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**STALIN'S REPRESSIONS IN IVAN BAHRIANYI'S NOVEL "SAD HETSYMANSKYI"  
("GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE") AND IN AZERBAIJANI LITERATURE:  
TRUTH AND FICTION**

**Abstract**

In this paper, one of the most famous Ukrainian novels about the Great Purge, "*Sad Hetsymanskyi*" ("Garden of Gethsemane") by Ivan Bahrianyi, is discussed from the perspective of the latest academic works, including the semiotic studies on reality and representation. The Ukrainian novel is compared to four works by Azerbaijani authors describing the Great Purge: a scholarly work by Ziya Bunyadov; Vidadi Babanlı's autobiography; a novel by Mehdi Hüseyn; and a play by İlyas Afandiyev. The first two works belong to the category of nonfiction, while the last two works belong to fiction. Unlike the Azerbaijani authors, Bahrianyi chose to use literary discourse to tell the real story of his own imprisonment in 1938–1940, making his novel a mixture of fiction and nonfiction. A comparative review of Ivan Bahrianyi's presentation of the Great Purge and the presentations of that historical period by the four Azerbaijani authors in light of the modern scholarship helps identify the differences in readers' perception of these works as well as similarities in describing the Great Purge and the evil of the Soviet system.

**Keywords:** *Ivan Bahrianyi, the Great Purge, semiotics, fiction, comparative literature, Ukrainian literature, Azerbaijani literature*

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**İvan Bahryaniyin "Sad Hetsimanski" ("Getsamani bağı") romanında və Azərbaycan  
ədəbiyyatında Stalin repressiyaları: həqiqət və uydurma**

**Xülasə**

Bu məqalədə Stalin repressiyaları barədə ən məşhur Ukrayna əsərlərindən biri olan İvan Bahryaniyin "Sad Hetsimanski" ("Getsamani bağı") romanı, bədii (uydurma) ədəbiyyata dair son elmi əsərlər, o cümlədən gerçəklik və təsvir mövzusunda semiotik tədqiqatlar nöqtəyi-nəzərindən incələnir. Bu roman, Stalin repressiyalarını təsvir edən dörd Azərbaycanlı müəllifin əsərləri: Ziya Bünyadovun elmi əsəri, Vidadi Babanlının avtobiografiyası, Mehdi Hüseynin romanı və İlyas Əfəndiyevin pyesi ilə müqayisə olunur. İlk iki əsər sənədli, son iki əsər isə bədii ədəbiyyata aiddir. Azərbaycanlı müəlliflərdən fərqli olaraq, Bahryaniy 1938-1940-cı illərdə özünün həbsi hekayəsini nəql etmək üçün ədəbi diskursu seçmiş və beləcə romanını bədii və sənədli janrlardan ibarət hibrid bir janrda yazmışdır. Stalin repressiyalarının İvan Bahryaniy və dörd Azərbaycanlı müəllif tərəfindən necə təsvir olunduğunun bədii və sənədli ədəbiyyat barədə müasir elmi tədqiqatlar işığında müqayisəli surətdə nəzərdən keçirilməsi bir yandan bu əsərlərin oxucular tərəfindən qavranılmasındakı fərqləri və digər yandan Stalin repressiyalarının və sovet sisteminin şərini ifşa etməsindəki oxşarlıqları müəyyən etməkdə yardım edir.

*Açar sözlər:* İvan Bahriyani, Stalin repressiyaları, semiotika, bədii ədəbiyyat, müqayisəli ədəbiyyat, Ukrayna ədəbiyyatı, Azərbaycan ədəbiyyatı

## Introduction

In the 1930s, Joseph Stalin's government carried out massive repressions against "enemies of socialism" all over the Soviet Union. The repressions are known as the Great Purge. In those years, millions of Ukrainians and Azerbaijanis were imprisoned, exiled, and executed. Millions suffered loss and persecution because of their relation to "enemies of the people."

The horror of those years and the suffering of innocent people have been described in academic and literary works by Ukrainian and Azerbaijani authors. One of the most famous Ukrainian works ever written on that subject is the novel *Sad hetsymanskyi* ("Garden of Gethsemane") by Ivan Bahriyani, a surviving victim of the Great Purge. The novel is known as autobiographical because it is the author's own story of his imprisonment during 1938–1940. Instead of biography, Bahriyani chose to design his novel as a work of fiction. This is different from the way Azerbaijani authors described the Great Purge. In this paper, Ivan Bahriyani's novel is discussed from the perspective of the latest academic studies of fiction, and his presentation of the Great Purge is compared to the presentations of that historical period by four Azerbaijani authors: Ziya Bünyadov, Vidadi Babanlı, Mehdi Hüseyn, and İlyas Afandiyev.

In the 1930s, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, enforced ruthless repressions against "enemies of socialism," known as the Great Purge or the Great Terror. The number of victims of these repressions is still debated. According to Britannica, "the Soviet historian Roy Medvedev estimated that about 20 million died as a result of the labour camps, forced collectivization, famine, and executions. Another 20 million were victims of imprisonment, exile, and forced relocation" (1). The repressions continued until Stalin's death in 1953. Three years later, in 1956, Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, made a speech denouncing Stalin and launched a de-Stalinization campaign (2).

The most massive repressions took place in 1937–1938. Hiroaki Kuromiya notes that the "death sentences accounted for 44.66 and 59.29 percent of those arrested in 1937 and 1938 respectively. The corresponding figures for the preceding and succeeding years, 1936 and 1939, were 'only' 0.4 and 4 percent respectively. These 1937 and 1938 death sentences, according to official Soviet data, account for 91 percent of all political death sentences handed down between 1921 and 1940" (Kuromiya, 2007: 2).

One of the victims of the Great Purge was a young Ukrainian poet known as Ivan Bahriyani (1906/7<sup>1</sup>–1963). He was arrested twice: in 1932 and in 1938. In 1932, he was held in Kharkiv "internal prison" for 11 months and then sent on a 5-year exile to the Far East. (4) During his second imprisonment (June 16, 1938 – April 02, 1940), he spent most of his time in Kharkiv "internal prison" and experienced the worst horrors of the repression there, including various forms of intimidation, threat, and tortures. As was mentioned above, the highest percentage of executions was documented for those who were imprisoned in the year 1938. Bahriyani was one of them and barely escaped the tragic fate. He was fortunate to be released "due to lung disease and insufficient materials for conviction<sup>2</sup>" (5). Following his release, Bahriyani stayed in Western Ukraine and, in 1945, emigrated to Germany.

In immigration, Bahriyani wrote and published various literary works, including poems, novellas, novels, and one play. He worked on his novel "*Sad Hetsymanskyi*" ("Garden of Gethsemane") from 1948 to 1950, and it was published in Ulm, Germany. He chose to plot his story as a mixture of fiction and nonfiction. The novel begins with the following note: "All the names in this book, including the names of all the NKVD<sup>3</sup> officers and prison administrators depicted here without exception, as well as all the names of the prisoners (with the exception of only a few that

<sup>1</sup> The year of his birth is not known for sure. Different sources indicate it as 1906 or 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter, all quotes from Ukrainian and Azerbaijani texts are given in my translation [I.P.].

<sup>3</sup> For NKVD, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NKVD>

have been changed), are true” (6). This note sets the reader’s expectations of reading a documentary or autobiographical report by an eyewitness or even a participant in the events. However, the reader soon discovers that the main character is an imaginary person named Andrii Chumak, who is the youngest of the three sons of an honest and godly man from a Ukrainian village. After many years of exile, Andrii returns to his village, and just a few hours after his arrival, he is arrested again. This resembles the author’s own life story. However, Ivan Bahrianyi had only one brother, while Andrii Chumak had two. So, it is impossible to identify Andrii with the author himself fully.

Talking about linguistic and psychological mechanisms behind literary fiction, Anders Pettersson emphasizes the importance of “analogical thinking”:

“Literary discourse could be described, coarsely and preliminarily, as discourse specially designed to invite analogical thinking in the addressee: to invite implicit or explicit reflection on the wider applicability of the states of affairs that are being described or the attitudes that are being expressed. Analogical thinking and the search for relevance to the addressee are two of the most fundamental mechanisms behind the emergence of literature and its continued existence” (Pettersson, 2014: 86).

We don’t know whether Bahrianyi deliberately or intuitively used this type of discourse to describe what he had experienced during his second imprisonment. Whatever the case, his choice has proved successful in the impact his novel has had on generations of Ukrainian readers. Pettersson mentions some advantages of using literary discourse instead of scholarly or historical one: “If, as an author, you are not restricted by what is or was actually the case, if you can transcend the factual and have recourse to fictionality, you can create stories which, when read as invitations to analogical thinking, have a larger potential for emotional, cognitive, and formal-aesthetic impact on your audience than if you had had to restrict yourself to narrating things that actually transpired. And that is the whole point of using fictionality in literature” (Pettersson, 2014: 86).

The seeming disadvantage of using fictionality is that it is perceived as something “made-up,” “fabricated,” and therefore untrue or unreliable. At first glance, scientific or historical discourse may seem a better mode for communicating to readers what actually happened, but academic studies indicate that it is not.

Semiotics, the study of signs or how things are represented, reveals that neither documentary nor fictional texts present facts as they are, but both give a representation of reality. In his book on the basics of semiotics, Daniel Chandler explains that in nonfiction, “what is foregrounded is the content rather than the form or style of production. As in the dominant mode of scientific discourse, the medium and codes are discounted as neutral and transparent and the makers of the text retreat to invisibility. Consequently, reality seems to pre-exist its representation and to ‘speak for itself’; what is said thus has the aura of truth” (Chandler, 2007: 68).

Nonfiction appears to give the full and impartial picture of what really took place and what things really are. The “aura of truth” makes the author “invisible” and creates in readers’ minds the illusion that they deal with pure facts. The same thing is true for other kinds of representation that are perceived as “factual,” such as photography or film. Photographs and video recordings do not give us the full picture of reality; they are only representations of reality. “While we do not mistake one for the other, we do need to remind ourselves that a photograph or a film does not simply record an event, but is only one of an infinite number of possible representations. All media texts, however ‘realistic’, are representations rather than simply recordings or reproductions of reality” (Chandler, 2007: 67).

The problem is that, unlike painting and fictional literature, photography (or videos and documentary films) and scientific literature make a claim to recording reality. Even when a biography or a documentary is a masterpiece of art, the public perceives it as a true record of reality and expects it to show reality as it is. Lubomir Doležel points out (quoted by Margalit Finkelberg): “It is one thing to write in a certain style, but it is a completely different thing to make truth claims. Literariness and truth-functionality are two distinct qualities of writing: the former is a property of texture, the latter is a matter of the communicative aims and speech-act characteristics of textual activity. History, journalism, legal and political discourse, and so forth, all falling into the domain

of cognitive communication, can be conducted in styles of various degrees of poeticity. But no flights of poetry or rhetoric can liberate them from truth-valuation” (Finkelberg, 2014: 160).

Bahriyani’s choice of literary discourse instead of biography or history allowed him to have freedom of expression without accountability for his narrative. Scientific and historical discourses (nonfiction) are distinct from literary discourse (fiction) because “they are meant to be judged by the “true/false” criterion” (Finkelberg, 2014: 159). In literary discourse, there is a silent “disclaimer” by the author that whatever he or she wrote is a literary work without documentary claims. Fritz Peter Knapp called it a “fiction contract” (Knapp, 2014: 179).

In *Sad hetsymanskyi* (“Garden of Gethsemane”), Bahriyani informed his audience that the novel was his own story where he described true people and wrote their true names; nevertheless, he also indicated (as a silent “fiction contract”) that the novel should not be read as a collection of strictly historical or biographical facts, but it would include some fictional elements. Thus, he set the readers’ expectations of reading a true record of his own experience of the Great Purge from 1938 to 1940 without making claims for historicity. The novel *Sad hetsymanskyi* (“Garden of Gethsemane”) makes the reader aware of what the author had to endure and what being a victim of the Great Purge really felt like in general terms.

Similarly to Ukrainians, millions of Azerbaijani people suffered from the Great Purge in different ways. Azerbaijani literature contains various books about the horrors of that period. We will look at four of them here and compare them to the novel *Sad hetsymanskyi* (“Garden of Gethsemane”):

1. *Qırmızı terror* (“The Red Terror”) by Ziya Bünyadov (an academic work presenting only facts that have been documented).
2. *Gizlinlər* (“The Secrets”) by Vidadi Babanlı (an autobiography).
3. *Yeraltı çaylar dənizə axır* (“The Underground Water Flows to the Sea”) by Mehdi Hüseyn (a novel with no claims for historicity).
4. *Sevgililərin cəhənnəmdə vüsalı* (“The Lovers’ Union in the Hell”) by İlyas Afandiyev (a play).

The first two books make truth claims and don’t belong to literary discourse.

*Qırmızı terror* (“The Red Terror”) is an academic work by one of the most prominent scholars of Soviet Azerbaijan, Ziya Bünyadov (1921–1997). The author used scientific discourse with strong truth claims. Naturally, the audience perceives the book as consisting of documented facts. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to consider it purely factual because it inevitably includes some subjective elements. F.P.Knapp points out that even when the author’s intention is merely to relate facts, “human consciousness and language bring about a narrative transformation which goes beyond the mere facts, and this transformation cannot do without fiction. This occurs just as readily in everyday life as it does in scholarly and literary historical treatment. Indeed, fiction must here quite consciously fill out the series of facts to create a meaningful continuum for narration. All the same, fiction has only a complementary function here, however difficult it may be to define its limits” (Knapp, 2014: 179).

Ziya Bünyadov’s book does not consist of facts only but presents the facts that the author selected and does it in a certain order, according to the author’s design and with the author’s evaluation. The work is inevitably marked by the author’s emotions and personal opinions. For instance, the chapter dedicated to the well-known professor Bekir Çoban-zade (1893–1937) begins in the following way:

BEKİR VAAP OĞLU ÇOBAN-ZADE.

Investigation case no. 12493.

To completely destroy the national human resources, first and foremost, to eliminate the world-famous, constantly thinking, reasoning, innovative scientists, thinkers, and intellectuals – this was the goal of the ruling clan, which was in charge of the country in the 1930s and was destroying everything progressive with its filthy hands” (Bünyadov, 1993: 88).

Ziya Bünyadov’s book has a high academic value, but it is limited by the mode of scientific discourse with truth claims. The advantage of literary discourse, which is free from such limitations,

can be demonstrated by comparing the way a victim's execution is presented in Bünyadov's work and in Bahrianyi's novel:

1) *Qırmızı terror* ("The Red Terror") by Ziya Bünyadov:

"On October 12, 1937, B.V. Çoban-zade was sentenced to the highest penalty – execution. The sentence was carried out immediately. (A note on the execution of B.V. Çoban-zade on October 13, 1937, was sewn to the case file.)" (Bünyadov, 1993: 95).

2) "*Sad Hetsymanskiy*" ("Garden of Gethsemane") by Ivan Bahrianyi:

"A person – Ivanenko, Petrenko, or Hrytsenko – opens the door and enters a narrow, dark corridor... There is a table in that corridor where things are kept, and in the hours of 'rest,' there is always a gun used for execution – it's a special gun because it was awarded an order for constant, faithful service in the 'struggle against the enemies of the people...' Then a voice says to the person, 'Go straight ahead!' The person walks, and another door opens up before him. A blinding light blazes in his eyes, for behind that door is a brightly lit cellar... Someone invisible grabs the person from behind by the collar and fires a shot into the back of his head... and then pushes him into the cellar... In the cellar, work is in full swing..." (6).

The second quote clearly gives a stronger sense of how the victims experienced the horrible reality of the Great Purge.

Another Azerbaijani literary work that belongs to the nonfiction category is Vidadi Babanlı's autobiography "*Gizlinlər*" ("The Secrets"). The author calls it a "true novel" (in Azerbaijani, "Gerçek roman"), leaving no room for a "fiction contract." He claims that in this novel, he honestly wrote about his life. At the end of the novel, he insists: "Well, my dear and respected readers! Let us part in peace. I have unfolded the book of my life before your eyes. I have presented to your attention the painful events of a long period of time as they were, without any embellishment or exaggeration. I have shared the hardships and artistic limitations of that period openly, without hiding anything. From the bottom of my heart, I laid out my secrets, which are preserved in my memory, in front of everyone" (Babanlı, 2005: 314).

"*Gizlinlər*" ("The Secrets") is a gripping artistic work written in a rich style and containing unique personal accounts of several well-known Azerbaijani writers of Stalin's and Khrushchev's periods. It differs from Ziya Bünyadov's book in that it does not present any proof or documentary verification of the facts recounted in it, so the information cannot be verified and, therefore, cannot be read as history in the strict sense of the word. The author had to be selective in what he shared with the public, and assuming he was honest, he still shared only his impressions of reality instead of reality itself. This puts him in the most disadvantageous position among the three authors. Unlike Ziya Bünyadov and Vidadi Babanlı, Ivan Bahrianyi decided to write an autobiographical novel using literary discourse, without making claims for historicity in every detail but affirming historicity in general. As was mentioned above, he promised his readers to write the real names of his torturers and most of his fellow prisoners, and since he had been in that place himself, his novel is perceived as a witness of what being a victim of the Great Purge was like.

Unlike the three books discussed hitherto, the novel "*Yeraltı çaylar dənizə axır*" ("The Underground Water Flows to the Sea") by Mehdi Hüseyn contains no truth claim at all but is presented to the public as a made-up story. During the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, an Azerbaijani woman, Samira Aydın, learns that her husband has been captured by the Germans. As a close relative of a prisoner, she is separated from her two small daughters and exiled to Central Asia together with a large crowd of other innocent Azerbaijani people. After spending long years in exile, Samira Aydın returns to Baku. The novel ends with the trial of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and an anticipation of a new life.

The First Secretary, Mir Jafar Baghirov, was indeed tried in Baku in April 1954. Soon after his trial, he was executed. Baghirov was responsible for destroying the lives of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis during the Great Purge. For some reason, Mehdi Hüseyn did not use Baghirov's name in his novel but called him "Mollayev." However, Stalin is called by his real name, and all the places in the novel are real, such as the notorious building on the seaside area of Baku (the NKVD

building). In any case, the readers would quickly understand who Mollayev represents when his name is first mentioned in the novel by Samira Aydın's director:

“ - In such cases, comrades do not hurry to go to the District Committee [of the Communist Party] but discuss the matter and sometimes even ask Mollayev personally for his opinion.

As soon as the director mentioned Mollayev's name, everyone silently ducked their heads” (Hüseyn, 2005: 158).

A person named Mollayev is a fictional character. There has never been a First Secretary with this surname in Soviet Azerbaijan. In literature, imaginary characters and events do not necessarily mean untrue. Professor Richard Winter has aptly put it: “Philosophically, we can invoke a correspondence model of truth, i.e., a ‘true’ account is one which ‘corresponds to’ an ‘objective reality.’ However, the ‘correspondence’ model of truth relies, in the end, on a circular argument, since we have no means of establishing the facts other than through our investigations and our accounts of those investigations. ‘Correspondence’ is thus a claim, rather than an objective criterion for judgment” (Winter, 2002: 144).

As was mentioned above, fiction is based on analogical thinking rather than correspondence to specific facts. Mehdi Hüseyn's novel is not meant to inform us of historical facts with real names and events but to teach us about the period and people in general, telling a story that represents many similar stories and portraying characters that represent many similar people. An important characteristic of a novel is not its historicity but its verisimilitude or historical trustworthiness. Professor Winter reminds us “that ‘truth’ not only means ‘corresponding to the facts’, but also ‘trustworthy’, and that the term ‘fiction’ is connected with the idea of being ‘shaped’ or ‘moulded’ (from the Latin ‘fingere’). This enables us to address the complexity of the relationship between truth and fiction by rephrasing our question. Not ‘Is this narrative ‘true’?’ but, ‘Is this narrative shaped and moulded in such a way that we feel it is trustworthy, i.e. does it *persuade* us that we might helpfully rely on the insights it presents about that particular situation to guide our thinking about other situations?’” (Winter, 2002: 144–145).

Knowing that writers use their imagination in analogy with reality and facts, and often with their own experiences, we can guess that the novel might contain some real stories from Mehdi Hüseyn's life. At the very least, they are based on his experience. What really matters is that they are trustworthy. There is nothing in the novel for which we would say, “This would never have happened in reality.” The whole story is believable and could have happened indeed.

*Sevgililərin cəhənnəmdə vüsalı* (“The Lovers’ Union in the Hell”) by İlyas Afandiyev is a play with no claims for historicity. One of the characters in this play is Mir Jafar Baghirov, a historical person, and he is portrayed as talking on the phone to another historical person whom he calls “Lavrentiy” (meaning Lavrentiy Beria, the Head of NKVD in the peak of the Great Purge, 1938–1940). However, Baghirov's actions in the play are described in a way that is more dramatic than realistic. He comes to the prison to personally talk with some prisoners, including an actor named Ayaz. It is hard to imagine Baghirov talking to a prisoner in such a way:

“M i r J a f a r B a g h i r o v (*to Ayaz*). So... How does our famous tragic artist feel? Why did he refuse to play the role of an enemy of the people on stage?

A y a z (*with passion*). Because I don't consider that character worthy of art. I don't understand at all what the term ‘enemy of the people’ means.

M i r J a f a r B a g h i r o v. You're simple-minded, like all great artists. Afshar Huseyn is an illiterate herdsman. He doesn't understand Stalin's policy of eliminating kulaks, dangerous people. But why don't you understand that?

A y a z. I do understand Lenin's policy.

M i r J a f a r B a g h i r o v. Never mind. Stalin's policy will be explained to you here. We need every piece of art to expose the ‘enemies of the people’” (Afandiyev, 2005: 269).

We cannot imagine such a description of the First Secretary of Soviet Azerbaijan in Ziya Bünyadov's academic book, in Vidadi Babanlı's autobiography, or even in Mehdi Hüseyn's novel. The dramatic genre has its own peculiarities, and such an unrealistic discussion is acceptable when it serves the purpose, which in this case is highlighting the heroism of the victims of the Great

Purge. The fictional character of this play seems to be deliberately flaunted to communicate the message to the audience. Back in 1989, when the play was published, Azerbaijan was still part of the Soviet Union, and Afandiyev had to show his heroes as sincere supporters of Lenin's ideology (as Ayaz said, "I do understand Lenin's policy" in the quote above). But Gorbachev's perestroika had weakened the Communist Party's grip, and nationalistic movements were emerging in Soviet Republics. The play portrays the victims of the Great Purge as true heroes, and even the Azerbaijani torturers are shown as mere slaves of the system who are forced to fulfill Moscow's orders. They do it against their will, with a feeling of guilt and a fear of their own uncertain future. The main torturer in the play, Salim, repeats the same words over and over again: "I arrest and shoot those who are branded as enemies of the people. I send them to the distant, frosty Siberian wastelands. But nobody knows that I cannot sleep at night because of fear and terror. I cannot be sure that I myself will not be arrested and shot one day, maybe today, tomorrow, or a year from now. I am horrified by the torture I give to people to make them admit that they were preparing to assassinate Baghirov or that they are against the Soviet system and against Stalin" (Afandiyev, 2005: 254).

Baghriyani's and Hüseyn's novels have similar descriptions of police officers who perform their duties with outward sternness but are inwardly sympathetic to their victims. In *Sad hetsymanskyi* ("Garden of Gethsemane"), Andrii once succeeded in breaking through to the heart of the secret police officer Sergeev, who was torturing him. That night, the officer had a long talk with Andrii instead of torturing him. But he had to keep this a secret from his fellow policemen:

"All of a sudden, Sergeev hit the table, slammed against it, threw a stick on the floor, and screamed furiously:

- You villain!!! Speak!!! Come on now!.. Break open!!!

Andrii was shocked and stopped in the middle of his speech. Sergeev listened for a moment to what was happening in the corridor, then smiled and spoke in his normal voice:

- If I suddenly start yelling and going wild, don't pay attention. (He looked at the door) Got it?

Andrii "got it." Some superiors were passing by the door in the corridor, and Sergeev was enacting that the investigation was "going full steam ahead." When the footsteps disappeared, Sergeev nodded to Andrei:

- Continue.

The conversation carried on..." (6)

Similarly, in *Yeraltı çaylar dənizə axır* ("The Underground Water Flows to the Sea"), the policeman who took Samira Aydın from her home and brought her to the ferry boat that would take her to Central Asia could hardly hide his reluctance. When he was leaving her on the boat, Samira asked him to do her a favor (the story is told from the first person, from Samira's perspective):

" - If possible, could you please tell my family where I'm being sent? I will be indebted to you for life.

At that moment, a man I didn't know passed by us and greeted him. The man who had brought me instantly changed his face from friendly to extremely cruel. He made a sharp movement of his hand in the air and said in a muffled voice:

- Who do you take me for, citizen Aydın?

Then he stepped away from me and again barely audibly uttered the last word:

- OK" (Hüseyn, 2005: 209).

Mehdi Hüseyn wrote this novel in 1961–1964 (Hüseyn, 2005: 318), soon after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. He was free to criticize Stalin and his rule, but he had to praise the Soviet system. His novel depicts the victims of the Great Purge as honest and faithful Communists, some of the best citizens of the Soviet Union, true followers of Lenin's ideals, and the future hope of the nation.

Ziya Bünyadov and Vidadi Babanlı wrote their books after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the Republic of Azerbaijan, independent from Moscow, they were free to publish any facts and criticize the Soviet system in any way. Babanlı's focus was not on the Great Purge, and his most valuable contributions to the subject were a short description of his own short imprisonment (which lasted only a few days) when he was still a teenager and some stories of the great Azerbaijani poet

Samed Vurgun's experience of the Great Purge, including his personal talks with Mir Jafar Baghirov and some dangerous situations when he barely escaped being repressed. Babanlı claimed to have witnessed or heard those stories from Samed Vurgun personally.

Ivan Bahrianyi wrote his novel while Stalin was still alive, and the repression continued. Despite that, Bahrianyi was free to describe the Soviet system as he had experienced it because he lived in Western Germany. He described the "internal prison" of NKVD and the tortures, but he was careful not to overwhelm his readers with the horrors but to balance the gloomy side of the story with the prisoners' humor and optimism. He called it "the gallows humor" and noted that it helped the prisoners survive and remain sane in those conditions. It may be part of the Ukrainian national character that has always given Ukrainians the strength to continue their struggle. Bahrianyi did portray some true heroes among the victims of the Great Purge, but in the focus of the novel is the evil of the whole Soviet system. The following words of a torturer addressed to Andrii describe it very well: "You are sorely mistaken if you think that someone here will pamper you. We have no time to pamper you. You – and not only you personally, but everyone there – will be crushed like a fly here, and no one will feel sorry for you. No one will even bat an eyelid. There are enough people in the USSR!.. You shall say everything here. If you refuse to say it standing, you'll say it lying down. If you don't say it in your memory, you'll say it unconsciously. But you shall! There has never been anyone here who took a hero's pose and endured it all to the end. You're not a hero. You're not even a human being here. You're just **a hole in a bagel!**" (6, emphasis belongs to the author)

What the torturer said was true for the majority but not for everyone. There were a few heroes there, and Bahrianyi was one of them, though he probably didn't consider himself to be one. Eventually, Bahrianyi's survival was like a miracle, contrary to expectations, and he did a great service to us by leaving a literary masterpiece that is, at the same time, a true record of what life was like in one of the most horrible prisons in the darkest years of the Great Purge.

In his essay "General Beliefs from Fiction," Göran Rossholm discusses the notion of general truth in narrative fictional literature. He argues that made-up stories help teach abstract general truths by illustrating them in a concrete form, making our beliefs deeper and stronger.

"[The] story makes the general truth easier to remember, since stories, in particular good ones, are easy to recall. Moreover, the narrative may deepen a belief we already hold. When we have difficulty in presenting illustrative applications of a general conviction, our belief is shallow, and contrarily, when we can explain what we mean by presenting detailed illustrative material, we have a deeper understanding of the general statement and an enhanced capacity to apply the statement to new instances. It does not matter whether these illustrations are fictive or factual. They do not constitute evidence for the truth of the statement, they testify to our fuller understanding of what we are talking about, they prove that we are not merely paying lip service to our stated belief" (Rossholm, 2014: 235).

In this regard, the five works discussed in this paper, whether fiction or nonfiction, serve the same goal of deepening our understanding of the Great Purge and broadening our knowledge of the evil nature of Stalinism as a part of the evil Soviet system.

### Conclusion

Ivan Bahrianyi's novel "*Sad Hetsymanskyi*" ("Garden of Gethsemane") is a unique autobiographical work that effectively and impressively describes the Great Purge. In some ways, it is like Ziya Bunyadov's academic work. Both Bahrianyi and Bunyadov present the real names of torturers and prisoners and tell their stories. In some ways, it is like Babanlı's "*Gizlinlər*" ("The Secrets"). Both novels are autobiographical and do not provide documentary proof of the facts they tell. In some ways, it is like Mehdi Huseyn's work. Both novels are highly artistic and emotional and introduce imaginary characters. In some ways, Bahrianyi's novel is like Afandiyev's play. Both literary works portray the glory of heroes and the misery of torturers.

What is important is the author's credibility and a good record of personal reputation. Bahrianyi's life journey is the best witness to his credibility. The Azerbaijani authors have a good



record, too. It is not surprising that they have described the years of Stalinism and the horrors of the Great Purge similarly in the most important aspects. All five authors describe the horrors of Stalin's regime, the tragedy of millions of people, and the glory of heroes who didn't betray their ideals in the face of danger, threats, and torture. The five works communicate the same truth that both Ukrainians and Azerbaijanis should never forget: that the Soviet regime is responsible for killing millions of innocent people all over the country and turning the lives of millions of the survivors into misery. Today, these works should serve as a reminder and a remedy for nostalgia for the Soviet Union that some Ukrainians and Azerbaijanis may still have today.

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