it was often referred to by euphemisms such as *oblit* and *gorlit* for provincial and city bureaus, respectively, while the censors became "inspectors."¹⁴

Pressure on writers to celebrate Soviet society had increased even before the formal adoption of socialist realism. F. I. Panferov, the sole author *Pravda* reported addressing the Seventeenth Party Congress, urged fellow authors to portray peasants' joy at collectivization.¹⁵ That writers and artists joined this fraud attests to their de facto acceptance of the performance as a higher truth governing public expression. This was, in fact, how officials presented it. P. F. Iudin, a bureaucrat whom the Central Committee added to the organizational bureau

of the new writer's union in August 1933, explained that since "truth" was found in life itself, the artist had only to represent it faithfully, for "life" was "more interesting than it is made to be in artistic literature."¹⁶ The truth to which he referred was that of the performance.

Gorky, despite a falling out with Stalin and resulting restrictions on his travel, advertised socialist realism as a creative reflection on the best of Soviet life.¹⁷ "We live and work in a country where feats of 'glory, honor, and heroism' are becoming facts so familiar that many of these are already no longer noted in the press," he wrote.¹⁸ He also blamed writers for being too negative and for seeing life through the prism of the old critical realism rather than its Soviet successor. Long-time resident and sympathizer Louis Fischer later explained socialist realism as follows:

The Soviets knew the hypnotic effect of the great dream, and as the promised future faded into the past they strove to keep alive the trust in delayed benefits. Among other things they ordered all writers, in the middle of the 1930s, to treat the present as though it did not exist and the future as if it had already arrived.¹⁹

Socialist realism in 1934 belonged to the performance. It was neither a literary tradition nor simply the tool of a dictatorship.²⁰ The leaders and supporters of the Stalinist system used it to enlarge the domain of their moral and intellectual claims. Even if one were to find a secret order from Stalin or Zhdanov or Gorky explaining that socialist realist novels would have to include a positive hero, heroic acts, optimism, references to Stalin, and so forth, the meaning of these constructs depended on the larger public performance which was beyond the power of any one of the leaders to articulate or fully shape. Over time, socialist realism became associated with aesthetic conventions and literary formulas, but it always represented a grossly unequal arrangement in which writers worked under the authority of cultural bureaucrats to promote the government's changing agenda. Accordingly, Stalin and his colleagues oversaw the redefinition of each element of a literary work—subject matter, author, and audience.

The press presented socialist realism in conjunction with its presumed subject matter: the exemplary figures whose names called up a heroic depiction of contemporary Soviet life. *Pravda's* editors and commentators had shaped the image of heroism with coverage of "feats" since the beginning of the plan and collectivization.²¹ These accounts had little to do with a new aesthetic or, for that matter, "positive heroes" of the nineteenth-century literary tradition, who, regardless of their other qualities, were heroes of civil society. On the day of the congress, a local correspondent hailed the three "best shock workers" who produced the seventy-five-thousandth tractor at a Kharkov plant. *The Peasant Newspaper* greeted the congress with a map of the country on which faces of "outstanding" workers from collective farms were superimposed. The caption read: "Our great country is remarkable, our people are remarkable. Write re-

markable books about this.”²² In effect, the writers were urged to amplify the press’s coverage of heroes and heroines, and hence to blur the boundary between the imagined and the observed.²³ They were to embellish an ongoing performance, not initiate one, and they were often expected to follow the journalists’ lead. The implicit message was that this is what they owed the state.

The big news in the newspapers during the spring and summer of 1934 was the aerial rescue of Shmidt’s expedition on the *Cheliuskin*. On the second day of the congress, the paper printed a large front-page picture of the “heroic flyers” and the rescued “Cheliuskinites” in Red Square holding flowers and waiting to shake hands with Stalin.²⁴ “Is it necessary to repeat the names of the seven heroes who plucked hundreds of Cheliuskinites from icy captivity after half the world had written them off as doomed?” read *Pravda*’s editorial (August 18, 1934). The *Cheliuskin* rescue, together with great industrial projects, were models of heroism at the congress. “For us,” *Pravda* explained on the same day, the second of the congress, “the main figures, the main characters in Soviet literature, consist of people from the Magnitogorsk Construction Site, the Dnieper [Dam] Project, the *Cheliuskin*, the builders of a new life.” Some of these people, including Shmidt, the leader of the *Cheliuskin* team, as well as champion workers whom *Pravda* identified by name, such as “Nikita Izotov, Stepanenko, Kaushnian, the best miners of the Donbas, holders of medals,” were present at the congress (August 18, 1934).

With the introduction of socialist realism, writers also became actors in the performance.²⁵ The headline over poster-artist Deni’s picture of Stalin and Gorky on the opening day of the congress read, “To the Advance Detachments of Soviet Culture, ‘Engineers of Human Souls,’ Writers of Our Great Homeland—an Enthusiastic Bolshevik Greeting.” The creative intelligentsia had been largely peripheral to the press for the decade after 1917, with the exception of the Party favorite, Demian Bednyi, whose doggerel appeared regularly. The sudden prominence of literati on front pages beside explorers, airplane pilots, and government leaders let it be known that authors now belonged to the public drama. On the first day of the congress, writers appeared in photographs inside the paper and in Kukryniksy’s drawing of “The Literary Parade” on page 3.²⁶ These cartoonists, later famous during World War II, portrayed Gorky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek, and several other cultural bosses reviewing a literary lineup that included Isaac Babel on a scrawny nag, civil war cap and spectacles askew. Although the caricaturists made writers appear eccentric, the newspaper’s headlines, captions, and commentaries conveyed the message that they were an integral part of the performance.

To be a writer now meant to participate. *Pravda*’s editorialists produced a statement on the congress’s first day in which the odd usage of Aleksei Maksimovich Gorky, instead of the familiar Maxim Gorky (pseudonym for Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov), accorded with the pomposity of the performance:

Today, in the capital of our state, the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers opened. Today, from the tribune of the congress sound the words of the great proletarian writer Aleksei Maksimovich Gorky, summing up the flowering of Soviet literature and pointing out its path of further development.

The country honors its artists of the word, “engineers of human souls,” the powerful detachment of the builders and creators of Soviet culture with a flurry of greetings and good wishes. (August 17, 1934)

The editors stressed that writers could no longer sit on the sidelines: “It is important that the overwhelming majority of writers, the creators of spiritual values, unanimously and unconditionally join with the party of Lenin-Stalin, the proletariat, the people of the Soviet country.”

The word *devotion*, with its religious connotations, came into play at this time, as it had earlier in biographies and obituaries of exemplary people (August 24, 1934).²⁷ From the late 1920s the press had cited heroic figures for selfless devotion to the Party. By 1934, however, Stalin also figured in this equation, and telegrams to the leader sometimes accompanied news stories about heroes. *Pravda* published a telegram from a group of flyers whose round trip from Vienna to Moscow was covered on the opening day of the congress. Another telegram from writers appeared on the next day below the picture of the rescuers of Shmidt’s expedition on the *Cheliuskin*.²⁸ It read in part: “Our own dear Iosif Vissarionovich, accept our greeting, our full love and respect for you, as a Bolshevik and a person, who with brilliant intuition leads the Communist Party and the proletariat of the USSR and the whole world to the last and final victory.”²⁹ At this point Isaac Babel is reported to have told Shmidt, who was present at the congress, “If it goes on like this, we shall soon have to declare our love through a megaphone like umpires at soccer matches.”³⁰

Writers such as Babel who were not enthusiastic supporters of the system could thereafter only be designated as public enemies. The union’s organizer, P. Iudin, summed up this view in a speech printed on September 4 as a conclusion to the congress:

In their works, with their books and at their first congress, Soviet writers affirm openly before all the world that they are proponents of the communist worldview, that they are firmly behind the positions of Soviet power, and that they are ready to give their whole lives as active fighters for the triumph of socialism in the USSR, for the victory of the proletariat in the whole world.³¹

Pravda prominently displayed the phrase “engineers of human souls” on the congress’s opening day, and thereafter it became ubiquitous. It signified, as David Joravsky has pointed out, a “job category, an administrative slot.”³² Stalin made this clear in a 1934 interview with H. G. Wells.³³ Who could read *engineers* in 1934 without recalling the Shakhty trial of 1928 and the arrest of half the engineers and technicians of the Donbas, or “the industrial party affair” of

1930 that devastated the technical intelligentsia and marked its full inclusion in the Soviet project?³⁴ These “affairs,” with their xenophobic overtones, undermined the independence of the professions and served notice that standards in all fields would be set nationally from above. Equally damaging for the professional standing of experts were Stalin’s widely promoted slogans empowering cadres over specialists, “The Bolsheviks Should Master Technology” and “Technology Decides All in the Period of Reconstruction.”³⁵ To equate writers with engineers under these circumstances was simply to bring literature into line with other reconstituted occupations.

The author of the lead editorial used the oddly sounding “master craftsman” and “apprentice” of the printed word to express perhaps the anachronistic character of literary work in the age of Soviet industrialization (August 17, 1934).³⁶ An engineer emphasized accountability: “We are demanding and strict. We accept every book from you just as they accept a machine from us—only when certain that it will bear the maximum load” (September 4, 1934). Yet the phrase “engineers of human souls” was disingenuous in another respect: Although the word *engineers* aligned the arts with the construction industry, *souls* implied a spiritual function. As chief engineer, therefore, Stalin also implicitly commanded Soviet spiritual life. The effect was to enlarge not literary authority but that of the leader, the Party, and the state. This shift was explicit in the attribution of the term *socialist realism*: “Our Party and Comrade STALIN chose socialist realism as the path for Soviet literature and art,” *Pravda*’s editors explained two weeks before the congress opened (July 28, 1934). Gorky was the only writer on the “Honorary Presidium of the Union,” which was otherwise composed exclusively of Party and Comintern officials, including Stalin. The writers did gain stature in one important sense at the congress, however. For the first time they joined other heroes and heroines of the performance. This was the aspect that Ilia Ehrenburg recalled most fondly, hobnobbing with Shmidt and champion shock workers.³⁷

When writers and artists joined the performance, the schemata of the 1920s, which had served to represent literature as a profession, a means of education, and a weapon of class war, faded from the central newspapers. The official culture of the 1930s was not an outgrowth of the Bolsheviks’ association with modernism but a repudiation of it.³⁸ The press of the 1930s redefined professionalism and “correctness” in the arts. The metaphors of pedagogy and war that had empowered some artists during the NEP dimmed, and the arts became a product of the administrative command economy with Stalin as architect and schoolmaster. The multifaceted battle against capitalism, with room for diverse allies, was now displaced by a narrower struggle for construction. Journalists employed new metaphors of growth, of building, and of the artist’s “path” to full collaboration with the state.³⁹ “Task” and “assignment” now prevailed, though military metaphors of “front” and “struggle” lingered on with new meanings.⁴⁰ The front became one-sided as barricades became construction

sites and warring sides metamorphosed into builders and wreckers.⁴¹ “If we look to the development of literature in the past year, then a simple question arises: Is our literature growing? Can we speak about regular achievements in this area?” wrote a critic who viewed the profession as an expanding structure.⁴² Writers, like other heroes, produced a quantifiable product: “He wrote twenty volumes and more than 150,000 lines of fighting verses,” wrote A. Efremov about the political poet Demian Bednyi.⁴³

There was little room in the performance for the self-judging function of professional criticism. Its end came gradually, without the startling trials that terminated the engineers’ independence. There were two types of cultural reporters during the 1920s: those who commented occasionally and those who wrote regularly on one art form or another. The occasional critics produced editorials and otherwise shaped the interpretive environment for the arts. The custom of inviting prominent public figures to discuss the arts was part of the Russian cultural tradition, and the unchecked executive power of the Soviet system lent such commentators immense authority. Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and other leaders pontificated freely on literature, art, and film, hardly distinguishing their personal tastes and judgments from official policy. The Communists’ intervention began in 1917 and continued nearly until the system’s demise, but Stalin oversaw its golden age. As critic in the Kremlin, he condemned and praised, rewarded and punished, added and deleted works from the repertoires of theaters and lists of publishing houses, and ordered changes and revisions in individual works.⁴⁴

When the editorial *we* replaced regular identifiable critical voices in the press, literature and the arts were no longer portrayed as occupations in which respected professionals determined quality and set trends. The new, frequently anonymous commentators of the late 1920s and early 1930s often affected a bullying tone and wrote as if they had a monopoly on truth, which, in their eyes, they did. “We judge Mayakovsky’s suicide like any withdrawal from a revolutionary post,” rebuked one commentator in 1930.⁴⁵ “But we have the right to demand more from [I. P.] Utkin,” wrote another after praising the poet’s first book.⁴⁶ *Pravda* of the early NEP had been but one authoritative word among many, whereas in the mid-1930s the newspaper was commonly assumed to express Stalin’s voice.⁴⁷ “We have often and justly spoken about the fact that our artistic literature, especially drama, has fallen behind life and does not satisfy the growing needs and demands of the working masses,” wrote the editorialists welcoming the Writers’ Congress in 1934.⁴⁸ Writers could not challenge such official pronouncements; they could only interpret them.

Journalists further undercut literature as an autonomous occupation in their depictions of non-Russian writers at the congress.⁴⁹ *Pravda* gave non-Russians 20 percent of the articles on the congress and 12 percent of the space, and *Izvestiia* also featured them prominently.⁵⁰ The Party paper showed writers whose status depended almost exclusively on the Soviet state rather than on

their works or any national public. For example, the illiterate official folk poet of Dagestan, Suleiman Stalskii, appeared in both a large article and a picture beside Gorky, who welcomed him with the words, "I am simply happy that I see a real singer of the people."⁵¹ *Pravda's* reporter described him as "one of the country's great talents" (August 20, 1934). The poet himself proclaimed in the same issue: "From this congress I bring my people hands full of literary fruits grown by the great gardeners of life—Stalin and his Party." Other designated notables displayed similar credentials. "We have one task: to fulfill the brilliant instructions of the leader of the Party," explained the poet-functionary and head of the writers' union of Belorussia, M. N. Klimkovich (August 24, 1934). *Pravda's* coverage thus served to sanction a particularly slavish literary role.

Press coverage of the writers' congress reflected the recasting of Soviet policy toward the nationalities. By showing people of other nationalities, and especially remote and exotic ones, in the same roles that Russian activists had performed throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, the press showed the official Soviet practices and mores as truly multinational. When Uzbeks and Ukrainians, Belorussians and Turkmenians, made the same kinds of statements that Russian activists and enthusiasts had been making throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, they demonstrated the openness of the performance to all peoples. Moreover, they showed that there was no public space for nonparticipants of whatever nationality.

During 1934 and 1935 the government cut back on its support for non-Russian traditions, cultures, and languages, and instead encouraged assimilation.⁵² Russification and the glorification of Russia became the order of the day. At the congress, some of the non-Russian writers were shown to express great deference to Russian culture and pledged to follow Moscow's guidance in future development of their national cultures. Ukrainian and Byelorussian writers promised to overcome nationalism and promote, in the words of one, "a full and open orientation toward proletarian Moscow."⁵³ A Tatar writer, K. G. Tenchrin, announced, "We playwrights from the national republics are learning from our older [Russian] comrades and experienced masters of art" (August 30, 1934). The press showed non-Russian writers adopting a Russified national identity, as befitted what would become the "family of peoples" in which Russians were elder brothers (January 14, 1935). Here, too, socialist realism meant collaboration and performance on a special stage. "No, it is not only writers who have gathered at the congress," editorialized *Pravda* at the end of the first week of the congress, "it is the peoples themselves of the multinational Soviet Union who have gathered as if to give a first accounting of their cultural development" (August 23, 1934).

The Peasant Newspaper and *Labor* paid little attention to non-Russian writers but cast proletarian and peasant authors in similar supporting roles. The

peasant paper, in its special issue on the congress, reduced the literary community to Gorky, Demian Bednyi, Zhdanov, Bukharin, Radek, and writers of tracts with titles such as *The Sound of Tractors*, *How We Became Prosperous*, and *The Harvest Is in Our Hands*.⁵⁴ On the congress's opening day, *Labor* juxtaposed front-page photos of a dozen "worker authors" with a picture of Gorky and Stalin.⁵⁵ "These are only examples from the thousands of talented representatives of the proletariat who are creating a new socialist culture," read the text. Inside were reports on Bolshevik stalwarts D. Bednyi, A. Novikov-Priboi, A. Serafimovich, and V. Mayakovsky.

Socialist realism, in its contemporary context, required not only performers but also a new audience of participants. This was not "a new class" or a social group but a wishful representation of the body politic that was acted out by actual people. The performing public included a range of heroic figures, from the Stakhanovites to minor officials and government leaders. All joined Stalin in a celebration of the Soviet order. Isaac Babel invoked the dreamlike quality of this public when he retreated into the risky silence that may have cost him his life. In his tortured speech at the congress, he confessed that he respected the reader so much that he had stopped writing. The beginning of the passage is famous; the end is less so but more revealing.

I feel such boundless respect for the reader that I am mute from it and fall silent. Well, I keep quiet. (Laughter) But if you imagine yourself in some auditorium of readers, with about five hundred district Party secretaries, who know ten times more than all writers, who know beekeeping and agriculture and how to build metallurgical giants, who have traveled over the whole country, who are also engineers of souls, then you will feel that you cannot get by with conversation, chatter, high school nonsense. There, the discussion ought to be serious.⁵⁶

Babel did not have to imagine this audience; those who claimed to embody it were present at the congress, both among the thousand guests on the first day and later in still greater numbers. *Pravda* portrayed local chiefs and activists from around the country who sat near the writers at the opening session, together with the Moscow elite and a few dozen sympathetic foreigners. The editors described the proceedings: "Beside the masters of Soviet artistic word, beside 'the engineers of souls' in the hall sit hundreds of readers, the best of readers. These are the outstanding people of the nation, the shock worker heroes."⁵⁷ Ehrenburg recalled that the crowded hall reminded him of a theater.⁵⁸

The newspapers produced many images of these readers during the course of the congress. *Pravda* depicted a gathering in which the writers faced twenty-five thousand "readers" who were all representatives of institutions situated in Moscow.⁵⁹ Commentators frequently identified the new public with the masses, but the meaning of this transference was never in doubt. The leaders and activists in this drama attributed their own wishes to the masses. As *Pravda* put it:

Millions of readers and viewers want the highest images of art; they avidly wait for their life and struggle, for the great ideas and deeds of our century to be shown in artistic works of great force and passion, in works that will enter the history of socialist culture, filling and organizing the thoughts and feelings not only of contemporaries but of future generations. (August 17, 1934)

A. I. Stetskii, chief of the Central Committee's Department of Culture and Propaganda (of Leninism) and a member of the presidium of the writer's union, urged writers to attend to the new readers: "They came to this tribune and said: We love you, Soviet writers, we respect you, but we are waiting for you to give us new songs, new works in which new feelings and thoughts flow" (September 1, 1934). Both Stetskii and *Pravda's* editorialists pinpointed the writers' dilemma: They were to be teachers and pupils, both to instruct readers and learn from them. Babel slyly alluded to this when he explained his silence before the five hundred Party secretaries. Writers and artists sat before this imagined public like pupils at school. "The time when the writer sat for an exam for critics alone has passed," wrote V. G. Lidin (pseudonym for Gomberg). "Now he sits for an exam before the whole country, before an enormous reader" (August 24, 1934).

The congress reverberated with demands for writers to engage in "constant deep study," explained the Ukrainian writer I. U. Kirilenko, a member of the union's secretariat (July 26, 1934). In his words, all school metaphors pointed to the teacher of teachers, "the great man, the giant of Bolshevism, the friend and teacher of Soviet writers, Comrade Stalin."⁶⁰ The moment Stalin and the Party became the schoolmasters, writer-pupils lost stature. As *Pravda* explained midway through the gathering, "The first days of the congress showed that this force [literature], under the wise leadership of the Party and Comrade Stalin, serves the historic purpose of educating the working masses in the spirit of communism."⁶¹ This was presumably the role Stalin had in mind when he had officials impress writers with the pedagogic function of literature in the months leading up to the congress. "I attempted to express Comrade Stalin's views on the educational significance of literature," I. Gronskii, a Central Committee spokesman, reported to Stalin and other leaders about a meeting with writers in early June 1933.⁶²

When *Pravda* showed writers and artists addressing a public of selected workers, peasants, *intelligenty*, activists, officials, Party cadres, and the leaders themselves, including Stalin, they enshrined an exemplary body politic shaped by nearly two decades of soviet power. This group of performers was representative of society but highly exclusive. As "outstanding new people," they stood apart from ordinary collectivized peasants, factory workers, white-collar employees, and many others who made up the majority of Soviet society. The press had traveled a long distance from its relatively open-ended queries to readers on matters of public policy during the early 1920s. By the decade's end,

the atrophy of the public was nearly complete. In A. Iar-Kravchenko's pseudo-historical painting of 1941, "Gorky Reads his Fairy Tale 'The Maiden and Death' to Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov on October 11, 1931." Only the great chiefs are listening.⁶³

The heroes celebrated by the press during the 1930s were representative of the official public. On the eve of the congress, the influential columnist D. Zaslavskii concluded an article about the Ossetians with the demand that writers look at "the new socialist economy of the country, its culture, literature, and new people."⁶⁴ The following day M. Koltsov, another leading journalist, wrote in *Pravda*, "Never were there in our country such people, such listeners, such brother readers."⁶⁵ To write about these characters was to glorify not only the heroes themselves but also "the performing public" as a substitute for the nation as a whole.

Pravda presented the writers at the congress bowing to an overweening authority, camouflaged with the phrase "Soviet power." The Russian novelist L. N. Seifullina declared: "Should we teach how to write or speak about our devotion to Soviet power? Soviet power cannot doubt this devotion because being writers of the Soviet country, we cannot be hostile to this country."⁶⁶ Her confusion was understandable. Behind all formulations lurked Stalin as the reader of readers. Nadezhda Mandelstam described what she considered to be her husband's effort to placate the dictator in 1937, "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 one's self under the spell of the liturgy which in those days blotted out all human voices."⁶⁷ Although the poet himself may have intended to insult Stalin rather than praise him, she conveys the power of the performative ethos as she perceived it.

Pravda and the central press in 1934 showed writers and artists interacting on the stage of public life with a presumed public that ranged from enthusiastic activists and Babel's local Party secretaries to Stalin himself. This audience differed from the ordinary people surveyed in the early and mid-1920s, despite claims that it embodied "the masses." The audience instead was largely coterminous with the actual state authority that sent artists and writers to industrial projects and collective farms to study and perform, and others, as yet largely peasants and political opponents, to die in prisons and camps.

The Nationalization of the Arts

A new process of labeling and categorizing Soviet classics and outstanding Soviet writers paralleled the rise of the new public. In the early and mid-1920s commentators discussed nineteenth-century Russian classics but were restrained with respect to contemporaries. Zeal for the plan, however, sparked interest in contemporary production in all fields, including the arts. *Pravda* hon-

ored Dmitry Furmanov, author of the novel *Chapayev*, later a famous film, on the fourth anniversary of his death in 1930. Mayakovsky's suicide a month later brought a flood of tributes, largely silencing his old enemies.⁶⁸ "A great revolutionary poet has died, a master of the writer's craft has died; a tireless stonemason of socialist construction," wrote one enthusiast (April 15, 1930). Soon living artists won equal attention. There was a string of celebrations in early 1933, including the seventieth birthdays of the director K. S. Stanislavsky and the writer A. Serafimovich. *Pravda* hailed Stanislavsky with considerable pomp, but Serafimovich's birthday was grander. "Bolshevik, *Pravda* Columnist, Writer" was the paper's headline (January 20, 1933). Although he had written only some stories and a short novel on the civil war, *The Iron Flood*, Serafimovich soon starred in the performance as one of "the founders of socialist realism."

For designated classics and their authors, *Pravda's* commentators had unbounded praise. One reviewer, on January 13, 1934, cited Nikita Gurianov, hero of Panferov's novel of collectivization, *Bruski*: "Panferov brought him to life as Goncharov brought his Oblomov, Lev Tolstoy his Platon Karataev, Maxim Gorky his Pavel Vlasov and Klim Samgin." Writers joined the game by naming colleagues. Konstantin Paustovskii praised Alexei Tolstoy, the historical novelist who had pleased Stalin by writing about Peter the Great. "Alexei Tolstoy is for us not only the greatest master of the new socialist times," Paustovskii wrote, "but the bearer of high traditions, from Pushkin, Gogol, Chekhov, Gorky" (January 27, 1939). Nevertheless classical Russian cultural figures often proved more durable than Soviet counterparts, whose names could easily fall from grace.

The inclusion of prerevolutionary luminaries in a Soviet canon depended on a shift in policy toward the tsarist past and the nationalities. In the early 1930s the rejection of "the Pokrovskii school" of Russian history, which denigrated imperial Russia, opened the way to link Soviet and prerevolutionary classics in a continuum of greatness. While Stalin began to envisage himself as an empire builder in the spirit of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, the press started to treat the Soviet and Russian arts as the arts of empire, which they remained until the collapse of communism.⁶⁹ The notion of *narodnost'*, sometimes translated as nationality or official nationality but expressing the idea of a people, particularly the Russian people, arose here as well. It meant the incorporation into the arts of an official concept of national worth. As the correspondent Zaslavskii wrote in 1936, "*Narodnost'* is one of the most important aspects of the art of socialist realism."⁷⁰ A member of a Ukrainian opera company divulged his feelings on performing in Moscow: "Moscow! The heart of our great homeland."⁷¹ Such views could hardly have been unwelcome to the Soviet managerial class, whose livelihood often depended on great projects in the hinterland that were directed from the capital.

Jubilees, memorials, and anniversaries of Russian cultural figures were im-

portant in the late 1930s. During the first third of 1936, *Pravda* published twelve large articles on the radical critic Dobroliubov's hundredth anniversary and many scattered reports on Pushkin and others. In the first two months of 1938, at the height of the terror, the paper printed eleven articles on Nekrasov's birthday and seven on Stanislavsky's. Prominent columnists and the leaders themselves joined the commemorations. The resilient Zaslavskii saluted Dobroliubov and Gogol in 1936 and Nekrasov in 1938. Culture boss Zhdanov wrote on Dobroliubov in 1936 and on Gogol in 1939. Khrushchev, already a leading functionary, brought Shevchenko into the pleiad. Editors used classical figures to convey political messages. *Pravda* observed the sixtieth anniversary of Nekrasov's death with letters from grateful collective farmers. "Reading it, I recalled my earlier life, when grain hardly lasted to the new year; the collective farm order delivered us from bitter need," wrote a correspondent in 1938 about Nekrasov's poem, "Who Lives Well in Russia?"⁷²

The apogee of commemorations was the hundredth anniversary of Pushkin's death in 1937, when the whole country turned out to honor the poet in an affair reminiscent of tsarist festivities.⁷³ A journalist noted a year later how the Pushkin Committee managed the jubilee. The writer's works appeared in more than eleven million copies in 1936 alone and were translated into fifty of the nationalities' languages. There were readings in factories, collective farms, and schools; a show at the Bolshoi for the Party and government; a meeting of the Academy of Sciences; a plenum of the writers' union; and speeches at statues in various cities. "One can boldly say," wrote the author of this report, "that never in history has one people so honored its poets."⁷⁴

The canonizers of Pushkin and others invoked a Russian past that prefigured Soviet triumphs. The artistic director of the Bolshoi Theater S. Samosud, in 1939, called Glinka's "patriotic opera," *Ivan Susanin*, "one of the peaks of human culture."⁷⁵ "Like Pushkin in Russian literature," he wrote, "Glinka lay the foundation for a great Russian music." Similarly, a critic described Musorgsky in the same year as "a genius and artistic innovator, a true son of a great people, vitally tied to his country."⁷⁶ Just as the history of the Party shrank to a list of heroes who died timely deaths, either accidentally or otherwise, such as Frunze and Kirov, the arts also diminished in richness. The canonizers turned Russian and world cultural history into a museum of selective displays with many closed wings. They excluded not only aesthetic modernism but also religious, spiritual, and other elements of Russian culture. Stanislavsky became the genius of modern theater, displacing the soon-to-be-murdered Meyerhold and other modernists; Gorky dimmed memories of Leonid Andreev and Alexander Kuprin; Taras Shevchenko obscured artists more identified with Ukrainian nationalism and independence.

This radical reduction of modern culture was probably alluring to upwardly mobile activists and facilitated their participation in the performance. Those with limited education valued the appearance or certification of learning, and a

simplified canon served their needs.⁷⁷ At a time when hundreds of thousands of semieducated people took jobs of prestige and authority vacated by victims of purge and persecution, emblems of cultural status were highly valued as a means to legitimate social mobility. Zaslavskii, in 1938, described a Ukrainian peasant poet's home: "Portraits of Stalin, Molotov, and Kaganovich hang on the walls of the room. There are also pictures drawn by her son [a tenth grader]. Books by Gorky, Pushkin, Shevchenko, and Ukrainian writers are on the bookshelves."⁷⁸ The author of the passage uses the writers and leaders to enhance one another, suggesting the simultaneity of past and present and the timelessness of the current government. The linkage of generations from son to poet confirms the lesson.

Foreign authors and writers held a prominent place in the simplified literary canon. The diversity, complexity, and richness of modern European culture may have been alien to the Soviet political class, but the press incorporated select recognized geniuses from the past, such as Beethoven and Shakespeare, into the performance. Music critic Braudo promised, in early 1929, that Wagner's operas "cannot fail to reach" the working class, just as "the symphonies of Beethoven and other inspired works of art reach them."⁷⁹ These remarks of the late 1920s, echoing early hopes for the diffusion of culture, differed only in part from later dedications of Beethoven or Chopin performances to Stalin.⁸⁰ The conceit of a grandiose new public of exemplary people who appreciated serious culture was the underlying theme.

The choices the authorities made in canonization were at least partially influenced by sensibilities they shared with constituents. Certain writers and artists could not be left out of the canon, even if portions of what they wrote went unread and unpublished, because even semieducated people expected them to be included, as they had been in the popular canon before the revolution.⁸¹ Dostoevsky could be largely excluded because his credentials had been challenged in the radical milieu before the revolution, but Lev Tolstoy was included, although his ideals clashed equally sharply with the Stalinist ethos. Gogol was included despite his mystical and reactionary writings, and Chekhov, too, found a place, irrespective of a humanism that was truly seditious in a Soviet context.

Pravda often engaged in campaigns in the late 1930s to promote specific new works. In 1936, boosting the film *We Are from Kronstadt*, *Pravda's* commentators reported crowds in Moscow and mass viewing elsewhere, and they did the same for other Stalinist classics such as *Party Card*.⁸² Typically in 1939, one author chronicled Soviet cinema in the Third Five-Year Plan by listing the number of viewers of the film *Chapayev*, seen by fifty million people.⁸³ Another described watching *Lenin in 1918*, a classic of the Stalin cult, with old factory hands who excitedly recalled those times (April 9, 1939).

Canonization brought a convergence between the cultural and the political narratives. These were years of terror against the intelligentsia and the Party,

and journalists who wrote about art incorporated official demands in various ways. A film reviewer praised *The Great Citizen*, Fridrich Ermler's 1937 classic about the purge trials, which the author revised according to Stalin's precise instructions: "*The Great Citizen* teaches vigilance, it teaches how to distinguish enemy from friend and friend from enemy" (February 17, 1938).⁸⁴ In Iu. Raizman's review of the film version of Alexei Tolstoy's novel *Peter the Great* in 1939, he described Peter's ill-fated son Alexei, whom the tsar tortured to death for opposing his policies, in terms imported from the purge trials.⁸⁵ Zaslavskii praised the nineteenth-century populist poet Nekrasov for instilling "a passionate hatred for enemies of the people and the country and a love for the homeland and the people."⁸⁶ Such remarks suggest how deeply persecutions of the era marked the image of the arts.

Journalists augmented the canon by promoting an anti-canon, a catalogue and description of condemned works. Keynote speakers at the writers' congress of 1934, Gorky and Zhdanov, damned modernist literature, as did Karl Radek and others in speeches printed in *Pravda*. Yet editors did not turn fully on their cultural enemies until 1936 when the paper led an attack on Russian and international aesthetic modernism.⁸⁷ The composer Dmitry Shostakovich was the first target in two articles, "Muddle instead of Music," about his opera *The Lady MacBeth of Mtsensk District*, and "Balletic Falsity," about the ballet *The Limpid Stream*.⁸⁸ Until then, music and, to a lesser extent, art had been more sheltered than literature. "The article on the third page of *Pravda* changed my entire existence," Shostakovich told Solomon Volkov. "It was printed without a signature, like an editorial—that is, it expressed the Party's opinion. But actually it expressed Stalin's opinion, and that was much more important."⁸⁹

A campaign of personal vilification followed, with meetings and declarations to which, like to the articles themselves, Shostakovich could make no reply. The first commentator charged the composer with *formalism*, a term used pejoratively since the early 1930s to describe an emphasis on formal aspects of a work of art such as color or line in painting.⁹⁰ "Talent for good music to captivate the masses was sacrificed to petty bourgeois formalist contortions for the pretense of creating original examples of cheap cleverness," the author wrote.⁹¹ "The composer," he continued "evidently did not pose for himself the task of heeding what is expected, what the Soviet audience seeks in music." Instead, he added, "*Lady Macbeth* succeeds with a bourgeois public abroad." In fact, one unstated complaint against *Lady Macbeth*, in which a young woman kills her old husband, may have been sexual mutiny, which offended the elderly male purveyors of the cult, as well as the promoters of the sanctity of the family.⁹² Shostakovich later recalled his feelings during the tirade against him:

If you were smeared with mud from head to toe on the orders of the leader and teacher, don't even think of wiping it off. You bow and say thanks, say thanks and bow. No one will pay any attention to any of your hostile rejoinders anyway,

and no one will come to your defense, and, most sadly of all, you won't be able to let off steam among friends. Because there are no friends in these pitiable circumstances.⁹³

Pravda's editors used the articles to launch an antimodernist campaign, condemning the composer and pressuring others to do so. Soon architects, film directors, writers, and dramatists found the articles germane to their fields.⁹⁴ *Pravda* denounced "cosmopolitanism," "antirealism," and hence "formalism" in the works of Cézanne and Matisse.⁹⁵ "We are against the 'complicated' chaos of Shostakovich's opera and ballet," wrote journalist Iu. Iuzovskii in February 1936. "We are for Shakespeare's and Beethoven's complicated richness."⁹⁶ Critics juxtaposed the canon to its opposite, and *Pravda* led the antiformalist campaign.

In mid-March the newspaper noted the formation of a committee of the chiefs of main theaters, directors, and major composers whose chairman, P. M. Kerzhentsev, a likely author of the attack on Shostakovich, urged composers "to accept fully in their work suggestions in *Pravda's* articles about questions of art."⁹⁷ The government's own arts committee, chaired by the same Kerzhentsev, chided those who ignored the articles.⁹⁸ Two days later the paper reported on a meeting at which Pasternak and others were accused of "formalism."⁹⁹ Ritualistic denunciations followed. "This winter there was a discussion in the papers about formalism," Pasternak wrote to his long-time friend, Leningrad literary scholar Olga Freidenberg, in October 1936. "It began with the article about Shostakovich and was extended to include the theater and literature (with the same sort of insolent, sickeningly unoriginal, echolike, arbitrary attacks on Meyerhold, Marietta Shaginyan, Bulgakov, and others)."¹⁰⁰ Freidenberg herself was attacked in *Izvestiia* at this time. "*Izvestiia* is an official Party newspaper," she recalled in her retrospective diary after the war.¹⁰¹ "Its every word has official significance, the practical results of which (or, as was then the phrase, the 'organizational implications' of which) cannot be overestimated." Pasternak, who wished to help but feared to worsen her situation, lashed out against the persecuting pundits in a letter to her: "There are certain miserable and completely cowed nonentities who are driven by the force of their own mediocrity to hail as the style and spirit of the times that obsequiousness to which they are condemned by the absence of choice—that is, by the poverty of their intellectual resources."¹⁰²

An official condemnation of the modernist high culture of democratic Europe and America was almost inevitable. Modernism was an international movement that depended on exchanges of information across national boundaries and acceptance of international trends and values. The modernist arts were individualistic, egotistical, and open to multiple viewpoints. Their practitioners, despite frequently leftist inclinations, were politically capricious. Stalin and his government required obeisance. Gorky, in a possibly apocryphal conversa-

tion in 1929, compared contemporary writers to Shahrazad who each night won the right to life with her storytelling.¹⁰³ Most Russian modernists adapted poorly to this situation, continuing to shock, mimic, and parody authority. They sought new modes of expression in a society that prized repetitive predictability, and they were ambiguous when simple formulaic meanings were valued. Most of all, they did not discard their quirky effrontery. "Negation," as T. J. Clark put it, "is inscribed in the very practice of modernism."¹⁰⁴ A tragic Russian example was Osip Mandelstam's private mockery of Stalin as "the Kremlin mountaineer" in the poem that probably cost him his life.

How could officials organizing new hierarchies and allocating rewards and privileges for services rendered not take offense at the effrontery of creative people whose standing in their fields depended not on the state or their success in the official performance but on other artists and spontaneously formed "publics" at home and abroad? How could writers and artists infused with romantic notions of the self adopt the badges and ribbons of the performance as the sole measure of their worth? Film director I. Raizman recounted in his glasnost memoirs how his friend Mikhail Romm ran to him after getting a medal in 1937, shouting, "I got the Order of Lenin; they will not arrest me now."¹⁰⁵ In fact, medals were hardly a guarantee of safety. Of the 571 writers and officials who took part in the writers' congress of 1934, 180 suffered in the repressions of 1937–39.¹⁰⁶

Tensions between leading cultural figures and the state unfolded in various scenarios of collaboration and resistance. With the opening of the writers' congress in August 1934, the government inaugurated the system of assignment of dachas, including the famous "dacha village" at Peredelkino, and other perks for cultural figures that would persist until the end of Soviet Communism. The short list of those designated for the first country houses included literary functionaries as well as writers. Among the writers were Babel, Pasternak, Panferov, Shaginian, Seifullina, Serafimovich, and Ehrenburg, who was later to become famous as a war correspondent.¹⁰⁷

What began with some artists' voluntary, if self-interested, participation in the revolutionary project became enforced conformity to the rules of the performance in the 1930s. By the mid-1930s in the Soviet Union, as in Nazi Germany, the arts had lost many of the independent attributes associated with the professions in the liberal democracies. Yet, in the performative culture, Soviet leaders and journalists invoked the image of the arts as professions and displayed them as a feature of a Soviet civil society whose interests and objectives were identical to those of the state. This invocation explains the public attention given to various unions in the arts and to the proceedings of academies in the sciences, including the Academy of Sciences, the All-Union Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences, and the Academy of Medical Sciences, as well as parallel academies in the various republics. *Pravda* was at the center of this transmutation of public values, and Soviet authorities used the newspaper and

other media to manipulate “the symbolic order and the power of naming” with an eye to the taste of their supporters.¹⁰⁸

The Covert Literary Response

By the time of the writers’ congress of 1934, the leaders’ monopoly of the means of public expression was virtually complete. The efforts and inclination of writers and others to contest this monopoly were necessarily circumscribed and halting. Some critics had continued to comment on the arts as art, particularly music, into the late 1920s and occasionally in the early 1930s. The old intelligentsia, however, reacted privately to the new official canon. Pasternak wrote to his father on December 25, 1934, soon after the writers’ congress and Kirov’s murder, to explain that he had come to his “senses” and that “nothing I have written exists.” He continued: “It would be bad if I did not understand this. But happily I am alive, my eyes are opened, and I am hurriedly remaking myself into a prose writer of a Dickensian type, and then, if my strength suffices, into a poet—of the Pushkin type.”¹⁰⁹

Pasternak chose a literary world that predated aesthetic modernism, but the notion of the intelligentsia was itself incompatible with the new order. “Society” and “intelligentsia” were hierarchical as well as oppositional concepts, suited to a situation in which a “self-perpetuating, sempiternal corporation” of professionals, in the phrase of Frank Kermode, fixed literary value for an educated elite.¹¹⁰ It was therefore as hard for writers to discard their professionalism as it was for cultural bureaucrats to recognize that they had done so. Yet the meaning of the Russian and world cultural heritage changed so markedly when the government appropriated its treasures that some intellectuals risked challenging it, albeit mostly privately. This may explain Mikhail Bakhtin’s passion for Dostoevsky and Rabelais, and Pasternak translating *Hamlet* at his dacha at Peredelkino in 1939 and finding something of “incomparable preciousness.”¹¹¹ The critic, children’s writer, and translator Kornei Chukovskii, despite his active participation in the performance, asserted his own and others’ literary authority more openly writing in *Pravda* on Pushkin, Shakespeare, and Nekrasov.¹¹² These and other transgressions of the official culture, which were peripheral at the time, figured eventually, much later, in the collapse of that culture and the discrediting of its hierarchy of values.

In the 1930s, writers and artists confronted compelling, politically charged official images of their presumed subject matter, of themselves as creators, and of the audience to whom their work was addressed. In response, a contrary veneration of the artist as witness, victim, and preserver of memory emerged. This is the tradition to which Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* belongs together with Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. Although wellsprings of the counter-cult of the persecuted writer go back to the early revolutionary era, the tradi-

tion acquired new moral force during the 1930s.¹¹³ In clandestine protest of Stalin's usurpation of the writer's role, Bulgakov made his writer-hero a Christ-like figure, as did Pasternak.¹¹⁴

Stalin himself acknowledged the power of writers as moral witnesses. According to one account of his famous phone call to Pasternak, he asked whether Mandelstam was a "master," thus inadvertently accepting a limit on his power to confer the honor.¹¹⁵ Mandelstam, as if to answer the question himself, had written a poem in 1935 titled "What Is the Name" which begins "What is the name of this street? Mandelstam Street," a wry rebuff to the pretensions of the leader for whom everything was named.¹¹⁶ Mocking official rhetoric with an outcast hero whose cap is embroidered with the letter M for Master, Bulgakov insisted on the divinity of talent. So did Anna Akhmatova in "Requiem," when she cast herself as recorder of eternal grief in reply to a question whispered in a line outside a Leningrad prison in the late 1930s: "Could you describe this?"¹¹⁷

Russia's greatest writers did more than risk their lives secretly to overthrow official images of the artist. Writing "for the drawer," they invoked a world more sacred than that of the performance, with rival immortals and a rival time. In "Requiem," Akhmatova compared herself to wives of mutineers against the tsars—"Under the Kremlin's towers I shall howl"—and called on Christ and the Christian time of the crucifixion: "The heavens were on fire, and he / Said, 'Why have You forsaken me, oh Father?'"¹¹⁸ Pasternak appropriated Christian imagery in *Doctor Zhivago* and reshaped the official metaphor of the path to lead not to communism but to the last judgment. The final line of the novel, in the poem "Garden of Gethseman," reads: "So shall the centuries drift, trailing like a caravan, / Coming for judgment, out of the dark, to me."¹¹⁹ In *The Master and Margarita* Bulgakov created his own sacred time and his own immortals—not Lenin and Stalin but the devil and his suite. Bulgakov's immortals threatened literary bureaucrats and hacks rather than "enemies of the people." His "great ancestors" were not the tsarist general, Suvorov, and the official Pushkin but Christ, Kant, Dostoevsky, and their like. Bulgakov, Akhmatova, Mandelstam, and other writers engaged in a subversive though largely solitary and secret counterperformance in which they venerated the artist, the creative act, and a personal and intimate dimension of life. The subversive tradition paradoxically drew sustained power from the performative culture that opposed and repressed it, and it remained extraordinary until the official culture became moribund.

Honor and Dishonor

EVERY society sets boundaries to identify insiders and outsiders. The genesis of a new society in 1917, and the presumption of its newness, required strict definitions of who did and did not belong. The early Bolsheviks drew boundaries according to a Marxist cartography. Stalin and his supporters first reinforced these lines of division and then largely replaced them with ascription of honor and dishonor as a means of demarcation. The honor they deployed was social honor, the honor bestowed by Stalin and the state on those who fulfilled official expectations by their achievements.¹ This kind of social honor differed from personal self-referential honor or individual pride. Honor defined in this way rewarded merit in the performance and demonstrated the state's arbitrary power to raise up some individuals and cast down others.

Honor has a long history in Russia, as personal honor, "honors" dispensed by the state and ruler, and corporate honor—codes of honor among the upper classes, the intelligentsia, the professions, and the military.² The key words are *chest'*, which was linked with personal honor as in "debt of honor," and *pochet*, as in "honorary title."³ Both terms were used in the 1930s in lieu of personal and professional honor. The performative culture had no room, however, for the type of honor that upper-class men defended by dueling in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe, including Russia. Social honor in the Soviet system was explicitly egalitarian and gender-neutral, despite its inherent biases. Its value was derived from party membership and state employment even in the mixed economy and relaxed atmosphere of the NEP, when money and professional reputation regained some independent legitimacy. After the promulgation of the First Five-Year Plan and collectivization, money and professional standing again declined in value. Privilege and position became more completely the true coin of the realm, and the urge to acquire social honor inspired some of the vigor of the performance.

The government conferred honor in the form of orders, ranks, and commendations, and the press displayed it.⁴ The most prestigious state honors were the Order of the Red Banner of Labor, which was established in the Russian Republic in 1920 and made an all-union order in 1928, the Order of Lenin (1930), the Order of the Red Star (1930), and the Badge of Honor (1936).⁵ Ranks and titles in the arts appeared in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and in 1939 the Stalin literary prizes were established and sometimes awarded by Stalin himself.⁶ Military ranks reappeared in 1935, and formal titles surfaced in other