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SOCIALIST REALISM

(on the problem of the emergence and evolution of the concept)

The article refers to one of the officially recognized and supported approaches of the State conception of the methods of artistic creativity, more precisely, the method of socialist realism which was politically preferable for the Soviet regime. The history of the development of the definitions of socialist realism with the conceptual core of the regime-based, exclusively centralized perception of the mission of the communistic artist and creator is revealed.

The history of the dogmatic interpretation of this mission is partly exposed on the basis of the activities of the key figures, as well as ideological bases and the policy of administrative interference with the creativity process, which in different periods of the history of Soviet Union would find its immediate reflection in the concept-based dictate of the Soviet State. The analysis of the aforementioned definitions uncovers the policy of imposed communist directives in the sphere of creative activities of Soviet writers and artists against the background of distorted perceptions of philosophical bases of the Soviet State. Thus, one can trace the rout of formally euphonious metalanguage of the definitions of socialist realism in a drastic isolation from the truly advantageous public policy to support the Creator of Arts.

The term "Socialist realism" came into sight for the first time in May, 1932 in "Literaturnaya gazeta" periodical [1]. The periodical released the article "Let's provide the literary circles with all the conditions necessary for creative activities", announcing that during the executive meeting of the literary circles of Moscow, the Chairman of the organizational committee of Writers' Union, Ivan Gronsky [2], had mentioned, "The concern about the method should be addressed not in an abstract way, not from the standpoint suggesting that the writer should first of all cover a course of Dialectical Materialism and only after that – begin writing. The main requirement that we make to writers is to write truth fully, depict candidly our

reality, which is itself dialectical. Therefore, the basic method of Soviet literature is the method of Socialist realism"[3].

The endorsement of the new method was necessary for the authorities of the soviet state, and above all – for more expressive, purposeful, reasoned advocacy of its policy, and for the necessity of coordinated control over the writers' activities grouped in various associations which surfaced after the events of October, 1917, and in particular, after the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPW) was formed in 1925.

The authorities in Kremlin fully realized that the complete rejection of romanticism, as an idealist conception of

the world, as well as the vilification of publicist and satirical genres by RAPWists had no future. After the publication of the above mentioned article in "Literaturnaya Gazeta", the term "Socialist realism" was widely promoted by its authors – Ivan Gronsky and Head of the editorial sector of fiction of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of the Soviet Union [5] Valery Kirpotin [6].

Until the second half of the 1950s the major event in the process of shaping the concept of "Socialist realism" was the famed meeting of the leaders of the Communist party and Government with writers at Maxim Gorky's [6] apartment in October, 1932. The meeting was attended by Joseph Stalin. Definitely, any theoretical key assumption, promoted at the level of the State in the period of personality cult, would necessarily be worked out either by Stalin's approval or by Stalin himself. As the witnesses (Ivan Gronsky, Valery Kirpotin) behold, Stalin defined the socialist realism as the method of creative writing of soviet literature [7].

During the following decades after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1956) writer Maxim Gorky was considered to be the founder of socialist realism, and the first all-union Congress of Soviet Writers (in August, 1934) was marked as a momentous event which determined socialist realism as a method of creative writing. Prior to the first congress of soviet writers, in his greetings on the occasion of the first All-Union Congress of Prominent Collective Farmers, Maxim Gorky stated, "In order to be well aware of and realize the venomous and dreadful malevolence of the past, we need an increased vision from the standpoints of the present-day achievements and considerable future objectives. Particularly this elevated standpoint should inspire that very proud

and blissful elation that will credit a new ambiance to our literature, helping out with new forms and creation of the new indispensable trend – socialist realism, which is, undoubtedly, likely to materialize on the basis of facts of the socialist experience only" [8].

At the Writers' Congress the term "Socialist realism" was involved in the Code of the organization and it received the first formal definition according to which the notion "Socialist realism" assumed the requirement of the truthful, historically distinct representation of the reality in its revolutionary development. Back then one of the critical issues of discussions among different groups of writers – the freedom of choice of forms, styles and genres – was also among the statements approved [9].

The assertion by Gorky on Socialist realism included in the report of the First Congress of Soviet Writers (August 17, 1934), gained wide popularity. In his reflections on critical realism, the writer came to the conclusion that this realism was necessary "only to cover the vestiges of the past, to fight against and eventually eliminate them" [10]. Gorky did not believe that that form could serve for educating Socialist individuals, as it would only criticize and was deficient in assertiveness. Moreover, in the worst cases it would trace back what had been condemned before. Furthermore Gorky stated that the Socialist individual could develop under the circumstances of collective labour solely. The statement was followed by the writer's definition of socialist realism, which sounds undeniably optimistic: "Socialist realism confirms the state of being as an act, and creativity, which aims at continuous development of the values of human capacities intended for the victory of the human being over the forces of nature, for the sake of healthy and long-lasting existence, for the sake of great happiness to live in the world which the

Human Being, in accordance with the ever-growing needs, wants to handle completely as a beautiful home of Mankind, united in one family" [11].

But, what happened to the authors of the term "Socialist realism"? In 1938 Ivan Gronsky, in spite of his loyalty to Stalin, was arrested and spent 16 years in prisons and concentration camps. During the Second World War Valery Kirpotin was accused "of alarmism" and later on dedicated himself mostly to scientific activities and teaching. The death of the eminent classic of Russian Literature, Maxim Gorky and his son still remains one of the mysteries of the last century.

Ivan Gronsky, Valery Kirpotin and all those who afterwards developed the theoretical premises of socialist realism as an ideological concept, would base it on the postulations of Marxism. Karl Marx wrote, "The attraction that we sense from their arts (i.e. "bourgeois arts", commented by R.M.) never contradicts the incompletely developed social level at which it blossomed. On the contrary, it is the result of that level and is inseparably related to the fact that immature social conditions in which it emerged, and it could solely have emerged, will never reoccur" [12].

Exploring the development of culture, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels referred also to the sphere of artistic creativity. They both highlighted, from the perspectives of materialistic perceptions, the importance of determining the place and significance of artistic creativity in the world they lived. The essential Marxist discernments on arts assumed the unity of cognition and vigour of reflecting the reality and activity in the course of the change of the latter, as well as the awareness of the uniqueness of arts as a form of social consciousness. Both Marx and Engels reckoned that realistic art was capable of meeting the needs of

the society in a much more complete way of living an emergent life of ingenious and multifaceted artistic cognition.

Realism for Marx and Engels was the hymn to the arts with a much broader coverage of the needs of Mankind aroused for the sake of their liberation.

The other classic of Marxism, V. I. Lenin, according to us, accurately states that an individual can never exist beyond time and space; neither can an individual artist exist beyond these dimensions. He reckons that writers can never stand alone, wandering throughout the vast universe of history. They are present as offsprings of their epoch, which presumes a necessarily assumed specific stance towards the social struggle of their time. It derives from the above mentioned statements that Lenin arrives at the inference that literature cannot but take on the characteristics of the communist party to counterbalance the habits and manners of bourgeoisie, the consuming attitude, "commercialized, merchandised" press, as well as the career-oriented, individualistic postures and suppressive anarchism in literature. Thus, this assumes that the Socialist proletariat is obliged to set forward the party-based literature, developing this principle eventually into an as complete and holistic form as it is possible.

Later on, on the bases of the aforementioned postulations, the theoreticians of the method of "Socialist realism" deduced that particularly and most specifically this method audaciously, comprehensively and deeply brought about the cognition of the world. There is nothing impossible for it, nothing that would keep the searching mind away from the temptation of getting in touch with the world, because the rules of life presumed the commandments of growth

and triumph of the socialist pattern of the society.

This is it – incontrovertible and beyond any doubt! Both in arts and elsewhere the principle remains unchanged: who is not with us, he is against us. And precisely this principle sanctioned the Marxists, who came into power in different countries, to apply repressions, persecutions against the representatives of creative intellectual circles, as well as to label people, to infringe any manifestation of freedom and humanism.

In different phases of the development of the USSR the definition of the method of Socialist realism underwent persistent changes, sometimes – evidently considerable ones. The occasionally registered adjustments happened basically due to the political system and interests of the governing elite. In the second edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, volume 40, published after Stalin's death and after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the concept of socialist realism is viewed as a method of creativity, the fundamental principle of which is the truthful, historically precise depiction of the reality in its revolutionary progress, primarily assigned for communist education of the masses. In the course of the formation of socialist relations in the soviet society socialist realism, retaining the traditions of realism of the past in new conditions, ultimately became the mainstream method of creativity in the USSR, as well as in the countries of "people's democracy" [13].

As we can see from the encyclopaedia article which follows the definition, both the class struggle and the discrepancy of statements and generalizations are much less referred to, and the definition itself brings up the traditions of the art of realism of the past. That was the period of thaw!

The definition of socialist realism, printed in the third edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (published in 1976) was more conservative in terms of Soviet reality. Socialist realism in it was scrutinized as a method of literary and artistic creativity which encompasses the aesthetic expression of the conception of the world and Human Being – realized by the socialist society and motivated by the epoch of the struggle for the establishment and formation of that society. The depiction of life in light of the ideals of socialism determined both the content and the fundamental artistic and structural principles of arts. Its emergence and development are related to the promotion of Socialist ideas in different countries, together with the advancement of the revolutionary movement of workers [14].

All the definitions mentioned above were set forward on the bases of the fundamental documents of the party, reports of the leaders of the country, which all were arranged by the ideological and government bodies of the USSR, reflecting, thus, the interests of the political regime of the given period. Even a cursory glance and comparison between the two definitions makes obvious the differences in the policies of the ruling elite of the Soviet Union during the second half of the 50's, 60's and 70's and early 80's of the last century, when the relative freedom in the sphere of culture was succeeded by much more rigid censorship and attempts to implement the dogmatic postulates of Marxism.

In the second half of the 1970s until the beginning of the 1980s the aging political administration of the Soviet Union had almost no direct concern about the ideological developments. The priority of the numerous staff of the variety of political sectors of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Union [15] was focused on the

groundwork of key ideological documents. The work was carried out by the utterly enhanced erudite, as a rule, recruited among the representatives of the generation of the 1960s, more explicitly, people who would think one way, while would write absolutely opposite things – to comply with the dogma preset by the “Kremlin Aged”. Eventually, newly revised comments on famous Marxist-Leninist, sometimes even Stalinist definitions were issued. Thus, socialist realism was reinterpreted as “a creative method of Literature and Arts, confined to the aesthetic expression of the concept of the World and Mankind from the perspective of Socialist awareness, and motivated by the age of struggle for the establishment and complete constitution of the Socialist society” [16]. Both the content and the basic principles of Socialist realism arts were observed with regards to the depiction of life from the perspectives of the ideals of socialism, dissemination of Socialist ideas in the multiplicity of worlds.

The definition mentioned above gained ground in the second half of the 1980s, to be exact, in the period of the gradually accelerating collapse of the Soviet State.

Following the fiasco of the putsch, the arrest of the organizers of the plot and the sanctions against the Communist Party, anything else at any rate associated with the Soviet regime was declared as illicit, antihuman and antiscientific.

The most astounding fact was that by the initiative and immediate efforts of the unions of the creative and artistic circles, a strict criticism was launched against those representatives of the same circles whose art and creative activities used to be favoured by the Soviet authorities and for whom favourable conditions of activities were funded. One may recall the public

demarches, for instance, the notorious congress of cinematography which condemned the prominent Soviet classics of the sphere. In summary, the situation, in its essence, pretty much resembled the situation in the period of the Bolsheviks' empowerment and rise to power. However, there was an essential divergence. The establishment of political pluralism never insinuated the new leaders of Russia the necessity of searching for methods of artistic creativity in the spheres of literature and arts that would arrange a centralized administration of culture.

Twenty years have passed by since the 1990s. Nowadays, when not only the soviet past, but also the euphoria, that rose in the process of democratization of social relations, have become history, it has turned out that the plan, even though scheduled at State level and destined to subordinate the literature and arts to a unified artistic method in a multinational country, has failed. The desire to ascribe the high-quality works of art to the Socialist eon has also fallen short. Consequently, the concept proper of “a work of art performed in accordance with the method of Socialist realism” assumes a relative nature. Quite often a canvas with smiling, joyful children, in addition, with scarlet pioneer ties on, against the background of a sunny day would affectedly be considered as a piece of Socialist realism, while a gloomy, dim scene used to be attributed to non-official arts, Soviet underground, and so on and so forth. *Conclusio est unum!* As at all times, there have been and will be works of exceptional artistic value independent of artistic forms and methods.

At the end of 2011 until the beginning of 2012 Palazzo delle Esposizioni held a large-scale retrospective of Soviet Art specifying that “the exposition of Soviet Art opens up the evolution of Socialist realism, with

a special reference to the oleographic and rhetorical styles”, as stated by Director General of the Palazzo Mario de Simoni. “It [the evolution] already reflected the gradual deepening insights into the individual values and it envisaged the forthcoming crisis of communism” [17]. Precisely that very grasp of individual values and the

awareness of the crisis of communism appear to be typical of the best pieces of literary and other arts of the Soviet period, regardless of the artistic method of creation that they belong to.

Therefore, we strongly believe that the delineation of the method of “Socialist realism” still needs further and deeper research and comprehension.

Literature

1. “Literaturnaya gazeta” – a Russian periodical. The first issue was founded and released on the 1st of January, 1830, by a group of Litterateurs with participation of Alexander Pushkin. The modern version of publication dates from April, 1929 and was initiated by Maxim Gorky. Between 1932 and 1934 the periodical became the official newspaper of record of the organizational Committee of the Union of Writers of Soviet Union, and after the first Congress of Soviet Writers it became the record newspaper of the Executive body of the Union of Writers of the USSR. Since 1990 to date “Literaturnaya gazeta” is an independent periodical established by its team.
2. Gronsky, Ivan (1884-1985) – Soviet public activist, journalist, specialist of the Theory of Literature and Literary Criticism. In the 1930s he was among the circle of trustees of Joseph Stalin, Chairman of the organization Committee of the Union of Writers of Soviet Union. During the summer of 1939 he was arrested and spent 16 years in the concentration camps and exile. He was set free after Stalin’s death. The years of imprisonment were followed by professional activities at the Institute of World Literature.
3. A quotation from Yu. Boryev, “Socialist realism: the contemporary’s view and contemporary view”, Moscow, 2008, page 76.
4. RAPW (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) – a mass litterateurs’ association. Functioned between 1925 and 1932. A leading procommunist organization. RAPW stood up a severe fight against other litterateurs’ groups, organizations and unions.
5. Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) – The leading administrative body of the Communist Part of the USSR.
6. Kirpotin Valery (1898-1997) – Specialist in the Theory of Literature and Literary Criticism. Maxim Gorky’s person assistant. The idea to found Writers’ Union belongs to him. Between 1932 and 1936 he headed the Sector of Fiction of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) and, at the same time, he was the Chair of the organizational committee of the Writers’ Union of the USSR. Professor, author of a number of books on D. Pisarev, M. Saltykov-Schedrin, M. Dostoyevsky, M. Sholokhov and N. Leonov. Ordered by Stalin, he wrote his book “Pushkin’s Heritage and Communism” (published in 1937).
6. Maxim Gorky, also known as Alexei Gorky (born Alexei Peshkov), Russian writer, author, playwright. One of the famed Russian writers and thinkers in the World.
7. See Yu. Boryev, “Socialist realism: the contemporary’s view and contemporary view”. – Moscow, 2008. – P. 77.
8. Maxim Gorky, Set of Works. – Moscow, 1953. – P. 12-13.

9. See The Materials of the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. – Moscow, 1934.
10. Maxim Gorky, Set of Works. – Moscow, 1953. – P. 229.
11. Ibid. – P. 330.
12. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Set of Works. – vol. 12. – Moscow, 1980, – P. 737-738.
13. The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, vol. 40. – Moscow, 1957. – P. 180.
14. The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (third edition), vol. 24. – Moscow, 1976. – P. 235.
15. Central Committee of the Communist Part of Soviet Union – The leading political and factual economic body of Soviet Union.
16. Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Literary Terms. – Moscow, 1987. – P. 414.
17. <http://www.inosmi.ru/> (posted on 29.10.2011)

**МИЗРАХАНЯН РУБЕН КАРЛЕНОВИЧ.
СОЦІАЛІСТИЧНИЙ РЕАЛІЗМ (ЩОДО
ПИТАННЯ ПРО ІСТОРІЮ
ВИНИКНЕННЯ І РОЗВИТКУ)**

У статті розглядається один із світоглядних методів державного підходу до художньої творчості, а саме, в радянську епоху політично пріоритетний метод соціалістичного реалізму. За допомогою історії розвитку визначень соцреалізму розкривається концептуальна база режимного, виключно централізованого сприйняття соціальної місії митця комуністичного ладу.

Історія догматичною трактування цієї місії частково розкрита на базі діяльності ключових фігур, ідеологічних основ і політики адміністративного втручання у творчий процес, які в різні періоди історії Радянського Союзу, знаходили своє безпосереднє відображення в понятійному диктаті радянської держави. Аналіз самих визначень викриває політику нав'язаних комуністичних директив у сфері творчої діяльності радянських письменників і художників на тлі викривленого сприйняття філософських основ соціалістичної держави. Таким чином, показаний шлях формальної благозвучності метамови визначень соціалістичного реалізму в згубному відриві від істинно сприятливої державної політики підтримки творця мистецтва.

**МИЗРАХАНЯН РУБЕН КАРЛЕНОВИЧ.
СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКИЙ РЕАЛИЗМ (К
ВОПРОСУ ОБ ИСТОРИИ
ВОЗНИКНОВЕНИЯ И РАЗВИТИЯ)**

В статье рассматривается один из мировоззренческих методов государственного подхода к художественному творчеству, а именно, в советскую эпоху политически приоритетный метод социалистического реализма. С помощью истории развития определенных соцреализма раскрывается концептуальная база режимного, исключительно централизованного восприятия социальной миссии художника коммунистического строя.

История догматичной трактовки этой миссии частично раскрыта на базе деятельности ключевых фигур, идеологических основ и политики административного вмешательства в творческий процесс, которые в разные периоды истории Советского Союза находили свое непосредственное отражение в понятийном диктате советского государства. Анализ самих определенных разоблачает политику навязанных коммунистических директив в сфере творческой деятельности советских писателей и художников на фоне искаженного восприятия философских основ социалистического государства. Таким образом, показан путь формальной благозвучности метаязыка определенных социалистического реализма в губительном отрыве от истинно благоприятной государственной политики поддержки творца искусства.