

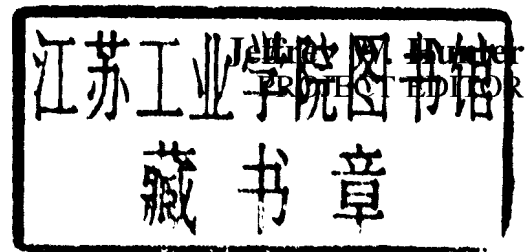
☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC 194

Volume 194

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in CLC inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each CLC volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in CLC provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

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Censorship and Contemporary World Literature

The following entry presents discussion and criticism of censorship in contemporary literature through 2001.

INTRODUCTION

Censorship is the practice of either banning or severely truncating a literary work, usually on political or moral grounds. A work can be pre-censored when submitted to an approval process before publication, or it can be withdrawn as a result of censorship after it is published. Some authors have commented that in chronically repressive societies such as the Soviet Union, China, or South Africa, the writer often internalizes the censorship mechanism, practicing a kind of self-censorship subconsciously during the writing process.

The relationship between censorship and contemporary world literature has developed across various historical contexts and geographical locations in the twentieth century. In some cases, the censoring of modern literature has been the result of collective opinion that a work presents a moral danger on the grounds that it is pornographic, that it treats a dangerous theme such as pedophilia or political rebellion, or that it presents an affront to the sociopolitical status quo. For example, William S. Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch* (1959) was seized by the U.S. Customs Department before it was published in the United States and underwent a lengthy legal procedure during which it was declared obscene. J. D. Salinger's novel *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) continues to generate debate about its suitability for inclusion in school curricula, and it has been banned in some school districts over the last several decades. Sparking discussion of censorship on a global scale, Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) interweaves politics, religion, and culture, and has elevated censorship to an international level.

Often the political climate in a given locale functions as the determining factor in literary censorship. Regimes notorious for repression and censorship of literary works include the Soviet Union under the reign of Josef Stalin in the 1930s and during the Cold War, China during and after the People's Revolution, and South Africa in the era of apartheid. During Argentina's military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, censorship was exercised routinely to limit exposure to writings expressing ideas that were considered threatening or uncomplimentary to the government. In Syria, the police

state has tightly controlled the flow of information as well as literature, while in Eastern European countries under Soviet influence, the Communist Party adjudicated the appropriateness for publication of every new piece of literature. Although there were elaborate institutions and mechanisms established to control the movement of literature or to ban its expression in each of these countries, writers and readers have found ingenious ways of avoiding censorship and securing alternate channels for publishing and distributing their work. In the Soviet Union, for example, the *samizdat* book-publishing process became an industry in its own right, and the *spetskhran*, or library of forbidden books, has coexisted alongside the state library for decades. Writers have also incorporated literary techniques that allow them to evade censorship—for instance, utilizing parody, fantasy, or irony to allude to current events, employing double meaning, and using atomized voices in drama so that no one person can be held responsible for a particular utterance. Censorship in the form of media controls and Internet access remains a topic of discussion into the twenty-first century.

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Breyten Breytenbach

Blomskryf: uit die Gedigte van Breyten Breytenbach en Jan Blom (poetry) 1977

Dog Heart: A Travel Memoir (memoir) 1998

William S. Burroughs

The Naked Lunch (novel) 1959

Camilo José Cela

La familia de Pascual Duarte (novel) 1942

J. M. Coetzee

Dusklands (novel) 1974

In the Heart of the Country (novel) 1977

Waiting for the Barbarians (novel) 1980

Life & Times of Michael K (novel) 1983

Foe (novel) 1986

Roberto Mario Cossa

La nona [The Granny] (play) 1977

Ricardo Halac

El destete [*The Weaning*] (play) 1978

Ulfat al-Idilbi

Wada' an ya Dimasha (novel) 1963

Susana Torres Molina

Extraño juguete (play) 1977

Ricardo Monti

Visita [*Visit*] (play) 1977

Eduardo Pavlovsky

Telarañas [*Spiderwebs*] (play) 1976

Salman Rushdie

Midnight's Children (novel) 1981

Shame (novel) 1983

The Satanic Verses (novel) 1988

J. D. Salinger

The Catcher in the Rye (novel) 1951

Mercedes Salisachs

Una mujer llega al pueblo (novel) 1957

Hubert Selby

Last Exit to Brooklyn (novel) 1964

Zakaria Tamer

Tigers on the Tenth Day and Other Stories (short stories)
1985

Oscar Viale

Encantada de conocerlo [*Pleased to Meet You*] (play)
1978

OVERVIEWS AND GENERAL STUDIES

J. M. Coetzee (essay date 1996)

SOURCE: Coetzee, J. M. "Emerging from Censorship." In *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*, pp. 34-47. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

[In the following essay, South African author Coetzee explores the influence of censorship on the psychological state and work of writers.]

From the early 1960s until about 1980, the Republic of South Africa operated one of the most comprehensive censorship systems in the world. Called in official

parlance not censorship but "publications control" (*censorship* was a word it preferred to censor from public discourse about itself),¹ it sought to control the dissemination of signs in whatever form. Not only books, magazines, films, and plays, but T-shirts, key-rings, dolls, toys, and shop-signs—anything, in fact, bearing a message that might be "undesirable"—had to pass the scrutiny of the censorship bureaucracy before it could be made public. In the Soviet Union, there were some 70,000 bureaucrats supervising the activities of some 7,000 writers. The ratio of censors to writers in South Africa was, if anything, higher than ten to one.

Paranoids behave as though the air is filled with coded messages deriding them or plotting their destruction. For decades the South African state lived in a state of paranoia. Paranoia is the pathology of insecure regimes and of dictatorships in particular. One of the features distinguishing modern from earlier dictatorships has been how widely and rapidly paranoia can spread from above to infect the whole of the populace. This diffusion of paranoia is not inadvertent: it is used as a technique of control. Stalin's Soviet Union is the prime example: every citizen was encouraged to suspect every other citizen of being a spy or saboteur; the bonds of human sympathy and trust between people were broken down; and society fragmented into tens of millions of individuals living on individual islets of mutual suspicion.

The Soviet Union was not unique. The Cuban novelist Reinaldo Arenas wrote of an atmosphere of "unceasing official menace" in his country that made a citizen "not only a repressed person, but also a self-repressed one, not only a censored person, but a self-censored one, not only one watched over, but one who watches over himself."² "Unceasing official menace" punctuated with spectacles of exemplary punishment inculcates caution, watchfulness. When certain kinds of writing and speech, even certain thoughts, become surreptitious activities, then the paranoia of the state is on its way to being reproduced in the psyche of the subject, and the state can look forward to a future in which the bureaucracies of supervision can be allowed to wither away, their function having been, in effect, privatized.

For it is a revealing feature of censorship that it is not proud of itself, never parades itself. The archaic model for the censor's ban is the ban on blasphemy, and both bans suffer an embarrassing structural paradox, namely, that if a crime is to be satisfactorily attested in court, the testimony will have to repeat the crime. Thus it used to be that in the public sessions of the rabbinical courts witnesses to blasphemy were supplied with codified euphemisms to utter in place of the banned name of the Holy; if the actual blasphemy had to be repeated to make conviction conclusive, the court moved into closed session, and testimony was followed by rituals

of purgation on the part of the judges. Embarrassment went even further: the very notion that the name of the Holy as a blasphemous word could curse the Holy was so scandalous that for "curse" the word "bless" had to be substituted.³ Just as a chain of euphemisms came into being to protect the name of the Holy, so in an age when the state was worshipped the office that protected its name had to be euphemized. That office waits for the day when, its functions having been universally internalized, its name need no longer be spoken.

The tyrant and his watchdog are not the only ones touched by paranoia. There is a pathological edge to the watchfulness of the writer in the paranoid state. For evidence one need only go to the testimony of writers themselves. Time and again they record the feeling of being touched and contaminated by the sickness of the state. In a move typical of "authentic" paranoids, they claim that their minds have been invaded; it is against this invasion that they express their outrage.

The Greek writer George Mangakis, for instance, records the experience of writing in prison under the eyes of his guards. Every few days the guards searched his cell, taking away his writings and returning those which the prison authorities—his censors—considered "permissible." Mangakis recalls suddenly "loathing" his papers as he accepted them from the hands of his guards. "The system is a diabolical device for annihilating your own soul. They want to make you see your thoughts through their eyes and control them yourself, from their point of view."⁴ By forcing the writer to see what he has written through the censor's eyes, the censor forces him to internalize a contaminating reading. Mangakis's sudden, revulsive moment is the moment of contamination.

Another passionate account of the operations of introverted censorship is given by Danilo Kis:

The battle against self-censorship is anonymous, lonely and unwitnessed, and it makes its subject feel humiliated and ashamed of collaborating. [It] means reading your own text with the eyes of another person, a situation where you become your own judge, stricter and more suspicious than anyone else. . . .

The self-appointed censor is the *alter ego* of the writer, an *alter ego* who leans over his shoulder and sticks his nose into the text . . . It is impossible to win against this censor, for he is like God—he knows and sees all, he came out of your own mind, your own fears, your own nightmares. . . .

This *alter ego* . . . succeeds in undermining and tainting even the most moral individuals whom outside censorship has not managed to break. By not admitting that it exists, self-censorship aligns itself with lies and spiritual corruption.⁵

The final proof that something has, so to speak, gone wrong with writers like Arenas or Mangakis or Kis is the excessiveness of the language in which they express

their experience. Paranoia is not just a figurative way of talking about what has afflicted them. The paranoia is there, on the inside, in their language, in their thinking; the rage one hears in Mangakis' words, the bafflement in Kis's, are rage and bafflement at the most intimate of invasions, an invasion of the very style of the self, by a pathology for which there may be no cure.

Nor am I, as I write here, exempt. In the excessive insistency of its phrasing, its vehemence, its demand for sensitivity to minutiae of style, its overreading and overwriting, I detect in my own language the very pathology I discuss. Having lived through the heyday of South African censorship, seen its consequences not only on the careers of fellow-writers but on the totality of public discourse, and felt within myself some of its more secret and shameful effects, I have every reason to suspect that whatever infected Arenas or Mangakis or Kis, whether real or delusional, has infected me too. That is to say, this very writing may be a specimen of the kind of paranoid discourse it seeks to describe.

For the paranoia I address is not the imprint of censorship on those writers alone who are singled out for official persecution. All writing that in the normal course of events falls under the censor's eye may become tainted in the manner I have described, whether or not the censor passes it. All writers under censorship are at least potentially touched by paranoia, not just those who have their work suppressed.

Why should censorship have such contagious power? I can offer only a speculative answer, an answer based in part on introspection, in part on a scrutiny (perhaps a paranoid scrutiny) of the accounts that other writers (perhaps themselves infected with paranoia) have given of operating under regimes of censorship.

The self, as we understand the self today, is not the unity it was assumed to be by classical rationalism. On the contrary, it is multiple and multiply divided against itself. It is, to speak in figures, a zoo in which a multitude of beasts have residence, over which the anxious, overworked zookeeper of rationality exercises a rather limited control. At night the zookeeper sleeps and the beasts roam about, doing their dream-work.

In this figural zoo, some of the beasts have names, like figure-of-the-father and figure-of-the-mother; others are memories or fragments of memories in transmuted form, with strong elements of feeling attached to them; a whole subcolony are semitamed but still treacherous earlier versions of the self, each with an inner zoo of its own over which it has less than complete control.

Artists, in Freud's account, are people who can make a tour of the inner menagerie with a degree of confidence and emerge, when they so wish, more or less unscathed.

From Freud's account of creative work I take one element: that creativity of a certain kind involves inhabiting and managing and exploiting quite primitive parts of the self. While this is not a particularly dangerous activity, it is a delicate one. It may take years of preparation before the artist finally gets the codes and the keys and the balances right, and can move in and out more or less freely. It is also a very private activity, so private that it almost constitutes the definition of privacy: how I am with myself.

Managing the inner selves, making them work for one (making them productive) is a complex matter of pleasing and satisfying and challenging and extorting and wooing and feeding, and sometimes even of putting to death. For writing not only comes out of the zoo but (to be hypermetaphorical) goes back in again. That is to say, insofar as writing is transactional, the figures *for whom* and *to whom* it is done are also figures in the zoo: for instance, the figure-of-the-beloved.

Imagine, then, a project in writing that is, at heart, a transaction with some such figure of the beloved, that tries to please her (but that also tries continually though surreptitiously to revise and recreate her as the-one-who-will-be-pleased); and imagine what will happen if into this transaction is introduced in a massive and undeniable way another figure-of-the-reader, the dark-suited, bald-headed censor, with his pursed lips and his red pen and his irritability and his censoriousness—the censor, in fact, as parodic version of the figure-of-the-father. Then the entire balance of the carefully constructed inner drama will be destroyed, and destroyed in a way that is hard to repair, since the more one tries to ignore (repress) the censor, the larger he swells.

Working under censorship is like being intimate with someone who does not love you, with whom you want no intimacy, but who presses himself in upon you. The censor is an intrusive reader, a reader who forces his way into the intimacy of the writing transaction, forces out the figure of the loved or courted reader, reads your words in a disapproving and *censorious* fashion.

One of Stalin's principal victims among writers was Osip Mandelstam. From the case of Mandelstam—which I take up in greater detail in Chapter 6—I extract certain important and appalling lessons about the paranoid state.

In 1933, Mandelstam, then 42 years old, composed a short but powerful poem about a tyrant who orders executions left, right, and center, and relishes the deaths of his victims like a Georgian munching raspberries. Though the tyrant is not named, the reference is clearly to Stalin.

Mandelstam did not write the poem down, but recited it several times to friends. In 1934, his home was raided by security police looking for the poem. Though they

did not find it—it existed solely inside the heads of the poet and his friends—they arrested him. While he was under arrest, the poet Boris Pasternak had a telephone call from Stalin. Who is Mandelstam, Stalin wanted to know? In particular, is he a *master*? (The word is the same in Russian as in English.)

Pasternak correctly inferred the second half of the question: Is Mandelstam a master or is he disposable? Pasternak replied, in effect, that Mandelstam was a master, that he was not disposable. So Mandelstam was sentenced to internal exile in the city of Voronezh. While he was living there, pressure was brought to bear on him to pay tribute to Stalin by composing a poem in his honor. Mandelstam gave in and composed an adulatory ode. What he felt about this ode we will never know, not only because he left no record, but because—as his wife persuasively argues—he was mad when he wrote it, mad with fear, perhaps, but mad too with the madness of a person not only suffering the embrace of a body he detests, but having to take the initiative, day after day, line after line, to caress that body.

From this story I isolate two moments: the moment when Stalin asks whether Mandelstam is a master, and the moment when Mandelstam is ordered to celebrate his persecutor.

“Is he a master?” We can be sure Stalin was not asking because he regarded great artists as above the state. What he meant was something like, Is he dangerous? Is he going to live, even if he dies? Is his sentence on me going to live longer than my sentence on him? Do I have to be careful?

Hence the command later on that Mandelstam write an ode. Making the great artists of his day kowtow to him was Stalin's way of breaking them, of making it impossible for them to hold their heads up—in effect, of showing them who was master, and of making them acknowledge him as master in a medium where no lie, no private reservation, was possible: their own art.

Side by side with the case of Mandelstam let me set a case from South Africa, comparable in dynamic if not in scale.

In 1972 the poet Breyten Breytenbach published a poem in Afrikaans entitled “Letter to Butcher from Foreign Parts.” As the poem made clear, the butcher to whom the letter was addressed was Balthazar John Vorster, then prime minister of the Republic of South Africa, the man who had done most to create a security-police empire with huge powers over life and death, untouchable by the law, above the courts.

At the end of the poem, Breytenbach lists the names of men who had died, probably under torture at the hands of the security police, and for whose deaths the courts

had found no one culpable. The poem baldly lists the names, as if asserting, "It is I that will live in memory and in history, not the court records." The heart of the poem, however, is a passage addressed to the butcher himself in which Breytenbach asks Vorster in the most intimate of ways what it is like for him to use fingers red with blood to fondle his wife's private parts. It is a shocking and obscene question, all the more obscene when uttered in a highly puritanical society. The poem was, of course, banned in South Africa.

Two years later the tables were turned. Breytenbach found himself under arrest and in the dock. Though the substantial charge was that he had tried to recruit saboteurs, his writings, particularly the poem against Vorster, soon emerged as a subtext to the proceedings. The goal of the prosecution, as it emerged, was to break him in much the same way that Mandelstam had been broken. This goal was attained: Breytenbach was brought to apologize to Vorster in open court, repudiating his own poem as "crass and insulting."

Confronting the vast machinery of the state, including its well-developed machinery of censorship, both Mandelstam and Breytenbach were clearly powerless. Yet their respective heads of state—both, as it happened, philistines—responded to their writings as if deeply offended, and deemed the cases important enough to merit personal attention. Why could the two poems in question, however insulting, not have been ignored like the pinpricks they were? Why need the antics of writers concern the state at all?

To answer this question, to understand the troubled relations between writers and the state in all their long history, we need to reflect not on single cases but on authorship as an institution, with a history going back to the beginnings of the modern age, and on the ambitions opened up to individuals by a career in authorship.

The notion that, by dint of writing, a person could aspire to and attain fame, was neither invented nor fostered by scribal culture, the culture of the West before the invention of printing. Such ambitions belong to print culture. We begin to see evidence soon after the invention of printing, as printers make it their practice to attach authors' names to the books they put out. Certainly this signing of the book had its commercial and legal side: the originator of the book laid claim to a share of the profits from its sale while accepting a share of the legal responsibility for its publication.⁶ Since copyright law would not arrive until the eighteenth century, what forced the writer to accept definition as a legal entity—to become an *author* with all the legal responsibilities thereby entailed—was the institution and the power of censorship.⁷

But signing a book also has a symbolic meaning. A book can be seen as a vehicle used by an author to

project his signature—and indeed sometimes his portrait—into the world, in a multiplied form. It is this potentially endless multiplication of traces of himself that gives to the author in the early modern age intimations of a power to cross all spatial and temporal boundaries. In visions of fame and immortality authorship and the mystique of the author as we know it today is born.⁸

The word of the author echoes in the ear of the reading public. Without his public, the author is nothing. This reading public is a creation less of authors themselves than of the early printer-publishers. It is also a model of the people as imagined in the philosophy of the early modern state: literate, integrated (as a body is integrated), receptive to direction. Thus it is no accident that, as habits of reading spread, state censorship takes on a more systematic, pervasive, and rigorous character, as though in printers and their authors the state had identified not so much an enemy (though in fact that is what they were often labeled) as a rival for power. From the sixteenth century onward we begin to detect in the language of the state, when it turns to authors and their powers, a note of distinctly modern paranoia, a paranoia that, as Tony Tanner reminds us, is predictable in and, indeed, necessary to a regime of censorship.⁹ Here, for instance, is Sir Nicholas Bacon, England's Lord Keeper in 1567:

These books . . . [make] men's minds to be at variance one with another, and diversity of minds maketh seditions, seditions bring in tumults, tumults make insurrections and rebellions, insurrections make depopulations and bring in utter ruin and destruction of men's bodies, goods and lands.¹⁰

Repressive censorship is usually thought of as part of the apparatus of absolutist or totalitarian states: the Russia of Nicholas I, Stalin's Soviet Union. But the rulers of early modern Europe, civil and clerical, viewed the book as a vehicle for sedition and heresy at least as seriously, and operated systems of censorship that were sweeping, draconian, and surprisingly sophisticated in their mechanisms.¹¹ As early as the sixteenth century, authors and printer-publishers were viewed from above as not only an interest group with a strong (and self-justifying) sense of historical mission but an elite with an ability to create a following among the influential literate sector of society in a way that was unsettlingly similar to the ambitions of the state itself.

The history of censorship and the history of authorship—even of literature itself, as a set of practices¹²—are thus intimately bound together. With the advent of printing and the rapid multiplication of copies, the fortunes of the author rose; he grew in power, but also became the object of suspicion and even envy on the part of the state. It is only in the late twentieth century, with the rise to dominance of new, electronic media and

the decline of the book, that the state has lost interest in the author and his waning powers.

II

There is nothing that raises the hackles of writers like the threat of censorship, no topic that calls forth a more pugnacious instinctive response. I have suggested why the threat of censorship is felt so intimately; I turn to the rhetoric in which that response is typically framed.

"Is he a master?" asked Stalin. Whether Mandelstam was a master writer or not, what had Stalin to fear from him? I raise this question again in the framework of a contest between state and author to spread their respective words of authority by their respective powers.

In this framework, the object of the state's envy is not so much the rival content of the author's word, or even specifically the power he gets from the press to spread that word, as a certain disseminative power of which the power to publish and have read is only the most marked manifestation. While the power of authors in general is slight without the multiplier effect of the press, the word of the master author has a disseminative power that goes beyond purely mechanical means of dissemination. The master's word, particularly in cultures where an oral base survives, can spread by word of mouth, or from hand to hand in carbon copies (*samizdat*, literally, "self-publication"); even when the word itself is not spread, it can be replaced by rumors of itself, rumors that spread like copies (in the case of Mandelstam, the rumor that someone had written a poem about which the Leader was furious).

Furthermore, a logic seems to spring into operation that works to the state's disadvantage. "A tyrant cannot take notice of a Fable without putting on the cap that fits," remarked a nineteenth-century editor of Aesop.¹³ The more draconically the state comes down on writing, the more seriously it is seen to be taking writing; the more seriously it is seen to be taking writing, the more attention is paid to writing; the more attention is paid to writing, the more the disseminative potential of writing grows. The book that is suppressed gets more attention as a ghost than it would have had alive; the writer who is gagged today is famous tomorrow for having been gagged. Even silence, in an environment of censorship, can be eloquent, as Montesquieu observes.¹⁴

No matter what the state does, writers always seem to get the last word. The craft-solidarity of men and women of letters—the intellectual community, the academic community, even the journalistic community—can be surprisingly strong. And those who write the books, in an important sense, make history.

Underlying the confidence among intellectuals in the inevitability of a reversal of power in their favor lies the Judaeo-Christian teaching of the vindication of the

truth in the fullness of time. There are many instances of this confidence in our own age. In the old South Africa, writers, no matter how much marginalized and repressed, knew that in the long run the censors would lose—not only because the regime of which censorship was an arm was doomed to collapse, not only because puritanical moral standards were on the wane in a worldwide economy of consumption, but because, as a community, writers would outlast their foes and even write their epitaph.

It is the very vitality of this myth of the inevitability of the emergence of the truth—a myth that intellectuals as a class have annexed and made their own—that leads me to ask whether writers under censorship are wholly disinterested in presenting themselves as embattled and outnumbered, confronting a gigantic foe. Since South Africa, where durable ties had long existed between writers—at least those to whom writing in English was an option—and foreign (principally British) publishers, may have been a special case, let me seek from farther abroad instances of how the conflict between writer and censor has been represented as a battle between David and Goliath.

In 1988, Seamus Heaney published an essay on the poets of Eastern Europe, particularly the Russian poets who suffered under Stalin, and on the effect upon the West of their exemplary lives. Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova, the Mandelstams, Pasternak, Gumilev, Esenin, Mayakovsky, says Heaney, have become "heroic names [in] . . . a modern martyrology, a record of courage and sacrifice which elicits . . . unstinted admiration." Even though they were silenced, the quality of their silence held an exemplary force. Their refusal to compromise their art "expose[d] to the majority [of Soviet citizens] the abjectness of their [own] collapse, as they [fled] for security into whatever self-deceptions the party line require[d] of them."¹⁵

To Heaney, these great persecuted writers were heroes and martyrs despite themselves. Neither seeking glory nor aspiring to bring about the downfall of the state, they merely remained true to their calling. In the process, however, they drew upon themselves the guilty resentment of those many who had given in to the menaces of the state, and so were left in vulnerable and ultimately tragic isolation.

There can be no question about the power of these life-stories to evoke our pity and terror. What I draw attention to, however, is the language of Heaney's account: to metaphors of battle, to the radical opposing of victory and defeat, suffering and triumph, courage and cowardice. Is the staging of the opposition between Russian writers and the Soviet state in terms of a metaphors of battle not in itself a declaration of war that strangely betrays what Heaney admires in these writers: