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Helen Saask

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Raising Soviets on Imported Goods. Socialist Realism in Estonian Secondary Education

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**Thesis submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

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Helen Sääsk

This thesis examines how the political leadership of the Soviet Union tried to cultivate its desired values and principles among the people of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. It illuminates one aspect of all the ideologically charged activities, and looks at Soviet Estonian schools through the lens of compulsory reading — how were socialist realist cultural goods used to promote Sovietization in Estonian secondary schools? Moreover, the study tries to evaluate to what degree the propagandistic intention was realized in literature lessons. Emphasis lies on exploring traces of the so-called ‘double-thinking,’ the notion that Estonians had the tendency to separate their lives into private and public spheres, adapting only the latter to official ideology. This master's thesis begins with a section discussing themes surrounding the issue of totalitarian state propaganda in secondary education. A second wave in post-Soviet Estonian culture allows for new ways of analysing the past. The thesis then focuses on primary source research, analyzing secondary school literature programs and textbooks from Soviet Estonia, also taking a brief look at the fiction books that were on compulsory reading lists. Included is a brief look at former students’ own descriptions of their reactions to required reading, making for a component of bottom-up response to the imposed propaganda. Evidently, students mastered Soviet rhetoric by the time they left school. The youth became proficient in the genre of Soviet speak just as was expected of them. However, using the ‘correct’ genre does not necessarily mean reflection on the substantive meaning of the message being carried. Despite setting heroic role models such as fiction characters and the writers who created them, Soviet values did not successfully override previous Estonian culture. Age-old family values and ‘capitalist’ mentalities were difficult to purge. On the other hand, socialist realist works can be gripping. What they present in subject matter may be alien, characters of books can seem absurd in their amplified New Soviet Man traits; however, socialist realism was capable of serving its goals by presenting the utopia that it depicted in exciting and acceptable ways.

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Introduction

In the year 1970, one Estonian high school senior wrote in her exam essay,

Do I live in a Leninist way? Do I study in a Leninist way? Is my attitude to work Leninist? Remember, Soviet school-leaver, that only if you have found an accurate and Leninist answer to these questions, can you become a wholesome person, a Communist.¹

Had that school-leaver grown up to be a Communist? Or, had she merely learned how to live in a Soviet state, including how to pass Soviet exams?

It can be argued that public education is something experienced in common by the whole society. True, people follow different educational paths, go to different schools and universities, meet different teachers and professors, and form unique groups of classmates. Still, primary and secondary level education is something that masses of society members share in. Theorists have interpreted education as having the primary function of preserving and spreading culture, transmitting knowledge in a society and socializing people into its tradition, thus reproducing culture and the framework of the society's existence.²

Furthermore, it was definitely the purpose of the Soviet state as a totalitarian regime to provide a universal educational foundation that would inculcate in its subjects the regime's ideology. Since 1961, there was an overall drive for progress through

¹ An excerpt from a successful secondary school graduation essay on the topic "In What Do I See V. I. Lenin's Historic and Human Greatness?" from 1970. Enno Tammer, ed., *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane: meie mälestused* (Tallinn: Tammerraamat, 2006), 183.

² David Swartz, *Culture & Power. The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 189-191.

making secondary education compulsory throughout the Soviet Union.³ Aspirations for total control naturally materialize in the school. If total control of a society is imaginable, then it cannot occur without a strong grip on the contents of education and on young minds. Soviet Estonian secondary education was a unique educational experience shared by generations in Estonia — incorporated into the Soviet Union between 1940-1941 and again from 1944-1991 — and it still shapes Estonians' expectations towards education today.

Furthermore, Soviet cultural imports are a rich source of cultural references, even though a resource inaccessible to the generations that have been raised after the fall of Communism. The Estonian reader of the communist era was quickly exposed to Soviet literature. From the end of World War II until the lifting of Soviet censorship in Estonia, about 1060 books of fiction were translated from Russian into Estonian and published in Estonia. In the same period, the number of original Estonian works of fiction published remained around 2500 titles. Roughly 21% of the fiction books published in Estonia at the time were therefore imported from the core of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics while about 50% were original Estonian works. However, it appears that in the first

³ Veronika Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatel 1940-1991* (Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2006), 96.

decade, from 1946 to 1955, translations from Russian made up 30% of all fiction publications, and in the last decade studied here, 1977-1986, only 18%.⁴

Moving from what David Brandenberger has called the projection of propaganda, its second level (the first level being the production of propaganda), to the stage of reception, two questions arise.⁵ First, still in the domain of projection, and taking an approach that can be characterized as top-down analysis, how did the Soviet power try to cultivate its desired values and principles among the people of the Estonian SSR? The present study attempts to illuminate one aspect of all the ideologically charged activities, and look at Soviet Estonian schools through the lens of compulsory reading — how were socialist realist cultural goods used to promote Sovietization in Estonian secondary schools? Moreover, the study tries to evaluate to what degree the propagandistic intention was realized in literature lessons. The latter is a first step towards studying the reception of ideology; however, the present paper does not focus on psychological or pedagogic details. Rather, the emphasis lies on exploring traces of the so-called ‘double-thinking,’ the notion that Estonians had the tendency to separate their lives into private and public spheres, adapting only the latter to official ideology. To analyze the varied receptions of Soviet education and literature in the Estonian SSR,

⁴ National Library of Estonia, “Estonian National Bibliography,” database on-line, (February 12, 2013), <http://erb.nlib.ee/?komp>.

⁵ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism : Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931 - 1956* (Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002).

memoirs are an access point to tracing those “imported goods” in the national consciousness.

Included in this analysis is a brief look at former students’ own descriptions of their reactions to required reading, making for a component of bottom-up response to the imposed propaganda. After the end of the Soviet occupation of Estonia, no one appeared to have been inculcated with a respect for Communism. The claim of the general public is that no one ever took propagandistic brainwashing seriously, if only for a fleeting moment as a child, feeling admiration at wonderful stories of, for example, Lenin's great persona. In this respect, my research is much indebted to journalist Enno Tammer's work. Tammer has published four collections of ordinary Estonians’ memories of life under Soviet occupation. At the turn of 2004, he appealed for people to send in memoirs of their school days. The recollections, accompanied by some complementary research by Tammer himself and generous illustrations, were published as a thick book in 2006. Among other themes, Tammer urged former Soviet students to think of topics such as reading materials, songs, art, communist propaganda, and how students avoided and dismissed the different ways in which ideology was forced upon them. Tammer thereupon assembled autobiographical excerpts. In his foreword, Tammer writes that the purpose of his book was to “map the Soviet era in a different way.”⁶

⁶ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*.

New ways of relating to the experience of the Soviet era are needed in the Estonian society. At the minimum, records and explanations are needed as the Soviet experience is now passed on to young generations of Estonians who were born after the fall of Communism. On a deeper level, the society, including its members born much later, is influenced by traces of this past that are not obvious at first sight. The sphere of education, for example, as it is usually approached from a conservative viewpoint of 'raising our children in the same way that worked out for ourselves,' is the focal point of many debates in Estonia today. The post-Soviet society has inherited Soviet-era disputes on larger issues such as Estonian against Russian as the language of instruction, and the popularity of secondary school and university versus vocational secondary education, but also smaller, pedagogy-centered matters like the system of grading and the amount of homework. Innovation is a current keyword on all levels of education.

This master's thesis begins with a section discussing themes surrounding the issue of totalitarian state propaganda in secondary education. The second half of the paper focuses on primary source research, analyzing secondary school literature programs and textbooks from Soviet Estonia, also taking a brief look at the fiction books that were on compulsory reading lists. Work by Tammer allows for a glimpse at student responses to the contents of literature lessons.

Chapter One: Background: Time, Place and Issues in History of Estonian Secondary Education

Developments in Estonian Post-Soviet Historiography

The Soviet Socialist Republic of Estonia eventually failed, perhaps even cursed at birth, and attitudes towards remnants of the Soviet occupation of Estonia — with some exceptions — are generally negative. Early historiography of the Soviet era written in newly re-independent Estonia largely served an evaluative and reflective purpose in the process of de-sovietization. Professional historians, other intellectuals, and anyone else with an inclination for writing were free to judge the fallen regime. Blaming and shaming have been identified as an important step in a society transitioning from authoritarian rule; however, this is a step Estonia has already taken.⁷ The change in circumstance leaves victims, perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders – notions often used in the post-Soviet or post-fascist context — with a need to relate to each other and to their shared past. With decades and generations passing, new themes and topics of interest slowly arise.

As Ene Kõresaar, Epp Lauk and Kristin Kuutma have written, “The post-communist condition created a special memory milieu, the existential center of which is

⁷ Aili Aarelaid-Tart, “Sissejuhatus: kultuurimuutused tagasivaatepeeglis,” in *Nullindate kultuur I: teise laine tulemine*, by Aili Aarelaid, ed. Anu Kannike (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2012): 7-8.

being engaged in the communist legacy.”⁸ Borrowing from Tony Judt,

The fall of Communism ... brought in its wake a torrent of bitter memories. Heated debates over what to do with secret police files were only one dimension of the affair ... The real problem was the temptation to overcome the memory of Communism by inverting it. What had once been official truth was now discredited in root and branch — becoming, as it were, officially false.⁹

Numerous works begin with making statements along the lines of ‘the recent decades have seen a memory boom’ and ‘there has been an explosion of memory studies’. As these opening claims might suggest, James Wertsch contends that there can be as many interpretations of memory as there are interpreters.¹⁰ Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins name reasons such as the rise of multiculturalism, the fall of the Soviet Union, and postmodernism as examples for explanations behind the memory boom going on since the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹ Wertsch draws attention to a certain duality of memory — it is seen as having two functions which go together: that of supplying an accurate account of the past and that of providing a ‘useable past’ for a purpose, often with reference to identity concerns, in the present. Despite the popularity of memory studies, ‘memory’ will not be used as a central concept here.

The Soviet experience, for Estonians today, is both very far removed and very

⁸ Ene Kõresaar, Kristin Kuutma, and Epp Lauk, “The Twentieth Century as a Realm of Memory,” in *The Burden of Remembering. Recollections & Representations of the 20th Century*, ed. Ene Kõresaar, Kristin Kuutma, and Epp Lauk, *Studia Historica* 77 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2009): 25.

⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York [etc.]: Penguin Books, 2006), 824.

¹⁰ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

¹¹ Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (August 1998): 105–108.

near at hand. The proportion of the society that has lived a part of their adult lives under Soviet rule has declined considerably in the past 23 years. The times between the 1940s and the Singing Revolution are the stuff of grandparents' recollections, they 'are history.' The feeling is that before the cowboy capitalism of the 'wild 1990s', there was the bloodless, romantic Singing Revolution of the 1980s, a decade that seems slightly absurd with a love for anything 'Western,' from plastic bags to colored bubble gum. Before the 1980s, the Russian era, as it is colloquially known, is largely a blur for younger generations when thinking back as far as the deportations and the world war. Things 'Soviet' or 'Russian' are easily considered insignificant, anachronistic.

On the other hand, people with immediate Soviet experience are still around in big numbers, and they play important roles in the society. As Varik points out, studying recent history is tightly connected to politics since many in today's political arena have been active in both eras.¹² The same is true for writers, singers, actors and others in the public sphere, and definitely for teachers and professors too. The political order may change, yet most people remain in the role that they used to play before. Politicians will still be in politics and teachers will still teach, there is hardly anyone with experience to take their place after half a century of Soviet domination. Nor should ideological reasons be grounds for dismissal in a democratic regime. From the viewpoint of Estonian culture, Soviet education with its uniforms, rote memorization and cheat sheets is a

¹² Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 10.

widely shared common experience, though it is largely inaccessible to post-Soviet generations.

Writing about Estonian culture more broadly, Aili Aarelaid-Tart has adopted the notion of a second wave, characterizing Estonian culture in the 'noughties.' Aarelaid-Tart identifies the existence of a plurality of memory regimes not only between separate memory communities in the society, but also between generations. The new experience of younger Estonians is leading towards fresh interpretations of the past in historiography and the arts. "Soviet reality is becoming an object," Aarelaid-Tart writes, of re-interpretation, of preservation and exhibition, of recollection.¹³ A vivid example of different approaches to the past existing in parallel can be found, again, in the domain of education — the atmosphere in a history lesson in an Estonian school today can be quite a tangle of interpretations with the fifty-something teacher relying on personal experience, students possibly coming from Estonian and Russian backgrounds, and the textbook implying that the grandparents of the latter arrived in Estonia much like parasites with no fatherland, looking for a better life. Perhaps the textbooks put it more mildly, but this is a common notion in high school history textbooks today.

In the academic perspective, the second wave of post-Soviet writers and researchers oftentimes relies on their experience not just as citizens of an independent Estonia but also as global citizens. Aarelaid-Tart is somewhat critical of this, pointing out

¹³ Aarelaid-Tart, "Sissejuhatus: Kultuurimuutused tagasivaatepeeglis," 8.

that foreign-obtained degrees come with certain isolation from the cultural reality of Estonia, and the lack of participation can lead to restricted interpretation of empirical evidence.¹⁴ However, it is not a novelty for Estonians to go abroad for an education, even though the options for decades were mostly limited to Leningrad and Moscow. Altogether, this is the setting that Estonian scholars of the humanities and social sciences work in today. The Soviet past evokes new approaches and new enquiries, often carried out by 'new' people who increasingly lack any firsthand connection with the Soviet era.

For clarity, it is important to note that older generations of Estonians have good memories of the occupation period as well. However, these are largely recollections of more carefree days, of happy childhoods and life choices made simple by a lack of options. Granted, some things may have been easier to obtain or better organized in an era where everything did not come with a (realistic) price tag. For example medical care may have been more readily available for some, even if it was customary for doctors to take bribes or humiliate patients. Anu Kannike has written of nostalgia in the home, marked by a favorable appreciation of Soviet architecture and interior design.¹⁵ It also deserves mentioning that humor has always played a part in people's private lives in dealing with the realities of the Soviet era.¹⁶ In recent years, most of Estonia has laughed

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Anu Kannike, "Aja kodustamine: nostalgia privaatsfääris," in *Nullindate kultuur I: teise laine tulemine*, by Aili Aarelaid, ed. Anu Kannike ([Tartu]: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2012), 124–46.

¹⁶ for a collection see Ivar Kallion, ed., *Nõuka-aja anekdoodid* (Tammerraamat, 2005).

at a highly popular comedy show called *ENSV* (*Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic*; the storyline begins with Brezhnev's death in November 1982) that follows a family, living in a communal apartment with a convinced Bolshevik next door, through their adventures of watching Finnish television, photocopying and trading Western adult magazines for car parts, celebrating Christmas in half-secret, tree stolen with help from a militiaman, and partying most lavishly at the end of kolkhoz harvest season. However, the first wave of interpretations of the Soviet period largely focused on painting a grim picture and exposing truths.

Overall, first- and secondhand experiences, the absurdity of the Soviet everyday, the horror of learning about killings and mass deportations, and some nostalgia, too, melt into a general feeling that, simply put, incorporation into the USSR was Estonia's tragedy and a grave violation against the state and the nation. Much of Estonian historiography, naturally, is concerned with presenting this evaluation; the "occupation" was bad, and anything that stems from it today is holding back progress, with the exception of some memories that are just so absurd that they are now funny. Education, the focus of this thesis, has also first and foremost been analyzed in history-writing as a means of cultivating repressive Soviet ideology;¹⁷ although the pursuits of literacy and

¹⁷ e.g. Eli Pilve, "'Aga vene ajal pidi igas õppetunnis siduma õppematerjali poliitikaga.' Ideoloogiline kasvatus nõukogude koolitunnis hilisstalinistlikus Eesti NSVs," *Tuna. Ajalookultuuri ajakiri* 13, no. 4 (2010): 54–71.

of access to higher levels of education (with the exception of those students who were ideologically suspect, of course) have always received some positive mention.

Historiography of Estonian Secondary Education

Veronika Varik (née Nagel; director of the Estonian Pedagogical Archives and Museum since 2007) has written in the introduction to her 2006 doctoral dissertation that the years of Soviet Estonia cannot be approached merely as black and white. Not everything that can be traced back to the Soviet period is the heritage of a foreign power. Varik identifies paradoxes of forced education policy and a local drive to preserve Estonian language and education. She directs attention towards pedagogy, the practice of teaching and its methods. Varik highlights development and perseverance; despite ideological pressure, Estonian education pulled through the Soviet era with a working school system on all levels of education, with Estonian as the language of instruction. Varik takes note of actual achievement and of Estonia being at the forefront of education innovation in the Soviet Union. She underlines the fact that according to the 1989 census, 10,7% of the Estonian population had obtained higher education as opposed to 0,8% in 1934. She characterizes Soviet Estonian general education as egalitarian, but different in organization from the rest of the Union, and retaining national features.¹⁸

¹⁸ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 10–11, 159-163; Sirk (2005) as cited in *ibid.*, 160. Compare with Toomas Karjahärm and Väino Sirk, *Kohanemine ja vastupanu: Eesti haritlaskond 1940-1987* (Tallinn: Argo, 2007), 76-106 for a shorter, more unforgiving overview.

Research on the history of Soviet Estonian education naturally began during the Soviet era in accordance with contemporary academic guidelines. (Used here for supplementary material is *History of Pedagogy* by Aleksander Elango.¹⁹) Present-day scholarship on Estonian history of education seems to be following above-mentioned historiographical tendencies. First, there was a need to point out ideological repression, to clarify that there had indeed taken place violent occupation during and after World War II. According to Estonian educational scholar Viive-Riina Ruus, memories of repression in education lost their topicality around the year 2000 when global trends and developments reached Estonia in full force; it had taken roughly a decade for Estonian education to fully change course.²⁰

Looking at current themes in research on the history of education in Estonia according to the Estonian National Bibliography, a more urgent topic, compared to general education, has been higher education as the intellectual foundation of the state.²¹ Gaining a university degree is an almost universally approved educational path for young Estonians. Higher education enjoys immense popularity over vocational education, despite concerns over the sustainability of the work force. Reasons to this are

¹⁹ Aleksander Elango, *Pedagoogika Ajalugu. Õpik Kõrgematele Pedagoogilistele Õppeasutustele* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1974).

²⁰ Viive-Riina Ruus, "Haridus- ja kultuurimuutused nullindatel," in *Nullindate kultuur I: teise laine tulemine*, by Aili Aarelaid, ed. Anu Kannike (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2012), 100, 102.

²¹ National Library of Estonia. "Estonian National Bibliography." Database on-line, February 12, 2013. <http://erb.nlib.ee/?komp>.

manifold and debatable, likely explanations include low wages, but also reverberations of Soviet education policy that damaged the reputation of vocational education, the other formal learning option. Institutions of higher education are also challenged with the task of being guardians to Estonian language, spoken by roughly one million people, a small number in our globalizing world. Overall, higher education is researched as part of intellectual history. Other research foci include studies on particular schools, written mostly with the intention of recording local history at a time when the Estonian network of schools, general and vocational, has been undergoing a major transformation due to falling numbers of young people and funding cutbacks. Another center of attention in history of education has been the so-called first Estonian republic. It may be assumed that researchers again share in a desire to set things straight and write 'real' histories that oppose Soviet-era negative judgments in describing that period, an almost uncharted territory if Soviet and contemporary knowledge are cast aside. Turning to school subjects in general education, attention has been on the history of history-teaching, the most controversial subject that has been analyzed in many settings all over the world.

Soviet Education Policy and The National Question

According to James Muckle, the Soviet school system was rooted in the prerevolutionary principles of education. The imperial Russian state had come to control

the school by the nineteenth century. Students had always been expected to not just obtain knowledge, but also *vospitanie* (“upbringing”). Muckle explains that this idea is central to understanding Soviet education. Schools, and every teacher in every lesson, were responsible for the morals and personal development of children. Muckle gives eleven areas of *vospitanie*: socio-political awareness, morality and ethics, patriotism and internationalism, military-patriotic education, labor education and professional orientation, mental development and the raising of general culture, athleticism, knowledge of the law, economic, aesthetic, and physical education. Soviet patriotism and internationalism, high morals, atheism, selflessness, bravery and a love for work were characteristics leading to the creation of the New Soviet Man, a true socialist. Furthermore, Muckle points to the Marxist belief that knowledge and action go together. The school was thus designed to produce Soviet citizens with good morals who based their activity on a Socialist understanding of the world.²²

According to Larry E. Holmes, the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution granted education a special role and value — it was to school new men for the new era; a new society was to be born in their selfless pursuit of progress. In line with Marxism, education had to become available to children of all classes, and prepare them for

²² James Y. Muckle, *A Guide to the Soviet Curriculum: What the Russian Child Is Taught in School* (London ; New York: Croom Helm, 1988).

work.²³ However, while propaganda played an active role in education, and education was to reach everyone, the 'new Soviet youth' needed to do more to obtain *vospitanie* than be a passive recipient of propagandistic information. Propaganda was openly one method of teaching; for example, teachers were instructed to use propaganda to promote atheism, they were told to constantly explain the unscientific nature of religion.²⁴ The student, though, was meant to be an active member of the collective, aware of the surrounding circumstances of place and time, to consciously learn and improve. The self of the student was not intended to be destroyed, it was supposed to be realized through the collective and for the good of the collective. A collective could reach its full potential only as the 'sum' of its members.

As Muckle also emphasizes, it was an overall characteristic of the Soviet school system that rote memorization of knowledge was assessed in examinations, the questions of which were known beforehand. Students were given the questions in advance so that they could prepare themselves. At the, usually oral, exam, it would depend on luck which particular question the student had to answer.²⁵ It emerges on the level of method and student experience that overall the system of schooling was much based on repetition and drill. Rather than individual opinion and independent analysis,

²³ Holmes, Larry E. *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917-1931*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

²⁴ T. Ahhaian, "Õpilaste maailmavaade ja kodanikuaktiivsus," in *Koolipedagoogika*, by Shchukina, I. et al. (Tallinn: Valgus, 1982), 73-74.

²⁵ Muckle, *A Guide to the Soviet Curriculum*, 7.

students learned to memorize material for recitation. This is in accordance with pursuing ideological unity and equality in education. In everyday school life, repetition and drill worked against conscious learning and promoted phenomena such as double-thinking. Students were more likely to pick up concepts or rhetoric that were repeated from subject to subject rather than the actual contents of what they memorized for any particular examination.

One of the facts to be crammed by Soviet students was that the USSR encompassed one-sixth of the entire dry land of the planet. In terms of its ethnic makeup, naturally, the union was extremely diverse. Therefore, scholarship on Soviet policies often stresses the importance of what was known as the National Question to the very foundations of the Soviet state — the Soviet leadership was well aware of the diversity of peoples living under its control, and kept the matters of ethnicity, nationalism, culture and language always in focus. Authors differ in their interpretation of Soviet nationality policy; some see a desire to assimilate all Soviet peoples while others find room for expressions of nationalism. Education in Soviet Union member states cannot be discussed without some attention to the National Question.

Scholars like Holmes and Mervyn Matthews have established that education policy was not stagnant throughout the evolution of Soviet Union. In the immediate postwar period, concerns over non-Russian nationalisms arose. All over the Stalinist

Soviet Union, republics were accused of downplaying Russian cultural influence.²⁶ The second half of the 1940s came to be characterized by Russocentrism.²⁷ The rhetoric surrounding school education, on the other hand, voiced a need to raise young Soviets. The post-war generations were to become Communists who had been properly prepared in politics and morals, and who carried the legacy of World War II victory as a foundational myth.²⁸ Public schools were a meeting ground for Russian nationalism and Soviet ideology.

Scholar Francine Hirsch, for example, writes that Soviet policy on culture and nationalities was markedly different from that of the Russian Empire. The latter oscillated between Russification and noninterference while the former used what she describes as “cultural technologies of rule” to pursue “double assimilation.” Hirsch adopts the first term to denote the use of cultural categories to gain control over territories of land, and the second term to imply a simultaneous process of making nations out of tribes only to have those nations work for the creation of socialist utopia. Hirsch avoids resorting to rigid typologies in her analyses of the Soviet Union and focuses on the transfer and transmission of ideas, thus referring to the creation of the Soviet Union and its subdivisions an interactive process where both the state and the

²⁶ Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*; Mervyn Matthews, *Education in the Soviet Union: Policies and Institutions since Stalin* (London; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

²⁷ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, chap. 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

peoples took part in the formation of national identities, the former to involve people in the socialist revolution.²⁹ Others, like Terry Martin, have found that the Soviet Union actually employed affirmative action by supporting minority nationalisms when they were expressed in a controlled and unthreatening manner. Nationalism would promote the emergence of class rifts, according to Leninist ideology, and thus accelerate the evolution of those people through the nationalism phase and speed up the arrival of Communism. Russian national hegemony as a threat to the international unification of the working class had to be avoided.³⁰

As described by Ronald Grigor Suny, the Soviet leadership first caused a cultural revolution at the end of the 1920s by dogmatizing Marxism-Leninism and subordinating the Soviet intelligentsia and schools to ideology. Suny agrees with Dobrenko, who argued that art and literature actualize control over society.³¹ As time went on, it became both possible and necessary to introduce the ideology to peoples who had been incorporated into the USSR. Thus ideological control mixed with nationality policy. While new member states were put through their own processes of installing censorship and establishing canons of approved texts and writers like the Russian core of the USSR

²⁹ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

³⁰ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1–8.

³¹ E. A. Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 143.

had done earlier, there was an import of literature in the form of works translated from Russian.³²

In the first years of the Soviet occupation of Estonia, the country lost not only large numbers of its general population but also most of its intelligentsia. Planned arrests, deportations and killings, but also voluntary escapes to Western countries, sharply shrunk the numbers of local intellectuals in the 1940s enabling Soviet leaders to exercise better cultural control. Across the Soviet Union, schools and their curricula were subjected to the state. According to Estonian researcher Urve Läänemets, teachers became severely restricted in planning their work as the content and methods to be used in each lesson were prescribed by the authorities. In addition to what the students had to learn, some school programs even stipulated another category for material to which students needed to be superficially introduced. Creativity in teaching was effectively removed.³³

A subject that gained much attention was, of course, history. In the Estonian SSR, school history lessons were found to be lacking in mentioning important Soviet figures and depicting alleged Russian and Estonian collective efforts against common enemies. With regard to the nationality question, Russian nationalism was to prevail as Soviet themes tended to merge into Russian ones in lessons. There was no clean break from the

³² Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment : Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³³ Urve Läänemets, *Hariduse sisu ja õppekavade arengust Eestis* (Tallinn: Jaan Tõnissoni Instituut, 1995).

traditional Russian prerevolutionary teaching.³⁴ Furthermore, reports soon made it clear that students of all ages had difficulty engaging with political material and recent history while older heroes and familiar themes were easier to understand.³⁵

The Importance of Art and Literature in Securing the Achievements of the Socialist Revolution³⁶

To import literature is one means of influence when a government under foreign occupation has decided, or rather, has received orders to carry out the ideological education of the populace. Local writers need a period of transition before they can be expected to conform to new rules. “[T]he works [socialist realism] produced are at once inferior as literature and significantly larger than literature”³⁷ — while not literary masterpieces, Soviet novels nevertheless, or thanks to that fact, served a cunning purpose, Dobrenko explains. Totalitarian regimes turn the beauty and power of the written word into tools, and not just of propaganda. According to Dobrenko, a new reality can be produced through art. Dobrenko explains that socialism without the literature that celebrated it would be nothing more than the plain and ruthless everyday

³⁴ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 188, 198.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

³⁶ High school graduation essay topic from 1950. Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 171.

³⁷ E. A Dobrenko, “Socialist Realism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. E. A Dobrenko and Marina Balina (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 112.

existence of the proletariat, that which was to come to an end under the new order of the workers taking power and rejoicing in their labor.³⁸

Ideological education in schools taught not only the social and political aspects of the Communist agenda but also a certain artistic worldview. Appreciation of art under a totalitarian regime is to become subject to guidelines independent of personal taste. Aesthetic education of the people was a state-controlled process.³⁹ A totalitarian regime can be expected to use a selection of books that promotes 'correct' values and aesthetic tastes. The literature lesson, Muckle believes, was a mixture of developing aesthetic tastes and language skills, and spreading propaganda. In his view, aesthetic education was the primary aspect of teaching literature, but he accounts for Soviet teachers having differed on which element was the most important one. Other authors have underlined the prevalence of propaganda over the other aspects, in fact, over everything in education.⁴⁰

Elsewhere, Dobrenko names socialist realism a social institution; it did fulfil the functions of art, but it was not necessarily art. He continues by giving an interpretation on the question whether socialist realist works should be taken for art at all. Dobrenko finds that socialist realism remains in between art, propaganda and politics. Dobrenko

³⁸ Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*, 2.

³⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁰ N. N. Shneidman, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1973); Muckle, *A Guide to the Soviet Curriculum*, 114–115.

wishes to add to what he finds to be the usual approach — socialist realism does not exist outside of certain political interest and is therefore itself politics, as opposed to being art. He expands this statement by adding that Soviet politics never stood separately from socialist realism, and thus political and ideological activity was “the inner sphere of Socialist Realist production and consumption.”⁴¹

Dobrenko is one of the authors who go beyond seeing socialist realist literature as simply propaganda. According to him, socialist realism helped build Soviet society through its influence on ideology. “Soviet literature ... was a completely new and unique phenomenon. Its main function amounted not to propaganda, but to the *production of reality through its aestheticization*.”⁴² He concludes that even though socialist realism was described as portraying reality, it was more closely concerned with creating that reality for socialism. Dobrenko goes further by adding that while it is an important social function of art to help replace the, perhaps mundane, present by the past or the future, socialist realism differs — “this is not the future replacing the present, but an attempt to imagine the future as the present.” Art was necessary to shift the present. He states that socialism was the “only successful product” of the Soviet Union, and Socialist Realism was the method of its creation. This was change through aesthetics, not through propaganda. As new generations were raised reading works of Socialist Realism, the

⁴¹ E. A. Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), xi-xii, xiv.

⁴² E. A. Dobrenko, “Socialist Realism,” 110.

reality presented in that literature became the reality of those people. The concepts of their reality derived from socialist realism. “Socialist Realism created not ‘lies’ but *images of socialism* that, through perception, return as *reality* — or, more specifically, as *socialism*.”⁴³

Historiography on the topic of propaganda, especially in Soviet cultural policies, helps identify attempts at indoctrination more specifically. Analyses of Soviet literature and writers provide a background of interpretations in the relatively narrow field of literature under the principles of socialist realism. Information can be derived on how Soviet texts came into being and which ideas they were meant to carry. Some, like N. N. Shneidman, have underlined literature in education as, first and foremost, propaganda.⁴⁴ Authors like Dobrenko have tried to explain socialist realism as more than a current in art or as pure propaganda. Socialist realism has been described as a complex interaction between the state, the writer, and the reader, not just as an imposed framework but as derived from the culture it helped transform. Furthermore, as Dobrenko writes, socialist realism was both a product of socialism and the creator of socialist reality. The reader of socialist realist fiction was raised to appreciate its values.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., 110-111.

⁴⁴ Shneidman, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education*.

⁴⁵ Dobrenko, “Socialist Realism,” 110–111.

The Soviet Novel

In *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Katerina Clark has produced a list of model novels which were to be regarded by members of the USSR Writer's Union as exemplars of good writing. In the model novels, Clark identifies a 'master plot' which was used to an extent by nearly all Soviet novels. This is not to mean that all the novels were variations of the same story, however, there are elements of the plot that are shared. The master plot carries and exemplifies the main principles of Soviet ideology. To get published, writers were not free to create as they saw fit. It was hardly rare for editors to demand rewriting or to make their own changes. Clark singles out *The Young Guard* by Alexander Fadeev (first published in 1945, reworked in 1951), commissioned by the Komsomol, as the best example of the master plot.⁴⁶ According to her analysis,

the Soviet "divine plan of salvation," or Marxist-Leninist account of History, is condensed by means of highly codified conventions and told as a tale ... of a questing hero who sets out in search of "consciousness" ... he encounters obstacles that test his strength and determination, but in the end he attains his goal ... On the one hand, he has before him a task from the public sphere. But his second, and more important, goal is to resolve within himself the tension between "spontaneity" and "consciousness."⁴⁷

In *The Young Guard*, hero Oleg protects his town from Germans which, in turn, raises his ideological consciousness and sacrifices his self to the good of the collective.

⁴⁶ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 159-160.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

Dobrenko writes, “Soviet literature, rather than orienting the real reader toward actualization of his own experience, instead demanded from him unconditional merging with collective experience ... isolated from both general human experience and individual experience.”⁴⁸ Stories like that of *The Young Guard* vividly depict total selflessness for the good of masses. According to Richard Stites, under the Soviet Union, the literary diversity of the previous era was replaced by a tradition that was meant to educate the society and support the state. Socialist realism, Stites explains, can be characterized as portraying adventure, exploration, settlement, production, aviation and so on, all in all, progress and moral guidance. It is simple and readable, often presenting the maturation of young heroes with guidance from experienced mentors. Altogether, the real horrors of Communist rule are denied in favor of mystification of the reality.⁴⁹

Which originally Russian-language books appeared in Estonian translation? Due to the small size of Estonia and the nature of Soviet rule, the number of publishing houses and books in print was limited which makes it possible to obtain a good overview. Of the twenty-nine books on Clark’s list of model novels,⁵⁰ the best of Soviet

⁴⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁹ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 67, 69, 95.

⁵⁰ Clark’s list does not separate multi-volume works. Practice in this respect is inconsistent. The original itself was likely to have been published over the course of several years. Volumes of the same novel appeared in translation sometimes as collections, and at other times, as separate books. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*.

fiction writing, only seven were not translated into Estonian.⁵¹ Out of the seven, three were made into movies by the Soviet film industry which probably means that they were still familiar to an Estonian audience.

Dobrenko opens *The Making of the State Reader*, his extensive study of Socialist Realism in literature, by stressing the idea that the Soviet reader was not a passive recipient of literature.⁵² Dobrenko sheds light on how Soviet culture worked to transform man. Literature was one of the tools of the regime towards making the New Soviet Man. However, since Dobrenko sees the reader as not just a passive recipient of culture, the reader emerges as the critic and creator of literature as well as its target. Dobrenko is interested in the reception and uses of Socialist Realism, not just its aesthetics. Reader and literature are in a process of communication where the reader presents her tastes and literature conforms. Dobrenko asserts that Socialist Realism came into being through drawing equally on the input of the masses and the authorities. The peculiarity of a totalitarian system is that this interaction is restricted. The process of reading is controlled for the purposes of the regime. Therefore, Dobrenko finds that reading in the Soviet situation can meaningfully be discussed as a meeting point of the

⁵¹ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography."

⁵² Following paragraph is based on Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*.

reader, the literature and the authority.⁵³ In Clark's opinion, those in power, in their turn, shaped their actions according to what literature taught them.⁵⁴

A document from an Estonian small-town school from the year 1948 reads "We must strengthen the connection between class teachers and the head of the library. We must push through to every student to check if they read only recommended literature."⁵⁵ Dobrenko explains that libraries were seen as the most important arena for raising Soviet readers. Schoolchildren, of course, largely read what was dictated by the curriculum, however, the librarian was to monitor what choices the student made, and recommend books of interest. The libraries contained books that had been approved by censorship, but Dobrenko makes it clear that the librarian's primary function under Socialist Realism was not to keep bookshelves in order and clean of banned books, rather, it was to maintain direct contact with the reader. Librarians could check on the interaction between reader and book, and the currents in literature interpretation.⁵⁶ Detailing the importance of extracurricular reading, a pedagogy textbook for university students (Russian original from 1977, Estonian translation published in 1982) explains that children's libraries, namely the 'guidance of children's reading,' are a special domain of Communist upbringing. Work methods here recommended to teachers

⁵³ Ibid., viii, 2, 10, 116.

⁵⁴ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 8.

⁵⁵ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 28.

⁵⁶ Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*, 10-11, 171.

include viewing lending records to determine tastes. While the text fails to specify how, teachers are also instructed to “fight against senseless reading of books and their random selection,” and to work with parents on children’s personal libraries.⁵⁷

Multiple types of student tasks gave teachers and librarians an array of tools to potentially monitor students’ reception of what they read. We may assume that most students were never such avid readers to have attended some kind of a private consultation with a librarian to draw up a personal extracurricular reading list. At the same time, teaching methods included different ways of encouraging students to reflect on fiction, thus allowing possible evaluations of student mindsets. A common exercise, for example, was keeping a reading journal. Practised by all ages, first-graders drew pictures inspired by stories while secondary school students were expected to put down book summaries or short essays. An important aspect of keeping a reading journal would have been to record each book that the student read, ideally including extracurricular reading. A reading journal can help evaluate the amount of work done by a student, and help the student prepare for exams. However, if brought together, library records, reading journals and student essays would have allowed for an insightful look at students’ interactions with and reactions to the Soviet novel.

⁵⁷ V. Kutsenko, “Õpilaste klassiväline töö” in *Koolipedagoogika* by G. Shchukina (Tallinn: Valgus, 1982), 174-175.

Chapter Two: Soviet Socialist Realism in Estonian Secondary Education

Developments in Soviet Estonian Secondary Education

Varik in her doctoral dissertation on education policy and the organization of primary and secondary education in Estonia in the years 1940-1991 offers the following periodization:

1940-1941 first Soviet occupation of Estonia

1941-1944 German occupation of Estonia

1944-1950 re-transition to the Soviet Union school system

1950-1958 late Stalinism and beginning of the Thaw in history

1958-1978 transition to 8-year compulsory school attendance and compulsory 11-year secondary education

1978-1985 excessive Russification⁵⁸

1985-1991 perestroika and a new national awakening⁵⁹

The period of Soviet education in Estonia, following Varik, can thus be narrowed down to the years 1944 to 1985 for the purposes of the present master's thesis. The first Soviet occupation lasted roughly for one school year, and teaching relied on 'programs' (the term used for the syllabi) that were committed to bringing Estonian

⁵⁸ Implies linguistic Russification above all, 'sovietization' would be a more accurate term for broader currents.

⁵⁹ Following two paragraphs are based on Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*.

schools into the Soviet education system. However, the programs were temporary and a full transition to the new system was planned to take place in the next few years. The German occupation, although undoubtedly relevant for the history of Estonian education, is left out of this discussion as emphasis will be put on the Soviet system alone. It was the approach of the Communists themselves, too, to continue where they had left off.

Therefore, syllabus research here is carried out on samples picked from each of the periods named by Varik, starting with the 1944 to 1950 era. The themes of the new national awakening will also be largely left out of focus here as a topic that deserves separate attention. With Soviet leadership passing on to Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, perestroika and glasnost as new currents brought about change. According to Varik, 1986 was the year of transitioning to new programs in most subjects after the 1984 decision of school reform by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the mid-1980s were the point of a new national awakening in education, in Varik's periodization. Already the 1984 literature program, described below, contains a reading list quite comparable to what Estonian students today are expected to master.⁶⁰

The format of school programs appears to have changed little over the decades in question. The Estonian Ministry of Education published them subject by subject in the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 9, 20, 59–60, 148–149.

form of little booklets. The printed programs became more refined over the years, and included not only a list of topics and the number of lessons assigned for each year of study, but also guiding texts on the purpose and methods of teaching and types of student tasks to be achieved. It can be derived that these programs not merely presented a course of study, but also aimed to advise schools and teachers on how to carry out their work with the intended outcomes of Communist upbringing. Teacher instructions are here used to understand the goals set for the secondary school.

In addition to that of 1984, school programs here studied come from the years 1949, 1955, and 1977. Noticeably, there is a 22-year jump from 1955 to 1977 while the 1960s seem to be skipped. This expresses both stability and stagnation in the 1960s and 1970s. In her periodization, Varik has chosen to group together the two decades from 1958 to 1978. It is possible to further divide this period. For example, Raudsepp has separated 1965-1977 as the beginning of stagnation (and linear history teaching) for the purposes of analyzing history as a school subject in general education.⁶¹ However, Varik's periodization was chosen here as it is designed to consider historical events and overall education policy in conjunction with developments in Soviet pedagogy.⁶² The choice of these program exemplars relies on the assumption that they signify currents in Soviet Estonian education when they were at their peak. Another aspect that influenced

⁶¹ Anu Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeeleaga üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2005), 11.

⁶² Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 9.

the choice of primary sources was the fact that new programs and other teaching materials were not printed for each year. It can also be presumed that shifts in policy and pedagogical thought, at least in times of stability, take time to be applied in schools as teachers need instruction, and most innovations are normally installed at the beginning of a school year.

Secondary school years (from grade eight, or from grade nine starting with the year 1959, up to grade eleven) are viewed as one entity for the purposes of the present master's thesis.⁶³ This is in accordance with the logic of the Soviet school programs; secondary education, viewed as a whole, was designed as a complete set of three or four years of schooling. Literature lessons over those years were also meant to make up a unitary course even though themes were many. The method of teaching can be generalized as following historical processes and tracing developments in literature by epoch, writer and geographical location.

In order to gain a new insight into Soviet secondary education in Estonia, a sample of literary works chosen from high school literature programs provides an entry into the educational experience that befell Estonian secondary students. An excursion into what was taught to Soviet Estonian secondary students becomes possible through juxtaposing a sample of fiction from literature programs, both works that can and cannot be characterized as foreign or socialist realist, with the general atmosphere of the

⁶³ Ibid., 159.

school, goals in teaching as explained by guidelines provided to teachers in the secondary school programs, developments in education policy and the society in general. Primary sources here used include secondary school programs and textbooks, literature on pedagogy, and works of fiction. Secondary sources are employed to provide an understanding of the natures of Communist totalitarianism and Soviet socialist realism, and an overview of education policy.

1949: Re-Transition to the Soviet School System

Before the Soviet occupation of 1940-1941, primary and secondary education in Estonia had altogether consisted of twelve years of schooling; in the Soviet Union, secondary education was gained in ten years.⁶⁴ In the spring of 1941, both the 11th and the 12th-year students graduated, however, eleven years of secondary education were retained in 1944 with local leaders claiming a need for an extra year for the reason of having to teach Russian extensively. Secondary school ran from grades eight to eleven, and seven years of schooling (or staying in school until the age of 16) became compulsory in Estonia in 1946.⁶⁵

By 1949, the Estonian school system was starting to recover from the immediate consequences of World War II, such as damaged infrastructure and lack of textbooks,

⁶⁴ Following paragraph is based on Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*.

⁶⁵ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 19–20, 50, 59.

students' extreme poverty, and infectious diseases.⁶⁶ Rebuilding schoolhouses and expanding the network of schools were part of the 1946-1950 five-year plan.⁶⁷ Starting in 1944, the task of teachers would be to apply the principles of Soviet pedagogy. It soon became clear that the majority of teachers were not loyal to the new regime, and thus import of school staff from the rest of the Soviet Union began.⁶⁸

In 1948, pressure on the Estonian bourgeoisie strengthened, and 1949 was the year of the second mass deportations when over 20 000 Estonians were forcefully transported to Siberia. The ministry of education initiated a purge of teachers, and many lost their jobs or were demoted, some after denunciation by colleagues. New teachers were often Russian Estonians who spoke Estonian poorly and remained disconnected from students.⁶⁹ According to Raudsepp's research, the number of teachers replaced after 1944 was equal to the sum total of teachers by the year 1950. It was not unusual for students to meet completely new teachers each fall, and the teachers were increasingly poorly qualified. Therefore, non-Estonian teachers appear to have been among the first Soviet 'imports.' Undoubtedly, students' experiences must have differed from school to school, however, some definitely studied under the guidance from teachers who were

⁶⁶ Ibid., 46–50.

⁶⁷ Elango, *Pedagoogika Ajalugu*. *Õpik Kõrgematele Pedagoogilistele Õppeasutustele*, 230.

⁶⁸ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 46–47.

⁶⁹ *ibid. ibid.*, 46–50.

unfamiliar with local conditions. At the same time, party membership among teachers remained low, rising only to ten per cent in cities.⁷⁰

Outside of regular lessons, students were expected to join the Young Pioneer Organization and, from the age of 14 upwards, Komsomol. These organizations were not popular, but they were often unavoidable for students who wanted to take part in extra-curricular activities which were all mostly directed towards members.⁷¹ The Pioneer and Komsomol organizations were another foreign import. The Scouting movement, for example, had reached Estonia in 1912, but no religious or other youth organization had been available to the masses in Estonia on the same scale ever before.⁷²

In the 1940s, humanities made up over a half of the curriculum in general education.⁷³ The literature lesson, alongside Estonian, Russian, history and geography, was under scrutiny from school inspectors, especially the aspect of Estonian literature in the program. The 1949 program for literature lessons for years 8 to 11 states that the contents of literature lessons for those years should include the history of Estonian and Russian literature plus an introduction to some works from other Soviet nations and Western Europe. The aim was to carry out the goals of Soviet upbringing:

⁷⁰ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeeleaga üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 22–23, 26–27.

⁷¹ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 55–56.

⁷² “Eesti Skautide Ühingu tutvustus,” Eesti Skautide Ühing, n.d., <http://www.skaut.ee/?jutt=10158>.

⁷³ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 53.

The task of the course is to develop the Marxist-Leninist worldview in students, to grow the Soviet feeling of patriotism and endless loyalty to Lenin-Stalin's great party, to show the students the conceptual richness of the best works of literature and the artistic power of the figures presented in them and to use the special part of literature in growing the high moral characteristics of the Soviet person.⁷⁴

Such declarations can be found at the beginning of literature programs throughout the years of Soviet Estonia – literature lessons were tools of Communist upbringing.⁷⁵ Secondary school graduates had to be educated and literate, but also fight selflessly for the causes of Lenin and Stalin's great work. Teachers were obliged to “raise their students to be brave builders of Communism, certain in the victory of Lenin and Stalin's ideas, courageous, afraid of no difficulties ...”⁷⁶ Another persistent theme in the literature programs is the class-based nature of literature and its party-mindedness. All literature was said to be born in certain socio-historic conditions and observed as a process with its historic regularities: “Fulfilling [her] task, the teacher must ... explain the regularity of literary phenomena in connection with social-historical conditions. ... The students must become aware of the class-character of literature, its party-mindedness.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus* (Tallinn: Pedagoogiline Kirjandus, 1949), 22.

⁷⁵ The rest of this subchapter is based on Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus* (Tallinn: Pedagoogiline Kirjandus, 1949).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

Interspersed with quotes from Zhdanov and others, the 1949 program emphasizes that the arts must be political, and that bolshevism will not agree to ideological distortions. It was made clear that there is a single correct way to understand art, and that is through the societal function of a work of art. There was no 'art for the sake of art' in socialism. Students were to master the correct aesthetic taste, the historical development of literature, and accept that Soviet literature was supreme to others as the most advanced and the most revolutionary:

The idea of the power of the fatherland, selfless service to it, the idea of valiant heroism for the happiness of the nation, feeling Soviet patriotism and national pride, a fight against the "blind mimicking" of Western Europe and against groveling before the putrid bourgeois culture, this is most characteristic of the best works of our literature.⁷⁸

The program acknowledges that Socialist Realism is among the higher stages of the development of art. The 1949 program also praises Russian literature, though Soviet literature is held to be greater in literary and educational importance: "The greatness of Russian literature lies in the fact that its best works correctly reflect the history of the great Russian nation, its enormous historical importance in the development of world culture."⁷⁹

Western classics outside of a select few were only to be taught if necessary in conjunction with Russian literature. The 1949 program altogether devotes 477 lessons to

⁷⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 22.

the study of literature throughout the four years of secondary school. The lessons are distributed equally from year 8 to 11 with the senior year getting some extra lessons for review. Western European classics are given little attention with 29 lessons, the focus lies heavily on Russian literature with 214 lessons. 84 lessons are to be devoted to Soviet literature. Estonian literature is the topic of 112 lessons, 25 lessons are to deal with Soviet Estonian writers. It may be derived that the 1949 literature program did not exclude original Estonian works; however, the emphasis in teaching was to be with Soviet and Russian literatures as the more advanced and valuable ones. The importance of Estonian literature was downplayed. The three writers to get the most class time were Maxim Gorky, Alexander Pushkin and Lev Tolstoy.

Literature was to be taught by epoch, noting its class and ideological struggles. Historical analysis of a novel was to consist of three components: analysis of characters, discovering the conceptual idea of the novel, and “historical-literary” evaluation of the novel. In addition to analyzing novels and books of poetry, students were to study the lives of the writers:

Introducing to students the lives and creations of literary classics, the teacher must tell of the great Russian and Estonian writers’ belief in the power and talents of the people, of burning anger against the negative aspects of tsarist Russia, of the great bravery of serving the homeland, and of the thirst to give people education.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibid., 27.

The teacher must emphasize in [her] lessons that leading writers, critics and publicists always held an irreconcilable fight against slave-mindedness before the foreign, bourgeoisie cosmopolitanism, apolitical thinking and devotion to the aesthetic, that they held high the flag of patriotism and defended the people's interests.⁸¹

The writer was the epitome of a patriot. Students had to learn the 'story' of the writer, the background, the upbringing, the career, and then the works of art.⁸² For example, Gorky was cast as the founder of Soviet literature and of the method of socialist realism, an autodidact who worked his way up from being an orphan to becoming the first great proletarian writer, but also a critic, journalist and editor.⁸³ Students, in retelling from memory what they had read, a common exercise, were even expected to mimic the peculiarities of a writer's style.⁸⁴

1955: Late Stalinism and Beginning of the Thaw in Education

The year 1950 was the culmination of Sovietization in Estonia. As interpreted by historian Olaf Mertelsmann,⁸⁵ 'sovietization' can be understood as more than political

⁸¹ Ibid., 23.

⁸² Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 22-26, 29, 31, 36-73.

⁸³ N. Bassel, V. Bezzubov, and K. Leht, *Vene nõukogude kirjandus. Õpik XI klassile*, 5th ed. (Tallinn: Valgus, 1986), 47.

⁸⁴ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 32; Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Keskkooli programmid 1955/56. õppeaastaks. Kirjandus* (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik kirjastus, 1955), 3.

⁸⁵ Olaf Mertelsmann, "Sovetiseerimise mõistest," in *Eesti NSV aastatel 1940-1953: sovetiseerimise mehhanismid ja tagajärjed Nõukogude Liidu ja Ida-Euroopa arengute kontekstis*, ed. Tõnu Tannberg, trans. Kairit Kaur, *Acta et commentationes archivi historici Estoniae* 15 (22) (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2007).

takeover, even though it was initially an official bolshevik line of action in the 1920s; sovietization can be taken to mean the initiation of change in all spheres of a society, including the transfer and adoption of culture change once control and political power had been secured by violent means. The local Estonian leadership, including top officials in the ministry of education, was replaced; intellectuals suffered under accusations of imperialism and nationalism. In the field of education, the early 1950s were a time of parallel centralization as Moscow subdued Tallinn and Tallinn subdued the rest of Estonia.⁸⁶ Every seventh or eighth teacher was fired or reassigned for political reasons in 1950 and 1951.⁸⁷ In 1953, however, the supreme leader Joseph Stalin died and, after an interregnum, was eventually succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev; thus, the Thaw began — an era of liberalization as compared to the rigidity and authoritarian control of Stalinism.⁸⁸

A pamphlet by the Estonian SSR Political and Scientific Knowledge Distribution Society from 1954 explains the role of the student collective in Communist upbringing. It begins with a look at the individualism of bourgeois morals. According to the text, capitalist societies are made up of warring individuals who are driven by nothing but money and power, and do not shy away from any means of exploiting each other. Collectivism is among the main characteristics of the Soviet person, there is no

⁸⁶ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 62.

⁸⁷ Puhkim as cited in *ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

inevitable opposition between person and society, collective property and collective work join people. This does not mean that personal interests need to be hidden; rather it is the collective that provides the individual with means to personal development and freedom. The Soviet Man is firstly a member of the collective, responsible for comrades. Only Soviet pedagogy in the reality of socialism is able to provide collective education. Only in the collective can a child's persona thoroughly develop. Students are transformed from objects into subjects as they form a collective and take collective responsibility; they lose their opposition to the school, are demanding towards themselves and earn good grades.⁸⁹

In the first half of the 1950s, the focus in education shifted from humanities to natural sciences and to the principle of polytechnization, providing students with a foundation of basic manual work skills to acquire any trade or job in the future.⁹⁰ The overall number of literature lessons in the 1955 secondary school program for grades eight to eleven is 432, down from 477 in the 1949 program. In each grade, Russian literature is given more lessons than Estonian.⁹¹ There was discord in the chronological aspects of humanities subjects: on the one hand, students were becoming overburdened in the 1950s, on the other hand, attempts at curbing program content failed to consider

⁸⁹ Aleksander Elango, *Õpilaskollektiivi organiseerimine ja kasvatamine*, Eesti NSV Poliitiliste ja Teaduslaste Teadmiste Levitamise Ühing 17 (177) (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1954).

⁹⁰ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 69.

⁹¹ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Keskkooli programmid 1955/56. õppeaastaks. Kirjandus*.

the unity of the overall content of education. Literature, for example, was not taught at the same rate of moving through time that was used in history lessons. Literature as a school subject earned much intellectual criticism for its textbooks. Local writers brought attention to the fact that literature was taught through principles of ideology and politics, and a distorted picture was painted of Estonian authors. After 1955, such critiques brought about change in school programs.⁹²

In 1956, with the Hungarian Revolution, ideological pressure mounted anew. Overall, the local Communist leadership joined in on negative evaluations of the Estonian educational system, and in 1958 Khrushchev's policy put the whole Soviet Union on a path towards educational reform. The goals of the reform were the effective Communist upbringing of the Soviet person, and polytechnization; this current lasted until 1964. At the same time, humanities regained their importance after 1959 as they were again deemed necessary for ideological education. School programs were changed keeping in mind the principles of internationalism, patriotism, atheism and collectivism. The latter initiated a new schooling method that took root in 1956 – the establishment of boarding schools.⁹³ These were primarily targeted at families who did not have the 'conditions necessary to raise children,' but also children of single mothers, of work and war invalids, and orphans.⁹⁴

⁹² Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 70–72.

⁹³ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 30–32, 36-37.

⁹⁴ Elango, *Pedagoogika Ajalugu. Õpik Kõrgematele Pedagoogilistele Õppeasutustele*, 233.

Despite Stalinism falling out of favor, 1955 was the year that students lost a certain freedom — the Soviet Union introduced its school uniform. Students in general education across the union would be dressed the same to promote order and discipline. Not all schools declared the uniform compulsory, but most schools in urban areas did.⁹⁵ On the other hand, Stalin's death and the ensuing liberalization led to the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol's decline in popularity and membership, especially in Estonian language schools.⁹⁶ In the school year 1952/1953, the number of Young Pioneers was 63,049, and it fell to 50,750 by the school year 1956/1957. Komsomol membership dropped from 11,464 to 9256 over the same period, meaning both organizations lost about a fifth of their members.⁹⁷

The 1955 secondary school program for literature lessons calls *belles-lettres* 'the source of perceiving life, a powerful means in students' ideological and moral upbringing, in shaping their worldview and character.'⁹⁸ These three aspects are echoed in school programs year after year, and once more fittingly summarize the purpose of art in Soviet secondary education. As noted by Dobrenko, art was to produce new, Socialist reality where everyone merged into a collective – made up of transformed individuals, Soviets who had mastered Communist values and morals, the *vospitanie*

⁹⁵ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 68.

⁹⁶ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 32–33.

⁹⁷ Aasmaa as cited in *ibid.*, 33.

⁹⁸ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Keskkooli programmid 1955/56. õppeaastaks. Kirjandus*, 3.

described by Muckle – a reality where life under a totalitarian regime was blissful and safe, where a future Socialist utopia had already arrived.⁹⁹

The 1955 secondary school program for singing lessons, too, states that music and singing are tools of Communist upbringing, and in the school they serve the goals of both artistic and aesthetic education, not just of teaching certain songs and developing the ability to sing. The program states that the anthems — which must refer to the anthems of the Soviet Union and the Estonian SSR — are learned in the third and fourth grades, and these are not given as belonging in the program as it is only natural that they are repeated throughout the school years.¹⁰⁰ 1955 was the last year of the latter anthem praising Stalin in its final verse; the lyrics were slightly changed in 1956. The anthem of the Estonian SSR begins by linking Estonians to their mythic forefather Kalev, but proceeds to socialist realist themes of the power and successes of collective labor under party guidance.¹⁰¹ The Soviet Union anthem was performed without lyrics until 1977, however, its lyrics centered on the motif of the unity and friendship of Soviet peoples.¹⁰² Other songs in the program include "The Internationale" and many more pieces that can be considered culturally alien in the Estonian setting, such as other

⁹⁹ Dobrenko, "Socialist Realism," 110; Muckle, *A Guide to the Soviet Curriculum*, 19–20.

¹⁰⁰ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Keskkooli programmid 1955/56. õppeaastaks. Laulmine* (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik kirjastus, 1955), 3, 5.

¹⁰¹ "Eesti NSV hümn," *Vikipeedia, vaba entsüklopeedia*, August 31, 2014, http://et.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Eesti_NSV_h%C3%BCmn&oldid=3953990.

¹⁰² "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1944-1991)," *Nationalanthems.info*, accessed September 21, 2014, <http://www.nationalanthems.info/sun.htm>.

socialist pieces or folk songs from faraway peoples of the Soviet Union. However, Estonian classics with 'neutral' lyrics, touching on folk topics like nature or love for the homeland, are also included.

On another repetitive theme, the 1955 secondary school literature program continues:

Russian classics that truthfully reflect the great historic past of the Russian nation and that are strongly connected to the movement for freedom in all its stages of development, full of great civic pathos and boundless love for its homeland and nation, give the richest opportunities for students' ideological, moral and aesthetic upbringing.¹⁰³

Again, the program also acclaims Soviet literature as the most advanced in the world, and even greater in educational value. Then, the program explains that students must realize that fiction does not copy reality, it generalizes life. These generalizations are not merely based on the illustration of repeating phenomena, they correspond to the very essence of social-historic phenomena. There is no 'art for the sake of art,' a bourgeois development.¹⁰⁴ All in all, the 1955 literature program repeats all the same key ideas as the 1949 one — literature lessons are a tool of Communist upbringing, all literature is born in specific socio-historic conditions and mirrors class struggles, Soviet and Russian literature are of the greatest value aesthetically and educationally, and writers are the greatest patriots and educators of the people.

¹⁰³ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Keskkooli programmiid 1955/56. õppeaastaks. Kirjandus*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Ibid., 4.

The task of the student was to access the main idea of a book and to analyze its characters as carriers of the ideas of the work. Topics in the 1955 literature program are divided into 'overview themes' and 'monographic themes'. The former mean lectures on certain periods in literature and history while the latter equate to studying specific writers and some of their works in depth. The program emphasizes that the teacher must stress the development of the writer's worldview, his ideals and feelings towards the homeland and the nation. The writers to be most thoroughly analyzed are Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Lermontov, and Estonians Eduard Vilde and Anton Hansen Tammsaare. The latter two, especially Vilde, also had a prominent place in the 1949 program; however, the importance accorded to Estonian writers had grown by 1955.

1977: Transition to Compulsory 11-year Secondary Education

The late 1950s in Estonia were a period of, if not acceptance, then of compliance. It became clear that this Soviet period would not soon end. On the other hand, the regime's political pressure had waned and the intellectual life saw some defense of national culture.¹⁰⁵ In education, the beginning to the 1960s saw a new emphasis on the need to raise young Communists. Central ideas enforced by the Communist Party were focused around the development of a scientific worldview and atheism, Communist

¹⁰⁵ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 78-79.

morals, proletarian internationalism and Socialist patriotism, and fighting capitalism and bourgeois ideology. In 1962, civic education was introduced in schools.¹⁰⁶

In 1964, the school uniform became compulsory across Estonia, including for after-school activities. Starting in 1967, new and improved clothing designs were introduced, and the Estonian uniform started to differ from the one used in the rest of the Soviet Union. In 1968, updates to the school uniform policy included girls in Estonia being given the right to wear long pants to school. Another minor freedom added in the second half of the 1960s was the five-day school week, reduced from six days a week.¹⁰⁷

Also in 1964, the principles of polytechnic education fell out of favor as failing to provide both proper general and proper vocational education.¹⁰⁸ In 1965, the amount of lessons in Estonian language and literature was increased again, and music lessons, not part of high school curricula in the rest of the Soviet Union, were reintroduced in secondary education. On the other hand, Russian language was reinforced with new zeal in the early 1970s as the Soviet *lingua franca*. Another innovation of the time was military preparation of high school students – 140 lessons of civil defense in grades ten and eleven.¹⁰⁹

1966 and 1967 saw further centralization in education with the establishment of

¹⁰⁶ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 38; Elango, *Pedagoogika Ajalugu. Õpik Kõrgematele Pedagoogilistele Õppeasutustele*, 234.

¹⁰⁷ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 82-83.

¹⁰⁸ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 86-87, 92.

the Ministry of Education of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁰ Even though 1968 introduced new ideological pressure, changes in Estonian education policy were not remarkable. Until the second half of the 1970s, struggles over matters of education remained largely in the domain of politicians. Local leaders successfully defended the eleven-year school, as opposed to ten years in the rest of the Soviet Union, and the right to print authentic Estonian textbooks.¹¹¹

Overall, the 1970s were the decade of mass participation in secondary education as per Soviet policy. Secondary education could be obtained in a regular high school, but also in evening schools, vocational schools and by distance learning, and in specialized schools for the working youth. As secondary education was prescribed by policy, it was probably easier than ever to reach graduation. Whereas up to the 1960s secondary school education meant belonging to the higher educated strata of the society, the 70s saw the specific type of school that an individual had graduated from become important. Secondary education from an actual secondary school came to be regarded differently from vocational and other specialist school diplomas which normally catered to students of lower social standing.¹¹² It can be argued that such a mentality has remained present in the Estonian society ever since. Today, gymnasiums provide general

¹¹⁰ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 41; Elango, *Pedagoogika Ajalugu. Õpik Kõrgematele Pedagoogilistele Õppeasutustele*, 235.

¹¹¹ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 43-46.

¹¹² Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 89-99.

secondary education and vocational schools give vocational secondary education; the former enjoys immense popularity while the latter, in the most extremely prejudiced views, is regarded as a dumping ground for excluding less successful students from the 'normal,' mainstream education. Overall, secondary education has not been viewed as elitist in the Estonian society since the 1970s.

The 1977 secondary school program in literature differs in tone from the previous examples. It begins in much the same way by asserting the special role that literature has among other school subjects in affecting young minds in the pursuit of Communist upbringing. However, after listing as bullet points the goals of teaching literature in the secondary school (developing a Marxist-Leninist worldview through art is the first one), the program turns to describing the content of the syllabus.¹¹³ There appears to be less emphasis on ideas like raising a new kind of person or the supremacy of Soviet and Russian literatures. The lives of writers are still underlined as being of interest, but more so for interpreting their works rather than glorifying writers as patriotic geniuses above the rest of the people.¹¹⁴ It is possible that there was no longer any need to stress what Soviet Estonian teachers already well knew about the goals of Communist education by the second half of the 1970s. The teachers working with this program and teaching in Estonian schools in 1977 had received training as desired by the regime. On the other

¹¹³ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Kaheksaklassilise Kooli Ja Keskkooli Programmid. Kirjandus. IV-XI Klass* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1977), 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

hand, this appears to be another example of using Soviet speak — the introduction to the program signals the 'correct' frame of mind by reasserting the Soviet principles; then the text moves on from formulaic declarations to its actual subject matter. The secondary school program in music, beginning in 1976, follows the same pattern: some mention of the goals of musical education, and then on to the details of music itself.¹¹⁵

Another change can be noticed in innovations in teaching. Theater and film have acquired a place in the school, but it may be assumed that not all students across Estonia had the opportunity to regularly visit plays or movie screenings. Perhaps more importantly, teachers have been given back the freedom of making choices in their everyday work. The program explains that the reception of art is subjective, depending on the individual, on the individual's maturity, and the era in which they live. It is mentioned that there is a 'correct conceptual-political' approach, based on Communist ideals, to interpreting a work of art; however, that is only the first step in interpretation. The teacher is not to prescribe evaluations of literature, the students are acknowledged to have subjective personal responses to art, their own likes and dislikes. Furthermore, teachers are allowed a small segment of the program, 15 lessons, to be used according to their own choosing. Teachers are also allowed to discuss new literature in that time.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Kaheksaklassilise kooli ja keskkooli programmid. Muusikaõpetus* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1976).

¹¹⁶ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Kaheksaklassilise Kooli Ja Keskkooli Programmid. Kirjandus. IV-XI Klass*, 20–21.

Based on the 1977 literature program and secondary school final examination questions in literature from the year before, the most important writers to be taught were Tammsaare, Tolstoy, Vilde and Gorky.¹¹⁷ Literature was taught according to currents and genres rather than by the country of origin, another innovation. The program acknowledges that Soviet culture is socialist in content, but comes in many different national forms. The overall number of lessons was 385 throughout the three years of secondary school, grades nine to eleven.

1984: The End of Russification

In 1978, the Communist Party in Estonia gained a new leader, Russian Estonian Karl Vaino. The Russian language was declared an absolute necessity both for everyday life and for understanding world culture. The desired outcome was for everyone to speak Russian as well as their mother tongue. In 1980, this kind of Russification culminated in student protests and their violent suppression. Outraged intellectuals stepped up to protect national culture with new zest, and brakes were put on Russification, though more years were to pass before significant change.¹¹⁸

As an immediate reaction to the student protests, ideological control in education intensified in the early 1980s. Humanities were once more specified as the focus of

¹¹⁷ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Keskkooli 1977/78. õppeaasta lõpueksamite piletid* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1978).

¹¹⁸ Nagel, *Hariduspoliitika ja üldhariduskorraldus Eestis aastatei 1940-1991*, 119–121.

ideological education, and atheism was pushed with fresh zeal. The number of party members among teachers grew, and teachers became increasingly compliant in their ideological tasks. At the same time, Soviet student organizations kept losing membership and students resisted the ideological principles more and more. 1984 was the year that the Soviet Union decided to begin another educational reform. Previously, the regime had succeeded in creating an educational system that was under its firm control. Now the regime began to lose its grip.¹¹⁹

The 1984 secondary school program in literature, the most recent one to be viewed for the present thesis — that is, before newer reforms and the gradual undoing of the Soviet Estonian school system — again begins by asserting the goals of literature teaching as developing a Marxist-Leninist worldview, and learning about the historical processes connecting art and life.¹²⁰ The theme of the all-around supremacy of Soviet and Russian literature is not present, there is instead again reference to Soviet culture being socialist in content and having a multiplicity of national forms. At the same time, the 1984 program took a slight step back to dividing lesson topics by writers and their origin rather than literary currents.

The total number of literature lessons in the secondary school is 350. Out of those, 149 are devoted to original Estonian literature, which remarkably surpasses the 60

¹¹⁹ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 50-52, 55.

¹²⁰ The rest of this subchapter is based on Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Kaheksaklassilise kooli ja keskkooli programmid. Kirjandus IV-XI klassile* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1984).

lessons accorded to Russian literature and the 37 and 12 lessons given to Soviet and Soviet Estonian literature, respectively. The most important authors were said to have been Tammsaare, Vilde, Friedebert Tuglas – all Estonians – and Gorky. All in all, it may be concluded that even though the end of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s are characterized as a period of Russification and strengthened ideological control in Estonian education, the secondary school literature program appears more 'Estonian' than ever before during the Soviet era. The syllabus does mention, though, that some Soviet classics have just been moved from the secondary school to be taught and read by slightly younger students, so they were not completely erased from Estonian education yet.

Like the previous program from 1977, the 1984 one mentions the use of theater and film in teaching, but also adds radio and television. The program again emphasizes that all teaching must consider the age and maturity of the students according to pedagogical and psychological principles, and gives teachers the opportunity to use their own creativity and make professional choices while keeping in mind that each era has its own interpretations of art. An innovation can be noticed in the program underlining the need to connect literature to other arts and other school subjects.¹²¹

¹²¹ Ibid., 3, 4, 6, 8, 12, 16, 19, 20, 21, 41.

Imported Goods in the Literature Lesson

Throughout the decades of Soviet Estonia, in accordance with the principle of 'national form and socialist content,' local literature retained its position in school programs. Tammer's research proves the strong presence of Tammsaare; according to school programs, Vilde and Tuglas must be named as the most important Estonian authors. The Estonian national epic, *Kalevipoeg*, has also always been included in Estonian education. Thinking of the present day, this develops the overall impression that, where national classics are concerned, the Estonian secondary school literature program has remained unchanged through the late Soviet and independence years. However, despite the works being read remaining the same, their interpretation was quite different in the Soviet period. Estonian realism of the late 19th-early 20th century — with its depictions of bondsmen, peasants and village life, rural and nature scenes — could well be interpreted through the lens of Communism. It was also easy to argue due to the geographical vicinity that Estonian writers of the time were indeed influenced by Marxism (and some may have been). Thus, there was no need to cast away original Estonian literature, both books and writers could be given socialist content.

The literary works discussed below were chosen by comparing secondary school programs to graduation essay topics as collected by Tammer.¹²² His 2006 collection of Soviet school-time memoirs devotes a special section to what could be called in English

¹²² Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*.

the 'graduation essay'. However, in the Estonian language, it is often referred to as the 'maturity composition' when written as an exam at the end of secondary education. The high school diploma, too, used to be called the 'maturity certificate.' The implication here is that the essay, which used to be composed over the course of six hours by all graduating students across the country, demonstrated not only the mastery of language but also the students' analytic ability, social skills and values, and readiness to enter adulthood. Until the spring of 2011, the essay was a compulsory educational rite of passage compulsory for all high school seniors. Therefore, the exercise of essay-writing cannot be underestimated, it is traditionally a central skill learned in literature lessons in Estonia.¹²³

The choice of possible graduation essay topics, in the Soviet era and later, the same for everyone in Estonian-language high schools, always included some based on literary works, and even though not strictly compulsory, there was a general expectation that the student should demonstrate which books she has read. Teachers would drill students to weave into their writing examples from literature. In the Soviet period, already according to the 1949 secondary school program in literature, special attention

¹²³ It may be argued that the Soviet-era habit of drilling for the graduation essay was persistent in Estonian schools. In 2011, this traditional final examination in Estonian language was replaced by a modernized version. Debates, marked by protests from teachers, surrounded the decision to transform the former lengthy composition into a test consisting of reading exercises and a shorter essay without a given topic. Thus, the strength of the graduation essay tradition was championed in the face of voices from the spheres of higher education asserting that the old form of the essay did nothing but cultivate obsolete clichés and the writing of a specific kind of highly restricted text that could serve no purpose in 'real life;' e.g. Argo Kerb, "Tiit Hennoste: Las Kirjand Sureb Rahus," *Õpetajate Leht*, March 2, 2012, http://www.opleht.ee/admin/pages/preview/?archive_mode=article&articleid=6981.

was also to be given to students' quoting Lenin and Stalin in their written assignments.¹²⁴ Based on newspapers, as well as archives and memoirs, Tammer was able to recover most Estonian graduation essay topics from the Soviet era. Taking into consideration the special role of the graduation essay, and the peculiar form of this genre, the essay topics are telling. As Tammer himself writes, "perhaps the topics of the graduation essays can, most clearly, pass on the foolish ideological pressure, in the school, of a foolish time ... The options are fairly red and unchanging."¹²⁵

In 1945-1989, the number of graduation essay topic choices ranged from two to ten, and Tammer accounts for 172 topics, 109 of which contained some kind of a reference to a writer or a work of fiction. According to the information gathered by Tammer, the name of Gorky was mentioned in a graduation essay topic fifteen times between the years 1948 and 1986. Out of those, nine times the topic concerned the novel *Mother*. Closely following were the Estonian Tammsaare, mentioned in twelve topics, the Russian Mikhail Sholokhov in eleven topics (seven times with *Virgin Soil Upturned*), *War and Peace* by Tolstoy in nine topics, and poetry by Vladimir Mayakovsky in seven topics.

Thus, based on school programs and graduation essay topics, Tammsaare's *Truth and Justice* and Vilde's *To the Cold Land* were chosen alongside *Mother* by Gorky, *Virgin*

¹²⁴ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 27.

¹²⁵ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 166.

Soil Upturned by Sholokhov, *War and Peace* by Tolstoy, and *Eugene Onegin* by Pushkin as sources for analysis in this thesis. The first two are original Estonian works predating the Soviet era, the second pair is Soviet Russian, also identified as socialist realist model novels by Clark, and the final two are Russian classics.¹²⁶ Like with Tammsaare and Vilde, the works of Tolstoy and Pushkin were given appropriate, Soviet interpretations while keeping the famous writings in the national canon. Notably, there are no Soviet Estonian works included here despite Estonian socialist realism always being included in school programs. Such works never seem to have played a particularly prominent role.

Additionally, attention will be given to two more of Clark's socialist realist model novels, *The Young Guard* by Fadeev and *How the Steel was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky. Judging by the number of literature lessons devoted to these novels, they were not among the most important focal points of the programs. In later years, they were moved from secondary education to the middle school. However, not only are the novels exemplars, their heroes and antagonists are themselves young people. As is also mentioned in secondary school programs, these works were included because of their educational value; aesthetic qualities of those novels or the figure of the author were not

¹²⁶ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 262.

primary.¹²⁷ Subjectively, these are the titles that today's middle-aged Estonians recall when asked about Soviet books that they read in school.

Soviet Literature

According to the Estonian National Bibliography database, a central high school textbook on Soviet literature was the eleventh-grade *Russian Soviet Literature* by Naftoli Bassel, Valeri Bezzubov and Kalju Leht, printed five times between 1976 and 1986.¹²⁸ The textbook begins by explaining that 'our' Soviet literature has a great impact on people's worldview and behavior due to its Communist party-mindedness, multi-national character and international unity. Quoting Lenin and Sholokhov, students are told that party-mindedness is not in conflict with creative freedom, writers willingly serve their people, the workers. Literature captures the most progressive ideas of its time in high artistic quality; experiments with form are an excess that obfuscates ideological clarity; content and form are united. The Soviet people, a 'new historic human union,' formed in over half a century of shared development, consists of tens of nations with equal rights. "All of their literatures (there are over 70) make up a new conceptual and aesthetic unity — multi-national Soviet literature."¹²⁹ Interestingly, prompts for student discussion at

¹²⁷ e.g. Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 66.

¹²⁸ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography."

¹²⁹ Bassel, Bezzubov, and Leht, *Vene nõukogude kirjandus. Õpik XI klassile*, 3-4.

the end of the introductory chapter contain quotes from Western and Estonian writers, seemingly praising Soviet literature.¹³⁰

Mother

Gorky (1868-1936) played a truly prominent role in Soviet literature, and his *Mother* was among the most widely available fiction books in Soviet Estonia – according to the Estonian National Bibliography database, it was all in all printed seven or eight times, in different translations, from 1934 up to 1985.¹³¹ High school literature programs included it in the eleventh grade, altogether devoting 20-25 lessons to Gorky and his many works. The 1949 program, for example, names Gorky 'the greatest representative of proletarian art,' the founder of Soviet literature who had an early connection with the revolution; Gorky worked to expose the capitalist world.¹³² Literature textbooks for the secondary school contained considerable sections detailing his life as was customary in accordance with the principle of writers being depicted as exemplary hard-working geniuses who could serve as role models for the students.

In between citing stanzas of poetry in Russian with no translation included (a task for the student, in the form of poetry or prose), a common practice in Soviet Estonian literature textbooks, Bassel et al. quickly reach Gorky who is explained to have

¹³⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹³¹ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography."

¹³² Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 61–62.

guided Russian proletarian literature into becoming a weapon of revolutionary struggle.

The writer Gorky is pictured to have hailed from the lowest strata of the bourgeoisie, who went on to become one of the greatest authors due to his immense talent and diligence. Much like a nursemaid for Pushkin, Gorky's grandmother was the sole positive figure in his childhood, and also introduced to him folk songs and tales that left a lasting impression. The rough early years formed Gorky to have both dignity and willingness to protest. The young Gorky did simple jobs and traveled, was several times jailed for revolutionary activity; then moved on to try many different genres of writing. In his later years, Gorky was close with Lenin, according to the textbook, and the latter coached Gorky through his ideological errors. After Lenin's death, Gorky depicted him as the ideal person and leader.¹³³ It can be noted that both the school programs and the textbooks take time to emphasize that writers, such as Gorky and Tolstoy, and therefore their works, may not be fully ideologically correct.¹³⁴ The writer may have lived at a time that was not yet revolutionary, or he may have been mistaken in some conclusions, but students are explained that these great writers worked with a wish to serve their people and Lenin himself was there to guide them or offer commentary to their writing which had great artistic value and the best interests of the masses at heart.

Mother marks a new level in Gorky's writing, and it is among the first pieces of

¹³³ Bassel, Bezzubov, and Leht, *Vene nõukogude kirjandus. Õpik XI klassile*, 9, 12, 13, 23, 39-42.

¹³⁴ e.g. Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 62.

socialist realism, the textbook explains. Based on real situations, *Mother* gives

a historic and realistic depiction of the development of workers' movement from spontaneous bouts of class hatred to conscious, organized struggle. ... The novel depicts life in revolutionary development, emphasizes the inevitability of the victory of the working class and the ideas of socialism.¹³⁵

Much like the Bassel textbook from later years, the 1949 literature program interprets *Mother* as depicting the fight of the proletariat against despotism and capitalism, the revolution.¹³⁶ The characters evolve mentally and ideologically through revolutionary activity, they stand for a new worldview, a new psyche and new morals, and Gorky is said to have given world literature a new character, the working revolutionary. This new character defined the new method, socialist realism.¹³⁷ The 1949 literature program calls the protagonist of *Mother* the 'first carrier of the idea of party-mindedness in world literature'.¹³⁸ The working class is the most progressive and the most revolutionary force in the society. The novel's central character, the mother, is a 'generalization of the most backward masses of workers turning to revolutionary truth,' she surpasses her enslaved psyche through her maternal love, and symbolically becomes the mother of all revolutionaries, an allegory for life and creation.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Bassel, Bezzubov, and Leht, *Vene nõukogude kirjandus. Õpik XI klassile*, 30-31.

¹³⁶ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 62.

¹³⁷ Bassel, Bezzubov, and Leht, *Vene nõukogude kirjandus. Õpik XI klassile*, 31-32.

¹³⁸ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 63.

¹³⁹ Bassel, Bezzubov, and Leht, *Vene nõukogude kirjandus. Õpik XI klassile*, 33-34.

As Tammer states, Maxim Gorky's *Mother* is an almost omnipresent book on the topic lists for high school graduation essays. It is linked to, roughly, a fifth of all the topics of the forty-four years in question. One of Clark's model novels, *Mother* utilizes what she calls the master plot. Such books were to translate abstract cultural ideas into a narrative that brings them close to the people. The positive heroes of *Mother* go through a personal evolution along Marxist lines. They become Socialists who are ready to be martyred for their beliefs. According to Clark, *Mother* displays the need for leaving religion behind and imitating the revolutionaries. Thus, *Mother* creates new myth.¹⁴⁰

Virgin Soil Upturned

Virgin Soil Upturned by Sholokhov (1905-1984) was read by eleventh grade students, secondary school seniors. It was widely available to the Estonian public with its two parts published separately and once together, nine times between 1935 and 1980. In the 1980s, students were given a choice between *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *Quiet Flows the River Don*, the other major work by Sholokhov, also present in school programs throughout the years (its four volumes were published separately, altogether eight books were printed between 1936 to 1957).¹⁴¹ The 1949 program refers to the author as a classic socialist realist writer, and *Virgin Soil Upturned* is explained as depicting the party

¹⁴⁰ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 9-10, 52-57.

¹⁴¹ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography."

in its fight for collectivization, the class struggle and the figures of class enemies in a village.¹⁴²

The Bassel et al. textbook explains that *Virgin Soil Upturned* is part of the 1930s literature that depicts the “socialist rearrangement of village life, the change of the psyche of the peasantry through collectivization.”¹⁴³ Its author Sholokhov also started working at a young age. The characters of the *Virgin Soil Upturned* are engaged in a conflict between the old and the new, Communism. Labor is creative, a new life is born through collective effort. The tragic and the comic alternate.¹⁴⁴

How the Steel Was Tempered

How the Steel Was Tempered by Ostrovsky and *The Young Guard* by Fadeev were later moved to the seventh grade program, however, in the first decades of the occupation they were read in the eleventh grade. The Bassel et al. textbook calls *How the Steel Was Tempered* a socialist novel of formation about “the tempering of new human character, the development of new, Communist morals” that is to be seen in Pavel Korchagin.¹⁴⁵ The protagonist Korchagin is explained to have become a guide and close friend to many; apparently despairing soldiers thought of him and carried his example

¹⁴² Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 66.

¹⁴³ The following paragraph is based on Bassel, Bezzubov, and Leht, *Vene nõukogude kirjandus. Õpik XI klassile*.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 92, 108-110.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 92.

in mind to pull through incredible hardships, which also proves the role of fiction in a person's life.¹⁴⁶ The figure of Ostrovsky himself appears to have been interpreted as a true role model, too — 'an unwavering example of serving the homeland and the people.'¹⁴⁷

The novel was printed in Estonia eight times between 1941 and 1984, making it as widely available as works by Gorky and Sholokhov.¹⁴⁸ The book was not only easily obtainable, it must have also been easy to read. Even in the present day, while the Communist ideology is absolutely impossible to overlook, *How the Steel Was Tempered* is rather easily accessible. True, the protagonists are so unwavering in their beliefs that they are able to take inhuman suffering for the Communist cause which makes the characters altogether ridiculous and underlines the fact that they are indeed fictional. At the same time, the story is exciting, just as might be expected from a youth novel. Those same characters are relatable. Being a novel of formation, it traces ordinary teenagers who go through feelings that are simple to grasp for anyone. Young Pavel begins friendships and makes enemies, he develops a crush on a girl. The wartime circumstance adds more thrill, everyone is acting courageous and grows up fast. Just as in children agreeing to become Pioneers for the sake of extracurricular activities, the

¹⁴⁶ Sergei Florinski, *Vene kirjandus. Õpik keskkooli VIII klassile* (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1957), 4–5.

¹⁴⁷ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 66.

¹⁴⁸ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography."

same mechanism must work here — ideological education knit into an adventure story is more palatable.

It has to be said though, that the ending of *How the Steel Was Tempered* reaches levels of absurdity that are hard to ignore at least in the present day. Korchagin is blind and paralyzed, but continues to work as a writer for the cause of Communism; this outdoes previous scenes of scarcely dressed people in a terribly freezing weather building a railroad that is crucial to secure firewood for a town. Another theme that deserves separate mention for going to an extreme is the novel's depiction of love and marriage. The adult Korchagin suppresses all physical desires and treats his female comrades with nothing but respect, seeing them almost as genderless. Communist men and women in the book have intellectual partnerships rather than marriages based on feelings and emotions. When Korchagin eventually picks a significant other, it is primarily to raise the girl into a Communist and save her from her despotic bourgeois father. In turn, the woman nurses the sick Korchagin. All in all, episodes of danger and adventure seem credible as desperate times help characters surpass themselves; however, such scenes are accompanied by moralistic idealism that goes far beyond what may be considered ordinary for human nature.

The Young Guard

According to school programs, *The Young Guard* by Fadeev portrays the heroic

pathos and patriotism of the youth raised in the socialist reality.¹⁴⁹ It was printed four times from 1947 to 1974.¹⁵⁰ Like *How the Steel Was Tempered*, the novel was well known and easy to obtain. The characters are also a group of youths, however, when Korchagin participated in war as a member of the army, the so-called Young Guard were a band of real-life secret fighters working in the name of protecting their town from the occupying German army.¹⁵¹

The book looks to cast role models much like Korchagin, but its ending is what truly catches attention. The final chapters of the novel describe brutal torture of the townspeople. There are no depictions of torture scenes in detail; however, sadistic acts towards the protagonists by the Germans are listed with their aftermath. The array of abuse is wide, there is mention of torture devices, beatings with wires, bones being broken, skin being carved, seating a girl on a hot stove, etc. People are thrown into underground mines where it takes days for them to die, others get shot in various ways. There is no mercy for women or children; in fact, a man is tortured by the beating of his elderly mother in front of him. Of course, the real heroes of the story are unflinching,

¹⁴⁹ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 68.

¹⁵⁰ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography"; the 1954 edition here consulted was printed as part of a Stalin Prize winners' series, it cost 13 roubles and 17 kopeks, and comes with a ribbon bookmark and a higher quality print of the author's portrait glued in. The copy bears an inscription from 1958, it has been given to a student for her work in a mandolin orchestra.

¹⁵¹ The youth wing of the United Russia party was named Young Guard in 2005, the heroes appear to have retained fame; Young Guard of United Russia, "Young Guard of United Russia," *Molodaya Gvardiya*, November 1, 2014, <http://www.mger2020.ru>.

male or female, physical pain of unthinkable scales cannot manipulate them into cooperating with the enemy. Mothers surrender to the idea of losing their children if only the children die without betraying anyone else. A young girl chooses to be shot in the face rather than kneel for her execution. *The Young Guard* thus culminates in episodes of grotesque brutalities, the stuff of nightmares. The enemy is cast as truly inhuman.

The characteristics attributed to the main figures of *The Young Guard* and to potential role models from other Soviet novels here mentioned are in accordance with the pursuits of Soviet pedagogy and psychology. According to a textbook used in the 1970s and 1980s (intended for secondary schools and popular use), the most important traits to be promoted as part of character-building were self-control, bravery, sense of duty, modesty, honesty and justice. Children were to be reared to suppress excess emotion, be accustomed to discomforts including pain, hunger and thirst, to be tidy and organised, simple in clothing and manners, ready to aid others.¹⁵² The importance of a seamless collective over a fussy individual is apparent; yet, proper Soviets had to be well aware of their selves and their faults, character-building was cast as a conscious effort on the level of the individual, largely carried out through belonging to a collective, but not as simple as some kind of top-down manipulation of homogenous masses.

¹⁵² E. Koemets et al., *Psihholoogia ja pedagoogika alused. Populaarne algkursus*, 3rd ed. (Tallinn: Valgus, 1981), 132-135. Aesthetic upbringing was explained to rely on close contact with beauty. Namely, beautiful surroundings, from a nice nursery and “tasteful” toys to flowerbeds around schoolhouses, develop the perception of beauty. These also have a disciplining effect, a person cannot act badly around beauty; Ibid., 137.

Russian Literature

Eugene Onegin

Eugene Onegin by Pushkin (1799-1837) and *War and Peace* by Tolstoy still hold a spot on Estonian high school reading lists. A novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin* is not an easy read, especially with emphasis being put on literary analysis of the verse as well. The Soviet-era school programs present *Eugene Onegin* in the eighth or ninth grade; nowadays it has been moved into the tenth grade. According to the 1949 literature program, ' *Eugene Onegin* is the first Russian realist psychological and situational novel, 'an encyclopedia of Russian life.' Pushkin depicts the relationship between the intelligentsia and the people, based on characters who have detached themselves from the people. The female protagonist, Tatiana, is the embodiment of 'the best qualities of the Russian woman.'¹⁵³

In 1955-1958, a Russian literature textbook for the eighth grade by Sergei Florinski, translated from Russian and adapted, was printed each year. After an introduction, the textbook concentrates on only three authors: Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Nikolai Gogol. Soviet literature lessons cast Pushkin as Russia's greatest poet, the creator of contemporary written Russian language and Russian literature.¹⁵⁴ A great man despite blows of fate, he is another role model, explained to have had an

¹⁵³ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 42-43.

¹⁵⁴ Sergei Florinski, *Vene kirjandus. Õpik keskkooli VIII klassile* (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1957).

unhappy childhood in a noble family, having a stronger bond with his nursemaid than with his aristocratic parents. Pushkin is described to have 'taught the reader to love the tough truth.'¹⁵⁵ Both Pushkin and Tolstoy serve as examples of the glorification of writers as tireless workers and determined thinkers, often ahead of their time, apparently fostering sentiments of later, socialist times.

War and Peace

A widely used textbook on Russian literature, translated from the Russian language and adapted to the Estonian 1955 curriculum, was one for the ninth and tenth grades by Alexandr Zertshaninov, David Raihhin and V. Strazhev. Judging by the Estonian National Bibliography database, the same material was probably reworked and printed 14 times between 1951 and 1961.¹⁵⁶ It is a survey of Russian literature in the second half of the 19th century, particularly from the 1860s to the 1880s. As is customary, the textbook moves from writer to writer, presenting their biography and most important works.

War and Peace, or at least chapters from it, was read in the tenth grade throughout the Soviet era. The textbook's introduction to Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910) begins with a description, written by Gorky, of how much Lenin valued Tolstoy's work.¹⁵⁷ Apparently,

¹⁵⁵ Juri Lotman, *Vene kirjandus: õpik IX klassile* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1982), 37, 81.

¹⁵⁶ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography."

¹⁵⁷ The following paragraph is based on Alexandr Zertshaninov, David Raihhin, and V. Strazhev, *Vene kirjandus keskkooli IX-X klassile* (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1957).

Lenin described the ambiguities in Tolstoy's work — he was a great artist and opposed capitalism, but he was also part of the nobility, and a religious man. 'One of humanity's great geniuses,' Tolstoy grew up on a picturesque manor, and became close with the nature and the peasantry. Disappointed with university education and social life, he quit after a short period away from home, and returned to his birthplace and devoted himself to improving the life of his bondsmen. Restless, he soon joined the army, and also began writing, becoming one of Russia's greatest authors. Until his old age, the writer led a simple life and remained physically active in his 70s and 80s.¹⁵⁸

As years passed, Tolstoy realized the overall backwardness of the bourgeois culture. In personal crises, the writer came to share in the views of the peasantry, and started to attack the 'life and morals of the privileged classes,' in the end denying the state, the church, and private property.¹⁵⁹ In saying so, the textbook mirrors the school programs.¹⁶⁰ However, the writer was apparently mistaken in seeing a solution to the 'horror built on man's cruelest exploitation of man' in a moral rebirth of the people, when it would have been correct to conclude there was a need for social revolution.¹⁶¹ This is a common way of making a writer and his or her works ideologically palatable, assuring that the writer as a person had good intentions and the 'right' mindset,

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 158-162, 17, 203-204.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 169.

¹⁶⁰ e.g. Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 55.

¹⁶¹ Zertshaninov, Raihhin, and Strazhev, *Vene kirjandus keskkooli IX-X klassile*, 170.

however, the surrounding conditions were not yet ripe for 'correct' conclusions to be made, the society had not reached socialism. In Tolstoy's case, his deep religious beliefs are downplayed. Students are told nothing of Tolstoy's spiritual searches and that his denial of the church was aimed at the institution, not Christianity.¹⁶² Apparently, Tolstoy had deep religious convictions that he passed on to disciples, his extreme views causing much stress in his marriage — thoroughly unsuitable for a socialist role model. A textbook on Russian literature for the tenth grade by Harald Reinop, printed 14 times between 1966 and 1982,¹⁶³ mirrors the same aspects of Tolstoy's life. According to Reinop, the main object in *War and Peace* is the moral of human relationships, war in its reality, man before death and the critique of egoism, and the role of the masses in history.¹⁶⁴

War and Peace, a monumental novel of four volumes is said to have taken Tolstoy only six years to write.¹⁶⁵ According to textbooks, Tolstoy pushed himself relentlessly, reworking chapters until he was pleased with everything. Living in the era of Russia's transition from feudalism to capitalism, Tolstoy opposed the upper classes by taking the position of the patriarchal peasantry. He did not depict revolutionary class opposition.

¹⁶² "Leo Tolstoy (Russian Writer)," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed September 27, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/598700/Leo-Tolstoy>.

¹⁶³ National Library of Estonia, "Estonian National Bibliography."

¹⁶⁴ Harald Reinop, *Vene Kirjandus. Õpik X Klassile*, 13th ed. (Tallinn: Valgus, 1980), 66–67, 73.

¹⁶⁵ The following two paragraphs are based on Zertshaninov, Raihhin, and Strazhev, *Vene kirjandus keskkooli IX-X klassile*.

Different parts of the Russian nobility are pictured through numerous colorful characters. Some are cruel owners of serfs who care for nothing but their position and wealth, some take good care of their peasants. Notably, the textbook finds that one of the main characters, nobleman Andrei Bolkonsky, were it not for a mortal battle would have surely become a Decembrist. Bolkonsky leaves life thinking about love and death, seeing death as freedom, a return to being part of eternal, godly love. However, the textbook explains that such philosophizing was alien to his sober, serious mind; it was all pre-death agony.

Both Bolkonsky and the second protagonist, Pierre Bezukhov, are explained to move closer to the ordinary people in their search for the meaning of life, the former by surpassing his individualism, the latter by exiting his inner world and becoming an analyst of the outside reality. Bezukhov reaches the ideas of Decembrism. In painting his female characters, Tolstoy is emphasized to have given his own female ideal that has all the good traits of a woman, yet Tolstoy limits the happiness of his female characters to the sphere of the home and the family. The themes of patriotism and war are secondary for the ladies. Tolstoy's treatment of the theme of war is analyzed as being realistic with suffering and death, and the characters who take part vary from manly and courageous to dishonest go-getters. Tolstoy is also said to be a genius in depicting nature and the

land; however, the textbook underlines that in doing so, Tolstoy remains a materialist, he sees nothing mystical or religious.¹⁶⁶

Estonian Literature

To the Cold Land

Throughout the existence of Soviet Estonia, Vilde (1865-1933) was given around twenty lessons in the tenth or ninth grade. According to Soviet-era interpretations, Vilde fought against fascism and decadence in Estonian literature.¹⁶⁷ A 1950 textbook¹⁶⁸ explains that the young Vilde saw the difficult life of ordinary people at a manor, peasants being beaten. He is claimed to have developed a Marxist worldview and an opposition to religion. Thus, Vilde saw life in the correct, materialistic way. Some of Vilde's work was ideologically at odds with the Estonian leadership, forcing the author into exile. During his stay in the West, he apparently degenerated due to missing the influence of bolshevism, and remained a critical realist without progressing to the next stage of development in art, socialist realism. He did, however, try to expose the rotting bourgeois nature of the United States during his stay in America.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 166-167, 177-187, 193, 199.

¹⁶⁷ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 57.

¹⁶⁸ The following paragraph is based on Julie Teder, *Eesti Kirjandusloo Õpik-Lugemik 10. Klassile* (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1950).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 141-142, 146-148, 155.

To the Cold Land depicts Jaan, a poor farmer, renting his home from a pious, yet rich and patronizing landlord. While Jaan takes pride in his honesty, some of the other peasants are driven to theft, at times to make an easy living, at times purely out of hunger. Stolen goods are looked for in the poorest homes, including Jaan's to his great anger. Seeing his family starve, Jaan finally caves in to friends and resorts to crime as well. Eventually caught, Jaan is deported to Siberia, albeit with his landlord's daughter Anni who stepped up to her father and became a convict's wife, leaving her father's comfortable home. As a train carrying Jaan and Anni to Siberia sets off, a thunderstorm strikes.

In the Soviet interpretation, the novel is seen as critique of owners of large farms and of the church. The ending is explained to be revolutionary, representing hope for the newly married couple who are about to begin their life together after having faced a storm.¹⁷⁰ Student prompts from a 1976 textbook ask for examples of the suffering of the poor, explanations on the symbolism of the ending, the proletarian milieu and class antagonisms; students are asked to characterize the intellectual and moral standing of the protagonists, and the humanism demonstrated by Anni.¹⁷¹

Modern interpretations agree with placing Vilde at the forefront of Estonian critical realism with an interest in Estonian everyday life of the second half of the 19th

¹⁷⁰ Eesti NSV Haridusministeerium, *Alg- Ja Keskkoolide Programmid. Kirjanduslik Lugemine. Kirjandusõpetus*, 59.

¹⁷¹ Taim and K. Leht, *Eesti Kirjandus: Õpik X Klassile* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1976), 61, 63.

century, women's emancipation and sexual ethics.¹⁷² However, the Estonian Literary Museum website, for example, makes no mention of the writer having shared in Marxist views or opposing religion.¹⁷³ Vilde is claimed to have worked in Europe and the United States, joined social democrats in Germany and served as a diplomat for Estonia. It is not of interest here to establish facts about the life and beliefs of Vilde. However, his example displays the presentation of selected traits, if not of half-truths or inventions, so as to use the image of a publicly known figure for the cause of propaganda, be it Communist or even Estonian nationalist.

Truth and Justice

Many, if not all of the previous writers were highly productive and are remembered for numerous works. Condensing Tammsaare (1878-1940) and *Truth and Justice*, all five parts of it, into a few paragraphs is in the Estonian setting comparable to doing the same with Tolstoy and Pushkin in the context of Russian literature. It is a vast amount of literature that touches upon many themes and introduces numerous characters. Therefore, it is important to mention that the concern here will be with the first book of *Truth and Justice*, the volume most well-known and read in every Estonian secondary school. According to the cliché, the novel is 'a pillar of Estonian national

¹⁷² Teder, *Eesti Kirjandusloo Õpik-Lugemik 10. Klassile*, 41.

¹⁷³ Sirje Olesk, "Eduard Vilde (18765-1933)," Estonian Literary Museum, Kreutzwaldi sajand. Eesti kultuurilooline veeb, (n.d.), http://krzwlive.kirmus.ee/et/lisamaterjalid/ajatelje_materjalid?item_id=47&table=Persons.

character, Estonian history and Estonian identity,' and Tammsaare is among the most recognized prose writers and one of the most important figures of romanticism in Estonia. In addition, one of the protagonists of *Truth and Justice* is interpreted as being based on Tammsaare himself as the writer placed the first book into a setting copied from his childhood home. Present-day analyses describe *Truth and Justice* as pessimistic, but ending on a lighter note of redemption.¹⁷⁴

Truth and Justice begins with two families living side by side, both struggling to secure a good life for themselves despite dwelling on marshy land that is difficult to farm. It is a deeply psychological novel picturing the characters' relationships to their homes and with their families, all protagonists having unique personas. Already the first volume oversees two generations, the initial heads of the families starting out as young men, then raising children and aging. Rifts develop as things have a way of turning out differently than planned — crops turn out smaller than expected, diseases take people to their grave, children marry the children of enemies, and the elderly feel bitter due to their shattered illusions. The themes of the book are not easy to relate to for teenagers, especially those growing up in urban settings. The first volume can come off as boring and depressing, characters seem stubborn if not stupid — why work to death on barren land? Why not move if you hate your neighbor?

¹⁷⁴ Sirje Olesk, "Anton Hansen Tammsaare (1878-1940)," Estonian Literary Museum, Kreutzwaldi sajand. Eesti kultuurilooline veeb, (n.d.), http://kreutzwald.kirmus.ee/et/lisamaterjalid/ajatelje_materjalid?item_id=53&table=Persons.

The Soviet sources here used also suggest that Tammsaare grew up poor and was familiar with the difficult life of the peasantry since childhood.¹⁷⁵ During his school years, he is said to have lost his faith. His works peak at revealing the evils of the bourgeois world. *Truth and Justice* depicts the reality of man's struggle against the land through hard work, but also the beginning, development and degeneration of Estonian bourgeoisie, the emergence of capitalist relations and the stratification of the Estonian village. The land-owning farmers of the novel are selfish with a 'wild sense of ownership'; however, the hard labor that all the characters do exposes the best qualities in man.¹⁷⁶

Due to his bad health, Tammsaare himself was seen in the textbooks here consulted as a heroic figure that worked despite illness even though it demanded excelling himself continuously.¹⁷⁷ Tammsaare was a humanist with a love for truth and free from prejudice. During secondary school, he became a secret Marxist, it is claimed. Despite being well read, despite his success and numerous awards, Tammsaare remained a modest man. From the viewpoint of the present, it may be said that Tammsaare is remembered and honored in Estonia, however, there is no such

¹⁷⁵ The following paragraph is based on E. Sõgel, ed., *Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu: õpik keskkooli XI klassile. 4. [osa]*, vol. 4 (Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1953). and Taim and Leht, *Eesti Kirjandus: Õpik X Klassile*.

¹⁷⁶ Sõgel, *Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu: õpik keskkooli XI klassile. 4. [osa]*, 37, 41-42, 48 and Taim and Leht, *Eesti Kirjandus: Õpik X Klassile*, 234.

¹⁷⁷ The following paragraph is based on Taim and Leht, *Eesti Kirjandus: Õpik X Klassile*.

heroization. His biography is mentioned as a background for his books, he is not cast as a remarkable role model.¹⁷⁸

"No one told us not to take it seriously"

Estonian students' experiences varied greatly across time. For example, around 1940-1941, one teacher had a sixth-grade girl read out her essay as the best one in class. The piece was a story about an unhappy song thrush whose nest had been taken over by a big crow (Estonian: *vares*). "We burst out laughing because everyone knew that the crow was supposed to mean the high official of the new order, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR Vares-Barbarus."¹⁷⁹ Another woman recalls from 1944 that most of her teachers carried on as they had before and she felt no big ideological change.¹⁸⁰ Yet, a school document from 1945 reads: "The teachers' extremely discrete position on political upbringing must change;" and from 1946: "The slogans in several classrooms are very impartial, which could be used in every era. Teachers must decisively change the position of the class in this respect ... The most important task of the teachers is to raise the students of a Soviet school in the Soviet

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 204, 212, 218–219, 224.

¹⁷⁹ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 15.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 19.

spirit while being role models to the students.”¹⁸¹ Following such guidelines, the atmosphere in schools was quick to change.

Memoirs in Tammer's collection from the end of the 1940s demonstrate a growing importance of indoctrinating activity.¹⁸² Others wrote to Tammer on reading Brezhnev some decades later: “At that time ... you could not express your own opinion on books ... Brezhnev's sentences were facts, were correct ... you had to glorify them.”¹⁸³ Dobrenko ascertains that text was considered to contain a fixed meaning. Interpretation was not meant to vary much.¹⁸⁴ Professional literary criticism established the correct interpretation, and teachers were to convey it to students as part of their *vospitanie* to shape the social system.¹⁸⁵ The schooling assured that literature would retain its prominent role as a tool of control and definer of culture.¹⁸⁶ In the 1980s, the pressure started waning again, with some schools conforming for a while longer whereas others

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁸² One of the most striking examples of indoctrination attempts comes from a man who went to high school between the years 1972 and 1975. He describes having to follow “the personal complex plan of Soviet youth,” titled “To Learn Communism”. The plan, recorded in a small booklet, consisted of duties and goals that every student set for their personal Leninist development. A sample page, titled “Societal-Political Self-Development,” has three columns: “Duty,” “Deadline” and “Fulfillment”. The first column listed activities such as participating in an international relations circle, competing in olympiads, working in a kolkhoz, learning chess and analyzing articles by Lenin. The third column was for teachers to mark upon accomplishment. While some of these appear quite neutral, the complex plan was intended to cultivate a Leninist spirit by introducing Lenin and his works, advancing political instruction and underlining the importance of the collective. Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 188.

¹⁸⁴ Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*, 16.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 18, 147.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 148–150.

quickly allowed their students small freedoms such as dismissing the compulsory school uniform.

A true distillation of propagandistic rhetoric taught in schools was the secondary school graduation essay. Students demonstrated what they had picked up, and were graded based on conformity. Criticism towards expressing ideologically faulty views can be found in the teachers' newspaper. Regarding the topic "To work, it means to be useful for the homeland," the newspaper found that, "... when dealing with this topic, mistakes and wrongful stances were not absent from the musings of the students. For example, one student held intellectual labor more valuable than physical labor, thinking incorrectly that intellectual labor brings the homeland more gain than physical labor."¹⁸⁷ On another instance, the topic "To live feeling that I am responsible for everyone" was discussed, and a student was scorned for writing that since it is impossible to be responsible for everyone, she just tries to manage herself. Ironically, the critic, a school inspector, concluded that the student was failing to "think independently."¹⁸⁸

The fact that secondary school graduation essay topics were repetitive did not go unnoticed by contemporaries; however, only in 1987 has Tammer found an excerpt from the teachers' newspaper that criticizes this. The same article sheds light on the process of establishing the essay topics: "... It was not hard to guess a topic ... one topic came from

¹⁸⁷ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 174–175.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

a writer celebrating a birthday, another from a political highlight of the school year and the third from problems of childrearing currently on the agenda (work, nature protection, the friendship of the nations)."¹⁸⁹ What is more, the whole genre of the graduation essay was built upon repeating clichés. In 1963, a Soviet critic also noted that the essays present correct ideological views, yet the literary work being discussed remained secondary and its artistic value was not manifested.¹⁹⁰

It appears from Tammer's collection that young Estonian readers entered the realm of Soviet fiction with cultural values preordained by the home, and pressing for conformity did not easily override traditional values that children picked up from their parents. A tractor driver may have enjoyed equal status with a doctor according to ideology, but parents were likely to urge their children to excel academically and pursue higher education. Collectivity was the official stance, yet it is difficult to imagine full collective responsibility. Apparently, the latter is what some students described in their essays, however, it is questionable whether statements like "I, too, want to live feeling that I am responsible for everyone" is proof of Communist views or mastery of Soviet rhetoric.¹⁹¹ Another example in Tammer's collection touches upon the biggest role model for Soviet youth, Pavlik Morozov, a boy who, allegedly, denounced his own

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 194–195.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 178–179.

¹⁹¹ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 194.

father.¹⁹² Pioneers were expected to emulate this martyr hero by reporting anything suspicious said or done in their homes, and to risk their lives and condemnation by their families if need be. According to one of Tammer's contributors, it once happened during a Komsomol meeting that a student uttered something about Pavlik not being a proper young man if he betrayed his parents and family. The man gives a colorful description of what followed: "The Komsomol Secretary was on the verge of heart attack, the class teacher went pale and the principal's jaw quivered ominously. You can imagine what kind of a good conduct grade graced the boy's report card for desecrating holy Pavlik ..."¹⁹³

The sarcastic final note about 'Saint Pavlik' conveys another theme that often emerges in Tammer's book — in hindsight, people are appalled by the brainwashing that befell them as children. A woman born in 1969, for example, revealed that she feels embarrassed when reading her old Communist essays. At the same time, she was expected to be a good student and this is what she strove for. She adds that whether children took the Communist principles at face value or just used them as instructed, they were serving ideology either way.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Andres Laasik, "Noor Moskvalanna Leidis Uuralitest Pavlik Morozovi Loo Tõe," *Eesti Päevaleht*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.epl.ee/news/kultuur/noor-moskvalanna-leidis-uuralitest-pavlik-morozovi-loo-toe.d?id=51284297>. Apparently, Pavlik was turned into a mythical hero, but his story was falsified. He was never a pioneer, and it is questionable if he denounced his father, and who killed him.

¹⁹³ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 125.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

Tammer puts very simply what perhaps emerges as one of the central points of a certain adult-child conflict on propaganda and literature: “No one told us not to take these pieces seriously” — the majority of adults did not think to speak to their children on the topic of propaganda and indoctrination as they were either scared, uninformed themselves, or believed ideologically charged instruction to be necessary.¹⁹⁵ Youngsters were left to realize for themselves when growing up that it might be questionable whether, for example, Vladimir Lenin really was as multitalented as he was portrayed to have been. Many assert that how a child regarded what was taught in school depended on the home. On the other hand, the older generations can hardly be blamed for caution. Many anecdotes prove that children, sincere as they are, might display their knowledge of anything at the most unsuitable moment.

To give tone to his collection of school time memoirs, Tammer recalls his own youth. He asserts the fact that children tend to get in trouble at school every now and then despite the political order of the society that they live in. Tammer's warning on linking every hassle to ideological protest clearly mirrors the stories in his book.¹⁹⁶ For example, one woman recalls that she was a restless child and once added horns and a beard to a photo of Stalin in her textbook; “this was not a political or pretentious act, it was just a misdemeanor. But what trouble it could have ended with had someone in

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

class informed on this.”¹⁹⁷ Another woman shares a story of a principal’s shock at children tossing paper planes at Stalin’s portrait.¹⁹⁸ Most contributors assert that they were just kids, open to manipulation, and often acting on impulses and motives that were completely incomprehensible to adults, especially when the adults happened to be blinded by a fear of ideological wrongdoings.

Propaganda in schools seems to have been the most effective when intertwined with something of symbolic value to children. Thus, a rite of passage such as becoming a pioneer or graduating from high school made children if not conform to, then at least pay some attention to the message being spread. Former students explained that the joy of growing up was always sincere, and politics were not on the children’s minds. Another factor was peer pressure. When a class of students all became pioneers then it demanded real courage to be left out. On the other hand, older students were quick to demonstrate their dislike of certain obligations like wearing the red pioneer scarf or organizing events for junior pioneers, and they inevitably became role models that outdid propaganda. Unfortunately, it is not clear from the collection of memoirs by Tammer whether the lead of older peers was driven more by a mix of laziness and

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 19. The expression used in Estonian, *teatama, kuhu vaja*, is itself worth attention as it is used in many memoirs. It could be translated as “to report to where it is necessary” — a figure of speech denoting the action of denouncing one’s fellows.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 35–36.

testing the limits of what was acceptable as is often the case with teenagers, or if the people recalling these stories viewed their actions at the time as an ideological rebellion.

Discussing sovietization, Mertelsmann agrees that change in the society needed a lot of time despite the external appearance of fast-paced change. He argues that Sovietization can be found in gradual, continuous processes, not sharp shifts. Like other authors such as Aarelaid-Tart, Mertelsmann also finds that people adapted to the system after a quick change of circumstance had begun to seem unlikely. Aarelaid-Tart in her analysis of double-thinking identifies the 1941-1950 birth cohort as the generation for whom double-thinking became 'the basis of structuring social consciousness,' they had no personal experience in a different setting.¹⁹⁹ However, economic problems, happy memories of the past, political repression and violence always remained as obstacles to sovietization. Forced change brought about unwanted effects such as bribery and theft at the workplace or alcoholism. Sovietization was never completed as societies later left the socialist system.²⁰⁰

As several authors have noted, part of the Soviet everyday was to 'speak Soviet.' For example, Virve Raag has explored actual Soviet speak in the Estonian language from a linguistic viewpoint; she documents new words and abundant use of clichés, but also a tendency for abstractness and blurring to avoid any ideological mishaps, a

¹⁹⁹ Aili Aarelaid, "Topeltnõutlemise kujunemine kahel esimesel nõukogulikul aastakümnel," *Akadeemia* 12, no. 4 (2000): 758.

²⁰⁰ Mertelsmann, "Sovetiseerimise mõistest," 25–26.

preoccupation of the language.²⁰¹ Knowing the 'right' things to say could help manipulate various situations. People absorbed the language of the system on both the levels of vocabulary and rhetoric, and knowingly used it.²⁰² Certain types of rhetoric were easier to pick up than others. Tammer notes a newspaper excerpt which states that school-leavers, in their graduation essays, demonstrated a close affinity with Lenin on a personal level, yet they struggled to analyze him as a politician.²⁰³ Since childhood, these students had learned of the greatness of Lenin due to the personality cult, and using such rhetoric served them well in essays too. Student essays were employed as a centrally organized means of monitoring students' attitudes and understanding of ideology.²⁰⁴ At the same time, essays were a regular means of securing the skills of Soviet speak.

²⁰¹ Virve Raag, "The Sovietisation and de-Sovietisation of Estonian," in *Inheriting the 1990s: The Baltic Countries*, ed. Baiba Metuzāle-Kangere, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Uralica Upsaliensia 37 (Uppsala: Distributed by Uppsala University Library, 2010).

²⁰² Unsuccessful attempts have entered jokes about Soviet education; for example, at a medical school exam at the University of Moscow, a student is shown two skeletons and asked whose they are. As the student is struggling, a professor tries to help, "You cannot remember? What have we been studying here altogether?" "Are these really Marx and Engels?" Or another about a class field trip to a forest. A rabbit runs past. The teacher asks if the children know what animal that was. No one thinks of rabbit. "Try to remember," the teacher says, "we have been talking so much about it." "Was it really Lenin?" Ivar Kallion, ed., *Nõuka-aja anekdoodid*, 76-77.

²⁰³ Tammer, *Nõukogude kool ja õpilane*, 184.

²⁰⁴ Raudsepp, *Ajaloo õpetamise korraldus Eesti NSV eesti õppekeele üldhariduskoolides 1944-1985*, 27-28.

Conclusion

'True' reception of propaganda is difficult to measure in hindsight. Today, those who were once members of the Soviet youth in Estonia are European Union citizens of a liberal democratic state. After the fall of the Soviet regime, no Communist party remained in Estonia, not even any marginal group was left that publicly identified itself as Communist or socialist. There is no reason to believe anyone did in private either. Judging by that, it really appears as if totalitarian Soviet propaganda *totally* failed, Communism was thoroughly wiped out from the public sphere and the 1990s were an era of undoing and rebuilding, transitioning out of Communism, not transforming it in any means. On the other hand, it cannot be claimed that what was crammed year after year into succeeding generations of Estonians since elementary school could have left no mark at all.

As is evident from the high school graduation essay examples cited above, students mastered Soviet rhetoric by the time they left school. The youth became proficient in the genre of Soviet speak just as was expected of them. In books, essays and discussions, this way of public speaking and writing was drilled in literature classes. Teachers in the first decades of the Soviet era were immersed in instructions overflowing with ideology and propaganda. However, did these young people believe in what they read and wrote? Using the 'correct' genre in their own writing does not mean the student reflects on the substantive meaning of the message being carried. Borrowing

from Aareleid-Tart, there is evidence of double-thinking, isolating private thoughts to the sphere of the home.

From the collection of memoirs by Tammer it emerges that absolute indoctrination through education is not as easy as one might expect. Children may be oblivious to propaganda and unable to recognize brainwashing, yet before school, temporally and in importance, comes the home. Despite setting heroic role models such as fiction characters and the writers who created them, Soviet values did not successfully override previous Estonian culture. Age-old family morals and 'capitalist' mentalities were difficult to purge even from the consciousness of children, and even under the conditions of terror and parents frightened out of openly sharing their convictions. Paraphrasing Dobrenko, the Socialist actuality was celebrated to hide its everyday gloom, but the reality produced in the Soviet culture did not prove everlasting. The Communist reality was outlived by traditional values.

On the other hand, socialist realist works can be gripping. What they present in subject matter may be alien, characters of books can seem quite absurd in their overly amplified Soviet traits that give them superhuman strength and willpower; however, as described by Clark and Dobrenko, socialist realism was capable of serving its goals. Socialist realist works presented the utopia that they depicted in a way that was exciting. Adventure and thrill stand out next to stories of peasants fighting against the water that floods their marshy land. This comparison is not to deny that there is a

certain essence of Estonianness in *Truth and Justice*, the latter undoubtedly being a book that Soviet students could go home and discuss with grandparents, representing those traditional values that ultimately prevailed. However, though appalling in hindsight, not all forms of propaganda must have missed their mark completely. Schools are a powerful tool for ideology as they give access to young minds, hour after hour five (six) days a week.

Dobrenko asserts that “the main thing the Soviet school achieved in its teaching of literature was *the legitimization and historicization of Soviet literature*.”²⁰⁵ He thus underlines the fact that literary works taught in schools enter a certain canon for the society in question, and they dictate reader tastes. This is also true for the case of Soviet literature in Estonian schools and in the Estonian society. The generations that grew up during the Soviet era shared in the reading experience that the schools and libraries of the time induced. Those works are now considered propagandistic and of low value, however, and the younger generations have been left out of that tradition. This produces an odd discontinuity where children’s literature curricula are something unfamiliar to their parents. In some subjects, today’s children learn the same facts that their grandparents used to, in some subjects new knowledge and discovery have been included, and then, in subjects like history and literature, it does seem as if reality has been altered in the meantime.

²⁰⁵ Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*, 161.

The aftermath of the Soviet Union is a matter of political and cultural debates both in the new states that rose from the Union's collapse and in the Russian Federation. Soviet literature influenced generations of people in Estonia and elsewhere. The works written or rewritten during the Soviet period are still found on Estonians' bookshelves, even though they are probably rarely read nowadays. An ideologically charged education is part of the common experience shared by several age groups. Although initially imported, Soviet novels are now part of Estonian culture. Soviet literature is the source of scores of cultural references even if younger Estonians are finding these increasingly harder to access, and even if this cultural capital is typically not thought to have high value. On the other hand, the related theme of writers as role models does not reverberate despite much effort to depict them as examples of New Soviet Men, hard-working patriots of their homeland and the collective.

The second wave in post-Soviet Estonian culture allows for new ways of analysis and unmasking pluralities, at the same time recording the past. A tendency for double-thinking during the Soviet era has already been identified. The Soviet decades are a period both very simple and very difficult for the historian. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly possible to gain approval by passing a negative judgment; a greater risk lies in finding positive things and continuities with the present day. There is also an attitude of detachment, to the point of disinterest. The cultural legacy of Soviet Estonia is today largely discarded as insignificant. It does not appear to be a trendy theme to

work on, if not for purposes of nostalgic entertainment. It remains to be seen where the so-called second wave of post-Soviet culture leads. A growing need is presenting itself — coming generations do not have even secondhand access to the Soviet era. Assuming a desire to preserve and pass on the experience as part of Estonian culture and identity, it needs not only be recorded but also analyzed in depth greater beyond simply labeling it ‘bad.’

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