

READING RUSSIA. A HISTORY OF READING IN MODERN RUSSIA

vol. 3

Damiano Rebecchini and Raffaella Vassena (eds.)

Где есть рабочий—там должна быть „РАБОЧАЯ ГАЗЕТА“.



Подписывайтесь на журнал „КРОКОДИЛ“.

АДРЕС РЕДАКЦИИ И КОНТОРЫ: Москва, Охотный ряд, д. № 7.



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IN MODERN RUSSIA**

Volume 3

Edited by Damiano Rebecchini and Raffaella Vassena

di/segni

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Ledizioni

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ISBN 978-88-6705-594-4

ILLUSTRAZIONE DI COPERTINA:
M. M. Cheremnykh, *Poster calling for subscribers to popular
periodicals, 1923*

n°32
Collana sottoposta a double blind peer review
ISSN: 2282-2097

Grafica:

Raúl Díaz Rosales

Composizione:

Ledizioni

Disegno del logo:

Paola Turino

STAMPATO A MILANO
NEL MESE DI APRILE 2020

www.ledizioni.it
www.ledipublishing.com
info@ledizioni.it
Via Alamanni 11 – 20141 Milano

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List of Abbreviations

In the notes the following will be used:

d. (dd.) *delo (dela)*

f. *fond*

GARF *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*

GASO *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sverdlovskoi oblasti*

GATO *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tverskoi oblasti*

IK *Iskusstvo kino*

l.(ll.) *list (listy)*

LG *Literaturnaia Gazeta*

op. *opis'*

ORF GLM *Otdel Rukopisnykh Fondov Gosudarstvennogo Literaturnogo Muzeia*

RGAE *Rossiiskii Gosudartsvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki*

RGALI *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva*

RGASPI *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii*

SD *stsenarnoe delo*

TsGALI-SPb. *Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, Saint Petersburg*

TsGAIPD-SPb. *Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Istoriko-Politicheskikh Dokumentov, Saint Petersburg*

PART III
AFTER THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

THE READERS' MILIEU, 1917-1920s

Evgeny Dobrenko, Abram Reitblat

I

The readership of the first post-revolutionary years largely consisted of those who belonged to the Russian reading public at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By this time, literacy and, accordingly, reading had become strong features of the urban lifestyle, but had only begun to take root in the countryside, where oral transmission of cultural traditions and work experience prevailed. Such an attitude to the book and reading was well entrenched and changed slowly.

However, the post-revolutionary era was characterized by radical sociocultural shifts. Revolutions, World War I and the Civil War not only galvanized the masses, but also politicized them. The “social creativity of the masses” (Lenin) was the result of a crisis and the subsequent rapid destruction of all previous social institutions. This process led to radical shifts in collective (class, national) and individual identity, reinforcing the Party’s need to understand political and social changes, adapt to the new conditions, and have a number of social groups participate in building a new society.

The Communists who came to power retained to a large degree the intelligentsia approach to culture. They aimed to familiarize the population with ‘culture,’ and therefore saw as their immediate tasks eliminating illiteracy and fostering among the population (primarily the working strata) the need for the printed word, a book, and a steady reading habit. But gradually, reading’s capacity to influence the population ideologically became increasingly important, enhancing political campaigns and otherwise mobilizing the population. Works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin as well as

propagandistic brochures were published in large runs. In 1920, the total run of propagandistic editions published by the Moscow branch of the State Publishing House was ten times higher than that of artistic ones. At the same time, the library funds and warehouses of book-selling organizations were cleared of “ideologically alien and outdated” literature.¹

There is no exact data on changes in the readership in Soviet Russia. However, one could safely assert that the total number of readers in the first post-revolutionary years (in comparison with the pre-revolutionary period) barely changed. On the one hand, readers made up a significant part of those 9–11 million by which Russian population declined between 1917–1921.² On the other hand, during this period, approximately 4–5 million workers and peasants became regular readers thanks to the eradication of illiteracy. Only the social structure of the readership had undergone significant changes. The proportion of those who before the revolution could be called an “educated audience” declined considerably: a large part of them emigrated, others were repressed, some died on the fronts of the Civil War, and others died of starvation and cold because they received insufficient rations. At the same time, the proportion of those who used to be called “popular readers” (*narodnye chitateli*) significantly increased. This was primarily due to the large-scale campaign to eradicate illiteracy. In 1918, the Russian Federation Constitution stated: “In order to ensure that workers have effective access to knowledge, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic aims to provide workers and the poorest peasants with complete, comprehensive and free education.”³ On December 26, 1919 Sovnarkom adopted a decree by which the entire population aged 8 to 50 was obliged to learn to read and write in their native language or Russian. The All-Russian Emergency Commission to eradicate Illiteracy in the Commissariat of Enlightenment was established by Sovnarkom decree on July 19, 1920. As a result, approximately 4 to 5 million were taught to read and write between 1918–1921.⁴

In addition, a number of measures had been taken to ensure the availability of books for workers and peasants: all public libraries were nationalized and open to use, and new ones were created as well. New publications were distributed free of charge to libraries and other organizations between 1920 and 1921. As a result, the number of workers’ libraries in Petrograd grew from 14 in 1914 to 65 in 1919, and their readership amounted to about

1 See A. I. Nazarov, *Oktiabr’ i kniga* (Moscow, 1968), 197.

2 See E. Z. Volkov, *Dinamika narodonaseleniia SSSR za 80 let* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1930), 270; V. P. Danilov, “Dinamika naseleniia SSSR za 1917–1929 gg.,” in *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1968 god* (Moscow, 1970), 246; Iu. A. Poliakov, I. N. Kiselev, V. A. Ustinov, “K voprosu o metodike opredeleniia chislennosti i natsional’nogo sostava naseleniia SSSR v 1917–1926 godakh,” *Istoriia SSSR*, 2 (1981), 109.

3 *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1959), vol. 2, 553.

4 See T. Iu. Krasovitskaia, “Perveishei zadachei iavliaetsia gramotnost’,” *Voprosy istorii*, 5 (1979), 120.

650 thousand⁵. 1,754 mobile libraries operated within the Army in early 1919; by the end of the year, their number reached 19.5 thousand.⁶ Hut reading rooms/libraries (*izby-chital'ni*) were created in rural areas, which at the same time were comparable to clubs.

This educational work aligned with popular interest and demand. Scholar Nikolai Rubakin came to the conclusion that socio-political and cultural changes in the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russian library and reading practices contributed to the advancement of reading. The rapid growth of literacy and ever-growing number of educational institutions, intensive migration caused by war and revolution, participation in political life, and dissemination of socialist ideas all contributed to “increasing [...] semi-intelligentsia [this is how Rubakin referred those who had only recently acquired reading skills —A. R., E. D.] in all social classes.”⁷ Broad strata of the population which joined the political movement after the revolution felt an urgent need for the printed word, which would allow them to navigate a turbulent political life and to form a new worldview.

In a popular ditty the soldier addresses the book with the following words:

Oh, you, the book, young lady!
Hanging with the rich,
You leave the rich,
Visit our brother.⁸

American publicist John Reed said:

All of Russia was learning how to read and really read books on politics, economics, and history; read because people wanted to know... The [...] thirst for enlightenment, which was constrained for so long, burst out with spontaneous force along with the revolution. [...] Russia absorbed printed material with the same insatiableness with which dry sand absorbs water.⁹

Dmitrii Furmanov, who was engaged in propaganda work among workers in 1917, noted that in this environment “the thirst for political knowledge is huge. [...] Everybody is anxiously waiting for a good, fresh book! They ask each other, run, search, and queue to read.”¹⁰ One of the writers of

⁵ *Materialy po statistike Petrograda* (Moscow, 1920), issue 2, 3.

⁶ *Politrobotnik*, 2 (1920), 12-13.

⁷ N. A. Rubakin, “Knizhnoe delo i chitatel'stvo v Rossii v epokhu voiny i revoliutsii 1914-1918 gg.,” *Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Gosudarstvennoi Biblioteki* (OR RGB), f. 358, kart. 47, d. 21, l. 5.

⁸ S. Fedorchenko, *Narod na voine* (Moscow, 1925), vol. 2. *Revoliutsiia*, 9.

⁹ D. Rid, *10 dnei, kotorye potriasli mir* (Moscow, 1957), 36.

¹⁰ D. Furmanov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1961), vol. 4, 94.

the time expressively wrote that “the new masters of life, new readers, and new consumers of cultural values go and multiply from its very roots, from the bowels of the earth. A mass of people hungry for spiritual nourishment has risen, and this mass eagerly pounces on books.”¹¹

The historical circumstances stimulated this sudden and wide appeal of reading, which was fuelled by: uncertainty about the changes occurring in society, and the need to clarify them; sharp and rapidly increasing social disintegration as a result of revolution; war and the politics of the new regime, which produced mass migration to the cities and caused widespread marginalization, thus creating the incentive to ‘master’ urban (book) culture.

From 1914 to 1920, in six provinces alone (Arkhangelsk, Moscow, Novgorod, Saratov, Tver, Ufa) the number of library readers increased dramatically (according to incomplete information), nearly quadrupling from 174 thousand to 667 thousand.¹² The number of the Leningrad Gubpolitprosvet library readers increased from 47 thousand in 1918 to 88 thousand in 1921.¹³ A similar increase in the number of library subscribers was observed in other Russian regions.

In the village, many new readers appeared from among the village activists, the most politicized peasants, former Red Army men, etc.¹⁴

The rapid increase of the literate population and the exponential growth of the library network created a real basis for familiarizing the broad masses of the population with book reading, but it was hampered by “book hunger,” difficult living conditions, etc.

Interesting data on the material basis of reading and on the conditions in which the printed word was utilized is found in the census of Soviet officials held in August-September 1918.¹⁵ The vagueness and uncertainty of the question included in the questionnaire (“Do you find spiritual nourishment in bookstores, theaters, etc. —and how satisfactory is it?”) makes it impossible to make any precise quantitative calculations for the answers to it. However, the detailed answers available on a number of the forms allow us to characterize some tendencies in the use of the printed word during this period. First of all, the urgent need for books is striking. A significant number of respondents gave a positive response about the benefits of “spiritual nourishment,” but about a third of the motivated negative re-

¹¹ S. Liubosh S. [S. B. Liuboshits], “Literatura griadushchego dnia,” *Vestnik literatury*, 6 (1919), 24.

¹² See K. I. Abramov, *Bibliotechnoe stroitel'stvo v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti. 1917-1920* (Moscow, 1974), 118.

¹³ See A. Kukharskii, “Uspekhi i perspektivy v oblasti bibliotechnogo dela g. Leningrada,” *Kommunisticheskoe prosveshchenie*, 1 (1925).

¹⁴ See V. A. Kozlov, *Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia i krest'ianstvo. 1921-1927* (Moscow, 1983), 49.

¹⁵ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 3524. See on the census: M. P. Iroshnikov, “Materialy perepisi sluzhashchikh 1918 g. – istochnik po istorii stanovleniia sovetskogo gosudarstva,” *Istochnikovedenie istorii Velikogo Oktjabria* (Moscow, 1977), 237-255.

sponses contained such formulations as: “no, but I would like to,” “no, but it’s very desirable,” “I’m planning to” and so on.¹⁶

Responders also pointed out the difficulties that were obstacles to reading. In the city, they were connected, as a rule, with post-revolutionary living and working conditions. Lack of time and money, working conditions, business trips, traveling —these reasons prevailed in negative responses. The most typical of them: “I don’t [find spiritual nourishment in books —A. R., E. D.] for lack of time, since the urgent construction of the plant requires [...] hours of work” (repair plant engineer)¹⁷; “Not yet, since the organizational period of the institution where I work takes up all my free time” (head of the financial department of the Supreme Economic Council,¹⁸ “due to current events, there is no time” (instructor of the Labour Department of the District Council of Deputies)¹⁹.

Intensive work on building the state apparatus and restoring the economy, as well as overcoming numerous domestic difficulties and the harsh realities of everyday life (providing oneself with food, clothing, fuel, etc.), left very little free time, which was only enough to read newspapers and current political literature.

Another important obstacle to reading was the insufficient development of the library network, the lack of books, etc. Most often, such responses were given by those who were sent to the countryside: “In the village where I now work, there are no books”;²⁰ “There is no spiritual nourishment to be found in the village. I can’t even get newspapers here”;²¹ “We have to use only newspapers, since there is nothing else in our Mamoshinskii volost’ council of the Ruza district”.²² However, even Moscow experienced a shortage of libraries, as evidenced by the following type of responses: “I don’t (find any spiritual nourishment there) because it’s not possible due to the relatively small number of Soviet educational institutions in Moscow” (the head of operations department of the High Council of National Economy);²³ “In the absence of books [...] in the area of service and residence, I do not (find spiritual nourishment)” (accountant).²⁴

‘Book hunger’ also affected the scale and nature of reading during these years: because of a shortage of paper and overall devastation, the capabilities of the printing industry were severely reduced even as the demand for books sharply increased. ‘Book hunger’ at first manifested itself in the almost complete absence of available books for literacy training, self-education, re-

16 GARF, f. 3524, d. 204, l. 121; d. 205, l. 235; d. 279, l. 121.

17 GARF, f. 3524, d. 225, l. 172.

18 GARF, f. 3524, d. 225, l. 338.

19 GARF, f. 3524, d. 275, l. 84.

20 GARF, f. 3524, d. 280, l. 584.

21 GARF, f. 3524, d. 280, l. 582.

22 GARF, f. 3524, d. 280, l. 578.

23 GARF, f. 3524, d. 484.

24 GARF, f. 3524, d. 213, l. 228.

search, scientific studies, as well as the rising cost of textbooks for secondary education and the cost of printing new books, etc.²⁵ In subsequent years, the situation with books became even more aggravated, as evidenced by numerous articles with eloquent titles: “Book hunger,” “Book impoverishment,” etc.²⁶ A report by the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment noted that “the main obstacle to the development of the library network is the impoverishment of the book markets; the demand for books has reached colossal proportions, and this demand remains unsatisfied.”²⁷

The rapid increase in the number of readers among workers and peasants was due to the fact that the sharp breakdown of the old social and cultural structure forced many working people to turn to reading as a means of adapting to new social conditions and joining a new way of life. World War I and two revolutions ‘shattered’ and consequently undermined the value system of a significant part of society, the most important components of which were religion, faith in the ‘tsar-father,’ etc. Now, with the help of periodicals and books, the population assimilated a new system of values based on Marxist ideology. It is worth noting that new readers, for whom reading was not an easy task, did not seek to read just any (and certainly not entertaining) books; rather, they only sought books on vital issues. If earlier in the village this ‘world-building’ function belonged to religious and moral literature, now that there was a crisis of religion²⁸—political, atheistic and ‘practical’—books came out on top.

It is indicative that in 1921, when answering the question about the books that contributed most to the formation of their worldview, readers named either anti-religious and anti-church books (*Articles about Religion* by Paul Lafargue, *Religion and Communism* [*Religiia i kommunizm*] by Sergei Minin, *Religion, the clergy, its income, its curses and blessings* [*Religiia, dukhovenstvo, ego dokhody, ego prokliatiia i blagosloveniiia*] by Ivan Stepanov, *The Life of Jesus* by Ernest Renan, etc.) or works of natural science (*The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, *How, when and why people appeared on Earth* [*Kak, kogda i pochemu poiavilis’ liudi na zemle?*] by Nikolai Rubakin) in addition to publications of political content.²⁹ The book, therefore, was the most important

25 See “O knizhnom golode,” *Bibliograficheskie izvestiia*, 1-2 (1917), 90.

26 See I. V. Vladislavlev, “Knizhnyi golod,” *Bibliograficheskii ezhemesiachnik*, 1 (1917), 5-10; “Knizhnoe oskudeniie,” *Vestnik literatury*, 6 (1919), 8; V. Kerzhentsev, “Knizhnyi golod,” *Izvestiia*, September 9, 1919; S. I. Mitskevich, “Propala kniga,” *Izvestiia*, December 1, 1920; N. A. Semashko, “Golod khlebnii i knizhnyi,” *Izvestiia*, August 4, 1921, etc.

27 Narodnyi Komissariat po prosveshcheniiu, *1917-oktiabr’ 1920: (Kratkii otchet)* (Moscow, 1920), 72. See on book shortages also: J. Brooks, “The Breakdown in the Production and Distribution of Printed Material,” in A. Gleason, P. Kenez, R. Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1989), 151-174.

28 See L. I. Emeliakh, *Istoricheskie predposylki preodoleniia religii v sovetskoii derevne* (Leningrad, 1975).

29 See P. Gurov, “Novaia biblioteka i zaprosy ee chitatelia,” *Pechat’ i revoliutsiia*, 7 (1922), 192.

instrument for the secularization of consciousness, the transition from a religious to a materialist worldview.

The key element of one's worldview now became knowledge. For example, one of the Red Army political workers of that time wrote that "the Red Army mass wants to know everything: what the earth, the sun and the stars are, how the earth and man happened, how the universe works, whether or not there is a god, what is Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, whether miracles are possible, about the relationships between church and state, religion and communism." Readers were interested in issues of spiritual and material culture, forms of government; they had many questions about the nature and objectives of the Soviet state, family and marriage; they wanted to know "how it will be in the future."³⁰ Consequently, the prestige afforded to the carrier of knowledge—the printed word—increased sharply.

The book undermined the foundations of outdated worldviews and became one of the most important values of the new one. The following lines by one of the proletarian poets vividly captures the moment of the "transition," when a person who was accustomed to conceptualizing reality in terms of religion now replaces religious faith with knowledge and books:

My temple is a library,
My book shelves—an iconostasis,
And the human mind—a Savior
Not Made By Hands.
Not a golden ark
For Mind outfit,
But ciphers, their letters aflame,
On a book cover...³¹

For people with a relatively high level of education and reading culture, this restructuring was accompanied by intensive reading of a wide variety of publications—from the social, political, and natural sciences to artistic and 'applied' (i.e. necessary in the everyday) work. However, a number of neophyte readers in the world of book culture, who had only just begun to go beyond the confined world of the rural community, were primarily interested in utilitarian literature. Valuable material for the characterization of such readers, who were in the 'transition' stage from oral culture to book culture, is provided by data from a questionnaire survey by the Red Army, conducted in 1920–1921 (more than 12 thousand profiles).³² Thirty-one percent of respondents were almost half-literate and had stayed in school for only one or two years. As a result, two-thirds of the respondents said they preferred to

³⁰ I. Rostov, "Prosveshchenie na fronte," *Politrabotnik*, 10 (1921), 5-10.

³¹ I. Loginov, "V biblioteke," *Pravda*, January 11, 1918.

³² See *Massovyi chitatel' i kniga* (Moscow, 1925). All the data on Red Army readers is quoted from this edition.

read themselves, and for the rest it was preferable to have a listening, or that both ways of getting acquainted with books were equivalent. A library worker of that time noted: “On the whole, we have before us in the Red Army libraries a novice reader who is not prepared, who not only cannot read in the exact sense of the word, but who has not yet learned to hold the book.”³³

Eighty percent of the interviewed Red Army men believed that they benefited from reading, which gave them a deeper knowledge of life in general or allowed them to acquire practical information on agriculture, handicrafts, etc.

Agricultural literature turned out to be the most preferred type of literature among the Red Army soldiers of peasant origin (32% of readers in this indicated group), since they intended to use the acquired knowledge for more rational land management upon returning home. Characteristic in this regard is a letter from one of the Red Army men to the *Novaia Derevnia* (*New Village*) magazine with a request to send him a book about the multi-field system:

When I entered the Red Army, I was completely illiterate, I could not even write a letter home, because I did not know all the letters, but now, as you can see, I am writing a letter to you here with my own hand, as I can and I will be able to [...]. One of these days I am going home to the village to destroy the three-field system. I will try to explain to my fellow villagers to the best of my ability the benefits of the multi-field and the harm of the three-field.³⁴

The above-mentioned “utilitarian” peasant approach to reading prevented, in part, the consumption of other types of literature. Nevertheless, 20% of Red Army soldiers of peasant origin preferred fiction, and 8% preferred political literature.

Some of the answers emphasized the ideological significance of reading, the possibility of using it in a new way to comprehend the surrounding reality (“In reading I find many useful things: 1) I got rid of the yoke of religion; 2) learn how to live a fair life”; “Reading gave me knowledge, for example, about the way we used to live and how we should live further”; “It taught me to understand the meaning of the surrounding life, acquainted with the people of old times, and this makes it possible to look in and forward: to make up some picture of the future”). Other answers emphasized the utilitarian importance of reading books (“in view of fertilizing the land for a new

³³ Ia. Kiperman, “Zadachi i sredstva bibliotечноi aktivnosti,” *Trudy I Vserossiiskogo s'ezda bibliotечноykh rabotnikov Krasnoi Armii i Flota (15—24 oktiabria 1920 g.)* (Moscow, 1922), 38.

³⁴ Quoted in V. P. Prozorov, “Chto krest'iane pishut o knige,” *Novaia derevnia*, II (1923), 77.

crop," "helping to keep a better farm," "learned from the book how to build a new farm," "for the most part reading benefited agriculture" and so on).

Reading was a powerful means of political influence—32% of respondents noted the influence of reading on their political views ("reading changed my political views, it put them on the right ways scientifically and consciously relate to the reality surrounding me"; "I used to read books, and they told me they didn't bring any benefit, now I've begun to read political books, newspapers—it's very beneficial"). Nevertheless, despite the clearly propagandistic and ideological nature of the survey, approximately 1.5% of respondents named religious books as their preference, and 1% named fairy-tales. Although both of these sections were not indicated in the questionnaire, they were written in by the readers themselves.

Among the most liked writers, Red Army soldiers cited well-known authors, above of all Lev Tolstoi ("writes truthfully," "enlightens the people," "a teacher of life," "writes about religion and truth," "encouraged people to love and brotherhood"), then Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin; such classics of Russian literature as Aleksandr Pushkin ("writes beautifully," "tells stories well," "it is written clearly"), Nikolai Gogol', Nikolai Nekrasov, Anton Chekhov, Ivan Turgenev; and among contemporary authors, Maksim Gor'kii (like him for "protecting the rights of the proletariat," "correctness of the image of people's life," "as more popular") and Dem'ian Bednyi (attracted by "his tententiousness," "for the criticism of topical problems," "writes lucidly and truthfully").

The most literate part of the rural population that was more readily engaged in reading tended to join the Red Army. It is also important to note that active political and educational work was carried out within the army, and that a developed network of libraries was at its disposal. Reading in the countryside was significantly less intensive, which was due to a lower level of literacy and a weaker base of reading materials. In 1923, 13.8% of peasants read newspapers and 13.1% read books. The time spent reading in this environment (on average per person) was a little over 1.6 hours per month.³⁵ On the reading practices of other social groups in this period we have much more limited information.

According to a survey in the cities, in 1922 45.9% of workers read newspapers, 41.0% read books and journals/magazines. The figures are slightly different among working women specifically: 40% read newspapers and 20% read books and journals/magazines.³⁶ On average, workers spent 10.2 hours on reading per month (that is, 6 times more than the peasants), and working women specifically—3.7 hours. A 1923 survey found that 64.2% of working families did not have books.³⁷ If we consider that the literacy rate

³⁵ See S. G. Strumilin, *Biudzhet vremeni russkogo rabocheho i krest'ianina v 1922-1923 godu* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1924), 103.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24, 26.

³⁷ See S. G. Strumilin, "Domashnii byt po inventarium," in *Idem, Izbrannye proizvedeniia*

among workers, according to the professional census of 1918, was 79.1% for men and 44.1% for women,³⁸ then it can be stated that a number of potential readers were not yet attracted to systematic reading during this period.

Elena Kabo, who studied the everyday life of workers between the years 1924 to 1926, notes that in this environment “the book is not used for recreation or entertainment. Reading here is still work, not quite familiar, sometimes hard, but necessary for life and knowledge.”³⁹ Attention to the intellectual function of reading is also evidenced by the data of a questionnaire survey conducted in 1921 in the Armavir workers’ library. It was found that 70% of subscribers read for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and only 30% (among which students and employees prevailed) for entertainment.⁴⁰

A questionnaire survey conducted in early 1919 on the everyday life and living conditions of the workers of the town of Mtsensk, Oryol Province showed that “the young worker is greedy for enlightening reading. He has a lot of brochures, flying sheets and newspapers in his hands.”⁴¹ In 1921, socio-political literature accounted for a quarter of all regularly issued books in the libraries of the Komsomol clubs of Petrograd.⁴² In the mass libraries of the Kostroma province, the reading of socio-political literature was only 0.1% in 1917, and in 1922 it was already 4%.

Fiction was actively read along with political literature. Describing the readership of 1920, contemporaries noted that “fiction is easier to read than a scientific book, they buy it more readily, it appeals to a wider reading mass.”⁴³ For example, in the aforementioned Armavir library, readers most often asked for the books of Fedor Dostoevskii, Lev Tolstoi, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Victor Hugo, Aleksandr Amfiteatrov, Ivan Turgenev, Anton Chekhov, Maksim Gor’kii, Dmitrii Mamin-Sibiriak, Grigorii Danilevskii, Ivan Goncharov, Herbert Wells, Vladimir Korolenko, Aleksei Pisemskii, Aleksandr Pushkin. and others. It was also noted that readers “turn to such authors who inspire them to fight, to support the revolution” and that the workers’ demands were more serious than those of other social groups.⁴⁴ However, there is also evidence of a countervailing trends. For instance, in 1918-1919 at the Prechistenskii workers’ courses (Moscow), workers “in fiction demanded Pinkerton, Jacolliot, Amfiteatrov, Verbitskaia,”⁴⁵ that is,

(Moscow, 1964), vol. 3, 268.

38 See *Gramotnost' v Rossii* (Moscow, 1922), 45.

39 E. O. Kabo, *Ocherki rabocheho byta: Opyt monograficheskogo obsledovaniia domashnego byta* (Moscow, 1928), vol. 1, 191.

40 See Gurov, *Novaia biblioteka i zaprosy ee chitatelia*, 194.

41 Report quoted in E. G. Gimpel'son, *Sovetskii rabochii klass 1918-1920 gg.* (Moscow, 1974), 330.

42 See N. B. Lebina, *Rabochaia molodezh' Leningrada: Trud i sotsial'nyi oblik. 1921-1925* (Leningrad, 1932), 129.

43 E. Khersonskaia, “Kak chitat' belletristiku,” *Obshchee delo*, 5 (1920), 9.

44 See Gurov, *Novaia biblioteka i zaprosy ee chitatelia*, 198-200.

45 *Istoriia bibliotechnogo dela v SSSR: Dokumenty i materialy. 1918-1920 gg.* (Moscow, 1975),

adventure literature and books by authors who wrote about the acute problems of sexual relations.

The heightened interest of the broad working masses in political literature, as well as an correspondingly oriented publishing strategy, determined the general picture of reading during these years. However, this does not mean that there were no other groups who differed in their attitude towards books. The press noted an unhealthy craving of the bourgeoisie for the old classics.⁴⁶ Representatives of the opposition-minded social strata (former nobles, the bourgeoisie, a significant part of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia) read books by pre-revolutionary writers, moving away from the unpleasant and dangerous Soviet reality into a more harmonious and humane world of the past. Moreover, educated readers paid extra attention to the culture of the publishing world. When the exhibition "The Fine Book in the Past" was organized in Moscow in 1918, the reviewer frankly admitted in a newspaper article that "it is always pleasant to look at a good old book, but now that the book has generally been destroyed, now that the book has become godlessly expensive and scruffy, the pleasure of contemplating the exhibited [books] grows more profound and acquires a tinge of dreary env."⁴⁷ In our opinion, the revitalization of bibliophile societies and the increase in the number of bibliophile publications in the post-revolutionary period are connected with this nostalgic attitude. However, actual, living *representatives* of such an attitude to books were very few. For example, in 1921, the circulation of the magazine *Sredi kollektionerov* (*Among collectors*), which contained materials not only about books, but also about painting, applied art, etc., did not exceed 500 copies.

Thus, in the early Soviet years, the readers' milieu underwent a significant transformation. This was due to a number of reasons: the Civil War ended and the socio-political situation stabilized; with the beginning of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the situation in the economy improved and domestic problems (food provisions, fuel, clothing, etc.) were not so acute; literacy rates increased; a new, young generation already emerged in the early Soviet years. The readership now consisted primarily of workers and peasants. 'New readers' were characterized by new attitudes towards the book and book culture. The prestige of the printed word in this milieu was high, but the low level of education and general culture caused a peculiar combination of conflicting tendencies (e.g. a utilitarian-practical approach to the book, the growing popularity of fiction, etc.).

Gradually, the authorities began to take issue with the Russian population's desire for the printed word, for the independent formation of a new vision of the world, for a new worldview; they feared that this desire might

196; also See I. K. "Nat Pinkerton – korol' syshchikov," *Rabochii mir*, 11 (1918), 40-42.

46 G. Martinson, "O literature," *Izvestiia*, January 16, 1919.

47 "Khronika," *Bibliotechnye izvestiia*, 1 (1918), 61-62.

run counter to their own goals of unifying the population's thinking, narrowing its ideological horizon, making it absorb the Marxist worldview in its vulgarized form, and compelling it to adapt to urgent political tasks. By the mid-1920s, a solid infrastructure in the form of a significant number of libraries, working clubs, newspapers, and magazines/journals and books of a corresponding ideological orientation were already created for these tasks, and a large corps of ideological workers and propagandists had been formed. However, during the period of the NEP a large number of private publishing houses appeared in the country, and censorship somewhat weakened. Readers had an opportunity to make some choices within the framework of the book publishing repertoire. Given this situation, all kinds of educational institutions and libraries were launched in the 1920s (especially in the second half of the decade) in order to intensely study readers and thereby increase the effectiveness of education and propaganda. Interest in the 'voice of the reader,' as well as the theoretical foundations in the study of the reader—including the very concept of the reader itself—formed among the populist intelligentsia and played a crucial role in shaping the new reader. This intelligentsia, which saw in the revolution the possibility for expanding its influence on the masses, had much experience working with and studying the mass reader. It possessed a conceptualization of the reader (i.e. someone who is being shaped intellectually through the act of reading) that dovetailed well with the needs of the time—and also possessed no small amount of the classic 'intelligentsia precariousness' that was ultimately rejected by the more rigid and dogmatic authorities.

The ideological orientation of these studies affected both the focus of research and the tools it employed (the selection of respondents, the choice of indicators, the formulation of questions, etc.).⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the material collected in these studies (taken critically) allows us to highlight in more detail reading practices in Russia during the second half of the 1920s (since by the early 1930s these studies were curtailed, and from the mid-1930s discontinued and resumed only in the mid-1960s).

2

Let us begin our characterization of readers of the second half of the 1920s with the peasants, who made up the bulk of the country's population and whose reading habits were more stable (whereas the urban reading milieu is more variegated and its scale of values is extremely dynamic; the

⁴⁸ For review and assessment of the methodology and validity of the results of these studies See B. V. Bank, "Iz istorii izucheniia chitatelei v SSSR," *Sovetskii chitatel'* (Moscow, 1968); J. Brooks, "Studies of the Reader in the 1920s," *Russian History*, 9, 2–3 (1982), 187–202; A. Gerasimova, "Vzlet i padenie: ob izuchenii chitatel'skikh otzyvov v 1920-kh gg.," in *Russkaia filologiya: sbornik nauchnykh rabot molodykh filologov* (Tartu, 2018), 221–236.

same can be said of the young readership, which is characterized by greater instability and educational impacts from the outside). A survey of village readers in the Leningrad province in 1926 showed that the rural poor borrowed more popular science books than fiction books from libraries (the first—52.3%, the second—47.7%). At the same time, the main interest in popular science literature was associated with the acquisition of practical knowledge. Such books were borrowed by 53.8% of respondents; however, a considerable portion of the books (38.5%) also concerned the social and political sciences.⁴⁹ This fact was also noted in research on book purchases. M. T. Slukhovskii wrote that “the overwhelming majority of peasant inquiries testifies to the utilitarian approach to the book [...]. The book is primarily for work, for production,” while political literature came in second (16%), and the share of fiction was only 5.7%.⁵⁰ In rural libraries of the Leningrad province, almost all readers turned to Russian literature (88.8%) and only 11.2% to foreign literature, which significantly distinguishes the rural reading tendencies from urban ones. Among Russian books, modern literature prevailed over older literature: it was read by twice as many readers (67.5% vs. 32.5%, respectively). Attitudes towards modern fiction were quite serious, as indicated by negative reviews of modern fiction: 44% of readers pointed to the frivolity or triviality of the plot (“Windbag. Did not like,” “Bad. Rubbish,” “Did not like it at all. We know it by heart,” “Nonsense. As it is it's impossible to understand”); 27% of readers pointed to the author's inability to “engage” the reader, complaining of the text's monotony, flatness of presentation (“Monotonous,” “Boring,” “Nothing interesting”); 19% expressed telling “ideological objections” to the works: “Sick and tired of commissars!,” “I do not like to read the present books: there is no truth, everyone lies. All ‘the city cares about the poor,’ but it is not true—they write not what they have, but what they would like to have happened”). Most popular was modern Russian fiction.⁵¹ Researchers noted the discrepancy between the approaches of critics and the peasants: “The peasant completely disagrees with our qualifications of renowned [writers]. He does not approve of their approach to the topic, nor of the language, nor the interpretation of the material; he shies away from their stylistic delights; they do not understand at all, in any way, the village they portray.”⁵²

Contemporary foreign fiction, as we have noted, occupied a rather small place in the reading in the Revolutionary-era village. It is remarkable, however, how the “social novel” changed the structure of values, bringing new “class parameters” into this fiction. For example, in reviews of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, there were the statements such as “It's curious how educated countries make fun of oppressed people,” and “The

49 B. Bank, A. Vilenkin, *Derevenskaia bednota i biblioteka* (Leningrad, 1928), 15, 42.

50 M. I. Slukhovskii, *Kniga i derevnia* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1928), 20, 27.

51 B. Bank, A. Vilenkin, *Derevenskaia bednota i biblioteka*, 20, 22, 26-32, 39-40, 91.

52 Slukhovskii, *Kniga i derevnia*, 106.

capitalists' making fun of their slaves is described really well."

In terms of the number of books issued to the readers, the most popular were Aleksandr Neverov, Maksim Gor'kii, Aleksei Tolstoi, Pavel Dorokhov, Aleksandr Serafimovich, Al. Altaev, Semen Pod'iachev, Pavel Loginov-Lesniak, Ivan Volnov (from modern Russian writers); Korolenko, Danilevskii, Pisemskii, Chekhov, Dostoevskii, Turgenev (from pre-revolutionary authors); and Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Erckmann-Chatrian, Hugo (from the foreign ones).

Younger readers showed less interest in applied literature and greater interest in fiction, with the latter predominating over the former (57% to 42.6%). There was greater interest in foreign (18.4%) and modern Russian literature (72.3%) in this readership. Researchers noted that "about half of all peasant youth using the library pursue the topic that interests them and, not limiting themselves to reading a single book on this topic, systematically return to it, trying to grasp it comprehensively and as widely as possible," and that one-fifth of the respondents in general read in a planned manner and for the purpose of self-education.⁵³

Overall, interest in reading in the village was quite low. By the late 1920s, according to Glavpolitprosvet, only 2.7% of the rural population of the Russian Federation were members of a library.⁵⁴ The main problems here were the low level of literacy and a lack of interest in reading.⁵⁵

In many respects, the situation in the city was different, which was mainly due to changes in the working environment. There were about a million reader-workers in the country, and according to the statistics of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, as of March 1, 1926, there were one and a half million regular readers (subscribers) in all trade union libraries.⁵⁶

Fiction prevailed in these readers' preferences. A survey of workers' reading, conducted in 1929 in Leningrad libraries, showed that it accounted for 60.5% of all books borrowed, and that two thirds of non-fiction books consisted of political propaganda literature.⁵⁷ Summarizing the results of numerous studies, library scholars concluded that "the reading and loaning of fiction in all libraries holds pride of place."⁵⁸

What did the worker of the mid-1920s read? Let us turn to the materials of the study of the factory readers of Kolomna near Moscow in 1925. At the

53 B. Bank, A. Vilenkin, *Krest'ianskaia molodezh' i kniga (opyt issledovaniia chitatel'skikh interesov)* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1929), 19, 29, 31, 106, 192.

54 "V bibliotechnyi pokhod," *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 6, 4 (1929), 3.

55 On peasant readers see a book by L. I. Petrovicheva based on sociology of reading in 1920s: L. I. Petrovicheva, *Sovetskii krest'ianin — chitatel'* (Minsk, 1981); also see R. Robin, "Popular Literature of the 1920s: Russian Peasants as Readers," in S. Fitzpatrick, A. Rabinowitch, R. Stites (eds.), *Russia in the Era of NEP* (Bloomington, 1991).

56 See A. Bek, "Problema izucheniia chitatelia," *Na literaturnom postu*, 5/6 (1926), 23-24.

57 B. Bank, A. Vilenkin, *Rabochii chitatel' v biblioteke* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1930), 11-12.

58 A. Kukharskii, *Prigovor chitatelia. Otsenka khudozhestvennoi literatury sovremennyyi chitatelem. Opyt issledovaniia i nabliudeniia* (Leningrad, 1928), 4-5.

Kolomna Metal Works there was a library of 10,000 books to which more than 1,700 adult workers were subscribed. First of all, it is worth noting their interest in fiction: out of 7,260 books taken in one month, fiction accounts for 5,317. Of the fiction, the books by Dem'ian Bedniy and Aleksei Novikov-Priboi were the most read; the factory intelligentsia mostly read translations. Classical literature was read mainly by workers 50 years and older (Pisemskii was the most popular), although young workers also asked for classics. The novels by Aleksandr Sheller-Mikhailov were most popular among young women. We note a strong interest in Jack London and Upton Sinclair, and the social novels of Émile Zola. Of the Russian classics, Lev Tolstoi was the most popular, followed by Turgenev and Dostoevskii. The modern writers in greatest demand were Gor'kii and Serafimovich. From the 'new literature' (in descending order of demand)—Neverov, Lidia Seifullina, Iuri Libedinskii, Vsevolod Ivanov, Leonid Leonov, Dmitrii Furmanov, and Fedor Gladkov. The most frequently read poets were Nikolai Nekrasov and Ivan Nikitin, and among the modern ones—Sergei Esenin, Aleksandr Bezymenskii, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Aleksandr Zharov, Ivan Doronin. The study showed that the factory youth read little, especially the Komsomol activists.⁵⁹

Per the survey, it should be noted that the library “has almost no adventure literature, revolutionary romance. Ticky-tacky pinkertonism was withdrawn from the library [...]. There is no memoir literature at all.”⁶⁰ Clearly, had these categories of books (i.e. adventure and memoir) existed in the library, it would have been a different picture, as they were the most the most popular genres of mass literature.

The picture changes if we turn to the more robust statistical materials from a major 'Europeanized' city. In 1926, the Odessa Office of Political Education investigated the book forms of 13 factory and club libraries from October 1926 to February 1927.⁶¹ The data considered only those writers whose books were loaned during this time in all 13 libraries at least 100 times (at the same time it was taken into account how many books of these authors were in circulation). About twenty thousand book loans over 4 months were analyzed.

The survey showed that interest in translated literature strongly prevailed over interest in original (Russian and Ukrainian) books, 57.7% vs. 42.3%, with American writers on top. In Western literature, first place was occupied by Jack London's books and Upton Sinclair's social novels, followed by books written by Herbert Wells, Heinrich Mann, Claude Farrère, and Victor Hugo.

⁵⁹ See A. Isbakh, “Chto chitaet kolomnskii rabochii,” *Na literaturnom postu*, 2 (1926), 36-37.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶¹ The data was published in L. Kogan, “Rabochii-chitatel' i khudozhestvennaia literatura,” *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 4 (1927), 41-52.

Regarding Russian literature, three-fourths of the demand was for modern literature and one-fourth was for classical. Of the contemporary Russian writers, in the first place (60.3%) were the so-called “fellow travellers” (Gor’kii, Il’ia Erenburg, Seifullina, Vikentii Veresaev, Vladislav Shishkov, Aleksei Tolstoi, Boris Lavrenev, Panteleimon Romanov, Vsevolod Ivanov, and Isaak Babel’), then “proletarian writers” (39.3%: Neverov, Gladkov, Serafimovich, Libedinskii). Last were members of “LEF” (not including Maikovskii), constituting only 0.4%. The Russian classics were represented by (in descending order of demand) Turgenev, Lev Tolstoi, Korolenko, Nikolai Gogol’, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, and Pushkin.

Interestingly, the 1929 study showed that in the book shopping habits of metalworkers, fiction was not the most popular, but rather socio-political literature (with a third of the total books purchased). Much technical literature (instruction manuals, textbooks, etc.) was also bought (17.3%), and the proportion of fiction only slightly exceeded a quarter of all books purchased.⁶²

Within the confines of workers’ reading demands in the 1920s, one can see a sharp break reflecting the intensive urbanizing process that transformed the country. The workers’ milieu of the 1920s was comprised of both “established workers” and yesterday’s peasants. In addition, during this period there is a noticeable “rejuvenation” of the working reader, and at the same time a qualitative change in the literature itself. The simultaneous influence of so many factors, both intra-literary and extra-literary, could not but lead (and indeed led) to a significant change in the structure of reading in the working milieu.

According to the results of the “Old and new book” questionnaire (with more than 2500 responses processed), conducted among workers by the Leningrad Regional Committee of the Metalworkers’ Union in 1928, the “new” literature was read twice as much as the “old.” In addition, a significant age difference among readers was revealed: older workers were familiar with classical literature twice as much as young people. But another feature of the readers’ demands also came to light: “The most well-known and widely read books are read the least.”⁶³ Gogol’, for instance, was in first place in terms of fame, but among the most widely read authors, he was close to being last—37th. Among all contemporary authors, Dem’ian Bednyi was the most famous, but his books were not in demand in working libraries. The authors of the questionnaire explained the popularity of the “first proletarian poet” by the fact that people were “reading his works in newspapers.”⁶⁴

Among contemporary authors, books by Aleksei Chapygin, Aleksander Fadeev, Gladkov, Seifullina, Ivan Evdokimov, Lavrenev, Furmanov,

62 B. Bank, A. Vilenkin, *Rabochii pokupatel’ knigi* (Leningrad, 1930), 22.

63 G. Brylov, N. Lebedev, V. Sakharov, “Populiarnost’ literatury sredi rabochikh,” *Krasnyi bibliotekar’*, 4 (1929), 54.

64 *Ibid.*, 55.

Serafimovich, Neverov, Nikolai Liashko, and Babel were most read.⁶⁵ E. O. Kabo, who studied workers' reading habits in the mid-1920s, concluded that workers

feel an acute need to read not the great masters of Russian literature, but simple and understandable teachers of life who can answer the burning questions of modern times. That is why, of all the fiction writers, according to our observations, Gorky enjoyed the greatest popularity. This is also the reason for the success of Gladkov, Neverov and other contemporaries.⁶⁶

To understand the nature of the changes in reader demand, it is necessary to address the problem of motivation. Important material was collected in 1926-1927 in Rostov-on-Don, when, during workers' reading group conferences, questionnaires on the topic "Why read fiction?" were distributed. Typical answers were: "Because it is not boring," "Because it vividly describes and reflects human life," "You can find a lot about the past in it," "Just to kill time." In terms of percentages, the questionnaires gave the following picture: in first place, one read fiction "to replenish knowledge, because fiction sometimes provides more knowledge than science" (43%); then "for entertainment" (31%); then in order "to understand the meaning of life" (13.8%); then "in order to develop speech" (9.5%); and "for rest and escape from their difficult life into a life of beautiful dreams" (2.7%). In general, "conscious reading" accounted for 56.8% of the readers' activity, "entertainment"—33.7%, and "development"—9.5%.⁶⁷ As we see, the data on the motivation for reading testifies above all to the status of reading in the minds of reader-workers; however, the data do not answer the question of why one needs to read and how precisely to answer the question about one's motivation for reading.

A significant shift to 'conscious reading' (counter to the regular reader's love of reading itself, in which time spent with an interesting book gives him pleasure) indicates a shift towards the 'correct answers' that were expected from the readers by propagandists, librarians, educators, and, ultimately, the authorities behind them. There is no doubt that the percentage of "conscious readers" would be significantly higher if the survey were not anonymous.

Of particular interest among readers of the 1920s are the working youth. In the first place, it is the young reader who quantitatively dominates in all data groups, and in the second, it is this generation of readers (from 16 to 23) that can be defined as the first proper generation of Soviet readers.

⁶⁵ See Brylov, Lebedev, Sakharov, *Populiarnost' literatury sredi rabochikh*, 56.

⁶⁶ Kabo, *Ocherki rabochego byta*, 191.

⁶⁷ The data was published in K. Boris, "Chto pokazal opyt chitatel'skikh konferentsii v Rostove na Donu," *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, II (1927).

Within the confines of young workers' reading habits, fiction amounted, according to a survey conducted by Glavpolitprosvet in 1927 in 23 cities of Russia, from 70 to 80% of all reading material,⁶⁸ whereas the scientific literature accounted for only 20-30% of demand. We note a low percentage of scientific literature, of which only a third was "social science."⁶⁹ At the same time, strictly among working-class youth, there was a tendency towards greater interest in modern literature among men and, conversely, to "old literature" among women. Moreover, the "old literature" did not include the classics, which with age disappears from the reading preferences of working youth (at the age of 19 it is 37%, and at the age of 23 it is only 23%).

A survey conducted by the Moscow City Council of Trade Unions in 1927-1928 gives a more detailed picture of the working youth readership in the 1920s. Over the course of this survey, conducted in 58 of the largest trade union libraries in Moscow, more than 4,000 responses from readers between the ages of 16 and 23 were processed.⁷⁰ It turned out that 70% of the total demand was for fiction, of which only 15% were from the classics, while translated and modern Russian literature each occupied 40% of that share. Among the working youth, the most widely read authors were Esenin, Lev Gumilevskii, and Romanov.

This worried the leadership of Politprosvet:

The common feature of all young people reading fiction is the quest for entertaining reading. We think that this is not a completely healthy inclination and one that needs to be corrected. On the other hand, our proletarian writers need to think about this and to give the reader artistic images of the new man, building a new life in an entertaining, captivating way.⁷¹

However, this 'social order' was never fulfilled by proletarian writers. It can be said that the reading habits of working youth after the 1920s remained essentially unchanged. The most popular writers since the first decade of the Revolution included Fadeev, Gladkov, and Serafimovich, and as time passed, the more this fossilised pantheon of canonical Soviet authors diverged from the popular demand.⁷²

Although worker-readers attracted general interest, and although the educational efforts were primarily directed at them, they did not constitute the

68 The data was published in L. B., "Chto chitaet rabochaia molodezh'," *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 4 (1928), 42-43.

69 A. Liubimova, "Na bibliotechnom fronte neblagopoluchno," *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 4 (1931), 15.

70 The data was published in V. Gorovits, "Chto chitaet rabochaia molodezh'," *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 4 (1929), 39-51.

71 *Ibid.*, 45-46.

72 On workers readers see L. I. Petrovicheva, *Sovetskii rabochii – chitatel'* (Minsk, 1978).

majority in the 1920s, not only among the 'readership' of the whole country, but also among the urban readers.

The urban readership was exceptionally variegated, although the bulk of the adult patrons of the city libraries were students—of universities, various courses, technical, working and party schools, etc.—who accounted for up to 60% of urban readers. They read almost exclusively technical literature, science textbooks, and other academic materials “in accordance with the [academic] program,” “for credit,” etc. Only 15-20% of the readers of city libraries were young working people not associated with schools of various types. Most popular in this group were books by Gor'kii, London, *The Gadfly* by Ethel Lilian Voinich, *Spartacus* by Raffaello Giovagnoli, Henri Barbusse, the science fiction novels by Wells and Aleksandr Bogdanov, novels by Sinclair, Bernhard Kellermann, Zola, Hugo, and Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii.

The intelligentsia, as the research shows, remained unsatisfied with the district library, and happening upon it, these readers snapped up everything new—journals, magazines, the latest works of “fashionable contemporary authors,” be they Boris Pilniak or Il'ia Erenburg. A district library's core set of patrons was more likely to be a large group of elderly readers. The old urban intelligentsia was alien to the new literature, did not recognize the new art for the most part, and merely tried to conform to the 'new cultural life.' Its representatives read and re-read classics, old magazines, humour; for the readers of this category, “modern” literature ended with Knut Hamsun. Finally, the last category of readers of urban district libraries is, in the terminology of those years, 'urban semi-intelligentsia and urban philistines.' They read

almost exclusively fiction [...] with a particular inclination [...] to look for romance in all its varieties, like old historical novels, high-ranking, resplendent heroes (counts, princes), lack of ideology, and mysticism. These are library grave diggers, book hyenas. If you haven't purged the fiction from your library yet, rely on their instincts for any 'carrion,' as they ask for the exact books that need to be removed: Verbitskaia, Ponson-du-Terraille, Salias, Vsevolod Solov'ev, Paul de Kock, prince Golitsyn, Breshko-Breshkovskii, prince Meshcherskii—these are their requests.⁷³

We now turn to more detailed statistical information on the adult readership of the city. Of considerable interest in this regard are the materials of Moscow Province Educational Department for the years 1926-1927. It represented the first coordinated, methodologically consistent research

⁷³ N. Frid'eva, “Sovremennyye zaprosy gorodskogo chitatelia i aktivnost' biblioteki,” *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 1 (1924), 53.

into city libraries of different types, carried out by the Glavpolitprosvet and the Moscow Library Association.⁷⁴ According to this large-scale survey, the greatest reading activity was observed among young readers aged 16 to 25 (who accounted for two thirds of the total number of subscribers). But the older the readers were, the more independent their demand was, the more diverse their interests were, and the more interest they had in fiction. Students accounted for almost half of the audience (44.0%), workers—just over a quarter, and the others—16.5%.

Both in the group of students and in adult groups, London, Gor'kii, and Lev Tolstoi were among the most widely read (as well as, among adults, Sinclair). By gender, in all age groups over 20 years old, men made up 75% of readers, and women—25%.

Here we should take into account the historical background behind these data: the migration patterns in the first decade after the Revolution led to the erosion of the traditional urban reading milieu, which was the result of the new authorities' purposeful policy of narrowing the traditional cultural aura of the city. Urban cultural infrastructure had undergone a sharp deformation. This was partly due to the emigration of the cultural elite and the emergence to the fore of new social groups, and partly due to the general reorientation of the readers. An important role in this process belongs to the purging of library collections: by the end of the 1920s, for the traditional reader of the city library there was practically nothing to read in it—a significant part of the book fund was removed from circulation. Therefore, there was a sharp decrease in the share of traditional urban readers from the “old intelligentsia.” This reading group, formerly the most numerous in the cities, was now left with only personal book collections, which fuelled its reading needs throughout the 1930s and mostly perished during the war.

Thus, by the end of the 1920s urban youth—consisting of petty officials, Soviet officials, employees of the party and Soviet apparatus, etc.—represented an overwhelming quantitative majority of readers. Due to this change, the urban reading environment of the 1920s, for the most part, was characterized by the instability of readers' interests (which is generally characteristic of young people), here reinforced by the new urban residents' marginal social status (e.g. workers or graduates from the Workers' Schools) who had recently moved from the village to the city.

Let's take a closer look at women's reading habits. Let us compare the village women's reading interests with the preferences of the urban female readership. First of all, the ‘sympathy’ of the rural readers for the “new woman,” in comparison with the city, merits attention. The younger the readers, the more enthusiastic their support for the ‘heroine social activist’: “It is interesting that the women started working in defence of their rights. All

⁷⁴ The data was published in: L. Perepletchikova, “Opyt izucheniia vzroslogo chitatelia v moskovskikh bibliotekakh,” *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 7 (1927), 28-48.

women need to assert their rights" (18 years old); "I liked the book because it describes something new and communicates well how peasant women love Lenin" (20 years old); "I liked it because Malasha is a social worker" (18 years old); "I liked the fact that Mariia became strong, that she freed herself from the obstacles that used to constrict her, that she began working in the village soviet" (17 years old); "I liked the book. These are women with strong character who are fighting for the rights of women, for the interests of working people, for Soviet power" (19 years old).⁷⁵

It is interesting that such liberalism and progressivism regarding the "women's issue" among young peasant readers existed alongside sincere conservatism when it comes to assessing social phenomena: "I do not like it. I do not like to read about the revolution. I'm tired, and they don't give you a rest even with the book" (17 years old); "Did not like it. If they would live peacefully without war and fratricide, we would not suffer so much economically" (17 years old); "It's well written, but I don't like to read about war. Our life is hard enough" (19 years old).⁷⁶ It combines a peasant understanding of 'stability,' 'order,' 'well-being,' and rejection of 'turmoil' and 'fratricide' with a new understanding of the 'women's issue' that came from the city (often, though not exclusively, communicated by means of literature). It is this circumstance that highlights the 'feminine perspective' on literature; otherwise, women's reviews are no different from the men's.

The urban reading milieu was much more diverse. According to a broad survey of women's reading habits in Odessa libraries held in 1926-1927, the main groups of readers are women workers, employees, and housewives.⁷⁷ Each of these groups had its own specific features, both in terms of the intensity and structure of their reading practices. Housewives read the most intensively (on average 19.2 books in six months), then employees (18.9), and then, in last place, workers (8.8). Interest in reading fiction prevailed over translated literature. Interest in modern literature was highest among female workers and lowest among housewives. In regards to modern literature read by working women, "proletarian writers" commanded 45% of that share, and "fellow travellers" 55%; for employees, "proletarian literature" accounted for only 15% of modern literature read, with 85% for "fellow travellers." Finally, among the housewives "proletarian writers" occupied only 8% of the modern fiction read, while "fellow travellers literature" accounted for 92%.

If the woman workers read Neverov, Serafimovich, Gladkov, Libedinskii (from "proletarian writers"), Gor'kii, Seifullina, Erenburg, Veresaev, Lavrenev (from the "fellow travellers"), then employees from "proletarian

⁷⁵ Quoted in Bank, Vilenkin, *Krest'ianskaia molodezh' i kniga*, 62-64.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁷⁷ The data was published in L. Kogan, "Chto chitaiut zhenshchiny," *Krasnyi bibliotekar'*, 6 (1927), 18-28.

writers” read only Serafimovich and Gladkov, and housewives read Gladkov only.

Housewives were the most “apolitical” in their reading interests, while workers were more conservative than even rural readers in terms of the ‘women’s issue’ (“the most striking female image in the novel *Cement* [*Tsement*], Dasha Chumalova, was often met with a disapproval from female workers who did not wish to see in her either a heroine nor the founder of the new life”⁷⁸), not to mention the housewives, for whom the ‘women’s question’ was not at all essential (and probably too social for their tastes).

If the process of reorienting a new adult reader took a long time in the post-revolutionary period—since forming of a new kind of adult readership required taking into account existing library funds and breaking well-established reading interests and habits while still reckoning with the readers’ existing preferences—then, comparatively speaking, children’s reading was utterly transformed after the revolution. Because of library collection purges, the texts available for children’s reading were altered dramatically. This increased attention to children’s reading materials was partly due to the fact that children’s libraries were part of the system of the People’s Commissariat of Education; consequently, they were supervised by Nadezhda Krupskaja, who, as Deputy Commissar, was at that moment “laying the foundations” of the new Soviet pedagogy. The new authorities rightly saw the children as its future base, and the project of bring them up properly was directed primarily at them. If adults needed to be re-educated and their established views needed to be reckoned with, then the children turned out to be practically defenceless before these new educational measures, which were carried out both through public organizations and through the school. It was here that fiction played an essential ideological role.

Consider the range of children’s reading. Let us turn to the materials sent by sixty children’s libraries to Glavpolitprosvet from various places of the USSR—from Leningrad to Tashkent, from Kharkov to Kazan, from Odessa to Saratov.⁷⁹ The survey of 1926-1927 was as diverse and widespread as possible. It was conducted on the basis of written and oral reviews of children, live readings, and collective discussions, taking into account demand, recommendations by the children themselves, questionnaires about favourite books, individual conversations, observations on exhibitions, records in albums of opinions about books, readers’ diaries, works of literary circles, and finally, reader forms.

The general report revealed the following picture (the lists are given in decreasing order of demand):

- boys’ favourite topics are: adventure and travel, civil war and revolution, technology, “what and how to do it yourself”;

⁷⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁹ The data was published in *Krasnyi bibliotekar*, 8 (1927).

- girls' favourite themes are: everyday life, 'compassion';
- general themes are: 'fairy tales,' 'animals,' 'humor';
- boys' favourite authors are: Jules Verne, Mayne Reid, Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Sergei Auslender, Sergei Grigor'ev;
- girls' favourite authors are: Charles Dickens, Louisa Alcott, Elisabeth Werner, Vera Zhelikhovskaia;
- common favourite books are: *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher-Stowe, *The Prince and the Pauper* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Twain, *Murzuk* by Vitalii Bianki, *Children of Captain Grant* by Verne, *With a bag after death (S meshkom za smert'iu)* by Grigor'ev, *Tashkent is the city of bread (Tashkent gorod khlebn-yi)* by Neverov, *The Leatherstocking Tales* by F. Cooper.

It worth noting that different social strata exhibited demands for different kinds of books. Thus, fairy tales represented 27.5% of all reading among children of workers and artisans, whereas among children of clerks it was only 15.7%. While travel and adventure literature amounted to 31.7% of all reading among children of clerks, but only 21.5% among children of workers and artisans. The only thing that united 'children's reading' in the 1920s was the school, and consequently, demands made on school curricula acquired outsized importance for state institutions.

The schools' instructional materials were completely different from the students' independent reading preferences. In fact, the school (with varying degrees of efficiency) did everything to break the latter. Indeed, 40% of 'school literature' was 'socio-political literature' (which occupied up to 5% in independent children's demand), but adventure and travel literature in the 'school demand' occupied merely 1.5%, with no fairy tales represented at all.

As we see, books recommended by the school did not at all correspond to the independent needs of young readers. Already in the mid-1920s the Soviet school had shown its revolutionary nature in its desire to alter the usual children's reading habits. It succeeded and children's habits began to change, although at some point the school was forced to abandon its revolutionary extremism and take into account the specifics of children's reading—even if it was unable to fully account for the psychology of typical children. This was partly due to instructors focusing on pedagogy at the expense of their pupils' psychology, and partly to the fact that the Soviet school was ideologically overdetermined.

Non-library reading occupied a significant share in the general reading habits of children. According to a survey of one and a half thousand children conducted by the Kiev Association of Children's Library Workers in 1926, before joining the library, 65% of the new "young readers" procured books through means outside of the library system, while 34% did not have any books in their homes and took them from their friends. As it turned out, as a result of such "uncontrolled reading," up to 80% in non-library

reading was occupied by literature published before the revolution, and only 20% was dedicated “new literature.” The most serious problem was that children read “harmful literature”: names like Lidiia Charskaia, Klavdiia Lukashevich, Nadezhda Lukhmanova, Daniil Mordovtsev, Vera Novitskaia, Sofia Segur, Ol’ga Rogova and other books constantly appeared in the questionnaires long after they were withdrawn even from adult libraries. The survey’s conclusion sounded like an indictment:

More than 50% of the books indicated in the questionnaire make for an obsolete, anti-artistic reading habit completely unsuitable for children’s reading, and if we take only literature read by girls, this figure will increase to almost 70% [...] Outside of the library system, we raise our children on a very narrow and very harmful corpus of books.⁸⁰

Of course, in these conditions, the children’s library increasingly acquired the character of a pedagogical institution. Moreover, the institution was extremely rigid. The child was completely dependent on the library holdings, and independent demand was reduced to almost zero; the librarian completely determined the circulation of reading materials in accordance with the goals of this ‘educational work.’

More successfully than any other kind of library, the children’s library achieved the pedagogical model which was the basis of the broader Soviet ‘library construction.’ “The main task of the children’s library is to educate the reader. Therefore, all its work should be pedagogical [...] Political work should not be a separate component of the children’s library, but rather the point of view from which all the work is being done and should be organically incorporated into it” instructed the journal *Krasnyi bibliotekar’* (*Red Librarian*) in 1924, asserting that ‘young Leninists in the library should feel like knights of communism, “whose weapon is the book.”’⁸¹

The final word on pedagogical rationales for the development of children’s libraries occurred during the All-Russian Conference of Children’s Librarians in 1928. The principles of ‘restructuring’ children’s libraries were specified here. Thus, it was found that “filtered in certain way, a library can influence the evolution of readers’ interests, contributing to their switching in the desired direction.” (For example, as a result of this ‘filtering’ there was an “evolution of demand in girls—an increase in demand for adventure at the expense of fairy tales.”) Among the main issues discussed during the conference was the question of “organizing the reading milieu” (i.e. about the actual subordination of the library to the “plans for educational work” of

⁸⁰ A. Margolina, “Formirovanie chitatel’skikh navykov u detei i podrostkov,” *Krasnyi bibliotekar’*, 1 (1928), 42.

⁸¹ I. Zhelobovskii, “K voprosu o politicheskoi rabote v detskoj biblioteke,” *Krasnyi bibliotekar’*, 4/5 (1924), 82, 83.

schools, as well as pioneer and Komsomol organizations). Special attention was paid to work with senior students:

The aim for youth libraries and branches should be: a) to keep young people constantly aware of the next policy of the government; b) to teach the youth to use the book to develop a Marxist understanding of the world and social work skills, [and to treat the book] as a tool of labor; c) to prepare the youth for the transition to the adult libraries.⁸²

This list exhausted the set of goals of the library, designed to “work with youth.” In the children’s and youth library, the general model of the Soviet library was worked out in the most rigid form. This rigidity was provoked by the relative malleability of children’s and adolescents’ perception. As a result, in the process of pedagogization the children’s library turned into a kind of appendage of the school, or, more precisely, of the “social and political organizations of the youth.”⁸³

By the end of the 1920s, interest in children’s reading shifted from a matter of abstract study to one of direct impact. In the 1930s the statistics of children’s reading disappeared, and the children’s reader turns into an ideal “pioneer reader” who is interested exclusively in books “about our Motherland” and the “Soviet classics.”

As even this general outline of the reader of the revolutionary era shows, the main thing that characterizes the reading milieu of the 1920s was its heterogeneous character and dynamism. This is not only the most significant of its characteristics but perhaps its most distinctive, given the next several decades of Soviet history. The propaganda work of the Soviet state resulted in the creation of a new, Soviet reader as a result of ideological ‘molding.’ Already by the end of the 1920s the reading of the main patron groups of city libraries was largely controlled and directed. However, Soviet propaganda could not control a reader’s worldview completely, leaving room for elements of other views. Thus, the book-library mechanism of control was never total nor definitive: there were always sociocultural groups and facets of reading that remained free of it. The vanguard of the ‘new Soviet reader’ was the young worker-reader. This fact helps to reconcile two contradictory points that characterize the period: on the one hand, the situation was dynamic, while on the other hand, imposition of Soviet norms was well under way.

But the longer it went on, the stronger the process of ‘levelling the reading circle and the unification of the readers’ preferences became. The pre-

⁸² M. Smushkova, “Ocherednye zadachi detskikh bibliotek (Itogi konferentsii detskikh bibliotekarej),” *Krasnyi bibliotekar*, 11 (1928), 29, 38.

⁸³ See N. Khersonskaia, “Detskaia biblioteka i pionerskoe dvizhenie,” *Krasnyi bibliotekar*, 8 (1924), 9.

requisites for this development were already laid out in the ‘optics of reading’ vis-à-vis the mass reader of the post-revolutionary years.

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THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC ADJUST TO A NEW NORMAL, 1918-1935¹

Jeffrey Brooks

INTRODUCTION

In the roughly fifteen years following the Bolshevik seizure of power, the Soviet press came into existence and transitioned into an instrument of state-sponsored propaganda. It is in this form that most who followed Soviet affairs in subsequent decades viewed *Pravda* (*The Truth*), *Izvestiia* (*News*), and other official vehicles of the press, and the view is not wrong. In the earlier period, however, the Soviet state was not yet positioned to produce propaganda; nor was the public prepared to internalize it.² This essay argues that the newspapers of the early period can be considered the pre-propaganda press. The material that follows describes the functions of the early press, and specifically how the functions changed as the institutional framework for governance was established and the priorities of the state shifted. Before taking on their later and lasting propagandistic role, newspapers helped create the conditions that would support it. Important among these were design of the institutions and staffing of an administrative order consistent with Soviet objectives and able to restrict dissenting views, including those of the emigration and foreign press.

The dailies and weeklies of the twenties to mid-thirties laid the foundations for subsequent hegemony of propagandistic media in four stages from 1918 through 1935. During the first period, from 1918-1921, the old reading habits of

1 I thank Georgiy Chernyavskiy, Nikolay Koposov, and Karen Brooks for helpful comments.

2 The word propaganda is ill-defined but for recent functional definitions see J. Auerbach, R. Castronovo, "Introduction: Thirteen Propositions about Propaganda," in J. Auerbach, R. Castronovo (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies* (Oxford, 2013), 2-16 and J. Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton, 2015), 39-80.

the vibrant pre-revolutionary publics were upended, along with removal of most of the publications that nurtured them. During the New Economic Policy from 1921/22 to 1927 the partial relaxation of controls and cautious reemergence of some commercial outlets supported an exploratory interaction between the reading public and the organs of the state. The exploration ceased with Stalin's Great Break and the truncation of the NEP in 1927/28, as the state exercised its growing ability to control discourse and flows of information. Between 1933 and 1935, with control over logistics firmly in hand and clarity on official positions regarding the content of approved discourse established, the Soviet propagandistic press threw off the chrysalis and spread its wings.

During the earlier period of preparation, the press was doing more than simply grooming for a subsequent function. Propaganda, according to Lenin, has as its primary purpose influence over long-term beliefs in order to sway behavior.³ In 1918, changing hearts and minds was not the highest priority for the Bolshevik leaders. Nor was this objective within reach. The new rulers found themselves in charge of an enormous traumatized nation. Their first order of business had to be identification of a cadre of people who could staff a rudimentary administrative state, restore order, and resume delivery of key public services.

T. H. Rigby has described the personnel challenges the new leaders faced, and how they addressed them during the period under discussion by establishing the *nomenklatura* system.⁴ The new leaders also needed to master operational control over a largely conscript army of questionable loyalty. Yet they had no workable metric to identify those with the minimal technical skills and requisite sympathy for the revolutionary cause to qualify for the new positions. Without consciously electing to do so, they used the early Soviet press as a vehicle for communication with people potentially suitable to staff the new order. Newspapers conveyed information about changing events that aspiring cadres would need to know and informed them about boundaries on attitudes considered acceptable in the official sphere. All newspapers also published party and government decrees and devoted additional space to explaining them.

Many people sought places in the post-revolutionary structures at the start. Literacy was a key skill for new administrators and Party members, since newspapers were the medium of broad communication between the state and the citizenry. But simple word recognition and relating words to known phenomena of daily life or the vocabulary of popular culture that had

³ Lenin and the Bolsheviks distinguished between propaganda to change beliefs and agitation that promotes action on a single issue. See section 3 B of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* See also H. Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia: A Study in Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge, MA, 1950), 38-50 and P. Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-29* (Cambridge, UK, 1985), 3-7.

⁴ T. H. Rigby, "Staffing USSR Incorporated: The Origins of the Nomenklatura System," *Soviet Studies*, 40, 4 (Oct. 1988), 523-537.

served newly literate people in the earlier decades was insufficient for the new era. Those who would lead on a local level after the revolution had to be willing to invest in understanding the new lexicon and conceptual frameworks that the Bolsheviks used. For people willing to make that investment the press served a signaling function, alerting them to new developments and new behaviors that could open opportunities for advancement.

An effort to understand the early Soviet press risks imposing intent, structure, and order where little existed. Much of what was published in the early years was haphazard and part of a process of learning by doing. The early press invited exercise of skills in irony, counter-readings, questioning, and plain ordinary guffaws of disbelief that readers had honed during the years of lively journalism of the pre-revolutionary period. Urban young people had reason to question the suddenly dominant national narrative of freedom and empowerment at home and oppression and exploitation abroad. Many remembered and to some extent enjoyed new Soviet variants of the lively celebration of self in colorful dance, music, film, fashion, and dress that had animated the earlier press and continued until the authorities suppressed them at the end of the NEP in the late 1920s. The contrast with the drab official alternative was too stark for many to ignore and it undercut the credibility of the new narrative. Beyond this rather sophisticated and somewhat cynical urban public, the Bolshevik leaders initially expected an enthusiastic hearing from among common readers more generally, but here, too, counter readings proliferated, fed often by a simple inability of many to understand or believe what was printed.

In this early environment of uncertainty and confusion, the staffing of the new structures was of paramount importance; without it order could hardly be imposed. Not until the matchmaking between aspirants and the apparat was largely complete and the administrative party-state fully functioning did the primary purpose of the press shift to propaganda. This temporal marker can be placed at about 1933-1935.

Even in this later period as the conveyance of propaganda assumed greater importance, the press continued to signal and guide those aspiring to upward mobility. Bureaucracies naturally experience turnover, and the massive purges of the time depleted the old membership and cleared the way for new. With the consolidation of power and the shift of policy to industrialization and collectivization, however, the propagandistic functions of the press gradually dominated those of signaling. The behavior of the general populace required for industrialization and collectivization to advance could be enforced through the punitive power of the state, but threats and terror alone would not have sufficed. The investment of energy and postponement of reward needed for industrialization and collectivization required belief on the part of the public. The press became the instrument to condition belief; hence the shift to propaganda.

I. 1918-1921: THE DEMISE OF THE OLD PRESS AND DELAY IN ESTABLISHING THE NEW

Under War Communism from 1918-1921, the new leaders set out gamely to use the press to promote their vision of the party-state. The pre-Soviet culture of reading had depended on an easily accessible narrative language, visual realism with appeal to the minimally literate, and close attention to consumer demand. The offerings were diverse to address the needs and preferences of a wide range of readers. They were tailored to suit the demand for self-advancement and consumption in a rapidly expanding market economy and in a society in which religious reading had a large and meaningful role. The Bolshevik leaders neither understood these features of the pre-revolutionary culture of reading, nor, had they understood them, would have tolerated their continuation. The ensuing breakdown in the culture of reading was in part a deliberate political act, and in part a natural concomitant of the confusion and shock of the times.

The Bolsheviks could not match the quantity of pre-war publishing, its accessibility, or appeal. Readers' demand for newspapers usually rises in times of chaos; this was very likely the case in the post-October period, but the Bolsheviks could not satisfy it. The essential feature of communication within the new state and party order was its novelty and departure from past practices. The discontinuity was physical as well as cultural.⁵ The shutting down of the old press proceeded in stages, beginning with bourgeois dailies and concluding with moderate socialist publications in the summer of 1918.⁶ In the Red Terror after the assassination attempt on Lenin on 30 August, the new leaders silenced their most dangerous rivals, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries.⁷ Millions had read the St. Petersburg *Gazeta Kopeika* (*Kopeck Newspaper*) and the Moscow *Russkoe slovo* (*Russian Word*). The several hundred newspapers of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries also had loyal readers, particularly the two dozen or so published in Petrograd and Moscow.⁸ The new rulers seized the presses and destroyed the distribution networks of these major vehicles.

The Bolshevik approach to news differed completely from what had gone before. While in the past publishers had sought broad appeal and the revenues that accompanied it, the new strategy was highly targeted. The leaders focused initially on *Pravda* for the Party and *Izvestiia* for the government. These were for the political public of high and middling elites, though the Bolsheviks initially expected advanced workers to read these publications as well. They targeted

5 I draw on my essay "The Breakdown in Production and Distribution of Printed material, 1917-1927," in A. Gleason, P. Kenez, R. Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), 151-174.

6 Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 38-44.

7 V. N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October: The Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca, 1987), 105-125.

8 Ibid.

rural people in the first post-revolutionary mass newspaper, *Bednota* (*The Poor*, 1918-1931). When this failed to win a large public of peasants, they founded *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* (*The Peasant Newspaper*, 1923-39) intended for the lower level of a rural mass public. They also created *Rabochaia gazeta* (*The Workers' Newspaper*, 1922-1939) and *Rabochaia Moskva* (*Working Moscow*, 1922-1939) for workers who would not read the two elite newspapers. The newspapers had various supplements including the satirical magazine *Krokodil* (*Crocodile*) and *Rabotnitsa* (*Working Woman*), among others.

Creating a new press proved more difficult than destroying the old one. The numbers of copies printed fluctuated wildly. *Pravda's* circulation more than tripled from 80,000 in 1918 to the end of 1921 but *Izvestiia's* fell from 452,000 in 1919 to 350,000 in 1921.⁹ Even *Bednota*, the paper designed for common readers, dropped from a peak of 570,000 in 1920 to 275,000 at the end of 1921.¹⁰ Total copies of these newspapers and *Gudok* (*Whistle*), also intended for a wide audience, fell from 1.2 million copies in 1920 to under a million in late 1921.¹¹ Soviet estimates put newspaper production at half to a third of pre-revolutionary totals. Shortages of paper, ink, and spare parts for printing and typesetting machinery limited the production of newspapers and books and pamphlets, as well.¹²

Yet even under these conditions much of what was published went unread. Paper in short supply was valued for other uses; as fuel, cigarette wrappers, and toilet tissue. *Pravda's* front-page header on May 5, 1921 (Press Day)¹³ entreated a public little inclined to waste paper: "Comrades! Preserve Newspapers. Do not tear them up. Return them to the institutions where you got them." This bold header on the day dedicated to praise of the press revealed more than was perhaps intended; namely, that newspapers were handed out in bundles by institutions regardless of demand, and that those bundles were valued for more than the news they carried.

Mastery of the material conveyed in the early Soviet press required a high degree of political literacy. Readers needed the ability to decipher its cumbersome official language of acronyms, new words made by sticking fragments of two words together, foreign and exotic words (such as proletariat), and concepts (such as collective, middle peasant, dictatorship). Political literacy was integral to signaling and selection; that is, connection with receptive readers willing to engage sufficiently to discern the meaning. The press during the Civil War fulfilled a primary function to identify potential

⁹ See tables in Brooks, "The Breakdown," 166-171, for these and other figures unless otherwise noted. For *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* table 3 on page 167.

¹⁰ For figures on *Bednota*, see J. Brooks, "Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press, 1921-1928," *Slavic Review*, 48, 1 (Spring, 1989), 29, Appendix A.

¹¹ See tables in Brooks, "The Breakdown," 166-171, for these and other figures unless otherwise noted. For *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* table 3 on page 167.

¹² For a detailed discussion see Brooks, "The Breakdown," 151-174.

¹³ Press Day commemorates the first publication of pre-revolutionary *Pravda* on May 5, 1912.

fighters, party members, and administrators willing and able to contribute to the establishment of Bolshevik rule. The identification was accomplished through signaling to receptive readers, who could, in turn, indicate their understanding through feedback to the newspaper in the form of letters to the editor, or use of the language in interaction with local officials.

Recruitment did not take the form of a modern human relations strategy. Instead, editors and accommodating journalists stressed self-sacrifice and devotion (*predannost'*), a word loaded with religious connotations.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the press promised the select few an enticing upward mobility in the spirit of the old tsarist era success stories.¹⁵ As one journalist explained in *Bednota* on 8 February 1921, “any peasant straight from the plow can become an agronomist, an engineer, a doctor, or, in general any kind of scientist or scholar.” The setting for this exchange was a workers’ program at a university. The very name of the program, *rabfak*, illustrates the hurdles that many of the intended audience would have had to jump. The composite term is formed by contractions of the words for “worker” and “department (or faculty),” but an etymologically unsophisticated reader might instead have puzzled over the Russian word *rab*, meaning slave or bondsman, and *fak* meaning nothing at all.

Even in the army during the exigencies of the Civil War confusion dominated the messaging. Literacy among new conscripts on the eve of WWI had been 66 percent. The wartime expansion plus replacements for the huge casualties incurred during three years of fighting flooded the ranks with less literate recruits, chiefly peasants, thereby diluting the overall literacy of the army. Bolshevik publicists encountered more problems than opportunities as they hurriedly initiated programs to maintain morale and increase the militancy of the conscripts, whose number included many former tsarist officers. Force and fear more than persuasion dominated behavior. Those who broke ranks or disobeyed orders were summarily shot from the early days of the Civil War, and the paradox of expecting loyalty from such an army was apparent from the outset. Political officers were assigned to secure discipline among soldiers and the tsarist officers of sometimes dubious allegiance.¹⁶

Mark von Hagen has described the challenge that these political officers in the army faced.¹⁷ According to a Soviet report in 1925, the government provided the Political Administration of the Military Soviet (*Politicheskoe upravlenie Revvoensoveta*) in 1920 alone with 20 million pamphlets and posters, 5.6 million books, and 300,000 to 400,000 copies of newspapers per day.¹⁸

¹⁴ See J. Brooks, “Revolutionary Lives: Public Identities in *Pravda* during the 1920s,” in S. White (ed.), *New Directions in Soviet History* (Cambridge, 1991), 33.

¹⁵ See J. Brooks, “The Origins of the Soviet Success Story,” *Journal of Popular Culture* (fall, 1998), 145-157.

¹⁶ M. von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca, New York, London, 1990), 78-79) shows the importance of summary justice and changing composition of the Army.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁸ N. A. Rybnikov (ed.), *Massovyi chitatel' i kniga* (Moscow, 1925), 6-7.

Yet suppression of the old styles and formats of the press and the shift to expressions unfamiliar to most of the common soldiers, coupled with the reduction of illustrations and pictures that many had relied on earlier to bolster their often shaky command of the written word, created a vacuum of effective communication between soldiers and officialdom despite the allocation of scarce paper for this priority. The collapse of the old system of popular information could hardly have been more complete. Printing machines failed due to lack of spare parts and proper maintenance even when paper and ink was available. The sporadic free bulk distribution of newspapers was no substitute for the former networks of peddlers, kiosks, and open market sales. Nor could the new language and subject command an audience familiar with the previous well-tested popular vocabulary of words and images or the lurid sensationalism of the old press. The result was a near vacuum in the Bolsheviks' communication at least in print with soldiers, as well as with common readers more generally.¹⁹ Into the vacuum flowed anything available from old pre-revolutionary magazines and popular fiction to the occasional product of the émigré press able to penetrate still leaky borders.

In 1921-1922, the Army's Political Administration (PUR) surveyed over 11,000 soldiers about books and newspapers.²⁰ That the survey took place suggests a good-faith effort on the part of the new leaders to understand an important potential constituency and respond to its preferences. The respondents identified themselves by age, level of education, unit, and previous occupation. Two thirds the respondents had three or more years of schooling. Slightly more than half were age 25 years or older, suggesting that they may have been exposed to or part of the self-education movement before the war, the participants in which were known as the "intelligentsia from the people." The social mix of respondents showed diversity, although the responses also showed sensitivity about reporting class and social status and genuine confusion as the traditional legal categories and professional engagement diverged. More than half of respondents reported themselves to be peasants, but another more than half indicated that they worked in offices, in skilled crafts, or in retail trade. Perhaps of most interest, less than 10% reported themselves to be workers.

The survey confirms the marginal role of newspapers during the Civil War. Only 450 (out of 11,000) respondents answered a question about interest in reading newspapers. Among them *Bednota* was the most widely read (86), then *Izvestiia* (76), *Pravda* (71), and *Kommunisticheskii trud* (*Communist Labor*). Of those few that expressed their preferences, 54 noted that they read whatever newspaper came to hand. One confessed that he

19 For a detailed discussion see Brooks, "The Breakdown," 151-174.

20 I discuss this survey in "Studies of the Reader in the 1920s," *Russian History*, 2-3 (1982), 187-202; see also the detailed report on the survey in *Massovyi chitatel' i kniga*. Soviet authorities gave me only a hundred completed survey forms, all from a unit of bakers and written out on wrapping paper perhaps intended for bread.

liked to listen to the newspapers read aloud, since he could not understand them if he tried to read them himself. Some expressed an interest in reading about agriculture, the war, and particularly about peace. One complained that newspapers were full of lies.

Ordinary literate people, whether workers or peasants, often had neither the skill nor the motivation to read the new newspapers. The group that took greatest interest were the semi-educated people of common origins, whether the prerevolutionary intelligentsia from the people, or those active in self-education groups for workers, in the local government, cooperatives, and other earlier organizations. These people had already stood out as ambitious and eager for advancement through their aspirations to be perceived as people of culture.²¹ In the immediate post-revolutionary period, this group found the newspapers a valued source of information helpful for advancement through involvement in the Party, the Komsomol youth organization, the army, or the new local governmental institutions. This was the dominant self-selected audience of the new press. Some enrolled as “worker correspondents,” providing reports from the field that in the early days, were surprisingly candid and sometimes critical. For example, in *Pravda* on 5 May 1921, a worker correspondent complained that the new bosses were treating cooks, yardmen, stablemen, servants, and female kitchen workers much like the old ones did.²²

Even the premier vehicle, *Pravda*, had little to attract the eye. Photos appeared routinely in *Pravda* and in the mass newspapers only in the late 1920s, perhaps for reasons not only technical. The language of images or pictures was at least as important to new readers as was the language words. This was particularly true perhaps of those striving for political literacy to improve their lot in life. The Bolsheviks relied heavily on visual language during Civil War in everything except the newspapers, and its absence in the press may have been part of the explicit targeting to an intended audience. They designed their daily newspapers initially for an elite that did not need visual images.

To address audiences seeking visual expression, the Bolsheviks turned backward to adopt elements from the three earlier traditions of (1) mid-nineteenth-century popular prints, (2) the satirical magazines of 1905-1907, and (3) the WWI propaganda of Vladimir Maiakovskii (1893-1930) and Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935). In so doing they broke with the immediate pre-revolutionary rise of the photograph and acceptance of the photo as a portrayal of reality (although the photo came into its own in later years), as well as with the increased realism of the late nineteenth century lubok, chromolithographs, new urban magazines with realistic illustrations, and photo-magazines such as

21 On these workers see M. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca, 2002), 21-61; on the intelligentsia from the people see also my “Popular Philistinism and the Course of Russian Modernism,” in G. S. Morson (ed.), *Literature and History. Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies* (Stanford, 1986), 90-110.

22 *Pravda* (May 5, 1921). The heading is “Pomeshchiki,” signature unreadable.

Ogonek (*Little Spark*).²³ Such publications flooded cities, were read by working people as well as a new middle class, and also trickled down into the countryside.

The new graphical language adopted by the Bolsheviks made ample use of monsters, demons, and evil-doers that would have been familiar to many urban readers from 1905-1907, but not to peasant readers or soldiers. This turn in visual culture was notable for its departure from the development in illustration gaining sway in the pre-revolutionary period.²⁴ The role of Maiakovskii and Malevich was crucial in this regard. Malevich produced a series of patriotic posters and postcards for “The Contemporary Lubok” (*Segodniashnii lubok*) publishing company he founded with Maiakovskii in Moscow in 1914. His designs formed part of a series of works commissioned from various artists, with captions written by Maiakovskii, who also produced some of the images.²⁵ Malevich intended with this archaic language and bold lines to mobilize deep-seated loyalties and foster national solidarity with reference to a shared heritage.²⁶ The approach also concurred with Bolshevik notions of the backwardness of the peasants; this despite the peasants’ enthusiastic acceptance in the last decades of the old regime of realistic images of themselves in the modernized *lubok* and photographs in popular magazines such as *Ogonek*. Even illiterate peasants at the time were already accustomed to realistic images in *lubki*, photos in the illustrated press, and the new medium of postcards, which had supplanted the *lubok* as widely circulated accessible images.²⁷

In *What is to be Done?* (*Chto delat’?*, 1902) Lenin distinguished between propaganda and agitation, noting that the latter is used to rouse the masses to action for a single event or idea. Visual images served this function particular-

23 I discuss this shift to realism in visual culture including the *lubok* in “The Moral Self in Russia’s Literary and Visual Cultures (1861-1955),” in M. Remnek (ed.), *The Space of the Book: Print Culture in the Russian Social Imagination* (Toronto, 2011), 201-230 and in “The Russian Nation Imagined: The Peoples of Russia as Seen in Popular Imagery, 1860s-1890s,” *The Journal of Social History*, 43, 3 (2010), 201-230.

24 On the power of the satirical magazines of 1905-1907 see Brooks, “Marvelous Destruction: The Left-Leaning Satirical Magazines of 1905-1907,” *Experiment*, 19, 1 (2013), 24-62.

25 For reproductions, see *Pervaia mirovaia voina 1914-1918* (St. Petersburg, 2014), 128-141. For Malevich’s *lubki* and postcards, see Ch. Lodder, “Kazimir Malevich and the First World War,” in J. E. Bowlt, N. Misler, E. Sudakova (eds.), *A Game in Hell: The Great War in Russia: Graphic Art and Photography from the Collection of Sergey Shestakov* (London, 2014), 99-109.

26 Iu. Lotman, “Khudozhestvennaia priroda russkikh narodnykh kartinok,” in *Narodnaia graviura i fol’klor v Rossii XVII-XIX vekov (K 150-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia D. A. Rovinskogo)* (Moscow, 1976), 247-267.

27 On photos see C. Stolarski, “The Rise of Photojournalism in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900-1931,” unpublished PhD thesis, John Hopkins University (2013), and his “Press Photography in Russia’s Great War and Revolution,” in M. Frame, B. Kolonitskii, S. Marks, M. Stockdale (eds.), *Cultural History of Russia in the Great War and Revolution, 1914-1922* (Bloomington, IN, 2014), 159-184 and his “Another Way of Telling the News: The Rise of Photojournalism in Russia, 1900-1914,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 12, 3 (Summer 2011), 561-590. On postcards see T. Mathew, *Greetings from the Barricades: Revolutionary Postcards in Imperial Russia* (Gettysburg, PA, 2018), 78-79, 305-361.

ly well, and the Bolsheviks employed them liberally during the Civil War. Stark images of revolutionary supporters and enemies of the revolution harkened back to the visual language of the satirical magazines of the Revolution of 1905 and the earlier forms of popular prints. The new graphical language of the revolution developed largely in parallel to the press and defied the pre-revolutionary development of commercial aesthetics just as the press flouted the journalistic traditions. Political leaders working together with avant-garde artists such as Malevich drew on representative forms of Suprematism and Constructivism that included elements of abstraction. They produced colorful posters recognized now as peerless exemplars of aesthetics that were at the time nonetheless not to the tastes of their intended audiences. If given a choice, most of the peasants would probably have selected a good photograph of something they valued, a colorful chromolithograph of a known historical scene, or a postcard of a celebrity over a poster by Malevich and Maiakovskii.

In addition to new styles, the posters introduced unfamiliar content, particularly the monsters, demons, and evil-doers, which referred back to the urban-centered satirical magazines of 1905-1907, albeit with new context. Among the most famous posters are the “ROSTA windows,” initiated by Mikhail Chermnykh (1890-1962) for the Russian Telegraph Agency (*Okna ROSTA*) in late 1919. Reproduced by stencil and hung in shop windows and on walls, the vivid posters skewered the opposition and promoted Bolshevik causes. Their simple messages targeted the illiterate as well as the literate viewer. Maiakovskii wrote many of the satirical verses and illustrated a third of the 1500 ROSTA windows.²⁸ Other posters created by Viktor Deni (V. N. Denisov, 1843-1946) and Dmitrii Moor (Dmitrii Stakhievich Orlov, 1883-1946) showed Lenin standing on the globe and sweeping away priests, monarchs, and capitalists with a crude broom (Deni, 1920) or workers confronting dragons (Moor, 1919).²⁹ Such posters would have found a ready public among those familiar with the satirical magazines of 1905-1907 but not among the mass of semi-literate peasant soldiers and civilians for whom they were optimistically intended. Still less intelligible were avant-garde variants, such as El Lissitskii’s purely abstract “Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge.”³⁰

Amidst the mass of posters those promoting literacy were also likely paradoxically to challenge new readers. A. A. Radlov’s poster shows a blind man stepping off a cliff with the caption, “An Illiterate is like a Blind Man: Everywhere Misfortune and Unhappiness Await Him.”³¹ Yet few whether sighted or not, literate or not, could avoid misfortune in 1920. An anonymous poster also from 1920 features a man on a winged horse captioned “Literacy is the Path to Communism.” A poster by V. Kozlinskii also from 1920 simply

28 A. Morozov, *Maiakovskii: Okna ROSTA i GlavPolitProsveta. 1919-21* (Moscow, 2010), 3.

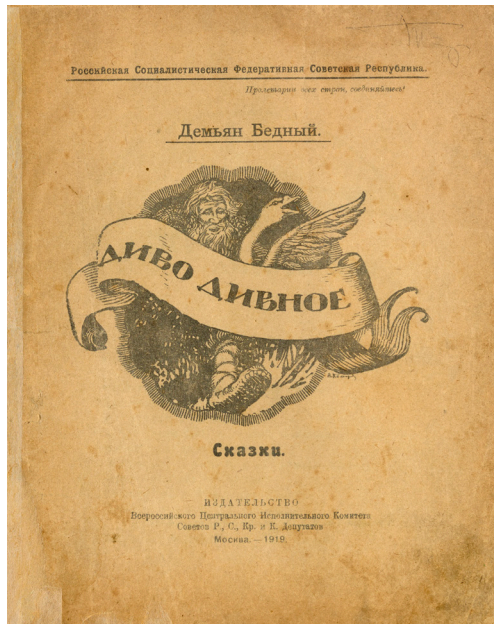
29 S. White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven, 1988), 45, 56.

30 White, *Bolshevik Poster*, 40.

31 The Posters appear in P. I. Lebedev (ed.), *Sovetskii plakati epokhi grazhdanskoi voiny 1918-1921* (Moscow, 1960), 668-669.

commands: “Literate Person, remember your duty (*dolg*) to teach an illiterate person.” Unable ideologically to appeal to self-interest, the Bolsheviks promoted cultural enlightenment as best they could. In fact, they devoted only 13% of the over three thousand handmade or printed posters of the Civil War to “cultural enlightenment.”³² The rest were either military (32.4%), economic (27.9%), or political (20.7%). Most of the posters with which the Bolsheviks bombarded the population appealed either to fear of enemies or hatred of them. The posters, in both their numbers and content can be considered part of the early experimentation in how best to reach publics no longer served by the pre-revolutionary networks of the printed word and image.

Supplementing the newspapers and posters were illustrated pamphlets with crude political lessons such as the 1919 pamphlet the *Marvel of Marvels: Stories (Divo divnoe: Skazki)* by Dem’ian Bednyi, author of doggerel for newspapers and posters. The half fairy tale half propaganda tract warns against kulaks, priests, tsars, and the fools’ gold of riches. It features a hodgepodge of illustrations, and political instruction in the form of folktales. In one tale a peasant acquires a magical goose that provides an endless supply of food until it is stolen by a crowd of kulaks and bourgeois crooks. The cover image of the peasant and the goose evokes the familiar imagery of folklore.



1. The cover of Bednyi’s *Marvel of Marvels* in the realistic style of the Peredvizhniki

³² Ibid., 23.

A smirking devil on a bag of gold pieces in another of the tales and a peasant harnessed like a horse and whipped by a kulak provide discordant images. The pamphlets were often associated with events covered in the press although they were issued separately from newspapers. For example, a page in Bednyi's pamphlet marked with the date 1918 carries an illustration of a peasant surrounded by accoutrements and properties of peasant life bludgeoning a puppet-like image of the tsar.



2. Note the break with realism in the booklet's Image of the Tsar

As the Civil War wound down the military situation stabilized in much of the country, but the Bolsheviks' command of the administrative structures was still tenuous. The absence of a formidable opposition did not mean the presence of a capacity to govern. To rally people to staff administrative structures and lower-level party management, the Bolsheviks needed to offer supporters upward mobility and material benefits. At the end of the Civil War military political workers complained that they did not see a future for themselves even within the army.³³ To create such a future for select common people, the Bolsheviks needed to expand the Party and administration.³⁴ The bureaucracy grew rapidly and Party membership rose from a low of 150,000 in autumn of 1919, when the Civil War seemed lost, to over two million in 1935, the end of our period.³⁵ How the press contributed to the

33 Von Hagen, *Soldiers*, 132.

34 *Ibid.*

35 L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* 2nd Edition (New York, 1971), 440.

expansion of the Party and staffing of the administration during the NEP is the subject of the next section.

2. 1921/22-1927: NEWSPAPERS SEEK A PUBLIC IN THE ERA OF THE NEP

The Bolsheviks maintained their monopoly over the printed word under the more relaxed regime of the NEP, and no aspect of print culture was more closely supervised than the press. Under War Communism, the Bolsheviks had produced without a need to sell what they printed, since they simply distributed it. They had an interest in readers' preferences, as shown in the attempts to survey selected audiences, but the results of the surveys did not appreciably affect decisions on production. Their chief challenges regarding the press during the Civil War had been production and distribution, rather than marketing.

Under the policies of the NEP, the need to sell what they produced (albeit at subsidized prices) created a new set of difficulties. When payment was introduced, even at subsidized levels, newspaper circulation in the Russian Republic dropped by about half between January 1922 and 1923 before subsequently recovering.³⁶ Circulation bounced back to 2.5 million in 1924 but did not reach late imperial levels until the end of the decade.³⁷

Just how devastating this collapse was is evident from the report of *Rabochaia gazeta* on Press Day (May 5) in 1925, presumably a day of peak production. The editors reported a low of 16,500 copies in 1922, a jump to 127,000 copies in 1923, then to 185,000 in 1924, and 270,000 in 1925. On 9 March 1923, the editors described their readers as "the working proletariat of factory and plant who did not have its central organ." By 29 October 1925, the editors claimed to reach 120,000 readers in Moscow and its environs. The same issue contained the announcement of the production of two different editions per week, one for Moscow and its environs and another for the rest of the country. The following day they upped the circulation to 145,000 per day and claimed 435,000 Moscow readers. These were pitiful figures given the circulation of *Russkoe slovo* and *Gazeta kopeika* of the late imperial era.

According to the 1926 census 71% of the population lived in rural areas. Success in addressing a national public of newspaper readers necessarily meant reaching rural people. Although schooling and literacy had declined in the immediate post-revolutionary years, the 1926 census reported literacy among men and women at 72 and 43 percent, respectively, meaning that many rural residents were literate in the sense of being able to sign their

³⁶ *Rabochaia Moskva*, May 4, 1923.

³⁷ On the crisis see Brooks "The Breakdown," 151-174.

names.³⁸ Moreover, the rural reader was paramount if the Bolsheviks were to control the countryside. *Bednota*, with its off-putting title (for, after all, who wants to be poor?), the first broad-gauge Soviet daily for peasants, faltered badly in its first few years. During the Civil War, print runs of *Bednota* had risen from 50,000 daily copies in 1918, its first year of production, to 800,000 in 1921.³⁹ Yet when a price was put on it and people had to buy it, circulation tumbled from the 500,000 copies published on January 10, 1922 the first day the new rules were applied, to 200,000 on January 17, 1922, when the editors ceased to provide this information.

Institutions continued to buy many copies, but they received less support for such purchases as the NEP unfolded. During the Civil War three-quarters of all copies published each day went directly to the Army for free distribution. Later, the authorities also targeted the countryside, where the demand for paper for heating as well as cigarettes was likely even greater than among soldiers. The format of *Bednota* shifted back and forth from a small tabloid to a large unwieldy broadsheet, as the producers tried to guess what might appeal to peasant readers. A mere 35,000 daily copies appeared in 1923, and the number of individual subscriptions at that time hovered at a low of 7000.⁴⁰ On March 12, 1925 *Bednota's* editors gave up on the mass reader and announced their decision to address “the advanced stratum” of village society.

With the increased emphasis on demand during the NEP, the authorities redoubled efforts to study the reader.⁴¹ They issued questionnaires, read newspapers aloud to would-be readers, made lists of words not understood, and queried local correspondents. The surveys confirmed that ordinary people, including rural people, found the newspapers uninteresting or unreadable due to acronyms, foreign words, and Marxist concepts. Although the reader studies appeared designed to seek out the common reader, they actually focused on the activist readers most eager to engage with the newspapers.

The willingness to study the reader was much higher than the willingness to act on the findings.⁴² The problem received some notice when production revived in the mid-1920s, and workers and peasants re-entered the labor force. The editors of *Rabochaia gazeta* on 12 December 1926 cited a report by the Central Committee that “the existing network of newspapers cannot serve the culturally and politically backward strata of the proletariat

38 For this figure and the following, see J. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000), 11.

39 Brooks, “Public and Private Values,” Appendix A, p. 29. See also, Brooks, “The Breakdown,” 153

40 Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*, 11.

41 I discuss these studies and who carried them out in “Studies of the Reader in the 1920s.”

42 See Brooks, “Studies of the Reader in the 1920s.”

either in form or content.” A year and a half later, on 29 May 1927, they concluded that neither *Rabochaia gazeta* nor *Krest’ianskaia gazeta* addressed “the special demands” of ordinary workers or peasants due to the “low cultural level” of the intended readers.

Although flagging demand was recognized as a problem during the NEP, the traditional solutions in the form of coverage of bloody crimes, pictures of curiosities of nature, lurid serial fiction, and close-ups of the personal lives of celebrities and political figures were off-limits.⁴³ The editors and the journalists who worked under them had to please the authorities on whose good will their careers and survival depended, even when doing so meant failing to meet sales objectives. For example, editors regularly filled their front pages with speeches of the most prominent leaders and long detailed reports about party and state conferences, despite clear evidence from surveys that readers never read them.⁴⁴ The parallel practice of producing millions of copies of the leaders’ works in books and booklets was equally wasteful since only a tiny minority of activists could make sense of such materials.⁴⁵

Although much of the official press was dull and failed to engage readers, the satirical press, also officially sanctioned and promoted, had a livelier style. The satirical press arose at the end of the period of War Communism and specialized in the demonic characterization of the new regime’s enemies but flourished fully from the early 1920s until 1928. Journalists of the satirical press broke with the tradition of realism and extended the satirical tradition of the ROSTA posters, first with a smattering of such images and subsequently as a powerful tool for demonizing and dehumanizing enemies at home and abroad. In addition, the satirical press served a diverse, largely urban, multi-generational public comfortable with irony as a cultural construct.

Among this public were readers of the satirical magazines that evolved from the ROSTA posters of the Civil War. Such magazines employed talented illustrators and literati who had supported the Reds during the Civil War and carried on during the NEP. Over two hundred satirical magazines were created from 1921 through 1930.⁴⁶ In part their appearance reflected the somewhat easier atmosphere of the NEP that offered creative people more space and somewhat lighter supervision. The links between the satirical magazines and the earlier ROSTA posters were clear, but so, too, were their departures. Although their main targets initially were foreign leaders in the West, the magazines featured savage caricatures of the old ruling classes and the newly identified bourgeois figures of the NEP; crooks, prosperous

43 I. Vareikis, *Zadachii partii v oblasti pechati* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1926), 11.

44 Brooks, “The Breakdown,” 157.

45 G. I. Porshnev, *Etiudy po knizhnomu delu* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1929), 63.

46 G. N. Pavlov, *Oruzhiiia liubimeishego rod* (Moscow, 2002), 9-10; see also S. I. Stykalin, I. K. Kremenskaia, *Sovetskaia satiricheskaia pechat’, 1917-1963* (Moscow, 1963).

peasants, and others who achieved material success in the constrained market of the day. As the NEP gave way to the ‘Great Break’ and purges, the satirical magazines increasingly identified domestic enemies at fault for the failures of the great leap and collectivization.

Maiakovskii founded *Bov* in April 1921. The single issue that appeared included two cartoons by the early ROSTA artists: Viktor Deni’s cartoon of a Red Army soldier plugging the “Crimean Bottle” and Dmitry Moor’s cartoon of pitiful irate enemies looking down on the new nation from a cloud.⁴⁷ The leading magazines that followed included *Krokodil* (1922-), *Bezbozhnik* (Godless, 1922-41), *Begemot* (*Hippo*, 1924-28), *Krasnyi perets* (*Red Pepper*, 1923-26), *Smekhach* (*One who laughs*, 1924-28), *Lapot* (*Bast Shoes*, 1924-33), and *Chudak* (*Marvel*, 1928-30). Except for the immortal *Krokodil* most did not long outlive the New Economic policy.

The satirical magazines were often published as free supplements to newspapers to enhance the appeal of the former to the non-activist public. For example, *Krasnyi perets* appeared in a single issue in June 1922 in 10,000 copies, with the work of Dem’ian Bednyii, Moor, and others, and then from January 1923-1926 as a free supplement to *Rabochaia Moskva*. *Krasnyi perets’* circulation varied from 8000 to 50,000 copies. Its mandate was to deride “bureaucrats, red-tape mongers, bunglers, petty crooks, and cheats who have sneaked into the Soviets and the economy.” *Drezina* (*Trolley*), a short-lived supplement to the main newspaper for railroad and factory workers *Gudok* (*Whistle*), was also an outlet for somewhat subversive humor. A biweekly of 12-16 pages with a circulation of 15,000 to 25,000, it lasted a mere 16 issues in 1923-24.

The journalists of satire courted a public accustomed to reading at multiple levels in mixed audiences of adults and children. These habits of reading and the ability to navigate multiple meanings carried over from the experience of the literacy transition in the final years of pre-revolutionary Russia. Literacy had spread first among school-aged children, who then read everything from religious texts to serialized novels aloud to their parents and neighbors. Wartime newspapers also attracted a mix of readers, and what made people of one age laugh could be of compelling interest to others. The more knowing listeners would challenge lies and implausible reports. In this way, reading for irony and multiple meanings extended across generations and social groups.

Irony is understood to be a use of language in which the actual import of words is different from their literal meaning.⁴⁸ Irony also refers to layered meanings, in which characters or actors perceive one reality, and readers or viewers perceive another. The capacity of irony to encompass multiple

⁴⁷ Unless otherwise noted all figures on satirical magazines are from alphabetical listings in S. Stykalin and I. Kremenskaia, *Sovetskaia satiricheskaia pechat’*.

⁴⁸ C. Colebrook, in *Irony* (London, 2004), summarizes the literature on the topic. See also W. C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, IL, 1975), 19-21, 240-241.

and incompatible meanings, to express an idea and simultaneously its opposite, made it a formidable and, from the perspective of the authorities, a somewhat risky instrument of communication in early Soviet Russia. Nonetheless it was clearly present and officially supported in the satirical magazines, and, to a lesser extent and subject to greater control in later years. The growth of the satirical press during the NEP in part counterbalanced the inability of the more sober publications to reach the general populace and a sophisticated audience as well.

While the press was largely failing during the NEP to respond to the increased emphasis on demand and readers' interests it was succeeding in furthering the personnel policies of the growing Soviet state apparatus. The managers of the press turned gradually and perhaps unintentionally to activists as their prime audience. The press successfully engaged with the 'advanced strata' of upwardly striving readers with the skills and political literacy necessary to join the activist public just below the *nomenklatura*, the emergent political class of top officials, administrators, and Party members. For example, the official trade union paper, *Trud (Labor)* appeared in a mere 150,000 copies (at a time when *Pravda* reported a circulation of half a million and *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* a million), but it carried outsized importance because its readers were bureaucrats and activists with influence over ordinary workers.

In the course of the 1920s, mid-level supporters of the regime found inspiration and encouragement in the press. Some highly motivated readers became worker and peasant correspondents; that is, people who read the newspaper regularly and wrote to the editors on a voluntary and semi-regular basis to convey views from their communities. The numbers of worker and peasant correspondents fluctuated widely as controls were imposed in the early years of the NEP from 50,000 in 1923, dropping to 15,000 in March 1924, but subsequently rising to a half million in 1928.⁴⁹ Given the circulation of newspapers at the time, this was a nontrivial interaction with a specific segment of the audience. The class composition of the correspondents varied by newspaper and by self-ascription of the communicator. By the mid-1920s, *Rabochaia gazeta* claimed to have received 70,000 letters (1926) and in *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* almost a half million.

The letters are presented as correspondence with new cadres and applicants to party membership, and not with ordinary readers. No doubt with this in mind, the editors explained on January 24, 1923 that they had decided to present a series of articles in order to enhance political literacy among the least prepared members of the Party. A few months later Mikhail Kalinin, writing in *Bednota* on March 4, 1923, claimed 60,000 subscriptions from "the advanced stratum" of village society; that is, those "who worked in the Party and the Soviets." The authorities founded the new weekly tabloid,

49 Brooks, "Public and Private Values," 16-35.

Krest'ianskaia gazeta, to address readers not yet “ready for more serious material.”⁵⁰ The official tally of circulation of the new publication reached a half million in 1923, and a million in late 1928.⁵¹ More interesting perhaps, is the headline the paper ran on 13 January 1925, in which they claimed to speak for 600,000 actual individual rural subscribers.

Newspapers included several spheres featuring different modes of communication with readers.⁵² The activist sphere of the newspaper included interactions between and among the leaders and designated village activists. A section on page 4 in *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* on 1 June 1923 “On the Inspection of the Village” (*K smotru sel*) featured reports on Komsomol and Party cells functioning well and, alternatively, those requiring radical improvements. The same issue included a direct appeal to Stalin from two Red Army veterans. Communicating back to the local level in the same issue, the editors informed a group of rural correspondents that their proposed resolution on taxes had been accepted and was confirmed by the Commissar of Finance. The latter piece included an illustration and an appeal to peasant correspondents to write to the editors about all instances of illegal taxation.

Those who wrote to the newspapers were largely ambitious young people (under the age of 40).⁵³ A columnist for *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* claimed in April 1926 that 65% of the correspondents were peasants, 13% rural laborers, 15% administrators and government employees, and only 6 belonged to the intelligentsia. According to the same article (4/27/1926), at a time when rural party members were few, 7% of correspondents belonged to the Party and 20% to the Komsomol. *Rabochaia gazeta* had a constituency in which Party members were more prevalent. According to a statement on Press Day May 5, 1924, 60% were Party Members in 1924 and 38% in 1925, a fall explained by the surge in the number of correspondents in that year. As the movement expanded, the prestige of the correspondents grew. In a 1926 handbook *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* described the rural correspondent as “the advanced peasant who has definitively understood that Soviet power is his own power.”⁵⁴

The fact that such correspondents were chiefly men was apparently so accepted at the time that it was hardly discussed. A total of 7183 men and only 300 women answered at least some of a list of fifteen questions published in *Rabochaia gazeta* in 1925.⁵⁵ The newspapers celebrated male authority, as is apparent from two contrasting images in *Young Communist*

50 Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*, 11-12.

51 Brooks, “Public and Private Values,” Appendix A, 29.

52 See Brooks, “Public and Private Values.”

53 A. Miromskii, I. P. Putnik, *Derevnia za knigoi* (Moscow, 1931), 37.

54 A. Glebov, *Pamiatka sel'kora* (Moscow, 1926).

55 Ia. Shafir, *Rabochaia gazeta i ee chitatel'* (Moscow, 1926), 26-28, 31, 177-82.

(*Iunyi communist*) on 13-14 August 1922.⁵⁶ A smiling young man described as a Komsomol member is pictured in boots, with a proper cap, a balalaika and newspaper under his arm. An unsmiling female activist is pictured in the same issue in much the same format, but she carries a briefcase with no newspaper and lacks the presumed camaraderie accorded the young man.

The editors of the weekly *Rabochaia gazeta* suggested on Press Day 5 May 1925 that the newspaper “saves much time for the reader who cannot spend whole hours reading long articles but who wants to know about everything that takes place on the globe.” A year and a half later the editors described their target readership on 12 December 1926 as “the politically active middling worker” who reads neither *Pravda* nor *Izvestiia*.⁵⁷ In February 1925 the paper carried a discussion about the education of the children of communists, and whether their continued education should be guaranteed or they should alternatively be compelled to work for two or three years in a factory.⁵⁸ This discussion illustrates the role the press had assumed in addressing personnel issues, including the perquisites and benefits of cadres and party members. On 5 June 1925, *Rabochaia gazeta*, in answer to a query, carried the directive: “... communists cannot and should not occupy high posts for motives of personal gain. The striving of communists for high posts, for big salaries and gain for the family is called careerism and self-seeking.”

Although the interests of editors had clearly shifted to an activist public, the fiction that the press could and did address general readers, including those in rural areas, was maintained. That this was a fiction was confirmed in numerous false steps to address their most likely activist readers. One misstep can be seen in the choice of the name of *Bednota*, meaning “The Poor,” for the first Soviet newspaper aimed at common readers. Aspiring young people likely to buy the newspaper preferred to identify with rising Komsomol members and future Bolsheviks, rather than the destitute peasants of the day.

Krest'ianskaia gazeta fared little better. For example, the cover image of the 17 November 1925 issue showed a peasant with whom few among the target audience would be likely to identify.

⁵⁶ The images appear on pages 55 and 50 of the magazine and are reproduced in A. E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, 2000), 47, 113.

⁵⁷ Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*, 11-12.

⁵⁸ See *Rabochaia gazeta* for 13, 24, 26 February and 17, 18 March 1925.

№ 101 Тираж Газеты—2000. Цена 10 к. оп. Вторник, 17 ноября 1925 года. В ЗАКЛАДКЕ СООБРАЖЕНИИ И ОТВЕТСТВ.

КРЕСТЬЯНСКАЯ ГАЗЕТА

Крестьянско-Фермерский Комитет Российской Коммунистической Партии (больш.)

№ 101 Тираж Газеты—2000. Москва, Владимирская, 5. Цена 10 к. оп. 101

Во 101-й годовщину «Крестьянской Газеты»

Великий день «Крестьянской Газеты» совпадает с юбилейным ее десятилетием. Это один из самых знаменательных дней нашей истории и культуры. И, конечно, «Крестьянская Газета» при этом имеет значение не только для народа, но и для культуры, для культуры в широком смысле слова.

Во время войны газета, что раньше никогда не бывало, читали крестьяне, рабочие, студенты, а также и те, кто в то время считался «буржуазными» и «либеральными». Газета была нужна всем, и в то время, когда в стране шла борьба за власть, и в то время, когда в стране шла борьба за культуру.

С тех пор и теперь «Крестьянская Газета» имеет свою задачу по отношению к народу. Но не только к народу, а также и к культуре, к культуре в широком смысле слова. Газета продолжает бороться за дело своего народа.

О злодочках, «Крестьянской Газете»

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Бедняцкому и середняцкому другу, неутомному борцу за революционную законность на деревне — дружеский крестьянский привет. Крестьяне — работники, «Крестьянской Газеты»: Чукунов, Зубнов, Манушин.

3. The Peasant Newspaper shows its implausible old-time reader on Press Day

An old man in a greatcoat and boots, pipe in hand, carries a large-format edition of the newspaper. An editor knowledgeable about peasant Russia would have picked up all that was wrong with the image. The old man looks at least 50 and therefore not likely able to read the paper. He juggles the unwieldy item along with his pipe and other gear—not circumstances conducive to reading. The image showed a patriarch from whom the activists sought to wrest power and authority in a thousand villages across the nation. Upwardly striving rural correspondents related uneasily with such figures as the old man with the pipe. The decision to feature the old-timer on the cover without the balancing inclusion of a young activist exemplifies consistent misreading of the audience. That publications such as *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* and *Rabochaia gazeta*, though aimed at literate common readers, failed to achieve their objectives is apparent from dozens of studies of readers addressing the subject.⁵⁹

Half of the challenge that editors faced during the NEP related to identifying the right target audience. The other half was the question of what con-

59 Brooks, "Studies of the Reader in the 1920s."

stituted news. Coverage varied somewhat according to the intended audience. The editors of *Bednota* allotted roughly a fifth of the space to peasants and only 5% or 6% to workers from 1921 to 1927 until collectivization.⁶⁰ *Krest'ianskaia gazeta*, which replaced *Bednota* for ordinary peasant readers, allotted most space to peasants, local government, and taxation, as well as science with an eye to combating religion. *Rabochaia gazeta* emphasized economic issues. All three, however, paid considerable attention to foreign affairs. In *Bednota* coverage varied from 14% of all column inches in 1921, 1924, and 1925 to over 20% in 1926 and 1927. Coverage of foreign affairs in *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* ranged from 15-16% in 1923-26 to 11% in 1927. In *Rabochaia gazeta* it varied from 26 % in 1923, the year of the war scare, to 15% to 22% until 1927, when excitement over the First Year Plan turned attention inward.

Space allotted to life abroad initially reflected urgent interests of the new regime to secure diplomatic recognition and maintain vital trade links, but it also accorded with sympathies of readers for Western ways of life that had strengthened in the final pre-revolutionary period. Late Imperial Russia had turned toward the West even as some cultural figures explored Russian exceptionalism. The expansion of schooling and other features of the Great Reforms produced a society that warmed to technology, science, and changes perceived as progress often associated with Europe and America. The tilt toward modernity was not limited to the elite; in the elections for the first State Duma of 1906 peasants voted for schoolteachers, not priests, as Terence Emmons has noted.⁶¹

Coverage of foreign affairs and life abroad during the 1920s responded to this continued interest in the wider world and fell largely into four recurrent stories or explanatory frames. One line of coverage addressed prospects for peaceful relations (including diplomatic recognition and commercial and cultural exchange) with other countries and a second explored related stories about the outlook for world revolution. Two additional types of "evergreen" pieces presented the misery of life under capitalism and foreign threats to the new socialist regime. The first two kinds of stories reinforced identification with "the West," a term used neutrally in the Soviet press, while the last two reinforced contrary views of insularity and wariness toward the outside world. Each type of coverage accounts for about a quarter of the space allotted to foreign affairs in *Pravda*, *Krest'ianskaia gazeta*, and *Trud*.⁶²

60 See Brooks, "Public and Private Values," Appendix C, 31-32 for my calculation of the allocation of space by content in *Bednota*, *Krest'ianskaia gazeta*, and *Rabochaia gazeta* in the 1920s. All subsequent reference to space unless otherwise noted refer to these tables.

61 T. Emmons, *The Russian Landed Gentry and the Peasant Emancipation of 1861* (Cambridge, 1968), 317.

62 I discuss these issues in *Thank You Comrade Stalin*, 32-33, 38-43 and in "Official Xenophobia and Popular Cosmopolitanism in Early Soviet Russia," *American Historical Review*, 97, 5 (Dec. 1992), 1431-1448.

Reports of the grim life abroad doubled as praise for Soviet life.⁶³ These stories during the NEP served largely to signal aspirants to positions in the Party and state as to attitudes they should hold regarding life abroad. *Pravda* presented an essay about Polish peasants eager to hear discussions and speeches among their counterparts across the border (P6/16/25). *Pravda*, *Trud*, and even the *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* reported regularly on threats from abroad and allotted considerable space to the war scares of 1923 and 1927. The Bolshevik journalists used anti-foreign rhetoric as a temporary expedient to unite the country as Lenin's health failed. They promoted fear of foreigners and foreign powers in 1927 to crush domestic opposition and insulate the country from foreign influence.⁶⁴ An ambiguous engagement with the world at large remained characteristic of the Soviet Union until its collapse, and foreign affairs constantly tested those who sought always to discern and express the favored attitudes.

America presented special challenges. The country had been a focus of curiosity and admiration among diverse readers before October 1917.⁶⁵ Russians in the late tsarist era identified the US with technology, energy, science, modernity, democracy, and capitalism, and the Bolsheviks tapped into this tradition when they promoted Ford's assembly line. Yet Ford was unquestionably capitalist and thereby suspect. "There is nothing frightening about Fordism in a Soviet country," a journalist reassured activists in *Rabochaia gazeta* (5/3/26). *Pravda* promised its readers in the mid-1920s that Russia would become a "second America" (11/15/24, 12/31/25).

Yet simultaneously the press denounced life in America with special attention to readers who might believe that it was anything but a hell of capitalist exploitation. Journalists of the 1920s challenged the notion of America as a land of opportunity with a steady stream of articles about oppression, poverty, and class struggle.⁶⁶ They addressed resisting readers with ironic captions such as "Life in Rich America," "In the Democratic Heaven," and "In the Country of Freedom."⁶⁷ "The Great Democracy is a hell for Negroes," wrote a columnist in *Rabochaia gazeta* on 9 August 1922. A journalist in *Bednota* wrote of "The slavery of peasants in America" on 19 July 1922. A *Pravda* journalist complained on April 3, 1926, that even peasants believed in "America's heavenly wonders." The journalists at all levels addressed unseen readers with unsolicited answers to unposed questions, thereby acknowledging the possibility of dissent from official views.

63 I discuss this particular schema emphasizing repression abroad in the press *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*, 38-40.

64 Brooks, "Official Xenophobia," 1442-1443.

65 In this section draw on my essay, "The Press and its Message: Images of America in the 1920s and 1930s," in S. Fitzpatrick, A. Rabinowitch, R. Stites (eds.), *Russia in the Era of the NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington, 1991), 231-252.

66 See *Rabochaia Moskva* (May 9, 1923) and *Rabochaia gazeta* (July 10, 1923).

67 *Rabochaia Moskva*, (August 16, 1922), (August 25, 1922), (December, 28, 1927).

Articles about suffering abroad could not quell dissatisfaction with the reality of suffering at home and its contrast with the Bolsheviks' empty promises of a better life.⁶⁸ Ordinary people even refused to rally behind the government during the war scare of 1927, as historian Ol'ga Velikanova has shown.⁶⁹ The government sat on many secret reports of hostility and anger among the very people in whose name they claimed to hold power. Even the marked recovery of the rural economy under the NEP was not enough to compensate for the mix of petty tyranny and disorder to which peasants were now exposed. More important was resistance to the promotion of the Bolshevik cause among urban young people from whom the activists and new party members would most likely be drawn. Here the issue was probably chiefly not a shortfall in expectations, although the gap between aspirations and opportunities may have mattered. The nature of the NEP, itself, may have led urban young people away from advancement within the Bolshevik structure and toward more individualistic identities outside of the official hierarchies of merit and power.

Russian young people and cultural entrepreneurs identified Russian urban life in the 1920s with a commercial and semi-commercial popular culture of self, pleasure, style, and enjoyment in tandem with similar cultural practices in the capitalist nations of the West. The new rulers permitted the import of foreign films throughout the entire decade, even though film was probably the most powerful source of fantasy and of role models at the time. Denise Youngblood has demonstrated that foreign films were widely shown in the USSR until 1930, well attended, and "heavily advertised," even in *Pravda*.⁷⁰ Soviet film-goers watched in private theaters or workers' clubs, laughing with Chaplin and Keaton and doting on Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Though first-run tickets may have been costly, young workers joined the so-called NEPmen and government white collar workers in the theater seats. This mixed public also consumed the 245,000 copies of biographies of Pickford and Fairbanks issued during the NEP. The allure of the films and the public personae of their stars ran deeply. When queried in 1928, according to an article in *Pravda* on January 6, 1928, children explained their preference for American films over Soviet ones because "another life is shown there," and what the Soviet films "show in our land is boring and poor."

Marina Levitina explains how Soviet filmmakers used the American stars as role models to promote new active Soviet identities.⁷¹ In America Pickford

68 O. Velikanova, *Popular Perceptions of Soviet politics in the 1920s: Disenchantment of the Dreamers* (London, 2013), 22-117.

69 Velikanova, *Popular Perceptions*, 45-118; See also D. Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror Under Stalin, 1927-1941* (New Haven, 2011), 18-21.

70 D. J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 1992), 19-22.

71 M. L. Levitina, *'Russian Americans' in Soviet Film: Cinematic Dialogues between the Us and the USSR* (London, 2015), 32-33.

and Fairbanks personified a gospel of success based on mobility with merit.⁷² Stalin personally pitched such traits as energy, initiative, and enthusiasm to the masses to promote the Five-Year Plan, collectivization, and the Cultural Revolution. The most important effect of the constant presence of foreign films during the NEP was their representation of foreigners in the capitalist world as admirable, happy, and interesting. Bolshevik journalists would modify this picture of the foreign other when the movies were no longer shown after Stalin's Great Break, but they were unwilling to abandon it entirely.

Although the state controlled the press during the NEP, the wider mass culture during these years was more pluralistic than the press and necessarily created a cultural dynamic that engaged the newspapers. The influence of the broader culture penetrated more deeply than the Bolshevik leaders might have liked. Despite the repressive political order, the rage for dancing, pop music, and faddish clothing that swept through Russian cities resembled that which flourished abroad. As S. Frederick Starr argues in his classic study of Soviet jazz, "By 1928, the new music and dances had conquered large parts of the educated urban middle class and had made inroads among the laboring population of a few centers."⁷³ As he further explains: "... Soviet society provided limited space in which the twenties could roar..." but roar they did.⁷⁴

Many young people in the capitals supplemented or replaced the somewhat boring official culture with a lively western alternative in dancing, movie watching, dress, fashion, and music. The young urban cohorts most needed to carry the Bolshevik project forward returned from evenings dancing the Charleston without much enthusiasm to go forth into the day and demonize that capitalist world, at least in its American manifestation. The Bolsheviks had imagined young people as the vanguard of the future and worked hard to draw them into the Party and the Komsomol. The political literacy pushed in the official press clashed with the blandishments of commercial culture, especially in the elevation of the self over the collective, the individual over the state, and present enjoyment over sacrifice for a bright future. Anne Gorsuch has argued that in part for this reason authorities blocked access to foreign cultural goods and cracked down on western culture in the Cultural Revolution at the end of the 1920s. Despite the eventual block, the experience of the 1920s likely inspired many readers to take a skeptical view of the regime's boldest claims and even to adopt an ironic attitude toward official culture in general.

⁷² Levitina, 'Russian Americans,' 153.

⁷³ S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union 1917-1980* (New York, 1983), 77.

⁷⁴ Starr, *Red and Hot*, 77.

3. 1928-1932: A TILT TOWARD PROPAGANDA

By the end of 1928, key positions in the administrative hierarchy had been filled by people who had largely demonstrated at least a rudimentary knowledge of political terms and conditions, and an eagerness to achieve the recognition and emoluments associated with public service. As Rigby shows the *nomenklatura* system was well established and able to manage additional staffing required. Yuri Slezkine in his *The House of Government* offers an intimate view of the *nomenklatura* through a painstaking description of the lives of residents of a special Moscow housing complex built in 1931 for families of high officials. The residents are a mix of opportunists, high-living cynics, quasi-religious fanatics, and cautious and obedient top administrators.⁷⁵ This “house on the embankment,” was not the only such residence for the ruling elite and their families; the first had been established in the Kremlin when the Bolsheviks moved the capital back to Moscow from Petrograd in 1918.

Stalin reoriented the press toward propaganda as he consolidated power and undermined the NEP. He suppressed the Left Opposition of Trotskii and others at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927. He weakened advocates of the NEP such as Bukharin when he defied the market in agriculture with the forcible seizure of grain during his trip to Siberia in January 1928. By 1928 Stalin and his close associates had become concerned that the NEP diverged culturally from directions consistent with his political objectives. They launched the Five-Year Plan, collectivization, and the persecution of prosperous peasants with a corresponding sharp turn to propaganda in the press.

The shift can be attributed to opportunity and necessity. The opportunity arose with the enormous growth in the base of supporters, as purges swept away old Party members and cleared the way for new ones. The political leadership at this point had little need to use the press to communicate with applicants, since the number of aspirants exceeded requirements and other mechanisms for selection were available. Total Party membership (of full and candidate members) reached a million and a quarter on 1 January 1928.⁷⁶ Yet after the Sixteenth Party Congress in June-July 1930, of these 12% were expelled. Larger purges came in January 1933 and 1934, and recruitment was even suspended for a time during this period. In 1930 nearly half of the two million party members were new, and by 1933 among them were 700,000 former peasants.⁷⁷ The new collective farms alone soon employed millions of low-level non-field employees. An assault on the old intelligentsia also opened space for new people. By 1933, three quarters of a million worker-communists had joined the professions or taken white collar jobs.

75 Y. Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 2017).

76 Schapiro, *The Communist Party*, 439-440 for these figures on the party.

77 On figures for party membership, purges, and employment, see Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*, 55-56.

The press gave notice of further openings with coverage of trials of those blamed for mishaps and mismanagement. *Pravda* launched the Shakhty trial of engineers accused in 1928 of flooding a Donbas mine. Scientists at the Academy of Sciences were culled in early 1929 and managers of the food industry in September 1930. *Pravda* assailed the grocery managers with a three-column editorial on 22 September 1930 that read: No mercy for the Conscious Organizers of Difficulties in Supply.” Scapegoating trials attacked the so-called “Industrial Party” in late 1930, and Mensheviks in the following year.

This record of tenuous tenure might be expected to have discouraged new applicants, but the press played a role here, as well. Those dismissed were in all cases accused of wrong-doing. Readers with no source of alternative information or personal experience with false accusation may have taken the statements at face value. They might naturally assume that they, themselves, would not be at risk of dismissal since they had no intention to do wrong.

The necessity of the shift to propaganda followed from the disastrous results of Stalin’s “Great Break.” Living standards fell, workers’ wages sank to nearly half of 1928 levels, rationing was imposed in cities, and millions starved in the famine in Ukraine and the Volga region. Although the regime had at that point formidable resources of social constraint and repression, a correct understanding that the misfortunes were induced by bad policy might have led to widespread discontent. Thus the press instilled the dual belief that current calamity was due to domestic and foreign wreckers and that the future held hope for prosperity. The belief was intended to sustain the engagement of citizens as motivated workers and patient consumers. The formulation and mass inculcation of this belief required propaganda, and the press delivered it.

In his speech, “The Year of the Great Break” for the November anniversary of the Revolution in 1929, Stalin hailed “a year of great change on all fronts.” He stressed the offensive against the capitalist elements in town and country, as well as the future superiority of life at home over that abroad. His words were telling of the importance he attached to the comparison: “And when we have put the U.S.S.R. on an automobile, and the muzhik on a tractor,” he concluded, “let the worthy capitalists who boast so much of their ‘civilization’ try to overtake us!”⁷⁸ No picture of Stalin in the press accompanied his words, since the cult was just getting started. The press also conflated the language of command with the voice of the Party in general, as in the central headline on 14 November 1929: “The Party Masses Demand the Complete Liquidation of the Right Opposition” and sub header: “For the General Line of the Party.” To read these lines is to immerse oneself in the terror and confusion of those times, made worse by the stilted dogmatic language of the press that had an almost incantatory quality. For the mass of activists and believers alike the sudden

⁷⁸ Translation from Marxists’ Internet Archive at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1929/11/03.htm> (accessed April 5, 2020).

turn from haltingly informative discussions, information, and argument to what amounts to new kind of communication must have been baffling.

With Stalin's "Great Break" the press shifted from party building and facilitating identification of suitable cadres to the promotion of the new policies and alternative realities. Under collectivization, Stalin and the leadership took command of agriculture away from the individual peasants who had farmed during the NEP. They established brutal labor discipline in the factories between 1927 and 1932. The front pages of newspapers filled with the commands of the command economy. Directives from the Central Committee to all provincial party organizations occupied the front page of *Bednota* on 1 January 1929, and the editorial celebrated 12 years of Soviet rule. The paper's front page on 13 August of the same year lamented that preparations for the harvest were delayed and warned "Brigades of Workers uncover intrigues of the Kulak." The editorial screamed of "The Bloody Provocation" of the Japanese in Nanking. A few days later, on 16 August, the editorial blared "We need fighters and builders, not bureaucrats."

The editors of *Bednota* featured Stalin's speech on the Great Break on page one of the 7 November 1929 anniversary issue.



4. *The Poor* shows Stalin's Great Break speech on the front-page plus a photomontage

The headers read “Long Live the 12th Anniversary of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” and “Under the Flag of Lenin, to a World-Wide October [Revolution].” Simple uncolored illustrations at the top of the page featured an airplane marked “the country of Soviets” and at the bottom a photo montage of factories and crowds with a statue of Lenin in the center. Crudely hand-lettered signs in English read “Unity” and “Defend the Soviet Union.” The press conveyed in this manner a vision of the world and the Soviet Union divided into friends and enemies at home and abroad that proved long lasting. The vision suited Stalin’s nationalistic program to consolidate power and mobilize the effort needed to turn the country into a leading industrial power despite wasteful squandering of agricultural potential, industrial raw materials, and human labor.

Bednota did not accompany coverage of Stalin’s 7 November speech with a photo of the leader, indicating the nascent stage of the cult of personality at that time. The illustrations on that day instead featured a full-length drawing of Lenin by Deni, a long line of tractors by the same artist, and visuals of smiling workers above excerpts from Lenin’s speeches. *Pravda* relegated Stalin’s speech “Year of the Great Turn” to page 2, in which he shared space with the Jewish anti-religious propagandist Emel’ian Iaroslavskii and with Lenin’s widow Nadezhda Krupskaja. As if reinforcing the secondary placement of Stalin’s speech, the editors put yet another quote from Lenin at the top left of the page.

Less than three months later on 25 February 1930 *Pravda* and *Bednota* signaled Stalin’s ascending stature with a large front-page cartoon showing a puff of smoke from his pipe erasing “wreckers, NEP men, and kulaks.”⁷⁹ On 27 June 1930 *Bednota* featured a cover illustration of Stalin and a tractor under the caption “...Long Life to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and its General Secretary, Comrade Stalin.” Within a few months, the props of the pipe and the tractor were gone, and Deni presented Stalin in *Pravda* on 7 November 1930 in an army tunic and high black boots, hand on heart, as in his much-ballyhooed oath to Lenin on the leader’s death. *Pravda* on 1 January 1931 carried another front-page image of Stalin, again by Deni, this time in a jaunty cap and jacket and a round collared shirt. The progression in portrayal of Stalin over the twelve months, from his implied presence behind the pipe to the full-length portraits in regalia of power, illustrated how the press signaled the cognoscenti about shifts in the political winds.

Stalin and his coterie now had millions of activists and supporters at hand ready to promote the new policies and simultaneously further their own self-interest. Should they stray, there was always the threat of a purge and punishment; hence the need for functionaries to discern what was called the “General Line” from the press. The failure of the press to find

79 See my study of the cult in *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*, 59-77, particularly 129, 130 for reproductions of *Pravda*’s front page illustration by Deni on 25 February, 1930 and *Bednota*’s front page on 27 June 1930; Jan Plamper suggests contrarily in *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven, 2012), 37, that the cult was “on hold from 1930 to mid-1933.”

an audience with ordinary people did not mean failure with the new rising political class of party members, candidate members, local officials, and activists. For them, life had improved, but the benefits even for them might be short-lived and were always at risk. They had to read newspapers to learn who was targeted and therefore whom to condemn or at least shun.

When mass persecutions began, perpetrators and victims alike had to look to the press for direction toward self-preservation. This was the ironic meaning of a quip that Il'ia Il'f (1897-1937) and Evgenii Petrov (1903-1942) put in the mouth of their hero Ostap Bender: "Those who do not read newspapers should be morally killed on the spot!" The line appears in their second novel featuring Bender *Little Golden Calf* (*Zolotoi telenok*, 1931), a comic favorite of readers throughout the Soviet era.⁸⁰ The year 1931 in which it was first published was a critical one. Stalin had published his "Dizzy with Success," speech in *Pravda* the prior year blaming the disaster of collectivization on others. The chaos of the plan and the collectivization were at their worst, and persecutions were on the rise, as well as mass expulsions from the party.

Il'f and Petrov paid a back-handed complement to the importance of the press in charting a course for survival in turbulent and baffling times. That they were right can be seen in the fate of Dem'ian Bednyi (1883-1945), the opportunistic and thoroughly despicable author of doggerel whom Stalin patronized until he didn't. Bednyi missed a turn in the General Line; specifically, he failed to notice that Stalin had adopted the view of the old tsarist empire as a boon to the colonized peoples. For this oversight Bednyi was expelled from the party, though he escaped the physical destruction that was the fate of so many.⁸¹

Attacks on cultural elites began in the late 1920s. As early as 1926 the authorities had reached into the terrain of literature and the arts to apply their divisions of the world into friends and enemies. They gave radical leftist advocates of "proletarian culture" a green light to attack prominent rivals in the literary community and the avant-garde. What began as a campaign against bourgeois influence evolved gradually into a campaign against modernism in general under the rubric of "formalism," in the sense of the priority of style over content. The campaign was played out largely in the press.

The origins of these attacks in the propaganda against the capitalist world can be seen in an early denunciation of Kazimir Malevich, who was accused of 'formalism' in 1930. The vulgar quality of such denunciations is striking. On 30 June 1926 a critic in *Leningradskaia Pravda* (Leningrad Pravda) denounced an exhibition of Suprematism as "artistic masturbation that no one needs" at a time "when proletarian art is confronted by gigantic challenges in all their magnitude, when hundreds of truly gifted artists go hungry."

80 I. Il'f, E. Petrov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1961), 44. Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov, *The Little Golden Calf*, trans. A. O. Fisher (Montpelier, VT, 2009), 72. The translation is from 1931 in *30 Days* (*30 dnei*).

81 K. Clark, E. Dobrenko translate the letters between Bednyi and Stalin in *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (New Haven, 2007), 68-75.

In the same year another critic opined that “For the future historian of art the canvases of Picasso, our Kandinskii, Malevich, and ‘their ilk’ will be the most obvious and indisputable proof of the insane horror at the dead-end that seized the international bourgeoisie. ...”⁸² Maiakovskii, once a favorite on the left, came under fire a few years later in *Pravda* for a false “leftist” note in his late play, *The Bathhouse (Bania)*.⁸³

The two core elements of the propagandist messaging; that is, distinctions between friends and enemies and the belief in a glorious future took different forms for different audiences. For artists the emphasis was on friends and enemies, and the acceptable artistic forms that allowed one to stay on the safe side of the line. For the general public the motivating messages included pride in the nation, Stalin’s infallibility, and the superiority of life at home over hellish conditions abroad. The press offered diptychs of imagination paring people with whom ordinary Russian might identify, such as workers or farmers, living grim lives under terror and oppression abroad contrasted to Russian peasants and workers enjoying happiness, freedom, and plenty.

Presiding over this tableau were the increasingly frequent presentations of Stalin’s visage in varying forms and contexts, presaging the ubiquity to come. This was propaganda aimed at ordinary people. It also reminded party managers and officials on whom their status depended. Among such cadres, newspapers had become obligatory reading for information and to gauge whose fortunes were rising, and whose plummeting.

4. 1933-1935: PROPAGANDISTS AT WORK

By the mid-1930s the newspapers had emerged as the chief guide to the official image of Soviet society, and a major force propelling adherence to official pronouncements. Until the modest recovery in 1932-1933 from Stalin’s Great Break the press had much to demand and little to celebrate. The recovery coincided with a decline of Western economies into the depths of the Great Depression. The press contrasted images of unemployed workers and desperate farmers in America to Soviet workers and peasants enjoying an overstated improvement in material life. Reality thus conveniently served propaganda, and helped to dispel the positive images of life in America that had dominated the popular imagination during the NEP.

Stalin proclaimed Socialist Realism as the officially accepted style of literature and the arts in 1934, formally contrasting an exaggeratedly positive view of Soviet life with the depression and poverty in the West. Organizers

⁸² I. A. Vakar, T. N. Mikhienko (eds.), *Kazimir Malevich: Letters, Documents, Memoirs, Criticism*, Vol. 2 (London, 2014), 529-530.

⁸³ W. Woroszyński, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (New York, 1970), 483-484.

of the First All Union Congress of Soviet Writers (7 August-1 September 1934) repeatedly compared “our lives” with “theirs” and “our literature” with “theirs.” Writers had occupied positions of high visibility in Russian society since the nineteenth century, and the great authors of the earlier period were still revered in 1934. Writers and poets now considered great were active in the 1920s (for example Isaac Babel’, Mikhail Zoshchenko, Il’ia Il’f and Evgenii Petrov, and Andrei Platonov, among others), but they were not officially lauded by Bolshevik leaders preoccupied with other matters. Stalin’s anointment of Socialist Realism with official approbation opened the way for Soviet writers to be positioned administratively within the canon that included the nineteenth century greats. Because of the nature of Socialist Realism, the writers so elevated (not, for the most part, those whose reputations have withstood tests of time) also became propagandists for the glorious future life of which Zoshchenko’s nightingale sardonically sang (“What the Nightingale Sang,” 1925). The press did its part to burnish the reputations of writers promoted into the ranks of the Soviet newly great.

Pravda introduced Socialist Realism on 17 August 1934, day one of The First Soviet Writers’ Congress, with a front-page drawing of Stalin and Gor’kii smiling shoulder to shoulder. The lead editorial hailed “A holiday of Soviet Culture.” A few lines about engineers of the human soul addressed to the advanced detachment of the Soviet cultural elite appeared in italics just under the logo “Proletarians of all countries unite.” The proclamation of Socialist Realism was a counter to what might be called actual realism or, with reference to the 19th century, critical realism.

In many respects Soviet life in the 1930s was a culture of performance. Role-playing was a survival skill and it is hardly surprising that writers adopted the role of enthusiasts. They were well prepared to do so. Soviet film directors presented enthusiastic heroes and heroines on screen, and Stalin cited “labor enthusiasm” twice in his 1929 speech on the “Year of Great Change.” At the writers’ congress, “enthusiasm was everywhere: in the speeches in the lively atmosphere, the noise of fanfares, the laughter of the highly diverse delegations,” notes Régine Robin in her classic study of the meetings.⁸⁴ Those present made a big show to appear energetic and enthusiastic. “I remember the congress as a big wonderful holiday, Il’ia Erenburg recalled years later, adding that he prepared “like a girl prepares for her first ball.”⁸⁵ At the time Andrei Zhdanov, who helped organize the gathering, intimated that some of the enthusiasm was false and cautioned Stalin to be alert to how the participants “tried to outdo each other.”⁸⁶

Most Russians first encountered “Socialist Realism” as a catch phrase in the press beside other catch phrases such as “the active Soviet public” (*sovet-*

84 R. Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. C. Porter (Stanford, 1992), 14.

85 I. Erenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn’: Vospominaniia v trekh tomakh* (Moscow, 1990), vol. 2, 30.

86 Quoted in D. L. Babichenko, *Pisteli i tsenzory* (Moscow, 1994), 10-11.

skaiia obshchestvennost'). The press shaped the gathering by portraying Soviet heroes as the proper subject matter for Soviet literature. *Pravda* devoted page after page to the writers' speeches and emphasized that those present in the audience as would-be readers were the outstanding people of Soviet society: activists, party leaders, officials, super-achievers, and leaders in the Union Republics, which were fully represented. The emphasis on heroic individuals had gained force in the year before the congress. Journalists highlighted heroines and heroes and how they were rewarded. Much was made of the rescue of the icebreaker the *Cheliuskin* and its crew, whose captain attended the gathering. The flyers who had managed the rescue were hailed as "Heroes of the Soviet Union" in *Trud* (4/21/1934) a few months before the congress. The audience represented what had come to be called "the active Soviet public."

Isaac Babel, one of the greatest of the writers present, referred to this public to explain why he had ceased to publish or, more precisely, had decided to "keep quiet." Such a public, he explained (undoubtedly despairing with tongue-in-cheek, but safely so) in his speech as printed in *Pravda* on 25 August 1934 "knows ten times more than all writers." *Pravda* and the central press provided writers with an imagined public that had little to do with the kinds of readers surveyed in 1920s. *Krestianskaia gazeta* on 17 August greeted the congress with a map dotted with the faces of "outstanding" collective farmers. The header read: "Our great country is remarkable; our people are remarkable. Write remarkable books about this."

The newspapers had focused on super-achievers well before the writers' congress, though often with an aside to identify wreckers and troublemakers. In February 1934, *Pravda* issued a large-format album on the transport industry illustrated by Kukryniksy, the famed trio of caricaturists who had made a career of mocking enemies. In the album the cartoonists send up crooks on one page, and, on the facing one, a realist artist pictures a super-achiever in the same industry. A mini-biography appears beside the achiever while *Pravda's* original denunciation accompanies the illustration of the crooks. The preface by the editorial board of *Pravda* praises the shock-workers collectively as "excellent Bolshevik leaders": and the Kukryniksy, as "snipers of proletarian satire" who unmask "saboteurs, bureaucrats, and enemies of the reconstruction of transport." The volume concludes with a description of how those caricatured were punished, and after that, a poem thanking the Kukryniksy for good work by Dem'ian Bednyi, who was still in Stalin's good graces as a court clown.

The album published by *Pravda* exemplified the consistent pairing of rising newly favored activists and has-been's discarded in disgrace. In one set of illustrations a cheery upbeat group of mechanics on the Moscow-Belarus-Baltic Railway grin at readers while on the facing page the director of a

Cheliabinsk plant is chastised for hiring truants previously fired from their jobs, including so-called “former people,” priests and tsarist officers.



5. Mechanics on the Moscow-Belarus-Baltic Railway



6. Pravda signals that officials who hire priests and “former people” will be punished

Other images in the volume show managers carelessly wrecking state property and other instances in which failures can be attributed to specific miscreants who are named and then publicly punished. Among the punishments reported on the last page are chiefly loss of the job and expulsion from the party or other unspecified disciplinary action.

The Writers' Congress emphasized the contrast between Russia and the West, between life at home and life abroad. Gor'kii opened the congress with a short introduction in which he distinguished between the optimism of Russia and the pessimism of the West. A. A. Zhdanov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, followed with a damnation of bourgeois writers and culture for mysticism and pessimism: "In our country the main heroes of literary works are the active builders of a new life. ... Our literature is saturated with enthusiasm and heroism. It is optimistic..."⁸⁷ Maksim Gor'kii, in his long full speech that followed, also contrasted Soviet culture with the oppressive culture of capitalism, though he accepted practitioners of "critical realism" in the west and writers friendly to the Soviet Union.

The press increasingly adopted as its chief function the task of molding the opinions of ordinary citizens, both with reference to the enthusiastic achievers as model citizens and with a comparison of life at home and abroad. Journalists became propagandists at work. As these qualities of the press hardened, journalism increasingly adopted features of the Socialist Realism that it lauded; the line between literature and journalism blurred, and not because the language of the press took on commendable literary excellence. The blur derived instead from the blending of fact with fiction in the press, a clear characteristic of propaganda. *Pravda's* header on 7 November 1934 declared "Our Country has Become a Great Proletarian Power." Similarly, *Pravda's* headline address to model citizens on 1 January 1935 read: "Men and Women Shock Workers of the Great County of Soviets, Advanced Masters of Technology, A Bolshevik Greeting!"

Ordinary people in cities and the countryside could well judge the quality of their lives in relation to past experience and draw appropriate conclusions. They could not, however, compare their situations with those of ordinary people living abroad. Here the press was likely to have had its greatest influence on readers. The most influential publication in this regard is probably not *Pravda* or any of the mass newspapers, but instead *Za Rubezhom* (*Abroad*), a newspaper published three times monthly and intended to inform opinion leaders about developments abroad. Edited by Gor'kii and Mikhail Kol'tsov (an editor and subsequently a well-known correspondent covering the Spanish Civil War—he featured in Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*), with a circulation in the second half of 1935 of 125,000 copies, it was not only prestigious, but also informative and even entertaining for its cartoons and photographs. Issues often ran to more than 20 pages. The tabloid format was accessible but the paper's length suggested an audience of those with a place to store it after reading an article or two.

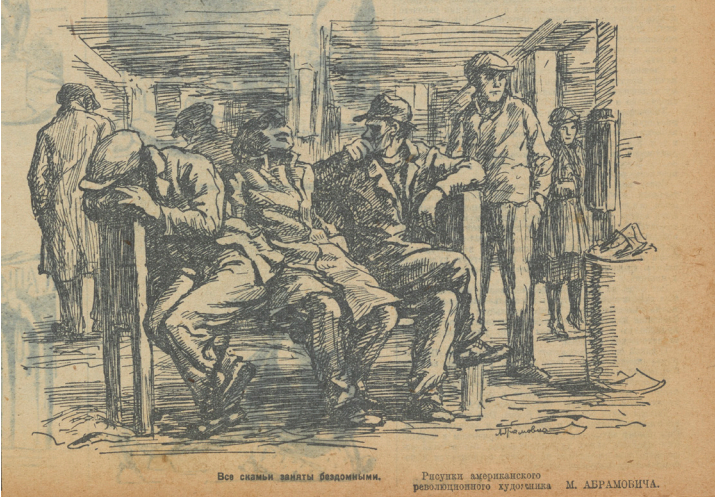
87 *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei. 1934. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1934), 4.

The cover of issue No. 14 on 15 May 1935 exemplifies the paper's appeal to agitators and propagandists. They could read it for enjoyment and also use it to explain why Soviet workers and peasants should be grateful to live in the Soviet Union and not in America. The front page shows gloomy workers crowding into a narrow entrance to the New York Subway.



7. The newspaper *Abroad* shows that the New York Subway is no Moscow Metro

The lead story in the issue of 5 June 1935, a few weeks later, features hassle and police arrest reported to be common in the New York subway. Inside the paper are more drawings including several of the unemployed one of evil-looking detectives, and another of a poor fellow scavenging a smoking cigarette butt from the ground. By way of contrast, the Moscow metro had been operating already for more than a half year with grandiose stations; a mobile palace for the people.



8. The magazine features jobless New Yorkers on a subway bench

The same issue on 15 of May with the cover image of the New York subway features a grim piece by Il’f and Petrov, “A Day in Athens,” alongside a warning on German preparations for war in the air and a letter from some unemployed Poles. Throughout 1935 monstrous figures convey the terror with which the working poor and peasants in the worlds of capitalism and fascism must contend. The editors routinely portray Hitler with the skeletal figure of death at his side, threatening war. The overall impression is that life abroad is one of danger and chaos. Some photos may have sparked a chuckle, however, such as one of New York of housewives protesting high prices and urging others not to buy meat or poultry (25 July 1935).

Coverage of life abroad routinely noted the friendship of oppressed peoples for Soviet Russia. Furthermore, although the images of capitalist exploiters were without mercy, the coverage always conveyed sympathy for those forced to live under such oppression. The propagandistic hardening of distinctions between life at home and abroad was therefore fully consistent with an ideological sympathy for solidarity among peoples across borders. This sympathy can be seen within the tradition of humanistic expression common in Russian literature and perhaps even traceable to the charity of holy fools and saints of Orthodoxy. It was also conveniently consistent with the tenet of Marxist ideology according to which the exploited peoples of the world would throw off their oppressors and unite in a victorious socialist future. The approved feeling for foreign suffering was in stark contrast to brutal punishment for anyone who expressed sympathy for those

persecuted at home, including the kulaks and their families and all who fell in the purges.

The portrayal of misery abroad may have also carried an element of *schadenfreude* or *zloradstvo* in Russian; the joy or pleasure at another's suffering that derives from recognition of one's own more favorable position. The journalists' intent was presumably to make readers feel thankful to be Soviet, and hence motivated to contribute to societal progress. This intent, too, was consistent with the shift to a propagandistic press after 1933 and subsequent full commitment to that function.

CONCLUSION

The language, substance, and context of the Soviet press from its birth in 1918 to its demise in the 1990s are associated with propaganda; that is, the creation of a distorted or alternative reality to influence the beliefs and behavior of members of a target audience. For much of Soviet experience, this characterization is correct, but not for the earliest period. During War Communism and the New Economic Policy and up until about 1928, the press and those who produced it worked with technical challenges and internal pluralism that precluded the hardening of messages required for fully-fledged propaganda. During the early years the press had first to be established on a new post-revolutionary footing, and then to assume an essential role of public communication to underpin staffing of the administrative state and establishment of the *nomenklatura* system.

With the completion of these preconditions and the capture of control by Stalin and his associates, the press was redirected administratively to propagandistic purpose. On balance the redirection served the intent of those who ordered it. Despite unspeakable hardship and untold suffering, only a minority of Soviet citizens attributed their troubles to bad decisions of their leaders. Instead the key tenets of propaganda presented in literary form in Socialist Realism and journalistic form in the press; that is, that Soviet life was good and getting better, that problems could be traced to internal enemies or external and unavoidable factors, and that expansion of Soviet hegemony and influence was to the benefit of those experiencing it, proved to be deeply embedded in the popular consciousness and long-lasting.

The tenets were long-lasting, but not universally accepted despite the panoply of instruments of control at the disposal of Soviet leaders. In parallel to the official press throughout the Soviet decades, dissenting views penetrated from the earliest days and supported a small but vibrant counter-current of literature, rumor, humor, and quest for objective information. The counter-current was in part a natural concomitant of propaganda and the human capacity for inquiry. It was fed by the development of a culture

of reading in the final pre-revolutionary period that led to widely distributed skills critically to manage the written word by people even with rudimentary command of literacy. With this legacy, the Stalinist government's near total control of what was printed and disseminated coexisted with intellectual resistance and dissent.

The odd mix of propaganda and its discontents did not ultimately yield clarity of insight, as was evident from the generalized confusion when the Soviet edifice came crashing down. It nonetheless nurtured a vibrant culture of reading and intellectual engagement that ranks among the notable cultural developments of the twentieth century.

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IS THERE A CLASS IN THIS TEXT? READING IN THE AGE OF STALIN

Thomas Lahusen

The last two days I have read in the newspapers about conversations with milkmaids. I have read so much of it that during the night I have been dreaming of cows. /Laughter/
– Speech of com. Dem'ian Bednyi. *Izvestiia*, 15.2.1936¹

By inverting the title of Stanley Fish's famous book, *Is There a Text in this Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* in the title of the present contribution,² my goal was to signal a number of problems and difficulties that any research on reading in the age of Stalin encounters. What is "class" in the 'classless' society of Stalin's Soviet Union? What are its "interpretive communities"? What tools of investigation can we use when we are confronted with the absence of any *bona fide* surveys?

I will begin by discussing several approaches that have dealt with one or more of these questions. After presenting some of the basic concepts used by Evgeny Dobrenko in his "classic" *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*,³ such as the "ideal reader" or the "death of dialogue" between author and reader in the Soviet "situation of reading," I will present some of the limitations of the state's "reading guidance," attested by my own findings about the readers of

¹ My many thanks to Yurou Zhong for her detailed reading of the draft of the paper and valuable comments.

² S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA, 1980).

³ E. Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford, 1997).

a Stalin Prize novel of the late 1940s. Denis Kozlov's *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past*⁴ will serve me not only to outline some of the important changes that reading *after* Stalin entailed but also to question some of the assumptions that are contained in the notion of reader "defiance" and "confrontation."

A recent interview of a Russian woman who started reading in the late 1920s and the manifestations of reading found in a series of diaries of the 1930s will serve as empirical material that, I hope, sheds some light on the difficult question of what was reading in the age of Stalin. I will also compare some of my findings to those of Oleg Lekmanov, who also used diaries for his analysis, and whose contribution is included in the present volume (LEKMANOV, "The 'Other' Readers of the 1920s").

* * *

One of the important contributions to the question of Soviet readership overall is Evgeny Dobrenko's *The Making of the State Reader*. From the very start Dobrenko underlines the limits of his approach: his work "does not in the least aspire to be any sort of history of reading in Soviet times." What the author is after, is the "*shaping of the reader* of Soviet artistic literature." This literature is part and parcel of the formation of the "institution of literature," the design of which, in the Soviet context, was "to perform (and did perform) substantive political and ideological functions in the authorities' overall system of activities aimed at 'remaking,' 'reforging,' and ultimately creating a new man."⁵ Dobrenko recognizes that the Soviet "State-hierarchy system" was also a "mosaic" with its specific "cultural strata" and various modes of consumption, performing a host of functions (escapist, socializing, compensatory, emotional, etc.), but his focus is the "situation of reading"⁶ ultimately determined by the state whose "horizon of expectations" and "guidance" practically lead to the "death of dialogue" between author and reader. Out of this new situation of reading emerges the "ideal reader" who "is a product of the joint creative work of the authorities and the masses."⁷

Two questions come immediately to mind: what are "the masses" and what are "the authorities"? Dobrenko gives some interesting sources about the former: the provided statistics on readers' preferences and check-out counts refer to Moscow young workers and students of the trade schools and factory training schools in the 1940s as well as rural and regional readers. In the Moscow case, the "authorities" that initiated the surveys were a

4 D. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA, 2013).

5 Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*, viii.

6 *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

7 *Ibid.*, 282-83.

subsection of the Directorate of Cultural Enlightenment. In Vologda and other regions, it was the “library itself.” The explicit goal of the Moscow surveys was “to test the effectiveness of the propaganda of the best works of Soviet literature” and that of the rural survey, “to help the reader.”⁸ The results provided by Dobrenko of what was read by whom are not very surprising, and could even be qualified as somehow “tautological”: the lists of books and their rankings “reflected not simply supply but also readers’ demands as moulded by the school curriculum.” What we see here, is “the apotheosis of the ‘guidance of reading.’”⁹ Some additional statistics provided by Dobrenko go a bit further: for example, the high rate of circulation in Irkutsk of “not only books that have received the Stalin Prize” but also “local Socialist Realist literary productions.”¹⁰ Concerning the “Socialist Realist idyll,” Dobrenko reminds us that “one should not err to the opposite direction,” claiming that nobody read Socialist Realist literature. The statistics should be sufficient to prove that opinion wrong.¹¹

At the risk of being accused of self-plagiarism, I will refer to my own work on Vasiliï Azhaev’s novel *Far from Moscow (Daleko ot Moskvy)*.¹² It largely confirms Dobrenko’s findings. Azhaev received thousands of letters by readers, a good number of which were kept in his personal archive. Some of the first letters were sent to *Novyi mir (New World)*, the ‘thick’ journal that published the novel in 1948. Others were sent to various newspapers after Azhaev was awarded the Stalin Prize, first class, in 1949, or to his own address. Many of these letters were written as a result of “readers’ conferences,” of which the author kept a self-typed list, with hand-written additions up to 1953. These readers’ conferences took place all over the Soviet Union, in libraries, reading rooms, factories, construction sites, collective and state farms, hospitals, railway and army units, middle schools, pedagogical institutes, universities, etc. Reports of these conferences were published in newspapers and journals, among them in an article that appeared in the July 1949 issue of *Novyi mir*. According to its author, N. Kovalev, “party organizer of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) in the Stalin automobile factory,” the readers’ conferences “represent the last link of a long chain of tremendous work, provided by the party organizations and the party committee of the factory in the propaganda of ideas contained in the works of literature.”¹³ The sentence clearly expresses the “horizon of expectation” defined by Dobrenko. Most of the letters to the author are indeed ‘guided’

8 Ibid., 284.

9 Ibid., 285.

10 Ibid., 287. Dobrenko capitalizes “socialist realism.”

11 Ibid.

12 T. Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin’s Russia* (Ithaca and London, 1997).

13 Ibid., 161.

to the point that they repeat the same clichés, slogans, and stereotypical encouragements to the author to correct and perfect his art.

At times, however, ‘life’ intrudes on these letters: for example, readers who recognize themselves and other ‘heroes’ in Azhaev’s novel during a conference organized in February 1949 at the Dzerzhinskii Club of the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁴ The stenographic transcript of the conference contains not only what has been said, but also the author’s answer to the collective who had “taught [him] how to live”: the officials of the Camp of the Lower Amur, where Azhaev worked as a ‘free laborer’ after having been released from the Corrective Labor Camp of the Baikal-Amur Main Line of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs. But the transcript also includes what “should not have been mentioned”: the writer edited the typed transcript by hand, with corrections, inked-out ellipses, etc.

Azhaev participated in many readers’ conferences devoted to his novel. In those he could not attend, he participated by some kind of proxy, sending an impressive amount of answers. Some of the letters contained in his archive reveal much more than “state guidance.” One reader criticises the author for “technical” inaccuracies, another for “historical” mistakes, and several others for aesthetic failures. “Azhaev is good every time he writes about the production process. But when he treats such problems as love and the personal feelings of the heroes, he falls to the level of very low-quality belles lettres.”¹⁵ Another reader blames the writer for only showing the leaders of the construction instead of depicting the builders themselves.¹⁶ Another asks him why he encrypted the place names of his novel: “Adun, Rubezhansk, Novinsk ... A great writer called Sakhalin simply: Sakhalin. Chekhov’s *Sakhalin Island*. Why classify it as a secret, what for?”¹⁷ For a reader from Tomsk, the narrator of *Far from Moscow* is a true Scheherazade: “What happened here is what happened in *A Thousand and Nights*, where the tale was interrupted at the most interesting moment and one had to wait for the next night.”¹⁸ The print run of *Far from Moscow* in the Sovetskii pisatel’ edition of 1959 was 150,000 copies. As shows the following letter, dated 7 November 1949, this was not enough:

You know that people liked *Far from Moscow*; but what you don’t know is that this book was read to shreds in the workers’ settlements of the Donbass (there was only one book, and everybody

¹⁴ Ibid., 151-154.

¹⁵ Ibid., 164.

¹⁶ Ibid., 166.

¹⁷ Ibid., 176.

¹⁸ Ibid., 170.

wanted to read it at the same time). Whole pages were copied from it, by people from various professions....¹⁹

Some letters, finally, asked for another type of guidance, which certainly did not correspond to the state's "horizon of expectation," like this letter of a former prisoner who obviously—like the collective who taught Azhaev "how to live"—decoded the novel's "real" locations (Komsomolsk-on-Amur—Sakhalin Island) and sought the author's financial help so that he could leave the Far East with his children.²⁰

As I have shown in my book, Azhaev was an assiduous reader of himself. Conform to the already long tradition of "rewriting" Soviet literature,²¹ the author of *Far from Moscow* enjoyed the personal "guidance" of Konstantin Simonov, chief editor of *Novyi mir*, when he was revising his novel for the Stalin Prize edition. A first version of it had been published in the journal *Dal'nii vostok* (*The Far East*) between 1946 and 1948.²² But here too, the results of following this guidance are far from "tautological." Simonov's editorial report contains a thirteen-point list of what the author should rewrite, eliminate, or add. Targeted are, among other things, the "love stories" that are part of the novel's plot. To quote just one of the changes proposed by Simonov is the suggestion of the editor to make one of the (slightly) negative female characters "ugly." Azhaev answered: "I don't like much the idea of introducing ugly women." Interesting are the writer's overall responses, very much in tune of his former, pre-Gulag, specialty: rationalization. In the margin of Simonov's list the author wrote "pluses" and "minuses," as well as "plus-and-minuses" to express his (un)willingness or hesitation to follow "guidance," i.e., to make the changes that Simonov requested. The final result was rather predictable: the "plusses" prevailed in the publication. But the author had shown his *personal view*, or at least, what was left of it after having been sentenced for paragraph 58 (counter-revolutionary agitation), spent two years of "re-education" in the labour camp of the Baikal-Amur Mainline, and seven years of work as a "free labourer" in the Far-Eastern labor camp system.

The massive opening of a dialogue between authors and readers after Stalin's death has been well documented in Denis Kozlov's *The Readers of Novyi Mir*.²³ Kozlov shows how the texts published in the journal *Novyi mir* after 1953 by writers like Erenburg, Solzhenitsyn, or Pasternak provoked thousands of letters sent to the journal, which allowed for an unprecedented-

19 Ibid., 22.

20 Ibid., 172.

21 For an outline of this phenomenon, see T. Lahusen, "Cement (Fedor Gladkov, 1925)," in F. Moretti (ed.), *The Novel. Volume 2 Forms and Themes* (Princeton, 2006), 476-482.

22 V. Azhaev, "Daleko ot Moskvy, roman." *Dal'nii vostok*, 1-2 (1946), 3-77; 4 (1947), 3-60; 5 (1947), 63-143; 1 (1948), 3-63; 2 (1948), 3-74.

23 Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past*.

ed exchange between Soviet citizens and their assessment of the country's dramatic history, from the 1917 revolution to collectivization, the purges of the 1930s, and the "Great Patriotic War." Even if Kozlov's work amply proves that the "massive, widespread, and open defiance of officially expressed viewpoints"²⁴ became only possible and visible during the Thaw, he acknowledges that Soviet literary audiences never fit the "Procrustean bed of ideological visions."²⁵ As Michael David-Fox has shown, border-crossings between the Soviet Union and the West never ceased, even during the most isolationist period of Stalinism.²⁶ Reading foreign literature was certainly part of it.

Let us take one of those readers who, to use Dobrenko's formulation, "erred to the opposite direction," i.e. did not follow the "reading guidance" of the state. "I started to read while sitting on my pottie (*sidia na gorshke*)," said Maiia Turovskaia in an interview that I conducted with her on 1 August 2018 in Munich, about seven months before her death. Turovskaia was a major Russian scholar, author of numerous books and articles about Soviet theater, film, and culture, as well as co-director of Mikhail Room's famous 1965 film *Everyday Fascism (Obyknovennyyi fashizm)*. The "pottie" stood next to the bookcase in the Moscow communal apartment where she lived. "I never stopped—she added—and I am still reading, at the age of 94. Russia is a reading country. Perhaps peasant Russia was illiterate, but urban Russia was always reading." Turovskaia was of course a typical representative of the intelligentsia, but her reading experience was not always typical of her 'class.' After all, Stalinist culture and socialist realism was one of her strong interests.²⁷

One of the first things that Turovskaia shared with me was her recollection of going with her father to the antiquarian (*bukinistichnye*) and non-antiquarian bookshops. Some of those shops were private, the others were government shops. Because she was still a child, they looked for children books. She had a remarkable collection of fairy tales. Gypsy tales, for example, or tales of the Ore Mountains, "not to mention the tales of the Brothers Grimm, or the Andersen Tales." Then, there were the book markets, the so-called "book-breaks" (*knizhnye razvaly*), which were the most interesting, of course. They were around the monument of Fedor the First Printer (*pamiatnik Fedoru pervopechatniku*), and also at the Kremlin Wall.

24 Ibid., 42.

25 Ibid., 4.

26 M. David-Fox, "The Iron Curtain as a Semipermeable Membrane: Origins and Demise of the Stalinist Superiority Complex," in P. Babiracki, K. Zimmer (eds.), *Cold War Crossing: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940-1960s* (College Station, 2014), 14-39.

27 One of her last publications is a memoir of the 1930s. M. Turovskaia, *Teeth of the Dragon: My 1930s (Zuby drakona: Moi 30-e gody)* (Moscow, 2015).



1. A book-break at the Kremlin Wall (1920s)

In what was discarded there, one could find anything and everything, starting with the collected works published by M. O. Vol’f and ending with books of the Niva publishing house, with their special paper covers. Then, of course, the book-breaks disappeared. And there was this man, called “book carrier” (*kniganosha*). He brought the subscription editions. He was very small, wearing an astrakhan hat. He brought the first editions of Marcel Proust and Romain Rolland. Turovskaia started reading adventure fiction at the age of six or seven: Jules Vernes, Mayne Reid, Louis Henri Boussenard, Gustave Aimard, O. Henry, etc. Her readings recall those of Tolia Starodubov, the “provincial boy” presented by Lekmanov in his contribution about the “other” readers of the 1920s. But Turovskaia was visibly a more privileged “reader-intellectual” than Anatolii Fedorovich. Her family had also a sizable German library. She had started learning German at the age of six and read the *Grimm tales*, or *Lohengrin*, in the original. Most of the readings were translated literature: she remembers playing the characters of Marc Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper* with the other children in the courtyard. But she only wanted to play the male characters...

Of course, Russian literature was also on her reading list: Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol’... But when asked if she read Soviet literature, her answer was not devoid of contradictions. After a distinctive and general “no,” she admitted reading Nikolai Ostrovskii’s *How the Steel Was Tempered* (*Kak zakalialas’ stal’*). “Even if its text was helpless (*bezpomoshchnyi*), very badly written, the story was dramatic. But *Cement*, we did not read,” she added emphatically, and in contradistinction to the already quoted Anatolii Starodubov, who “liked the novel.” Perhaps he did, because in 1926, the novel had not yet been the object of the bloodletting experienced during

the countless instances of rewriting, during which most of *Cement's* “ornamentalism” was purged for the sake of “socialist realism.”²⁸ Turovskaia remembered reading *The Rout (Razgrom)* by Aleksandr Fadeev, even quoting Commissar Levinson’s last words at the end of the novel: “A man has to live and do his duty” (*Nuzhno bylo zhit’ i ispolniat’ svoi ob’iazannosti*). Fadeev’s *The Young Guard (Molodaia gvardiia)* too, was very much read and discussed “because it was a true story, because these were real people, even if there was a lot of lies, as it turned out later. We couldn’t forgive that Fadeev depicted Tret’iakovich as a traitor.” Other authors mentioned were Mikhail Sholokhov’s *And Quiet Flows the Don (Tikhii Don)*, but Turovskaia did not want “to engage in the Solzhenitsyn polemic about the novel’s authenticity”. She also read Sholokhov’s novel *Virgin Soil Upturned (Podniataia tselina)*, which had “strong passages,” and Konstantin Paustovskii. His novel *Kara-Bugaz* was one of her favorites. “Later Paustovskii became sentimental,” she said.

Asked what kind of books were on the school program, Turovskaia proudly remembered going to the “Fridtjov Nansen” School No.10. Some of her classmates became very famous, Konrad Wolf, the future GDR film director, and his older brother Markus Wolf, who became the legendary head of East Germany’s foreign intelligence bureau, inspiring John le Carré’s character Karla. Among the students of School No. 10 was also Radek’s daughter and Svetlana Bukharina. “Svetlana Stalina and Svetlana Molotova were students of School No. 25, attached to the Kremlin. We had the unreliable (*nenadezhnaia*) Svetlana. She was one of my best friends.” Concerning the program in School No. 10, the choice was decided by the teachers. One of the texts for history, said Turovskaia, was Aleksei Tolstoi’s *Prince Serebrenni (Kniaz’ Serebrianyi)* (about Ivan the Terrible), or *Bleak House*, by Charles Dickens. In School No. 25, directed by some Leonova, “a strict party person,” the teaching was more “conscious.” It is only in fifth grade that “stable textbooks” were introduced, with the same program for all. Turovskaia recalled her first “stable” history textbook, authored by (Anna Mikhailovna) Pankratova. It was “written for small children and had nothing to do with a serious textbook.” But she vividly remembered one of her teachers, Ivan Kuz’mich: “He taught in the older classes of our school how to read newspapers between the lines. He taught us how to read the Soviet press. To read what was not written, what was hinted at, what was referred to, etc. It was an art to read between the lines, and he taught us this art.”

I could not refrain asking Turovskaia about the novel I had spent years of reading “between the lines”: she had read *Far from Moscow* “because of its title and because everybody knew about what he was writing.” I am still not sure if I can believe her. In any case, Azhaev’s novel was largely read,

²⁸ Lahusen, “Cement (Fedor Gladkov, 1925),” in F. Moretti (ed.), *The Novel. Volume 2 Forms and Themes* (Princeton, 2006), 476-482.

and not only in the workers' settlements of the Donbass. Reporting on the "remarkable craving for the printed word in the immediate post-war years," Kozlov quotes Iurii Trifonov's memoirs:

Readers wanted books about contemporary life, the life that was familiar to them. The quality of prose, overall, plummeted starkly in comparison to the 1930s, not to mention the 1920s. ... And yet the avidity for reading, the passion for books was an enormous, all-embracing fascination— after the war, after all the misfortunes, after the rationing system, after the years when books had been sold in order to buy bread. Therefore, writings in which there flickered at least a semblance of truth were embraced with unbelievable and seemingly inexplicable delight. Discussions about the novels *Far from Moscow* by [Vasilii] Azhaev or *Kruzhilikha* by [Vera] Panova gathered thousands of people. And what was in those books to discuss? What was there to debate? Everything in them was clear and indisputable.²⁹

Turovskaia was of course a reader not like any other and her 'situation of reading' was certainly very different from that of the 'conscious readers' enrolled in Moscow's School No. 25 or in the trade and factory training schools, mentioned by Dobrenko. Not everybody had among his or her classmates a Svetlana Bukharina or a Konrad Wolf, and few Soviet readers were able to read the *Grimm tales* in the original. But there is no doubt that she shared the "craving for the printed word" with the rest of her contemporaries, with one caveat, however: as Turovskaia noted at the beginning of the interview, if urban Russia was always reading, "perhaps peasant Russia was illiterate." In the next section of my article, devoted to other readers and other 'reading situations,' I will attempt to bring some clarification.

* * *

Russia, or rather, the Soviet Union, was not only a country of readers but also a country of writers. As Evgeny Dobrenko showed in his *The Making of the Soviet Writer*,³⁰ a fascinating sequel to *The Making of the Soviet Reader*, socialist realism was "a boundless sea of 'artistic production'—epics, novels, poems, plays, and so forth."³¹ The statistics Dobrenko provides, based on the data released from the Second Congress of Soviet Writers in 1954, are mind staggering: between 1934 and 1953, i.e., during the "classical Stalinist

29 Iu. Trifonov, "Zapiski soseda" [1972], in Idem, *Rasskazy. Povesti. Roman. Vospominaniia. Esse* (Ekaterinburg, 1999), 672. Quoted by Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 24-25.

30 Dobrenko, *The Making of the Soviet Writer*. For an analysis of the post-1917 readership, see DOBRENKO, REITBLAT, "The Readers' Milieu in 1917-1920s," in the present volume.

31 Dobrenko, *The Making of the Soviet Writer*, xiv.

era,” an average of 3,685 works was published per year with an overall print run of 119,231,000 copies. Within three decades, “the number of producers (and consequently the ‘artistic products’ produced by them) increased three-fold during this period.”³² The process follows the principle of the “transformation of quantity into quality and *vice versa*”³³: when the “collective creativity” of the “workers’-correspondent writers” and the “shockworkers of literature” of the late 1920s—early 1930s was replaced by the “mastery” of the “Soviet writer,” nurtured by the institutional control of literary circles, the *litkonsul'tanty* (litconsultancies), the Conferences of Youth Writers, and, of course, the Union of Soviet Writers itself,³⁴ quality was, in turn, transformed into quantity: “the torrent of the ‘new writers’ cadres” did not dry up; on the contrary, it swelled.”³⁵

One particular genre of writing did not make it into “Soviet literature,” but can be considered, at least in part, as its by-product. It is the diary. On the one hand, the diaries written during Soviet times focused, like all diaries, on the personal and the intimate and were not meant to be published. But on the other hand, they followed the process outlined above: they were part of the mass literacy and the “collective creativity” that was brought about during the 1920s and “swelled” during the years to come. Traditionally, diaries were written by the intelligentsia, by writers, politicians, artists, and other “cultural figures.” These are the “readers-intellectuals,” presented by Oleg Lekmanov in his “Three Portraits.”³⁶ However, from the 1920s onwards, the “lower strata” too began to write personal accounts of their life. In the sample that I will use in my presentation—diaries written during the 1930s “literature,” including “socialist realism” makes its appearance not only as an object of reading but in the very form of writing. As Denis Kozlov noted in *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, socialist realism blurred the boundaries between literature and journalism: on the one hand, literature was mobilized for political purposes; on the other hand, journalists regularly aspired to a literary career.”³⁷ For many men and women of the 1930s, writing a diary was also a way to participate in “literature,” from writing to criticism, and was therefore part of the “horizon of expectations” and “guidance” described above.

To trace activities of reading in my diaries, I proceeded by a simple search for keywords, such as the verbs *chitat'* (read), *chital(a)* (read, past time), *kniga* (book), *gazeta* (newspaper), *zhurnal* (revue), *avtor* (author), etc., or I looked for less obvious “signs” of reading. I was interested in what the diaries said about *the diary writers*, and *what* these writers read, and in what *context*. My search attempted to identify those readers who responded to the state’s “ho-

32 Ibid.

33 F. Engels, “Dialectics of Nature” (1883).

34 Dobrenko, *The Making of the Soviet Writer*, 220, 281, 397.

35 Ibid., 389.

36 LEKMANOV, “The ‘other’ readers of the 1920’s: three portraits,” in the present volume.

37 Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 2-3.

rizon of expectations” and those who did not, or to use Turovskaia’s term, those who displayed or not “consciousness.”

Some diaries that served for my present research were collected around 1995 in the context of a project that led to the publication of our collection *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*.³⁸ The remaining are diaries that did not “make it” into our collection. The authors of the diaries considered here were five professional writers, an actor of theater and film, a journalist, an archivist, a scientist, a Red Army commander, a woman activist, and two peasants. Some of the diaries that initially were found in the archives or were obtained after placing ads in newspapers have since then been published in journals or in book form. Instead of referring to page numbers, I chose to identify the quoted passages by their date. I chose to concentrate on the second half of the 1930s, the time of the Great Terror, which also corresponded to the time when the “collective creation” of the late 1920s-early thirties finally crystallized in “high Stalinist” socialist realism.

I will start with the writings of a poet, Ol’ga Bergol’ts’ “forbidden diary.” Published in the early 1990s, it was one of the revelations of the *glasnost*’ era.³⁹ The entry of 15 July 1939 states: “On 13 December 1938 I was arrested, on 3 July evening 1939 I was released from prison. I had stayed there 171 days.” One of the first readings mentioned in the diary is Bergol’ts’s own “poem about Stalin,” written in prison. “How they liked that weak verse there! They wept when I read it to the end, and I was myself overcome with emotion, when I read it [...] Then, I had not yet started thinking: ‘Your fault!’” (23 December 1939). Further entries mention reading newspaper materials about Stalin, among them, a “foul article” by some P. Tychina in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, which had refused to publish her poem, “not conform to the greatness of Stalin.” One year later, Bergol’ts reads Herzen, “with yearning envy of that type of people of the nineteenth century. Oh, how free they were. How large and pure!” (1 March 1940). Irina Paperno has discussed the turn to the “classics” of Russian literature, and especially to Herzen, in her *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams*, a book that explores the phenomenon of diary and memoir writing in Soviet society.⁴⁰ What Soviet intellectuals took from *My Past and Thoughts* (*Byloe i Dumy*) was Herzen’s “authorial position: a historicist self-consciousness that gave meaning and value to their difficult and complex lives, turning diverse per-

38 V. Garros, N. Korenevskaya, T. Lahusen (eds.), *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York, 1995).

39 O. Bergol’ts, “Ol’ga. Zapretnyi dnevnik,” *Neva*, 5 (1990), 174-177. For the “strange history” of the Bergol’ts diaries, see the report of Natal’ia Strizhkova, archivist of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI): <https://arzamas.academy/materials/667> (accessed October 6, 2018).

40 I. Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca, London, 2009).

sonal records into documents of potential historical significance.”⁴¹ Russian intellectuals drew on this tradition since the nineteenth century. One of the two texts that Paperno analyzes in her book is Lidiia Chukovskaia’s *Notes about Anna Akhmatova*. Chukovskaia was herself a Herzen scholar, and to some of her contemporaries, “she was a Herzen of her time.”⁴²

My Past and Thoughts appears in another of our diaries, at a precise moment of a life crisis. Reingol’d Berzin (Reinholds Bērziņš) was a Latvian Soviet and military figure. During the Civil War, he was the commander of the Northern Ural-Siberian front. In the 1930s, he lived in Moscow and held a high administrative position in Narkomzem, the People’s Commissariat for Agriculture. He started to write a diary in January 1936. “Reading” appears not very often on these pages, except increasingly frequent references to the press reporting on stories of sabotage and wrecking. At the closure of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Center show trial at the end of January 1937, he notes: “the history of mankind has not seen a more dark and infamous treason.” Soon, the noose is tightening around his own persona, and he finally writes “all day long” a letter to Stalin, but the more he writes, the more he understands that Stalin will never read his letter (diary entry of 17 April 1937). Soon, he is reduced to “doing nothing.” On 2 July 1937, he writes: “Today I began to read the second volume of *My Past and Thoughts*, by Herzen. I rest while doing this.” Reading Herzen inspired Berzin for the name he gave to a new chapter of his diary: “Notebook No. 3.” It is entitled “1937. Random Notes from the Past” (“1937 god. Sluchainye zametki iz proshlogo”). The first entry is made on 13 November 1937. It begins with these lines:

Alas, I have studied philosophy,
The law as well as medicine,
And to my sorrow, theology;
Studied them well with ardent zeal,
Yet here I am, a wretched fool,
No wiser than I was before.
Goethe, *Faust*.

It continues as follows:

Today at night, I remembered these words by Goethe. At night, when peace and silence is all around and the soul is awake, thoughts raise, in a long string, one after the other, and as out of the fog, scenes from long bygone days— long-extinct dreams and desires. Everything, everything, and perhaps not everything.

⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

⁴² Ibid., 10.

The diary has now taken the appearance of a historical narrative. Berzin remembers his youth, his unfinished studies of medicine, his involvement with the revolutionary underground in St. Petersburg and arrest by the “Tsar’s chancery.” And then his moment comes: Berzin can “beautifully pay him back” when the Tsar happens to be in his hands, “a miserable prisoner, in Ekaterinburg.” The diary does not mention whether Berzin took part or not in the decision to execute Nicholas II and his family on 16 July 1918. A year and a half after starting his diary, Berzin was arrested on 10 December 1937 and executed on 19 March 1938. His diary was kept by his daughter. Asked why there was a hole in the middle of the diary with traces of rust, she said that she nailed it under a bench of their dacha, a few days before her father’s arrest. We did not receive the authorization to publish the diary in our collection, and I don’t know if it was published later.

The diary of Andrei Arzhilovskii was one of the pieces of conviction that led to his execution on 4 September 1937 for “counter-revolutionary crime.”⁴³ Information about his life is outlined in the English translation of the diary.⁴⁴ For our purpose, suffice it to say that Arzhilovskii was an “educated” peasant: he had attended a rural school. And he read a lot. On 15 December 1936 he writes: “I am reading Dickens. Wonderful! And the kids have gotten engrossed in Hugo; they have to be dragged from the book by force.” Here are some other reading excerpts of Arzhilovskii’s diary:

I’ve started reading Jack London. A smart man and an enemy of the capitalists (23 November 1936); Sometimes I try to read, but it can be rather hard to swallow: Soviet literature shows only the good side of life, the part that is for show, and it just doesn’t grab me (2 February 1937); This year is the centennial of Pushkin’s death. Soviet power has adopted Pushkin as one of its own... True, the man loved freedom, but he also loved his native country as well, he was a true Russian patriot. The late poet was not fond of serfdom. Dostoevskii also adopted Pushkin for his own, but Soviet power is not fond of Dostoevskii (15 February 1937); When I find the time, I read from Sholokhov’s *And Quiet Flows the Don*. He writes well enough, but I wonder how he’s going to manage to tie it all together at the end to conclude with the ‘happy life.’ It’s hardly likely he’ll be able to be honest right up to the end. Given the amount of pressure the writer was under, it must have been impossible to be objective and impartial. But once he starts hopping around on one foot, there is nothing in it any

43 “Gody i sud’by. Andrei Arzhilovskii. Dnevnik 36-37.” *Ural*, 3 (1992).

44 *Intimacy and Terror*, 111-165. I quote Arzhilovsky’s text from this translation, while adapting the transliteration to the system of the Library of Congress, used in this volume.

more for the reader; it feels forced and unnatural (21 February 1937); *I borrowed Gladkov's book, but it turns out I'd already read it once. What nonsense* (19 April 1937).

The last sentence was underlined in red, like other “incriminating” passages marked by the NKVD employee for “evidence.”

Few readers were so outspoken in their criticism, and not all rural schools provided the same amount of education. Fedor Shirnov is the only other peasant of our sample.⁴⁵ Or rather, born as a peasant in the Urals, he climbed a few steps of the social ladder during his life. As we stated in our introduction to his “Manuscript Diary” (also published in *Intimacy and Terror*), the fact that he ended up in the Central [now Russian] State Archive of Literature and Art is an enigma.⁴⁶ The author was painfully aware of his limits. In the last section of the diary, simply entitled “1938,” he writes: “I ask my readers for forgiveness for the bad style in my wretched little manuscript diary. All the education I had was a village school way out in the middle of nowhere where I was born and spent my childhood up to the age of 14.”⁴⁷ Shirnov mentions “reading” a very few times, for example at the start of his “Trip on the Kalyma (*sic*) Expedition” in 1932:

When on the third day the locomotive whistle blowed and the train left the station, I got settled on my seat by the window and tried to read the paper my favorite, *Gudok*; but I was so worn out I couldn't make no sense out of it. I just stared at the lines without seeing them. And there was something in that monotonous clattering of the wheels that touched my heart, a kind of joy inside.

Two years later, Shirnov became the head of a workers' dormitory in Moscow: “In the evening I read them newspapers, explained things and told about my trip up north, they was very interested and that took care of all the disorderly conduct at the factory.”

Reading newspapers, including *Gudok* (*Whistle*), the famous daily of the railway workers, appears many times in our diaries. It can even take a material form, like in Galina Shtange's “Remembrances” (*Vospominania*).⁴⁸ Shtange, who joined the women's movement with the wives of the Commanders in

⁴⁵ Shirnov, Fedor Efimovich. *Dnevnik rukopis'. S 1 marta 1888 g. po 1 oktabria 1938 g.* Avtograf, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (RGALI), f. 1337, op. 1, ed. khr. 296.

⁴⁶ *Intimacy and Terror*, 67.

⁴⁷ I quote Shirnov's text from the translation provided in *Intimacy and Terror*, which attempts to render the author's often “non-standard” Russian writing, for example, in the passages quoted below, incorrect “blowed” (for “blew”) or “they was.”

⁴⁸ G.V. Shtange, “Vospominaniia, 1932-1936 gg.” RGALI, f. 1337, op. 5, ed. khr. 48. Parts of Shtange's diary were also published in *Intimacy and Terror*.

the Transportation Field of the People's Commissariat of Communication and Transportation in 1934, documents her "community work" by pasting newspaper articles (together with photographs, invitation cards, etc.) in her handwritten diary. Her special interest are articles, taken from *Izvestiia*, *Dzerzhinets*, *Krasnogvardeiskaia pravda* and other newspapers, describing the work of women activists. *Gudok* is not absent from the collection.

Andrei Kirillov, a journalist of peasant origin, who worked in the Soviet press since the first years of its formation, writes a diary in his Krasnoiar'sk exile.⁴⁹ Over and over again, he implores his family and former colleagues to send him already-read newspapers and journals. He manages to find books, both "classics" and Soviet literature.

I went to the library and there I read Rostand. Read again *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a work of genius. How desperately bleak are his other works in comparison to *Cyrano*! Here is what means to have written only one successful thing! The fate of Griboedov... The fate of today's Afinogenov (*Fear*) ... (22 February 1935). It's Sunday, a day off. That's why there is a snow storm. I just finished reading *Tsusima*⁵⁰ (11 March 1935). I carry with me Flaubert and a tutorial of German. Perhaps all this will soon be superfluous... "Suicide is beautiful."⁵¹ (8 September 1935).

On 26 October 1935, Kirillov is expelled from the party, together with other party members (20 percent of the local *aktiv*). It is the time of the campaign of "verification and exchange of party documents." In April 1936, he is sent to work in the remote village of Rozhdestvenskoe, where he fulfills the functions of commissioner for sowing in the local collective farm. He asks his wife to send him books from their private library: she dispatches a volume by Pushkin, *Virgin Soil Upturned* by Sholokhov, *Energy (Energiia)* by Gladkov and *The Big Refit (Kapital'nyi remont)* by Leonid Sobolev. Kirillov's diary ends abruptly on April 19, 1936. On 4 October 1936, after a search in Kirillov's room, the Kazachinsk party *aktiv* qualifies these books as "counter-revolutionary Trotskyite literature." The same day, Kirillov commits suicide on the shore of the Enisei.

"These last days I have read the first part of Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned*. Not a bad book, even if there are weak and even too weak passages." These lines are from Nikolai Zhuravlev's diary, written on 1 February

49 A.V. Kirillov, "V seredine tridtsatykh. Dnevnik ssynogo redaktora." Publ. i poslesl. L. Kirillovoi *Nash Sovremennik* 11 (1988), 109-142.

50 Novel by Aleksei Novikov-Priboi (1932).

51 Citation from Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pecuchet* (1881): "Le suicide est beau !—témoin Caton, objecta Pécuchet" [Suicide is beautiful! Witness Cato," protested Pécuchet]. The passage relates to the suicide of Cato the Younger in April 46 BC, considered in Rome as the perfect example of freedom.

1936, a few months before Sholokhov's novel earned the label of "Trotskyite literature," some 4,000 Km East from where the diarist lived and worked.⁵² Zhuravlev was an employee of the State Archive in Kalinin. While he was writing his diary, his work place became a branch of the NKVD.⁵³ He was also a local historian, doing research on his region and in particular on the writer and civil servant M.E. Saltkov-Shchedrin. Zhuravlev was also an avid reader and the entries of his diary reveal numerous literary comments, some of which accurately reflect the "horizon of expectations." According to him, "the weakness of *Virgin Soil Upturned* consists in the abundance of characters, appearing and disappearing on one single page, without having their personality developed. Too often, Sholokhov uses swear words, which could have been avoided (see for ex. Gor'kii)." In the entry of 4 February 1936, Zhuravlev discusses Leonid Leonov's *Road to the Ocean* (*Doroga na okean*):

The plot of the novel is quite interesting, but it slightly reminds one of adventure fiction. The crash of the train is well described. ... The *nachpodor*,⁵⁴ despite the author's assurance, does not yet look like a true Bolshevik and even less like a Bolshevik put forward by the political section of the railway, especially important in regard to strategy (11 February 1936).

At times, the diarist digresses about the very "situation of reading": "There is no greater pleasure than reading an interesting book in bed. It seems that there was not a single night without having read something before falling asleep. For me the day is for scholarly activities, at night I read literature" (13 February 1936).

Maksim Shtraukh wrote his diary between December 1936 and November 1937, while rehearsing his performances of Lenin, both in theaters and film during 1937 and 1938. We learn about the actor's insomnia... and readings:

In Kislovodsk I didn't lose weight, I even gained some. Bought a brochure entitled *Obesity...* (8 September 1938); In the evening, I read memoirs about Lenin (15 September 1938); Read about Lenin. At night, insomnia. Got up and read again. Fell asleep late (9 October 1938); Three o'clock at night. Insomnia! I switched

⁵² N.V. Zhuravlev, *Dnevnik*, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tverskoi oblasti (GATO), f. R-652, op. 1, ed. khr. 2, 1901-1957.

⁵³ In April 1938, the Central Archival Administration of the USSR (Tsentral'noe arkhivnoe upravlenie SSSR) was transferred to the NKVD and became the Central Archival Administration of the NKVD of the USSR (Tsentral'noe arkhivnoe upravlenie NKVD SSSR).

⁵⁴ Acronym of *nachal'nik politicheskogo otdela dorogi*, head of the political section of the railway.

on the light and sat down to read the memoirs of Sarah Bernard in German, so to get tired and fall asleep easier. Obviously, I should walk more... (23 October 1938); We stayed home in the evening. I thought about the role and read *Chapaev*; Ida⁵⁵ read *Byron*, by Maurois (30 October 1938); I'm at home, I am reading the play *The Three Musketeers* (27 November 1938); For some reason, I woke up at 10, I just couldn't get up. I wanted to sleep so badly, but couldn't fall asleep. Started to read in bed *Madame Sans-Gêne*... and also read the play *Ivan Bolotnikov*⁵⁶ (27 November 1938); Again, insomnia! 5 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING! I got up and read *Women in the Civil War*⁵⁷ (28 November 1938).

Shtraukh's insomnia seemed to have abated somehow in the following weeks and months. But he continued to read continuously, Russian and foreign plays above all. Other entries of Shtraukh's diary show that the actor was—like Maiia Turovskaia (and her father)—an avid visitor of book stores and buyer of books. Here are some examples:

I went to the bookstores. Found the memoirs of Sarah Bernard in German. A big find! (6 October 1937); Day off! During the day, I went to the bookstore—found *Near and Far* by Repin⁵⁸ (31 October 1937); Now my insomnia has started toward the end of the night... After the rehearsal, I went “for books” (3 November 1937); During the day, I went to the antiquarian book shops—I found a lot of interesting (foreign) books on theater. I bought them for 250 roubles. We have very little money now. But I can't resist (9 November 1938).

I will conclude Shtraukh's readings with an entry of 21 January 1938:

For the whole month, I couldn't force myself to write. We were at the dacha for 10 days... We ate, walked, read, slept, ate, read, read, ate, slept, walked, slept... At the dacha, I read *Till Eulenspiegel*; *Hans of Iceland* by Hugo; *Journey to the End of the Night* by Céline; and *Captain Fracasse* by Gautier. It wouldn't hurt to spend another ten days at the dacha.

55 Ida, short for Iudif' Glizer, actress and first wife of Maksim Shtraukh.

56 G. Dobrzhinskii, *Ivan Bolotnikov. P'esa v aktakh* (Moscow, 1938).

57 *Zhenshchina v grazhdanskoi voine* (The Woman in the Civil War) was a collection published in 1937. It was written in part by the women who participated in the operations in the Northern Caucasus against the White generals Kornilov, Denikin, and others.

58 The real title of Il'ia Repin's autobiography is *The Far Near* (*Dalekoe blizkoe*).

The diary of Agrippina Korevanova, deposited in the Sverdlovsk [now Ekaterinburg] State Archive,⁵⁹ is an almost textbook example of Dobrenko's *The Making of the Soviet Writer*. Born in the Ural, of peasant origin, Korenova "worked for her entire life in factories, at unloading barges, as a laundress, dishwasher, nurse in a maternity hospital." She started to write after 1917. Her memoirs, published in a journal in 1933 attracted the attention of Maksim Gor'kii. Invited as a delegate to the 1st Congress of Soviet Writers, she was admitted to the Union of Writers of the USSR. Her autobiographical novella, *My Life (Moia zhizn')*, was published in book form in 1936. It also made it recently into the collection on "life stories of Russian women" edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine.⁶⁰ In *his* introduction to the volume, Slezkine underlines that despite realizing her dreams, from "universal justice" to "freedom from pots and pans," Korevanova remains "completely and bitterly alone." Her "true family" is now the party, but "the party proves to be a stern patriarchal institution that sends her out to do female chores and rewards her with an occasional honorary diploma."⁶¹ Here is what Korevanova writes in her diary, 31 May 1934:

One must read and read a lot and I can't, before they read out of love and affection for the book, and now the necessity of reading happened, and a lot, and again there is a barrier, why? What is to be done? Today I took *Literary Gazette (Literaturnaia gazeta)*, read the front page, turned the page to read the last one, and dozed off, as if my eyes had no strength. [...] I went to bed and fell asleep right away. I see my daughter, whom I lost many years ago (and who never existed) [sic] and here I found her by chance, a girl, sixteen years old, she looks for her mother, she doesn't know where she is. They ask her, do you remember your mother? No, I don't remember, I searched for her a long time, and they told me, your mother died, and now I search for her grave, I would put flowers on it, I would have wept my grief on her grave.

Vera Inber is a very different type of writer, born in an Odessa family of the Jewish intelligentsia, highly educated, with lengthy visits abroad, member of the "Literary Center of Constructivists" in the 1920s. But she was also one of the thirty-six authors of the 1934 *Stalin White Sea – Baltic Canal (Belomorsko-Baltiiskii Kanal imeni Stalina)*.⁶² Was it this publication, or

59 Korevanova Agrippina Gavrilovna, pisatel'nitsa. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sverdlovskoi oblasti (GASO), f. 1-561, op. 1, ed. khr. 132.

60 S. Fitzpatrick, Yu. Slezkine (eds.), *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women. From 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton, 2000), 169-206.

61 *Ibid.*, 26.

62 M. Gor'kii, L.L. Averbakh, S.G. Firin (eds.), *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii Kanal imeni Stalina. Istoriia stroitel'stva* (Moscow, 1934).

“life” that was the cause of an analogous “reading lethargy”? On 7 October 1934, Inber writes in her diary⁶³: “Apathy, fatigue, disgust for everything. And again, I should do what I did before: go abroad. But I would prefer to lie down without motion and read books.” One year later, she has some thoughts about Gor’kii’s prose: “In *Klim Sangin* Gor’kii writes on every line “it seemed.” It seemed this, it seemed that. But it is necessary that it does not only seem to the writer, but also to the reader. (29 April 1935). On 2 January 1939, Inber provides us with a list of the “favorite books [she] read in 1938”: 1) Fabre. *The Life of Insects*; 2) Ovid. *Metamorphoses*; 3) Thomas Mann, *The Buddenbrooks*; 4) the *Diary of Amelia Earhart*.

Vladimir Vernadskii, one of the founders of geochemistry, biogeochemistry, and radiogeology, is probably the most famous of our diarists. The following entries are quoted from his 1938 diary, published in 1991 by the journal *Druzhba narodov*.⁶⁴ Vernadskii was also one of our most privileged readers: he had access to recent foreign books, and could subscribe to journals and newspapers from abroad. However, at the time of writing his diary, there were problems with delivery: “January 5. I found out about the subscription of foreign publications. All sorts of chicanery on the part of the finance department and censorship, in order to curtail the penetration of foreign books. [...] For the first time, they tried to prevent me from subscribing to the *Manchester Guardian*”; “January 30. The foreign journals don’t arrive. *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* (International Book Company) works badly.” Vernadskii’s complaints are interspersed with acrimonious comments about a number of Soviet publications: “March 25, morning. An academic book about Lenin (of 1934). Most of the authors are wreckers, executed (Bukharin), arrested or “fallen.” About the newspapers of May Day, Vernadskii has only words of contempt: “Mediocre. Nothing to read. One can feel some sort of breakdown. The ‘purge’ does not deliver the punishment it should have delivered... Apart from the leaders, the entire higher bureaucracy is beneath our mid-level: Shchedrin-Gogol types at every step.” But on August 8, the academician has praise for *The Pedagogical Poem* (*Pedagogicheskaia poema*), by Anton Makarenko, “a convinced pedagogue and Communist.” Both talk about Dzerzhinskii. For Vernadskii—he was a Torquemada. Makarenko heatedly defends Dzerzhinskii, he was a man who loved children. Vernadskii concludes: “Curious, how at present, with Ezhov’s terror, Dzerzhinskii is remembered as his antipode.”

It seems appropriate to conclude the analysis of my ‘sample’ by turning to readers who leave no doubt whether they read socialist realist literature: They were “socialist realists” themselves. *The Optimistic Tragedy*, the 1934

63 Vera Inber, *Bloknoty i tetrad’ s planami i nabroskami rasskazov, dnevnik, zapiskami*, 3 marta 1932–21 ianv. 1938. RGALI, f. 1072, op. 4, ed. khr. 4.

64 V. I. Vernadskii, “Dnevnik 1938 goda,” *Druzhba narodov*, 2-3 (1991).

play by dramatist and writer Vsevolod Vishnevskii, embodies in its very title the “dialectics” of the “truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development.”⁶⁵ It is all the more instructive to observe Vishnevskii’s comments in his “notebooks” about his contemporary writers, including himself.⁶⁶ The 11 August 1936 entry is about John Reed’s *Ten Days That Shook the World*: “Good job, he really saw it all... Amazingly interesting observations. I remember mine... John Reed! I wept, when I read his chapter on the battles of October and the funeral on Red Square. How he understood Russia!”⁶⁷ Stalin’s *On the Road to October (Na putiakh k oktabriu)*,⁶⁸ earns not only Vishnevskii’s observation of “distinct political development” but also an appreciation of Stalin’s style, which somehow reminds him of reading “Leonardo da Vinci” (13 August 1936). André Gide’s “3d volume” (?) only deserves the qualifications “watery, talkative” (16 August 1936). But his views of Nikolai Ostrovskii and his *How the Steel Was Tempered* (surprisingly?) coincide (almost) with Maiia Turovskaia’s lines about the novel, quoted earlier:

Yesterday night I read in one gulp N. Ostrovskii’s *How the Steel Was Tempered*. I sharply remember Ostrovskii’s funeral, a winter day, the crowd, the escort, the crematorium, the last kiss, the funeral on Novodevich’e Cemetery. [...] Reading the book, my Ukraine was beside me, my year 1919 [...] I thought how people read Ostrovskii’s book. It is a confession—once in a life time. Everything is true, even if a lot is condensed, crumpled in the book, but there are moments that bring up tears, amazing moments: the pogrom, the story of the hanging, the building of the railway, and the last chapters about his illness... I read until dawn. Today I finished the book at 3:00 in the morning. Here you have the pure spirit of Bolshevism. It would still need the brilliance of high style. But perhaps that is what the style consists of—simplicity, abruptness, roughness—the life of these days? (8 April 1937).

On 3 January 1939, the writer reminisces about his own life: “All these days, for some reason, I remember my literary youth. Moscow 1920–1933,

65 This was (part of) the official definition of socialist realism, put forward by the Organizational Committee of the 1st Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, making known the bylaws of the Soviet Writers’ Union.

66 V. Vishnevskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5 vols., VI (dopolnitel’nyi). *Vystupleniia i radiorechi. Zapisnye knizhki. Pis’ma* (Moscow, 1961).

67 Tolia Starodubov had found the book “boring.” See LEKMANOV, “The ‘Other’ Readers of the 1920s.”

68 I. Stalin, *Na putiakh k Oktabriu: Stat’i i rechi. Mart-oktiabr’ 1917* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1925).

Spring, worries, anxiety. All the time in the fight, in scuffles, in yearning. It was the struggle for myself, for my place, for my right in literature.”

If there was one writer who had secured “his place and his right in literature,” it was Vladimir Stavskii (real name—Vladimir Petrovich Kirpichnikov), who became the General Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1936 and the editor of *Novyi mir*. He was not only known for his Civil-War novellas, describing his participation in the grain confiscations during the collectivization of the Kuban region, but also for his denunciations of Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandel’shtam, and other writers, for which he entered history as the “executioner of Soviet literature.” Judging from his diary of 1938—1939, he had his own thoughts about his “place” and “right.” His notes about “reading” are very sparse. Some of them clearly express—as does his tormented handwriting—the author’s anxiety about his “writer’s block”:⁶⁹

On the way-back to Moscow I read Ketlinskaia’s *Fortitude*.⁷⁰ She has so much material. And her disposition is so bold. She introduces dozens of heroes all at one. And still manages to individualize them [...] She gives so much material in sixty pages that in the hands of another one of us writers would fill three novels! What can we expect from her in the future? (31 March 1938).

On August 14, Stavskii is “at Pospelov’s,” the chief editor of *Pravda* and director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. He complains about something “being wrong with the way [he] is being treated in the Writers’ Union.” “Believe me, Pietro, and remember what I’m saying now. A year or two will go by, and sooner or later it will all be clear; how they planned to ruin me, a good Stalinist and Bolshevik.” Pietro gives advice: “You have to write, Volodia! You can write, and you do it well. You can tell by, say, your article about Gor’kii—everyone read it, and they all praised it. Just carry on with your editorial work at *Novyi mir* and write.” The same day, Stavskii hears that Fadeev will replace him at the head of the Writers’ Union. But Pospelov and others keep encouraging him: “You made such a brilliant debut. Your books were a resounding success. No one cares about the Writers’ Union, but everyone is wondering why Stavskii isn’t doing any writing. Why is he silent? Doesn’t he have anything to write about?” Stavskii did not answer.

69 A page of his diary is shown on p. 218 of *Intimacy and Terror*. I quote from the translation included in our collection, but adapted the transliteration of names to the system used in the rest of the article.

70 V.K. Ketlinskaia, *Muzhestvo* (*Fortitude*; also translated as *Courage*) (Moscow, 1938).

CONCLUSION

Did I “cover” what was “reading in the age of Stalin”? By all means I did not. By taking a number of examples, gathered from a few diaries, some readers’ letters, and an interview, I have perhaps hinted at what could have been some of the “interpretative communities” of the time. But when works of Pushkin, Sholokhov, or Gor’kii became “counter-revolutionary Trotskyite literature,” somewhere on the shores of the Enisei, the Soviet “situation of reading” seemed to have reached its logical conclusion. I would have liked to find readers in the “brotherly republics,” autonomous oblasts, or among the “small peoples of the north” (or south), for example. As Yuri Slezkine has shown in his *Arctic Mirrors*, for the “natives” of the North “the master plot” of the newly formulated canon of socialist realism “was the ultimate story of conquered backwardness,” which ultimately turned “natives into Russians.”⁷¹ To turn them into Russian readers, one had to wait for another few decades, when Pushkin, Lermontov, or Gor’kii “opened a boy’s eyes to a new world of light and freedom.”⁷²

Is there “a class in this text”? There are remnants of the “old” intelligentsia: the writer Vera Inber, the actor Maksim Shtraukh, the scholar Vladimir Vernadskii. They all liked to read foreign literature, at times even in the original. And some of them loved to go buying books. Vsevolod Vishnevskii and Vladimir Stavskii are “Soviet litterateurs,” “master craftsmen” of the Union of Soviet Writers: they are socialist realists reading socialist realism: *Cement*, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, *Fortitude*, etc. Nikolai Zhuravlev is a local historian and archivist who sees his workplace becoming part of the NKVD. A specialist of Griboedov, he also responds to the “horizon of expectations” of the state, reading socialist realism with a “critical mind.” Andrei Kirillov became a journalist by joining the army of the workers’-correspondent writers of the late 1920s–early 1930s. In his Krasnoiarsk exile, he reads Rostand, Flaubert, but reading Pushkin, Gladkov, and Sholokhov seals his fate. Hero of the Civil War, and among those who decided the fate of the Tsar and his family, Reingol’d Berzin reads Herzen and Goethe when drowning in the raising flood of Stalin’s purges. The majority of the letters that Vasilii Azhaev received from readers of *Far from Moscow* were “fashioned” in readers’ conferences, but some were more personal, especially when they were sent from the places and institutions which taught the writer “how to live.”

The sources I found for this study are rather heterogeneous: they come from different times. The diaries I quoted were written in 1930s; *Far from Moscow* was read some ten years later. My only “real” peasant was Andrei

71 Yu. Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca and London, 1994), 292, 296.

72 *Ibid.*, 357.

Arzhilovskii. Like the former peasant Kirillov, he paid with his life for writing, and reading. Their fate is no doubt a dramatic illustration of the “death of dialogue” between author and reader in the age of Stalin. But life continued. Our “longest” reader is Maiia Turovskaia: she read for ninety years, but she came from a milieu whose “situation of reading” was hardly determined by the state’s “horizon of expectations.” Nevertheless, she was, like all the other readers we have talked about, part of the “reading country” that never stopped reading, at least during its lifetime.

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READING RUSSIAN CLASSICS
IN SOVIET SCHOOLS UNDER STALIN:
ANALYZING NORMATIVE MATERIAL, 1922-1941

Olga Malinovskaya

In Soviet schools children were encouraged to become avid readers, but what they read and more importantly, how they read literature was not left to chance. Jeffrey Brooks aptly underscores that under high Stalinism the emphasis was not only on inculcating ‘what’ to think, but also and more so on ‘how’ to think and what should be considered significant.¹ The study of the normative material for teaching literature (programmes and methodological aids) has much to reveal in this respect. This essay maintains that the methods of guided reading of literature in the 1930s appropriated and transformed the literary legacy, as well as the preceding methods in the early 1920s, tailoring them towards specific political aims.

In what follows it becomes apparent how the psychological ideas of the 1920s with age-appropriate lists of literary works and characters, were put to use in the ideological programming of young readers’ minds. The methods of the 1930s sought to employ emotional stimulation and ideological encoding of children’s emotions through teaching literature, including nineteenth-century masterpieces of literature. These methods included direct techniques of emotional stimulation through expressive reading, poetry and theatrics in the classroom and outside of it, as well as a more subtle prompting of an emotional response to literary characters (*obrazy*) and types, extracted from the nineteenth-century Russian classics. The literary types were then used to represent socio-historical movement in Russia. The boundaries between fiction and reality were purposefully blurred within the

¹ J. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000).

theoretical framework of the literary history course, as it was assumed that *obrazy* had their prototypes in life and thus were a means of moral education and of eliciting children's emotional reactions to others through this lens of learned 'typification.'² This essay demonstrates how this blurring had a purpose and a role in the personality cult and the efforts of creating the new Soviet people. The short- and long-term results of these efforts have been tangible,³ making the study of the formation of "the Soviet emotional complex"⁴ through guided reading in school pertinent.

In terms of the sources, I look here strictly at the normative material, recommendations for teachers, of the history of literature course during the last three years of Soviet secondary schools. For space consideration, I have omitted the analysis of other important normative material (e.g. textbooks for pedagogic institutions) and teaching practices, which I address elsewhere.⁵ First, in outlining stages leading to the consolidation of the programme for the history of literature course in Soviet secondary schools, I focus more on the changes in approaches to methodology rather than the formation of the canon—the latter having been covered in detail by other researchers.⁶ For the same reason, my description of the first two stages in the 1920s may appear cursory.

I. THE CHRONOLOGICAL READING OF NORMATIVE MATERIAL

The programmes for the history of literature course in the upper years of secondary schools of the 1930s reflect some critical ideological shifts of the period.⁷ An official source from the late 1940s claimed that the Soviet

2 In her *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford, 2001) Catriona Kelly brings forward Eric Naiman's argument on how "the unfolding of historical events (and perception of that unfolding)" might have been "uniquely dependent on literary models" (E. Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* [Princeton, NJ, 1997], 19). Kelly suggests that there remains the need to investigate this "question of literature's importance in events and perceptions in Russia." Kelly, *Refining Russia*, 243.

3 O. Malinovskaya, *Teaching Russian Classics in Secondary Schools under Stalin: 1936-1941* (unpublished D. Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2015), chapters 4 and 6.

4 Thanks to my D.Phil thesis supervisor Catriona Kelly for the apt term, "the Soviet emotional complex."

5 Malinovskaya, *Teaching Russian Classics in Secondary Schools under Stalin: 1936-1941*, chapters 3, 4 and 6.

6 M. Pavlovets, "Chast' pervaiia: istoricheskaiia rekonstruktsiia," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2 (2016) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2016/2/shkolnyj-kanon-kak-pole-bitvy.html>> (accessed April 15, 2019); E. Malygin, *Literatur als Fach in der sowjetischen Schule der 1920er und 1930er Jahre: Zur Bildung eines literarischen Kanons* (Bamberg, 2012); V. Shamchikova, *Metodicheskie iskaniia 20x godov i aktual'nye problemy sovremennoi metodiki prepodavaniia literatury* (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Russian Academy of Education, 1995).

7 The stages coincide with the stages of development of propagandistic media as identified by Brooks, "The Press and the Public Adjust to a New Normal, 1918-1935" in the present volume.

methodology for teaching literature at secondary school had inherited “the best of the pre-revolutionary legacy”—the historical approach—“immediately” after the October revolution of 1917.⁸ A careful look at the Soviet programmes of teaching literature in schools reveals a different picture, and thus challenges not only the Soviet official claim, but also a more recent view that the Soviet historical approach to teaching literature has its roots mainly in the pedagogic ideas of the nineteenth century.⁹ The formation of this methodology took place from the end of the 1920s, and consolidated by the end of the 1930s.

The chronological reading of programmes uncovers growing socialisation efforts, centralisation of school curricula and central control of methodology, and drastic ideological shifts, most suggestively, the ‘demotion’ of Valerian Pereverzev, a methodologist who fostered a strictly Marxist socio-historical approach to the history of literature. This marked the demise of sociology and revolutionary internationalism, an ideological rejection of ‘proper’ Marxism in favour of the amalgamate of Marxist rhetoric¹⁰ and state-building historical narratives that focused on personalities, including fictional personas, as I contend.

1.1. Stage one: flexible approach with a formalist component

No official programmes for teaching literature at school existed in the Soviet Union until 1921. The first programme for the United School of Labour, issued by the Enlightenment Committee (which in fact had the function of recommendations only), demonstrated a preoccupation with literary form above all. It stressed the artistic form’s direct and intuitive influence on readers, underscored the dual significance of the literary course—the emotionally-aesthetic and the ideologically-social—and suggested young people read a range of different works in their entirety; reading works from different time periods and countries was called “literary reading.”¹¹ A more systematic historical review of Russian literature was recommended only after a prolonged period of “literary reading” and only if students exhibited intellectual maturity. Even then, the programme advised combining “a historical overview” of Russian literature with “literary reading.”¹²

⁸ A. D. Grechishnikova, “Prepodavanie literatury v sovetskoi shkole (1917-1947 gg.).” *Literatura v shkole*, 5 (1947), 43.

⁹ A. V. Fedorov, “Russkie klassiki XIX veka v sovremennykh uchebnikakh: traditsii i novatsii,” in V. Iu. Troitskii (ed.), *Filologiya i shkola* (Moscow, 2008), 303.

¹⁰ Raymond Bauer was among the first scholars to describe the ideological changes in Soviet Marxism that took place between 1928 and 1934. See his *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge, MA, 1952).

¹¹ *Primernaia programma po literature dlia shkoly II-oi stupeni* (Moscow, 1921), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

The works were clustered either by their form or poetic motifs.¹³ The suggested reading lists took into account the psychological characteristics of different age groups. The programme called upon teachers to be flexible and pay close attention to students' psychological and "spiritual" needs.¹⁴ The students' 'needs' were defined as follows: the first group (13-14 year old students) who had a "joyful attitude to life" required adventure and fantastic literature; the second group (14-15 year olds), who were beginning to experience sentimental and romantic feelings, were supposed to have highly emotional responses to life and express dissatisfaction with surroundings; they required works with "heroes looking for truth and understanding such truth differently."¹⁵ It was only in the third group (pupils of 16-17 years of age) that a historical overview of Russian literature and critical works illustrating "the historico-economic development" of society could be introduced. The programme thus offered a different approach to each group of students and divided works by genre into "fantastic," "humanist," "idealist" and "heroic," "socio-artistic," "realist," and satirical works among others. The lists merely suggested works to be selected by the teacher; thus trusting teachers with the final choice of texts.¹⁶

The importance of literary reading, which drew on the perusal of a work of literature in its entirety, was underscored in the programme of 1922, which was very similar to its predecessor.¹⁷ It also emphasised that there was no need for a systematic historical approach until the very last year of instruction of 16-17 year old students. Instead, it strongly suggested an 'immanent' analysis, or an 'emotionally-aesthetic' analysis that paid attention to form, style, and poetic content. Such analysis, supplemented with commentaries of a philosophical, cultural, and historical nature, was deemed suitable for 15-16 year old students, who were thought to exhibit an inclination towards "critical thinking and an interest to real life and relations, an attempt to review social ideals and striving to become active and defend one's thoughts and ideas."¹⁸ It was then, allegedly, that the understanding of the class struggle "in the literary reflection" became psychologically possible.

The 5th group of the 2nd step of The United Labour School included 16-17 year old students who were "developing life principles" and possessed a "tendency to synthesise and generalise." The purpose of their literary instruction was to provide generalisations of a historico-cultural and historico-literary nature, as well as to place "contemporaneity into a historical framework and perspective."¹⁹ The assigned tasks of such literary instruction were usually followed by lists of suggested reading.

13 Ibid., 7.

14 Ibid., 4.

15 Ibid., 12-13.

16 Ibid., 15.

17 *Programmy po literature* (Rostov-on-Don, 1922), 55, 50.

18 Ibid., 51, 68.

19 Ibid., 70.

It is important to note that these programmes were created in Moscow and reproduced word for word in different regions of the Soviet Union.²⁰ But, despite this drive to centralise pedagogical materials from the first, what was most striking about these early programmes was that they repeatedly highlighted their advisory and non-obligatory role, thus leaving the teacher some room for independent approaches to his or her literary instruction.²¹

As well as allowing a high degree of trust to teachers in choosing an appropriate methodology for teaching a work or author, the programme advised teachers also to cultivate initiative in their own work—to inspire personal creativity and independent work in their students. Thus among the suggested methods of teaching were classroom discussion, student reports and essays on both literary and free topics that concerned teenagers. Interactive and independent student activities were encouraged, such as collective work inside and outside of the classroom, literary clubs, crafts and illustration, student-made journals and newspapers, excursions to museums and exhibitions, fieldwork for gathering examples of the folklore tradition, and so on.²² These teaching methods and activities were conducive to developing students' initiative and independent thinking.²³ Although literary clubs and student newspapers would survive into the 1930s, the teacher's control in any such activities would be increased, limiting students' independence in the 1930s.²⁴

1.2. Stage two: classics under threat

It was into these extracurricular literary reading and clubs that in 1923 the authorities suggested Russian classics be placed, thus removing them from the obligatory list of works.²⁵ In 1923 a new methodological approach, with little room for Russian classics, came into force. The new approach was

20 I have consulted and collated programmes issued in Moscow, Leningrad, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine. *Programmy srednei shkoly, Russkii iazyk i literatura*, 3rd edition (Baku, 1936); *Programmy srednei shkoly, Russkii iazyk i literatura, 5-7 klassy, 8-10 klassy, programmy* (Leningrad, 1936); *Programmy po literature, VIII-X klassy* (Kiev, 1937); *Programmy srednei shkoly. Russkii iazyk i literatura* (Moscow, Narkompros RSFSR, 1937).

21 *Primernaia programma po literature dlia shkoly II-oi stupeni* (Moscow, 1921), 4, 7.

22 *Programmy po literature* (Rostov-on-Don, 1922), 53, 54.

23 According to William Partlett, these elements of the educational approach persevered in the Project method of 1923-1927 and the subject-centered methods of the 1930s, see W. Partlett, "Bourgeois Ideas in Communist Construction: The Development of Stanislav Shatskii's Teacher Training Methods," *History of Education*, 35, 4-5 (2006), 453-474.

24 On changes in official attitudes with regard to children's autonomy towards expectations of obedience see C. Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven, CO, 2007), 93.

25 "Ob'iasnitel'naia zapiska," in *Novye programmy dlia edinoi trudovoi shkoly* (Moscow, 1923), 19, 21. See also the lists of suggested reading "Primernyi spisok proizvedenii dlia klassnogo i vneklassnogo chteniia," in *Programmy minimum edinoi trudovoi shkoly 1-oi i 2-oi stupeni* (Petrograd, 1923), 9-12, 57-68.

called “*kompleksnyi metod*.”²⁶ It emphasised a closer connection between school and life, “a new specific method of study of reality.”²⁷ This called for new ‘*kompleksnye*’ programmes created by the State Learning Council (*Gosudarstvennyi uchenyi soviet*) or GUS, in which the study material was grouped not by subjects, but around three main themes—labour, society, and nature. There were two different sets of GUS programmes—one for metropolitan schools and the other for rural areas.²⁸

The thematic approach, which became popular in those years, could not easily accommodate all texts, in particular nineteenth-century classics or foreign literature. Thus in 1924, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian CP(b) suggested that, since topics such as ‘labour’ and a range of contemporary concerns could not be reflected in the works of Russian classic literature, it was not worthy of study.²⁹

‘Complex’ programmes, in which literature was completely ‘diffused’, were not popular with teachers; the general discontent led Narkompros to create a special committee to work on a new programme.³⁰ In the summer of 1927, GUS issued new updated programmes, created by a group of literary historians under the direction of Valerian Pereverzev; these programmes combined thematic approach with a more traditional teaching of subjects.³¹ Thus, it was not until 1927 that literature stopped being a mere illustration of different themes and became a separate subject.³² The Russian classics found their way back into the school curriculum, albeit in the light of what would be later branded as ‘vulgar sociology’, and without any biographical study of the authors.³³ In 1928, delegates at the Congress of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature in Moscow was addressed by Nadezhda Krupskaya, who presented a major policy-making

26 For further description of the method, programmes, and bibliography see A. Pinkevich, *Sovetskaia pedagogika za desiat' let (1917-1927)*, 2nd edition (Moscow, 1927), 91-96.

27 *Metodicheskie pis'ma. Pis'mo pervoe. O kompleksnom prepodavanii* (Moscow, 1924), 3. Also see O. Iu. Bogdanova, S. A. Leonov, V. F. Chertov, *Teoriia i metodika obucheniiia literature*, 5th edition (Moscow, 2008), chapter 2, 61.

28 *Novye programmy edinnoi trudovoi shkoly pervoi stupeni* (Moscow, 1924), 13.

29 A. D. Grechishnikova, “Prepodavanie literatury v sovetskoii shkole (1917-1947 gg.),” 46.

30 “Kommentarii k ‘Literatura i marksizm,’” in A. V. Lunacharskii, *O vospitanii i obrazovanii*, edited by E. D. Dneprov, K. S. Erinova, F. S. Ozerskaia, A. M. Arsen'ev, et al. (Moscow, 1976), 603.

31 Pinkevich, *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, 93.

32 Bogdanova, Leonov, Chertov, *Teoriia i metodika obucheniiia literature*, 61.

33 ‘Vulgar sociology’ was a critical approach that took into account the social class to which an author or artist belonged. It was often schematic and generalising in that it grouped various and often strikingly different works under the historical epoch narrowly defined according to Marxist stages in history—feudal, early capitalist, etc. It was mainly associated with the school of M. N. Pokrovskii, *Programmy srednei shkoly. Russkii iazyk i literature* (Moscow, 1937), 22-23. For further discussion see N. N. Shneidman, “The Russian Classical Literary Heritage and the Basic Concepts of Soviet Literary Education,” *Slavic Review*, 31, 3 (1972), 627-628; C. Kelly, “Pushkin's Vicarious Grand Tour: A Neo-Sociological Interpretation of ‘K vel'mozhe’ (1830),” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 77, 1 (1999), 1-2.

report, “Communist Education and Literature.”³⁴ In it, Krupskaja proposed that, regardless of students’ difficulties in reading Russian pre-revolutionary masterpieces, teachers of literature were supposed to help their students “to correctly” understand these works.

Anatolii Lunacharskii, speaking at the same Congress, laid out the basis for the future approach to guided reading in secondary schools.³⁵ To extricate the moral and social significance of a work of literature became the central point of this approach. It was also presumed that a work of literature necessarily owed its existence to some particular social ends of which its author might have been unaware, and to which it owed its longevity. To uncover these socially significant aims, both at the time of the work’s creation and in the present, would become the main task of literary analysis.

The following year, another key example of this analysis appeared when Lunacharskii gave a speech on Griboedov on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the author’s death.³⁶ In it, Lunacharskii pointed out the ways in which classics were important and could continue to affect and teach contemporary readers, referring to Marx. Marx’s claim that the literary depiction of historical phenomena could prove useful to the proletariat in its portrayal of the oppressive “dark shadow” over a common man at certain stages of historical development and of the need for reforms suggested that literature could be used instrumentally—as a key to understanding harmful political systems.³⁷ This link between classics and criticism of the social order of the past, drawn by Lunacharskii in 1929, marked the return of the literary legacy into vogue.

1.3. Stage three: the first half of the 1930s

It was in 1931-1932, however, that the first real rupture in Soviet educational history occurred.³⁸ By decrees of the Central Committee of 5 September 1931 and 25 August 1932, the seven-year polytechnic school was reorganised to form the incomplete secondary school of 8 years and complete secondary school of 10 years.³⁹ More importantly from the point of view of instruction

34 N. K. Krupskaja, “Kommunisticheskoe vospitanie i literatura (doklad na 1-oi vserossiiskoi konferentsii prepodavatelei russkogo iazyka i literatury)” (1928), in N. K. Goncharova, I. A. Kairova (eds.), *Pedagogicheskie sochineniia v desiatii tomakh*, 10 vols. (Moscow, 1959), vol. 3, 323-325.

35 A. V. Lunacharskii, “Literatura i marksizm” (1928), in Dneprov ed al., *O vospitanii i obrazovanii*, 472.

36 A. V. Lunacharskii, “A. S. Griboedov,” in A. M. Gordin (ed.), *A. S. Griboedov v russkoi kritike: Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1958), 324-342.

37 *Ibid.*, 341.

38 For a concise discussion of the transition from the experimental stage and the turning point in Soviet education see Holmes, *Stalin’s School*, 10-12.

39 “Postanovlenie TsK VKP(b) ‘O nachal’noi i srednei shkole’, 5 September 1931”; “Postanovlenie TsK VKP(b) ‘Ob uchebnykh programmakh i rezhime v nachal’noi i srednei

in literature, the decrees stressed the importance of the ‘systematic’ teaching of subjects, which meant highly centralised and standard programmes and textbooks across the country.

These established programmes and textbooks were referred to as ‘stable.’ The decrees also called for a cohesive historical approach to humanitarian disciplines; the authors of stable programmes and textbooks were required to increase “elements of historicism.”⁴⁰ From that moment until the 1940s, every programme of literature quoted repeatedly from these decrees, including in such places of prominence as the inside cover.⁴¹ The fact that the number of editions of these programmes increased dramatically also confirmed the authorities’ commitment to the unification and centralisation of the new educational methodology.⁴²

A striking feature of the new programmes of literature was their combative language and aggressive tone, especially when addressing what was thought to be “out-dated and ideologically incorrect” approaches. Harsh criticism of the literary-critical and pedagogical approaches of earlier eras was one of the most recurrent established features of the programmes of the 1930s. The programmes in no uncertain terms stressed that theories which suggested individual impressions and interpretation of reality in the creative process of arguably the most intense individual endeavour—authoring fiction—no longer had any place among the official approaches to teaching the classics. Fiction’s function as an ‘accurate’ reflection of social reality was repeatedly emphasised. This idea about fiction served as both a criterion for the didactic potential of a literary work and as the master theory behind the recommended methods of teaching literature. In the light of this approach, a work of literature, in particular a Russian classic, became a weapon in the class struggle and a tool of the indoctrination of youth.

The 1932 programme illustrates the change in attitude towards Russian classics as tools of indoctrination, demanding “energetic transformation of the artistic and cultural significance of the classics.”⁴³ Reading classics, students were to develop a “critical approach” or aversion, judging by the language used to describe it, to bourgeois and religious values, individualism and other elements of alien ideology. Thus, an emotional component of an antagonistic kind was introduced into the teaching of literature. It was differ-

shkole’, 25 August 1932,” in A. A. Abakumov, N. Kuzin, F. I. Puzyrev, L. F. Litvinov (eds.), *Narodnoe obrazovanie v SSSR, Obshcheobrazovatel’naia shkola. Sbornik dokumentov, 1917-1973* (Moscow, 1974), 156-161, 161-164.

40 Ibid., 161-164.

41 “Predislovie,” in *Programma dlia srednei shkoly (gorodskoi i sel’skoi), 5-8 goda obuchenii, russkii iazyk i literature* (Moscow, Narkompros RSFSR, 1933); *Programmy dlia srednei shkoly* (Moscow, Narkompros RSFSR, 1935).

42 For example, I. M. Nusinova (ed.), *Literaturnoe nasledie v novoi shkole, rabochaia kniga po literature pervoi treti XIX veka dlia shkol povyshennogo tipa i samoobrazovaniia* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1931) had 75,000 published copies.

43 Ibid., 43-44.

ent from the aesthetical, or immanent, approach of developing sensitivity to the feelings of poets and authors that had been expressed in the early 1920s. This trend of encouraging a reaction to phenomena of the past in terms of negative emotions is first glimpsed in the strong language denoting hatred of differing literary theories, but is also used in describing the classics' portrayal of a different social order permeated with bourgeois values. The trend is apparent on the stylistic level: for example, when normative materials refer to A. N. Ostrovskii's portrayal of the ignorance (*nevezhestvo*) of "despotic family relationships," the epithet "wild" (*dikoe*) is used, or Saltykov-Shchedrin's characters' life principles are listed in an emotionally escalating row as a range of negative vilified features: "hypocrisy" (*litsemerie*), "sanctimony" (*khanzhestvo*), "deceit" (*khitrost*), "flattery" (*lest*), "subservience" (*podkhalimstvo*).⁴⁴

Furthermore, the programme ordered teachers to quote Lenin and Stalin on culture and literature.⁴⁵ For the first time, it was clearly spelled out that a programme was a state document and its instructions were obligatory. Thus the methodology was wrested from teachers' hands and prescribed in detail, with compulsory inclusion of lecture-overviews on class struggle of the period to which a work belonged, reading of works in the classroom as well as at home, written exercises and collective discussion of a prescribed theme as well as reading and reciting by heart of short excerpts and poems.⁴⁶ The trends corresponded to a renewed emphasis on academic standards,⁴⁷ as well as the drive to imbibe schoolchildren with a sense of history as "an effective catalyst for patriotic sentiments."⁴⁸

At the same time, the socio-historical economic approach of Pereverzev was preserved in the way these works were grouped. For example, the programme of 1933 divided assigned works into "feudal and capitalist formations". Year 8 (15 and 16-year-olds) was supposed to study: "Russian literature of late feudalism and developing industrial capitalism: Derzhavin, Fonvizin, Radishchev," while year 9 (16 and 17-year-olds) concentrated on Turgenev, Chernyshevskii, Dostoevskii (to represent the "reform stage") and Lev Tolstoi, Nekrasov, Saltykov-Shchedrin to represent the "epoch of the changes of feudal social relations," backed up by the western examples of Balzac and Zola.⁴⁹ The programme of 1933 remained intact in the following

44 *Programmy srednei shkoly, russkii iazyk i literatura 5-6, ob"iasnitel'naia zapiska, 8-10 (1936)*, 19, 23.

45 *FZS programmy, Russkii iazyk i literatura, 4th edition* (Moscow, Narkompros RSFSR, 1932), 46.

46 *Ibid.*, 47-48.

47 See Kelly, *Children's World*, 95-96. A. Livschiz, "Pre-revolutionary in Form, Soviet in Content?: Wartime Educational Reforms and the Postwar Quest for Normality," *History of Education*, 35, 4 (2006), 541-560.

48 More on this and the mobilisation agenda see D. Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 31, 63-76.

49 *Programma dlia srednei shkoly (gorodskoi i sel'skoi)*, 1933, 1-4.

year, except for the addition of some extra works for study.⁵⁰ These were the critical writings of revolutionary democrats, Belinskii and Dobroliubov. The 1934 introduction to the programme also strongly recommended teachers take into account an additional issue of the *Directions to Programmes by Narkompros RSFSR*. These directions were combined with the programme of 1932-33 and were published as the new programme of 1935.⁵¹ That year teachers also learnt that any deliberate deviation from the programme would be subject to disciplinary proceedings.⁵²

Another conspicuous change, enacted in 1933, was the emphasis upon literature's potential to inculcate 'the Marxist-Leninist worldview.' A literary work was affirmed to be more than a reflection ('a fact') of class struggle; it was, rather, a weapon, an "active factor," in it.⁵³ The new programme quite openly declared the school's agitational agenda—"to charge" (like guns with powder) students for an active struggle.

In order to achieve this goal of instrumentalising literature in the class struggle, extra-textual materials were required. It was essential to address the political context in which the Russian classics were produced and their political significance in the present day. This shift of emphasis underlined the new trend of capitalising on the classics and their contemporary critical reception for the didactic aims of the reformed school programme. This "re-evaluation" (as it was explicitly termed) was reflected first of all in the grouping of the classics, including foreign classics, into economic stages of sociological development. For example, the stage of medieval feudalism was represented by *The Song of Roland* and *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (*The Tale of Igor's Campaign*), the feudal aristocratic period by *Don Quixote* and *Hamlet*, while Molière and Schiller were deemed suitable for illustrating the stage of developing industrial capitalism.⁵⁴ This class-based approach would not, in fact, dominate for long. The use of critics as authority would last for much longer.

⁵⁰ *Programmy srednei shkoly, 8,9, i 10 klassy, Literatura*, 2nd edition (Moscow, Narkompros RSFSR, 1933).

⁵¹ *Programmy dlia srednei shkoly* (1935), 2. This adaptation of the programme went in step with regular purging of bibliographies, as evidenced, for example, in *Biulleten' Narkomprosa*. Here, People's Commissar for Enlightenment Andrei Bubnov directed that a range of books on the methodology of Russian language, which quoted Trotskii, an allegedly counterrevolutionary book by A. Selishchev, *Iazyk revoliutsionnoi epokhi: Iz nabliudenii nad russkim iazykom poslednikh let, 1917-1926* (Moscow, 1928) and a book *On Language* by Rybnikova, which contained quotes from the thick journal *Slavia* published in Prague (Uspenskii's *Russian Language After Revolution*, S. Karcevski, *Système du verbe russe*) must be excluded from circulation. "Ob iz"iatii riada knig po metodike russkogo iazyka. Prikaz po Narkomprosu No. 160 ot 25 fevralia 1935 g.," *Biulleten' Narkomprosa*, 8 (1935), 6.

⁵² "Ob ob"iavlennii vygovora direktoram 10-oi shkoly Frunzenskogo raiona i 1-oi shkoly Kirovskogo raiona Moskvy za narushenie uchebnogo plana, utverzhdenного narkomprosom. Prikaz po Narkomprosu No. 161 ot 20 fevralia 1935 g.," *Biulleten' Narkomprosa* (1935), 7.

⁵³ *Programma dlia srednei shkoly (gorodskoi i sel'skoi)* (1933), preislavie.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

1.4. A 'Stable' programme for the history of literature (1936-1941)

In the academic year of 1936-1937 the programme changed again. Two reasons were given in the programme: the centenary of Pushkin's death in 1937 and the course review that had followed the inspection of a selection of schools. The latter had supposedly revealed that the curriculum of Russian classics for the 8th form was far too difficult to finish in just one year.⁵⁵ A caricature in *Pravda* of 8 August 1936 (Figure 1) showed a teacher and students sweating through impolitely hurried visits to famous Russian authors.⁵⁶



1. Konstantin Rotov, *Students Visit Lev Tolstoy*.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Programmy srednei shkoly, Russkii iazyk i literatura*, 1936, 30.

⁵⁶ This is related also to the rise of a preoccupation with good manners (*kul'turnost'*) both in the narrow sense, as well as cultivation in terms of reading. Periodicals of the time were usually littered with references to *kul'turnost'*, referring to the different practices the concept implied, according to C. Kelly, V. Volkov, "Directed Desires: *Kul'turnost'* and Consumption," in C. Kelly, D. Shepherd (eds.), *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940* (Oxford, 1998), 294. Also see V. Volkov, "The Concept of *Kul'turnost'*: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process," in S. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London, New York, 2000), 210-230, especially a section "Reading and the Common Cultural Horizon," 223-225. Volkov names 1936-37 as the high point of models for *kul'turnost'* presented in the press.

⁵⁷ *Pravda*, August 8, 1936, 3.

Another reason to change both programmes and textbooks, as the front-page article “To Nurture the Love of Classic Literature in Schoolchildren” in *Pravda* made clear, was the criticism of the “vulgar sociological” approach to the study of literature that was coming from the highest levels of government: “Great writers belong to the proletariat who inherited cultural treasures from the preceding classes, and it is not within our interests to keep these treasures hidden.” Here it was not necessarily the historical periodization of Pereverzev’s programmes that was attacked, but the dry scholarly approach that made literary history too abstract for children, without the emotional engagement with heroes and authors alike: “The great writers are alive to us. [...] their works breathe with life and beating of the young human heart, they could help our youth understand not only the past, but the present.”⁵⁸ In line with this reaffirmation of organicism,⁵⁹ the class-based approach was now derided as “vulgar sociological”; it allegedly reduced literary classics to dry, “dead” information on the class stratification of pre-revolutionary Russia that bore little importance for and had little impact on Soviet youth.⁶⁰ Literature, even of the past, must disturb and agitate, in a pedagogically useful sense, instead. It was supposed to contribute to the important goal of self-criticism (*samokritika*), or the “examination of self” that shaped members of the collective and made them measure themselves, often with negative results, against ideals.⁶¹

The shift of emphasis onto the individual self (*lichnost'*), in the Stalinist epoch required certain tools with which to analyze this self; and these tools were provided by the study of literary characters.⁶² While the previously emphasised class approach held the social environment that formed class consciousness responsible for the potential shortcomings of the self, the use of literary authors and characters as “living exempla” contributed to shifting

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ On the origins of the theory of ‘the alive person’ in 1928 by RAPP writers and the widespread use of the vocabulary of organicism in the 1930s see Vladimir Papernyi’s description of the binary pair ‘dead-alive’ in his *Kul'tura “dva”* (Moscow, 1996), 160-168. Papernyi also draws a connection between the organicism and the expression of joy and happiness, 167.

⁶⁰ This repudiation of ‘vulgar sociologism’ went with the general move away from ‘class war’ rhetoric that was observable in 1935-1936, as part of the run-up to the promulgation of the ‘Stalin Constitution.’

⁶¹ For discussions of Soviet subjectivity see V. Garros, N. Korenevskaya, T. Lahusen (eds.), *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York, 1995); S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge, 1997); O. Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Soviet Culture: a Study of Practices* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1999); I. Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA, 2003); J. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); T. Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin 1939-1953* (Oxford, 2011); C. Kelly, M. Bassin (eds.), *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁶² On the new dictum of individuation and “the cultivation of each single individual” during the Stalinist epoch see Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Soviet Culture: a Study of Practices*, 229-230.

the responsibility for one's ideological sins and psychological shortcomings onto the individual reader.

This agitation through literature was also related to the old issue of the political ends of the arts, especially pertinent in the context of nineteenth-century Russian classical literature and the controversy between the realist writers and radical democrats.⁶³ The latter's utilitarian ideas on literature's social uses triumphed eventually, at least on the pages of Soviet textbooks, and resulted in the consolidation of a Russian classical canon within the critics' interpretive framework.⁶⁴ The nineteenth-century radical critics, who then began to occupy a significant role in the study of the Russian classics at school, had always warned against an excessively abstract approach to 'ideas', i.e. political programmes. This is best expressed by Belinskii: "the poetic idea is not a syllogism, dogma, or rule, it is a living passion, it is pathos!"⁶⁵

Thus, apart from minor changes and additions of Soviet war literature in the 1940s, this history of literature course for upper years, which a programme of 1951 would call "satisfactory and stable," was set in the academic year of 1937-1938.⁶⁶

2. EXPRESSIVE READING AND EMOTIONAL STIMULATION

The execution of the methods described above was subject to control. The analysis of regulators was published on a yearly basis to encourage good practice among teachers. These publications offer further insights into the guided reading in Soviet literature classrooms and describe methods by which literature teachers were supposed to ensure the emotional engagement of their students.

A published overview of the selective inspection of schools for the academic year of 1936-1937 "The Results of the 1936/37 Academic Year," in empha-

63 For the discussion of the conflict between radical critics and pre-revolutionary authors see R. W. Mathewson, "The Soviet Hero and the Literary Heritage," *American Slavic and East European Review*, 12, 4 (1953), 518. Also see R. W. Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, 2nd edition (Evanston, IL, 1975), 3-4.

64 On the formation and russification of the canon see K. Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 173. For a very interesting discussion on "the roots of the realist aesthetic" in the "revolutionary democrats" and Belinskii see R. Robin, *Le Réalisme socialiste: une esthétique impossible* (Paris, 1986), especially the chapter "Le parcours de la critique," 120-140. She questions the direct legacy and examines both the discursive basis of the critical texts of the nineteenth century Russia in their contradictory aspects and the nineteenth century literary texts, with its fixation on a 'cultural image'—a certain type of hero. Several decades previously, Rufus W. Mathew explored the outline of the hero problem in nineteenth-century Russian literature and indicated the uses Soviet critics made of this aspect of the national past.

65 V. G. Belinskii, "Sochineniia Aleksandra Pushkina. Stat'ia piataia," in Idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, edited by V. I. Kuleshova, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1948), vol. 3, 378.

66 *Programmy srednei shkoly, Literatura, VIII-X klassy* (Moscow, 1951), 3.

sising the role of a pedagogue, described an exemplary teacher of literature who “loves his subject with passion, and thus makes his lessons emotionally appealing, he has no indifferent student, and thus no failing student, in his classes.”⁶⁷ Emotional engagement was thought to contribute to academic progress. The publication was sprinkled with mentions of students’ feelings (*chuvstva*), sometimes in an unusual context: “it is extremely important to think a lesson’s ending through, to draw conclusions in such a way as to make students *feel* what they have just learnt.”⁶⁸ The new information was supposed to be absorbed at the emotional level. The lesson must end on a rhetorically high-pitched note, not unlike public lectures by communist leaders.⁶⁹

“The Results” highlighted one of the main drawbacks of the academic year 1936/37 as being lack of sensitivity to “literature as an art form.” It also claimed that “the analysis of thoughts and feelings and worries (*perezhivaniia*)—is the most important aspect in literature teachers’ work in a secondary school.”⁷⁰ It was no longer advisable to keep an analytical distance from the work of literature, now underlined as being first and foremost an artistic—and hence emotionally salient—work.

These generalisations had a direct impact on the way in which teachers were supposed to handle literature in class. The publication criticised lessons with insufficient collective reading of literary texts, praised the practice of learning textual passages by heart, and provided detailed instruction for the study of lyric poetry. In approaching a poem, teachers were cautioned not to butcher it through excessive rational analysis.⁷¹ An excessive analysis of motifs, including the ideological motifs of the poem, was thought capable of stifling emotional stimulation prematurely. In other words, if too much attention was given to analysis, this, it was argued, carried the risk of an approach that led to isolation from the author’s perspective and intentions, and atomized the impact of the work itself.⁷² In this holistic and organic view of art, feelings played a key role.

With regard to the new tasks assigned to literature teaching, the programme of 1939 obliged instructors of literature to teach their students to “feel” intensely while reading a work.⁷³ The programme explicitly stated that

67 *Russkii iazyk i khudozhestvennaia literatura v nepolnoi srednei i srednei shkole. Itogi 1936/37 uchebnogo goda* (Moscow, Narkompros RSFSR, 1937), 59–60.

68 *Ibid.*, 57.

69 See for example, the scenes of public speeches in *The Great Citizen*, directed by Fridrikh Ermiler (Lenfilm, 1937).

70 *Ibid.*, 56.

71 *Ibid.*, 55, 56.

72 Cf. C. Kelly, “Pravo na emotsii, pravil’nye emotsii: upravlenie chuvstvami v Rossii posle epokhi Prosveshcheniia,” in J. Plamper, M. Elie, S. Schahadat (eds.), *Rossiiskaia imperiia chuvstv. Podkhody k kul’turnoi istorii emotsii* (Moscow, 2010), 51–77, on the Soviet and especially Stalinist period see 68–77.

73 *Programmy po literature, Literatura VIII-X klassy* (Moscow, Narkompros RSFSR, 1939), 9–10.

the goal of this heightening of emotions in literature lessons was to develop heroic features in students' consciousness and characters.

At the same time, the process was supposed to develop students' aesthetic sense: "Encouraging healthy colourful emotions, aesthetic sense is part of the teacher's task."⁷⁴ Teachers were called to capitalise on "the ambience of strong passions" of Russian classics in order to affect "the will, mind and heart" of their students through "examples of a heroic past". Detailed instructions on how to conduct lessons with this goal of stimulation of emotions in mind were abundant in methodological literature.⁷⁵

This approach was emphasised across all pedagogical aids, such as the journal for teachers *Literatura v shkole* (*Literature in School*), which originated in 1936. There, the emphasis was also placed on the teacher's lecture and reading of texts, as well as on students' 'expressive' reading.⁷⁶ Students were supposed to learn a similar reading technique and use it in their own presentations, including in the extracurricular activities of literary circles. A teacher in his article in *Sovetskaia pedagogika* (*Soviet pedagogy*) described helping his student to prepare a report on Maiakovskii: "The musical sound of each phrase was evaluated, apart from the content of the student's presentation."⁷⁷

Where possible, available technology (gramophone, radio, cinema) was used to expose students to actors and authors reading poetry, including texts that were not set for work in class.⁷⁸ From the recordings that were used in the classroom and still remain from that period it is possible to see the level of drama and emotion such readings exhibited.⁷⁹ Students were encouraged to imitate and perform in a dramatic way in their oral reports. The growing demand for oral collective exercises in class is also palpable in the writings of late 1930s methodologists.⁸⁰ Thus classics were to be "revived" for the young readers, quite literally.⁸¹

74 Ibid.

75 A. A. Lipaev, "Metodika lektsii po literature v shkole," *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 63-73; Idem, "Metodika provedeniia uroka literary," *Literatura v shkole*, 4 (1936), 84-92.

76 G. Firsov, "O vyrazitel'nom chtenii v shkole," *Literatura v shkole*, 5 (1936), 62.

77 V. M. Kalashnikov, "Bor'ba za edinyi orfograficheskii rezhim v shkole," *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, 4-5 (1940), 102.

78 Ibid., 103.

79 Ibid.

80 On the overall growth of emphasis on oral education see Henry Chauncey, who says that after tests were abandoned in the early 1930s, when the progressive education was ditched, an emphasis was placed on oral examination in his "Some Notes on the Education and Psychology in the Soviet Union," *The American Psychologist*, 14, 6 (1959), 311. This might be related to other state-created rituals, such as meetings, that required people to speak up, so that their political commitment could be assessed: see S. Yekelchik "The Civic Duty to Hate: Stalinist Citizenship as Political Practice and Civic Emotion (Kiev, 1943-53)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7, 3 (2006), 530.

81 Evgenii Ponomarev in his series of articles devoted to the Soviet textbook of literature recaps an ideal lesson. In it, the teacher's role was similar to that one of an actor. Ponomarev, "Chemu uchit uchebnik?," *Neva*, 2 (2010) < <http://magazines.russ.ru/neva/2010/2/p017.html> > (accessed between 1 and 15 May 2018).

Not only was the literature lesson required to draw on emotional stimulation methods, including recitation, collective oral reading or reports; extracurricular activities, literary and theatre circles were also encouraged, to continue such work beyond regular school hours. Contrary to the similar phenomena in the 1920s, these activities were to be closely monitored by teachers, to the extent of advocating the careful management of homework essay by means of a plan corrected in advance by the teacher, demonstrates to what degree students' thoughts were expected to be directed.⁸²

If individualism belonged to an alien ideology and had to be criticised as a value during literature lessons, then individual expression was positively encouraged. But rather than stemming from original thinking and exposition, it was supposed to be channelled into an individual's dramatic performance, expressive reading or recitation. As a performance, this depended on the assumption that someone was communicating with listeners, to whom the performer was supposed to convey his or her virtuous and useful emotions.⁸³ There was therefore no intrinsic contradiction between the individual and collective value of 'expressive reading'; both were in harmony.⁸⁴

3. CHARACTERS (OBRAZY) AND MORAL UPBRINGING

Emotional stimulation had another application. Leliakov, an author of a methodological aid, pointed out that literature had the potential to elicit a wide range of feelings in readers, subject to a proper interpretation, or "unpacking characters" in a guided reading at school.⁸⁵ Students' ability to respond emotionally to characters, provided teachers guided such response, was also needed for the development of a moral judgement system. A literary character was 'unpacked' in such a way in the classroom as to elicit a particular emotion—hate or love, derision or admiration. The purpose was to link an attractive character trait in a literary hero with a positive emotional response and vice versa. This created a system of emotionally charged judgement-reactions that students could apply to their immediate social reality.

Pedagogically useful character traits were entrenched in (or rather extracted from) literary characters, which students were to study in detail. An article by professor L. I. Timofeev in the centre of the issue of *Pravda* of 8

⁸² *Programmy srednei shkoly*, 1939.

⁸³ Perhaps we see an impact of this in some film adaptations of classics, highlighted by Catriona Kelly in her analysis of Maslennikov's interpretation of Pushkin on screen as being less of an original "reading" and more of "a performance" in KELLY, "A 'Shady Affair': Reading the Russian Classics in Late Soviet Cinema" in the present volume.

⁸⁴ Oleg Kharkhordin makes similar points about the 1930s. On internalisation of communal mechanisms as the means for individual self-fashioning see Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Soviet Culture*, 241-255.

⁸⁵ E. Leliakov, "Rabota nad obrazom-personazhem na urokakh literaturnogo chteniia," *Russkii iazyk i literatura v srednei shkole* (Kiev, 1939), 8.

August 1936 identified the main criteria for choosing which classics were to be taught. The main selection criterion, Timofeev argued, ought to be the usefulness of the work in question, which came down to the verisimilitude of its literary characters. In the new methods of teaching literature in upper years, ‘live’ literary types were meant to serve as models of human behaviour, as well as to represent the historical conditions of different stages of Russian history in its influence on such types.⁸⁶

These types, allegedly sketched from life, provided students with psychological models, despite the temporal distance between these characters and their Soviet readers. As such, they were more didactically useful and students were invited to compare themselves and their relationships with them.⁸⁷ As the boundary between literature and life was thus slimmed down, students were supposed “to find answers” to their teenage queries on nature and relationships. These answers were increasingly controlled by normative material. In attempting to provide ‘answers’ to teenagers’ most natural and simple queries regarding their feelings and thoughts about crucial things, the school thus usurped the family’s role in the formation of values, with the aim of unifying the value judgements of Soviet generations. A literature lesson thereby acquired the functions of a sermon. If these were the general aims, there were, however, some nuances. For example, the approach took into account the psychology of the age group of students who were interested in heroes in general. This was the legacy of the methodology of the 1920s.⁸⁸

One of the most prominent methodologists and teachers at the time, Mariia Rybnikova, wrote that “the spirit/essence of heroism should be developed using examples of” heroes from literary works and characters.⁸⁹ To achieve this exemplary function, a literary hero was supposed to be examined in a particular light during a lesson, the appropriate analysis usually being prescribed by the programme.

Thus, Russian classics assigned by programmes were the source of positive and negative ‘*obrazy*.’ Apart from listening to a lecture on this in class, students were to read textbooks, which described *obrazy* in a similar fashion, and write essays that analyzed characters. This type of composition was called ‘*kharakteristika*.’ In year 8, programmes prescribed teaching students to give a simple *kharakteristika* of a character (e.g. “*kharakteristika Mitrofanushki Fonvizina*”); in years 9 and 10 students were supposed to be able to give a more complex, that is to say, more ‘generalised’ characterization.⁹⁰

86 L. I. Timofeev, “Zadachi prepodavaniia,” *Pravda*, 8 August 1936, 3.

87 Ibid.

88 *Primernaia programma po literature dlia shkoly II-oi stupeni*, 1921, 13-14.

89 M. A. Rybnikova, *Ocherki po metodike literaturnogo chteniia*, 3rd edition (Moscow, 1963), 15. This book was written, according to the author, during her work in Narkompros in 1939 and first published in 1943.

90 Ibid., 17. In terms of students’ written workload, the programme prescribed no less

As an example of a ‘generalised’ (*obobshchennyi*) negative type, a *Literatura v shkole* article entitled “Portraits of Men in Cases” suggested introducing students to a type, extracted from Chekhov’s three stories “The Man in a Case,” “Gooseberries,” and “On Love,” as one type.⁹¹

Another article in *Literatura v shkole* discussed a different example of an “almost extinct” type, Shchedrin’s Iudushka. The essay’s author quoted from Shchedrin’s works to underscore the “dark tones” of his writer’s paintbrush.⁹² Yet it was Gogol’s *The Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi*) that was thought to provide the best examples of how a character could incarnate an “ugly aspect” of pre-revolutionary Russia, for example Pliushkin, whose collecting of petty bourgeois items became proverbial.⁹³

These negative types were contrasted with positive characters, such as Turgenev’s Rudin or Chernyshevskii’s Rakhmetov, among others. For example, the programme of 1936 prescribed to dwell on the image of Rakhmetov and emphasise his revolutionary character.⁹⁴

However, the history of literature course was laid out in such a way that the study of Soviet literature during the last year of school provided the main pool for positive examples.⁹⁵ The best example of this would be Pavlik Korchagin from Nikolai Ostrovskii’s novel *How the Steel was Tempered* (*Kak zakalialas’ stal*); heavily influenced by the models of resolute and self-sacrificing behaviour that they encountered the hero’s self-sacrifice became the model that was needed in the pre-war Soviet Union.⁹⁶ By that point (year 10), students were expected to be proficient in comparing themselves with the characters and to have an appropriate emotional response to their different traits and be able to identify with their heroism. (Mythologised historical figures were also promoted as models, along with the main characters in children’s literature).⁹⁷

When analyzing literary works in a classroom setting, students were invited to empathise with certain characters and ‘correctly’ judge their choices. In *Literatura v shkole* (1940), Vladimir Gabo (1885-1966), a teacher at

than 5 essays in class and 3 as homework in year 8, while in year 10 this changed to 9 essays in class and 4 at home and in year 10, no less than 6 in class and 2 at home. The allocated time to write an essay in class was two academic hours. Ibid.

91 T. G. Morozova, “Portrety futbolnykh liudei,” *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 43, 45.

92 E. I. Korol’kova, “Kompozitsiia ‘Gospod Golovlevykh!’,” *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 53.

93 I. Kazanskii, “Literaturnyi plakat v shkole,” *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 84-85.

94 *Programmy srednei shkoly, Russkii iazyk i literatura, 5-7 klassy, ob’iasnitel’naia zapiska, 8-10 klassy, programmy*, 1936, 21.

95 On the mythological function of the super-hero of the 1930s see K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, London, 1981).

96 E. Ponomarev, “Chemu učit učebnik,” *Neva*, 6 (2010), < <http://magazines.russ.ru/neva/2010/6/po10.html> > (accessed August 5, 2015).

97 See C. Kelly, “Malen’kie grazhdane bol’shoi strany”: internatsionalizm, deti i sovetskaia propaganda,” *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 60 (2003), 231; Eadem, *Comrade Pavlik*, especially chapter 2; Svetlana Leon’eva, *Literatura pionerskoi organizatsii: Ideologiya i poetika* (Tver’, 2006).

Leningrad school No. 4 and a frequent author in pedagogical journals,⁹⁸ shared students' reports and discussions on the theme of love and friendship as "reflected in literature," including in works by Byron, Pushkin, Goethe, Tolstoi among others.⁹⁹

It is remarkable that the particularity of social conditions in different epochs was skipped over. The focus was placed on judgement, comparison, and didactic outcomes. Based on such literary examples, students chose positive and negative models of expressing feelings of love and friendship. Young people in this literary circle used literature as a source material that they could judge in order to come up with a clear, if rigid, guidance on what was deemed appropriate behaviour in love and friendship within their own contemporary reality.¹⁰⁰ The children of this literary circle raised the question whether it was indeed possible to trust books on the issues of love, friendship, and life choices.¹⁰¹ Under the teacher's guidance, the class answered this question thus: "Literature and history are the mirror and explanation of life. Literature helps to understand life and act in it, that's why the Party pays careful attention to it."¹⁰²

Such willingness to learn from earlier generations was part of a pedagogical approach that relied on tradition and thus ran contrary to the revolutionary approach of the 1920s, with its experimental and innovative tendencies that aimed to break free from pre-revolutionary values and methods.¹⁰³ As has been noted above, the turn towards pre-revolutionary literature reflected the change in educational and agitational policies of the party hierarchy. Quotes by classic authors that pointed to literature's didactic potential thus became pertinent in the 1930s.¹⁰⁴

The essay's author acknowledged that, in the new history of literature course, children were "subtly" (in this particular instance) directed to learn the behavioural norms from their guided reading ("images of friendship and love").¹⁰⁵ Thus, a carefully-chosen selection of authors (the list of works was assigned by the teacher) were considered particularly valuable with regards to matters of the heart. It was advised to approach love and friendship not sporadically and intuitively, but reasonably. Significantly, friendship in a love re-

98 Teacher Vladimir Gabo was the author of "Pis'mennye raboty i ikh ispravlenie," in *Voprosy prepodavaniia russkogo iazyka v shkolakh dlia vzroslykh* (Moscow, 1928); "Praktika ispravleniia uchashchimisia sobstvennykh rabot," *Russkii iazyk v sovetской shkole*, 1 (1931).

99 V. S. Gabo, "Tema 'liubvi i druzhby' v literaturnom krughke," *Literatura v shkole*, 4 (1940), 45.

100 Ibid., 46.

101 Ibid., 47.

102 Ibid.

103 On the hybrid character of the pedagogical model of 1920-1930—anthropocentric and sociocentric tendencies—see S. G. Novikov, "Vospitanie rossiiskoi molodezhi 1920-1930-kh godov: vzgliad cherez prizmu kul'turno-istoricheskoi genetiki," *Obrazovanie i obshchestvo*, 5 (2006), 95-97.

104 Gabo, "Tema 'liubvi i druzhby,'" 47.

105 Ibid.

lationship was emphasised by teacher and students alike. A series of negative literary examples of friendships included Onegin and Lenskii, Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich, whose *obraz* analysis begged for one conclusion that “friendship with no common ideology, so typical of the old world, is futile.”¹⁰⁶

Thus ‘ideological’ entered the emotional sphere with the intent to direct social relations of children and future citizens, at least on a theoretical level. In this process, character analysis in the literary classroom gained a significant role.¹⁰⁷

Novels were not the only source of positive examples for children. A classic author’s biography was also considered highly valuable educational material: Chernyshevskii’s friendship with Dobroliubov, Chernyshevskii’s relation to his own wife.¹⁰⁸ Soviet biographies of heroes and celebrities were also discussed so that students could learn from their emotional choices.¹⁰⁹

A similar strategy was suggested in one’s choice of an object of affection in love: “if you don’t share common cultural, political and moral goals and cannot develop together, then the love between you is not real and is bound to produce an unpleasant aftertaste.”¹¹⁰

Examples from Kaverin’s work *Two Captains (Dva kapitana)* and Nikolai Ostrovskii’s novel backed up this pragmatic attitude to romantic love. Friendship was considered to be a more important element in a love relationship.¹¹¹ Interestingly, the point of delaying the consummation of romantic feelings was emphasised on several occasions.¹¹² It was Kaverin’s work that was used as an example of this process to an extent in which the school-children reached a very conservative conclusion that “friendship turns into love when the goal of love is family.” As for those precocious Soviet *Romeos* and *Juliets*, pure sublimation was suggested: “if thoughts of another were conducive to study and education and mutual development, then these feelings were acceptable.”¹¹³

106 Ibid., 45.

107 Soviet text written for children played another major role in the education of feelings in Soviet children. For further discussion of models of friendship and romantic relationships propagated in texts for children and how these teachings were implemented into practices in the Stalin epoch as remembered by Oxf/Lef respondents see “V nashem velikom Sovetskom Soiuze *tovarishch* – sviashchennoe slovo’. Emotsional’nye otnosheniia mezhdru det’mi v sovet-skoi kul’ture,” *Detskie chteniia*, 3, 1 (2013), 38-73.

108 Gabo, “Tema ‘liubvi i druzhby,’” 46. Another ‘excellent example’ of ‘ideinaia’ friendship was Taras Shevchenko’s relation with the black actor Ira Oldridge. The story of their friendship was reported in a journal of the period (S. Zarechnaia, “Ob odnoi druzhbe,” 30 dnei, 1939) as a symbol of friendship between people who were discriminated against. Gabo, “Tema ‘liubvi i druzhby,’” 51.

109 Ibid., 50.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., 52.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid., 53.

It is perhaps arguable whether a pragmatic attitude to love was indeed advised to teenagers, since suitability on all three levels (ideological, moral, and physical) was called for, with the ideological leading the triad.¹¹⁴ That such an ideal was hard to find or sustain was not part of this school discussion. One issue that was raised, however, was suicide in the name of love, the conclusion to which the children were subtly—or not so subtly—guided towards by their teacher was this: “neither Anna Karenina, nor Werther, nor Katerina (from Ostrovskii’s play) were exemplary—they were victims of the social circumstances of their times.”¹¹⁵ When it was pedagogically exigent, the historical context was conveniently brought forward, as in the case of Anna Karenina, Werther, and Katerina.

Hence it is feasible to conclude that school methodologists’ main concern with regards to children’s attitudes to love and friendships was to encourage children to postpone love relations until after their graduation from school and to introduce ideological considerations into their choices of friends and love-interests. These behavioural norms were introduced in the literary classroom. Thus, through literary *obrazy* teachers of literature attempted to educate and regulate children’s feelings and behaviour alike.

4. VISUALISATION AS AN INDOCTRINATION TOOL: *NAGLIADNOST’*, *OBOBSHCENIE*, AND *PREEMSTVENNOST’*

Several other related features of the methodology sought to control children’s visualisation during reading and impact the way children read literary texts. These are visual aids, generalisation, and a survey of literary movements of the nineteenth century, illustrated through literary types. The emphasis on visualisation and visual aids came to replace *pedologiia* as a somewhat practical aspect of pedagogics. In line with this, the second half of the 1930s saw publications devoted to *nagliadnost’* and its alleged founder Jan Amos Komenský’s *The World in Pictures*.¹¹⁶

Here I address both visualisation in texts (*obraz* in the sense of image or visual realisation) and visualisation of texts and their surrounding material—e.g. author portraits and the laws of socio-historical development.¹¹⁷ The normative material for literary study advocated *nagliadnost’* in the classroom and it was employed to guide such cognitive processes as visualisation and

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ For example, I. A. Komensky, *Didakticheskie printsipy* (Moscow, 1940).

¹¹⁷ A recent work in Russian explored textbooks’s visual language, albeit for younger readers of a different period: M. V. Tendriakova, V. G. Bezrogov (eds.), “*Na fone Pushkina vospitanoe detstvo*”: *pedagogika vizual'nogo v uchebnike i na kartine. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov i materialov* (Moscow, 2011).

generalisation towards internalisation of the Soviet idea of the historical process and legitimacy of the Soviet state.

Victoria Bonnell, when examining the art of Soviet political posters, points out a drastic change in the 1930s. She argued that the function of Soviet imagery changed from merely representative to didactic, fashioning model identities and narratives.¹¹⁸ Following her ideas of political art of the 1930s providing a visual script, I contend that the visualisation of a historical process as a lawful (natural) evolution was meant to secure students' loyalty to the state.¹¹⁹

In her recent study on post-war secularisation in the republic of Mari, Sonja Luehrmann devotes one chapter to examining the role of visual aids and *nagliadnost'* in the Soviet anti-religious propaganda.¹²⁰ Identifying *nagliadnost'* as a Soviet era neologism, she points out that figurative speech, effective examples and statistics all counted as 'visual aids' in this type of propaganda.¹²¹ Tracing the term's earlier usage to Lenin and its likely origin to nineteenth century German philosophy, she concludes that its meaning is akin to an intuitive apprehension expressed in an image, well suited for bundling up information and emotional appeal.¹²² A related concept from nineteenth-century German philosophy—*Anschaulichkeit*—denoted the capacity of objects of contemplation to stimulate a cognitive process that combined sensory perception and generalisation.¹²³ Luehrmann differentiates between a Kantian type of generalisation and a form of contemplation offered by Goethe, that provides 'holistic visions of the essential features of a species or phenomenon' and points out that the concept's survival in the Soviet Union owed much to the nineteenth-century radicals' fondness for both Hegel and Schelling, both of whom propagated Goethe's meaning of the term.¹²⁴ While Luehrmann also notices that *nagliadnost'* was part of pre-revolutionary pedagogical reformist traditions, she relies on other experts on Soviet educational policy¹²⁵ in claiming that the Soviet state of the 1920s and 1930s was too suspicious of reformers trained before the revolution to implement the concept in its pedagogical efforts. This fallacy is perhaps due to Luehrmann's focus on a different period altogether, as she looks directly at the postwar literature to explore *nagliad-*

118 V. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1998), 38.

119 *Ibid.*, 14, 21-22.

120 S. Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington, 2011). The chapter on *nagliadnost'* is called "Visual Aids," 143-164.

121 *Ibid.*, 144, 146.

122 *Ibid.*

123 *Ibid.*, 147.

124 *Ibid.*

125 K. Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); S. Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of the Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921* (Cambridge, 1970); E. D. Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of Kraevedenie* (University Park, 2006), 97-123.

nost' in the Soviet anti-religious propaganda. On the contrary, as the following demonstrates, the concept of *nagliadnost'* was given a prominent role in the methodological material for literary study in secondary schools of the 1930s.

4.1. Authors' images and illustrations

Soviet textbooks were illustrated, with each author studied becoming familiar first through his portrait. Typically, these images were incorporated into the text, into the author's biographical information. For example in figure 2, Pushkin is shown as a young boy amidst the text that speaks of his childhood. The image is taken from an 1822 engraving produced after a drawing by K. P. Briullov.¹²⁶ In the textbooks, the images of Pushkin are usually taken from engravings and portraits carried out in his lifetime, as in figure 3, where an older Pushkin is represented by an illustration from a portrait by O. A. Kiprenskii, a famous nineteenth-century portraitist.¹²⁷



2. From an engraving by Egor Geitman, *Pushkin as a Boy*.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ “Briullov Karl Pavlovich (1799-1852),” in V. M. Polevoi et al. (eds.), *Populiarnaia khudozhestvennaia entsiklopediia*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1986), vol. 1 A-M, 101.

¹²⁷ “Kiprenskii Orest Adamovich (1782-1836),” *ibid.*, 331.

¹²⁸ N. I. Pospelov, V. Shabliovskii, *Russkaia literatura, uchebnik dlia VIII klassa srednei*



3. From a portrait by Orest Kiprenskii, A. S. *Pushkin*.¹²⁹

In the illustrated textbook by N. I. Pospelov and P. V. Shabliovskii the images' artists were not always acknowledged. For example, in figure 2 the name of the engraver is provided, but not the original artist from whose drawing the engraving was made. Similarly, in figure 3, the reader learns the name of the portraitist but not of the engraver (V. V. Mate).¹³⁰ The information for the image of A. S. Griboedov, an engraving by V. V. Mate after a portrait by I. N. Kramskoi, in figure 4 is left out altogether.¹³¹

shkoly (Moscow, 1939), 243.

¹²⁹ Pospelov, Shabliovskii, *Russkaia literatura*, 253.

¹³⁰ "Mate Vasilii Vasil'evich (1856-1917)," in *Populiarnaia khudozhestvennaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1 A-M, 437.

¹³¹ "Kramskoi Ivan Nikolaevich (1837-1887)," *Entsiklopediia russkikh khudozhnikov* < <http://www.artonline.ru/encyclopedia/292> > (accessed September 5, 2015)



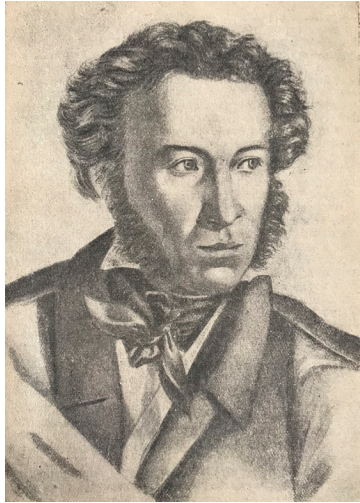
4. From an engraving by V. V. Mate after a portrait by I. N. Kramskoi, A. S. *Griboedov*.¹³²

To help teachers, and by extension students, visualise both authors and their characters, illustrations were also included in methodological literature. Biographical essays in *Literatura v shkole* were illustrated with large images (plates) of authors to provide teachers with additional visual material they could use in class. For example, the images of the portraits Pushkin, carried out during his lifetime, were large enough to serve this purpose (figures 5 and 6). The same was true for the images of the radical critic N. A. Dobroliubov (figure 7). Pushkin's portrait (in figure 5) was printed on a separate glossy page. Other issues had similar pages with portraits of Belinskii (figure 8) and Gor'kii (figure 9). Both images are unacknowledged, although an artist's signature is visible in the corner of Gor'kii's portrait.

¹³² Pospelov, Shabliovskii, *Russkaia literatura*, 219.



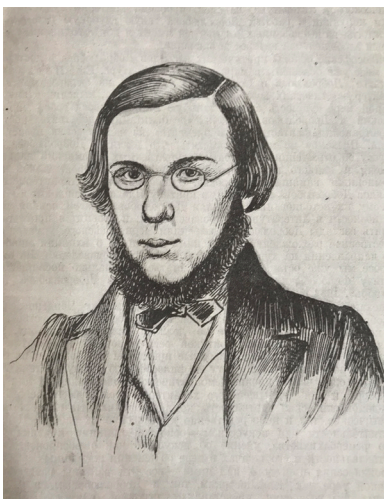
5. From a portrait by V. A. Tropinin, A. S. *Pushkin*.¹³³



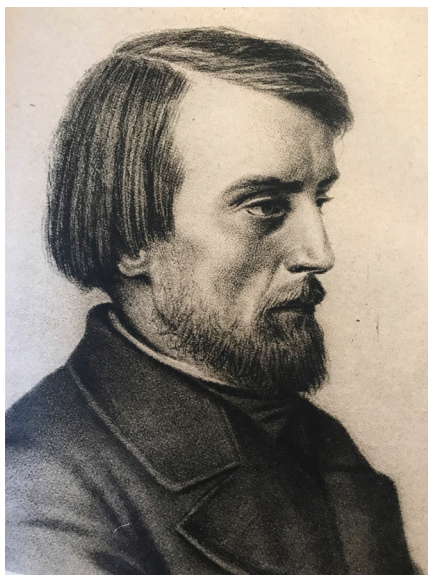
6. G. F. Gippius, A. S. *Pushkin*.¹³⁴

¹³³ L. I. Timofeev, "Lirika A. S. Pushkina (o spetsifike liricheskoi poezii)," *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 13.

¹³⁴ N. A. Glagolev, "Pushkin i sovremennost'," *Literatura v shkole*, 6 (1936), 17.



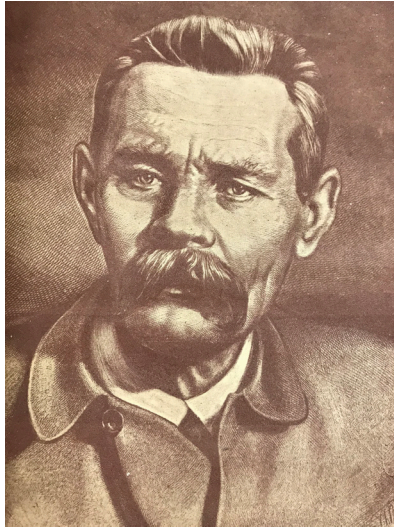
7. N. A. Dobroliubov.¹³⁵



8. Unknown, V. G. Belinskii.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ N. A. Glagolev, "Dobroliubov o realizme i real'noi kritike," *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 23.

¹³⁶ N. A. Glagolev, "Esteticheskoe nasledie V. G. Belinskogo," *Literatura v shkole*, 4 (1936), plate between 48 and 49.



9. Panov, A. M. *Gor'kii*.¹³⁷

Alongside authors' portraits, illustrations of literary works were also incorporated into the textbooks' essays about literary works. For example, figure 10 features a scene from Griboedov's comedy *The Woe From Wit* (*Gore ot uma*) by the nineteenth-century artist M. S. Bashilov, who illustrated the comedy's first uncut edition (1862).¹³⁸



10. From a drawing by M. S. Bashilov, *Famusov*.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ N. A. Glagolev, "Klassik sotsialisticheskogo realizma," *Literatura v shkole*, 4 (1936), plate between 32 and 33.

¹³⁸ V. F. Asmus "'Gore ot uma' kak esteticheskaia problema," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 47-48 (Moscow, 1946), 199.

¹³⁹ Pospelov, *Shabliovskii*, *Russkaia literatura*, 225.

Using visual aids in the classroom was highly encouraged by the methodological literature.¹⁴⁰ The effect of this would be that only authors' faces would become unmistakably familiar to students, but also the representations of characters. Added to this, the visualisation of literary characters, aided by illustration, had, as I will now discuss, another function—that one of consolidating the understanding of Russian and Soviet social types and Russian socio-historical development.¹⁴¹

4.2. *The historico-literary process illustrated by characters*

During the years leading up to WWII the history of literature courses reflected the accelerated pace of ideological indoctrination. 20 academic hours were devoted to introductory lectures, such as *Literature as Ideology*. Their content was given in a familiar fashion of short propositions: "Ideology as reflection of life in the consciousness of people. The social, historical, and class character of ideology. The meaning of ideas that reflect life for practical activities of society—production, social, political. [...] The possibility of contradiction between the ideas and convictions of writers and true verisimilitude of life in their works of art."¹⁴²

Ideology was thought of as the reflection of reality in people's minds, a series of images related to society, history, and class distinctions. Such imagery, the reflected reality, in literary works could even be in conflict with authors' ideologies. To enable instructors to teach these topics, however, the methodological note devoted more space to up-to-date precise ideological content and, in addition to Lenin, included quotes from Stalin and Molotov's speeches, in which the enemies of state were condemned or selected Soviet authors praised.¹⁴³ Teachers were encouraged to study Stalin's speeches in detail, be politically up-to-date¹⁴⁴ and raise the issue of class struggle at 'the literary front' when teaching.¹⁴⁵ The programmes aimed to raise teachers' political acumen by providing references to appropriate quotations and presumed a lessening of students' personal approach to literature study by repeatedly emphasising the controlling role of a teacher.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ A. D. Grechishnikova, "Nagliadnye posobiia na urokakh literatury," *Literatura v shkole*, 2 (1936), 68-78.

¹⁴¹ On the new trend, 'typification' in political posters in the 1930s, when an image, *tipazh*, rendered 'a social category' see Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 38-39, 217-218.

¹⁴² *Programmy srednei shkoly. Literatura, VIII-X klassy* (Moscow, Narkompros, 1939), 59-60.

¹⁴³ Trotskii and Radek were added to the list of those who were criticised previously—Pereverzev, Voronskii, Bukharin, Kamenev, Averbakh, *Programmy srednei shkoly. Russkii iazyk i literatura* (Moscow, 1937), 21. Stalin's quotes with or without references to him were present, 15. Stalin's role would grow with time in these programmes, for example the programme of 1952 would suggest that the directives of the CC have a direct bearing on the teaching of literature in schools and that the language analysis of works should be based on teachings of Stalin on language. *Programmy srednei shkoly. Literatura, VIII-X klassy* (Moscow, 1952), 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1937), 21.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Yet teachers' power was strictly regulated too. To ensure they could not fail to grasp the "ideological gist" (*ideinoe sodержanie*) of a literary work, strict interpretive guidelines were included in the updated programmes. This "ideological gist" was outlined in short propositions. These sketches for each work of literature offered teachers precise bullet points of their lectures and the conclusions students were expected to reach as a result of the guided reading. Thus the programme of 1937 stated clearly that the understanding of the laws of the historico-literary process, as seen by ideologists and methodologists of the late 1930s, as well as the internalisation of the process, became the course's main objective.¹⁴⁷ However, in the sketches offered to teachers in the programmes, the historico-literary process remained a series of flashcards of abstract ideas, difficult to digest for adults, let alone adolescents. Hence, the call for a more concrete representation was issued. This implied a particular method of character-study, which was not limited to moral upbringing and "*kharakteristika*." The protagonists of Russian classics acquired a generalising function—to illustrate socio-historical and literary development.

The study of literary character was part of the introductory lecture (alongside with the *Literature as Ideology* lecture). According to this methodology, everything in a work, including descriptions of nature, could contribute to the characterisation of a protagonist, which was more than a character or *obraz*—a type.¹⁴⁸

4.2.1. The Negative Type

The programme of 1936 prescribed spending 12 lessons ("academic hours") on Chekhov's "Gooseberries" ("Kryzhovnik") and *The Cherry Orchard* (*Vishnevyyi sad*) in year 9.¹⁴⁹ It was to be studied in connection with Chekhov's other two stories "The Man in a Case" ("Chelovek v futliare") and "On Love" ("O liubvi"). Apart from the narrative device—the stories are told during a day out hunting—the pedagogical aid for teachers insisted on highlighting that the stories were united by a central idea, the negative type represented in them: 'the person in a case' (*chelovek v futliare*), i.e. someone of hidebound and restricted perceptions.¹⁵⁰ An article in *Literatura v shkole* explained in detail how the main idea of Chekhov's stories was supposed to be shown through the image (*obraz*) of the man in a case.¹⁵¹ Echoing the programme (the story was an attack on moral short-sightedness, the article provided illustrations of the type (figures 11, 12). These illustrations followed an excerpt from the literary text, given underneath, and underscored characters' negative traits. They were not far from being caricatures. Another

147 *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1937), 21.

148 *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1939), 60.

149 *Programmy srednei shkoly, Russki iazyk i literatura, 5-7 klassy, ob'iasnitel'naia zapiska, 8-10 klassy, programmy* (Leningrad, 1936), 24.

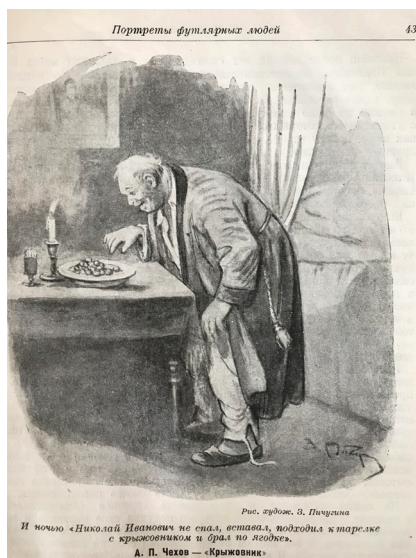
150 Morozova, "Portrety futliarnykh liudei," 41.

151 *Ibid.*, 47.

memorable example of such illustration of a negative type is Iudushka from M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovlevs* (*Gospoda Golovlevy*) (figure 13).



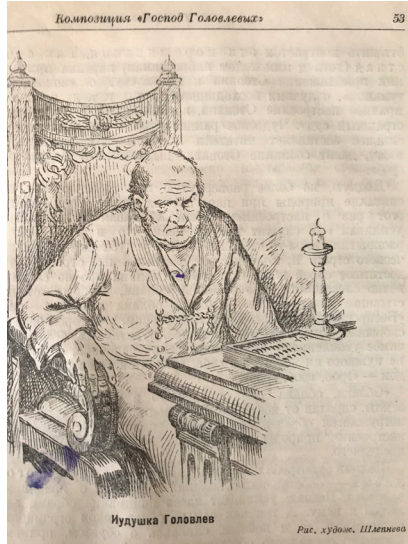
11. Zakhar Pichugin, *Belikov*.¹⁵²



12. Zakhar Pichugin, *Nikolai Ivanovich from 'Kryzhovnik.'*¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ibid., 45.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 43.



13. Vasilii S. Shlepnev), *Iudushka Golovlev*.¹⁵⁴

A few methodologists raised the role of portraits to the revelation of ‘the essence’ of a literary work. For example, an essay on the use of literary posters in the study of *The Dead Souls* drew a close connection between the visual effects of Gogol’s representations and the main ideas of his work: “*The Dead Souls* demonstrate an unsurpassable exactness of drawings in generalised, synthesised images of the ugly sides of the feudal Russia.”¹⁵⁵ The literary poster was thus thought to be an ideal medium for crystallising the visual elements in literary representation. The 1934 edition of *Dead Souls* contained famous illustrations by A. A. Agin,¹⁵⁶ previously published separately in 1892.¹⁵⁷ Alongside the illustration of Gogol’s Pliushkin by A. A. Agin (figure 14) was published another illustration of the same figure, by P. M. Boklevskii (figure 15).

154 Korol’kova, “Kompozitsiia ‘Gospod Golovlevykh,’” 53.

155 Kazanskii, “Literaturnyi plakat v shkole,” 84-85.

156 N. V. Gogol, *Mertvye dushi* (Moscow, 1934).

157 A. A. Agin, E. E. Bernadskii, *Sto risunkov k poeme N. V. Gogolia “Mertvye dushi”*, 18 vols (St. Petersburg, 1846-1847).



14. A. A. Agin, *Pliushkin*.¹⁵⁸



15. P. M. Boklevskii, *Pliushkin*.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ "Agin Aleksandr Alekseevich (1817-1875)," in *Populiarnaia khudozhestvennaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1 A-M, 13.

¹⁵⁹ "Boklevskii Petr Mikhailovich (1816-1897)," in *Populiarnaia khudozhestvennaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1 A-M, 87.

A well-executed portrait, accepted as a type, sometimes served as a symbol or even as the essence of the historical period it belonged to.

Interestingly, the production of drawings and paintings of the nineteenth-century classics was thought to have different principles behind it than the mere illustration of Gor'kii's work:

If the poster 'The Dead Souls' gives the gallery of types, then in the poster 'The Mother' it is the mass scene—the May demonstration, which is given central importance. Different characters in this poster are simply stitches. [...] The class struggle in the 'Main Street' by Dem'ian Bednyi is shown as a defeat and victory, a temporary defeat and the final victory of the proletariat. In other words, the literary work itself represents a 'heroic poster.'¹⁶⁰

In this passage it becomes apparent that the reductionism of such an approach to *nagliadnost'* could lead, in extreme cases, to the interpretive fallacy of reducing the meaning of a work of literature to a single (heroic in this case) idea-image. Although this was not a widespread practice and the majority of methodologists promoted the use of illustrative material as supplementary, the tendency to rely on such a reduction was nevertheless promoted among Soviet schoolchildren through the principle of *nagliadnost'*. Generalisation of this type was also practised and even encouraged in methodological literature for teachers. A particular role was reserved for conclusions—*vyvody*—which also had a reductive generalising character. The process of arriving at these certainties and loyalties was less intellectual than thoroughly based on attention to imagery.

Remarkably, the connecting line between literary characters of different authors could be also emphasised through illustrations. For example, one methodologist suggested illustrating the study of A. N. Ostrovskii with paintings by P. M. Boklevskii, an artist who had also illustrated Gogol'. Apparently, the dramatic compositions of his paintings also critically depicted the 'dark kingdom' of pre-revolutionary Russia.¹⁶¹ The paintings were meant to help transmit the ideological gist of a studied work, reinforcing the strict interpretive framework. For example, a tenuously related episode—the subject of the painting in figure 16—was suggested as an example to highlight the horrors of pre-revolutionary times during the study of works by Ostrovskii. Thus, the illustrations' role was deemed not only demonstrative but also corroborative, confirming the narrow ideological interpretation that was set out in the methodological guidelines.

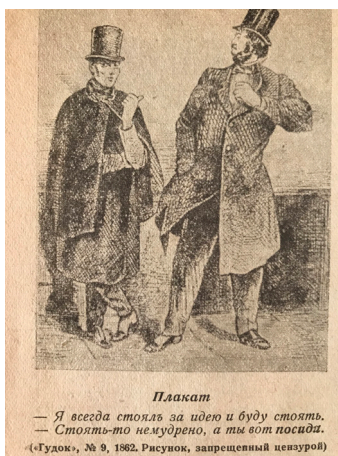
¹⁶⁰ Kazanskii, "Literaturnyi plakat v shkole," 86.

¹⁶¹ O. B., and O. L. Toddes, "Kartina pri izuchenii proizvedenii A. N. Ostrovskogo," *Literatura v shkole*, 5-6 (1938), 117-118.



16. Firs Zhuravlev, *Pered ventsom*.¹⁶²

In her article in *Literatura v shkole*, the methodologist Grechishnikova suggested that teachers should use the journal *Literatura v shkole*, along with *Literaturnyi sovremennik* (*Literary contemporary*), *Literaturnyi kritik* (*Literary critic*) and *Literaturnaia ucheba* (*Literary studies*), as a source for visual aid material.¹⁶³ Old pre-revolutionary journals (at least, of a politically appropriate kind) were also deemed helpful. For example, illustrations from the satirical journal *Gudok* (*Whistle*) (figure 17.) The poster in figure 21 contained a dialogue, a pun that differentiated mere proclamations of political convictions from the readiness to suffer for them.



17. Poster from *Gudok* 9 (1862).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Ibid., 118. “Zhuravlev Firs Sergeevich (1836-1901),” in *Populiarnaia khudozhestvennaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1 A-M, 247.

¹⁶³ Grechishnikova, “Nagliadnye posobiia na urokhkh literatury,” 73.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 74.

Grechishnikova thus raised the issue of using a pithy quotation as part of an illustration to help the memorization of the substance of a character or situation:

The principle of *nagliadnost'* is a principle of massive educative force. Our task is to use it effectively with a view to formation of youth through the artistic word. The future builder of socialism—our teenager—must possess knowledge, must know the material to perfection, -- only then will the artistic word become a true weapon in the struggle for socialism.¹⁶⁵

To master knowledge in order to participate in the struggles of socialism was, at least within the materials promoting this heavy emphasis on the visual approach, to internalise a system of images in their interrelatedness.

4.2.2. *The Superfluous People*

The study of each work of literature presumed a treatment of its characters in detail. The programme of 1937 already claimed a subtle shift in the approach to *obrazy*. Previously programmes had said a character or poetic image was part of the author's ideology and beliefs, which were formed by his historical circumstances. By 1937 the connection between an *obraz* and the epoch which produced it was treated as direct and divorced from the author, from the agency that created it. The key task for the student in this study was to identify a character's 'truthful' and typical features, characteristic of the author's historical reality, and to be able to give a *kharakteristika* of an explicitly evaluative kind.¹⁶⁶ This echoed Lunacharskii's view of the potential of literary types for educating a generation¹⁶⁷ but took it further towards ideological indoctrination. The analysis of character types now assumed a paramount importance: "the study of connected and comprehensive characteristics of heroes should be thought of as one of the crucial tasks in teaching literature to teenagers."¹⁶⁸ The key concept expressed here is 'connected,' referring to a comparative study of characters across the works studied, independently of date or authorial intention.

The fact that not only programmes highlighted the importance of this particular method—other late-1930s published methodological materials too referred abundantly to such character study—confirms the centrality of the approach. It was described in detail in a range of methodological aids as

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶⁶ *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1937), 30-31.

¹⁶⁷ Lunacharskii, *Griboedov v russkoi kritike*, 339.

¹⁶⁸ *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1937), 31.

one of the main tasks of teaching literature in upper years.¹⁶⁹ Another example is the first issue of *Literatura v shkole*, in which its head N. A. Glagolev writes in the inaugural article.¹⁷⁰ Glagolev traced back the concept of the typical in literature, as well as the issue of character, to the radical critics, and the journal devoted much attention to them. In its ‘consultation’ rubric, which addressed possible methodological queries posed by teachers, *Literatura v shkole* dealt with the elements of literary work and *obrazy* in particular.¹⁷¹

It was not sufficient that students would have to analyze literary characters, understanding their social flaws and exercising moral judgements over them, and echoing textbooks’ authors and teachers. Students were encouraged to think of these as social types. And there was an important role reserved to these literary types as well—one of historical *preemstvennost’*.

Professor Timofeev, writing in *Pravda* in 1936, reminded his colleagues about the importance of the historical context of the literature lessons that focused on “*zhivye obrazy*.”¹⁷² He advised teachers to consider Stalin, Kirov, and Zhdanov’s comments on the teaching of history in school and to apply a similar attitude to the historical understanding of literature, which first and foremost implied a rigid periodization that could be concretely represented through a range of literary types. A similar call for “learning from” the reforms of history teaching in secondary school was made by N. A. Glagolev in the journal *Literatura v shkole*.¹⁷³

Maksim Gor’kii’s detailed notes on the textbook for the 9th year (G. Abramovich, B. Brainina, A. Egolin), written in 1934, were also published on the same page of *Pravda* in abridged form.¹⁷⁴ The introduction to the article noted that the textbook’s authors had already taken Gor’kii’s comments into consideration. In them, Gor’kii addressed the problem of historical introductions to the periodization of literary history, warning that this periodization should not be simplified and that the didactic potential of historical parallels should not be overlooked. He advised adding a list of main events to each period, but also complicating the historical commentary. For example, it was important to explain why under the Romanovs’ rule, the German feudal elite had occupied prominent administrative positions—this was, he contended, because of the Romanov dynasty’s inherent mistrust of Russians in administrative positions. Gor’kii also criticised the oversimplified introductory chapter to Lev Tolstoi: he saw a parallel between

169 Leliakov, “Rabota nad obrazom-personazhem na uroках literaturnogo chteniia,” 9.

170 N. A. Glagolev, “Ocherednye zadachi zhurnala,” *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 7.

171 G. A. Abramovich, “Kakovy osnovnye elementy literaturno-khudozhestvennogo proizvedeniia,” *Literatura v shkole*, 1 (1936), 94.

172 Timofeev, “Zadachi prepodavaniia.” Also see his article “O tipicheskom kharaktere v literature,” *Literatura v shkole*, 2 (1936), 41-45.

173 N. A. Glagolev, “O prepodavanii literatury,” *Literatura v shkole*, 3 (1936), 3.

174 M. Gor’kii, “Zametki na uchebnik literatury,” *Pravda*, August 8, 1936, 3.

the fight of the boyar elite against Peter the Great and the aristocracy's fight against Nicolas I and wanted the authors of textbooks to be able to draw students' attention to these historical parallels, uncovering the roots of feudalism in the liberal opposition to the tsars and bureaucracy. This, Gor'kii thought, was relevant to the study of Lev Tolstoi, because his work tackled the pressures of an aristocratic upbringing.

Historical clarifications were necessary not only in order to understand a literary character. For example, Gor'kii thought it insufficient to state, in a chapter on Dostoevskii, that the author was against revolutionaries, without clarifying what kind of revolutionaries he rejected. These clarifications were meant to bring literature and history closer together in readers' minds.¹⁷⁵ Using the plural when referring to Chatskii, Pechorin, Rudin and other literary characters, Gor'kii already took for granted that these were drawn from life and had a historically representative function. The programmes' authors paid heed to Gor'kii's advice and constructed a connecting line of these historical types, exemplified by literary characters from different classic works with the goal of political indoctrination in mind.

A prime example of the close connection between life and literature, according to Gor'kii, was given by Chernyshevskii's characters, inspired directly by identifiable real people. But Gor'kii went further, and suggested creating relations between these types.¹⁷⁶ Gor'kii thought it practical to create such a relation between literary types of Russian classics for schoolchildren's clear understanding of the intellectual and social history of Russia and how each historical stage affected character formation. Following this advice, some heroes were indeed arranged into 'a historical chain' of *obrazy*, one of the most infamous examples being the chain of 'superfluous people.'

First coined by Turgenev,¹⁷⁷ the term 'superfluous people' later expanded to become an entire gallery of literary heroes. Either listless (Onegin or Pechorin), or vehement (Rudin or Bazarov), the so-called *lishnie liudi* were allegedly representative types of people who could not develop or apply their talents under the social structure of their societies at the time.¹⁷⁸ Soviet analysis of the superfluous people tended to put a 'class war' spin on this established type (a representative of the exhausted gentry etc.), and was often buttressed with appropriate illustrations. For example, figure 18

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

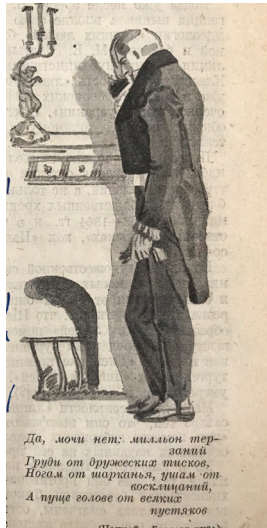
¹⁷⁷ I. S. Turgenev, *Dnevnik lishniago [sic] cheloveka* (St. Petersburg, 1911).

¹⁷⁸ A. M. Lavretskii, "Lishnie liudi," in *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, 11 vols. (Moscow, 1932), vol. 6, columns 514-540; R. W. Mathewson, "The Soviet Hero and the Literary Heritage," *American Slavic and East European Review*, 12, 4 (1953), 509. On the literary historian, D. A. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, who played an important role in developing the idea of *lishnie liudi* see C. Kelly, "The Education of the Will: Advice Literature, *Zakal*, and Manliness in Early-Twentieth-Century Russia," in B. Evans Clements, R. Friedman, D. Healey (eds.), *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (Basingstoke, 2002), 140-141.

represents Onegin, fatigued and bored. Figure 19 is a typical representation of Chatskii, unable to be heard or appreciated.



18. *Onegin*.¹⁷⁹



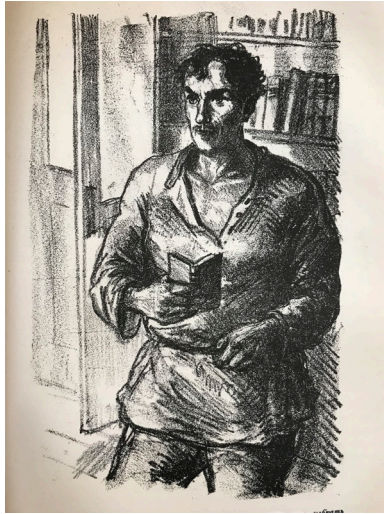
19. *Chatskii*.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ A. M. Lavretskii, "Problema 'lishnikh liudei' v russkoi literature," *Literatura v shkole*, 3 (1936), II.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

4.2.3. *The New Man*

A different type of hero, the new man, was called for by the nineteenth-century radical democratic critics.¹⁸¹ They applauded the protagonists of Chernyshevskii's *What Is To Be Done?* (*Chto delat'?*). But the problem of the 'superfluous person' was considered as solved in a classless society: the Socialist revolution 'turned any superfluous people into people in high demand' (exemplified by literary characters from the works of Socialist realism).¹⁸² The best example in the school programme was Nikolai Ostrovskii's Pavel Korchagin. Soviet illustrations of the new heroes, including the nineteenth-century protagonists, represented resolute active men, as in figures 20 and 21.



20. V. A. Milashevskii, *Rakhmetov*.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ For example, N. A. Dobroliubov, "Chto takoe obломovshchina?," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, I-IV (1859); M. A. Antonovich, "Asmodei nashogo vremeni," *Russkii vestnik*, 2 (1862). Both articles are referred to by Rufus W. Mathewson, "Soviet Hero and the Literary Heritage," 508.

¹⁸² Lavretskii, "Problema 'lishnikh liudei' v russkoi literature," 19.

¹⁸³ N. G. Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?* *Iz rasskazov o novykh liudiakh*, edited by N. V. Vodovozov, illustrations by V. A. Milashevskii (Moscow, 1937), plate between 240 and 241.



21. E. A. Kibrik, *Pavel Korchagin*.¹⁸⁴

In contrast to the static representations of superfluous men (usually portrayed as listless, idle, and deep in thought, see figures 18, 19), the new heroes were portrayed in-motion, as if caught in the middle of a purposeful action. Typical of this are illustrations of Rakhmetov from Chernyshevskii's *What Is To Be Done?* (Figure 20) and Korchagin from *How The Steel Was Tempered* (Figure 21). Both characters are shown in mid-activity, apparently full of energetic purpose.¹⁸⁵ Juxtaposing the superfluous men and the new men rendered the idea that the Soviet state had indeed solved the problem of superfluous men.

4.2.4. Political Figures

Gor'kii was mostly concerned with the *preemstvennost'* in literature. His take on literary characters as a snapshot of a socio-historical type and the idea of needing to draw historical parallels within Russian history and establishing connections between literary types based on these parallels, were implemented in the programmes with a slight but significant spin. The connecting line of heroes from the infamous superfluous men to the new men began to include not only literary figures, but also real political figures, thus enhanc-

¹⁸⁴ E. Z. Balabanovich, "Ostrovskii N. A.," in *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, edited by A. A. Surkov, 9 vols (Moscow, 1962-1978), vol. 5 (1968), columns 500-502; A Soviet artist, "Kibrik Evgenii Adol'fovich (1906-1978)," in *Populiarnaia khudozhestvennaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1 A-M, 325.

¹⁸⁵ On the representation of the new man in the 1930s see Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 36-43. Bonnell highlights that "intense effort and determination" was supposed to be the typical emotional expression of the Stalinist model citizen, 41.

ing its potential for political indoctrination. This use of concrete examples showed the principle of *nagliadnost'* at work in making sure that children in the upper years of secondary school saw “the laws of the historico-literary process.”¹⁸⁶ In this way, the history of literature course for the higher years capitalised on the Russian classics to inculcate in children a sense of the ‘natural’ development from nineteenth-century Russian intellectual thought to modern state policies. Education used history and literature to back up the rationale for loyalty to the state and its policies. If one spoke against the state, one was also speaking against Pushkin and all the other Russian geniuses.¹⁸⁷

The approach openly used historical and literary analysis to establish an overt, if counter-factual, connection between literary characters and the contemporary ideal type of the New Soviet citizen. Russian classics served as items of “the chain of literary development reflecting the concretely historic process of class struggle.”¹⁸⁸ In other words, the programme traced the evolution of Russian literature all the way to the Congress of Soviet Writers (All-Union Writers Conference).¹⁸⁹ It was as if this programme had its own “unity of form and content,” linking disparate works of literature into a peculiar mosaic that produced a grandiose and illustrated myth of Russian society’s exodus, from the darkness of feudal and capitalist regimes into the paradise of the future Communist state via the Soviet present (to which each studied Russian classical author contributed, as far as he could in his “limited class consciousness,” as a fighter against the injustice of his own epoch and a prophet of socialism).¹⁹⁰

The character study in the new method went hand in hand with the study of biographies. The contribution made to communist upbringing by teaching the biographies of Lomonosov, Radishchev, Pushkin, Belinskii, and Maiakovskii was increasingly emphasised.¹⁹¹ Belinskii, Dobroliubov, Chernyshevskii were brought into the curriculum also as personalities—as anti-types to the ‘superfluous man’ who was supposed to be characteristic of nineteenth-century psychology in its negative manifestation. Although works by Dobroliubov and Belinskii had been included in the programme since 1934, in 1936 a new emphasis was placed on the study of the critics’ biographies in year 9.¹⁹² More tentatively (given that they were not literary figures, but this point was never raised or questioned), communist leaders became the ideal *obraz*y to emulate for the

186 *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1937), 21.

187 M. Mal'tsev, “Dvadtsat' velikikh let,” *Literatura v shkole*, 6 (1937), 12-27 (18).

188 *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Leningrad, 1936), 15.

189 *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Leningrad, 1936), 31. In year 10, students were supposed to study the selective speeches and conclusions of the Writer’s Congress.

190 This was in line with ‘the discourse of power’ (moving from the capitalist darkness to socialist ‘light’) as described by Igal Halfin in his book *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2000).

191 *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1939), 9-13.

192 E. Ponomarev, “Osnovatel' russkoi literatury' M. V. Lomonosov i literatura XVIII veka v sovetskoi shkole,” in *Uchebniki detstva: iz istorii shkol'noi knigi XVII-XXI vekov: Trudy seminara “Kul'tura detstva: normy, tsennosti, praktiki,”* vol. 3, issue 13 (Moscow, 2013), 169.

New Soviet man. Continuity and legitimacy were established through Gor'kii's original principle of *preemstvennost'*, embodied through concrete 'images' (*obrazy*), and also represented visually, often through evocative parallels.

The cover of the journal *Literatura v shkole* 5-6 (1938) relied on the iconography used on the cover of Herzen's annual journal *Poliarnaia zvezda* (*Polaris*),¹⁹³ as designed by William James Linton (see figures 22-26).



22. *Stalin, Lenin*. Cover, *Literatura v shkole* 5-6 (1938).



23. *Stalin, Lenin*. Inside cover, *Literatura v shkole* 1 (1936).

¹⁹³ "Poliarnaia zvezda," in B. A. Vvedenskii (ed.), *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 2nd edition (Moscow, 1955), vol. 34, 119.



24. William James Linton, *Cover, Poliarnaia zvezda* (1855).

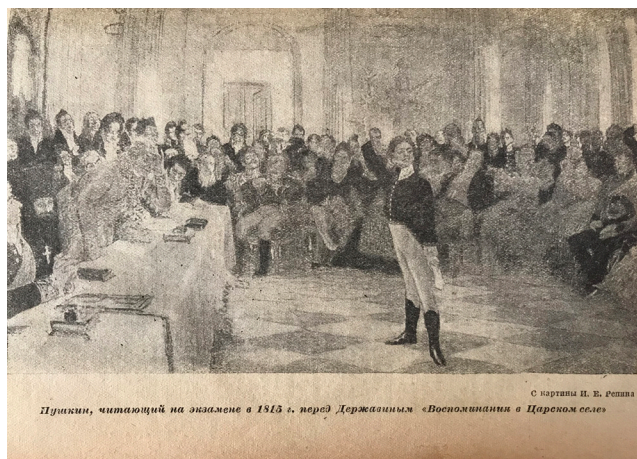
Efforts were made in the 1930s to retrieve Herzen's archives and to re-print a critical edition of *Kolokol*, though these ultimately proved fruitless. Yet the academic research that went into the edition's preparation brought forth a range of publications devoted to *Poliarnaia zvezda*.¹⁹⁴ Hence some of Herzen's material was made accessible to the pedagogues of the time, including in the journal *Literatura v shkole*.¹⁹⁵

Another example of these parallelisms appeared in 1937, Pushkin's anniversary year, when an article in *Literatura v shkole*, devoted to the history of Soviet school, was illustrated by scenes from Stalin's biography.¹⁹⁶ The illustrations were conspicuously similar to those illustrating Pushkin's biography. In figure 25 young Pushkin reads his poem in front of the overjoyed Derzhavin, while in figure 26, young Dzhugashvili proudly confronts his strict teachers of Tiflis seminary. In figures 27 and 28 both Pushkin and Stalin are portrayed as actively engaged in the activities of secret societies.

¹⁹⁴ For more on these publications see V. Vatsuro, N. Eidel'man, "Poliarnaia zvezda dekabristov – 'Poliarnaia zvezda' Gertsena," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 42 (2000); <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2000/42/dialog.html> (accessed August 8, 2015).

¹⁹⁵ N. A. Glagolev, "Literaturno-kriticheskie vzgliady A. I. Gertsena," *Literatura v shkole*, 2 (1936), 30-40.

¹⁹⁶ Mal'tsev, "Dvadsat' velikikh let," 14, 17, 27.



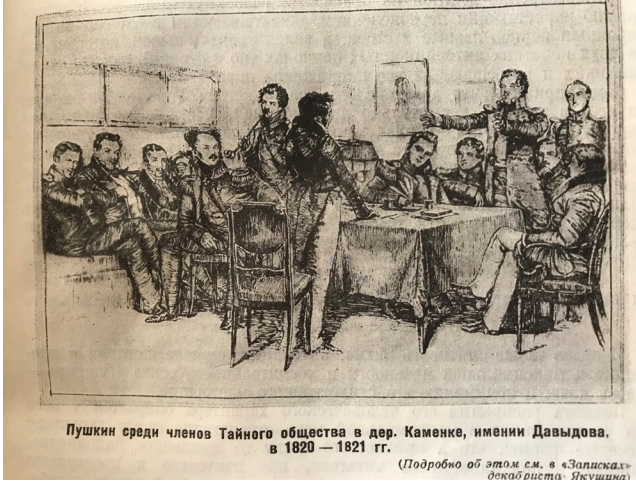
25. Pushkin's exam in Tsarskoe selo.¹⁹⁷



26. Bagrationi, Dzhugashvili's Expulsion from the Seminary in Tiflis.¹⁹⁸

197 Glagolev, "Pushkin i sovremennost," 21.

198 Mal'tsev, "Dvadsat' velikikh let," 14.



27. Pushkin Participates in a Secret Society.¹⁹⁹



28. P. Busyrev, *Stalin Leads Adjarians in Batumi*.²⁰⁰

The article ended on a high note, thanking “Stalinskii Tsentral’nyi Komitet”²⁰¹ and, following the principle of *nagliadnost’*, was illustrated with a photograph of grateful Soviet students (figure 29), enacting the ritual expression of gratitude in a visual image.²⁰²

199 Timofeev, “Lirika A. S. Pushkina (o spetsifike liricheskoi poezii),” 19.

200 Mal’tsev, “Dvadtsat’ velikikh let,” 17.

201 Ibid., 26.

202 On rituals of gratitude in Soviet public culture see J. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture From Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 2000). On the



29. *Physical culture parade. 1937.*²⁰³

The images of Lenin, Stalin, or Lenin and Stalin together (see figure 30 or title page figure 23) are frequent on the pages of literary textbooks and methodological literature alike.²⁰⁴



30. From a painting by P. V. Vasil'ev, *Lenin Speaks to Stalin.*²⁰⁵

function of the 'thanking' ritual for propaganda for children see C. Kelly, "Grandpa Lenin and Uncle Stalin: Soviet Leader Cult for Little Children," in P. Jones, J. C. Behrends, E. A. Rees (eds.), *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships* (Basingstoke, 2005), 108. In this essay Kelly, tracing the history and identifying functions of the personality cult, highlights that Stalin's images as a child or adolescent were rather common (107).

203 Mal'tsev, "Dvadtsat' velikikh let," 27.

204 See coloured plates in *Literatura v shkole*, I (1938).

205 "Velikii prazdnik narodov Sovetskoi strany," *Literatura v shkole*, I (1938), 7.

The fact that Stalin regularly cited favourite authors in his speeches²⁰⁶—another track for the absorption of literary material throughout Soviet society—accommodated such inclusion of the political into the sphere of pedagogy of literature. Yet these inclusions had another role—the leaders, dead or alive, were thus becoming part of the symbolic and imaginary continuity.

Stalin's *obraz* looms above the world, uniting the thoughts and feelings of millions of people, inspiring their will to struggle, igniting their faith in the victory—the *obraz* of a fearless courageous Bolshevik who sets a personal example of selfless service to the people.²⁰⁷

The *obraz* of Stalin was part of the artificial yet politically fruitful line of literary types, from superfluous people to the new type of men, that is to say part of a Russian literary tradition that affected the imagination of Soviet citizens.²⁰⁸

More generally, the *obraz* as employed in pedagogical literature of the Stalin era does not coincide with a historical subject or literary character because it is divorced from its original context; it is rather an idealised generalised mental visualisation, which joins extra-contextual ideological signifiers. Jan Plamper in his study of the origins of the Stalin cult and involvements of officials in visual representations of Stalin cites the anecdote of Artem Sergeev (Stalin's adopted son). In it, Stalin, the historical subject, allegedly points out to his son Vasili that he himself is not the Stalin of the people's imagination, the Soviet power of the newspapers and portraits.²⁰⁹ Plamper suggests that the cult was mainly a visual phenomenon.²¹⁰ I agree but would argue that it is possible to extend the definition of the visual to include 'the visualised'—the process of visualisation, fashioned by the literary pedagogy, which thus had a role in the cult alongside the mass media and political art.

Such a process of perception of others, be they fictional or historical, was fostered by guided reading practices in Soviet school.

206 On Stalin's citing from Russian classics see S. Iarov, "Ritorika vozhdai: V. I. Lenin i I. V. Stalin kak oratory," *Zvezda*, 1 (2007), paragraph 26 < <http://magazines.russ.ru/zvezda/2007/11/ja11.html> > (accessed August 9, 2015).

207 "Velikii prazdnik narodov Sovetskoi strany," 7. The quote is from "Polnaia pobeda bloka kommunistov i bespartiinykh," *Pravda*, December 14, 1937, 1.

208 Catriona Kelly in her study of the Stalin cult for children argues that the Soviet use of representation was "radically novel," especially in comparison to the traditions of tsarist ruler symbolism, and points to both "easily recognizable tropes" and "more elusive images" of the propaganda for children. C. Kelly, "Riding the Magic Carpet: Children and Leader Cult in the Stalin Era," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 49, 2 (2005), 203.

209 J. Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: The Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven, CO, 2012), xiii.

210 Another point emerges if one applies a term *obraz*—that one of the Russian orthodox tradition, in the context of which the episode with students' turning the image of Stalin to the wall because "the energy pouring from the leader's image made it impossible to converse freely" makes sense. *Ibid.*, xvi.

CONCLUSION

In 1846, Gogol' refused A. A. Agin and E. E. Bernadskii's rather lucrative offer to publish an illustrated edition of *Dead Souls*. The author explained his reasons in a letter to P. A. Pletnev, saying that he is against superfluous embellishments of texts.²¹¹ Such an edition nevertheless appeared in 1934, when the principles of *nagliadnost'* and *preemstvennost'* were put to the political use of indoctrination. In the history of literature course, these principles were more than illustrations and connecting devices for the literary works studied and served the overall agenda of the course.

The principles of *nagliadnost'* and *preemstvennost'* contributed to making literary characters into types that advanced the Soviet story of socio-historical development through literary study. They could also reduce an artistic meaning to the function of *oblischenie* and generalisation of a literary idea, visualising a type, as Gogol' had warned. The types from different classic works were connected chronologically among themselves to represent the laws of socio-historical process—from an individualistic lost superfluous hero to a purposeful and socially useful new man. The line culminated in the figure of an ideal communist, with Stalin as its best model.

Thus the protagonists of classic Russian literature, along with real historical characters, illustrated the historical process that justified Soviet power. The course also ensured that children possessed a gallery of image-types in their minds against which they would judge their surroundings. In addition, the new methods of memorisation of poems and texts encouraged children to learn poetry by heart as a series of images;²¹² Soviet children were thus called to actively exercise their imagination in their literary lessons. The provision of abundant visual aids, such as illustrations of classical texts, also prompted an intense interaction between children's spontaneous internal impressions and the state-sponsored imagery that was suggested to them. How these methods worked in practice and what their short- and long-term effects were, is another story.²¹³

²¹¹ See the letter to Pletnev dated March 20 (new style), 1846, in N. V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 14 vols (Moscow, Leningrad, 1937-1952), vol. 13, 45.

²¹² The extracts that needed to be studied by heart were listed in the programme of 1939. *Programmy srednei shkoly* (Moscow, 1939), 62-63.

²¹³ Malinovskaya, "Teaching Russian Classics in Secondary Schools under Stalin: 1936-1941," chapters 3, 4 and 6.

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READING DURING THE THAW: SUBSCRIPTION TO LITERARY PERIODICALS AS EVIDENCE FOR AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF SOVIET SOCIETY

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There are many ways of defining and analyzing the reading audiences of the post-World War II Soviet Union. Because by that point the country had reached nearly universal adult literacy, a comprehensive analysis would have to encompass the multimillion readership of a monumental number and variety of books and periodicals: popular and specialized, in Russian and other languages, of nationwide, republican, regional, or local appeal. Such an objective is clearly beyond the scope of a chapter or perhaps even a monograph. A focused project may examine the readership of a particular locality, genre, title, author, periodical, publisher, etc. Methodologies differ widely as well. One may look at the social profiles of readers, mechanisms of reader response, particular themes, ideas, and languages that emerged in communications among readers, authors, editors, or other cultural and political entities. Depending on the approach, the end results will vary greatly.

An especially challenging task is to build a bridge between the history of reading and an intellectual history of Soviet society. What can the examination of any segment of readership tell us about the generation and circulation of ideas in a Soviet community, region, or nation? How exactly did reading matter in such processes? To what extent can findings about one group of readers be projected upon other groups? A scholar of reading as a lens onto the intellectual history of Soviet society risks facing a dismissive attitude. The sample of evidence is usually imperfect, the group of readers under examination too small to allow reliable generalizations, and the whole project therefore is easily declared unrepresentative.

One case in point is the epoch of the 1950s and 1960s, commonly designated as the Thaw. While common, the designation is not universal. On

the one hand, these years were clearly marked by major political, social, intellectual, and linguistic changes, which found an outlet in literary and artistic conversations and thus were often the domain of readers. On the other hand, a broad societal impact of these conversations and changes remains a subject of controversy. Definitions and chronologies of the Thaw vary widely, depending on whether one takes a more or less inclusive approach, either limiting the Thaw to an intelligentsia of the capitals or interpreting it as a broader, far-reaching societal phenomenon.

In an effort to measure the extent of the Thaw as a phenomenon, this chapter focuses on mechanisms by which Soviet literature during the 1950s and 1960s reached its audiences. Specifically, I examine the circulation of literary periodicals, including those that generated the landmark turbulent discussions of the time: about the tragedies of the Soviet past, about multiple flaws in the economy and daily life, about ethics, material culture, and about languages of self-expression in literature or the arts. In order to analyze how much of an influence those literary discussions had on society, it is necessary to answer a few questions. How many people read literary periodicals during the Thaw? Where and how did they access this literature? Who was reading, listening, responding? To what extent might the controversies that raged on the pages of literary journals and newspapers affect a larger society? How widespread was their circulation and impact, how do we distinguish between “circulation” and “impact,” and how do we measure those?

My approach in this chapter is deliberately statistical and technical, rather than that of a history of ideas or linguistic evolution. As well, the evidence, and therefore the discussion, primarily focuses on the circulation of Russian-language literary periodicals and does not include literature published in the languages of other Soviet nationalities. For these and other reasons, my conclusions do not claim finality or comprehensiveness. Nonetheless, what follows may hopefully suggest a few links between, on the one hand, the mechanisms and geography of press dissemination during the Thaw and, on the other hand, a socio-intellectual history of this epoch.

I. SUBSCRIPTION AND RETAIL: OFFICIAL DISSEMINATION MECHANISMS OF THE SOVIET PRESS

By the 1950s, the Soviet literary landscape had taken well-established forms. At the center of this landscape stood the phenomenon of a thick literary journal, inherited from the imperial era and revived during the 1920s and 1930s. Affirming its own strategic “line” in matters far beyond the professional literary realm, a thick journal traditionally laid a powerful claim upon

its readers, from an aesthetic credo to political views, to economic theories, to socio-ethical guidance. It is not an exaggeration to say that readers formed genuine proto-political parties by rallying around the platforms of particular thick journals. This would be especially the case during the times of relative intellectual permissiveness, such as the 1860s and the 1920s in the past or the upcoming Thaw in the near future.¹ Politics aside, for purely literary purposes thick journals were of crucial importance as well. Before getting a chance to come out as a separate book, a major literary text was normally serialized in a thick journal, passing a rigorous test by editorial boards, critics, and censors. For a Soviet writer, publishing in a thick journal was the principal gateway to professional recognition.²

Given their importance, the habitat of thick literary journals during the late Stalin years looked painfully small. Similarly to the well-known *malokartin'e*, the scarcity of new feature film productions at this time, one may also describe the late 1940s and early 1950s as a moment of *malozhurnal'e*, the scarcity of literary journals, especially the thick monthlies that formed the core of Soviet literature. In the year of Stalin's death, 1953, there were only four thick literary journals in the capitals. Three were published in Moscow—*Novyi mir* (*New World*), *Oktiabr'* (*October*), and *Znamia* (*Banner*)—established, respectively, in 1925, 1924, and 1931. The fourth journal, *Zvezda* (*Star*), had been published in Leningrad since its inception in 1924. One other major literary journal, *Leningrad*, which had existed in its latest incarnation since 1940, was eliminated by the Central Committee's decree in August 1946 during the infamous ideological campaign that also targeted Mikhail Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova.³

It was not until after Stalin that new thick journals would be launched. In 1955, four of them appeared: *Druzhba narodov* (*Friendship of the Peoples*), *Iunost'* (*Youth*), and *Inostrannaia literatura* (*Foreign Literature*) in Moscow, as well as *Neva* in Leningrad. In 1956, two more journals emerged: *Nash sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*, previously an almanac which now became a quarterly, later a bi-monthly, and finally a monthly in 1964) and *Molodaia gvardiia* (*Young Guard*, resumed after its publication had ceased in 1941), followed in 1957 by *Moskva* (*Moscow*, also previously an almanac)—all published in Moscow.⁴ To these we should add the journal *Avrora*, published in Leningrad since 1969, and several regional periodicals, which were pro-

1 For the elaboration of this idea, see R. Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s* (Princeton, 1968).

2 E.g. RGASPI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii), f. 17, op. 133, d. 322, ll. 223, 225.

3 "Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) O zhurnalakh 'Zvezda' i 'Leningrad', 14 August 1946," *Pravda*, August 21, 1946.

4 *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei. 15-26 dekabria 1954 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1956), 36; [N. N. Dikushina], "Zhurnalistika i kritika 40-kh-nachala 50-kh godov," *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi literatury v chetyrekh tomakh*, (Moscow, 1968), III, 448-471, here 449; V. Iu. Afiani et al. (eds.), *Apparat TsK KPSS i kultura, 1953-1957: Dokumenty* (Moscow, 2001), 344.

duced either in Russian or in the languages of ethnic republics and autonomies. Among the best-known regional Russian-language literary journals were *Sibirskie ognii* (*Siberian Lights*, published in Novosibirsk since 1922), *Don* (published in Rostov-on-Don since 1925), *Zvezda Vostoka* (*The Star of the Orient*, published in Tashkent since 1932, under this title since 1946), *Ural* (published in Sverdlovsk since 1958), and *Volga* (published in Saratov since 1966).

Noticeably, it was during the Thaw that new literary journals proliferated. As of the late Stalin years, not only were such journals few, but also their print runs were minuscule. At the end of World War II in 1945, *Novyi mir*'s nationwide circulation was only 21,000 copies in both subscription and retail, while *Oktiabr*' sported an even lower 12,400.⁵ To see how tiny these numbers were, it is enough to say that in 1945 Moscow, a city of about four million people, received 2,500 copies of *Novyi mir*. Leningrad received seven hundred. All of postwar Ukraine, a country of at least 27.4 million people, received a paltry 2,000 copies of the journal, while Belarus, with its population of over seven million, got only 600 copies.⁶ The circulation of other thick journals was equally small.⁷

After the war, print runs began to grow but remained modest. In 1947, *Novyi mir* circulated in 59,800 copies in both subscription and retail nationwide (that is, all over the Soviet Union), compared to 60,300 for *Oktiabr*', 59,300 for *Znamia*, and 25,000 for *Zvezda*.⁸ This meant, for example, that in 1947 the seven-million population of Belarus received only 1,000 yearly subscriptions to *Novyi mir*.⁹ Two years later, in 1949, the journal's nationwide circulation rose, but only slightly: to 63,300. In that same year, the writer and poet Konstantin Simonov (1915-1979) who was *Novyi mir*'s editor-in-chief in 1946-1950 and 1954-1958, urged Central Committee secretary Georgii Malenkov to increase the journal's yearly circulation to 100,000. Simonov described the current circulation as "utterly insufficient to satisfy the readers' demands." Appealing to a first-rank political figure about a matter seemingly so technical was not an exception but a regular editorial practice, maintained since the early Soviet years. Under Stalin, literature was a matter of high political importance, with decisions about publication,

5 RGAE (Rossiiskii gosudartsvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki), f. 3527, op. 27, d. 122, ll. 16, 21.

6 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 122, ll. 16, 170b. For Ukrainian population statistics in 1945, see L. Luciuk, "Ukraine," in I. Dear, M. Foot (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford, 2001), 909.

7 Thus, in 1945 800 yearly sets of *Oktiabr*' went to Moscow, 300 to Leningrad, 1,650 to Ukraine, and 700 to Belarus. RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 122, ll. 180b, 190b, 20, 21.

8 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 152, l. 116.

9 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 216, l. 18. Belarus also received 1,200 sets of *Oktiabr*', 1,100 of *Znamia*, and 400 of *Zvezda* in 1947. In 1950, the republic's population was 7,709,000: "Chislennost' naseleniia Respubliki Belarus'," <http://belstat.gov.by/homep/ru/publications/population/tables.php> (accessed November 24, 2010); D. Marples, *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam, 1999), 16.

circulation, editorial appointments, awards, or reprisals against editors and authors frequently becoming top state priorities. Strategic issues of literary policy, including circulations, were customarily resolved not by the Union of Soviet Writers but at the very top of the power hierarchy: by the Politburo, Orgburo, or the Secretariat of the Central Committee. At times, these issues were resolved by Stalin personally.¹⁰

And so, Simonov wrote to Malenkov. To advocate the circulation increase for his journal, he noted, for example, that a major industrial and research urban center, Stalino (the contemporary name for Donetsk), received only 102 copies of *Novyi mir* in 1949 for a population of nearly half a million, while Stalingrad got only 202—apparently even less than in 1945 when it had received 250 copies. Simonov was a skillful politician, and it might have been not accidental that he chose two cities bearing the leader's name as his examples of a presumable vacuum in literary-ideological indoctrination. In yet another example he provided, Armenia, a republic with a population of about 1.3 million, received only 252 copies of *Novyi mir* in 1949—a drop in the ocean, although a drop five times larger than in 1945, when the republic had received a microscopic 50 copies of the journal.¹¹

Despite illustrating these deficiencies, Simonov failed to secure any drastic improvement in his journal's circulation. All the Central Committee agreed to do was to increase it from 63,300 to 66,000 copies nationwide, and only because that was the amount by which subscription to the journal had exceeded the designated maximum print run. Characteristically, this technical issue was managed at the very pinnacle of political power: by a special decree of the Central Committee Secretariat.¹² By May 1950, *Novyi mir's* circulation grew a little further, to 67,300. *Oktiabr'* circulated in

10 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 78, ll. 46-48, 50. On the involvement of top-level Soviet leadership in literary affairs during the Stalin years, see, e.g., H. Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-59* (Oxford, 1962); D. L. Babichenko (ed.), "Literaturnyi front": *Istoriia politicheskoi tsenzury, 1932-1946 gg.* (Moscow, 1994), 40, 43-44, 88-90, 144, 221-225, and *passim*; D. L. Babichenko, *Pisateli i tsenzory: Sovetskaiia literatura 1940-kh godov pod politicheskim kontrolem TsK* (Moscow, 1994); A. Artizov, O. Naumov (eds.), *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b), VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike, 1917-1953 gg.* (Moscow, 1999), 641-42, 643-46, 662-63; J. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000), 64, 116, 107-125, 167-168, 208, 226, and *passim*; A. Artizov, K. Clark, E. Dobrenko, O. Naumov (eds.), *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (New Haven, 2007), *passim*.

11 ORF GLM (Otdel rukopisnykh fondov Gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo muzeia), f. 168, op. 1, d. 40, l. 4; RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 122, ll. 160b, 170b; "Demograficheskie pokazateli po 15 novym nezavisimym gosudarstvam," *Demoskop Weekly*, 457-458 (March 7-20, 2011), http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_pop.php (accessed February 25, 2017); N. S. Dranko et al. (eds.), *Donetsk: Istoriko-ekonomicheskii ocherk* (Donetsk, 1969), <https://coolib.com/b/285973/read> (accessed May 3, 2018).

12 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 226, ll. 26-27. The circulation stated on the back page of *Novyi mir's* August 1949 issue was 66,300.

an equally unimpressive 65,400 copies, *Znamia* had 61,300, and *Zvezda* 27,000.¹³

The paltry circulation of literary journals was part of a general scarcity of printed matter, and more broadly, of the overall economy of shortages.¹⁴ The Soviet system of press dissemination was based not on market categories but on the principle of centralized allocation of resources, with ideological priorities as a constant additional factor. As a result, readers had to deal not directly with a publishing house or the editorial office of a periodical to which they wished to subscribe, but with a special government institution that carried out subscriptions. The system dated back to the early Soviet years, specifically to Lenin's government decree of 21 November 1918, which had prescribed employing the postal service in the distribution of periodicals. During the 1920s, the post proved not up to the task, technically let alone ideologically, while the overall press distribution system remained in a state of improvised diversity that often resembled chaos. In the second half of the 1920s, a gradual centralization of the press distribution took place, until finally in 1930 a rigidly uniform state mechanism of press dissemination emerged.¹⁵ In that year, a government agency titled *Soiuzpechat'*—literally, “Union Press”—was formed, replacing its inefficient predecessors and monopolizing subscription to periodicals. Operating within the system of the People's Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs (in 1932 transformed into the People's Commissariat of Communications), from 1937 *Soiuzpechat'* became responsible not only for subscription but also for distribution of the press.¹⁶

World War II made the system even more strictly regimented, drastically reducing opportunities for individual readers to access periodicals. Information, just as paper on which it was printed, was now in especially short supply, while at the same time acquiring great strategic importance. Many newspapers and journals, including literary ones, were discontinued, while the circulation of others sharply dropped. Paper was channeled toward the publication of those newspapers, leaflets, and other venues of mass persuasion that directly served the military effort. In what largely replaced the

13 Ibid; RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 171, l. 138; *ibid.*, d. 176, ll. 45, 47.

14 Historiographically, the concept of the Soviet economy of shortages was developed by Elena Osokina in her *Za fasadom "Stalinskogo izobilia": Raspreделение i rynek v snabzhenii naseleeniia v gody industrializatsii, 1927-1941* (Moscow, 1998), in English as Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread: Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927-1941* (Armonk, 2001).

15 On the overall evolution of the Soviet press during the 1920s and 1930s see Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*; M. Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, MA, 2004). On the press distribution system, specifically, see J. Brooks, “The Breakdown in the Production and Distribution of Printed Material, 1917-1927,” in A. Gleason, P. Kenez, R. Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), 151-174, esp. 154-156; Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 5-8, 11-15; Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 46-69.

16 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 203, ll. 9-11.

prewar system of subscription (heavily regulated by the Central Committee as it already had been), most periodicals were now distributed according to centrally imposed “limits,” first priority in the military and then among various civil institutions, with a fixed quota for each title per institution.¹⁷

After the war much of this regimentation stayed in place, the country only gradually returning to peacetime practices of subscription and retail. During the late Stalin years, a system of tight quotas imposed by the Central Committee and enforced via the regional party and Komsomol hierarchy continued to restrain subscription to periodicals. Under the party supervision, the technical distribution of quotas to institutions and localities—or “allocation of limits” (*razmeshchenie limitov*), as the contemporary term went—became the purview of *Soiuzpechat'*. Structurally a unit of the USSR People's Commissariat (since 1946 Ministry) of Communications, and officially known as the ministry's Central Directorate for the Distribution and Expedition of the Press, *Soiuzpechat'* operated a wide network of regional branches. In co-ordination with the postal service, it reached the population via local post offices as well as managed its own retail outlets.

Every year during and shortly after the war, the “allocation of limits” became a major headache for thousands of Soviet officials. In a characteristically militarized fashion, they described their yearly efforts as “subscription campaigns,” drafting numerous memos to emphasize every such undertaking as a matter of state importance. “The distribution of the press is not a technical but a political task. It is imperative for you to convey this idea to each and every employee,” senior *Soiuzpechat'* bureaucrats in Omsk instructed their subordinates in November 1944 about subscription for 1945.¹⁸ Every such campaign required complex co-ordination among regional departments of education, planning, the military, the police, health care, etc., not to mention party and Komsomol committees. The institutions busily corresponded with each other about the proper allocation of press quotas to cities and villages, local soviets and collective farms, libraries and “reading huts,” schools, hospitals, or even veterinarian clinics. High authorities up to the minister of communications himself reminded their staff about strictly observing the quotas and bearing personal responsibility for exceeding those. Occasional instances of employee oversight that led to such excesses became political emergencies: heads rolled, metaphorically at least, and to

17 On the emergence of the Central Committee-regulated system of distribution quotas during the 1930s, see Lenoë, *Closer to the Masses*, 59-63. On wartime shortages of the press, see I. Kuznetsov, *Istoriia otechestvennoi zhurnalistiki (1917-2000)*, ch. 4 (Moscow, 2002), <http://evartist.narod.ru/text8/09.htm> (accessed February 25, 2017); K. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 16-17, 27-29. On the earlier interwar situation, see Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 3-18, on subscription in the 1920s in particular, see *ibid.*, 15. For a brief overview of the Soviet periodicals' circulation prior to the Gorbachev years, see S. Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (New York, 2000), 104-107.

18 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 123, l. 33; see also *ibid.*, d. 191, l. 43.

satisfy the unforeseen extra subscribers, decisions to print additional copies had to be endorsed at the topmost level of power, as it happened with *Novyi mir* in 1949.¹⁹

Much of this centralization of subscription persisted into the 1950s and 1960s. However, shortly after World War II there also emerged a trend toward liberalization and gradual diminution of the military language. Realizing how cumbersome the existing mechanism was, *Soiuzpechat'* administrators began pushing for reform. In October-November 1946 the head of the agency, Fedor Ramsin, approached the Central Committee directorate of propaganda and agitation and its head Georgii Aleksandrov with suggestions for improving the system. In the first place, according to Ramsin, the very notion of a subscriber was to evolve. Institutional subscription, the practice by which an institution was allowed to subscribe to periodicals paying for the subscription out of a state-funded account, was to be drastically reduced. From now on, individual citizens would be encouraged to subscribe on their own. The advantages of the new system were obvious. Although limits on circulation and therefore subscription remained in place, periodicals could now reach a broader audience, as opposed to the earlier practice when much of the print runs ended up sitting in various institutional offices. The financial aspect was equally and perhaps even more important. Individual subscription meant that people would spend their own money on subscription rather than take advantage of copies of periodicals purchased by state enterprises on the government's dime and freely available for reading, say, at a factory library. For example, for the thick literary journals, *Novyi mir*, *Znamia*, *Oktiabr'*, and *Zvezda*, 60% of circulation would be allocated for individual subscription. Retail sales via bookstores and kiosks were to grow as well. The state thus would end up with a net financial gain, turning press dissemination from a liability into an asset.²⁰

These suggestions came into effect with the 30 November 1946 decree of the USSR Council of Ministers, "On the Order of Distribution of Newspapers and Journals." That winter, thousands of subscription outlets for individual readers opened all over the Soviet Union, at local post offices and branches of *Soiuzpechat'*. Factories, administrative offices, institutes, or hospitals had to cut their subscription budgets, while individuals indeed subscribed more actively. The share of individual subscriptions in the overall subscription to central journals and newspapers grew from 37-42% in 1946 to 66-73% in 1947. During the post-Stalin years, the individual share in subscriptions appears to have increased even more, although much depended on a par-

19 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 226, ll. 26-27; RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 171, ll. 137-138; RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 123, ll. 30-31, 123; RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 124, ll. 91-910b, 142-144; RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 191, l. 45a.

20 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 152, ll. 103-116; *ibid.*, d. 159, ll. 16-18. On institutional subscription during the early Soviet decades, see Brooks, "The Breakdown in the Production and Distribution of Printed Material, 1917-1927," 155-156; Lenoë, *Closer to the Masses*, 53-57, 62-66.

ticular title and location. At least in Moscow, two decades later, in 1965-66, nearly 90% of all subscription to periodicals was individual.²¹

Shortages of the press were not overcome, however. Print runs often remained insufficient, and subscription, although now to a large degree individual, continued to be limited for a number of titles—formally until 18 October 1964.²² Immediately prior to that date, the list of limited-subscription periodicals had included 53 titles. To be precise, as of 15 July 1964, according to the information sent by the USSR Minister of Communications, Nikolai Psurtsev, to the Central Committee, the official inventory of periodicals with limited circulation in the USSR consisted of 9 newspapers—*Izvestiia*, *Sel'skaia zhizn'*, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, *Krasnaia zvezda*, *Sovetskii sport*, *Trud*, *Pionerskaia pravda*, and *Literaturnaia Rossiia*—and 44 journals: *Za rubezhom*, *Krestianka*, *Krokodil*, *Nauka i zhizn'*, *Ogonek*, the literary supplement to *Ogonek*, *Rabotnitsa*, *Smena*, *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, *Sovetskii Soiuz*, *Iunost*, *Inostrannaia literatura*, *Bloknot agitatora*, *Vestnik protivovozdushnoi oborony*, *Voenno-meditsinskii zhurnal*, *Tekhnika i vooruzhenie*, *Tyl i snabzhenie sovetskikh vooruzhennykh sil*, *Sovetskii voin*, *Veselye kartinki*, *Vokrug sveta*, *Murzilka*, *Tekhnika molodezhi*, *Iunyi tekhnika*, the supplement to *Iunyi tekhnika*, *Zhenshchiny mira*, *Kur'er IUNESKO*, *Za rulem*, *Radio*, *Zdorov'e*, *Znanie – sila*, *Legkaia atletika*, *Sportivnye igry*, *Fizkul'tura i sport*, *Zhurnal mod*, *Modeli sezona*, *Muzykal'naia zhizn'*, *Okhota i okhotnich'e khoziaistvo*, *Roman-gazeta*, *Neva*, *Sovetskii ekran*, *Sovetskoe kino*, *Avtomobil'nyi transport*, *Mir nauki*, and *Sluzhba byta*.²³

The long list shows that, in addition to several major newspapers and a few specialized publications, among limited-circulation periodicals were numerous magazines devoted to popular topics such as fashion, sports, home economics, health care advice, movies, hunting, driving, etc., as well as titles for children – all of which obviously enjoyed mass appeal. The list also included four literary journals: *Roman-gazeta*, *Inostrannaia literatura*, *Neva*, and *Iunost'*. Literature thus was not an exception but rather part of the general environment of scarcity of the printed word.

Especially in big cities like Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, or Sverdlovsk, there were always more people who wished to subscribe to a newspaper or journal than the quotas allowed.²⁴ Retail sales could not compensate readers for the limited subscription opportunities, because retail trade fared even worse. Kiosks were few and the supply of journals and newspapers in them

21 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 159, ll. 16-21, 26-27, 55-56; *ibid.*, d. 1423, l. 173.

22 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1196, l. 14 (K. Sergeichuk, deputy minister of communications of the USSR, to the Ideological Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, October 26, 1964).

23 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1196, ll. 24-26 (“Spisok izdaniĭ, rasprostraniemykh v 1964 godu ogranichenymi tirazhami.” Appendix to the letter from the USSR Minister of Communications Nikolai Psurtsev to the Central Committee, July 15, 1964).

24 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, ll. 18, 56.

was chronically insufficient. As a result, retail usually comprised only a small portion of a periodical's circulation. To take literary journals as an example, in May 1950 no less than 98.3% of the circulation of *Novyi mir*, 98.3% of *Oktiabr'*, 92.8% of *Znamia*, and 100% of *Zvezda* was distributed via subscription, leaving negligible amounts for retail.²⁵ To make things worse, local *Soiuzpechat'* administrators often considered batches of periodicals designated for retail as a mere reserve to tap from when they ran out of subscription allocations.²⁶ In subsequent years the proportion of retail sales of periodicals increased, but retail would always account for a minor share of circulation. Thus, in 1966 retail accommodated only 20% of *Novyi mir's* nationwide circulation.²⁷ Such shortages characterized not only literary periodicals. It was often hard if not impossible to buy any journal, and sometimes even a newspaper, in a retail kiosk.

The situation prompted the authorities to be creative and come up with various devices for providing broad public access to the printed word. One such device were the ubiquitous public newsboards. A common sight in the streets of a Soviet city was that of a group of people standing and reading a paper glued to a large newsboard. An occasional side effect of this practice of collective outdoor public reading were animated ad hoc discussions, in which readers exchanged opinions right there in the street.²⁸

The shortages would plague the Soviet system of press dissemination throughout the late 1940s, 1950s, and afterwards. Official reports frequently noted that the readers' demand for periodicals exceeded supply. Again, literary journals were not just unexceptional but not even prominent in this regard. From time to time, shortages would emerge even for such major central newspapers (officially limited or not) as *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, or for popular illustrated journals such as *Rabotnitsa* (*The Working Woman*), *Krestianka* (*The Peasant Woman*), and *Ogonek* (*Little Fire*), all of which had far greater print runs than *Novyi mir*, *Oktiabr'*, or *Zvezda*.²⁹ In 1954 *Soiuzpechat'* recorded a shortage of up to one million subscriptions for *Pravda*. Subscriptions (and shortages thereof) going into millions were something about which the editors of thick literary journals at the time could not even dream.³⁰

Print runs were not easily brought up to match the readers' demand, in part because of a frequent shortage of paper supply in the publishing industry—an endemic issue that had afflicted Soviet printing and press dis-

25 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 176, ll. 45, 13.

26 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 213, l. 33 (January 1955).

27 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1416, l. 44.

28 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 123, l. 300b; M. Filimonov, "U gazetnogo stenda na Ploshchadi Revoliutsii," July 1, 1970. RIA Novosti, A70-16372, <http://visualrian.ru/images/item/718003> (accessed February 25, 2017).

29 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 176, ll. 16-17, 19 (1950); *ibid.*, d. 204, ll. 15-16 (1954); *ibid.*, d. 213, ll. 24-26 (1955); *ibid.*, d. 733, l. 75 (1958).

30 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 204, l. 16.

tribution since the 1920s.³¹ Requests to increase print runs in spite of paper shortages continued to go straight to the highest-ranking party and government officials, just as in Stalin's time. In May 1957, the head of *Soiuzpechat'* Boris Stepanov wrote directly to the Central Committee Secretary Dmitrii Shepilov citing such a paper supply shortage and asking the CC to "find a possibility" for increasing print runs at least for some periodicals and at least between June and September of that year.³² Two years prior, in March 1955, the USSR minister of communications Psurtsev had sent a similar request to Khrushchev personally.³³ In 1961, a particularly severe crisis of paper supply forced the party leadership to contemplate reducing the circulation of central newspapers two to five times.³⁴ Readers sent angry letters directly to Khrushchev, complaining, as one Evgenii Voronikin from Pskov did, that retail kiosks in the city received only five to ten copies of each central newspaper. Naturally, those were sold out early in the morning. "Your statements and speeches, Nikita Sergeevich, inspire us," the reader remarked caustically. "Only, it is not always possible to hear them [...] on the radio. One cannot buy a central newspaper at a *Soiuzpechat'* kiosk after work. [...] *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* are farther away from us than the planet Saturn."³⁵ Subscription apparently provided no relief in this local crisis of newspaper retail. In 1961 Pskov oblast', a region populated by nearly a million people, was allowed only 14,835 subscriptions to *Pravda*, or one for every 67 individuals. But these numbers looked generous in comparison to the minuscule local circulation of literary journals. *Novyi mir*, for example, circulated in the Pskov oblast' merely in 393 yearly subscriptions in 1961, or one per every 2,545 individuals.³⁶ Similar scarcity existed in many other regions—Altai and Arkhangel'sk, Belgorod and Astrakhan', Vologda and Briansk.³⁷

Soiuzpechat' did try to improve the situation. So far as the readers' demand and the paper supply allowed, the agency endeavored to minimize the list of titles with limited circulation. It also began moving away from centrally imposed circulation quotas to a system where circulation would be established not before but after a yearly subscription campaign, on the basis of readers' demand. At least from the mid-1950s, *Soiuzpechat'* officials regu-

31 On paper supply shortages during the 1920s and 1930s, see Brooks, "The Breakdown in the Production and Distribution of Printed Material, 1917-1927," 154; Lenoë, *Closer to the Masses*, 21, 35, 57, 66, and *passim*.

32 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 705, l. 20 (Stepanov to Shepilov, May 6, 1957).

33 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 213, l. 24 (N. Psurtsev to Khrushchev, March 8, 1955). For a similar shortage of paper supply in 1956, see *ibid.*, d. 687, l. 50.

34 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 830, ll. 21-21a, 112-114.

35 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 830, l. 115 (February 14, 1961).

36 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 834, l. 138. For the Pskov population statistics as per the 1959 USSR census, see *Demoskop Weekly*. Institut demografii Natsional'nogo issledovatel'skogo universiteta "Vysshiaia shkola ekonomiki" (hereafter *Demoscope Weekly*) http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_mar_59.php?reg=53&gor=3&Submit=OK (accessed March 2, 2017).

37 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 190b, 820b, 1140b, 1800b, 2120b, 3090b.

larly made the case, among themselves and before the Central Committee, for determining the print runs of periodicals upon receipt of subscription requests from regions and localities.³⁸ This eventually worked, at least in part, as on 25 July 1958 the Central Committee implemented those suggestions by a special decree.³⁹ By the second half of the 1960s, factoring subscribers' requests (aggregated by local branches of *Soiuzpechat'* and then submitted up the institutional ladder) into decision-making on circulations had become standard practice, at least officially.⁴⁰ Overall, the trend during the late 1950s and 1960s was toward increasing co-ordination between the printing press and the readers' interests. Circulation numbers became more flexible and could go up or down each year as well as fluctuate within a given year depending on local demand. The number of limited-circulation titles diminished, until eventually the subscription limits were removed in October 1964. Incidentally or not, this happened shortly after Khrushchev's removal from power.⁴¹

At the same time, even after 1965, the first officially "limitless" year, subscription remained centrally planned, and economic vicissitudes would occasionally force the authorities to re-impose limits, formally or informally. Such restrictions did not necessarily emanate from Moscow. Local officials responsible for press dissemination often felt uncomfortable and disoriented in the new "limitless" environment, as they had been accustomed to top-down distribution rather than any genuine advertisement of newspapers and journals. The central *Soiuzpechat'* authorities had to remind their local subordinates that imposition and enforcement in the matter of subscriptions were no longer admissible.⁴² In reality, such practices often carried on. Readers would long remember the various subscription schemes improvised by local administrators—such as mandating Communist party members to subscribe to party press, inducing people to cast lots for the opportunity to subscribe to an interesting journal, or imposing mandatory subscription "packages" where titles of high demand were coupled with less popular ones. It was not until 1988-89, already under Gorbachev, that subscription limits were ultimately abolished.⁴³

38 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 213, l. 25 (B. Stepanov, acting head of *Soiuzpechat'*, to the Central Committee, February 14, 1955); *ibid.*, d. 687, ll. 24, 35-37, 65 (a stenographic record of the meeting of press dissemination workers in Moscow, 26 September 1956); RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 733, ll. 59-62 ("O podpiske na tsentral'nye i mestnye gazety i zhurnaly," letter by N. Psurtsev to the Central Committee, April 16, 1958).

39 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 760, ll. 1-2; *ibid.*, d. 830, l. 184.

40 E.g., RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1380 (a reference note (*spravka*) by the Main Directorate of *Soiuzpechat'*, sent to the Central Committee, October 18, 1967).

41 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1416, l. 109; *ibid.*, d. 1423, ll. 5, 8-10.

42 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, ll. 8-9.

43 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 687, ll. 16-17; for Russian blogs, see <http://pda.sxnarod.com/index.php?showtopic=156806&st=0>; <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/wolfleo/post136943880/> (accessed November 25, 2010).

What made the press shortages all the more acute during the Thaw years was the readers' growing demand for the printed word, especially in the capitals. Muscovites, for example, had purchased 2.3 million yearly subscriptions to newspapers and journals in 1953, but in 1956 subscriptions in the city jumped up to 3.75 million.⁴⁴ Literature apparently played an important role in this reading boom. A few years later, in the 1960s, the circulation of literary periodicals in Moscow rivaled that of the Communist party periodicals. In 1966, subscription to literary journals in the capital exceeded subscription to Communist party journals, even though the latter were closely monitored and imposed upon the audiences by all means available. In 1966, Muscovites purchased 246,419 yearly subscriptions to party journals, but as many as 316,182 subscriptions to literary journals. As for the main national newspaper, *Pravda*, it circulated in 320,400 subscriptions in Moscow in 1966, a number almost equal to the subscriptions to literary journals that year. The comparison mortified the city *Soiuzpechat'* officials. In fact, subscriptions to *Pravda* went down in Moscow, from 345,007 in 1964 to 320,380 in 1965, and remained stagnant at 320,400 in 1966.⁴⁵ *Pravda's* counterpart for younger audiences, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, remained chronically unpopular among university students. In 1965 all higher education establishments in Moscow mustered 9,291 subscriptions to *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, or merely 3.4% of city-wide subscription to the newspaper. In 1966, *Komsomol'skaia pravda's* circulation in Moscow's institutions of higher learning plummeted even further: down to 7,509 subscriptions.⁴⁶ Literature, on the other hand, was doing remarkably well. Thus, the lifting of subscription limits in October 1964 prompted a nearly threefold increase in subscriptions to the journal *Iunost'* in Moscow: from 59,646 on January 1, 1964, to 155,413 on January 1, 1965.⁴⁷

I will return to the question of readers' demand for literary periodicals, but it is evident that at least in the capital the demand existed, and it was quite considerable. This demand may in part explain the growth in the literary periodicals' circulation. Nationwide in the Soviet Union, despite occasional fluctuations, the circulation of literary journals gradually went up during the postwar decades. In what follows, I discuss some of the dynamics of this circulation, often focusing on two emblematic literary journals of the Thaw years. One was *Novyi mir*, edited in 1946-1950 and 1958-1970 by Aleksandr Tvardovskii (1910-1971); the other was *Oktiabr'*, edited in 1961-1973 by Vsevolod Kochetov (1912-1973). The strategic rivalry between these two journals became proverbial during the 1960s and is often mentioned

44 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 687, l. 11.

45 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, ll. 3, 174, 177-79.

46 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, ll. 179-180.

47 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 105; *ibid.*, d. 1423, l. 175. See also *ibid.*, d. 1423, l. 13 (as of January 1, 1964 and 1965).

in studies of Soviet literary history. Under Tvardovskii's editorship, *Novyi mir* embarked on a long quest for a new literary ethos as well as language. The goal of this new literature, based on the critical and humanistic Russian literary tradition, was to enable writers and readers to face the tragic complexity of the twentieth-century experience. On the other hand, Kochetov's *Oktiabr'* adopted an ideologically conservative stance, seeking to mobilize literature for a defense of the Soviet order from a potentially destructive post-Stalin reassessment.⁴⁸

It is helpful to see what the circulations of these two journals were at the time, and how they compared to the overall background of Soviet literary periodicals.

Novyi mir's circulation rose to 104,000 in June 1950, 130,000 in January 1952, and 140,000 in January 1954.⁴⁹ Subsequently it dropped to 100,000 in 1960, and further down to 85,000 in 1961 (those were the years of the major paper supply crisis), but later began rising again.⁵⁰ In 1962, the year when the journal published Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*), its circulation increased to 90,000, then to 100,000 in early 1963, and by the end of that year apparently up to 113,000.⁵¹ By January 1966, the journal's total circulation had risen to 150,000 copies, with 120,000 allocated for subscription and 30,000 for retail. By January 1968, in the Russian Federation alone the journal had surpassed its 1966 all-Union subscription figures, accumulating 121,000 subscriptions. As of January 1970, the last month of Tvardovskii's second editorship, subscription alone (without retail) to *Novyi mir* in the USSR hovered at 146,000.⁵²

To compare, in the same month of January 1970 the nationwide subscription to *Oktiabr'* was 108,800 (down from 150,000 in 1965 and 1966). Among other thick literary journals, *Zvezda* accumulated 69,000 subscriptions, *Druzhba narodov* had 62,000, *Znamia* 108,000, *Inostrannaia literatura* 245,000, *Avrora* 45,400, *Moskva* 152,200, *Nash sovremennik* 62,000,

48 On relevant aspects of Soviet literary history during the 1960s, see, e.g., D. Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novyi mir and the Soviet Regime* (New York, 1982); Y. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 28-93; M. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia i vlast' v 1950-e i 1960-e gody* (Moscow, 1999); P. Jones, "The Personal and the Political: Opposition to the Thaw and the Politics of Literary Identity in the 1950s and 1960s," in D. Kozlov, E. Gilburd (eds.), *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, 2013), 231-268; Idem, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking The Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven, 2013); D. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); A. Kahn, M. Lipovetsky, I. Reyfman, S. Sandler, *A History of Russian Literature* (Oxford, 2018), 549-550.

49 Cited from *Novyi mir's* issues for those months.

50 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 789, l. 6; *ibid.*, d. 830, l. 124.

51 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 830, l. 5; d. 708, l. 87; d. 896, l. 4; d. 1189, l. 12; d. 1274, l. 27.

52 For 1966, 1968, and 1970, respectively: RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1416, l. 44; *ibid.*, d. 1619, l. 170b; *ibid.*, d. 1822, l. 1760b.

and *Neva* had 222,000 subscriptions.⁵³ All the numbers are cited without retail, which remained consistently small, anywhere between 10 and 20% of a journal's total circulation.

Of all literary periodicals, the one that enjoyed the largest circulation in the Soviet Union at the time was *Roman-gazeta*, which as of January 1970 was distributed nationwide in an impressive 2,087,100 copies in subscriptions alone.⁵⁴ *Roman-gazeta*, whose title may be translated literally as "Novel-newspaper," was not a traditional journal but a special combination of a periodical with a book, which usually devoted an entire issue to a single lengthy novel. It exceeded in circulation even the principal literary newspaper, *Literaturnaia gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*), whose nationwide subscription in January 1970 was 961,400 copies.⁵⁵

With the possible exception of *Roman-gazeta*, the circulation of Soviet literary journals during the 1960s may look rather low, especially if compared to the million-some print runs that thick journals would boast a couple of decades later, during the Gorbachev *perestroika*.⁵⁶ However, the circulation numbers of the 1960s were considerably higher than those of either the imperial or the early Soviet decades. For example, Nikolai Nekrasov's *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*), the nineteenth-century reformist journal often mentioned as *Novyi mir*'s predecessor and ethical inspiration, had circulated in about 7,000 copies in 1860-1861, its best years, and usually far less than that.⁵⁷ In the 1880s and 1890s, according to Jeffrey Brooks, the circulation of the most successful thick journals did not exceed 15,000.⁵⁸ Soviet literary journals of the 1920s had circulations comparable to those of the imperial era. In 1927 *Novyi mir* circulated in 28,000 copies (a record among thick journals), while *Oktiabr'* only reached 4,000 to 5,000 copies after 1924, 2,500 copies in 1928, and 10,000 copies in 1929.⁵⁹ The late Stalin years, as shown above, yielded somewhat greater numbers, and yet even those were inferior to what came afterwards. It was during the post-Stalin 1950s and especially 1960s that literary journals made major progress in reaching their audiences. To take *Novyi mir* again as an example, the journal's circulation increased sevenfold between 1945 and 1966: from

53 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, ll. 176ob, 178ob.

54 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, l. 177.

55 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, l. 161.

56 See, e.g., B. Menzel, *Bürgerkrieg um Worte: Die russische Literaturkritik der Perestrojka* (Köln, 2001), 46, table 1.

57 V. E. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, *Poslednie gody "Sovremennika." 1863-1866* (Leningrad, 1939), 113; Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil*, 36, 368, 382.

58 J. Brooks, "Readers and Reading at the End of the Tsarist Era," in W. M. Todd III (ed.), *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914* (Stanford, 1978), 97-150, here 102. Brooks mentions here that at the turn of the twentieth century some literary journals would occasionally reach even more impressive circulation numbers, such as 80,000 for Viktor Miroliubov's *Zhurnal dlia vsekh* in 1903.

59 Maguire, 368-370; V. Lakshin, "Pisatel', chitatel', kritik. Stat'ia pervaiia [1965]," in his *Literaturno-kriticheskie stat'i* (Moscow, 2004), 92.

21,000 to 150,000 copies.⁶⁰ If the numbers tell us anything, it is that, small as the circulation of literary periodicals may have been, during the Thaw they circulated more widely in Soviet society than ever before.

2. REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN SUBSCRIPTION TO LITERARY PERIODICALS

It is helpful to go further and analyze the regional dynamics of circulation and in particular subscription to literary periodicals. Such statistics are available, if fragmentary. Table 1 compares the subscription data for a selection of major Russian-language journals across several republics of the Soviet Union as of July 1964, adding Moscow to the comparison. The table includes not only literary journals but a variety of periodicals: three literary ones (*Znamia*, *Oktiabr'*, and *Iunost'*), the official political journal of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (*Kommunist*), and four popular illustrated magazines: *Krestianka*, *Rabotnitsa*, *Krokodil* (*The Crocodile*) (a highly popular satirical magazine), and *Ogonek*.

Table 1. Subscription to Russian-language journals, Moscow vs. selected Union republics, July 1964. (Limited-subscription journals are underlined)⁶¹

	Moscow	RSFSR	Ukraine	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Georgia	Estonia
Population (thousands)	6,423	125,179	44,664	8,480	11,449	4,389	1,268
Journals	Subscriptions (number of copies per 1,000 population indicated in parentheses)						
<i>Znamia</i>	5,090 (0.79)	42,925 (0.34)	9,022 (0.2)	1,555 (0.18)	2,672 (0.23)	385 (0.09)	215 (0.17)
<i>Kommunist</i>	81,206 (12.6)	349,563 (2.79)	122,304 (2.74)	12,917 (1.52)	14,588 (1.27)	2,747 (0.63)	1,658 (1.31)
<u><i>Krestianka</i></u>	4,734 (0.74)	1,955,788 (15.62)	581,594 (13.02)	88,102 (10.4)	207,966 (18.2)	8,637 (1.97)	5,004 (3.95)
<u><i>Krokodil</i></u>	124,817 (19.4)	859,026 (6.86)	118,380 (2.65)	36,749 (4.33)	68,407 (5.97)	6,607 (1.5)	4,729 (3.73)
<u><i>Ogonek</i></u>	37,182 (5.79)	691,703 (5.53)	193,538 (4.33)	25,705 (3.03)	74,800 (6.53)	7,787 (1.77)	3,230 (2.55)

⁶⁰ Vladimir Lakshin, the journal's most famous literary critic of the Tvardovskii years, was the first to note this dramatic growth of audiences. Lakshin, "Pisatel', chitatel', kritik," 86, 92-93.

⁶¹ Sources: RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 13; "15 novykh nezamisimyykh gosudarstv. Chislennost' naseleniia na nachalo goda, 1950-2016, tysiach chelovek," *Demoscope Weekly*, http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_pop.php (accessed February 25, 2020).

Oktiabr'	5,324 (0.83)	69,499 (0.56)	13,689 (0.31)	3,189 (0.38)	4,106 (0.36)	416 (0.09)	270 (0.21)
Rabotnitsa	336,306 (52.4)	2,366,810 (18.91)	455,702 (10.2)	99,030 (11.68)	150,922 (13.18)	41,038 (9.35)	12,039 (9.49)
Iunost'	65,474 (10.19)	382,771 (3.06)	112,287 (2.51)	22,359 (2.64)	32,463 (2.84)	6,944 (1.58)	2,561 (2.02)

It appears that the city of Moscow regularly enjoyed a higher rate of subscription to Russian-language journals, literary or not, compared to either the Russian provinces or the Union republics. In absolute numbers Moscow, whose population in July 1964 was about 6.4 million,⁶² accumulated the numbers of subscriptions to *Znamia*, *Oktiabr'*, and *Iunost'* comparable to those in the entire Union republic of Ukraine, whose population exceeded 44.6 million. Moscow surpassed in absolute numbers the subscription to those journals in Belarus, a Union republic of 8.5 million people.⁶³ Because retail was customarily low, it is safe to project this conclusion about a discrepancy between Moscow and some of the provinces to the journals' entire circulation.

This discrepancy becomes even better visible in subscription-to-population ratios, indicated in the table in parentheses. It is easy to see that such ratios were usually much higher in Moscow than either in the Russian Federation or in the ethnic republics. One steady exception was the journal *Krestianka*, which, perhaps because of its countryside-oriented content, may have appealed to rural audiences in the republics more than to urban dwellers in the national capital. The popular illustrated weekly *Ogonek* circulated more evenly than other periodicals, with Moscow occasionally even behind, e.g., Kazakhstan. But in most cases, Moscow was far ahead.

In turn, the Russian Federation normally surpassed the ethnic republics in subscription-to-population ratios for Russian-language periodicals. It is hardly possible at this point to analyze with any precision who the subscribers in the republics were. *Novyi mir's* case, which I have analyzed elsewhere on the basis of readers' letters from the 1950s and 1960s, suggests that many subscribers were Russian or primarily Russian speaking (it was readers with Russian-, Jewish- or Ukrainian-sounding names who responded to the journal's publications with particular intensity).⁶⁴

In other words, much of the circulation disparity between the capitals and the provinces, observed above for the late Stalin years, e.g. 1945, persisted into the 1960s, at least so far as Russian-language journals are concerned.

⁶² Moscow's population was estimated as 6,423,000 by January 1, 1965. *Chislennost', sostav i dvizhenie naseleniia SSSR: Statisticheskie materialy* (Moscow, 1965), 160.

⁶³ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 13, 48; "15 novykh nezavisimykh gosudarstv," in *Demoscope Weekly*, http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_pop.php (accessed February 26, 2017).

⁶⁴ D. Kozlov, "The Readers of *Novyi mir*, 1948-1969: A Social Portrait," National Council for Eurasian and East European Research Working Paper, University of Washington, 2012, 11-19. http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2012_826-03g_Kozlov.pdf

It remains to be seen whether this disparity was a result of a higher reading interest for those particular journals in the capitals than in the Russian provinces, and in the Russian provinces compared to the non-Russian republics, or whether the disparity mainly resulted from a centralized allocation of print runs that privileged the capitals over the Russian provinces and the Russian Federation over the ethnic republics. Possibly a combination of both factors, interest and centralized allocation, was at work. What may distort conclusions about readers' interest is that in July 1964 five journals out of eight in the table—*Krestianka*, *Krokodil*, *Ogonek*, *Rabotnitsa* and *Iunost'*—were still on the list of periodicals with officially limited subscription.⁶⁵ Readers' interest for those was likely higher than what the subscription numbers suggest. On the other hand, readers' interest in *Kommunist* was likely lower than what the numbers imply, since the principal political journal of the Communist party was often a mandatory read for party members. Nor do the numbers in the table differentiate between individual and institutional subscription, a nuance which I will address below.

Is it possible to trace and interpret geographical variations in subscription to different periodicals any further? In order to do that, it makes sense to move down from a republican level to a regional (*oblast'*) one. Table 2 presents the subscription statistics for several regions within the Russian Federation during the 1960s, for which relevant archival data is available. The table focuses on literary periodicals but incorporates a few others, too, such as the principal national newspaper, *Pravda*, or the illustrated magazine *Ogonek*, as reference points.

⁶⁵ "Spisok izdaniĭ, rasprostranĭaemykh v 1964 godu ogranichennymi tirazhami." RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1196, l. 24.

Table 2. Geographic variations in subscription to periodicals, by selected regions (oblasts and kraia) within the Russian Federation, 1961-1969. In absolute numbers of subscriptions⁶⁶

YEAR	1961	1963	1965	1967	1968	1969
Regions and titles of periodicals						
ALTAI KRAI	1961 ⁶⁷	1963 ⁶⁸	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁶⁹	701					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	28,390					
Don	174					
Moskva	570					
Nash sovremennik	225					
Neva	1,424					
Oktiabr'	1,435	1,582				
Sibirskie ogni	1,411					
Pravda	56,510					
Literaturnaia gazeta	5,877					
Zvezda	819					
Znamia	832	679				
Molodaia gvardiia	1,035					
Novyi mir	715					
Ogonek	20,069	16,017 +1,913 ⁷⁰				
Iunost'	3,150	5,203				

66 For sources, see endnotes to each particular section of the table. Unless otherwise indicated, the subscription statistics are for a city as well as its region (*oblast'*). Thus, for example, Murmansk stands for both Murmansk city and the Murmansk region. Institutional subscription, where such data is available, is indicated in parentheses, (). Double parentheses, (()), indicate rural areas out of total.

67 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 3, 4, 40b, 6, 13, 180b, 190b, 20, 290b. As of January 1.

68 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105. As of January 1.

69 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'* (*Literature and Life*).

70 Subscriptions to the *Ogonek* Literary Supplement (*Literaturnoe prilozhenie*) together with subscriptions to *Biblioteka Ogon'ka* (*Ogonek Library*). Hereafter subscriptions to these literary supplements are recorded after the '+' sign.

AMUR	1961 ⁷¹	1963 ⁷²	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁷³	254					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	10,553					
Don	38					
Moskva	152					
Nash sovremennik	25					
Neva	508					
Oktyabr'	819	937				
Sibirskie ogni	81					
Pravda	7,907					
Literaturnaia gazeta	1,628					
Zvezda	218					
Znamia	302	278				
Molodaia gvardiia						
Novyi mir	239					
Ogonek	5,367	6,165 + 749				
Iunost'		1,802				
ARKHANGELSK	1961 ⁷⁴	1963 ⁷⁵	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁷⁶	696					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	22,063					
Moskva	495					
Nash sovremennik	130					
Neva	1,099					
Oktiabr'	1,352	1,571				
Pravda	28,011					
Literaturnaia gazeta	3,202					
Zvezda	507					
Znamia	554	551				
Molodaia gvardiia	554					

71 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 34, 35, 350b, 37, 45, 50, 510b, 52, 61. As of January 1.

72 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

73 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

74 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 66-670b, 69, 77, 810b, 820b, 83, 920b. As of January 1.

75 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

76 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

Novyi mir	505					
Ogonek	16,223	12,531 +1,829 ⁷⁷				
Iunost'	1,986	2,207				
ASTRAKHAN'	1961 ⁷⁸	1963 ⁷⁹	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁸⁰						
Sovetskaia Rossiia						
Don	41					
Moskva	127					
Nash sovremennik	66					
Neva	221					
Oktiabr'	386	405				
Sibirskie ogni	18					
Pravda	10,592					
Literaturnaia gazeta	1,353					
Zvezda	128					
Znamia	201	203				
Molodaia gvardiia	129					
Novyi mir	189					
Ogonek	3,998	3,859 + 418				
Iunost'	1,171	1,870				
BASHKIR ASSR	1961 ⁸¹	1963 ⁸²	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁸³	673					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	28,993					
Don	163					
Moskva	489					

77 Subscription to the literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

78 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 98, 98ob, 100, 108, 113ob, 114ob, 115, 124ob. Data for central periodicals as of January 1.

79 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

80 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

81 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 131, 132, 132ob, 134, 142, 147ob, 148ob, 149, 158ob. As of January 1.

82 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

83 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

Nash sovremennik	187					
Neva	903					
Oktiabr'	1,594	1,394				
Sibirskie ogni	279					
Pravda	52,937					
Literaturnaia gazeta	5,182					
Zvezda	580					
Znamia	804	712				
Molodaia gvardiia	655					
Novyi mir	689					
Ogonek	17,922	13,921 + 2,381				
Iunost'	2,795	4,557				
BELGOROD	1961 ⁸⁴	1963 ⁸⁵	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁸⁶	254					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	18,060					
Don	105					
Moskva	192					
Nash sovremennik	52					
Neva	310					
Oktiabr'	464	442				
Sibirskie ogni	22					
Pravda	28,564					
Literaturnaia gazeta	1,348					
Zvezda	236					
Znamia	320	239				
Molodaia gvardiia	259					
Novyi mir	320					
Ogonek ⁸⁷	4,457	4,051 + 1,159				
Iunost'	1,532	2,176				

⁸⁴ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 163, 164, 164ob, 166, 174, 179ob, 180ob, 181, 190ob. As of January 1.

⁸⁵ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

⁸⁶ Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

⁸⁷ Subscription to the literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

BRIANSK	1961 ⁸⁸	1963 ⁸⁹	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁹⁰	315					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	14,487					
Don	27					
Moskva	169					
Nash sovremennik	55					
Neva	301					
Oktiabr'	611	597				
Sibirskie ogni	26					
Pravda	26,292					
Literaturnaia gazeta	1,589					
Zvezda	247					
Znamia	379	361				
Molodaia gvardiia	189					
Novyi mir	354					
Ogonek	4,430	4,089 + 656				
Iunost'	1,301	2,197				
BURIAT ASSR	1961 ⁹¹	1963 ⁹²	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁹³	210					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	8,350					
Don	37					
Moskva	170					
Nash sovremennik	32					
Neva	269					
Oktiabr'	485	432				
Sibirskie ogni	85					
Pravda	8,634					
Literaturnaia gazeta	1,200					

88 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 195, 196, 196ob, 198, 206, 211ob, 212ob, 213, 222ob. As of January 1.

89 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

90 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

91 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 227, 228, 228ob, 230, 238, 243ob, 244ob, 245, 254ob. As of January 1.

92 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

93 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

Zvezda	164					
Znamia	230	198				
Molodaia gvardiia	193					
Novyi mir	222					
Ogonek ⁹⁴	6,619	6,114 + 684				
Iunost'	1,100	2,204				
VLADIMIR	1961 ⁹⁵	1963 ⁹⁶	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ⁹⁷	550					
Sovetskaia Rossiia	15,204					
Don	115					
Moskva	395					
Nash sovremennik	79					
Neva	699					
Oktiabr'	1,125	1,053				
Sibirskie ogni	40					
Pravda	35,434					
Literaturnaia gazeta	2,775					
Zvezda	354					
Znamia	656	545				
Molodaia gvardiia	324					
Novyi mir						
Ogonek	6,281 + 1,608	6,340 + 1,397				
Iunost'	1,543	2,122				
VOLOGDA	1961 ⁹⁸	1963 ⁹⁹	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ¹⁰⁰	347	267 (14)				

94 Subscription to the literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

95 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 259, 260, 260ob, 262, 270, 275ob, 277ob, 278, 287ob. As of January 1.

96 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

97 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

98 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 292-293ob, 295, 303, 308ob-310, 319ob. As of January 1.

99 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1102, ll. 2-2ob, 3, 4, 6, 45ob, 47, 47ob, 49. As of January 1, 1963. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

100 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

Sovetskaia Rossiia	13,875	22,127 (470)				
Don	16					
Moskva	254	834 (205)				
Nash sovremennik	57	40 (37)				
Neva	568	1,103 (259)				
Oktiabr'	1,085	1,343 ¹⁰¹ (462)				
Sibirskie ogni	26					
Pravda	24,244	25,281 (3,196)				
Literaturnaia gazeta	2,006	1,881 ¹⁰² (376)				
Zvezda	288	352 (178)				
Znamia	726	515 ¹⁰³ (260)				
Molodaia gvardiia	304	383 (147)				
Novyi mir	905	628 (429)				
Ogonek ¹⁰⁴	7,306	7,786 (1,426) + 2,232 (693) or 7,785 + 846 ¹⁰⁵				
Iunost'	1,976	3,516 (601)				
PSKOV	1961 ¹⁰⁶	1963 ¹⁰⁷	1965	1967	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ¹⁰⁸						
Sovetskaia Rossiia	10,927					
Don						

101 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 91.

102 Including 759 in the countryside.

103 This figure is also in RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 95.

104 Subscription to the literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

105 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 99.

106 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 834, l. 138.

107 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

108 Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

Moskva	182					
Nash sovremennik						
Neva	324					
Oktiabr'	788	804				
Sibirskie ogni						
Pravda	14,835					
Literaturnaia gazeta						
Zvezda						
Znamia		487				
Molodaia gvardiia						
Novyi mir	393					
Ogonek ¹⁰⁹	3,896	3,582 + 437				
Iunost'	1,090	1,422				
MARI ASSR	1961	1963	1965	1967	1968 ¹¹⁰	1969
Sovetskaia Rossiia					12,048 (767)	
Don					39 (23)	
Druzhba narodov ¹¹¹					85 (77) + 6	
Moskva					169 (99)	
Nash sovremennik						
Neva					236 (106)	
Oktiabr'					217 (160)	
Sibirskie ogni					67 (39)	
Pravda					10,516 (1,794)	
Literaturnaia gazeta					530 (165)	
Zvezda					93 (69)	
Znamia					163 (121)	
Inostrannaia literatura					113 (49)	
Molodaia gvardiia						
Novyi mir					98 (73)	

¹⁰⁹ Subscription to literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

¹¹⁰ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1631, ll. 1, 2, 20b, 170b-200b. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹¹¹ Subscription to a supplement is indicated after the '+' sign.

Ogonek ¹¹²					2,004 (559) + 456 (87)	
Roman-gazeta					4,065 (318)	
Iunost'						
MORDOVIAN ASSR	1961	1963	1965	1967	1968 ¹¹³	1969
Sovetskaia Rossiia					16,985 (826)	
Don					29 (16)	
Druzhiba narodov ¹¹⁴					94 (63) + 58 (58)	
Moskva					224 (153)	
Nash sovremennik						
Neva					402 (172)	
Oktiabr'					366 (246)	
Sibirskie ogni					63 (9)	
Pravda					13,438 ⁸ (2,120)	
Literaturnaia gazeta					822 (529)	
Zvezda					189 (98)	
Znamia					270 (154)	
Inostrannaia lite- ratura					186 (44)	
Molodaia gvardiia						
Novyi mir					212 (143)	
Ogonek ¹¹⁵					4,030 (881) + 1,034 (315)	
Roman-gazeta					4,243 (485)	
Iunost'						

¹¹² Subscription to literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

¹¹³ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1631, ll. 82, 83, 83ob, 98ob-101ob. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹¹⁴ Subscription to a supplement is indicated after the '+' sign.

¹¹⁵ Subscription to literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

LENINGRAD (CITY)	1961	1963 ¹¹⁶	1965 ¹¹⁷	1967 ¹¹⁸	1968 ¹¹⁹	1969 ¹²⁰
Literaturnaia Rossiia		3,150 (691)				
Sovetskaia Rossiia		59,198 (4,589)		54,859 (3,569)	46,307 (3,107)	43,371 (3,467)
Don		142 (123)		211 (105)	329 (185)	434 (213)
Druzhiba narodov ¹²¹			380 (337) + 126 (98)	435 (371) + 1,564 (131)	489 (398) + 204 (144)	465 (370) + 195 (134)
Moskva		3,333 (1,889)	2,856 (1,666)	3,456 (1,840)	4,076 (2,173)	4,526 (2,057)
Nash sovremennik		613 (446)	1,140 (401)	1,968 (510)		3,255 (644)
Neva		3,997 (1,989)	4,779 (1,911)		4,652 (2,247)	4,661 (2,103)
Oktiabr'		2,876 (1,879) or 2,879 ¹²²	2,663 (1,863)	2,622 (1,719) ¹²³	2,630 (1,919) ¹²⁴	2,568 (1,736) ¹²⁵
Sibirskie ogni				447 (260)	375 (274)	514 (271)
Pravda		131,753 (15,434)		181,420 (15,871)	202,694 (15,813)	227,957 (16,190)
Literaturnaia gazeta		25,259 (2,897)		25,221 (2,012)	28,747 (1,951)	42,890 (2,195)
Zvezda		2,515 (1,878)	2,575 (1,687)	2,928 (1,802)	2,712 (1,933)	2,592 (1,903)
Znamia		2,584 (1,876) or 2,585 ¹²⁶	2,922 (1,729)	4,326 (2,149)	3,436 (2,067)	3,608 (2,006)

¹¹⁶ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1139, ll. 2, 2ob, 3, 3ob, 4, 4ob, 7, 7ob, 46ob, 48, 48ob, 49ob, 50. As of January 1. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹¹⁷ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1347, ll. 10ob, 14, 15, 15ob, 20ob, 48ob, 50. Data for Leningrad city and region (combined) for 1965. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹¹⁸ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1548, ll. 1, 2-2ob, 17ob-20ob. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses. As of January 1967, Leningrad city only, without the region.

¹¹⁹ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1640, ll. 1, 2, 2ob, 17ob-20ob. As of January 1. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹²⁰ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1747, ll. 1, 2, 2ob, 17ob-20ob. As of January 1. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹²¹ Subscription to a supplement is indicated after the '+' sign.

¹²² RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 92.

¹²³ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1548, l. 19ob.

¹²⁴ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1640, l. 19ob.

¹²⁵ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1747, l. 19ob.

¹²⁶ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 96.

Inostrannaia literatura				21,803 (2,248)	19,872 (2,297)	25,246 (2,367)
Molodaia gvardiia		1,383 (1,036)				
Novyi mir		3,778 (2,213)	5,627 (1,939)	11,412 (2,330) ¹²⁷	11,264 (2,361) ¹²⁸	11,253 (2,331) ¹²⁹
Ogonek ¹³⁰		19,535 (3,496) + 33,300 (3,680) or 19,544 + 7,507 ¹³¹	12,445 (3,458) + 19,687 (2,735)	12,599 (3,706) + 36,566 (2,645)	10,602 (3,705) + 45,428 (2,099)	12,188 (3,621) + 294,857 (4,838)
Roman-gazeta				28,668 (1,624)	15,258 (1,306)	27,321 (1,222)
Iunost'		13,859 (1,704) or 14,211 ¹³²				
LENINGRAD OBLAST'	1961	1963	1965	1967 ¹³³	1968 ¹³⁴	1969
Sovetskaia Rossiia				27,271 (648) ((8,170))		
Don				124 (22) ((30))	88 (10)	
Druzhba narodov ¹³⁵				149 (71) ((46)) + 54 (17) ((17))	139 (72) + 47 (25)	
Moskva				638 (260) ((228))	703 (227)	
Nash sovremennik				241 (61) ((67))		
Neva				1,709 (475) ((622))	1,571 (325)	

127 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1548, l. 170b.

128 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1640, l. 170b.

129 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1747, l. 170b.

130 Subscription to literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

131 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 100.

132 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, ll. 86-105.

133 For Leningrad region, see: RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1548, ll. 82, 83-83ob, 980b-1010b. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses. Double parentheses, (()), indicate rural areas out of total.

134 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1640, ll. 82, 83, 83ob, 980b-1010b. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

135 Subscription to a supplement is indicated after the '+' sign.

Oktiabr'				778 (367) (331)	817 (320)	
Sibirskie ogni				136 (17) (18)	128 (26)	
Pravda				26,460 (3,270) (8,139))	31,010 (3,117)	
Literaturnaia gazeta				2,139 (374) (769))	2,238 (435)	
Zvezda				651 (357) (230))	597 (294)	
Znamia				1,048 (346) (309))	831 (386)	
Inostrannaia literatura				1276 (264) (354))	1,212 (264)	
Novyi mir				793 (216) (277))	805 (372)	
Ogonek ¹³⁶				7,059 (808) (2,304) + 3,683 (667) (974))	5,537 (1,100) + 7419 (981)	
Roman-gazeta				21,841 (536) (6,883))	12,790 (591)	
Iunost'						
MOSCOW (CITY)	1961	1963 ¹³⁷	1965 ¹³⁸	1967 ¹³⁹	1968 ¹⁴⁰	1969 ¹⁴¹
Literaturnaia Rossiia ¹⁴²		6,636 (1,926)				
Sovetskaia Rossiia		157,494 (9,951)		141,925 (8,239)	113,071 (8,478)	118,429 (6,819)

¹³⁶ Subscription to literary supplements is indicated after the '+' sign.

¹³⁷ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1141, ll. 2, 20b, 3, 30b, 4, 40b, 6, 60b, 450b, 47, 470b, 480b, 49. As of January 1. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹³⁸ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1349, ll. Data for Moscow city and region (combined) for 1965. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹³⁹ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1549, ll. 1, 2-20b, 170b-200b. As of January 1. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹⁴⁰ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1631, ll. 163, 164-164ob, 1790b-1820b. As of January 1, 1968. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹⁴¹ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1746, ll. 1, 2, 20b, 170b-200b. As of January 1. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹⁴² Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

Don		238 (212)		290 (180)	334 (273)	560 (300)
Druzhba narodov ¹⁴³			635 (537) + 54 (42)	775 (627) + 112 (64)	816 (628) + 116 (66)	919 (708) + 92 (70)
Moskva		12,484 (3,846)	9,577 (3,432)	10,720 (3,780)	12,045 (4,284)	13,128 (4,377)
Nash sovremennik		1,050 (795)	1,700 (583)	4,089 (788)		6,454 (922)
Neva		3,808 (2,575)	4,872 (2,401)	5,494 (2,841)	5,037 (2,849)	5,452 (3,156)
Oktiabr'		5,761 (3,562) or 5,820 ¹⁴⁴	5,758 (3,306)	5,328 (3,379) ¹⁴⁵	5,210 (3,609) ¹⁴⁶	5,143 (3,366) ¹⁴⁷
Sibirskie ogni				307 (226)	442 (326)	586 (274)
Pravda		354,408 (32,299)		341,506 (28,647)	380,946 (30,929)	455,396 (29,632)
Literaturnaia gazeta		62,585 (7,717)		65,050 (5,673)	78,512 (5,425)	113,641 (5,586)
Zvezda		2,959 (2,416)	3,125 (2,144)	3,890 (3,183)	3,745 (2,732)	3,782 (2,942)
Znamia		4,749 (3,043) or 4,732 ¹⁴⁸	5,533 (2,908)	8,493 (3,614)	6,589 (3,723)	7,173 (3,788)
Inostrannaia literatura				39,966 (4,329)	36,971 (4,698)	46,436 (4,639)
Molodaia gvardiia		2,284 (1,803)				
Novyi mir		11,286 (4,179)	15,791 (4,028)	31,799 (4,837) ¹⁴⁹	29,683 (4,848) ¹⁵⁰	30,138 (4,865) ¹⁵¹

143 Subscription to a supplement is indicated after the '+' sign.

144 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 93.

145 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1549, l. 190b.

146 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1631, l. 1810b.

147 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1746, l. 190b.

148 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 97.

149 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1549, l. 18.

150 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1631, l. 1790b. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

151 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1746, l. 170b.

Ogonek ¹⁵²		43,317 (10,023) + 51,553 (7,334) or 44,030 + 8,634 ¹⁵³	30,614 (6,108) + 21,712 (3,128) ¹⁵⁴	32,117 (6,504) + 64,701 (3,099) ¹⁵⁵	24,927 (6,271) + 70,511 (2,674) ¹⁵⁶	28,403 (6,545) + 583,259 (7,268) ¹⁵⁷
Iunost'		53,360 (4,708) or 49,937 ¹⁵⁸	154,480 ¹⁵⁹ or 155,413 ¹⁶⁰			
Roman-gazeta				38,836 (2,714)	18,870 (2,253)	35,578 (2,112)
MOSCOW OBLAST'	1961	1963	1965	1967 ¹⁶¹	1968	1969
Sovetskaia Rossiia				121,569 (4,178)		
Don				80 (22)		
Druzhba narodov ¹⁶²				405 (271) + 178 (89)		
Moskva				2,911 (906)		
Nash sovremennik				1,443 (383)		
Neva				2,834 (861)		
Oktiabr'				2,280 (989) ¹⁶³		
Sibirskie ogni				209 (90)		
Pravda				140,714 (13,152)		

152 Subscription to literary supplements indicated after the '+' sign.

153 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 101.

154 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1349, ll. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

155 Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

156 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1631, ll. 1790b-180. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

157 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1746, l. 18. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

158 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 105.

159 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, l. 13. As of January 1. The triple growth of subscription is thanks to the removal of subscription limits in October 1964.

160 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, l. 175.

161 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1549, ll. 82-820b, 960b-990b. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

162 Subscription to a supplement is indicated after the '+' sign.

163 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1549, ll. 980b.

Literaturnaia gazeta				11,779 (1,741)		
Zvezda				1,192 (664)		
Znamia				2,828 (1,165)		
Inostrannaia literatura				5,155 (1,042)		
Molodaia gvardiia						
Novyi mir				4,307 (1,380) ¹⁶⁴		
Ogonek ¹⁶⁵				18,536 (3634) + 15,425 (2,519)		
Roman-gazeta				32,565 (2,131)		
Iunost'						
MURMANSK	1961	1963	1965	1967 ¹⁶⁶	1968	1969
Literaturnaia Rossiia ¹⁶⁷						
Sovetskaia Rossiia				23,502 (496)		
Don				75 (13)		
Druzhba narodov ¹⁶⁸				136 (68) + 73 (26)		
Moskva				435 (126)		
Nash sovremennik				219 (30)		
Neva				851 (179)		
Oktiabr'				430 (231) ¹⁶⁹		
Sibirskie ogni				100 (30)		
Pravda				20,000 (2,411)		
Literaturnaia gazeta				1,948 (244)		

¹⁶⁴ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, ll. 960b-97.

¹⁶⁵ Subscription to literary supplements indicated after the '+' sign.

¹⁶⁶ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1549, ll. 161-162ob, 1770b-1800b. Institutional subscription is shown in parentheses.

¹⁶⁷ Before 1963 *Literatura i zhizn'*.

¹⁶⁸ Subscription to a supplement is indicated after the '+' sign.

¹⁶⁹ RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1790b.

Zvezda				238 (133)		
Znamia				731 (206)		
Inostrannaia literatura				1,154 (188)		
Molodaia gvardiia						
Novyi mir				407 (169) ¹⁷⁰		
Ogonek ¹⁷¹				9,092 (935) + 5,655 (337)		
Roman-gazeta				11,742 (274)		
Iunost'						

Among many observations which the data in Table 2 makes possible, one is that, although subscription-to-population ratios in the capitals may have been higher, a very large share of subscriptions to major literary periodicals was still concentrated in the Russian provinces. Here, however, subscription patterns varied among specific periodicals. As an example, let us again take *Novyi mir* and *Oktiabr'*, two emblematic journals of the Thaw.

In 1963 and 1965, the total circulation (subscription plus retail) of *Oktiabr'* was 150,000.¹⁷² Of these, as Table 2 suggests, Moscow and Leningrad readers together bought only 8,637 subscriptions to the journal in 1963 and 8,427 subscriptions in 1965, or 5.8% and 5.6% of *Oktiabr'*'s nationwide circulation, respectively. Toward the end of the decade, the situation had not changed much. On 1 January 1967 *Oktiabr'*'s USSR-wide subscription was 88,600, plus the relatively high retail sales of 51,400, for the total circulation of 140,000.¹⁷³ Of these, Moscow and Leningrad consumed only 7,950 subscriptions in 1967, or 8.97% of USSR-wide subscription to the journal. In January 1970, *Oktiabr'* had 108,800 subscriptions USSR-wide (considerably down from the 1965 level, when it had had 113,800 subscriptions for the Russian Federation alone).¹⁷⁴ In absence of city-level statistics for January 1970, let us take the reasonably close 1969 figures. In 1969, Moscow and Leningrad together purchased 7,711 subscriptions to the journal. Thus, in 1969-70 the two capitals consumed only about 7% of the nationwide subscription to *Oktiabr'*, with 93% going to the rest of the country.

170 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, l. 1770b.

171 Subscription to literary supplements indicated after the '+' sign.

172 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1274, l. 90; *ibid.*, d. 1416, l. 144; RGALI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva), f. 619, op. 4, d. 88, l. 4.

173 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1521, l. 950b.

174 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1196, l. 4; *ibid.*, d. 1822, l. 1780b.

Novyi mir, to compare, circulated in 113,000 copies (subscription plus retail) in December 1963.¹⁷⁵ Of those, Moscow and Leningrad consumed 15,064 subscriptions in 1963, or 13.3% of the journal's nationwide circulation. In January 1967, *Novyi mir's* total USSR-wide circulation was officially approved at 150,000,¹⁷⁶ with the maximum of 30,000 copies allocated for retail and with subscription reaching 120,000 and possibly up to 124,200.¹⁷⁷ Of these, as Table 2 indicates, Moscow and Leningrad consumed 43,211 subscriptions, or 34.8 to 36% of the nationwide subscription and 28.8% of the journal's nationwide 1967 circulation. In 1969, *Novyi mir's* total USSR-wide circulation apparently fluctuated but averaged 125,000 copies a month, suggesting about 100,000 copies allocated for subscription.¹⁷⁸ Of these, as Table 2 shows, 41,391 subscriptions, or about 41% of the journal's nationwide subscription, were sold in Moscow and Leningrad. By January 1970 (the last month of Tvardovskii's editorship), *Novyi mir's* subscription had increased to 146,000 copies.¹⁷⁹ Even if the 1969 subscription figures for Moscow and Leningrad remained the same in January 1970 (and they probably increased), this means that no less than 28.4% of all subscriptions to the journal that month were sold in the two capitals.

In other words, Kochetov's *Oktiabr'* was a journal whose print run during the 1960s was predominantly consumed by provincial audiences.¹⁸⁰ Tvardovskii's *Novyi mir*, on the other hand, was more capital-heavy. Both in absolute numbers and in percentages, a greater share of subscriptions to *Novyi mir*, compared to *Oktiabr'*, went to Moscow and Leningrad. That said, most subscriptions to *Novyi mir* in the 1960s, anywhere from 59% to 86.7%, still went to locations outside Moscow and Leningrad.

Within the two capitals, we observe interesting dynamics of competition between the two journals. In both Moscow and Leningrad, as it appears from Table 2, Tvardovskii's *Novyi mir* consistently prevailed over Kochetov's *Oktiabr'* in absolute numbers of subscriptions. In Moscow during the 1960s, sub-

175 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1189, l. 12. The initial request from *Soiuzpechat'* for 1963, interestingly, had been only for 100,000. See *ibid.*, d. 896, l. 4.

176 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1416, l. 44.

177 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1521, l. 170b. Subscription figures for *Novyi mir* in 1967 vary: other archival files mention 120,000 on January 1, 1967 (RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1416, l. 44.), 115,500 in July (RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1521, l. 170b.), or 124,000, also for January 1 (RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1521, l. 94). In general, during the 1960s subscription statistics could vary slightly from month to month within a given year. See, e.g., RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 789, l. 6. (January 1, 1961); *ibid.*, d. 830, l. 5; *ibid.*, d. 1274, l. 27 (July 1964); *ibid.*, d. 1274, l. 42 (April, May 1964).

178 N. Biul'-Zedginidze, *Literaturnaia kritika zhurnala "Novyi mir" A.T. Tvardovskogo (1958-1970 gg.)* (Moscow, 1996), 358.

179 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1822, l. 1760b.

180 See also RGALI, f. 619, op. 4, d. 88, l. 4. In 1965, Kochetov complained to the RSFSR Bureau of the Party Central Committee about the insufficiency of his journal's current circulation, 150,000 copies, in light of high demand from potential subscribers. Provided this was not solely Kochetov's exercise in editorial strategizing, the demand may have mostly originated from provincial audiences.

scriptions to *Oktiabr'* always lingered at just above 5,000 copies, and in fact they were steadily declining: from 5,761 in 1963 to 5,143 in 1969. *Novyi mir's* subscriptions in Moscow, on the other hand, increased from 11,286 in 1963 to 30,138 in 1969. Occasionally, such as in 1967, the journal reached even higher numbers (31,799 subscriptions in 1967, which was apparently the record for Tvardovskii's *Novyi mir* in the city of Moscow). In Leningrad, the picture was very similar. *Oktiabr's* subscriptions in the city were always about or slightly above 2,500 and were slowly declining: from 2,876 in 1963 to 2,568 in 1969. *Novyi mir's* subscriptions in Leningrad, on the other hand, went drastically up: from 3,778 in 1963 to 11,253 in 1969. In both capitals, thus, the subscription numbers looked far better for *Novyi mir* than for *Oktiabr'*.

Let us refine these numbers further, looking at both the capitals and the Russian provinces. One additional advantage of the data in Table 2 is that it often distinguishes between individual and institutional subscriptions (with institutional statistics shown in parentheses). The distinction makes it possible to sharpen any conclusions about regional dynamics of subscription. It does make a difference, after all, whether a subscription originated in an individual household or in a large factory's library, office, public library, etc. Presumably, an individual's or a family's act of subscribing to a particular journal or newspaper reflected personal reading tastes and preferences much more directly than did the case of a factory librarian disbursing her yearly institutional budget on blanket subscription to dozens of periodicals. To be sure, in the Soviet system of press dissemination individual subscription did not flawlessly reveal the readers' preferences: one needs to keep in mind again, for example, the mandatory *Pravda* or *Kommunist* subscriptions for individual party members, or the administratively imposed individual "package" subscriptions that bundled the more interesting periodicals together with less demanded titles. Political efforts at boosting or undermining subscription to particular periodicals would supposedly factor in as well. And yet, all of the above notwithstanding, the levels of individual subscription may tell a story, especially as far as literary journals are concerned. That is especially likely when evidence of subscription is continuous and multi-year. Again, let us examine the cases of *Novyi mir* and *Oktiabr'*, presented in Table 3 for a few selected regions of the Russian Federation.

Table 3. Percentage of individual vs. institutional subscription to *Novyi mir*, by region, 1963-1969¹⁸¹

<i>Novyi mir</i>	1963		1965		1967		1968		1969		TOTAL yearly
	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	
Moscow	62.97	37.03	74.49	25.51	84.79	15.21	83.67	16.33	83.86	16.14	100%
Leningrad	42.42	58.58	65.54	34.46	79.58	20.42	79.04	20.96	79.29	20.71	100%
Moscow oblast'					67.96	32.04					100%
Leningrad oblast'					72.76	27.24	53.79	46.21			100%
Vologda	31.69	68.31									100%
Mari ASSR							25.51	74.49			100%
Mordovian ASSR							32.55	67.45			100%
Murmansk					58.48	41.52					100%

Table 4. Percentage of individual vs. institutional subscription to *Oktiabr'*, by region, 1963-1969¹⁸²

<i>Oktiabr'</i>	1963		1965		1967		1968		1969		TOTAL yearly
	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	Ind.	Inst.	
Moscow	38.17	61.83	42.58	57.42	36.58	63.42	30.73	69.27	34.55	65.45	100%
Leningrad	34.67	65.33	30.04	69.96	34.44	65.56	27.03	72.97	32.4	67.6	100%
Moscow oblast'					56.62	43.38					100%
Leningrad oblast'					52.83	47.17	60.83	39.17			100%
Vologda	65.6	34.4									100%
Mari ASSR							26.27	73.73			100%
Mordovian ASSR							32.79	67.21			100%
Murmansk					46.28	53.72					100%

¹⁸¹ Sources: same as in Table 2. Moscow oblast' and Leningrad oblast' numbers exclude the two cities themselves. For all other regions, the city and the region are combined.

¹⁸² Sources: same as in Table 2. Moscow oblast' and Leningrad oblast' numbers exclude the two cities themselves. For all other regions, the city and the region are combined.

Once we distill individual subscription from the general statistics, the distinction between the subscription patterns for two journals, *Novyi mir* and *Oktiabr'*, becomes even more apparent. So does the distinction between patterns of subscription in the capitals and in the Russian provinces.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show that both in Moscow and in Leningrad subscriptions to *Novyi mir* were predominantly individual. In Moscow, individual subscriptions to *Novyi mir* constantly exceeded institutional ones by a very considerable margin. This margin also steadily increased: the share of individual subscriptions to *Novyi mir* grew in Moscow from 63% in 1963 to 84-85% by the end of the decade. In Leningrad, a similar albeit more muted dynamic was in place: whereas in 1963, most of subscription to *Novyi mir* in the city (58.8%) was institutional, already in 1965 individual subscriptions began to prevail. Their share would continue to grow, reaching above 79% by the end of the decade, a proportion very close to Moscow's.

To compare, subscription to *Oktiabr'* in both Moscow and Leningrad during the 1960s was always mainly institutional, with about two thirds of all subscriptions going to various offices, libraries, and enterprises, and only one third purchased by individual subscribers. In absolute numbers, as of 1 January 1969 there were 30,168 subscribers to *Novyi mir* in Moscow, 84% of them individuals. By contrast, there were only 5,143 subscribers to *Oktiabr'* in Moscow as of 1 January 1969, and only about 35% of those were individual subscribers. In Leningrad, similarly, in January 1969 there were 11,253 subscribers to *Novyi mir*, 80% of them individuals, but merely 2,568 subscribers to *Oktiabr'*, and just 32% of those were individuals. To put this differently, in Moscow in 1969 there were 25,273 individual subscribers to Tvardovskii's *Novyi mir*, but only 1,777 individual subscribers to Kochetov's *Oktiabr'*. In Leningrad in the same year, 8,903 individuals subscribed to *Novyi mir*, but a meager 832 did to *Oktiabr'*.¹⁸³

The provinces tell a different story. In the nearby Moscow and Leningrad oblasts, for which I unfortunately have separate data only for 1967 and (for Leningrad oblast) 1968, subscription to *both* journals was largely individual. *Novyi mir* seems to have enjoyed a slightly higher rate of individual subscription in the two regions than *Oktiabr'* did, except in the Leningrad oblast' in 1968. In absolute numbers of individual subscribers, *Novyi mir* surpassed *Oktiabr'* in the Moscow oblast' in 1967 (2,927 to 1,291) and in Leningrad oblast' in 1967 (577 to 411), but then lagged behind *Oktiabr'* in the same Leningrad oblast' in 1968 (433 to 497). The proportion of individual subscription to *Novyi mir* in either oblast' was lower than in Moscow or Leningrad proper, while for *Oktiabr'* this proportion was higher. In other words, for some reason, individuals subscribed to *Novyi mir* less readily,

183 See the respective sections of Table 2 for sources.

and to *Oktiabr'* more readily, in the Moscow and Leningrad oblasts than in their capital cities.¹⁸⁴

The more remote provinces offer a still different picture, and a more varied one. Apparently, in many regions, such as Vologda, the Mari Autonomous Republic (ASSR), or the Mordovian Autonomous Republic, subscription to both *Novyi mir* and *Oktiabr'* was mostly institutional, not individual. Only in the Vologda region in 1963 (for *Oktiabr'*) and in the Murmansk region in 1967 (for *Novyi mir*) did individual subscription prevail. In absolute numbers of individual subscribers, *Oktiabr'* surpassed *Novyi mir* in the Vologda region in 1963 (881 to 199), in the Mari Republic in 1968 (57 to 25), and in Mordovia in 1968 (120 to 69), but had slightly fewer individual subscribers than *Novyi mir* in the Murmansk region in 1967 (199 to 238).¹⁸⁵

What can we make of these numbers? For one thing, it appears quite certain that, as far as subscriptions are concerned, in Moscow and Leningrad the battle for readers between the two journals was a victory for *Novyi mir*. Be it in absolute numbers of subscriptions or in the proportion of individual subscribers, during the 1960s *Novyi mir* consistently surpassed Kochetov's *Oktiabr'* in both capitals. Given that *Oktiabr'* was a journal whose ideological orthodoxy was far more preferable to the political authorities than the critical reformism of *Novyi mir*, the statistics are particularly important. During the year 1964, for example, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was regularly informed on the course of the subscription campaign for *Oktiabr'*, being clearly interested in the journal's maximum dissemination.¹⁸⁶ Judging by the numbers for that year and subsequently, this high political patronage did not particularly help *Oktiabr'*s subscription rates. It is especially because the subscriptions may have been impacted by such political pressure, that the failure of Kochetov's *Oktiabr'* and the success of Tvardovskii's *Novyi mir* in both capitals become all the more meaningful. They mean, among other things, that readers' interests and preferences did play some independent role in Soviet subscriptions to periodical press during the 1960s.

The provinces, again, offer a more blurred and heterogeneous picture. The data is obviously fragmentary and insufficient, and yet the panorama of subscription appears quite different in the provinces than in the capitals. Neither journal, *Oktiabr'* or *Novyi mir*, enjoyed a massive superiority over its adversary. There were regions where subscriptions to *Oktiabr'* surpassed those to *Novyi mir*, while in others the opposite was the case. The drastic discrepancy in favor of *Oktiabr'* in Vologda of 1963 looks somewhat irregular and may perhaps be explained by the December 1962 publication of Aleksandr Iashin's journalistic sketch "Vologda Wedding" (*Vologodskaia svad'ba*) in

184 See the respective sections of Table 2 for sources.

185 See the respective sections of Table 2 for sources.

186 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1196, l. 27.

Novyi mir, where Iashin scathingly criticized the deplorable material situation in the Vologda countryside. Following the publication of the sketch, there was a backlash against *Novyi mir* in this region, involving an administrative campaign against subscription to the journal but also possibly some readers' genuine disaffection.¹⁸⁷ Other than in Vologda, the proportions of individual subscribers to either *Novyi mir* or *Oktiabr'* in the remote provinces appear to have been fairly close. These proportions could also fluctuate and occasionally reverse, as they did in the Leningrad oblast in 1967-68. Other unknown variables might have been at play in each local case, too. But overall, the conclusion may be that Kochetov's *Oktiabr'* was able to hold its ground against *Novyi mir* far better in the provinces than in Moscow or Leningrad.

What may this brief examination of subscription patterns to *Novyi mir* and *Oktiabr'* reveal more generally about the history of reading during the Soviet 1960s? Apparently, Soviet literary audiences at the time formed a diverse panorama, where geography mattered in the circulation of texts and where regions may have differed from the capitals in their reading patterns.

To be clear, the provinces offered a very active readership of literary periodicals. For example, in the archive of *Novyi mir*, where readers' letters are preserved best compared to similar archival collections for the Thaw years (and certainly better than in the *Oktiabr'* archive, which contains almost no such letters), most of the readers' letters from the 1950s and 1960s came from provincial locations outside Moscow and Leningrad. So did, apparently, most of the subscriptions to *Novyi mir* during the 1960s: as mentioned above, anywhere between 59% and 87% of them came from outside the capitals. *Novyi mir* was definitely *not* a journal for the exclusive consumption of Moscow and Leningrad but, on the contrary, was significant for provincial reading audiences as well.¹⁸⁸ Importantly, I use the terms "provinces" and "provincial" here only as identifiers of geographic location, not as an evaluation of readers' intellectual qualities. As this chapter will discuss below, intellectually the self-expression of readers from the Soviet provinces during the Thaw did not differ from that of readers in Moscow or Leningrad, either in the ideas formulated, language employed, or any degree of rhetorical sophistication.¹⁸⁹

187 A. Iashin, "Vologodskaia svad'ba," *Novyi mir*, 12 (1962), 3-26. Subscriptions to *Novyi mir* in the Vologda region actually did go down in 1963 (628, compared to 897 in 1960 and 905 in 1961), while subscriptions to *Oktiabr'* increased by the same margin (1,343 in 1963, compared to 1,152 in 1960 and 1,085 in 1961). At the same time, subscriptions to *Oktiabr'* had prevailed over those to *Novyi mir* in the region even before Iashin's publication. RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 844, ll. 292, 293, 293ob, 295, 303, 308ob, 309ob, 310, 319ob. Statistics as of January 1, 1960, 1961, and 1963.

188 For a sophisticated discussion of the provincial readership of literary periodicals, specifically *Novyi mir*, during the late Stalin years, see T. Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia* (Ithaca, 1997), 151-178, esp. 170-178.

189 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 8, 9, 10; Kozlov, "The Readers of *Novyi mir*, 1948-1969: A Social Portrait"; idem, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, passim.

That said, when placed on a broader geographical map of Soviet literary audiences, the readership of *Novyi mir* likely coexisted with other readerships, and patterns of reading may have varied depending on geography. Arguably, these patterns may reflect something more complex about the Soviet audiences than mere administrative *diktat* simply prescribing specific dimensions of literary consumption in particular localities and boosting the circulation of some periodicals while suppressing others. Whereas the political involvement of Soviet authorities in press dissemination cannot be denied, it is unreasonable to picture all dissemination of printed matter in the Soviet Union during the 1950s and 1960s as a result of pure *diktat* and fiat. Especially after October 1964, when subscription limits were officially abolished, but possibly even before that date, subscription statistics are an interesting corpus of evidence, which may, at least in certain cases, reveal contemporary readers' preferences.

I would certainly go too far were I to suggest that Soviet subscription statistics for the mid-to-late 1960s might be regarded as something akin to a public opinion poll on the audiences' intellectual predilections. Nonetheless, provided we bear in mind all the limitations and qualifications of the press dissemination machinery in each particular case, subscription data may still be a meaningful—and so far virtually unexplored—tool for research in Soviet intellectual history. For example, it is worth examining variations in subscription among specific titles and across different regions. As far as readers' interest is concerned, the exercise becomes particularly meaningful for the post-October 1964 period.

All Soviet literary periodicals circulated everywhere in the USSR, but the circulation took diverse forms and could considerably vary in scope from region to region. In the capital cities, Moscow and Leningrad, subscription to *Novyi mir* evidently prevailed over that to *Oktiabr'* during the 1960s. Given the central cultural and political significance of the two capitals, this prevalence of *Novyi mir* among their reading audiences probably did set a long-term nationwide trend for intellectual developments from the Thaw years onward. And yet, in each geographic locality within the country those developments may have taken diverse trajectories, producing different results. This is not to mention the possibly still different patterns of reading in the ethnic republics and among predominantly non-Russian-language audiences, a subject I have barely touched here. These varying trajectories of reading-as-intellectual life in different geographical parts of the Soviet Union await their proper exploration.

3. SUBSCRIPTION, LITERATURE, SOCIETY

Regional and local patterns of reading literature varied, and so perhaps did regional and local trajectories of intellectual life. But do the numbers above

convey a sense of societal importance of literature? Can we say, on the basis of subscription statistics, that literature mattered in this society? It probably did in Moscow and Leningrad, where, as we have seen, the subscription audiences of literary journals in the 1960s matched or even surpassed those of Communist party journals. But even in the capitals, what do we do with the fact that in Moscow, a city of about seven million people in 1969, only 25,273 individuals subscribed to *Novyi mir* (not to mention the paltry 1,777 individual subscribers to *Oktiabr*)?¹⁹⁰ That means one individual subscription to *Novyi mir* per every 278 people in Moscow. Or, to take Leningrad in the same year 1969, in the city of nearly four million people just 8,903 individuals subscribed to *Novyi mir* (and again, the microscopic 832 subscribed to *Oktiabr*).¹⁹¹ That is one individual subscription to *Novyi mir* per every 449 people in the city.

Or, to move “far from Moscow,” what do we do with the fact that in 1968 in Mordovia, a republic whose population was close to a million, only 69 individuals subscribed to *Novyi mir*? Yes, *Oktiabr* fared better, but only slightly: no more than 120 individuals subscribed to it in the entire republic that year.¹⁹² Other literary journals in Mordovia had similarly minuscule numbers of individual subscribers that year: 71 for *Moskva*, 230 for *Neva*, 91 for *Zvezda*, 116 for *Znamia*, 142 for *Inostrannaia literatura*, etc. Even *Literaturnaia gazeta* had only 293 individual subscribers. Of all literary periodicals, only *Roman-gazeta*, as usual, looked more or less robust with 3,758 individual subscribers. And yet for the republic’s population even that number was rather slim. One of those few subscribers to literary periodicals probably was Mikhail Bakhtin, then professor at the Mordovian Pedagogical Institute in the republic’s capital, the city of Saransk. But for a million people in Mordovia, there was only one Bakhtin.

To say a few words about money, the low subscription rates can hardly be explained by reasons of personal finance. Literary periodicals do not appear to have been supremely expensive for the contemporary Soviet readers. To take again *Novyi mir* as an example, in December 1945 the journal’s price

190 For population statistics, see P. L. Kirillov and A. G. Makhrova, “Polimasshtabnyi analiz demograficheskogo razvitiia Moskvy v postsovetskii period,” in *SPERO*, 17 (2012), 35-56, and in *Demoscope Weekly*, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2013/0551/analit02.php> (accessed March 18, 2017); M. B. Denisenko and A. V. Stepanova, “Dinamika chislennosti naseleniia Moskvy za 140 let,” in *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Seriya 6. Ekonomika*, 3 (2013), 88-97, and in *Demoscope Weekly*, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2016/0689/analit03.php> (accessed March 18, 2017).

191 For population statistics, see I. I. Eliseeva, E. I. Gribova (eds.), *Sankt-Peterburg, 1703-2003: Iubileinyi statisticheskii sbornik*, vypusk 2 (St. Petersburg, 2003), 16-17; N. Chistiakova, “Tret’ie sokrashchenie chislennosti naseleniia... i poslednee?” in *Demoscope Weekly*, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2004/0163/tema01.php> (accessed March 18, 2017).

192 In 1970, the population of Mordovia was 1,032,900. See I. Paramonova (ed.), *Chislennost’ i razmeshchenie naseleniia respubliki Mordoviia po itogam perepisei naseleniia. Statisticheskii sbornik no. 923* (Saransk, 2012), 5.

was 10 rubles per single issue; in December 1946 it was 5 rubles.¹⁹³ Since February 1948 at least, a single issue cost 7 rubles, the yearly paperback set of twelve issues thus amounting to 84 rubles.¹⁹⁴ There also existed a more expensive hardcover edition, which cost 9 rubles a month or 108 rubles a year, but much of its relatively small print run was apparently purchased by libraries, which needed durable copies.¹⁹⁵ After 1948 these prices persisted with remarkable stability for almost a quarter of a century despite inflation. The price did not change after the tenfold currency depreciation of 1961: now it was 70 kopecks for a single issue, or 8 rubles 40 kopecks for a yearly twelve-issue subscription set in paperback, or 90 kopecks per issue and 10.80 for the yearly set in hard cover. Those exact prices would still be in place as late as 1970.¹⁹⁶ Other journals had similar prices. The twelve-issue yearly subscription to *Oktiabr'* cost 6 rubles in 1970, while *Inostrannaia literatura* cost 9.60, *Znamia* 6.60, *Roman-gazeta* 6 rubles, etc.¹⁹⁷

These were relatively affordable prices, especially by the late 1960s and early 1970s. From an individual viewpoint, subscription to a thick literary journal was not particularly costly, although not extremely cheap, either. In 1950, yearly subscription to the paperback edition of *Novyi mir* (84 rubles) would take up 1.1% of an average urban worker or office employee's yearly salary of 7,668 rubles.¹⁹⁸ Apparently, there were dedicated readers prepared to spend that much money on a subscription. In 1956, an average Moscow family spent 2.3% of the average yearly nationwide salary (more than 200 out of 8,580 rubles) on newspapers and journals. In 1966, in the Moscow region (evidently outside the capital itself), only 100,370 out of 1,430,000 families did not subscribe to any periodicals at all. The overwhelming majority, 93%, subscribed to at least one title.¹⁹⁹ Earnings in Moscow, and even in the Moscow region, could be higher than in the provinces, and spending on periodicals per family in the USSR overall was generally lower, but not

193 *Novyi mir*, 12 (December 1945), back cover; *Novyi mir*, 12 (December 1946), back cover.

194 *Novyi mir*, 2 (February 1948), back cover.

195 One could subscribe to *Novyi mir* either for three, six, or twelve months. For the terms and prices of subscription, see, e.g., *Novyi mir*, 12 (December 1951), 320.

196 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1822, l. 1760b; *Novyi mir*, 11 (November 1953), 288; 12 (December 1958), 288; 12 (November 1964), 288; 8 (August 1969), 286 (subscription advertisement for 1970); *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura*, 1953-1957, 440.

197 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1822, ll. 1760b-177.

198 *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1965 g.: Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow, 1966), 567; Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (London, 1969), 309. The State Bank of the USSR exchange rate was 5.3 U.S. dollars to one ruble from 1937 until 1 March 1950, and 4 U.S. dollars to one ruble from 1 March 1950. Thus, officially 7,668 rubles in 1950 converted to anywhere between 1,447 and 1,917 contemporary U.S. dollars. See M. Poliakov, "Spravka 'O kurse rublia v otnoshenii inostrannykh valiut, 25 aprilia 1956 goda,'" in *Po stranitsam arkhivnykh fondov Tsentral'nogo banka Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, issue 15, *Iz neopublikovannogo: Voprosy denezhnogo obrashcheniia (1919-1982 gody) (vedomstvennye materialy)*, ed. Yu. I. Kashin (Moscow, 2014): 83-84.

199 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1410, l. 42.

insignificant—anywhere from 60 to 90 rubles in 1956, that is, close to 1% of yearly income.²⁰⁰ In other words, if an average reader wanted to subscribe to *Novyi mir*, then that was financially affordable, although it could mean making choices and excluding other titles from the subscription diet. During the 1960s, given the inflation, wage increases, and fixed subscription prices, the affordability of newspapers and journals increased. As of 1969, *Novyi mir*'s yearly subscription price of 8 rubles 40 kopecks would take only 0.6% of the average yearly wage of 1,402.8 rubles.²⁰¹ To be sure, these numbers refer mostly to urban readers, while the situation in the countryside could be worse.²⁰² But what further proves the affordability of thick literary journals is that their “thin” counterpart, the richly illustrated and colorful *Ogonek* magazine, always enjoyed far greater subscription rates, despite costing more. In the same January 1970, the yearly subscription to *Ogonek* cost 15 rubles, and yet its circulation hovered at 1,700,000 nationwide, far exceeding that of any thick literary journal.²⁰³

Thus, despite being relatively affordable, during the 1960s individual subscriptions to literary periodicals were generally few and far between. If so, and if we adopt the position that Soviet subscription statistics may, at least to some degree, provide an insight into the readers' interest in particular periodicals, do the low numbers mean that the Soviet audiences' interest in literature was also generally low?

The answer is no. The low levels of individual subscription to literary periodicals do not necessarily mean a correspondingly low reading interest in literature on the part of the Soviet audiences. Rather, these numbers need to be analyzed in the framework of a general shortage of the press and other printed matter, the shortage that, despite some improvements, persisted throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

The non-literary periodicals offer a useful reference point here. In July 1964, for example (see Table 1), subscription to the popular illustrated magazines *Rabotnitsa* and *Krokodil* far exceeded that of the literary journals *Znamia* and *Oktiabr'*, in Moscow or in the provinces, in absolute numbers or in subscription-to-population ratios. In itself, there is nothing surprising in the fact that a popular magazine surpassed a relatively highbrow literary monthly in its broad appeal. But even with the ever-popular *Rabotnitsa*, and

200 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 687, l. 13; Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, 345; salary data for 1955.

201 *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1970 g.: Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow, 1971), 519. Wages for 1970 are in post-1961 rubles revalued at one-tenth of their previous worth. The State Bank of the USSR exchange rate in 1969 (effective since 1 January 1961) was 0.9 rubles for 1 U.S. dollar. Thus, officially 1,402.8 rubles converted to 1,558.6 contemporary U.S. dollars. See *Po stranitsam arkhivnykh fondov Tsentral'nogo banka Rossiiskoi Federatsii, issue 9, Balansy Gosudarstvennogo banka SSSR (1922-1990 gg.)*, ed. Iu. I. Kashin (Moscow, 2010), 88.

202 Collective farmers began receiving salaries in 1966. The average yearly wage of a state farm worker in 1969 was 1,089.6 rubles. Ibid.

203 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1822, l. 1760b.

even in Moscow, the maximum of 52 people out of every 1,000 in the city, or one out of nineteen (about 5%), subscribed to the journal as of 1964. This number includes unspecified institutional subscriptions, and so the actual number of individual subscribers was certainly lower. *Rabotnitsa* in Moscow is the best-case scenario, too, because this was the privileged capital and because *Rabotnitsa*—an illustrated magazine with lots of home economics advice that targeted primarily an urban female audience—was, despite official limits imposed upon its circulation, *the most* broadly circulating magazine in the USSR that year. In 1964 *Rabotnitsa*'s nationwide circulation reached 4.2 million.²⁰⁴ Other periodicals often fared worse, especially in the provinces. What we usually observe is about or less than 1% of the population, sometimes one-tenth of a percent, subscribing to a given periodical. Retail, again, was of little help because it usually consumed only a small percentage of a periodical's total print run and, judging by the readers' multiple complaints, was chronically insufficient. Even *Pravda* apparently continued to be in fairly short supply in some areas of the country at the end of the 1960s, just as it had been in the early years of the decade. In the Pskov region, according to a reader's letter cited at the beginning of this chapter, one could not obtain a copy of *Pravda* in 1961. In that year in Pskov, there were 67 individuals per each subscription to *Pravda*. To compare, in 1968 in Mordovia there was one subscription to *Pravda* per every 75 individuals, and there is no indication that retail was of considerable help.²⁰⁵ In other words, the shortage of the press in Mordovia in 1968 may have been as bad as in Pskov in 1961. One may expect to find, some day, a letter by a disgruntled Mordovian reader who was unable to obtain a copy of *Pravda* in Saransk.

The economy of shortages in the Soviet publishing industry did not only or necessarily mean an insufficient output of printed matter. Often, particularly during the second half of the 1960s when subscription limits had been officially removed, the shortages resulted from the inefficiency of *Soiuzpechat*' officials who, apparently accustomed to operating under the old system of quotas, failed to organize advertisement, subscription, ordering, or retail sales to satisfy the readers' demand. One case in point was the Moscow region (outside the capital), where in 1966, because of a poor ordering system, most retail kiosks would run out of newspapers after four to five business hours on any given day.²⁰⁶ Subscription fared better here than

204 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, l. 13. On *Rabotnitsa*, see Natalia Tolstikova, "Reading *Rabotnitsa*: Ideals, Aspirations, and Consumption Choices for Soviet Women, 1914-1964." Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001; idem, "Reading *Rabotnitsa*: Fifty Years of Creating Gender Identity in a Socialist Economy," in M. Catterall, P. Maclaran, L. Stevens (eds.), *Marketing and Feminism: Current Issues and Research* (London, New York, 2000), 160-182; idem, "*Rabotnitsa*: The Paradoxical Success of a Soviet Women's Magazine," *Journalism History*, 30.3 (2004), 131-140.

205 See Table 3 for sources; *Chislennost' i razmeshchenie naseleniia respubliki Mordoviia*, 5. In 1970, the population of Mordovia was, again, 1,032,900.

206 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1410, ll. 42-49, esp. 46-48 ("Spravka o sostoianii

in Pskov or Saransk, and yet in 1967 there were only 140,714 subscriptions (127,562 of them individual) to *Pravda* in the Moscow region for the population of about 5.8 million, or approximately one subscription for every 41 individuals.²⁰⁷ Literary periodicals were often in short supply, too. In 1966, the Moscow oblast *Soiuzpechat'* drew criticism of its superiors for ordering insufficient numbers of literary periodicals. Among the cited examples was the fact that the regional office had allowed the retail sales of *Novyi mir* to go down by having ordered 473 retail copies of the journal in January but only 426 copies in November. Evidently, what explained the shortage of *Novyi mir* in the Moscow oblast was not so much politics as the malfunctioning of the local *Soiuzpechat'* apparatus.²⁰⁸

Or, to take another problem area, in Tatarstan in the same year 1966 *Soiuzpechat'* inspectors were alarmed to see their regional and local subordinates request low numbers of periodicals from the center, either for subscription or for retail. Whereas the republican capital, Kazan, was doing relatively well, elsewhere the situation looked bleak. For Bugul'ma, a fairly large industrial city with a population of 68,000, *Soiuzpechat'* officials filed no requests at all for *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta* (*The Economic Gazette*), *Sovetskoe kino* (*Soviet Cinema*), and *Literaturnaia Rossiia* (*Literary Russia*). For Chistopol', a city of 59,000, only six copies of *Literaturnaia gazeta* were ordered. The town of Aznakaevo, the principal center of oil industry in Tatarstan with a population of about 20,000, had only two copies of *Literaturnaia gazeta* and two copies of *Sovetskaia kul'tura* (*Soviet Culture*) on order. In 1966, such journals as *Molodezhnaia estrada* (*Youth Popular Music*), *Teatr* (*Theatre*), or *Turist* (*Tourist*) were ordered by the local *Soiuzpechat'* officials only for the city of Kazan, but not for any of the other 44 *Soiuzpechat'* distribution centers in the republic.²⁰⁹

Characteristically, and probably accurately, the inspectors did not attribute these press shortages to a lack of reading interest on the part of the audience. Instead, they blamed the shortages on the ineptitude of the local *Soiuzpechat'* officials who had failed to advertise particular titles or to request them in sufficient quantities from the center. Indeed, blaming the readers would hardly work here. One may perhaps hold a discussion about

rasprostraneniia periodicheskoi pečati v Moskovskoi oblasti (po itogam proverki s 14 po 19.II.1966 g.).")

207 Table 2. The population of the Moscow region (*oblast'*) was 5,863,003 in 1959; by January 1970 it had decreased to 5,774,529. *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1959 g. Chislennost' nalichnogo naseleniia gorodov i drugikh poselenii, raionov, raionnykh tsentrov i krupnykh sel'skikh naselennykh mest na 15 ianvaria 1959 goda po respublikam, kraiam i oblastiam RSFSR*, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus59_reg1.php (accessed May 21, 2018); *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1970 g. Chislennost' nalichnogo naseleniia gorodov, poselkov gorodskogo tipa, raionov i raionnykh tsentrov SSSR po dannym perepisi na 15 ianvaria 1970 goda po respublikam, kraiam i oblastiam*, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus70_reg1.php (accessed May 21, 2018).

208 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1410, l. 47.

209 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1410, ll. 66-68.

the popularity of *Novyi mir* in a place like Aznakaev, but it would be unreasonable to question the mass appeal of “Youth Popular Music.” As in many other cases, the explanation for press shortages in Tatarstan was not necessarily underproduction, political manipulation, or a lack of the audiences’ reading interest, but rather the systemic inertia and logistical inefficiency of the press dissemination mechanism.

Equally telling are reports of press surplus, which were nearly as common as the shortages. In the Moscow region, again because of a poor ordering system, while some kiosks glaringly displayed empty shelves, others accumulated heaps of unsold newspapers and journals, clogging up the distribution network. For Tatarstan, we have a few titles of those unwanted periodicals. Prominent among them were the ideological publications. “The unsold surplus of party journals is especially large,” the inspectors observed grimly. Among those gathering dust on the shelves of kiosks were two principal Communist party journals, *Kommunist* and *Partiinaia zhizn’* (*Party Life*), as well as *Agitator* (*The Agitator*) and *Politicheskoe samoobrazovanie* (*Political Self-Education*). Those journals might have had some audience in Tatarstan, but it is likely that, for ideological reasons, *Soiuzpechat’* inflated their regional circulation allocations.²¹⁰

As far as the overall output of printed matter was concerned, the late Soviet press industry actually looked impressive. The average rate of what the professional jargon of *Soiuzpechat’* officials termed “press saturation” (*nasyshchennost’ pechat’iu*)—admittedly a somewhat blanket per capita calculation of all copies of all periodicals circulating in a given territory—kept growing during the postwar decades, ultimately placing the Soviet Union well ahead of many Western countries. As early as 1956, at least according to *Soiuzpechat’*, the city of Moscow with 454 copies of periodicals per 1000 residents was ahead of similar statistics for the U.S., West Germany, France, and Italy (although somewhat behind the U.K. with its 600 copies per 1000 population).²¹¹ By 1965, this index for Moscow had apparently grown more than twice, reaching 958 copies per 1000 residents.²¹² And while the provinces were usually (not always) behind the capital, as of 1 January 1961 the average rate for the Russian Federation was a rather inspiring 424 copies per 1000 residents.²¹³ By the mid-1980s the total circulation of newspapers alone in the Soviet Union was nearly three times that of the U.S., with the Soviet population being only slightly larger.²¹⁴

210 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1410, ll. 47, 68.

211 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 687, l. 12 (“Stenogramma sobraniia obshchestvennogo aktiva g. Moskvy ot 26 sentiabria 1956 g. po rasprostraneniuiu pechatii”). Another number available for Moscow, as of 1 January 1956, is 518 copies of periodicals per 1000 population. RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 834, l. 123.

212 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, l. 2.

213 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1423, l. 2.

214 Th. C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin* (Bloomington, 1985), 41; Th. Remington, *The Truth of Authority: Ideology and Communication*

However, the monumental figures of “press saturation” tell little of the readers’ capacity to obtain not just any periodical, but one that was actually of interest to them. The problem with the Soviet economy of shortages, as far as the world of reading was concerned, was not a lack of printed matter per se, but a lack of coordination between, on the one hand, the supply, and on the other hand, the readers’ demand for particular published texts. As much as *Soiuzpechat*’ tried to reconcile the two, those efforts were not always successful.²¹⁵

Aside from the overabundance of massively printed ideological publications, the prevalent reality of Soviet press dissemination, even by the late 1960s, was still that of shortage. Both the quantities and the mechanics of newspaper and journal circulation placed the audiences, especially provincial ones, on a fairly meager reading diet. Although the subscription limits may have been officially abolished in October 1964, the print runs of all periodicals were still decided in a centralized fashion. Despite the trend toward balancing circulations and readers’ interests, the system of press distribution continued to be dominated by, if not entirely non-market, then heavily distorted market mechanisms where money and consumer satisfaction did not tell the whole story. In addition to pecuniary means, a reader had to obtain physical access to a periodical, a task that was often difficult. The reading environment of the 1960s remained one of scarcity, where demand for many (albeit certainly not all) periodicals regularly exceeded supply.

In this environment, individual subscription or retail were not the only and often not even the principal methods of readers’ access to periodicals, or to published texts more broadly. In order to get a full picture of the Soviet reading audiences and their interests, one needs to examine other practices of reading, such as collective reading, sharing of printed matter, reading in public or institutional libraries, and other similar ways of accessing the printed word.²¹⁶

This is where statistics reaches its limit, because such unorthodox practices of reading and information exchange obviously cannot be quantified. And yet they certainly existed in Soviet society. Unlike *Pravda*, a 288-page copy of *Novyi mir* could not be glued to a newspaper board, and so readers had to find other ways of accessing this or another literary journal. Evidence suggests that this happened often. Always there, the shortages greatly increased every time a journal published something particularly interesting.

in the Soviet Union (Pittsburgh, 1988), 100.

215 Stephen Lovell makes similar observations with regard to book publishing and distribution during the 1950s and 1960s. On excessive supply of books unwanted by readers, and on a general lack of coordination between supply and demand as features of the late Soviet book publishing industry, see Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*, 56-71, esp. 58-63, 66.

216 On the centrality of libraries in Soviet reading culture from early on, see E. Dobrenko, *Formovka sovetskogo chitatelia: Sotsial'nye i esteticheskie predposylki retseptii sovetskoi literatury* (St. Petersburg, 1997).

Then long lines would form in libraries, with potential readers entering their names in special rosters and the wait lasting for weeks if not months. Sharing was a common practice, too. Unlike some other material objects, books and journals could be used by many people, and readers frequently shared them with each other. Readers' letters often described a situation when the same tattered copy of a journal was read by dozens, at times hundreds of eyes. People read at libraries and at work. Neighbors subscribed to one set of a journal collectively, while the more fortunate individual subscribers lent their copies to relatives, friends, etc. Here lines formed as well, and it was not uncommon to borrow a journal issue for only one sleepless night of reading. Published texts were multiplied on individual typewriters, and in cases of extreme popularity the typed copies could be sold on the black market at several times the journal's official state retail price.

Examples abound. In 1954, Leningrad typists made money by copying Vladimir Pomerantsev's emblematic article "On Sincerity in Literature" and selling each copy for 25 rubles, more than three times the seven-ruble price of the December 1953 issue of *Novyi mir* in which the article had been published.²¹⁷ Here at last is evidence of pure market demand, presumably the best indicator of a product's popularity. This popularity was not limited to Leningrad or Moscow. On the contrary, there is evidence of a similar resonance the article enjoyed in the provinces, both Russian and non-Russian. One reader, whom Pomerantsev had never met before, somehow obtained his home telephone number and called him, jubilantly reporting that the article received an enthusiastic welcome at Komsomol gatherings in Ukraine.²¹⁸ Especially vivid was a story told by one T. Permiakov, an instructor at the Khabarovsk Medical Institute in the Far East. As he described it in his letter to *Novyi mir*, entire offices in Khabarovsk would stop working for hours at a time in 1954, with people passionately arguing about Pomerantsev and sincerity in literature. Sometime in January of that year Permiakov found the entire staff of an office at the city radio station engaged in a heated argument. When he asked why the passions ran so high, the radio journalists responded that they were discussing Pomerantsev's article, and were astonished to hear that he had not yet read it. "Do read it! This is astoundingly fresh and good!" they advised him.²¹⁹ A few hours later he, apparently someone involved in the world of letters, stopped by the editorial office of the regional newspaper *Tikhookeanskaia zvezda* (*Pacific Star*), only to hear again the editors applauding Pomerantsev's article. A few days passed, and Permiakov heard the same ecstatic praise for the article at the local branch of the Writers' Union. Intrigued, as he still had not read it, he finally went to a library and asked for the December 1953

²¹⁷ RGALI, f. 634, op. 4, d. 708, l. 13; V. Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature," *Novyi mir*, 12 (1953), 218-245.

²¹⁸ RGALI, f. 1702, op. 9, d. 8, ll. 6-6ob.

²¹⁹ RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 89, l. 127 (March 23, 1954).

issue of *Novyi mir*. The librarian gave him an understanding smile. With the words, “Of course, you came for Pomerantsev!” she produced a long list of readers who had signed up for that issue of the journal. Because he “did not have connections at the library,” a full two months had to elapse before Permiakov’s turn came to read “On Sincerity.” Throughout these months of anxious waiting, he kept hearing about the article everywhere, including his department meetings at the Medical Institute. “And everywhere,” he reported to *Novyi mir*, “the verdict was the same: ‘Great! What a punch! What a knockout! That’s where the truth is told!’”²²⁰ In fact, the largest share (37.4%) of readers’ letters to Pomerantsev that are available in the archives, came not from Moscow or Leningrad (those generated about a third of the letters), but from large provincial cities like Khabarovsk.²²¹ It was in the provinces that Pomerantsev’s success resonated especially loudly. He became the hero of the day, with people jubilantly greeting him in letters full of elated expressions and exclamation marks.²²²

Or, we may take the 1956 *Novyi mir* publication of Vladimir Dudintsev’s novel *Not by Bread Alone*, another literary classic of the Thaw. In the autumn of that year, letter writers reported about people reading the light-blue-jacketed journal’s issues with the novel “in the subway, in the streetcars, in the trolley-buses,—young people, adults, and seniors.”²²³ Again, this was happening not only in Moscow or Leningrad but also in Gomel’, Kishinev, Krasnoirsksk, Tashkent, Odessa, Riga, and other places across the country. Retail kiosks that sold the journal were emptied out in a few hours. Readers lined up in libraries for months waiting to get the novel,²²⁴ and sometimes the checked-out issues of *Novyi mir*, torn and full of marginalia, went missing.²²⁵ Once again, the lucky subscribers were besieged by scores of friends, friends of friends, relatives, colleagues, and acquaintances borrowing the journal for a day and sometimes only a night.²²⁶ Once again, readers without such personal ties turned to the black market, buying

220 Ibid. For similar reactions, see RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 72, ll. 49-56 (Valentina Klimova, engineer and chief technical designer, Leningrad, 27 January 1954).

221 The percentage is based on the number of letters from identified locations (91 letters). Overall, *Novyi mir*’s archive contains, on my count, 104 letters to Pomerantsev from more than 135 letter writers. RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 72, ll. 1-1480b; *ibid.*, d. 80, ll. 1-2; *ibid.*, d. 85, ll. 86-880b; *ibid.*, d. 88, ll. 1-144; *ibid.*, d. 89, ll. 1-1540b; *ibid.*, d. 90, ll. 78-84; *ibid.*, d. 91, ll. 1-133; *ibid.*, d. 92, ll. 1-152; *ibid.*, d. 93, ll. 1-88. *Literaturnaia gazeta*’s archive contains a further 20 letters. See RGALI, f. 634, op. 4, d. 747, ll. 1-97.

222 For the story of Pomerantsev’s article and its reception, see Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 44-87.

223 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 242, l. 111.

224 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 240, l. 37 (Novosibirsk), 85 (Tashkent); *ibid.*, d. 241, l. 67 (Lviv oblast’), 117 (Kostroma); *ibid.*, d. 243, l. 25 (Yalta); *ibid.*, d. 245, l. 57 (Leningrad); RGALI, f. 1702, op. 8, d. 127, l. 222 (Velikie Luki); *ibid.*, d. 134, l. 14 (Minsk); *ibid.*, d. 136, l. 18 (Kazan’); *ibid.*, d. 268, l. 15 (Odessa).

225 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 8, d. 133, l. 132 (Baku).

226 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 240, l. 15; *ibid.*, d. 241, l. 16.

copies of *Novyi mir* with Dudintsev's novel at three times the state price.²²⁷ People read the novel silently and aloud, on their own and in groups, with discussions breaking out at homes, workplaces, and numerous readers' and writers' conferences—just as in Pomerantsev's case earlier, but on a much larger scale.²²⁸ This is not to mention that in Moscow itself, multi-thousand crowds of Dudintsev's readers occasionally had to be patrolled by mounted police, as it happened at the Central House of Writers on 22 October 1956, where Dudintsev himself made a public appearance.²²⁹

The 1960s are somewhat less rich than the 1950s in offering such extreme sights of readers' enthusiasm and effort at obtaining a work of literature. And yet the effort and the enthusiasm were commonly there. Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, initially published in *Novyi mir* in November 1962, was frequently read in public libraries, where demand greatly exceeded supply. When, having waited in a line for several weeks, a reader would finally get hold of a library copy of the journal, it would be tattered and greased from many previous readers' hands, with numerous pencil marks on the margins. Thus looked, for example, the copy which, in January 1963, ended up in the hands of the 71-year old S. A. Kolendovskii from Kharkiv, Ukraine.²³⁰ In Solzhenitsyn's case, again, Moscow was not very different from the provinces. One similarly looking copy of *Novyi mir*'s issue with *One Day* in it, which has clearly been through thousands of readers' hands, survived in the Moscow Public History Library as late as 2001, when I took a picture of it. From the late 1960s, too, we occasionally get similar reports of the Soviet readers' energy and resourcefulness in overcoming shortages of highly demanded texts that interested them. In 1969, Anatolii Shishkov, a pensioner and a former mining timekeeper, traveled all the way from his village of Goloven'ki, Shchyokino district, Tula oblast', to the city of Tula in order to obtain a copy of the newspaper *Sotsialisticheskaiia industriia* ("Socialist Industry") that had bitterly attacked *Novyi mir* shortly before. The concerned reader then wrote a long letter in defense of Tvardovskii's journal and sent it to *Novyi mir*'s editorial office. From his remote location, he had literally walked an extra mile, and likely many miles more, in order to perform the act of reading and letter writing.²³¹ Interestingly, the newspaper he sought, *Sotsialisticheskaiia industriia*, was a newly-minted mouthpiece of mass persuasion that enjoyed a special patronage of the Central Committee, being endowed with a generous

227 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 242, ll. 22-23; *ibid.*, d. 243, l. 121 (Magnitogorsk).

228 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 6, d. 241, l. 16 (Gomel'), l. 76 (Molotov region); *ibid.*, d. 242, l. 128 (Kiev); RGALI, f. 1702, op. 8, d. 131, l. 4 (Leningrad).

229 On Dudintsev, see K. E. Smith, *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge, MA, 2017), 256-279; Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 88-109.

230 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 10, d. 76, ll. 39, 40-40ob, 41ob (20 January 1963).

231 RGALI, f. 1702, op. 9, d. 326, ll. 37-38ob (August 13-14, 1969); M. E. Zakharov, "Otkrytoe pis'mo Glavnomu redaktoru zhurnala *Novyi mir* Tvardovskomu A. T.," *Sotsialisticheskaiia industriia*, July 31, 1969.

USSR-wide circulation allowance of 302,000 copies in retail and 500,000 in subscription. Of those, however, only 84,961 were claimed by actual subscribers. Founded only a few months earlier that year, 1969, the newspaper already circulated in 1,893 subscriptions and 2,500 retail copies in the Tula region. Evidently though, none of the subscriptions had reached the village of Goloven'ki where the elderly Mr. Shishkov resided. It is highly unlikely that his village had a *Soiuzpechat'* retail kiosk, either.²³²

Not all press was of interest to all Soviet readers, but literary press often was, and they found a way to obtain it. This interest was not limited to the capitals. Overall, as far as reading literature is concerned, the pre-eminence of the capitals over the provinces should not be exaggerated. The myth that literary journals, and consequently any sophisticated intellectual currents, had no circulation outside the narrow circle of the Moscow and Leningrad intelligentsia—and that therefore intellectual life in Soviet society took place mainly in the capitals whereas the provinces were passive, silent, stagnant, and could at best follow suit—is a distortion of reality. To import here my findings from elsewhere, systematic examination of readers' letters to *Novyi mir* between 1948 and 1969 shows that Moscow and Leningrad did not even come close to dominating the journal's active audience, except occasionally in the mid- to late 1960s. It was the provincial readers, mainly those from large regional urban centers such as Gorky, Kharkiv, Khabarovsk, Sverdlovsk, etc., who contributed the greatest share of written responses to the journal's publications. The intensity of these responses—in other words, percentages of letter writers from those cities measured against the cities' share in the country's population—was indeed somewhat lower than in Moscow, Leningrad, or Kiev, and yet the provincial urban centers responded to literature almost as actively as the capitals. In smaller urban locations the intensity of response was usually lower, while the countryside responded to the journal's publications yet less intensely. But overall, if *Novyi mir* is any indication, the literary life of the Thaw reached a very broad geographical range of locations, from the capitals to villages all over the USSR.²³³ The journal's active audience was primarily urban, and to a great extent also provincial. To stress this again, “provincial” here is a geographical attribution, not a qualitative characteristic, since readers' letters about literature from the provinces were in no way less sophisticated than those from Moscow or Leningrad.

Rather than any kind of intellectual pre-eminence of the capitals, what the disparity in the circulation of literary periodicals between the Soviet capitals and the provinces suggests may be two different patterns of cir-

232 RGAE, f. 3527, op. 27, d. 1708, ll. 18-18ob, 20ob, 33-35ob (subscription figures for the newspaper). On *Sotsialisticheskaia industriia* and its oversight by the Central Committee, see RGASPI, f. 638, op. 1, d. 20, l. 4.

233 Kozlov, “The Readers of *Novyi mir*, 1948-1969: A Social Portrait,” 23-27, esp. tables 9 and 10.

circulation and consumption of the printed word, literature included. Flawed as it was, in Moscow, Leningrad, or other major urban centers such as Kazan', by the mid-to-late 1960s the dissemination of periodicals had to some extent reached modern dimensions, with a certain correlation existing between the supply of printed matter and the readers' demand for it, and with individual subscription and retail playing a considerable, although admittedly insufficient, role in the audiences' consumption of published texts. Therefore, the statistics of circulation and subscription in the capitals, and perhaps bigger cities more generally, may offer some guidance to contemporary Soviet readers' interests and preferences. In the more remote provinces, by contrast, a more archaic model of reading consumption may have still prevailed, with traditional practices of collective and shared reading largely dominating the reading landscape. Those practices were not extinct in Moscow or Leningrad, either. Arguably, the more remote and ill-accessible a geographic locality was, the more archaic the practices of reading there would be.

A FEW PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

When we bring together the myriad ways in which Soviet readers accessed or reacted to texts published in literary periodicals during the 1950s and 1960s, in the provinces as well as in the capitals, what does this variety of statistics and reading practices suggest?

It suggests, in the first place, that literature did have societal importance during the Thaw. It also suggests, however, that in the Soviet environment of centralized and officially restricted circulation of the press, building a direct correlation between subscription figures and readers' interests would be a precarious exercise.

During the two and a half post-World War II decades, the Soviet system of press dissemination evolved from a rigidly hierarchical, militarized, top-down distribution of printed matter into a more open environment that sought to accommodate readers' interests and to balance the supply of periodicals with the audiences' demand. Nonetheless, the mechanism of press circulation remained centrally regulated, cumbersome, and often inefficient, operating as it did within the nationwide economy of shortages. Politics and ideology continued to be important elements of this mechanism as well, influencing the production and distribution of periodicals in either supportive or at times restrictive ways.

Therefore, it is often impossible to measure the reading audience of a Soviet periodical or another publication by applying regular categories of literary market analysis accepted in a Western society. Circulation numbers alone will tell us little about the actual popularity of a given title among

readers. Low circulation did not necessarily mean that the title was unpopular, nor did high circulation automatically mean popularity. An occasional imbalance between the numbers of printed and actually circulating copies of a given title could be dictated by political priorities rather than economic factors, and it was not necessarily overcome, on the government's part at least, by market methods of reconciling supply and demand. Excessive supply could be allowed to continue, provided it was politically justified, and measures could be taken for enforcing an unwanted publication upon readers. On the other hand, excessive demand could be suppressed by limiting the circulation of a given periodical or by allowing the shortage to carry on, despite the supply being clearly insufficient.

That said, the efficiency of press dissemination, and particularly subscription, varied depending on specific circumstances and locations. The system tended to function more successfully in the capitals and other large urban centers, offering a greater variety of periodicals for subscription, paying some attention to the interests of individual subscribers, and making a more or less consistent effort to match reading supply and demand. Because of that, subscription data from larger cities may occasionally indicate the intellectual preferences of Soviet readers. The competition between the journals *Novyi mir* and *Oktiabr'* in Moscow and Leningrad during the second half of the 1960s is one case in point. However, even in the capitals the state-run mechanism of readers' access to the press was far from perfect or sufficient, ensuring the parallel survival of more traditional modes of shared and collective reading that took multiple forms. Outside big cities, these archaic modes of reading consumption tended to be more prevalent.

Singular reliance on statistics of subscription or retail in order to measure the readership of a newspaper, journal, or for that matter any publication in Soviet society, would be misleading. The obverse of the economy of shortages was that the actual readership of any published text of broad interest, especially a literary text, was larger than anything the official numbers may tell. Modest circulation or subscription should not lead us to think that the literary audiences were indeed that small. While numerically inferior to the readerships of major central newspapers or popular illustrated magazines, such as *Ogonek*, *Rabotnitsa*, or *Krest'ianka*, the audiences of literary journals numbered in hundreds of thousands, and sometimes in millions. Millions is not an exaggeration, because texts originally published in a thick journal were often subsequently republished with a larger print run. To give again the example of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the novella came out in *Novyi mir* in 1962 with a circulation of 90,000. The following year it was reprinted separately in *Roman-gazeta* with a circulation of 700,000. In that same year, 1963, *One Day* came out as a book from the *Sovetskii pisatel'* publishing house (100,000 copies), in Lithuanian and Estonian translations (15,000 and 10,000 copies respectively), and even

in 500 special copies for the visually impaired. Thus, the total official circulation of *One Day* in 1962-63 reached 915,500 copies.²³⁴ And even those impressive circulation numbers were often insufficient, as it happened in the case of *One Day*. When a published text elicited truly massive attention and interest, readers resorted to their own, either non-market or improvised-market, tactics of broadening the circulation of a given title. Especially widespread were the time-honored practices of collective and shared reading. Thanks to those, the actual audience of a literary publication could easily reach several million people.

Conversely, there are many examples when the officially endorsed broad circulation and an affordable price did not mean the actual popularity of a publication. The mandatory circulation of *Kommunist*, the multiple reprints of works by the classics of Marxism, the unwanted subscriptions to *Komsomol'skaia pravda* among Moscow students in 1965, and the heaps of unclaimed copies of *Agitator*, *Politicheskoe samoobrazovanie*, or *Partiinaiia zhizn'* in Tatarstan in 1966 are just some cases in point. Again, here is where statistical evidence reaches its limit. There is no way to calculate the readership of a text that was lavishly over-produced and over-disseminated on ideological grounds.

For all these reasons, an attempt to quantify the reading interests of Soviet audiences on the basis of subscription and retail data is bound to produce fragmentary results that will always lack comprehensiveness or precision. The result would be even less accurate if, on the grounds of statistics of circulation, subscription, and retail, one attempted to judge not just a short-term “popularity” but a long-term “impact” of a periodical or any, in particular literary, text. For these complex dimensions of socio-intellectual history, evidence of press dissemination is clearly insufficient. An altogether different kind of long-term analysis that would focus on changing patterns of language as well as the longevity and recurrence of particular ideas in readers' responses, would need to be performed. Among potential discoveries, one may find here that texts of initially modest circulation might over time produce an increasingly powerful impact on society, conquering the audiences and the minds.

If so, then are the statistics of subscription and circulation a useful tool of analysis for the history of Soviet reading, and potentially Soviet intellectual history? They certainly are—provided the analysis is performed carefully. Soviet subscription figures may be informative, but only if one knows the context of production, dissemination, and reactions to a particular text.

234 A. Solzhenitsyn, “Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha,” *Novyi mir*, II (1962), 8-74; *ibid.*, *Roman-gazeta* (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1963); *ibid.* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963); *ibid.* (Vilnius: Goslitizdat, 1963); *ibid.* (Tallinn: Gazetno-zhurnal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1963); *ibid.* (Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1963); T. Goriaeva (ed.), *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury: Dokumenty i kommentarii* (Moscow, 1997), 587-88 (*Glavlit* order to remove all copies and editions of *One Day* from libraries and bookstores, February 14, 1974).

That, in turn, is possible only if one combines statistical data with additional types of evidence, such as readers' letters, correspondence among writers and editors, and other sources.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Soviet readers displayed a great interest in, and were in constant interaction with, the world of literature. In order to study this interaction and its outcomes, it is necessary to keep in mind that literature and society spoke to each other in forms particular to the contemporary culture of reading. Subscription to literary periodicals was one, but not the only, such form. Knowing these forms, the peculiar specifics of the Soviet reading environment, is a necessary precondition for analyzing this country's intellectual history.

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READING SAMIZDAT

Josephine von Zitzewitz

INTRODUCTION

Samizdat, that is, the publication of texts without the involvement of the state publishing houses and the censor's office, was a mass phenomenon in the later decades of the Soviet Union. It is impossible to give a reliable figure of how many people were involved on all levels, from merely reading to creating and disseminating texts. Moreover, this figure varied widely depending on the decade we consider. Overall estimates range from hundreds of thousands to several million people. And while samizdat activity was naturally highest in big cities, especially the capital, it was present on the entire territory of the USSR. As the government retained a monopoly on publishing the written word, samizdat was de-facto illegal under Soviet law.

In this chapter I will discuss samizdat as a reading culture with the help of research that targets the ordinary samizdat reader, in as far as it is possible to define him or her. The main body of data used for this piece was gathered during 2017 with the help of an online survey. This allows me to test several widespread hypotheses about samizdat, derived from 'common knowledge' and the personal experience of individuals, against empirical data. It also throws into sharp relief the extraordinary role the figure of the reader played in the process of samizdat. The results of the survey-questionnaire are discussed in detail in the second part of the chapter.

I. WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT SAMIZDAT AND SAMIZDAT READING

1.1. *What was Samizdat?*

Samizdat emerged in the second half of the 1950s on the crest of the poetry boom that saw emerging poets such as Evgenii Evtushenko fill entire stadiums. Enthusiasm for poetry inspired cultural initiatives that were organised by interested citizens rather than any official structure, such as the weekly gatherings on Mayakovsky Square from 1958 onwards, where large groups of young people would read poetry out loud. For the centrally organised Soviet cultural sphere that had just emerged from Stalinism, such spontaneous initiatives were a novelty.

New poets such as Evtushenko, Andrei Voznesenskii, Bella Akhmadulina and others constitute one group that enthralled the reading public. The other group was the Silver Age poets, i.e. writers who were famous before the 1917 revolution and whose work was frequently not re-published. Some poets, notably Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandel'shtam, produced a significant body of work after the revolution, which was never published, or published in tiny print runs. These texts re-emerged slowly during the 1950s and 1960s¹ and had a huge influence on reading tastes and ultimately on the writing techniques of new poets. Readers who had access to Silver Age poetry, often through pre-revolutionary editions, would copy poems out, frequently by hand, and share them with their acquaintances. Samizdat was born.

This process is described in many first-hand accounts and the respondents to our questionnaire confirm its mechanics: “my first texts were my mum’s ‘lists’ of Esenin’s poetry (respondent #22, *1976)”.² One respondent dutifully recorded the characteristic mixture of old and new poetry: “A lot of poetry was circulating. People were copying, by hand, Tsvetaeva from the books published in the 1920s in tiny print runs, and Gumilev, but also [Naum] Korzhavin and [Iosif] Brodskii. I myself copied little, but provided many texts for people to copy.” (#64, *1956).³

The term ‘samizdat’ became attached to this phenomenon in the 1960s, but it pre-dates the mass practice of circulating texts in this way. Its origin is commonly attributed to Nikolai Glazkov who, during the 1940s, gave self-bound typescripts of his prose miniatures to his friends, adorned with the word ‘samsebiaizdat’ (self-publishing house), a pun on state publishing houses such as ‘Litizdat’ (Literature Publishing House) or ‘Gosizdat’ (State Publishing House) in the place where you would expect to find the name of

¹ An early example is the first (re-)publication of 42 poems by Marina Tsvetaeva in the literary miscellany *Pages from Tarussa (Tarusskie stranitsy)* in 1961.

² Question 4: “What was the first samizdat text you saw or read?”

³ Question 54.1: “If you came across samizdat in school or university (for example, if your peers were interested in or reproducing samizdat texts) please give details.”

the publishing house.⁴ Thus samizdat was, from the very beginning, also an outlet for contemporary writers who could not, or did not try to, publish their texts in the official press. Some of the best-known Russian writers of the late twentieth century owe all or most of their reputation to samizdat. Among them are Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), whose *Gulag Archipelago* (*Arkhipelag GULAG*, published in Paris in 1973) eclipsed the fame of the earlier, officially published *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*, 1962) and the poet Iosif Brodskii (1940-1996). Both of them are Nobel Prize winners. Others include Venedikt Erofeev (1938-1990), Elena Shvarts (1948-2010) and Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (1940-2007).

From the mid-1960s onwards, samizdat began to include material relating to history, religion, politics, public affairs and other topics; it was also increasingly supplemented by texts published abroad and smuggled back into the Soviet Union ('tamizdat'). The texts circulated in samizdat have been scrupulously collected and, in many cases, reproduced in print form. Iconic texts, such as Solzhenitsyn's novels and Brodskii's poetry, were published abroad, often decades before the first Soviet or Russian editions. By now, lesser-known literary texts and political writings have been collected, too. The following overview of sources is indicative, but does not make a claim to completeness.

Two major sources exist in both book form and online: Viacheslav Igrunov's *Anthology of Samizdat* (*Antologiiia samizdata*) is divided into sections for poetry, prose and social journalism (*publitsistika*).⁵ The section on unofficial poetry collected in *Samizdat of the Century* (*Samizdat veka*) has been incorporated into the *Russian Virtual Library* (*Russkaia virtual'naia biblioteka*).⁶ The archives and records of Radio Liberty, which broadcast samizdat back to the Soviet Union, are in the Hoover Institution Library and Archives, with additional material held in the Open Society Archive at the Central European University in Budapest; many of the samizdat broadcasts were made accessible online in 2016.⁷ Different branches of the *Memorial* Society hold extensive samizdat archives, many of them from private collections.⁸ The archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies

4 Described by Aleksandr Daniel in "Istoki i smysl sovetskogo samizdata," in V. Igrunov, M. Barbakadze, E. Shvarts (eds.), *Antologiiia samizdata: nepodtsenzurnaia literatura v SSSR 1950-e – 1980-e* (Moscow, 2005), I, 18. Five of our respondents (#4, #11, #50, #56, #57; questions 3.1. and 7.1.) explicitly mention this episode as the origin of samizdat.

5 Igrunov, Barbakadze, Shvarts (eds.), *Antologiiia samizdata: nepodtsenzurnaia literatura v SSSR 1950-e – 1980-e*; <http://antology.igrunov.ru/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

6 M. Ishkov, I. Akhmet'ev, V. Kulakov, T. Gromova (eds.), *Samizdat veka* (Minsk, Moscow, 1998); <http://rvb.ru/np/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

7 http://catalog.osaarchivum.org/?f%5Blanguage_facet%5D%5B%5D=Russian&f%5Brecord_origin_facet%5D%5B%5D=Digital+Repository. For an overview of what is where see <http://www.rferl.org/p/5806.html> (accessed February 25, 2020).

8 Memorial Moscow/International Memorial:

at the University of Bremen (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) holds a sizeable samizdat collection, sourced from private archives, and possibly the largest collection of samizdat periodicals.⁹ The University of Toronto's Project for the Study of Samizdat and Dissidence attempts to make part of the process visible with the help of timelines and digital reproductions, in particular of samizdat periodicals, part of which have been made fully searchable.¹⁰ The Keston Center at Baylor University, Texas, now holds the archives of Keston College/the Keston Institute, an organisation founded in the UK in 1969 with the aim of researching religion in communist societies; the Institute amassed a large amount of religious samizdat.¹¹ The Andrei Belyi Centre in St. Petersburg is continuing to expand its digital archive of literary samizdat.¹² The *Im Werden* project, which set itself the ambitious goal of becoming the online library of the *RuNet*, the Russian internet, maintains a special section for 'Second Literature', i.e. texts not officially published in the Soviet Union; the collection is large and texts are downloadable.¹³ The International Samizdat Research Association has a slightly outdated website that nevertheless publishes a useful list of archives holding samizdat collections.¹⁴

Thus if we consider samizdat to be merely a body of texts the scholar or interested layperson will find plenty of sources. However, this is a reductive interpretation. Indeed, the question 'What was samizdat?' is hotly debated. A roundtable at the Memorial Society in 2014 asked researchers to consider precisely this question—"What is samizdat?"¹⁵ In the introduction to the essay collection *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond*, editors Friederike Kind-Kovacs and Jessie Labov invite their contributors to ponder whether samizdat was a publishing practice, a reading practice, a set of texts, or a state of mind.¹⁶ Aleksandr Daniel calls samizdat a "mode of existence of the text,"¹⁷ while Elena Strukova discusses its importance as a "memorial to

<https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/collections/archives/dissidents/guide/>. (accessed February 25, 2020). Research and Information Centre Memorial St. Petersburg: <http://iofe.center/elarch>. In both cases, the majority of documents are not online.

9 https://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de/en/9/20110606113229/Archive_Library.html (accessed February 25, 2020). The archive itself is not online.

10 <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/>. The database of samizdat periodicals can be found at <https://samizdat.library.utoronto.ca/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

11 <https://www.baylor.edu/kestoncenter/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

12 https://samizdat.wiki/Заглавная_страница (accessed February 25, 2020).

13 The site offers selected texts for free download. <https://vtoraya-literatura.com/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

14 <http://www.samizdatportal.org/directory/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

15 The stenogram is published in *Acta Samizdatica: Zapiski o samizdate. Vypusk втори* (Moscow, 2015), 10-39.

16 F. Kind-Kovacs, J. Labov (eds.), *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism* (New York, Oxford, 2013), introduction, 2.

17 Daniel, "Istoki i smysl sovetskogo samizdata," 17.

book culture in the late twentieth century.”¹⁸ The Canadian researcher Ann Komaromi, who initiated and runs the *Project for the Study of Samizdat and Dissidence*, asks whether samizdat was a medium, a genre, a corpus of texts, or a textual culture,¹⁹ and the Italian scholar Valentina Parisi has produced a volume focusing on the samizdat reader and the paratextual aspects of samizdat periodicals.²⁰ I myself have considered the periodicals in the context of reading communities.²¹

Moreover, there are several dedicated outlets and discussion forums for questions relating to samizdat: The Memorial Society publishes a biannual almanac, *Acta Samizdatica: Notes on Samizdat (Acta Samizdatica: Zapiski o Samizdate)*, which includes new research alongside archival publications. There are several bespoke Facebook groups facilitating the exchange of information.²² Thus plenty of material is available on the content transmitted by samizdat, as well as on the material medium and the process itself. Yet surprisingly, there is very little specifically on reading, and even less on the samizdat reader. Or perhaps this should not come as a surprise, because the largest group involved in samizdat is notoriously difficult to research.

1.2. Samizdat as a reading culture

The literature, and public opinion too, commonly understand samizdat as a function of ‘dissidence,’ i.e. the many forms in which different groups or individuals either protested against the Soviet regime’s practices and/or created their alternative social and communication networks. This is true in one direction only: all dissidents were involved in samizdat, and indeed reading samizdat was often the first step towards dissidence. To put it differently, reading uncensored texts inspired ‘uncensored,’ independent thought. For a significant minority, the next logical step was the writing and circulation of their own texts and/or various forms of activism, from the dissemination of texts to the creation of entire samizdat periodicals. Some actions were more or less political, such as the letters intellectuals wrote to protest against the arrest, in 1965, of Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel for

¹⁸ E. Strukova, “Samizdat kak pamiatnik knizhnoi kul’tury vtoroi poloviny XX veka,” *Acta Samizdatica: Pilotnyi vypusk* (Moscow, 2012), 7-13.

¹⁹ A. Komaromi, “Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics,” *Slavic Review*, 71, 1 (2012), 72.

²⁰ V. Parisi, *Il lettore eccedente: edizioni periodiche del samizdat sovietico, 1956-1990* (Bologna, 2013).

²¹ J. von Zitzewitz, “Leningrad Samizdat Journals as Early Social Networks: Journals, Target Audiences and Distribution,” in E. King (ed.), *Reading Communities* forthcoming in 2020. For a classic work defining reading communities, see D. Rehberg Sedo (ed.), *Reading Communities: from Salons to Cyberspace* (Basingstoke, 2011).

²² See f.i. <https://www.facebook.com/samizdat.community/> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/353375628083079/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

publishing abroad,²³ the demonstration on Red Square on 25 August 1968, by eight people, against the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968,²⁴ or the foundation of the Moscow Helsinki group, the oldest human rights group still operating in Russia, in 1977.²⁵

An example of how reading a (forbidden) literary text led to a critical reassessment of Soviet ideology and gradually, many years later, to active dissidence that culminated in arrest and a prison camp sentence is the story of Sergei Khodorovich who, in 1977, became one of the managers of the (unofficial) Public Foundation for Political Prisoners and their Families.²⁶ The art historian Igor Golomshtok, who did not consider himself an active dissident, remembers his own disagreement with the regime in the 1960s as likewise inspired by literature:

We did not protest against the regime, but against the regime's lies [...] This we learned from the songs of Galich and Okudzhava, the poems of Brodskii, the stories and later, the novels of Voinovich, not to mention the Russian classics from Pushkin to Mandel'shtam, Tsvetaeva and Platonov.²⁷

Much of Soviet dissent was even more restrained and often did not directly engage with the regime at all. The poet Olga Sedakova remembers the mature cultural underground of the 1970s as follows:

For us, culture in its broadest historical aspect was that very freedom and height of the spirit denied to us by the Soviet system.

23 Information about the case, the transcript of the trial and many of the letters of protest, were collated by Aleksandr Ginzburg and circulated in samizdat. Ginzburg himself sent one copy of this *White Book (Belaia kniga)* to the KGB, another abroad. For this he and three friends received labour camp sentences. In English collected in L. Labeledz, M. Hayward (eds.), *On Trial: The Case of Sinyavsky (Tertz) and Daniel (Arzhak)* (London, 1967). For information about the demonstration inspired by the case, which became an annual event, this arrest, including many interviews, see D. Zubarev, G. Kuzovkin, N. Kostenko, S. Lukashevskii, A. Papovian (eds.), *5 dekabria 1965 goda* (Moscow, 2005).

24 For information see: N. Gorbanevskaia, *Polden'. Delo o demonstratsii 25 avgusta 1968 goda na Krasnoi ploshchadi* (Moscow, 2007).

25 The history of the group, including historical documents, can be found on their website, <https://mlhg.ru/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

26 The Foundation was set up by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who pledged all present and future royalties he would receive for *The Gulag Archipelago*. It was active between 1974 and ceased open activity in 1983, following intense persecution. Khodorovich tell his story in an interview with Gleb Morev, in Morev's volume of interviews, *Dissidenty. Dvadsat' razgovorov* (Moscow, 2017), 247-275. The story that set him on the path to dissidence is from the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem's 1971 collection *The Star Diaries*.

27 I. Golomshtok, *Zaniatie dlia starogo gorodovogo. Memuary pessimista* (Moscow, 2015), 150-151.

[...] We all emerged from some kind of protest movement, which was not so much political as aesthetic or spiritual resistance.²⁸

The degree to which samizdat was persecuted depended on the nature of the texts circulated. Naturally, texts engaging with the political situation and human rights abuses in the Soviet Union past or present, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* and the human rights bulletin *The Chronicle of Current Events* (*Khronika tekushchikh sobytii*, 1968-1983), were more likely to lead to reprisals than 'purely' literary texts.²⁹

Samizdat texts and the channels by which it was circulated were instrumental to the functioning of informal networks, including those that readers both Russian and Western have in mind when they say 'dissidents', i.e. "all those who actively protested against the regime in one way or another: by signing protest letters, participating in demonstrations, serving a camp sentence or exile."³⁰ Most often, dissidents are equated with the Soviet human rights activists (*pravozashchitniki*). It is in this function, as an information channel for dissidents, that veteran human rights activist Liudmila Alekseeva describes samizdat in her seminal survey *The History of Dissent in the USSR* (*Istoriia inakomyслиia v SSSR*). Characteristically, the section "The Birth of Samizdat" is embedded into the chapter on Human Rights activists, although Alekseeva dutifully mentions the origins of samizdat through the circulation of poetry in the 1950s.³¹ The English version differs in structure and carries additional information; here, the phenomenon of samizdat is described as "The Core of the Movement" in a chapter dedicated to "The Communication Network of Dissent."³² The tendency to treat samizdat as a function of dissidence can be observed in contemporary research, too: in 2017, the literary scholar and editor Gleb Morev published a book with 20 narrative interviews with Soviet dissidents, who all talk about samizdat as a matter of fact, but reduce samizdat reading practices to a footnote.³³ The University of Toronto's *Project for the Study of Samizdat and Dissidence*, which offers a database of Soviet samizdat periodicals, illustrated timelines of dissident movements, and interviews with activists, implicitly identifies dissent and samizdat in its very title.³⁴ However, while all dissidents read

28 O. Sedakova, S. I. Yastremski, "A Dialogue on Poetry," in O. Sedakova, *Poems and Elegies*, ed. by S. I. Yastremski (Lewisburg, PA, 2003), 11–20, 15.

29 The *Chronicle*—founded in 1968 to document human rights abuses and with an information and distribution chain that was highly conspiratorial—was heavily persecuted. The editors changed regularly, usually due to arrest. For information see L. Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*, transl. by C. Pearce, J. Glad (Middletown, 1985), 285–287.

30 Golomshtok, *Zaniatie dlia starogo gorodovogo*, 149.

31 L. Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomyслиia v SSSR* (New York, 1984), 112.

32 Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 283 ff.

33 G. Morev, *Dvadsat' razgovorov* (Moscow, 2017).

34 <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

samizdat, by no means all readers of samizdat were active dissidents. The dissidents numbered in the hundreds, the readers of samizdat at least in the hundreds of thousands.

1.3. *How to study the Samizdat reader*

Samizdat was irreplaceable. And it owes much of its vitality to the fact that it lacked any kind of central organisation. But now this very guarantor of success constitutes a serious impediment to any attempt at reconstructing how people actually read samizdat, and who these people were.

For the researcher, the biggest challenge is that samizdat culture resists being recorded with our usual tools. For a start, the only element of this culture that is easily accessible is the text itself, preserved in a private or public archive. But this text is intriguingly and frustratingly silent. If we are lucky, a preserved archival copy gives away two names, namely that of the author and that of the final reader. Even if other sources confirm that both these people participated in the samizdat chain—and that is not always the case—the preserved fragments are too few and far between to make it possible to reconstruct the journey and readership of a given individual text. Samizdat's informal nature is one reason why this journey is hard to reconstruct. The fact that samizdat was de-facto illegal compounds the problem, as those involved often concealed their identity. It is indeed impossible to imagine a samizdat text being accompanied by something like a borrowing sheet listing its readers. Only very few people marked their samizdat texts with their name—after all, such an inscription could become incriminating evidence. Moreover, none of the statistics usually used by book historians, such as print run, editions, sales figures, reviews and translations, are available. While printed books and journals feature information about editors, publishers and print runs, and libraries have borrowing registers, no such records exist for samizdat.

The general process of how samizdat worked is well-known. One of the most succinct accounts is given by Liudmila Alekseeva in her *History of Soviet Dissent*:

The mechanism of samizdat was like this: the author would print their text in the way that was most accessible to a private individual under Soviet conditions, i.e. on the typewriter, in a few copies, and give these copies to his acquaintances. If one of them considered the text interesting, they'd make copies from the copy they had got and give them to their acquaintances, and so on. The more successful a work the more quickly and widely it would be disseminated.³⁵

35 Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomyслиa*, 112.

Apart from the fact that this is a generic story lacking individual detail, its focus is—and this is typical—on the process of textual production at the expense of the process of reading. It is of course an exaggeration to say that the reading of samizdat left no traces at all. We find such traces, for example, in private diaries held in archives and in published memoirs.³⁶ As a rule, these reminiscences make no attempt at establishing or analyzing the way reading networks function. In some cases, networks are documented, out of necessity, but their use for researchers is limited. In his (unpublished) memoir, Iurii Avrutskii, a collector and organiser of a reading circle for samizdat, describes how he decided to begin a register of texts and readers but encrypted the entries for fear of compromising his friends should the register be found.³⁷ Whether or not a person was able to read (much) samizdat depended on the people they knew and the circles of which they were part; the exchange of samizdat texts was based on mutual sympathy and trust. This also means that samizdat texts became a kind of currency in social networks while generating new such networks at the same time.³⁸ It is these network structures that cannot be traced any more, for the reasons described above.

Sources that focus explicitly on samizdat reading exist but are limited in scope for various reasons. One of them is the series of interviews conducted by Raisa Orlova, wife of the well-known dissident Lev Kopelev, in Germany and other Western European countries in the early 1980s. In collaboration with the newly funded Centre for the Study of Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen, Orlova interviewed recent émigrés from the Soviet Union about their experience with samizdat. Her sample was small though, and it was limited to people who had left the USSR, often as a result of persecution. Many of those were active dissenters or prominent writers and thus above average involved in samizdat. What is more, they naturally protected their acquaintances who had remained in the Soviet Union by not giving names. Over the space of three years, Orlova managed to conduct just over 50 such interviews. At the moment, they are held in a specialist archive, not available to the general public.³⁹ Similar restrictions hold true for

36 E.g. L. Kopelev, R. Orlova, *My zhili v Moskve 1956-1980* (Moscow, 1990), L. Alekseeva, *Pokolenie otpepli* (Moscow, 1990); N. Trauberg, *Sama zhizn'* (St. Petersburg, 2008), Liudmila Miklashevskaiia, *Povtorenie proidennogo* (St. Petersburg, 2012), I. Golomshtok, *Zaniatie dlia starogo gorodovogo. Memuary pessimista* (Moscow, 2015).

37 The memoir is part of Avrutskii's private archive, held by the Memorial Society in Moscow (fond 175, opis 4). The reading circle and its function are described by A. Makarov "Ot lichnoi kollektsii samizdata k obshchestvennoi biblioteke. Trudnosti granits i definitsii," in *Acta Samizdatica. Pilotnyi vypusk* (2012), 24-35. Avrutskii's reading circle grew into a samizdat library and is described in section 2. 9) below.

38 Ann Komaromi writes about this in "Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon," *Poetics Today*, 29, 4 (2008), 656.

39 Archive of the Research Centre of East European Studies, University of Bremen, fond I-86. The interviews are at present being prepared for publication as a commented edition with *Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie*, under the direction of Gennadii Kuzovkin. Updates are published regularly on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/235003858273/> (accessed February

contemporary initiatives, such as the Memorial Society's annual roundtables on samizdat⁴⁰ and the interviews with samizdat activists published on the website of the *Project for the Study of Samizdat and Dissidence*.⁴¹ A number of people have published memoirs relating specifically to samizdat.⁴² Yet once again, these are individual accounts that tell us little about the general characteristics of the networks within which samizdat flourished, and often nothing about readers other than the author themselves.

The 1960s-1970s, when the phenomenon was at its height, can still be considered recent history. Many middle-aged and elderly Russians alive today have had some exposure to samizdat. While most members of the founding generation, which included names such as Lev Kopelev (1912-1997), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), Andrei Siniavskii (1925-1997) and Larisa Bogoraz (1929-2004), have now passed away, the historical proximity still offers unique opportunities for research. We can still gather empirical, first-hand data and thus try to improve an imbalance that affects available first-hand accounts and research alike: whenever we read about samizdat, the same dozen or so names, including those given above, feature again and again. These figures, many of them active dissidents, have become the accepted 'leaders' and spokespeople of the subculture that was samizdat; researchers keep turning to them even today.⁴³ But as a reading culture, samizdat was a mass movement. And the 'ordinary' members of this movement—those who primarily read and passed on texts and stayed away from more visible activity—have more often than not ceded the right to remembrance to the 'leaders' who have become the accepted historiographers of the movement.⁴⁴

25, 2020).

40 In collaboration with the Russian State History Library (GPIB), proceedings published in *Acta Samizdatica*. The roundtable on the "Cultural Life of Unofficial Moscow in the 1960s-1980s" contains detailed accounts of samizdat experience by a number of invited guests. *Acta Samizdatica Vypusk tretii* (2016), 195-220.

41 Seven interviews, accessible on <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/interviews> (accessed February 25, 2020).

42 For example: A. Rogachevskii, "Novosibirskii samizdat glazami podrostka: (Konets 1970-kh - seredina 1980-kh)," *Solnechnoe spletenie*, 2001, 16/17, 208-12. Aleksei Smirnov, <http://gendirectori.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html> (accessed February 25, 2020). Viacheslav Igrunov not only details his own extensive experience of samizdat on his website, but also provides a platform for accounts by others: <http://igrunov.ru/vin/vchk-vin-dissid/smysl/1058065392/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

43 For example journalist Gleb Morev in his abovementioned volume of interviews, *Dissidenty*, which includes prominent names such as Sergei Grigoriants, Vera Lashkova, Pavel Litvinov, Sergei Khodorovich, Viacheslav Igrunov and Aleksandr Daniel.

44 One such historiographer is Aleksandr Daniel. A founding member of the Memorial Society, where he set up the programme *The History of Dissent in the USSR*, he is the son of Iulii Daniel, whose arrest in 1965 and camp sentence in 1966 for publishing literature abroad was one of the decisive moments in the history of the dissident movement, and the prominent dissident Larisa Bogoraz. Born in 1951, he is old enough to have participated in samizdat himself. His many published articles are a popular source for scholars, including myself. He is regularly interviewed

If we want to study how samizdat functioned as a reading culture we must research the ‘mass’ reader. But how are we to gather data from a group that is so large, so heterogeneous and so geographically dispersed? These are not the only factors that render the traditional methods of oral history, in particular the in-depth narrative interview, unsuitable for this kind of research. More importantly, we do not know our research subject—the ‘ordinary samizdat reader’—by name. Thus, rather than actively approach a limited number of previously known respondents, our aim must be to persuade as many samizdat readers as possible to approach us and share their experience. This is only possible with the help of the internet and social media. The internet reaches all generations and compensates for the geographical dispersion of people from the former Soviet Union, including the emigration of large numbers of intellectuals to Western Europe, Israel or the USA. There are a large number of active social media accounts belonging to people who witnessed the era of samizdat as young adults or adults.

In this place I need to address the often-invoked parallel between samizdat and the internet, if only to rule it out as irrelevant to the present project. It has become popular to compare samizdat to the World Wide Web, particularly to social media.⁴⁵ Eugene Gorny, the director of the Russian Virtual Library (www.rvb.ru) describes samizdat as one of the main metaphors used to describe the Russian section of the internet.⁴⁶ Sharon Balazs has drawn up a useful table for comparing historic samizdat and the internet.⁴⁷ Such a comparison usually hinges on the fact that both phenomena allow for the spontaneous generation of texts at grassroots level, without the interference of either editors or censors.⁴⁸ And indeed, both samizdat and social media are network-based and rely on users not also generating but, crucially, sharing content and manipulating existing texts. Yet there are serious limits to this comparison, and, as Henrike Schmidt has noted, it is only valid only if we think of ‘samizdat’ as a metaphor for describing a space where debate is relatively spontaneous, easily accessible and largely free of commercial interests. Beyond this basic parallel, many factors reveal social media and samizdat to

on human rights in the USSR (a list of interviews given to Ekho Moskvy radio station: <https://echo.msk.ru/guests/8880/> (accessed February 25, 2020) and has recently given a lecture series on “The Human Being against the USSR” for the online academy *Arzamas*, including a lecture on the dangers of literary samizdat and another on the *Chronicle of Current Events*: <https://arzamas.academy/courses/40> (accessed February 25, 2020).

45 In her volume *Russische Literatur im Internet: Zwischen digitaler Folklore und politischer Propaganda* (Bielefeld, 2011), Henrike Schmidt includes a three-essay section on “Internetliteratur und die Tradition des Samizdat: Historischer Kontext.” One of them was significantly developed some time later: H. Schmidt, “Postprintium? Digital Literary Samizdat on the Russian Internet,” in Kind-Kovacs, Labov (eds.), *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond*, 221-244.

46 E. Gorny, *A Creative History of the Russian Internet* (Saarbrücken, 2009), 189.

47 Quoted in Schmidt, “Postprintium?,” 222.

48 The journal *Osteuropa* devoted its issue No. 11 (November 2010) to the topic of “Blick zurück nach vorn: Samizdat, Internet und die Freiheit des Wortes,” comparing samizdat and the internet as spaces in which the free word can flourish.

be different in nature. It is not my objective here to discuss these factors individually. Important for my purpose is the fact that samizdat conceals any direct links between text and readers, while the internet, and social media in particular, render these links transparent. Online, the processes of reading and distribution become visible in the literal sense of the word. This is precisely the process hidden from the researcher of samizdat.

Thus Gennadii Kuzovkin, a historian and archivist and the director of the programme “The History of Dissent in the USSR”⁴⁹ at the Memorial Society in Moscow, and I designed an online questionnaire aimed at inhabitants of the former USSR with experience of reading Samizdat. We were fortunate in that we could draw on the generous support of a group of Russian sociologists.⁵⁰ The questionnaire, hosted by the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages at the University of Cambridge, went live on 14 March 2017 and was promoted via social media and selected Russian online media.⁵¹ In 2018, it found a permanent home as part of the ongoing *Project for the Study of Samizdat and Dissidence* at the University of Toronto.⁵² 122 replies were gathered between 14 March 2017 and 26 June 2018, the majority before December 2017. To our knowledge, this survey constitutes the first attempt to collect empirical data about (and from) the ‘ordinary’ reader of samizdat.

The questionnaire has two main purposes. The first of them is the preservation of as many individual accounts of reading samizdat as possible. Secondly, we aim to create a broader knowledge base by explicitly inviting the testimony of those who were not in any way ‘spokespeople’ of the subculture. Of course we do not discourage well-known samizdat activists from participating in the survey, and indeed some of them replied. But the threshold for participation is very low, and the survey explicitly permits anonymous submissions. In this chapter all respondents are referred to by a unique number. Where names have been given they are known to the researchers.

However, before the discussion of the survey results, there are some theoretical issues to consider.

1.4. *Samizdat as literary process: theoretical issues*

For technical reasons, I will refer to samizdat as a literary process here, without distinguishing between literary and political samizdat or, within literary

49 <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/history-of-repressions-and-protest/protest/dissidents/programma-istoriya-inakomysliya-v-sssr-1954-1987-gg/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

50 We are grateful for the expert advice of Andrei Alekseev, Leonid Blekher, Liubov’ Burusiak, Natalia Vasil’eva, Dmitrii Ermoltsev, Natalia Kigai and Margarita Samokhina.

51 <http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/samizdat>. (accessed February 25, 2020).

52 <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/content/samizdat-survey#> (accessed February 25, 2020).

samizdat, between new literature and pre-existing texts that were circulated. This is solely for the purpose of illustrating the mechanism of text production, multiplication and distribution. A literary process requires writers, ‘middlemen,’ and readers. Moreover, for a text to remain accessible to new readers—in print or circulation—it depends on the endorsement by earlier readers. In this respect samizdat was no exception. However, the externalities of textual production, distribution and, ultimately, reading itself, differ significantly from the ones we study when researching ‘traditional’ printed texts or even manuscripts. Looking at these differences will afford us a shortcut to the understanding of why it is so crucial to research the reader.

We might want to begin by assessing the position of samizdat within Soviet textual culture and in particular its relation to print culture.⁵³ Samizdat existed precisely because the state had monopolised printing. Yet it was not completely different from print. Rather, it was a hybrid genre⁵⁴ in technical, organisational and even material terms, already because it was situated within a highly developed print culture, partly overlapping with it and partly replacing it. As the name ‘samizdat’ (versus ‘gosizdat’) already intimates, samizdat was an alternative rather than separate phenomenon altogether.

In technical terms, samizdat was a hybrid because it was, for the most part, produced with the help of a typewriter. A typewriter is itself a hybrid, fit for private use but producing a limited number of absolutely identical copies in a standardised font. Moreover, samizdat was a hybrid in organisational terms because parts of it were clearly modelled on the official literary process, minus the censorship. This is particularly apparent when we consider the literary journals of the 1970s with their editorial procedures, subscription schemes and publication schedules.⁵⁵ Samizdat was a hybrid in material terms because a significant proportion of the literature that circulated in samizdat existed in print and was merely reproduced and disseminated in samizdat because no new print editions were available. This concerned above all pre-revolutionary literature and contemporary texts produced in small print runs such as the writings of the Strugatskii brothers. Finally, we should not forget that many samizdat writers had been published in official print. It is sufficient to remember the sensational publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day*

53 See Ann Komaromi’s discussion of samizdat as “Extra-Gutenberg phenomenon”; also G. Hirt, S. Wonders (pseudonym of G. Witte, S. Hänsgen), *Präprintium: Moskauer Bücher aus dem Samizdat* (Bremen, 1998), which probably inspired the term Henrike Schmidt uses for the internet, “Postprintium.” Also, B. Belenkin, “‘Rukopisnoe’ ili ‘pechatnoe’? ‘Pечатnoe’ kak ‘rukopisnoe’? Malotirazhnye izdaniia v kontekste sovremennogo kul’turnogo protsessa,” *Acta Samizdatica, Pilotnyi vypusk* (2012), 14–23.

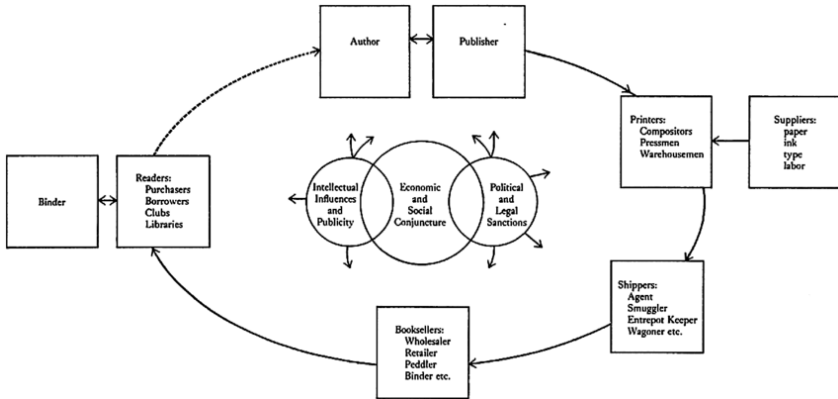
54 Simon Franklin uses the term ‘hybrid’ in order to describe a writing culture situated between manuscript and print in “Mapping the Graphosphere: Cultures of Writing in Early 19th Century Russia and Before,” *Kritika*, 12, 3 (2011), 531–560.

55 I discuss samizdat journals in greater details in Zitzewitz, “Leningrad Samizdat Journals as Early Social Networks.”

in the *Life of Ivan Denisovich*,⁵⁶ the officially published poetry collections of Varlam Shalamov, the author of the *Kolyma Tales* that circulated only in samizdat,⁵⁷ or the fact that most of the poets who defined Leningrad unofficial culture in the 1970s, had published officially at some point.⁵⁸

A further complicating factor was tamizdat, the publication abroad of texts that had no chance of publication in the Soviet Union. Tamizdat was often realised through émigré publishing houses or specialised Russian language publishers.⁵⁹ Prominent examples include Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (*Doktor Zhivago*) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Copies inevitably made their way back into the USSR where they would be typed up or reproduced by other means, turning 'back' into samizdat. From the mid-1970s tamizdat gradually became the most important medium for accessing literature that was not officially sanctioned.⁶⁰ Samizdat and print culture were thus very tightly entwined, depended on each other, and comparing them is appropriate for this discussion.

A tool that illustrates and will help us understand the magnitude of the technical differences between them is the 'communications circuit' diagram devised by Robert Darnton.⁶¹



⁵⁶ *Novyi mir*, November 1962.

⁵⁷ Five collections of poetry were published during his lifetime, in 1961, 1964, 1967, 1972 and 1977.

⁵⁸ For a study of how the authorities curated young writers in the 1960s see E. Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953–1975: The Thaw Generation* (Berne, 2010).

⁵⁹ E.g. Ann Arbor, Grani, Posev, YMCA Press, Beseda.

⁶⁰ The process of tamizdat gradually replacing samizdat during the 1970s is described by A. Daniel in "Istoki i smysl sovetskogo samizdata." An eloquent confirmation is the interview Lev Kopelev gave to researchers from Bremen University in the 1980s. Archive of the Research Centre of East European Studies, University of Bremen, Fond 1-86.

⁶¹ R. Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" in *Daedalus* III, 3 (1982), 65-83 (the diagram is on p. 68). For an alternative, simplified model that emphasises the role of external influences (intellectual, political, social and commercial see: T. R. Adams, N. Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society* (London, 1993), 5-44.

The diagram goes to illustrate just how many intermediaries and influencing factors are habitually involved in a literary process. In this respect, neither Soviet official culture nor samizdat were exceptional. Yet in both processes the roles of intermediaries and external factors were distorted beyond recognition.

Let us briefly look at official culture first, because samizdat emerged from this culture and reacted against it. The framework of Soviet official culture distorted in particular the three circles in the middle of the diagram. The fact that all texts had to be assessed by Glavlit, the censor's office, to ensure their conformity with the ideological and aesthetic guidelines set by the communist party, as well as the central role of the Writers' Union, show that political sanctions played a disproportionately large role. They did not merely dwarf intellectual considerations, but were superimposed on them. By contrast, market pressures as they are known in the West were subdued. While Soviet publishing houses were in theory supposed to support themselves financially, the concern to meet ideological and/or educational requirements usually overrode concerns for profit; readers were seen as receivers of culture rather than consumers of books.⁶²

One could say that samizdat reacted to this imbalance by abolishing political (and legal) considerations altogether. The texts circulating in samizdat included anything proscribed by official culture, from erotica such as the *Kamasutra* to poetry judged aesthetically deficient, religious texts and material explicitly criticising Soviet policy. Indeed, one of the definitions of samizdat literature is "*nepodtsenzurnaia literatura*," uncensored literature, literally, "literature not under censorship"; this is confirmed by our respondents who used the term 15 times to define samizdat.⁶³

Market pressures were virtually absent. Commercial samizdat was rare, although it became more common as time went on,⁶⁴ and indeed 25 of our respondents remember buying or selling samizdat, while 48 respondents report knowing about samizdat being sold or produced for sale. A symptom of slowly increasing commercialisation—in itself a sign of an increasingly professional literary process—was the fact that typists started working for money; some people hired professional typists rather than typing themselves.⁶⁵ At the same time, intellectual/aesthetic considerations were

62 The mechanisms of Soviet book publishing after Stalin are discussed by Stephen Lovell in *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (Basingstoke, 2000), ch. 3, in particular p. 55 ff.

63 A term used in reference works, too, e.g. B. Ivanov, B. Roginskii (eds.), *Istoriia leninogradskoi nepodtsenzurnoi literatury* (St. Petersburg, 2000).

64 Described by Liudmila Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 285.

65 Ibid. I myself have interviewed several typists who worked for money, usually women. Findings and analysis will be published in J. von Zitzewitz, *The Culture of Samizdat: Literature and Underground Networks in the Late Soviet Union* (London, forthcoming in 2020). A well-known example is Viktoria Apter, the typist of the Leningrad periodical *Chasy* (source: Interview with Boris Ostanin, August 2015). Our survey respondents were no strangers to commercial

everything: if the reader did not like the text, they would not pass it on or reproduce it (this process is discussed in greater detail in section 2.8 below). The absence of institutions such as libraries and bookshops, where a potential reader can familiarise themselves with a given text, means that in order to gain even one additional reader, a Samizdat text had to find favour with its initial reader enough for the latter to pass the text on to a friend and/or to copy it out.

The factors described above already indicate the importance of the reader and their taste above everything else. However, samizdat's greatest distortion of the communications circuit becomes apparent when we consider the outer circle of the diagram and the roles described in each individual square. Whether it was the decision to publish, printing, shipping/distributing, selling, binding and stocking, and preserving for posterity—all these functions were carried out by the reader. Incidentally, this reader might also be the author of a text, in which case they would be responsible for the entire circle; cf. veteran dissident Vladimir Bukovskii's statement "I write it myself, I edit it myself, I censor it myself, I publish it myself, I circulate it myself and I myself serve the prison sentence for it."⁶⁶ The typewriter as a method of production and the absence of an editorial process (unless we are talking about journals) means that the threshold for becoming a 'published' author was low, and indeed 22 of our respondents report being samizdat authors.

The readers were responsible for circulating a very limited number of physical copies to the largest possible circle of readers. Many of them produced further physical copies, either solely for their own use or for passing on to others; the typewriter made it possible to do both things at once.⁶⁷ The reader thus acted as both publisher and printer. Such secondary copies were produced in great haste, as readers often kept texts for a day or a night only and during this short time typed up all or part of it. This approach naturally had a great impact on the state of the text as a physical object.

samizdat: "The typing and dissemination were done by a male friend. He lived on the money he got for disseminating texts and would type everything that readers might find interesting [...] He would type and sell uncensored literary and political texts; I sometimes helped with dissemination, selling texts to people I knew [...] That was in the early 1980s." (#25, *1963, Questions 21.1: ("What was for you the most valuable element in the samizdat texts you knew? Please tell us why?") and 15 ("If you feel that your interest in samizdat arose as the consequence of certain events in your life, could you name these events?"). "I set the price myself, corresponding to the fee of a typist based on the going rate per page depending on the difficulty of the text (many footnotes and words in foreign languages that needed to be inserted cost more etc)" (#26, *1969). These occurrences belong to the late years of samizdat.

⁶⁶ Cited in "Putevoditel' po vystavke 'Ot tsenzury i samizdata k svobode pečati. 1917-1990,'" *Acta samizdatica. Vypusk tretii* (2016), 224.

⁶⁷ Aleksandr Daniel maintains that this "secondary multiplication" at one remove from the author's own circle, was instrumental for the process of samizdat, see "Istoki i smysl sovet-skogo samizdata," 17.

Different copies of one and the same text often display an astonishing degree of variation beyond obvious typos or accidental omissions. It is clear that the way in which texts were reproduced—informally, by hand, by the readers themselves—changed the attitude towards the text as an inviolable whole. Readers took liberties with texts, making decisions that normally are the prerogative of authors or editors.⁶⁸ Sometimes, people would copy out only part of a text or collection of poetry, to save time or for aesthetic reasons, and then circulate it, leading to a new version becoming established. #120 (*1949) reports cherishing a handwritten copy of Akhmatova's *Requiem*, a text which circulated in samizdat for a long time and was also passed on orally, and then discovering it didn't correspond to the version that finally made it into print: "Akhmatova's *Requiem*—I typed it myself and I still remember manuscript versions that didn't always correspond to the final published text."⁶⁹ In other cases, samizdat authors, translators or typists purposefully reproduced only part of a text. Natalia Trauberg, who translated, among other things, religious and philosophical texts from the English for samizdat circulation (Chesterton, C.S. Lewis) details how she would leave out large chunks of text she deemed inaccessible to her potential readers because they lacked the theological knowledge necessary to appreciate the text.⁷⁰ Respondent #6 (*1977) reports that samizdat texts were indeed rarely complete:

Samizdat is a printed text created by an underground press rather than an official one. As a rule, texts that were banned on the territory of the Soviet Union were published in this way. The texts were printed with the help of a typewriter on poor-quality paper. Books weren't always complete, it happened that you would get part of a book and needed to wait for the next bit.⁷¹

Samizdat periodicals were no exception. These periodicals were closely modelled on print culture; many editors worked hard to achieve a professional 'product'.⁷² However, unlike printed texts, typescripts could and regularly were corrected by hand, for example when words in Latin script had to be added. This practice blurs the distinction between manuscript and typescript

68 This phenomenon is discussed by D. Sukhovei, "Krugi komp'iuternogo raia," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 62 (2003).

69 Question 23/ 23.1: "Did you keep any samizdat at home?"; "If yes, can you remember the name of any texts you kept at home and/or the approximate number of texts?"

70 See "Vsegda li pobezhdaet pobezhdennyi?" in N. Trauberg, *Sama zhizn'* (St. Petersburg, 2008), 411-412.

71 Question 7.1.: "Do you have a definition what samizdat is? Please explain your definition?"

72 For a statement to this effect by Boris Ivanov, founding editor of *Chasy*, see: B. Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81* (St. Petersburg, 2015), 32, 36. The individual copies of the Leningrad journal *Transponans* were veritable artworks, examples can be see here: <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/samizdat%3Atransponans> (accessed February 25, 2020).

and indicates the distance between typescript and professional print. At the same time, it marks each copy of a given journal as an individual document. A practical example: the first issue of the Leningrad periodical 37 (1976-1981) features an article on Max Scheler and naturalism, written by editor Tatiana Goricheva. In the copy held in the archive at Bremen University,⁷³ this article carries multiple references. However, the text of the footnotes is missing. It is not usually possible to type footnotes on a typewriter; these would need to be inserted by hand. Asked whether she could explain the absence of the notes, Tatiana Goricheva stated that this must be a copy she did not see, otherwise she would have supplied the notes herself.⁷⁴ Here is another example where readers did not take care to reproduce a journal copy in its entirety: the copy of *Chasy (The Clock)* No 12 that is held in the archive of the Research and Information Centre Memorial in St. Petersburg⁷⁵ features a report about a session of the Religious-Philosophical Seminar.⁷⁶ In the copy in the archive of the Centre of East European Studies in Bremen this report is not only absent, but not even mentioned in the table of contents.

Naturally, samizdat knew no copyright; indeed copyright would have been counterproductive to the movement's mission. Not only does this remove all control from the author the moment the text is submitted for publication, it also means that it is very difficult to establish the authoritative version of a given text. As a consequence, and in addition to the reasons cited above, specific physical copies of a given journal and their digital reproduction should be treated like archival relics rather than copies of an authoritative text; digital reproductions should indicate which archive or collection holds the particular copy that is being reproduced.⁷⁷ The handmade, improvised and almost deliberately shabby appearance of samizdat texts has become their trademark sign and is now being studied extensively.⁷⁸

At the same time there can be no doubt that the fluidity of samizdat texts was an accidental consequence of their material reality rather than the result of any deliberate action. Authors and editors strove actively towards more durable, i.e. printed formats. Samizdat via émigré publishing houses is one such example. For this reason, people with contacts to the West played an

⁷³ Fond No 75 (Boris Groys Collection).

⁷⁴ Interview with Tatiana Goricheva, 2 July 2015.

⁷⁵ Samizdat archive, no further classification.

⁷⁶ The Religious-Philosophical Seminar was one of many unofficial study groups in 1970s Leningrad. It was initiated in 1974 by Tatiana Goricheva and Sergei Stratanovskii and convened regularly at a number of venues until 1980. For basic information see D. Severiukhin, V. Dolinin, B. Ivanov, B. Ostanin (eds.), *Samizdat Leningrada 1950e-1980e. Literaturnaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 2003), 445-447. For a detailed survey and interpretation see J. von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar 1976-1980: Music for a Deaf Age* (Oxford, 2016), ch. 1.

⁷⁷ This is done in exemplary fashion by the *Project for the Study of Samizdat and Dissidence* at the University of Toronto.

⁷⁸ For example by A. Komaromi, "The Material Existence of Samizdat," *Slavic Review*, 63, 3 (2004), 597-618.

importantly role. They ensured copies were smuggled abroad for publication in émigré journals and publishing houses, and for safekeeping in archives; this version would often become authoritative.⁷⁹ On the receiving side, the ‘third wave’ of emigration in the 1970s-1980s supported this process: Andrei Siniavskii, who emigrated to Paris in 1973, founded the almanac *Sintaksis* (*Syntax*, 1978-2001). Vladimir Maramzin, arrested in 1974 for compiling a five-volume samizdat edition of Brodskii’s poems, also emigrated to Paris, where he co-edited the literary journal *Ekho* (*Echo*, 1978-1986); *Ekho* is still a Russian-language publishing house today. Tatiana Goricheva, one of the ‘hubs’ of Leningrad samizdat in the 1970s and editor of three journals, *37*, *Zhenshchina i Rossiia* (*Woman and Russia*) and *Maria*, emigrated in 1980 and founded the publishing house Beseda in Paris. Beseda published both a literary journal, *Beseda* (*Conversation*, 1983-1993), and monographs. Many poets of the Leningrad cultural underground published their first significant collections with *Beseda*.⁸⁰ Tamizdat copies were often re-converted into samizdat by means of photography and later, copying machines (see section 2. 6) below). Journal editors, too, began to use copying machines as soon as it became possible. The editors of both *Chasy* and *Mitin zhurnal* (*Mitya’s Journal*) remember this practice;⁸¹ *Mitin zhurnal* was later produced on a printing press and is now an online publication and part of Dmitrii Volchek’s *Kolonna Publications*.⁸² The turn to copy and print formats was likely motivated by the desire to make the process less labour-intensive and ensure wider circulation. A side-effect was the emergence of authoritative versions of texts and the loss of the individual samizdat manuscript as a unique artefact.

The processes described and examples given above demonstrate clearly the degree to which Samizdat depended on the reader’s approval for its very existence in the most direct, physical sense. On the other hand, readers can fulfil these tasks only to a limited degree, and the result, including the material available to the researcher, looks very different from the picture we know from mainstream literary culture.

2. ‘A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT SAMIZDAT’: THE READER SURVEY

2.1. *Who are our respondents?*

The point in time at which we started our research means that we surveyed the second and third generations of samizdat—the typical ‘mass readers’

79 On readers as publishers who ensured that copies ended up in Western archives see Komaromi, “Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics,” 74-75.

80 E.g. V. Krivulin, *Stikhi*, 2 vols. (Paris, Leningrad, 1988); E. Shvarts, *Stikhi* (Leningrad, Paris, Munich, 1987), O. Okhapkin, *Stikhi* (Leningrad, Paris, 1989).

81 Interviews with Boris Ostanin and Dmitrii Volchek, 2015.

82 <http://kolonna.mitin.com/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

rather than the pioneers and most important authors. Our oldest respondent was born in 1931, and the vast majority of those we surveyed were born in the 1950s and 1960s. 28 respondents either did not give their name or asked us not to publish any personal information.

By the time those born in the 1970s (the youngest participant was born in 1977) had grown into conscious readers, the political processes around Perestroika meant that samizdat—and official culture were on the way to merging. This process was begun when Gorbachev announced the policy of glasnost’ in 1986, which led to a gradual relaxation of censorship, and culminated in the adoption of the Law on Print in 1990, which abolished censorship altogether.⁸³

Here are a few basic statistics:

Decade of birth	Number of respondents
1930s	5
1940s	15
1950s	49
1960s	36
1970s	12
No DOB given	5
TOTAL	122

Sex	Number of respondents
Male	63
Female	42
Not specified/anonymous	17
TOTAL	122

City of birth	Number of respondents
Moscow	58
Leningrad/St. Petersburg	24
Other Russian city or town	27
In USSR but not Russia	7
Not specified/anonymous	6
TOTAL	122

Education	Number of respondents
High school	5
Technical college	8

⁸³ For a timeline see “Putevoditel’ po vystavke...,” 221-239.

University degree	64
Postgraduate/PhD	41
Other/not specified	4
TOTAL	122

Neither the prevalence of Moscow—which is the place where most people lived when reading samizdat—nor the fact most respondents were university educated should surprise. Samizdat thrived in university circles, perhaps not surprising given that universities are an ideal environment for socialising with like-minded peers. Soviet university students typically lived in halls of residence (*obshchezhitie*) and shared their rooms. Here are a few typical stories how the university environment fostered people’s acquaintance with samizdat.

#9 (*1965): During my studies at the Faculty of Philology I came across samizdat all the time. We would swap books, giving them to each other overnight to read and then pass on to the next person. Several of these books are still in my private library.⁸⁴

#45 (*1947) I was a student at the Faculty of Philology of Moscow State University. I started there in 1966; that means that the first time somebody gave me samizdat to read overnight happened no later than 1968. It was [Pasternak’s] *Doctor Zhivago*.⁸⁵

#13 (*1967) Somebody gave me a samizdat book at the Faculty of Philology of Moscow State University where I was a student. A book of poems by Nikolai Gumilev. Later I was given unpublished poems by Mandel’shtam. I also remember receiving some Galich, I think.⁸⁶

2.2. Getting to know the reader

Since the focus of our questionnaire is on the collection of the maximum of information there are no dedicated research questions we hope to answer with the help of the material gathered. The questionnaire consists of 63 questions, the majority of which require the respondent to check a box or choose from a list of possible answers. Such questions might ask in which decade

⁸⁴ Question 6.1.: “What did you do after reading your first samizdat text? Please provide details.”

⁸⁵ Question 2: “When did you first hear the term ‘samizdat’? When did this happen, and how?”

⁸⁶ Question 2.

the respondent first came across the word ‘samizdat,’ whether they ever read tamizdat (98 respondents out of 122) or listened to samizdat broadcast via foreign radio stations (67 respondents). Such questions, which elicit comparable statistical data, are always followed by open-ended questions which encourage the respondents to share what they remember about texts and people. To give an example, the question about reading tamizdat (No 32) is followed by questions asking about dates and titles and then by an invitation to tell freely: “How did you manage to receive tamizdat?” (No 32.4). This set-up means that the data we received is very uneven, because our respondents provided vastly different amounts of information. We deliberately refrained from making any of the questions compulsory. As a result, some people only answered the tick-the-box and multiple-choice questions, ignoring the invitation to reminisce. Others left out individual questions or blocks of questions. Yet others wrote way above average amounts of free text.

The statistical data gathered from such a small sample can only ever give an indication. The limited use of a small self-selecting sample in strictly statistical terms makes it all the more clear that every statistic consists of a tapestry of personal stories that cannot easily be translated into numbers. Each of these stories is unique, and they are what we risk losing—stories of how a significant minority circumvented a literature-centric society’s prescriptive print culture with the help of informal networks and hand-made artefacts. Yet even this small sample confirms several widely believed hypotheses about samizdat reading that are founded on the personal testimony of the ‘opinion makers’ of the samizdat movement. Here is a brief taster of the stories we gathered.

One respondent gave us a rough sequence of the phenomenon, without attaching a timeline, from the origin in poetry lists to the time when entire volumes of prose or history were available, often through tamizdat:

As far as I remember, first there was poetry by Gumilev and Akhmatova (*Requiem*) and fairly neutral texts from the Writers’ Union. After that came anti-Stalin texts, Solzhenitsyn’s Nobel Prize lecture and only afterwards entire books already, Avtorkhanov et al. (#120,*1949)⁸⁷

This respondent describes how the decision on what to read was determined by the availability of texts:

At home we only had literary texts, in homemade publications. (#83,*1968)⁸⁸

87 Questions 20.1.: “Which textual genre was predominant in your samizdat reading? Please explain your choice or choices—why did you read those texts?” and 21.1.: “What was for you the most valuable element in the samizdat texts you knew? Please tell us why.”

88 Question 20.1

The Russian adjective used here to denote ‘homemade’—*samopal’nyi*—means both homemade and counterfeit, highlighting that this was a special form of literature, produced not ‘how it is supposed to be made’.

What it meant to have samizdat at home:

It was a book my mum was reading. We weren’t allowed to tell anybody about it. And during the week that the book was at ours we weren’t allowed to bring any friends home. (#6, *1977)⁸⁹

Particularly intriguing first encounters:

I think that was a typewritten copy of Erofeev’s *Moscow Circles*. In 1972, if I remember correctly. My mum and I immediately typed up a copy. And I remember that a bit later a really funny thing happened with this book. An acquaintance of the time, [name supplied], who’d borrowed the book from me, spent several hours on the phone at night dictating it to his then girlfriend. She was a professional typist and typed it up, taking dictation. (#23, *1955)⁹⁰

Evtushenko’s poem *To the Memory of Esenin* [*Pamiati Esenina*] and Vysotskii’s “The Gunlayer” [“Navodchitsa”]. But that’s something I found out only afterwards; I can’t remember whether authors and title were written on the texts. I found them in my aunt’s cupboard (I don’t remember whether by accident or whether I had been looking for them), on yellowish paper, either typescript or some other reproduction technique, faded letters. (#98, *1951)⁹¹

The sheer ubiquity of it:

It was in the air. (#113 m, *1960)⁹²

How samizdat was vindicated by history when censorship was abolished:

When the formerly forbidden texts started to be published in large numbers during Perestroika (and later) it turned out that I

89 Question 4: “What was the first samizdat text that you saw or read?”

90 Question 4.

91 Question 4.

92 Question 20.1: “Which textual genre was predominant in your samizdat reading? Please explain your choice or choices—why did you read those texts?”

was already familiar with the vast majority of them via samizdat and tamizdat. (#98, *1951)⁹³

Our respondents cite a range of reasons for reading samizdat. In its basic form samizdat was a source of better literature. This is a selection of replies to Questions 20.I. (“Which textual genre was predominant in your samizdat reading? Please explain your choice or choices—why did you read those texts?”) and 21.I. (“What was for you the most valuable element in the samizdat texts you knew? Please tell us why?”):

The utter poverty of “Soviet” theology, the limited access to literature. (#64, *1956)

I’m indifferent towards religion. Everything else was excellent ammunition for the battle against sensory deprivation (boredom). (#20, *1966)

New authors and styles were especially interesting, because I was all focused on literature: Brodskii, Prigov, Rubinshtein, Ak-senov. (#25, *1963)

In those years I loved poetry... I was enchanted by the poetry of Iosif Brodskii. (#74, *1957)

In its entirety, samizdat stilled a hunger for reading material that had arisen as a result of the Soviet regime’s isolationist policies and strict censorship. For many, it became an important source of information that could not be accessed in any other way:

Any literature that contained trustworthy historical information helped to put together the puzzle, to explain the historical process. (#63, *1950)

Without samizdat it was impossible to discover the history of the Soviet era. (#11, *1952)

Facts and pseudo-facts that were absent from official literature. (#20, *1966)

New and previously carefully concealed information came from outside. (#53, *1954)

⁹³ Question 19: “Would you say that at some point in your life you became a regular samizdat reader?”

Some seem to have listed the functions of samizdat according to perceived importance:

Samizdat provided me with information about what was going on in the country, immersed me into social and philosophical topics and acquainted me with amazing works of literature. (#72, *1940)

Samizdat acquainted me with questions concerning the repressions under Stalin, the Thaw, the fate of the dissidents and the fate of writers in the 1920s and 1930s. (#29, *x)

Some readers of samizdat had political motivations:

As I was busy searching for a way to transform the Soviet system, for me the most important samizdat materials were historical and sociological texts, alongside academic literature. (#21, *1941)

The orientation towards socio-political activity with the aim in the future to transform Soviet society, introducing a greater degree of democracy and social justice [was what motivated me]. (#57, *1953)

Others explicitly resisted such ideas

The information and social journalism [in samizdat] seemed to be a bit biased. I wanted truth rather than howls and hysterics. The literary texts were gentler and more varied. (#48, *1959)

I think that as a Soviet reader I disliked critical anti-Soviet texts if they belonged to the genre of journalism without outstanding artistic and philosophical merit. (#52, *1960)

The last response shows that some evidently saw no difference between identifying themselves as 'Soviet people' and reading samizdat.

2.3. *What makes a regular reader?*

Everyone who took part in the survey has some experience of reading samizdat, and they regard this experience as important enough to warrant spending upwards of one hour on filling in a questionnaire. It is therefore even

more interesting to check how many respondents considered themselves regular samizdat readers. (Question 19: “Would you say that at some point in your life you became a regular samizdat reader?”). Several of the older respondents name the year 1968, namely the ‘era of [protest] letters and Czechoslovakia [the violent suppression by Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces of the Prague Spring]’ (#81, *1935), as the moment that turned them into regular samizdat readers. #21 (*1948) specifies that he ‘began to regularly receive samizdat in October 1968’.

#63 (*1950) attributes his regular reading, beginning in 1972, to his friendship with a particular individual. #105 (*1949) identifies personal contacts as crucial for a samizdat reader. Once a text is produced, samizdat is a chain with no particular beginning, as the reader who passes on samizdat to their friends in turn becomes their ‘source’.

By contrast, #67 (*1947) questions the validity of the question itself—the haphazard channels through which samizdat was produced and passed to the reader means that “the word ‘regularity’ is inappropriate in this context”.

Most interestingly, #105 (*1949) elaborates that one of the impediments for the average samizdat reader was the inability to have a designated space to keep the texts:

People with links to dissidence lived with the threat that their home might be searched at any moment. I believe that there were distinctive “repositories” and libraries even then. But only people in whom the KGB was not interested had them.

#105’s point about the existence of libraries is indeed correct. We shall return to this question in section 2. 9 below.

30 out of our 122 respondents identify themselves as only occasional readers. In 15 of these cases, this can be attributed to age: born in the second half of the 1960s or the 1970s (in two cases, as late as 1977); they simply would not have been old enough before the Soviet Union first relaxed and then abolished censorship, so their samizdat experience is limited to seeing samizdat texts, perhaps in the way one sees artworks, rather than using samizdat as a regular means of reading interesting new texts:

August 1984. It was Bulgakov’s novel *The Master and Margarita*, and next to it there were some pages with satirical poems on Gorbachev and his wife. I saw the book and the pages on the dresser in my parents’ room. (#6, *1977)

1988. *Tale of the Troika* by the Strugatskii brothers. Somebody brought and showed the text, which was printed on the reverse

side of various papers from a Scientific Research Institute. (#68, *1977)⁹⁴

The answer of #68 stresses the different material quality of samizdat. Both *The Master and Margarita* (*Master i Margarita*) and *Tale of the Troika* (*Skazka o Troike*) were in fact published in the USSR,⁹⁵ although *The Master and Margarita* was officially available only in censored editions until 1973.

2.4. Samizdat as a literary phenomenon; reading patterns, common authors

While it owns its reputation as a counter-culture largely to the texts produced by the dissidents, which include certain ‘sensational’ literary or semi-literary works, such as the novels of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his monumental ‘experiment in literary investigation,’ *The Gulag Archipelago*, literary texts not only preceded political, religious, philosophical and other materials, but also continued to dominate samizdat. The overwhelming majority of our respondents became acquainted with samizdat via texts that can be classified as literary; literature also continued to be the most commonly read samizdat throughout their reading ‘career’. Even for those born in the 1970s this was a common way of coming into contact with samizdat:

If we assume that samizdat is something copied out on a typewriter or by hand rather than a photocopy, then my first texts were my mum’s ‘lists’ of Esenin’s poetry. And my uncle’s computer copies of Vysotskii’s poems. (#22, *1976)

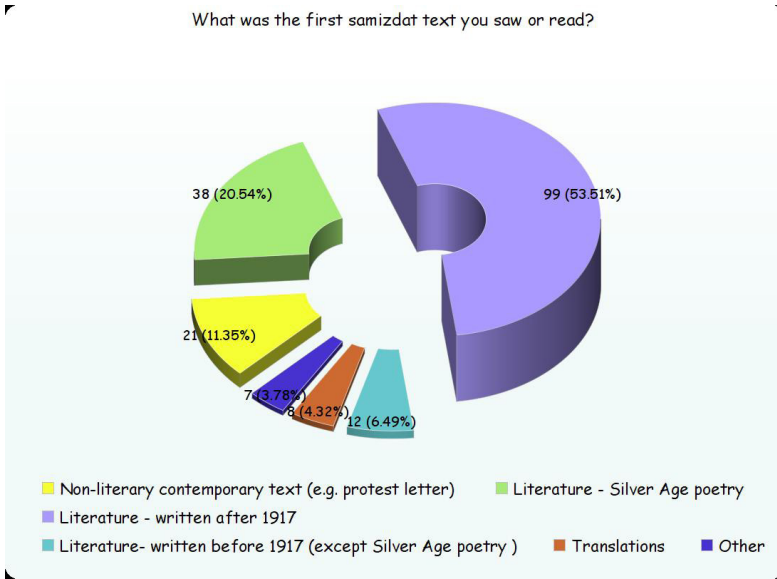
On the other hand there were also those who seemed surprised that their own experience began with literature, evidently sharing the common perception that samizdat was political by definition and/or forbidden:

This may sound strange, but it wasn’t political samizdat [but] Nabokov’s novel *The Gift* (*Dar*). (#51, *1952)

Here is a visual representation of the replies to Question 4 (“What was the first samizdat text you saw or read?”), divided by genre:

⁹⁴ Both replies to Question 2: “When did you first hear the term ‘samizdat’? When did this happen, and how?” and/or 4: “What was the samizdat text you saw or read?”

⁹⁵ *The Master and Margarita* was serialized in the journal *Moskva*, in a heavily censored version, in 1966-1967, a complete version was published in tamizdat (Paris, 1967). In 1973, the novel, which had become a cult book, was published in the USSR in full, in a print run of 30,000 copies. *Tale of the Troika* was published in 1968 in the almanac *Angara*, which was removed from public libraries a year later. A longer version was published in book form in 1989.



If we bear in mind that this chart divides literature into four different categories—poetry of the Silver Age, pre-revolutionary literature other than Silver Age poetry, literature written after 1917 and translations—the predominance of literature as the genre that introduced respondents to samizdat becomes overwhelmingly obvious. Only the yellow and dark blue sections denote non-literary texts. I strongly feel that separating out Silver Age poetry is warranted because it played such a decisive role in the emergence of samizdat as a phenomenon. Moreover, some of it remained taboo, such as the poetry of Nikolai Gumilev, shot in 1921 as a counterrevolutionary. #36 (*1968) remembers being told “don’t tell anyone at school about Gumilev”.⁹⁶ #27 (*1954) told us the following anecdote: “According to one urban legend, Raisa Gorbacheva absolutely loved the poetry of Nikolai Gumilev that circulated in samizdat. And—or so the myth goes—this was one of the reasons for Perestroika: yes to the KPSS and to socialism, but it must be socialism with a human face where one is allowed to read Gumilev.”⁹⁷ The Silver Age poets remained hugely popular while samizdat flourished, as #110 (*1962), asked which texts were especially popular, affirms: “Poetry, especially Gumilev, Tsvetaeva, Mandel’shtam and Brodskii.”⁹⁸ #32 (*1954)

⁹⁶ Question 6.1.: “What did you do after reading your first samizdat text? Please provide details.”

⁹⁷ Question 11: “In your opinion, what was the role of samizdat in the transformations that happened in the USSR (Russia) in the 1980s-1990s?”

⁹⁸ Question 28: “Which samizdat texts were particularly popular and circulated widely in your opinion? In other words, which texts would you call ‘samizdat hits’?”

also lists them when he remembers which writers were read in a group environment: “Poetry. Voloshin, Mandel’shtam, Tsvetaeva, Gumilev etc. The Silver Age.”⁹⁹ The post-revolutionary work of certain modernists, suppressed by official culture, was also very popular—Marina Tsvetaeva’s verse, Akhmatova’s *Requiem (Rekviem)* (mentioned 15 times), Mandel’shtam’s later texts. The fact that the Soviet regime repressed the heritage of the Silver Age to varying degrees is common knowledge; yet it cannot but (at least mildly?) shock to see how many authors who never wrote politically charged texts and are now on the Russian school curriculum were suppressed to such a degree that they could become samizdat hits. As #110 (*1962), asked which aspect of samizdat was especially valuable reminds us: “‘New literary styles’—well, ‘new’ in the sense that part of literature that wasn’t very new (e.g. the Silver Age) was available mainly via samizdat.”¹⁰⁰

Alongside genre, we have asked respondents for the first authors they read in samizdat, about the ones they remember reading throughout and about the ones that left the strongest impression. One outstandingly popular author, and clearly the most popular pre-revolutionary ‘samizdat’ poet, was Osip Mandel’shtam. His name is mentioned 66 times across different questions. Thus our respondents sided with contemporary (samizdat) poets who considered Mandel’shtam a key influence.¹⁰¹ Also widely read were the poems and song lyrics of two contemporary bards, Aleksandr Galich (41 mentions) and Vladimir Vysotskii (37 mentions), whose music circulated in magnitizdat—samizdat on tape. Fans would copy down and circulate their song lyrics, much as teenagers in the 1990s sharing CD booklets and now, playlists.¹⁰² Galich and Vysotskii feature prominently as respondents’ first samizdat authors. This is perhaps not surprising—they were contemporary, very popular among young people and not particularly ‘dangerous,’ i.e. likely to lead to prosecution.

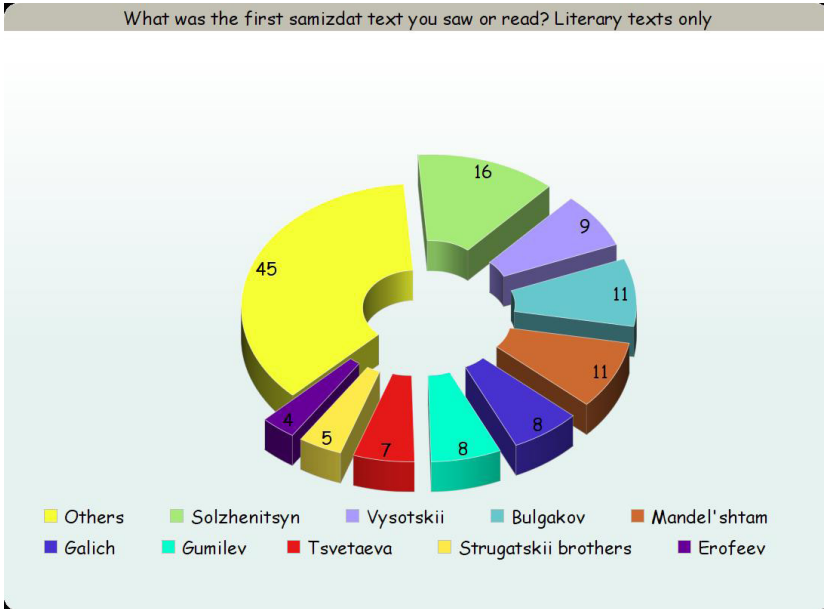
This chart shows the literary authors who initiated the readers into samizdat:

99 Question 29.1.: “Do you remember incidents when samizdat texts were read collectively (e.g. when one person would read a page and then pass it on to the next)? Which texts were read in this way, and when was that?”

100 Question 21/21.1.: “What was for you the most valuable about the samizdat texts you knew? Please tell us why.”

101 Emily Lygo describes his popularity in *Leningrad Poetry*, 7 ff. I discuss his influence on the poetics of poets prominent in the 1970s in von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar*, ch. 2.

102 The sheer popularity of Vysotskii can be gleaned from https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Список_произведений_Владимира_Высоцкого



Two conclusions can be drawn from this chart, including the replies that are hidden inside the items ‘others’. Firstly, the prevalence of what we might consider highbrow literature goes to show that samizdat satisfied primarily a hunger for culture, information and thought rather than easy entertainment. This data confirms the reasons our respondents gave for their attraction to samizdat (cf. section 2. 2). It is also at least implicitly a testimony to the Soviet background and education of the readers, who were brought up in an environment that afforded the written word a central role: the Bolsheviks had attempted to utilise literature as a tool for forging the new Soviet man,¹⁰³ while the belief in the ability of literature to influence behaviour was enshrined in the doctrine of Socialist Realism and arguably one of the reasons for censorship. Just as the reader according to Soviet ideology, the Soviet reader of samizdat was always a receiver of culture rather than a consumer. It just happened that they read—and sometimes, wrote—the wrong kind of text.¹⁰⁴ All these factors conspired to make the Soviet Union the ideal setting for the phenomenon of samizdat.

¹⁰³ Compare the statement that “writers are engineers of the human soul,” popularized by and attributed to Stalin, who used it in 1932 at a meeting with Soviet writers. In fact he was quoting the novelist Iurii Olesha. See http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/dic_wingwords/1087/Инженеры (accessed February 25, 2020).

¹⁰⁴ For a chronological analysis of the ‘Soviet reader’ see Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*.

Secondly, the prominence of Solzhenitsyn and the mention of Venedikt Erofeev are indicative of the relatively young age of our respondents. Erofeev wrote *Moscow Circles* (*Moskva-Petushki*) in 1969-1970; it became a cult text in samizdat almost immediately afterwards; it was published officially in the Soviet Union only in 1988.¹⁰⁵ Bulgakov was a slightly different case: his novel *The Master and Margarita* was written between 1929-1940 and serialised, in an abridged, censored version, in the journal *Moskva* (*Moscow*), in 1966-1967; an unabridged tamizdat edition appeared almost simultaneously. This edition, but in particular the passages excised by the censor circulated widely in samizdat even after a complete version was officially published in 1973; most respondents did not specify whether they saw the entire novel in samizdat or just the censored sections. The fate of *The Master and Margarita* displays remarkable parallels to a story from the nineteenth century. Aleksandr Griboedov's play *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*) widely circulated in manuscript form while the censor's office still deliberated whether to allow print publication.¹⁰⁶ This goes to show that genuine reader demand makes it impossible to suppress the material reproduction of a text, even when few technical means are available. Most of the sensationally popular science-fiction novels of the Strugatskii brothers were published, but hard to obtain. In the case of poets, our respondents rarely mentioned particular poems, with the exception of Akhmatova's *Requiem*. Usually they name the author or specify 'unpublished Mandel'shtam'. Sometimes a specific collection is named, but most common are the authors' name or the author's name accompanied by the word 'poems'. This means that if we want to research the history of individual texts, and poems in particular, we need additional research tools. Below is a model answer—unfortunately such detailed answers are rare.

Something from this list:

- the excised parts from Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*
- Marina Tsvetaeva's poems from different years
- *The Ugly Swans* (*Gadkie lebedi*) by the Strugatskii brothers
- *The Gulag Archipelago* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
- *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (#52, f, *1960)

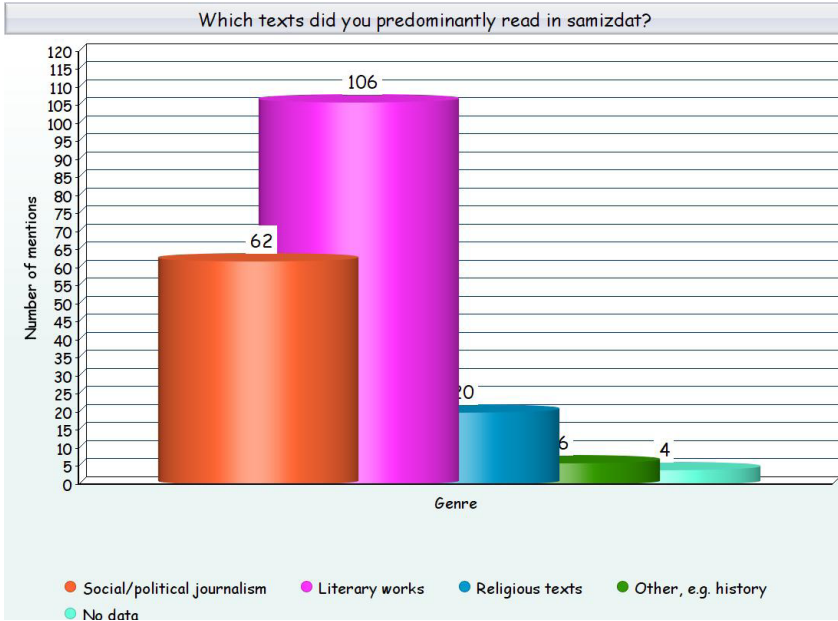
This list is a typical mixture of literary texts that circulated in samizdat in the 1970s: a censored text (Bulgakov), pre-revolutionary poems that were hard to find (Tsvetaeva), a suppressed text by two hugely popular contemporary fiction authors (Strugatskii), very topical and banned (Solzhenitsyn), foreign and banned (Orwell). The list also faithfully reflects the fact that

¹⁰⁵ The poem-in-prose was first published in print in Israel in 1973 (in Russian).

¹⁰⁶ As told by Simon Franklin in "Mapping the Graphosphere," 554.

prose texts, including contemporary works, enjoyed much greater prominence in the mature period of samizdat.

Literature continued to predominate throughout the entire period the respondent spent reading samizdat. Here are the replies to Question 20 in graphic representation:



The rubric ‘other’ includes historical sources and scientific and esoteric texts. Some respondents were not entirely clear about the limits of samizdat. #81 (*1935) remembers “I don’t know whether protest letters can be considered samizdat. I was fired from my job because of such letters.” Naturally, those who associate samizdat with political dissidence would see these letters as the quintessence of samizdat. Indeed, Igor Golomshtok remembers that his main aim in writing letters of protest was “[to] inform, by means of samizdat, people about what was in fact going on in the country.”¹⁰⁷

The picture looks slightly different for Question 18 (“Which of the samizdat texts you read left the strongest impression with you and why?”). Non-literary texts play a much more important role, especially if we decide, as I have done, to include Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago* in this category. *The Gulag Archipelago* is by far the most frequently mentioned work: there are 31 mentions, alongside 14 others that simply say ‘Solzhenitsyn’ or cited one of his other works; respondents were allowed to name more than one text.

¹⁰⁷ Golomshtok, *Zaniatie dlia starogo gorodovogo*, 130.

Another non-literary ‘text’ mentioned frequently is the human rights bulletin *Chronicle of Current Events* (57 respondents mention it, many more than once). Many ‘impressive’ texts were also directly or indirectly linked to the topics of Gulag, state terror and repression: works by the historian Avtorkhanov¹⁰⁸ and Andrei Amalrik’s *Will the USSR last until 1984?* (*Prosushchestvuet li SSSR do 1984*), from among the clearly literary works, Varlam Shalamov’s *Kolyma Tales*, Andrei Platonov’s *The Foundation Pit* (*Kotlovan*) and *Chevengur*, Vasili Grossman’s *Life and Fate* (*Zhizn’ i sud’ba*) and George Orwell’s 1984—alongside a transcript explaining the rationale behind the yearly ‘rallies’ on Pushkin Square on 5 December, the Day of the Soviet Constitution (#14, *1967);¹⁰⁹ the last words of those who demonstrated on Red Square on 26 August 1968 (#21, *1948) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the USSR adopted in 1948.

Those respondents who described their reaction broadly agree that these texts offered them new information about their own country; 81 respondents provided details, many, unfortunately, only very brief: ‘I found out about the existence of political prisoners’ (#14, *1967); “This was the first time I understood the system of control in the USSR,” (#29, *x); “A part of my country’s history that was completely unknown until then” (#34, *1965); “The sheer scope of the system, its huge size and coherence” (#48, *1959); “Information about resistance to the ‘communist’ system. Information about the scale of repression in the USSR” (#57, *1953); “Touching upon the truth” (#58, *1958); “Horror and hatred for the Soviet system” (#74, *1957); “Well, it’s more or less clear with regard to literature about the camps and the repressions: one can’t live like that” (#105, m, *1949); “The tragic history of my Motherland (tragedy generally leaves an impression)” (#116, m, *1966).

Most eloquent are the explanations that refer to Orwell:

Orwell showed me that a totalitarian regime as such is the greatest evil there is, and that this evil is a fundamental characteristic of the regime rather than a price to pay for its transition period. (#52, *1960)

In 1984, I read the novel 1984 in English and cried: just HOW could Orwell know WHAT would happen to us in 1984? (#121, *1954)

So while samizdat was a mostly a literary phenomenon, for many people even literary texts had an impact that exceeds strictly aesthetic criteria and

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, the *Chronicle*, *The Gulag Archipelago* and Avtorkhanov’s *Technology of Power* are among the texts frequently mentioned on the pages of the *Chronicle of Current Events*. The list, as well as a description of the process of indexing, can be found in G. Kuzovkin, “Nauchnoe izdanie ‘Khroniki tekushchikh sobytii’ i novye vozmozhnosti dlia izucheniia samizdata,” in *Acta Samizdatica. Pilotnyi vypusk* (2012), 36–45.

¹⁰⁹ For information on the rallies see <http://www.cogita.ru/a.n.-alekseev/kontekst/10-dekabrya-moskva-pushkinskaya-ploschad-18-chasov> (accessed February 25, 2020).

might be seen as influencing a worldview that is wide open beyond the horizon of Soviet ideology and potentially critical of this ideology.

2.5. *Reading Samizdat as an act of resistance*

In spite of the uncontested predominance of literary texts, most respondents nevertheless attached at least a nuance of political significance to Samizdat reading. Question 12 (“Do you agree that samizdat emerged in opposition to certain traits of Soviet society?”) was answered positively by 108 out of 122 respondents. The most commonly used term in the subsequent text field (12.1., “What is it that samizdat opposed?”) is “censorship” (38 times), accompanied by adjectives such as “total” or “savage”; also popular are “control” and “surveillance”. Here are a few examples: “The totalitarian essences of the Soviet regime” (#2, *1931); “The lack of tolerance for thought that was different, the lack of freedom, and censorship” (#5, *1951).

In a monolithic, centrally controlled culture, Samizdat represented a way of counteracting, in the words of #34 (*1965) “the effort made by the government to control people’s information sources, tastes and views”. And indeed, samizdat was an antidote to the “greyness (in all its nuances) and the all-encompassing uniformity of thought that was imposed on us” (#7, *1957) and to the “impossibility to disseminate one’s creative work and views outside the official institutions” (#4, *1972). In this context, reading samizdat increased people’s individual feeling of freedom and represented a personal act of resistance. #49 (*1955) specifies: “People wanted more information—political, art-related, religious. The authorities would oppose this and even imprison people for reading and circulating samizdat. This was opposition.”

Historians are still arguing about the reasons for the demise of the Soviet Union and the degree to which civil society had an impact. This argument is neatly reflected in the replies to Question 11, “In your opinion, what was the role of samizdat in the transformations that happened in the USSR (Russia) in the 1980s-1990s?” This question inspired a good number of longer replies, which are interesting in their own right. A basic tendency is immediately recognisable: the 20 people who reckon that the role of samizdat was negligible are invariably convinced this was the case because of samizdat’s limited reach—the phenomenon was limited to the educated strata of society in the big cities. The answers of those who are convinced that its role was significant (69 respondents) are more varied: quite a few point out that samizdat made ‘truthful’ information available to the ‘reading public’ and the ‘educated elites’ and thus had an influence on the worldview of those that were involved in shaping the fate of the country:

Samizdat widened the possibilities for education, and the reading public simply filled in the gap in both Russian literature and history of the twentieth century and in world politics and philosophy. This gave rise to questions that couldn't be answered by the usual means and led to a more profound interest in, and knowledge of, reality. (#25, *1963)

Samizdat formed the mentality of the elite that would become involved in the political process during Perestroika. This mentality had an impact on political developments. (#21, *1948)

This is not the place to collect historical evidence or argue whether samizdat had an impact on Soviet politics. More significant, and very hard to counter, is the argument for samizdat's indirect impact on civil society as a unifying force that brought people together outside Soviet official culture:

It revealed hidden knowledge and brought together people who were close to each other in spirit. (#53, *1954)

[It played] an important role, because it united people. (#69, *1947)

Even if it didn't form them, samizdat, alongside the songs of singer-songwriters and unofficial culture in general, supported an entire generation of people who were inwardly free from communist ideology and prepared for change. In addition, samizdat rallied, brought together and, one could almost say, created a stratum of people who understood each other by the merest hint and trusted each other, while not trusting the authorities in the slightest. (#73, *1941)

It prepared the soil, loosened it. (#5, *1951)

I think it helped bring up a generation that not only no longer believed, but also wasn't afraid. (#108, *1960)

In her article "Dissident Publics," Ann Komaromi used Nancy Fraser's concept of "alternative publics".¹¹⁰ Such a reading emphasises that the groups that produced, distributed and read samizdat made a significant contribution to the increasing stratification of Soviet society in the last decades of the

¹¹⁰ Komaromi, "Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics," 85 ff. She is referring to Nancy Fraser's critique of Habermas in "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 109–142.

Soviet regime. In particular, samizdat was a symptom of the growing internal emancipation of certain segments of society, as a way of self-organisation that diversified a monolithic, centralised and very prescriptive cultural sphere. Read in this way, the emphasis and importance of samizdat is on the word *sam* – self. In the midst of a centrally organised ‘monoculture’ that discouraged, suppressed and penalised individual initiative, samizdat depended on it. This is also what the already cited Vladimir Bukovskii must have had in mind when he said “I write it myself, I edit it myself, I censor it myself, I publish it myself, I circulate it myself and I myself serve the prison sentence for it.”¹¹¹ While comparatively few of those involved in samizdat would go to such extreme length, our questionnaire received many statements confirming ‘freedom’ and ‘individual freedom’ as one of the most important functions of samizdat. #2 (*1931) specified “The spirit of truth and freedom,” while #6 (*1966) insisted that the possibility of circumventing the censor was in itself more important than the content of the texts:

Samizdat resisted the total censorship and the control the state exercised over each person. Not all the texts were of high artistic value, but the act of owning such a text or even just knowing about it made you a bit freer.¹¹²

34 of our respondents experienced persecution for samizdat, either personally or in their immediate circle of family and friends. These range from invitations for a ‘chat’ with the KGB (14 mentions) to house searches (ten mentions), problems at work/being fired (five mentions) or at university (exclusion, not allowed to join—three mentions). Seven respondents or their next of kin served prison sentences between one and six years. The Soviet Criminal Code contained no article against samizdat per se, but many of those arrested for political activity, including the spreading of texts, in the years after Stalin would have been sentenced according to the infamous article 70.1, ‘anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda,’ adopted in 1960. Two respondents specify being accused according to this article. One of our respondents told a detailed story about how he was accused of speculation for facilitating the sale of a volume of samizdat, although the reason for arresting him was the large amount of samizdat in his flat and the evidence that he was reproducing texts, including the *Gulag Archipelago* (Respondent #23, *1955, reply to Question 44 “It is well-known that during the Soviet era people were persecuted for samizdat. Were you affected by persecution?”).

These figures suggest that serious persecution for samizdat was not a very high risk for those who merely read. Moreover, most instances of persecu-

¹¹¹ See footnote 66.

¹¹² Both replies to Question 21.1.: “What was for you the most valuable element in the samizdat texts you knew? Please tell us why.”

tion were haphazard and intended first and foremost to bully and scare. Yet persecution remained a real prospect, and as such potentially contributed to a sense of identity that rallied samizdat readers. As an activity that potentially incurred a prison sentence, reading was invested with heightened importance. This was in addition to the significance afforded to the written word by the long tradition of writers acting as truth tellers in Russian society.

2.6. *What was Samizdat: text, process, multi-media sphere*

The list of definitions offered by our respondents in response to question 7 (“Do you have a definition of samizdat, and if yes, what is it?”) is as varied as that used by scholars. Perhaps predictably, samizdat is most commonly understood to be a body of texts. The majority of the 50 respondents who answered to this effect stressed the fact that these texts were “uncensored,” “unofficial,” “banned from official publication” or “produced without the involvement of the authorities”. It seems that content defines samizdat to a lesser degree: three respondents specify “prose and poetry” while only one respondent is adamant that the term applies to political texts only (#72, *1940). Others (13 responses) place the emphasis on how the texts were made—most frequently, “typescript,” others accept “photocopy,” one respondent mentions “handwritten” or simply “not printed.”¹¹³ 12 respondents focused on the “private,” “non-public” aspects of samizdat, the fact that it was “done in private” and that the texts were “the work of one’s close friends” (#53, *1954; #55, *1954). In a Soviet context, which discouraged private initiative of any kind, the emphasis of samizdat as an essentially private practice—an area shielded from the enforced ‘publicity’ of official culture—carries significant weight.

While the typescript page remains the iconic material representation of samizdat, samizdat was clearly not a monomedial cultural sphere, and few respondents limited samizdat to the typewritten page. Indeed, our question about the methods by which respondents themselves reproduced samizdat texts shows that all media were used—handwriting, typewriting, photography, copying machine, photocopy.

Only one person explicitly included tamizdat into their definition as “texts imported without state control” (#20, *1966). However, when we also consider other questions it becomes clear that people did not always neatly distinguish samizdat and tamizdat. While the majority of respondents report coming across it (98 respondents out of 122), only a minority, namely 11 respondents, remember passing on texts for publication abroad. Once a text re-entered the USSR in a foreign edition, it would inevitably be further reproduced in order to maximise its readership, often by means of photo-

¹¹³ When respondents combined two definitions, i.e. “forbidden literature in typescript” (e.g. #16, *1959); their answer was counted in both categories.

copy, which had become more widely available by the 1970s and facilitated the reproduction of long works.¹¹⁴ Thus tamizdat turned once again into samizdat, as these replies to various other questions show:

The Gulag Archipelago (photocopied, which means it can be counted as samizdat), as the volumes appeared one after the other. (#57 (*1953))¹¹⁵

They were for the most part photocopies of tamizdat editions (Pomerants, Iu. Annenkov, A. Galich, Mandel'shtam, with corrections by [his widow] Nadezhda Mandel'shtam) and classified editions (Dzhilas etc). (#50, *1955)¹¹⁶

We had photo prints of *The Gulag Archipelago*, which were kept in the overhead cupboard. (#59, *1951).¹¹⁷

Question 29 asks about respondents' experience of collective reading of samizdat, i.e. people meeting to share a single physical copy of a text ("Do you remember incidents when samizdat texts were read collectively (e.g. when one person would read a page and then pass it on to the next)? Which texts were read in this way, and when was that?"). Respondent. #57 (*1953), replied: "In 1975-1976 the first volume of [Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag*] *Archipelago* was read by groups of students in the zone E dorms of the main building of Moscow State University." It is highly likely that the respondent is referring to a tamizdat copy or secondary reproduction thereof.¹¹⁸ Respondents who mentioned "the American Mandel'shtam" or "the American Mandel'shtam edition" were without doubt referring to tamizdat, although it is not clear whether they had a printed copy or a reproduction thereof.¹¹⁹ Some people identified them completely: "I made no distinction between tamizdat and

¹¹⁴ For a timeline and general description of the process see L. Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 284-285.

¹¹⁵ Question 18: "Which of the samizdat texts you read left the strongest impression with you, and why?"

¹¹⁶ Classified editions [izdaniia s grifom "*Rasprostraniatsia po spisku*"] were books that were printed officially but made available only to a narrow circle of people. The reply cited refers to Question 4 ("What was the first samizdat text you saw or read?")

¹¹⁷ Question 23: Question 23 and 23.1.: "Did you keep any samizdat at home?"; "If yes, can you remember the name of any texts you kept at home and/or the approximate number of texts?"

¹¹⁸ *The Gulag Archipelago* was published in Paris in 1973 by YMCA Press; this publication was instrumental in the decision of the authorities to force the Solzhenitsyn into exile in February 1974.

¹¹⁹ Four respondents mention this edition, which is most likely the three-volume collected works that came out in 1967, six years before the much more modest Soviet edition: Osip Mandel'shtam, *Sobranie sochineniia v trekh tomakh*, introduction by C. Brown, G.P. Struve, B.A. Filipov (Washington, 1967).

samizdat. It was all samizdat to me” (#45, *1947).¹²⁰ This reader evidently regarded samizdat as a culture or mode of being of the text. If we are prepared to consider tamizdat a distinctive sub-section of samizdat we see that within unofficial culture, hand-produced texts and print continued to overlap. In this sense the most accepted marker for samizdat is not so much the production method of a given text, or not even the fact whether it was a written text (see music, definition below), but rather the question of whether or not it was a product of Soviet official culture.

Only a small minority (12 respondents) of those who answered Question 7 and 7.1., asking for their definition of samizdat, defined it as a process rather than a specific body of texts. In six cases this definition is simply “the circulation of typewritten and/or forbidden text,” placing the emphasis on the action rather than the object. Only one person calls samizdat “a means of resistance” (#122, *1965). Three respondents distinguish between the product, i.e. the text, and the process, i.e., in the words of #63 (*1950) “In the broad sense: unofficial cultural activity during the Soviet era. In the narrow sense: the texts.” The answer of #50 (*1955) is worth quoting at length, as it encompasses all the possible definitions that we have encountered; it is worth noting that he seems to rate the process as more important than the product and emphasizes the aspect that is nowadays popular among researchers; he also underlines that it is the reader alone who decides whether a given text is circulated and how many copies exist:

Samizdat is:

- 1) the process of producing uncensored copies of an uncensored text (it's rarer that texts are unavailable for other reasons). Unlike in the case of Nikolai Glazkov's "samsebiaizdat" [who gave copies of his own works to friends], the number of copies circulated is determined not by the author, but by the readers, according to reader demand;
- 2) the entirety of texts produced in this way;
- 3) an individual copy of a text, produced in a samizdat manner that is available to the ordinary person (photocopy, photo, copying by hand, reading on tape etc);
- 4) the same thing read on tape (a variety of "magnitizdat") [...]

For completeness' sake we should supplement it with the words of #4 (*1972), who called samizdat “an unofficial, underground network for book publishing and book dissemination.” This reply evidently has its limits, considering only books, and draws a distinction between the process of publishing and dissemination that was not as clear-cut in practice. However, he is one of the few to emphasise the network aspect, which is crucial to sam-

¹²⁰ Question 32.3.: “Did you ever come across tamizdat, and when?”

izdat as a whole and an essential rather than practical difference between samizdat and official/traditional print culture.

2.7. Samizdat as a collective reading experience

Samizdat was an inalienable constituent of the culture of “*kruzhki*,” informal circles that allowed people to circumvent highly regulated and prescriptive Soviet official culture, as described by Liudmila Alekseeva: “These groups [...] often replaced non-existent or for various reasons inaccessible institutions—publishing houses, lecture halls, exhibitions, notice boards, confessionals, concert halls, libraries, museums, legal consultations, knitting circles [...] as well as seminars on literature, history, philosophy and linguistics.”¹²¹ The ‘collective experience of literature’¹²² created and nurtured many of these circles, the functioning of which depended on the participants being able to identify and trust each other.¹²³ A closely related type of group emerged later as part of the unofficial music and art scenes in the 1970s and 1980s, but also some literary journals, namely that of *tusovka*, a group with no clear distinction between authors/performers and audience.¹²⁴

The typical samizdat reader was thus more likely a highly sociable networker than the proverbial solitary bookworm. The majority of our respondents report knowing many others who read samizdat:

Question 14 How many readers of samizdat did you know?	Number of respondents
Under 10	9
Over 10	45
Over 100	28
“Many”	27
Not specified/can't answer the question	13
TOTAL	122

Those who reported that the majority of their acquaintances read samizdat were counted as ‘many’. Typical such answers include:

¹²¹ L. Alekseeva, P. Goldberg, *Pokolenie otpepli* (Moscow, 2006), 91.

¹²² Schmidt, “Postprintium?,” 225.

¹²³ The process how people used to establish to whom they could give texts is described in great detail by Lev Kopelev, unpublished interview, Archive of the Research Centre of East European Studies, University of Bremen, fond I-86.

¹²⁴ The origin of the term is discussed by Polly McMichael in W. J. Risch (ed.), *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc* (Lanham, 2015), 187 ff. Also see A. Troitsky, *Tusovka: Who's Who in the New Soviet Rock Culture* (London, 1990).

Dozens. I think that there wasn't a single one among my friends who didn't read samizdat. And many of them made and disseminated [samizdat]. (#10, *1955)

Very many (practically everyone I knew). (#17, m, *1950)

Quite a lot, I think that in my social circle there weren't any people who didn't [read samizdat]. (#46, *1968)

Yet this is precisely the genre of question where practical and methodological issues specific to samizdat make it hard to obtain precise information. Depending on the kind of samizdat they read, people were secretive about it and, as #119 (*X), pointed out, “[I knew] several dozens, but I can't give a concrete number. If you were interested in [this question] people would have considered you an informer.” A more immediate problem is that even approximate numbers are hard to compare because they necessarily relate to different years and, as #50 (*1955) underlines: “This question must be considered in relation to time. It is impossible to put [samizdat readers] from the 1970s in with those from the 1980s.” Nevertheless, they illustrate clearly that samizdat reading was a sociable activity. Not knowing enough/the right people from whom to procure and to whom to give texts was cited repeatedly as the reason why somebody failed to become a habitual reader of samizdat, or why they did not read a particular genre of text (see also section 2. 3):

I didn't have a reliable source for obtaining samizdat. If I heard of something interesting and could get my hands on it I would read it. (#11, *1952)

That depended on the sources to which I had access. For example, in my immediately social circle there were hardly any serious disseminators of political literature. (#56, *1945)

In the reverse case, being part of a specific friendship group also predisposed a person to samizdat reading:

This is what people read and gave to others to read in my circle of friends at the time. (#19, *1966)¹²⁵

All these factors—the limited availability of texts, the clandestine nature of the process as a whole, and the fact that texts were often lent only for a short period of time meant that people frequently read them in a group set-

¹²⁵ All three replies to Question 20.1.: “Which texts did you predominantly read in samizdat? Please explain your choice or choices—why did you read those texts?”

ting. Reading samizdat brought people together in the immediate physical sense. Indeed, 46 of our respondents remember incidents when texts were read collectively (Question 29: “Do you remember incidents when samizdat texts were read collectively (e.g. when one person would read a page and then pass it on to the next)?”). Quite a number of them remember poetry as especially popular in this context:

These were literary texts, mostly poetry. We read them aloud in my circle of friends. (#31, *1963)

Poetry. Voloshin, Mandel'shtam, Tsvetaeva, Gumilev etc. The Silver Age. (#32, *1954)

Later, collective reading was common in the case of particularly topical (and definitely ‘forbidden’) texts:

We read one after the other. Me, my mum and my wife. An ordinary family evening. We would read Voinovich aloud, I remember that. (#24, *1976)

We would read, for example, Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* (*Rakovyi korpus*), passing the typescript pages round in a circle. I guess that was around 1970. (#73, *1941)

For example, a photocopy of *The Gulag Archipelago*. In the flat of my friend X [name supplied], in 1977. (#75, *1962)

A particularly interesting report of a collective reading of *The Gulag Archipelago* from the archives rather than our survey is this:

The first chapters of the *Archipelago* I received from one of the Germans at the journal *Der Spiegel*. [...] And so we got together. We didn't have the text in Russian, but everyone was keen on it. And so we decided to not postpone for a minute. Our *kruzhok* got together, if you can call it that, we never called ourselves a *kruzhok*, and I translated on the spot for everybody. I simply looked at the German text and translated it into Russian and sometimes even managed to get the style more or less right [...] This is how we got to know quite a number of the chapters, well, at least those that were published at that moment.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Raisa Orlova, unpublished interview with Elena Vargaftik, 30/04/1983. Archive of the Research Centre of East European Studies, University of Bremen, fond I-86. Excerpts from *The Gulag Archipelago* were published in the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, 1-5, 1974.

The small group culture in which samizdat flourished brings to mind another time period in which *kruzhki* were seminally important to the development of Russian literature, namely the literary salons and circles of Pushkin's era¹²⁷ and later, of the early Silver Age.¹²⁸ The earlier period is especially interesting for comparison because it encompassed manuscript as well as print culture and was characterised, in the words of Simon Franklin, “[a] fluidity of the relations of the various media [...] Authors and readers, reciters and listeners, producers and critics, scribes and printers were in multimedia dialogue with each other as never before.” Franklin notes that “the elegant manuscript album was revered as an emblem of civilised pursuits’ and describes the salon members’ vacillation between disdain for the vulgar new-ish technology of print and aspiration for print as the more reproducible medium which could provide professional writers with earnings.¹²⁹ Samizdat—a handmade, ‘backward’ medium that somehow managed to become the vehicle of the most interesting, novel, daring literary pursuits and rare, trustworthy facts—was held by its practitioners in similarly high esteem. The shabbiness of the barely legible typescript on onion paper was ‘cult’ in the 1960s already, and part of society preferred samizdat to official print as ‘more truthful’. A widely known anecdote goes like this: “A man asks a typist to type up *War and Peace*. Surprised, she asks him why, upon which the man explains: ‘My son’s in high school, he reads only samizdat, but I want him to read this novel...’”¹³⁰ Our respondents tell similar stories, without the hyperbole that makes the anecdote so funny:

I was a school kid and I fully understood the value and difference between the printed [party] newspaper *Pravda* and the *Chronicle [of Current Events]* lying on the table. Hearing the conversations of one’s parents and their friends is one thing, seeing the printed text quite another. That the pages were typescript made them more convincing in my view, weightier, more truthful. (#47, *1955)¹³¹

However, while Pushkin’s friends despised print for its potential mass appeal, (some) samizdat practitioners held it in disdain for its dependence on official ‘mass’ culture which continued to marginalize, exclude and even

127 Franklin, “Mapping the Graphosphere,” 552. Studied in detail in M. Aronson, S. Reiser, *Literaturnye kruzhki i salony* (St. Petersburg, 2001; orig. 1929); I. Murav’eva, *Salony pushkinskoi pory: Ocherki literaturnoi i svetskoi zhizni Sankt-Peterburga* (St. Petersburg, 2008).

128 One of the best-known salons of the Silver Age, Viacheslav Ivanov’s “Tower,” is researched in great detail in V. Bagno et al, *Bashnia Viacheslava Ivanova i kul'tura serebriannogo veka* (St. Petersburg, 2006).

129 Franklin, “Mapping the Graphosphere,” 552.

130 S. Semanov, *Russkii klub. Pochemu ne pobediat evrei* (2017, ebook)

131 Question 5: “What was the impression left by your first encounter with a samizdat text? Give details if possible.”

persecute them. A comparison of the typical barely legible onion paper samizdat page and a nineteenth century manuscript illustrates this incongruity, and the limits of such a comparison.

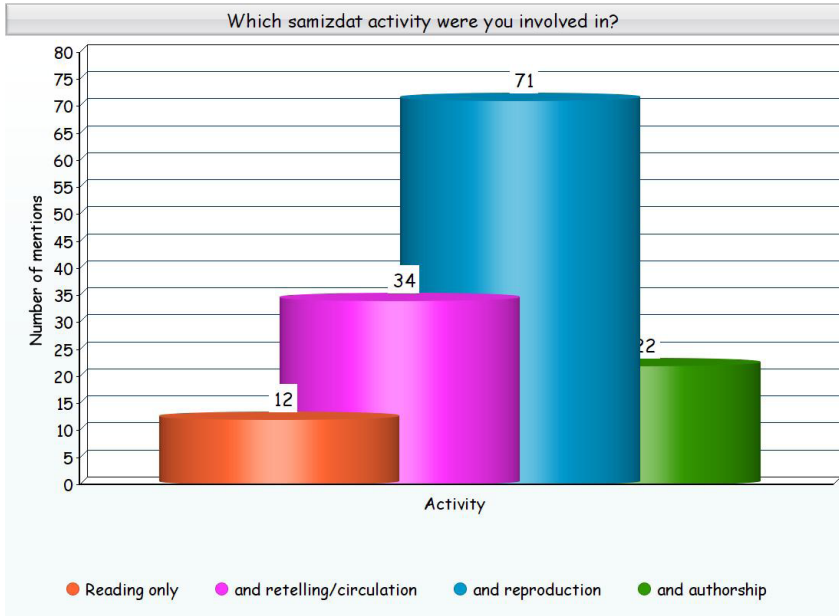
2.8. *Much more than just a reader*

As we have seen, different kinds of people felt an attraction to samizdat because it stilled a hunger for information not available due to censorship and cultural isolation. As such it fulfils the criteria of a classic reading community as described by DeNel Rehberg Sedo: “reading communities of the past often exposed their members to learning opportunities that were not available within the institutionalized education system”.¹³² Rehberg Sedo defines reading communities very broadly; one element all those groups have in common is that they constitute a social process based on shared reading. Seen from this angle, samizdat fits the paradigm.

However, the issues discussed in the final, theoretical part of Section I indicate that ultimately, samizdat explodes the theoretical framework of the reading community, at least as long as we do not find a way to expand it so that it encompasses production and distribution of texts. The literature makes it clear—and our research confirms it—that the ordinary samizdat reader is much more than ‘just’ a reader.

In our sample, those who ‘only’ read and returned the text to the person who gave it to them are in the absolute minority. According to the data gleaned from the responses to Questions 17/17.1. (“Which samizdat activity were you involved in? You can tick several options. Please give details about your answer.”) and 24/24.2 (“Did you ever reproduce samizdat texts? If so, what influenced your decision to do so?”), the most common additional function fulfilled by the reader was duplication/reproduction, including for their own use or out of “the desire to commit [the text] to memory” (#97, *1951). Only twelve out of our 122 respondents reported that they merely read samizdat texts (for the sake of comparison: 22 respondents were also samizdat authors). 34 respondents popularised samizdat texts by reading and either passing on their copy or re-telling the content. However, 71 respondents—the majority—reported that they reproduced samizdat, usually with the help of a typewriter. This example clearly shows how deeply enmeshed reading and publishing functions were.

132 D. Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Communities: from Salons to Cyberspace*, 5.



It is tempting to regard samizdat, especially its literary branch, as a particularly ‘pure’ literary process, depending solely on the reader’s approval on aesthetic grounds and thus rendering ‘viable’ even texts that would not stand up to commercial scrutiny. It is thus imperative to scrutinise our respondents’ motivation for reproducing samizdat.

Indeed, the data submitted broadly confirms the thesis that the reproduction of texts depended on personal aesthetic approval or, in the case of political samizdat, the value of the text as information. Of the 71 people who reported reproducing texts, 32 stated as their reason variations of these three answers: a) “Delight in the unusual language” (#51, *1952) or even “My conviction that it was of exceptional literary value” (#63, *1950)¹³³ and (#59, *1951) “I was happy to reproduce true literature”¹³⁴; or, b) “I felt an insuperable urge to share this amazing text with my friends” (#23, *1955); or, c) “I simply wanted these books to myself” (#77, *1969) or, in greater detail,

I was given the book for one day, it was very long, 800 pages, I wanted to read it but there was no time, so I had to photograph the book and return it. Later we printed the photographs, they took up a huge amount of space. (#103, *1954).

¹³³ Both replies to Question 24/24.2.: “Did you ever reproduce samizdat texts? If so, what influenced your decision to do so?”

¹³⁴ Question 20.1. “Which texts did you predominantly read in samizdat? Please explain your choice or choices—why did you read those texts?”

This is classic reader behaviour, and indeed the latter reason is exactly why readers in an ‘ordinary’ literary process visit a bookshop, expressed very clearly:

The opportunity to own a copy of Jung’s lectures. (#70, *1962)

By contrast, 17 people saw their function as closer to that of a middleman in a literary process, i.e. they were acting to satisfy a demand:

One of my dissident friends asked me to. (#10, *1955)

or because they assumed a particular function, either professionally or through friendship ties:

I was a member of the Leningrad Rock Club’ (#18, *1967; this respondent typed the Club’s journal ROKSI)¹³⁵

My close acquaintance and friendship with the editors of various journals: *Chasy*, “37,” *Obvodnyi Kanal* etc. (#7, *1957; this respondent typed and circulated literary samizdat journals)¹³⁶

or because they had access to the necessary resources, such as a typewriter:

They brought me a book and asked me to make copies. (#55, *1954)

I had taken typing lessons and could type very fast. (#14, *1967)

The account of #26 (*1969), who remembers copying a tract of traditional folk medicine in Moscow in 1983, deserves to be quoted in full:

It was a proposal I couldn’t turn down: the original typescript was divided into parts and distributed for copying during lessons by the teacher of the industrial training centre, which all older pupils had to attend in order to learn some kind of profession. The subject was typing and office administration. Well, what did we care which text we used to train speed typing?

¹³⁵ This and the previous replies in this section are to Question 24/24.2.: “Did you ever reproduce samizdat texts? If so, what influenced your decision to do so?”

¹³⁶ Question 17/17.1.: “Which samizdat activity were you involved in? You can tick several options. Please give details about your answer.”

Only four respondents cited a straightforwardly moral and/or political reasons:

August 1968 [i.e. the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia]. (#40, *1950)

My desire to share information and examples of moral resistance with others. (#41, *1954)

My friend's insistent advice to use my position as a librarian and my steadfast hatred of the Soviet authorities. (#59, *1959)¹³⁷

The outstanding 20 either gave no reason or one that does not neatly fit these categories.

Does this really make samizdat an exceptionally 'pure' literary process though? When we look at Silver Age authors circulating in samizdat we should remember that interest in them was heightened because their work, belonging as it did to another era, had been suppressed; their popularity could not thus be compared to that of present-day authors, let alone present-day authors participating in a standard literary process. And what about 'new' samizdat authors, those writing in the 1960s-1980s? These authors implicitly assumed the position of people whose creativity was being thwarted by repressive official culture; the underground poet is the quintessential Russian poet, persecuted for the sake of the 'truth' he or she has to tell.¹³⁸ Underground culture added a further notion to this myth, namely that of the (underground) writer as the preserver of authentic literary culture in an environment that does everything to stifle this culture.¹³⁹ Of course this would not work if readers were not complicit; their leniency¹⁴⁰ and the absence of editorial input, in the case of self-produced texts, or permissive editors, in the case of some literary journals,¹⁴¹ temper any claim that samizdat, as a literary process, was dependent merely on the readers' *aesthetic* judgement.

¹³⁷ This and the previous replies in this section are to Question 24/24.2.: "Did you ever reproduce samizdat texts? If so, what influenced your decision to do so?"

¹³⁸ As Svetlana Boym has observed, the quasi-religious cult of the poet as voice of truth thrives on political oppression, in S. Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge, MA, London, 1991), 120.

¹³⁹ In their theoretical and critical writings many underground writers made conscious use of this stance. Relevant examples, published in *samizdat*, are B. Ivanov, "Kul'turnoe dvizhenie kak tselostnoe iavlenie," 37, 19 (1979); "K materialam 2-oi konferentsii kul'turnogo dvizheniia," *Chasy*, 24 (1980), 256-78 and A. Kalomirov (a pseudonym of Viktor Krivulin), "Dvadsat' let noveishei russkoi poezii," *Severnaia pochta*, 1, 2 (1979).

¹⁴⁰ cf. "Not all the texts were of high artistic value, but the act of owning such a text or even just knowing about it made you a bit freer." (#6, *1966).

¹⁴¹ *Chasy* was intended to be the written organ of unofficial culture. See "Bez redaktsii starykh Bolshevikov andegraunda' ili sho takoe chasy," for Cogita!ru, 2011. <http://www.cogita.ru/news/sobytiya-i-anonsy-2009-2011/abbez-redakcii-staryh-bolshevikov-andegraundabb-ili-chto-takoe-abchasybb>

2.9 *The location of Samizdat*

The topic of book collecting and libraries helps us establish some more of the fundamental particularities of samizdat reading in comparison to traditional print culture. During the early decades of the Soviet Union, mass reading was mainly confined to libraries. However, from the 1950s onwards, private collections grew in importance as leisure activities migrated to the private sphere. The demand for books rose sharply, as did the demand for more varied reading materials, one of the factors fuelling samizdat.¹⁴² This is in addition to the fact that intellectuals have always amassed home libraries. 120 out of our 122 respondents boast of having collected books at home or growing up in homes filled with books.

Samizdat was a written culture, not an oral one. Yet the texts were highly mobile, constantly passing from hand to hand, being read in short bursts, often overnight. Add to this the fact that the possession of samizdat, especially politically relevant texts, was a risk, and it is evident that samizdat could never form part of readers' private libraries in the same sense as printed books. Yet almost all of our respondents (102 people) kept samizdat at home (Question 23/ 23.1.: "Did you keep any samizdat at home?"; "If yes, can you remember the name of any texts you kept at home and/or the approximate number of texts?"). Those who named texts (93 people) usually list works of literature, alongside two political texts, *The Chronicle of Current Events* and *The Gulag Archipelago*.

I think I would have kept more samizdat if I had been able to obtain these texts—they were normally given to be "read by tomorrow," more rarely for a couple of days, and in those cases I felt the need to share them with my friends. (#75, *1962)

Several respondents queried the very concept of 'preserving samizdat':

Samizdat and tamizdat were not supposed to be kept at home, they needed to be disseminated. (#7,*1957)

By the way, in fact I tried hard to not keep the books at home for too long. It was a pity, as there were no copies. I acted according to the principle of reading as fast as I could and then passing the book on. (#105, *1949)

Others made a distinction according to the topicality of the text—information ought to be passed around in real time, while belles-lettres could be kept.

(accessed February 25, 2020). Boris Ostanin, one of the founding editors, reports that the editorial policy was to publish every author who submitted at least once to offer them a platform (Interview with Boris Ostanin, August 2015).

¹⁴² Discussed in Lovell in *The Russian Reading Revolution*, 60-69.

Why should one not keep literature at home? But to keep, for example, a regularly appearing dissident chronicle about what was going on in the camps in Mordovia would have been silly. The *Chronicle* was immediately circulated so that people could read it, not keep it in their bookcase. (#116, *1966)

The perceived danger of a text also played a role:

The Gulag Archipelago, in a photocopy reproduction, was kept in the overhead cupboard, called “the Tablets of Testimony” and given to close friends, while other materials were constantly in free circulation. (#59, *1951)

[...] and the most dangerous part [of the samizdat archive], including copies of the *Chronicle of Current Events*, we burned in the Izmailov Forest. (#63, *1950)

Political samizdat (microfilms, to be precise) I would stash away in the basement. (#27, *1954)

A photocopy of the samizdat Mandel'shtam was openly displayed on our bookshelf. And a few typescripts were kept in the cupboard, hidden from view. (#75, *1962)

The very nature of samizdat severely disrupted the reading process, rendering impossible both book collecting and solitary, slow reading in the peace of one's own home¹⁴³ as well as reading in a public library that was founded in order to preserve and disseminate knowledge.

There were Samizdat libraries, although they remained a rare phenomenon and differed significantly from ‘ordinary’ libraries.¹⁴⁴ 20 of our readers report knowing of the existence of such libraries; four of which mention the well-known and meticulously organized library of Viacheslav Igrunov in Odessa. Other cities mentioned are Moscow, Leningrad, Obninsk, Kazan, Vilnius, Chelyabinsk. We were fortunate that Viacheslav Igrunov agreed to fill in our questionnaire:

In a special repository we had collected several hundred books (I think around 500), a certain number of periodicals, both samizdat and foreign, and several thousands of articles, letters, poems, stories, essays etc. (#21, *1948)

¹⁴³ Cf. “Those who might in theory have something rare or forbidden would offer to read it at their place.” (#22, *1976).

¹⁴⁴ For a list of well-known librarians see Makarov “Ot lichnoi kollektzii samizdata k obshchestvennoi biblioteke,” 30-31.

But he is not the only respondent with a large collection:

There were thousands of texts and my samizdat library was used by several dozen readers in Cheliabinsk; people would also come from the surrounding area. (#60, *1969)

I had very many books—almost everything by Solzhenitsyn, including *The Oak and the Calf* (*Bodalsya telenok s dubom*), the American Mandel'shtam edition, Pasternak... Well, once again, I was a keeper and disseminator of illegal literature. (#89, *1950)¹⁴⁵

Perhaps samizdat libraries were a contradiction in terms. Some readers indeed question whether such a structure can be called a library: “How could libraries of samizdat exchange texts? Your question is a dead-end. By form of dissemination, samizdat and tamizdat were not a library but a network” (#116, *1966).¹⁴⁶ Be that as it may, the structures that became known as ‘samizdat libraries’ necessarily exhibited traits of ‘ordinary’ libraries, such as a subscription and a cataloguing system, as well as an (encrypted) system of borrowing records.¹⁴⁷ However, as part of a clandestine subculture they had to exist without an actual building for a repository and reading rooms that readers could visit. The task of a samizdat librarian was particular, too: in the cases that are described, each member of a group of librarians would keep certain books and pass them on to readers from a pre-approved circle.¹⁴⁸ Samizdat libraries relied heavily on copied rather than typed material and sourced much of their reading stock from tamizdat editions. There were two ways in which a text could be “photocopied”: with a photocopier (*kseroks* in Russian) or with a camera; in this case the individual shots would be developed like photos, on photo paper. Both Igrunov and Avrustskii describe this process as essential to their libraries.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ All replies to Question 23 and 23.1.: “Did you keep any samizdat at home?”; “If yes, can you remember the name of any texts you kept at home and/or the approximate number of texts?”

¹⁴⁶ Question 34: “Did you know of any samizdat libraries (associations which regularly exchanged texts)?”

¹⁴⁷ An example of such encrypted records—pertaining to the library of Iurii Avrustskii—can be found in the archive of the Memorial Society in Moscow, fond 175, opis 4. Avrustskii details how the use of his records in his unpublished memoir, summarised by Aleksei Makarov in Makarov “Ot lichnoi kollektsii samizdata k obshchestvennoi biblioteke.” Viacheslav Igrunov has made the structure of his library public, including the names of those tasked with keeping and disseminating : http://igrunov.ru/cv/odessa/dissident_od/samizdat/library-structure.html (accessed February 25, 2020).

¹⁴⁸ From Iurii Avrustskii’s memoir, quoted in Makarov, “Ot lichnoi kollektsii samizdata k obshchestvennoi biblioteke,” 34. Igrunov describes the process : http://igrunov.ru/cv/odessa/dissident_od/samizdat/1123138219.html (accessed February 25, 2020).

¹⁴⁹ Makarov “Ot lichnoi kollektsii samizdata k obshchestvennoi biblioteke,” 34 and http://igrunov.ru/cv/odessa/dissident_od/samizdat/1123138219.html (accessed February 25, 2020).

They were of course collections of samizdat, often sizeable, that were not libraries, already because they were private. In its archives, the International Memorial Society has amassed a large quantity of samizdat from private collections. When people submit these materials, the archivists record the owner's relationship to the texts—was he the author of the text? A reader who managed to preserve some of the samizdat he read, perhaps by typing their own copy and giving others to friends? This person would not have collected samizdat in any organised fashion. Or was he a disseminator (“*ras-prostranitel*”)—somebody who was actively circulating texts in a deliberate attempt to secure the widest possible readership? Disseminators did not necessarily keep large amounts of texts at home, unlike the last category, the ‘librarian’ of samizdat who collected texts and passed them on to readers without getting a text in return, and the text would have returned to him.¹⁵⁰

We tried a similar approach and asked our readers about different roles in the samizdat process. Question 16 listed a number of roles—much larger than the archival list given above—and invited respondents to tick if they fulfilled these roles or knew anybody fulfilling them:

Roles in the samizdat process	Number of mentions
Reader	120 (with three missing answers)
Author	57
Keeper/custodian	79
Disseminator	93
Involved in reproduction	92
Editor/compiler	42
Correspondent for samizdat periodicals	27
Translator	30
Collector	13
Organiser of a samizdat library	16
Organiser of commercial reproduction	11

In interpreting these mentions we should note that we did not offer an explanation of the terms and did not use the term ‘librarian,’ as we foresaw it causing confusion. People who mentioned keeper/custodian (“*khranitel*”) may well have implied somebody not collecting for themselves but for further dissemination and/or a library. ‘Disseminators’ includes those who merely passed on texts to close friends.

¹⁵⁰ This categorisation is described in Makarov, “Ot lichnoi kollektzii samizdata k obshchestvennoi biblioteke,” esp. 28-29.

Samizdat libraries, emerging in the late 1960s or 1970s,¹⁵¹ are evidence of the growing professionalisation of the subculture. Samizdat evolved from an informal subculture into a parallel culture that provided alternatives and substitute for those things official culture would not provide—in this case, reading material that was in high demand from a significant substratum of those who read a lot.

CONCLUSION

Existing sociological models are of limited use for describing all of samizdat (reading). Such models work well for individual sub-sections, such as literary periodicals, which I have described as ‘communities of practice,’¹⁵² i.e. social groups defined by a shared outlook, values and behaviours,¹⁵³ such as interaction (“mutual engagement”), common endeavours (“joint enterprise”), and a shared repertoire of common resources of language, styles and routines by means of which they express their identities as members of the group.¹⁵⁴ But if we look at samizdat as a whole, this model loses its plausibility. There is, on the one hand, the sheer scope of the phenomenon. More importantly, samizdat was so heterogeneous with regard to the material being read, the origin and motivation of those involved, and the level of involvement, from occasional reading to authorship, dissemination and conspiracy to run an illegal library, that finding a common denominator is near impossible. The questionnaire, which will remain live for the foreseeable future, constitutes a sustained attempt at researching samizdat, in particular the reading and reproduction of literary texts, as social networks—the totality of acquaintanceships connecting people in a particular place and/or social cluster.¹⁵⁵

Samizdat was both the process and the product of unofficial, i.e. non-state-sanctioned, cultural activity. It centered on written texts but was not limited to texts. Probably the most salient difference between samizdat and traditional print culture was the fact that readers alone were responsible for every single link in the chain that is the communications dia-

151 Avrutskii’s library emerged in 1974, Igrunov’s in 1967.

152 Von Zitzewitz, “Leningrad Samizdat Journals as Early Social Networks.” For the use of the term, originally developed in education science, in the study of management and virtual networks, see E. Wenger, *Communities of Practice* (Cambridge, 1999), further developed by David Barton and Karin Tusting in *Beyond Communities of Practice* (Cambridge, 2005).

153 See Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of ‘habitus’ in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, MA, 1979). See also his *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, 1991), 130 ff.

154 *Beyond Communities of Practice*, 2.

155 For a criticism of the way in which sociology describes late Soviet social networks, which includes the absence of systematic research into samizdat as one system of social networks see: I. Kukulin, “Prodistsiplinarnye i antidistsiplinarnye seti v pozdnosovetskom obshchestve,” *Sotsiologicheskoe obozrenie*, 16, 3 (2017), 136-174.

gram. Samizdat depended on networks and in turn created and sustained networks. Samizdat readers mounted a sustained ethical challenge to the Soviet readers. Samizdat readers also developed a parallel culture that allowed certain people to factually ignore Soviet official culture. It is thus logical that samizdat as a phenomenon stopped existing once censorship was first relaxed and then abolished and independent/private owned presses became a reality. Over the course of the 1980s official and unofficial culture came closer. Most of the texts previously available only in samizdat were published officially and independent journals emerged. When the two cultures ultimately merged with the adoption of the Law on Print in 1990, samizdat stopped existing.

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THE 'OTHER' READERS OF THE 1920'S: THREE PORTRAITS

Oleg Lekmanov

It is very difficult to give a general description of the readers who lived in Soviet Russia in the 1920s¹, owing to the heterogeneous composition of the readership at that time. A significant part of it consisted of so-called *new* readers, i.e. representatives of the working class and peasantry, whom the Soviet state was striving to educate and elevate. However, there was still a fair amount of skilled readers, including intellectual readers and former nobles, present in the country. And we can talk not only about those whose intellectual habits were formed at the end of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth centuries, but also those who was a child in 1917—the tradition of intellectual reading in a family circle continued in Russia after the October Revolution.

A unique political value was placed on 'molding' this novice reader,² per Evgeny Dobrenko's well-known account of how high-skilled readers were overshadowed newer ones. In the 1920s, the state strove to change readers ideologically in word but, as a rule, failed to do so in deed. Soviet political workers of different kinds still did not reach to such readers.

In much research literature from the last several decades, outsized attention was likewise given to the new Soviet reader and his interrelations with the state. Soviet magazines and their sections specially designed for

1 For obvious reasons, we call the period in the history of Russia from November 7, 1917 to December 31, 1929 as 'the 1920s' in this chapter.

2 See E. A. Dobrenko, *Formovka sovetskogo chitatelia. Sotsial'nye i esteticheskie retseptsii sovetskoi literatury* (St. Petersburg, 1997, Engl. transl. The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature (Stanford, 1997). Among the recent works see A. V. Gerasimova, "Vzlet i padenie: Ob izuchenii chitatel'skikh otzyvov v 1920-kh gg", *Russkaia Filologiya*, 29. *Sbornik nauchnykh rabot molodykh filologov* (Tartu, 2018), 221-236.

such readers, various state directives, reports, regulations, readers' questionnaires etc., were described and analyzed in great detail by scholars, who expanded their theme from "The State and the Molding of the 'New Reader'" to "The State and the Molding of a 'New Person.'"

Within this interpretive framework, intellectual readers once again found themselves rendered almost invisible. The present article is aimed at partially addressing this injustice. We would like to remind you that global generalizations and conclusions should not replace the study of specific reader practices. Accordingly, we do not claim to perform in this article the description and systematization of the entirety of the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1920s; rather, we focus on three particular types only:³ *an old reader, a young woman (specifically a scientific worker)* and *an adolescent provincial boy*. Further, this gallery should be undoubtedly enhanced with portraits of other types' representatives no less significant for the general situation of that time: former officers of the tsarist army, actors, housewives, engineers, doctors, adolescent and adult emigrants from Soviet Russia, etc. However, this is a topic for future research, and in the following chapter, the material for analysis consists solely of three personal diaries of these specific readers, fully consistent with three types listed above. We are interested not only in that which is typical in these diaries, but also individual to their authors, and, more precisely, the ratio of that which is typical to that which is individual. We will try to show how something typical in each reader's strategy was supplemented, and sometimes significantly enhanced, by the personal ones.

A very important requirement for the choice of subjects of this article was the fact that none of them had ever published fiction or poetry, i.e., they were not professional writers, as we seek to examine the experience of *intellectuals* who lived in Soviet Russia in the 1920s, and not writers as readers.

I. AN OLD READER

In the first section we will speak about Aleksei Vasilievich Oreshnikov (1855–1933), a well-known collector of ancient coins and researcher. He was born to a Moscow merchant family, and was a native of the city Liubim in the Yaroslavl' region. From the age of ten, the boy was fond of collecting old coins. When Oreshnikov was twelve, he was sent to a secondary educational institution that trained financiers, the Moscow Practical Academy of Commercial Sciences. Having graduated from its gymnasium department, the young man studied trade science course for one year in a special form,

³ Among the works on the types of the Soviet reader, we will distinguish the above-mentioned E. A. Dobrenko's monograph, which contains an excellent bibliography on our point of interest.

but then he was forced to suspend his training for health reasons. He spent three years abroad, and when he returned to Moscow, he combined collecting activities with the scientific numismatics. Oreshnikov had to run his father's business for a long time, but after his death in 1885, the son gradually ceased trading. By this time, he had already become one of the most active workers in the State Historical Museum in Moscow for two years; however, he did so unofficially, since Emperor Aleksandr III personally crossed Oreshnikov off the list of employees since he was a person of non-noble origin. He was officially accepted to the museum staff only in 1887. For some time, Oreshnikov was also a secretary of the Moscow Archaeological Society. After October 1917, his life and work went on without incident, and in 1928 Oreshnikov was even elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.⁴

Nevertheless, Oreshnikov never accepted the October Revolution, and this fact can be considered his quintessential feature as a "typical" old reader. In his diary, Oreshnikov was often cautious in his assessments of Soviet modernity. However, it is easy to draw clear conclusions about his attitude to the new government based on his reader's comments (there are 212 of such comments in his diaries of the 1920s.) At first Oreshnikov makes a dry and non-evaluative note in a diary of 1919: "I read Lenin's speech," then, in the diary of 1925, his judgment towards the famous revolutionary poem of Aleksandr Blok "The Twelve" ["Dvenadtsat'"] looks quite unambiguous: "M. V. Picheta came and read me some lady's article about Blok: the parallel between Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* [*Mednyi vsadnik*] and the Blok's poem 'The Twelve'; I really do not like the latter, so, in my opinion, no parallel here is acceptable."⁵

We can assume what kind of feelings were triggered by the memories on the last Russian Tsarevich Aleksei Romanov, which Oreshnikov read in 1921: "I'm reading *The Tragic Fate of the Russian Imperial Family. Memoirs of the Former Tutor Pierre Gilliard of the Heir Tsarevich Aleksei Nikolaevich* [*Tragicheskaiia sud'ba russkoi imperatorskoi familii. Vospominaniia byvshego vospitatelia Naslednika Tsezarevicha Alekseia Nikolaevicha P'era Zhil'iara*]. Revel, 1921 (70 pages)." Soviet newspapers' feuilletons surely made painful impression on Oreshnikov in 1929, as they defamed politically undesirable scientists and members of the Academy of Sciences: "From N.P. Likhachev I received a letter with newspaper clippings of articles on the persecution

4 The biographical information about Oreshnikov is taken from the publication: A. V. Oreshnikov, *Dnevnik. 1915-1933*, 2 vols., comp. P. G. Gaidukov, N. L. Zubova, M. V. Katagoshina, N. B. Strizhova, A. G. Iushko; ed. by P. G. Gaidukov (Moscow, 2010). We quote Oreshnikov's diary in this edition.

5 However, Oreshnikov treated the 'non-Soviet' Bloc with interest and sympathy. Please refer to his diary entry of the same year, 1925: "In the evening I went to L.V., she read to me from Blok's 'Retribution' ['Vozmezdnie'], there were some beautiful extracts."

of many people serving in the Academy of Sciences. It is impossible to read them indifferently.”⁶

It is possible to derive three basic premises of his reader’s experience from the facts of Oreshnikov’s biography. It is necessary to start with the fact that Oreshnikov did not receive a regular higher education: the level of culture that he achieved was almost entirely the result of his independent efforts, primarily as a reader, and hence he attached special significance to reading. Then it should be noted that he was a collector of cultural artifacts and a professional merchant; hence the attention he paid to descriptions of everyday life, subject details, and, in general, the most diverse information that could be gleaned from the books read. And, last but not least, Oreshnikov’s reading habits were primarily derived from his pre-Revolutionary life; thus his obvious indifference to contemporary Soviet fiction. If, for example, Maiakovskii is mentioned in the diary of Oreshnikov in 1925, it is reported that it was a friend of his who read his poems aloud, not himself.

Moving from our presuppositions to our conclusions, we would consider it worth asking what reading meant to Oreshnikov in his capacity as an old reader.

First, reading meant the constant practice of cognition and research. The exceptional rationalism and positivism that defined the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as the personal experience of Oreshnikov as a coin collector, researcher, and a merchant, are reflected in his particular interest in reading books for the sake of acquiring useful information. It is clear that Oreshnikov read many works directly related to his interests as a researcher and collector: “... read A. N. Zograf’s *About the Types of Kherson Coins* [O tipakh khersonskikh monet]” (from the diary of 1922); “I read the articles of Zograf, Berthier-Delagard and my own in the numismatics of Khersoniana (from the diary of 1929); “The other day Pisanko brought me a manuscript about rare Russian coins of the XVIII–XIX centuries; in the foreword he wrote about the Russian numismatics of the XVII–XX centuries; I haven’t read anything more ridiculous in this area, it is extremely mediocre and ignorant” (from the diary of 1929), etc. However, Oreshnikov sought out information about which he was curious not only in historical works,⁷ but in fiction as well. For example, in 1923 he wrote, “Read *The Fiery Angel* [Ognennyi angel] by V. Briusov; the author is thought to be a talented,

6 For more details on this persecution, please refer to: F. F. Perchenok, “Akademiia nauk na ‘velikom perelome.’ Zven’ya. Istoricheskii almanakh,” 1 (Moscow, 1991), 163-235.

7 “I read P. K. Stepanov’s *The History of Russian Clothing* [Istoriia russkoi odezhdy] (about Scythian clothing); “For the whole day I was reading passages from Karamzin, Kliuchevskii, Bagalei, which related to the Kiev period of Russian history; I’m looking for a connection between the economic side of the era and the issue of the first stamped coins; my searches are unsuccessful, but archaeological data lead me to believe that earlier in the twelfth century, no coins were stamped except ‘Iaroslav’s silver’ which was minted in Novgorod while Iaroslav the Wise was reigning there. This is a strange phenomenon. I made note of some information,” and other examples.

educated person; I found out many interesting things about everyday life in sixteenth-century Germany.”

This diary entry expressively demonstrates the feature of Oreshnikov's intellectual personality which simultaneously unites him with many old readers and distinguishes him from them: in books, first of all, he looked for a detailed depiction of the life of the era the author wrote about. Oreshnikov's perception of the carefully-read text was oriented primarily in the direction of domestic material culture: “I was reading *The Golden Ass* the whole day; the parts describing the mysteries of Isis, the ballet ‘The Court of Paris,’ and the tale of Cupid and Psyche are highly interesting; and there are so many curious features of domestic life!” (from the diary of 1921); “Reading Kakash and Tiktander, *Journey to Moscovia in 1602*; there are a few domestic details” (from the diary of 1926); “I am reading Gogol’, how many everyday features there are in his stories, especially in *Taras Bulba*” (from the diary of 1927); “I spent the whole day reading Kliuchevskii and Solov’ev about Russia before the beginning of the 12th century; trying to understand the family life of this era” (from the diary of 1929).

His second, more pleasurable approach to the book does not contradict to the first, utilitarian one. Indeed, the word ‘delight’ or the formula ‘great aesthetic delight’ is often found in Oreshnikov's notes about the books he read: “I read Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*; full of improbabilities; I didn't experience any aesthetic delight while reading” (from the diary of 1918); “I read *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* [*Slovo o polku Igoreve*] with D.N. Dubenskii's comments, got great delight” (from the diary of 1926). We quote another similar entry: “I've read with delight *Woe from Wit* [*Gore ot uma*]. What a mind and observation the writer has!” (From the diary of 1927). But the important thing is that Oreshnikov derived his greatest aesthetic delight from books that enable him to immerse himself in the life of the past. (This rich past was possibly opposed in his mind to the barbaric destruction of the established pre-Revolutionary life in Soviet Russia in the 1920s). “I am reading *Anna Karenina* I enjoy the highly artistic pictures of everyday life that Tolstoi shows,” Oreshnikov writes in a diary of 1924.

The paradoxical consequence of the fact that Oreshnikov did not receive a regular higher education is that his reading habits drew him to an unusually wide variety of works. Acquiring daily pleasure from reading, Oreshnikov was not constrained by any fear of breaking cultural taboos. If the book he read was not obligingly Soviet, Oreshnikov was grateful to its author for the fact that this book at the very least distracted him from the present, and sometimes simply entertained him. “I am sitting at home and reading *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Dumas; I cannot read something serious,” Oreshnikov writes, for example, in a diary entry from 1919, a very difficult year for him. “I've read *Where the Oranges are Ripening* [*Gde apel'siny zreiu*] by Leikin (the 18th edition!!), one of the most vulgar books that I've ever read, but there can be no

doubt about the liveliness of certain sections,” he says in a 1920 entry.

It is probably Oreshnikov’s blissful ability to receive positive emotions from the ‘liveliness’ of various books that can explain a very wide repertoire of his reading, as well as a certain eclecticism in his tastes. Among the authors that Oreshnikov read with interest were Valerii Briusov and Konstantin Staniukovich, Homer and the yogi Ramacharak, the polar explorer Nansen and Suetonius, Rudolf Steiner and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, Mark Twain and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii.

But, thirdly, ‘delight’ is a too weak word to describe Oreshnikov’s reading experience. For Oreshnikov’s autodidact, reading, of course, was not just a simple leisure activity or even a function of his beloved occupation; on the one hand, it was almost a physical need, and on the other hand, almost a religious rite. One of the more tragic leitmotifs of Oreshnikov’s diaries in the 1920s is his inability to read due to his health conditions and/or the environment: “A strong melancholy feeling; I cannot read” (from the diary of 1924); “I feel [that I am having] a strong nervous breakdown, I could not concentrate on reading (I was reading *Troilus and Cressida* by Shakespeare)” (from the diary of the same year); “Eczema hurts, especially at night. I feel a great weakness, I cannot even read at night” (from the diary of 1925); “With such a life I cannot read at all, my head does not work” (from the diary of the same year).

Fourthly, the book remained for Oreshnikov—as it did for many other old readers—the main source of consolation and comfort throughout the 1920s. “A dreary feeling, which prevented me from concentrating, didn’t let me read; I spent an hour playing solitaire, then went to the *A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens, and my head returned to a normal state” notes Oreshnikov in a 1925 diary entry. However, Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin certainly had the most life-giving impact on him.⁸ “I was reading *Eugene Onegin* [*Evgenii Onegin*]; Pushkin makes me so calm, no matter how excited I am when I read him, I calm down,” admits Oreshnikov in a 1924 entry. “I read Lermontov in the morning, re-read all my favorite poems from the last years of his life; what a great talent. Then I read Pushkin, my mind relaxed; my favorite poet gives me great calmness,” he writes in a 1926 entry. “Before breakfast I read Chekhov, got bored and began to read *Dubrovskii* by Pushkin,” notes Oreshnikov in an entry from the same year. It is interesting that Oreshnikov also used Pushkin’s works as a healing treatment in communication with his close friend. “...I went to L.V., she had pains in her heart; I read her excerpts from the *Captain’s Daughter* [*Kapitanskaia dochka*] by Pushkin aloud,” he wrote in his diary in 1924.

What is the common denominator of all these reader’s modes? Let’s pay

8 Here is another similarity between Oreshnikov and other old readers, many of whom lived in the 1920s at the behest of the last poem by Aleksandr Blok “To Pushkin House” (“Pushkinskomu domu”), in which the poet addressed his great namesake: “Give us your hand in wind and weather, / Help us in our mute struggle”.

attention to the impulse with which Oreshnikov moved from the dreary world of the present to the world of the past. "I'm reading the beautiful description of the Roman Forum in *Le Forum Romain* by Ch. Huelsen (Roma, 1906); I bought this book during my unforgettable days in the eternal city in 1913," he writes in his diary of 1920. "...I read Saltykov-Shchedrin's letters, they are very interesting; I finished reading [the letters from] [18]76, I'm going through that time," he notes in a 1925 entry. "The whole day I was reading *Letters to My Brother [Pis'ma k bratu]* by Gershenzon [...]. The book is interesting as it makes me go through the time that I experienced myself," Oreshnikov writes in 1927. All this points to a defining trait of the old reader type in the 1920s—*emigration into reading, constant and consistent withdrawal from the Soviet life into the world of literature.*

2. A YOUNG WOMAN — A SCIENTIFIC WORKER

A fundamentally different type of Soviet reader in the 1920s is represented in the diaries of Militsa Vasil'evna Nechkina (1899/1901?–1985). She was born in the Ukrainian city Nizhyn. Nechkina's mother came from a family of rich merchants, and her father, a technical engineer, was the director of the Nizhyn Technical School before the revolution. Nechkina received her secondary education in the Ekaterina Women's Gymnasium in Rostov-on-Don and in the Second Ksenia Women's Gymnasium in Kazan, at which she finished with a gold medal and the title of 'home instructor' (in mathematics). In 1918, having received the matriculation certificate for the course at the male gymnasium, Nechkina became a student in the History and Philology Faculty of Kazan University. In 1921, having graduated, Nechkina remained there to prepare for a professorship in the department of Russian history. In 1922, Nechkina published the book *Russian History in the Coverage of Economic Materialism (Russkaia istoriia v osveshchenii ekonomicheskogo materializma)* in Kazan, and in 1924 she moved to Moscow. As a scientist Nechkina was a strong supporter of the official Soviet Marxist historians leader, Academician M. N. Pokrovskii. She taught political economy and history in the workers' faculty of the First Moscow State University, as well as the history of the USSR in the Communist University of the Workers of the East. At the same time, Nechkina worked as a senior research fellow at the Russian Association of Research Institutes. In 1927 her monograph *Community of United Slavs (Obshchestvo soedinennykh slavian)* was published. Later in life, Nechkina renounced the officially criticized concepts of Pokrovskii in the USSR, she worked for many years (from 1936 to 1985) at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and gradually turned into the coryphaeus of Soviet historical science, crowned with

the State Stalin Prize of the Second Degree in 1948 and was elected a Full Member (Academician) of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1958.⁹

Obviously, unlike Aleksei Oreshnikov, Nechkina was purposefully pursuing a career as a *Soviet* scientist in the period we are interested in. The way to make this career for herself was first to get a higher education at a reputable nearby university (Kazan University), then move to Moscow, and finally teach in Soviet universities (and to write scientific articles, of course). Proceeding from these assumptions, we might highlight two conditions which determined Nechkina's early reader's experience.

Firstly, with a single significant exception (which we'll speak about later on), Nechkina's sphere of reading consisted of books and articles she had to read as a student, or a teacher, or a person who studied foreign languages (books in English, French and Italian);¹⁰ or, alternatively, texts that she had to read as an author of scientific reports, articles and books. The occasions of non-task-based, on-a-whim reading were so rare in Nechkina's practice that she made special notes about them in her diary: "I read Edgar Poe's book and (by chance) Sluzhkov's pamphlet on mathematics" (from her diary of 1919); "I read / looked through Plekhanov's *The History of Russian Social Thought [Istoriia russkoi obshchestvennoi zhizni]*." "I read Kuzminskaia's children's book *From the Life of a Serf Girl [Iz zhizni krepostnoi devochki]* St. Petersburg, 1911, which accidentally came into my hands," (from the diary of 1920); "Reading Rozhkov's articles from *Education [Obrazovanie]*, I read all the rubbish from there as well" (an entry from the same year); "I was reading some not very good story in *Awakening (Probuzhdenie)* when I was waiting for the dentist" (an entry from the same year).

Secondly, modern Soviet literature was also a part of Nechkina's *compulsory* reading, and works that confirmed Soviet ideology would have been positively evaluated by her a priori. Of course, Nechkina, in contrast to Oreshnikov, read the agitational poem of Vladimir Maiakovskii 150,000,000 voluntarily in 1921, and in 1920 she re-read Blok's *The Twelve*.

Nechkina's attitude towards reading was developed by years of study and teaching. She perceived reading as an occupation requiring considerable discipline and will, which influenced even her acquaintance with those fiction works that she read beyond any program, for her own entertainment only. In 1921, she felt bored reading a rather voluminous novel by P. Melnikov-Pecherskii and made the following entry in the diary: "I read *In the Woods [V lesakh]* by Pecherskii, not always willingly, sometimes as a kind of duty: it's necessary to know. It's bad." A few days later, a note appears in the diary indicating Nechkina's strong-willed efforts to continue reading the

9 The Information about Nechkina's biography is taken from the publication: E. L. Rudnitskaja, S. V. Mironenko (eds.), *Istoriia v cheloveke' – Akademik M. V. Nechkina: Dokumental'naiia monografiia* (Moscow, 2011).

10 Cf. Nechkina's entry in 1919: "I tried to read Sappho in Greek, but it turned out to be pointless, because I do not have a dictionary."

book: "I read *In the Woods* quite a lot." And later she reports she has started reading another multi-page novel by the same writer: "I began to read *On the Mountains* [*Na gorakh*]."

These premises point to Nechkina's main reading tendency: reading is not only 'otium' for her, but also 'negotium'; not only a blissful goal, but means of social self-realization, a career tool. How did Nechkina's readership features evolve during the 1920s?

Unfortunately, once she moved to Moscow in 1924, Nechkina recorded her reader's impressions irregularly for some time. Notably, there are only four entries in her diary of 1929 and not a single one is about the books she read. Her diaries of the Kazan period, though, were constantly filled with notes and impressions of books and articles she had read. All in all, there are 396 records of this kind in Nechkina's diaries between 1918 and 1928.¹¹

In Kazan, her reading consisted of an inexpressive variety of books that could be easily classified into thematic clusters.

The first consists of books and articles according to the university program, which, in turn, are divided into historical and philological ones: Nechkina couldn't immediately make her final choice of the specialty. The fourth reading-related entry from her diary of 1918 illustrates the situation of the professional intersection where Nechkina found herself at the beginning of her scientific path:

I read Vernadskii's article "The Sovereign Service and Industrial People in Siberia in the seventeenth Century" (The Ministry of National Education Journal) ["Gosudarevy sluzhilye i promyshlennye liudi v Sibiri 17 veka." Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia]. There I also read about the sources of Lermontov's poetry, and was excited by the recent thinking about unconscious plagiarism; I re-read the instance of plagiarism by E. Keller and was thinking a lot.

Later, she made her choice favor of history, but it seems that Nechkina still considered for some time the possibility of returning to the philological path. Was that the reason that in 1919-1920 she was active in reading western fiction of the past?¹² (The number of Western classics sharply de-

¹¹ Nechkina's diaries are cited according to the publication: "... *'I muchilas, i rabotala nevroiatno': Dnevnik M. V. Nechkinoi,*" ed. E. I. Pivovarov; comp., opening chapter and comments by E. R. Kurapova (Moscow, 2013).

¹² "I read Balzac" (from the diary of 1919); "I read Walt Whitman. In the morning in Vera's place I began to read *Le Docteur Pascal* by Zola" (from the diary of 1919); "I read Surville and Hugo—about Balzac" (from the diary of 1919); "I read *Edda*" (from the diary of 1919); "Read Edgar Poe" (from the diary of 1919); "... read a vulgar novel by Mirbeau" (from the diary of 1919); "Began to read *Une vie* by Maupassant" (from the diary of 1919); "I began to read A. France's *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*" (from the diary of 1920); "A was reading a little of Maupassant's *Girls Who Got Married* (in the Political Department)" (from the diary of 1920);

creased in her reading between 1921-1924.) If Nechkina eventually took up the profession of a foreign philologist, a good knowledge of several foreign languages could have served as her trump card.¹³ However, perhaps she may have simply been preparing for her upcoming examinations in foreign literature.

Nevertheless, the lists of studies regularly appear in the general list of her student readings, which Nechkina, being an excellent student, did indeed attend to before her exams. The listed titles are, for example, to be found on the vast registers of books and articles on Western painting that she read before taking her university exam in the history of art in 1920.

The second cluster which stands out from Nechkina's reading list from her Kazan period includes books and articles she engaged while preparing for her studies as a teacher. "Yesterday I gave the girls a lesson about Babylon and read them 'The Lamentations of Jeremiah,'" she writes in a diary of 1919. "I was preparing a lesson for girls—the first lesson on the history of Greece," Nechkina notes in her diary of the same year. Subsequently, her home lessons with young students would be replaced by her lectures and seminars for Soviet students; those lectures also required preparations using thematically selected books and articles. Here are two entries from her Moscow diary of 1923: "I read excerpts from *Capital* in class, I am pleased" and: "I was preparing for a lesson in literature—read Turgenev (different works!)"

The third cluster includes a variety of materials that Nechkina was studying while working on the texts of her reports, articles, and books¹⁴—for example, a report on a large study of the historian Vasiliï Kliuchevskii. "I

"In the library, I began to read the Russian translation of A. France's *Rebellion of the Angels* and I've read more than half of it. Remarkably deep and witty, in places—sculpted" (from the diary of 1920); "I read excerpts from *The Song of Roland* in *The Anthology on the History of West European Literature* by Kogan and Marten (Marten 'Leçons De la littérature française')" (from the diary of 1920); "I began to read Dante. I read and browsed *Inferno* in Chuiko's translation" (from the diary of 1920); "I Read Federn's *Dante and his Time*, ed. 'Biblioteka dlia samoobrazovaniia,' Dante Alighieri 'La Divine Commedia,' Firenze, 1864, 'The Divine Comedy' in the translation of Chuiko and Golovanov, Courses of Storozhenko and de La Bart about Dante. I moved on to the Renaissance, and read the introductory chapters from Storozhenko" (from the diary of 1920).

¹³ Books that were read for better mastery of foreign languages could be singled out as a separate mini-circle of young Nechkina's readings: "Yesterday was a special day: I read Shakespeare in English for the first time in my life—an excerpt from *Julius Caesar*" (from the diary of 1918); "I was training hard in Italian (a little): I read Verga's *Novelle rusticane*, wrote down and learned words, rehearsed the old ones" (from the diary of 1919). Nechkina was fluent in French since her childhood.

¹⁴ Here is, for example, an entry from Nechkina's diary in 1921: "Velidov and Anuchin ran to me in the morning, they intrusively asked me to make a report on the *History of Prostitution*, I read 3 volumes about prostitution. *Encyclopedias of Practical Medicine* edited by Shpierer. I visited V. Ditiakin to take books about prostitution, and went to Troshin for the same reason and I was there for about three hours, he studied reflexes and 'made interrogations.' I read about prostitution in the small *Granat [Encyclopedic Dictionary]* ('v malom Granate)."

read V. Khvostov's *The Evolution of Historical Science and its Present State* [*Evoliutsiia istoricheskoi nauki i ee sovremennoe sostoianie*] for my work about Kliuchevskii, and I took notes. I looked through Falkenberg, Kuno Fischer about Hegel. I read about L. Ranke in the lithographic course of the new history of Professor Forsten, took notes. Made some notes from the 'plekhanovets' article "Notes of the Reader on the Book of Comrade Bukharin *The Theory of Historical Materialism*" ["Zametki chitatelia o knige tov. Buharina *Teoriia istoricheskogo materializma*"] (*Under the banner of Marxism* [*Pod znamenem marksizma*] 1922, 11–12) — for Kliuchevskii," Nechkina noted in her diary in 1923.

At the end of the above entry, we can clearly see the methodological foundations of Nechkina's labors by that time. It is necessary, however, to pay attention to the fact that Marxism had turned into an ideology which she did not immediately confess. The notes from her diary of the early 1920s show that she was then examining the main—and the only—ideology of the Soviet state, and was still wondering if this ideology could become her own. "I read the biography of Marx a little," Nechkina notes in her diary in 1919. "I started reading Tugan-Baranovskii's article 'What is Socialism?' ['Chto takoe sotsializm?']" she writes in an entry from the same year. "I began to read the *Communist Manifesto*," Nechkina wrote after a while. "I read the article by G. V. Plekhanov 'Herzen the Emigrant' ['Gertsen-emigrant'] in *Istoriia russkoi literatury* the day before," she writes in another 1919 entry. These and other entries from Nechkina's early diaries are non-judgmental (she usually was lavish with her judgments); the fact of her acquaintance with the Marxist literature and methodology is recorded, but nothing more.¹⁵

However, in her first book published in Kazan in 1922, Nechkina already acts like a true-believing Marxist, and her diary of 1923 was almost lyrical: "I read newspapers and magazines in the editorial office library (*Prozhektor's* edition, devoted to Lenin) (I love Lenin), No. 14 for 1923."

15 In 1922 Nechkina even writes in her diary about her fatigue at this kind of reading, which, however, is not surprising, considering the number of Marxist books and articles she read in a very short time: "...read / looked through, made notes: Plekhanov's 'The Diary of a Social-Democrat' ['Dnevnik Sotsial-demokrata'], 1916, No. 1; also his 'Our disagreements' ['Nashi raznoglasiya'], St. Petersburg, 1906; N. Kamenskii (Plekhanov) 'On the Materialistic Understanding of History' ('O materialisticheskom ponimanii istorii'), in the *Novoe Slovo* magazine, 1897, September; and his 'Destiny of Russian Criticism' ['Sud'by russkoi kritiki'], *ibid.* October; S. Ushakov (Plekhanov) 'A few Words in the Defense of Economic Materialism' ['Neskol'ko slov v zashchitu ekonomicheskogo materializma'], *Russkaia mysl'*, 1896, vol. 9; Tugan-Baranovskii's 'The factory's struggle with the handicraftsman' ['Bor'ba fabriki s kustarem'], *Novyi mir*, 1897, October; Elnitskii's 'G. V. Plekhanov', *Obraz*, 1906; Pokrovskii's 'The Reflection of an Economic Life in Russkaia Pravda' ['Otrazhenie ekonomicheskogo byta v Russkoi pravde'] (in *Russian History from the Ancient Times to the Time of Troubles* [*Russkaia istoriia s drevneishikh vremen do smutnogo vremeni*], an anthology of articles edited by N. Storozhev, 1, Moscow, 1898, ed., Biblioteka dlia samoobrazovaniia, No. 13); *Kievan Rus'* [*Kievskaiia Rus'*], edited by N. Storozhev, an anthology of articles, Moscow, 1910, ed. 'Biblioteka dlia samoobrazovaniia,' No. 13. I tired almost to the point of losing consciousness."

Thus, Militsa Nechkina would represent an exemplary intellectual reader as formed by the Soviet state—if it wasn't for one important circumstance of her biography. The fact is that in Nechkina's reader's repertoire of the 1920s there is still an extra large, fourth cluster of texts that absolutely does not fit into the biography of the Soviet career academic, and even partially compromises its integrity—namely, the works of the Russian Modernists.

One can state, with no exaggeration, that at the end of the 1910s and the beginning of the 1920s it was precisely the Modernist poems that constituted Nechkina's most cherished readings, that figured most prominently in her hierarchy of texts. Being treated for fatigue in a sanatorium in August 1919, she tried to completely abandon reading for a time; this proved too difficult, and she read a number of authors superficially and in small doses. The only book she made an exception for was a collection of poems by a contemporary poet:

On August 3, at 9:00 pm, I arrived at a sanatorium. During the entire period of my stay, I was fundamentally detained from any kind of reading and writing. This was not quite possible: a book will turn up occasionally and you'll read a few lines or several pages. [...] Among those writers I read by pages and lines I remember Chekhov, Rodenbach [...] Maupassant, Igor' Severianin (let's say I read properly his *Goldlira* [*Zlatolira*]), Hoffmann.

According to the diary, Nechkina preferred the verses and prose of the Russian Symbolists¹⁶, but she also read the poems of the Acmeists¹⁷,

16 "I read Blok (Aleksandr Blok' Poems' ['Stikhotvoreniya']. Vol.2, 1904-1907, Moscow, 1916)" (from the diary of 1919); "I looked through the *Symbolism* [*Simvolizm*] of A. Belyi, I grasped the difference between the meter and the rhythm"; "Read [...] G. Chulkov's *The Golden Night* [*Zolotaia noch*]; "I've read the *Song of Destiny* [*Pesn' sud'by*] by A. Blok, ed. Alkonost, Pb., 1919"; "I read *Une vie* and *Urbi et Orbi* by Briusov"; "I read poems by V. Briusov"; "I reread Blok's *The Twelve*"; "I read Briusov" (from the diary of 1920); "I read [...] *Gold in Azure* [*Zoloto v lazuri*] by Andrei Belyi" (from the diary of 1920); "Read Bal'mont 'Let us be like unto the sun' ['Budem kak solntse'] in ed. of Pashukanis, 1918"; "I read [...] A. Belyi 'Urn' ['Urna']"; "I read Belyi a little, 'Ashes' ['Pepel'], 1909"; "Read [...] *Splinters* [*Ivernii*] by Maksimilian Voloshin"; "I read Blok"; "I read Blok and M. Voloshin's *Splinters*"; "I read *Infancy* [*Mladenchestvo*] by Viacheslav Ivanov, ed. Alkonost, St. Petersburg., 1918"; "I read *Splinters* of M. Voloshin and his 'Verhaeren,'" Moscow, 1919"; "I read poems by Gippius, Sologub and some others in the third volume of *The Reader-Declamator* [*Chtets-deklamator*]; "I read *Incense* [*Fimiam*] by Sologub, 1921"; "I read Blok's 'A Gray Morning' ['Sedoe utro'], Alkonost, St. Petersburg, 1920, I also looked though his 'Beyond the Past Days' ['Za gran'iu nashikh dnei']"; "I read Andrei Bely's *The Princess and the Knights* [*Korolevna i rytsari*], ed. Alkonost, 1919"; "Then I read *Petersburg* of A. Belyi"; "I read *Notes of Dreamers* [*Zapiski mechtatelei*], No. 2-3 (A. Belyi's epic *Me* [*Ia*])."

17 "I read [...] Gumilev (*Bonfire* [*Koster*]. *Poems*, St. Petersburg, 1918); "I read Gumilev's *Pearls* [*Zhemchuga*]", "I read Akhmatova's *White Flock* [*Belaia staita*]; "I re-read *White Flock*"; "... I read poems by Anna Akhmatova"; "I read [...] Anna Akhmatova"; "I read the *White Flock* by Anna Akhmatova"; "... I read *Pillar of Fire* [*Ognennyi stolp*] by Gumilev"; "I read the entirety of Gumilev's poem *Mik*"; "I read and copied from Anna Akhmatova's."

Futurists¹⁸, and Imaginists¹⁹ with interest, as well as modern poets who did not belong to any of the listed schools.²⁰ Nechkina was interested in Modernist authors not only of the first, but also of the second, and even of the third tier (for example, Georgii Chulkov, the early works of Vadim Shershenevich, Aleksei Lozina-Lozinskii, Maria Moravskaiia, Marietta Shaginian). However, her absolute favorites poets were the three most beloved of the whole generation of 1920s readers—Aleksandr Blok, Anna Akhmatova, and especially Innokentii Annenskii.²¹

Her reading of his play is recorded in one of the most open and touching entries in Nechkina's diaries of the 1920s (1921): "I was reading Annenskii's *Famira-Citharede* [*Famira-Kifared*], feel terribly tense and upbeat, overworked, understood *Famira*, as if I had a hunch. A lot of happiness." Reading Annenskii's verses and articles about him is one of the leitmotifs of Nechkina's diary in 1920–1921.²²

The reason for her heightened interest in the Russian Modernists is explained very simply. The fact is that Nechkina's characteristic ambitions of the Soviet historian were combined with her claims of being a poet for several years—and, what is more, a poet of a Modernist orientation. She did not

18 "...I read *The Sounds of Spring* ([*Zvuchal vesnianki*], poems by Vasilii Kamenskii); "I've finished reading 'Victoria Amazonica' ['Victoria Regia'] by Igor' Severianin"; "...I read *Carmina* [*Karmina*] by Vadim Shershenevich, vol. 1, Moscow, 1913"; "... I read and looked through [...] Pasternak"; "I read 150,000,000 by Maiakovskii"; "I read *Thing* [*Veshch*], No. 1, 2, 1922, the avant-garde magazine which is published in Berlin."

19 "I read 'Goluben' by S. Esenin, Moscow, 1920"; "I read the 'Trerriadnitsa' by Sergei Esenin, in 1921, and read 'Imaginist girl' ['Imaginistka'] by Ippolit Sokolov, 1921"; "I read some Imaginists'."

20 "I read Lozina-Lozinskii's *The Pious Journey* (*Blagochestivye puteshestvia*), St. Petersburg, 1916"; "I read [...] 'The Mundane Chasuble' ['Zemnaia riza'] by P. Radimov"; "I was delighted with the 'The Pristiad' ['Popiada]"; "I read 'On the pier' ['Na pristani'], the poems of M. Moravskaiia, Petrograd, 1914"; "... I read and looked through M. Shaginian's *Orientalia*"; "I read Kuzmin's poems in *The Poet-Declamator*," vol. 3, ed. 2".

21 To learn more about Annenskii's readers of 1920s: Please refer to R. D. Timenchik, *Podzemnye klassiki. Innokentiy Annenskii. Nikolay Gumilev* (Moscow, 2017); See also TIMENCHIK, "Early Twentieth-Century Schools of Reading Russian Poetry," in Volume 2.

22 "I read *The Cypress Chest* [*Kiparisovyi larets*] by I. Annenskii"; "I'm completely ill, no toothache. I read *The Cypress Chest* by I. Annenskii a lot, Moscow, 1910"; "I read *The Cypress Chest* by I. Annenskii after sewing. I remembered a lot by heart"; "I both read and recited *The Cypress Chest* by Annenskii a lot [...] I read an article by Viacheslav Ivanov about Annenskii in the anthology *Channels and Boundaries* [*Borozdy i mezhi*]. I looked through the *Bibliography of Innokentii Annenskii* [*Bibliografiia Innokentiiia Annenskogo*], compiled by Arkhipov, ed. Zhatva, 1914 (the edition is numbered, Podliachev gave it to me, No. 218); "Erlikh was there. We talked a lot, read Annenskii"; "I read *The Cypress Chest* a lot"; "I read Annenskii and Lorenzo de Medici"; "I read Annenskii and Anna Akhmatova"; "I read a lot, I copied Annenskii and reflected on him [...] I've taken from Podliachev articles about Annenskii by Arkhipov and Mitrofanov and I've read them"; "I read Arkhipov's article about Annenskii's 'No one and nobody's' ['Nikto i nichei'] again" (from the diary of 1921); "I copied the poems by Annenskii"; "In the evening I studied Turgenev. I read [...] Annenskii's article 'The Dying Turgenev' ['Umiraiushchii Turgenev'] in the anthology devoted to Turgenev. 'Russkaia i inostrannaia kritika.' Compiled by P. P. Pertsov, Moscow, 1918."

publish any of her poems during her lifetime; nevertheless, Nechkina performed some of these poems on the stage during poetic evenings in Kazan. “A Poets’ meeting, disputation on Futurism. I recited poetry,” she writes, for example, in her diary in 1920. Nechkina sent her poems to Mikhail Kuzmin in Petrograd, spoke with a former member of Gumilev’s ‘Guild of Poets’ Pavel Radimov²³ in Kazan, and was in love with the newcomer poet Volf Erlikh²⁴ (later a close friend of Sergei Esenin).

We see that Nechkina, as a reader of the early 1920’s, stood at the crossroads of two hypothetical vocations, choosing between the fields of Marxist scholar (Soviet historian) and the ‘paths’ of the Modernist poet. This was reflected, in particular, in the reader’s notes from her diary. “I read Sombart’s *Modern Capitalism* and described *The Cypress Chest* [*Kiparisovyi larets*],” Nechkina notes in her diary of 1921.²⁵ What determined her final choice of readership strategy? It was not so much the personal inclinations of young Nechkina as her understanding of the logic of social order. When the historical vector was clearly outlined as a vocation by about 1923, she rejected the path of marginalization and relied on the ideological highway. Having realized that neither writing Modernist poetry, nor scientific research²⁶ would provide her a safe place in the Soviet modernity, Nechkina, from 1923 on, no longer contributes to her diary entries about reading contemporary poetry and prose and lands firmly on the position of the true-believing Marxist historian.²⁷ It is typical that one of the last entries in her 1923 diary, which contains references to a poet-modernist, is the information about reading a vulgar sociological abusive article by Boris Arvatov about Anna Akhmatova, who was once so beloved by Nechkina: “... I read the latest issue of a magazine *Molodaia gvardiia* I think No. 5 (Arvatov’s article about Akhmatova and others).”

Thus, reading for Militsa Nechkina —unlike Aleksei Oreshnikov— was, first of all, a social practice and a method of career self-affirmation. Listening sensitively to the social order of the Soviet era, Nechkina did not hide from it in a book; on the contrary, she used it as a springboard, climbing the ladder of prestige through reading. Thus, her reading, if we use the formula of L. I. Ginzburg, became the ‘fate’ of a person—the “point of intersection

23 “... I’ve been at Radimov’s for approving an examination-and-test register,” Nechkina wrote in her diary in 1921.

24 Presumably that was Erlikh who instilled in Nechkina her love of Annenskii (see one of the cited above entries from her diary).

25 We give here one more excerpt from Nechkina’s diary of 1919: “I began to read *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* by K. Marx. I read ‘Catilina’ (‘Katilina’) by A. Blok.”

26 According to Nechkina’s diary of the early 1920s it becomes clear that she was going to write articles about Blok, Andrei Belyi, and Annenskii.

27 Please refer to: A. I. Iaroslavtsev, *Militsa Nechkina: Literaturno-psikhologicheskii ocherk* (Moscow, 2010).

between universal tendencies” and was finally defined as “the pressure of the times.”²⁸

3. A DEVELOPING PROVINCIAL BOY

If Oreshnikov and Nechkina embodied the opposite *adult* readers types of the early Soviet period, the example of Anatolii Fedorovich Starodubov (1909–1979) helps to identify and describe specific stages of a *boy* becoming a reader (and only later—an adolescent and a young man); that is, a boy little affected by the influence of Soviet ideology.

Born in the Penza province to a tax inspector and a teacher, he moved to Ekaterinoslav (since 1926, Dnepropetrovsk)²⁹ at the age of eight. Tolya Starodubov stoically endured the Soviet backdrop of his early life, and regarded reading books from the Soviet canon as an inevitable and dreary duty, performed for the sake of a successful transition from one school form to another. In his diary of 1925 Starodubov wrote: “Here they are, the days before the end of the term! Apparently every single student spent a sleepless night learning politgramota³⁰, culture, or algebra. Oh, how bitter these days are!” The following entry was made in the 1927 diary: “Belitskii suddenly showed up today [...] According to him, the theme of Russian and public writing will be ‘The Beginning of the Labor Movement’ and Gor’kii’s *Mother* [Mat’]. I started to read *Mother* today.” Starodubov underscored his unenthusiastic impressions of this premier social-realistic novel in a later entry from the same year: “I was reading Gor’kii’s *Mother* for almost the whole day. I remember in the spring, a week before the exams, I devoured this book, read some pieces, and there was so little time...and now I’m reading the book ‘with feeling, with sense’...the book is ruined by endless conversations, but still it worries me in some parts (the search, the escape, May 1, beating Rybin).”³¹ “... I went to the garden and read...oh, dear! Babel’: *Red Cavalry* [Konarmia],” Starodubov noted in his 1929 diary. “As for books, I read a boring chronicle of J. Reed, *Ten Days*.” At this point, he shared his feelings about the ultra-Soviet book by the American journalist John Reed *Ten Days That Shook the World*, which concerns the October Revolution. “I read Lenin’s ‘Imperialism’ and did not understand anything,” Starodubov wrote angrily in his diary of the same year.

28 L. I. Ginzburg, *Zapisnye knizhki. Vospominaniya. Esse* (St. Petersburg, 2002), 60.

29 We took Starodubov’s biographical facts from the preface article by A. K. Fomenko “Ob avtore i ego dnevnike,” A. F. Starodubov, *Zapiski ochevidtsa. Ekaterinoslav, 1918-1923*, 2 vols., edited by A. F. Fomenko (Dnepropetrovsk, 2001), I. Starodubov’s diaries are quoted on both volumes of this edition.

30 Elementary political science

31 Let us also quote Starodubov’s opinion on the novel by B. Chetverikov (from the diary of 1926): “I read Chetverikov’s *Aleksei Sakulov*. This is the Soviet Martin Eden: the laborer who succeeds in writing. However, this book is for sure incomparably weaker.”

Perhaps the only exception to the rule was a social-realistic novel by Fedor Gladkov which impressed Starodubov. “Finished reading *Cement* [Tsement]. I liked the novel. The life of the workers, military communism, etc., are described true to life,” he wrote in a 1926 diary entry. But Starodubov was usually attracted to completely different books.

In 1918-1922 he, like every child, read and listened to what was recommended by adult—his father and mother, older brother and sister, a teacher, a priest... In Starodubov’s diary of that time, there are very few critical judgments about the books he read; the main evaluative statements are generally confined to the phrases “I liked it” and “it was interesting”: “I read *A Little Woodman* [Lesovichok] by L. A. Charskaia, an interesting book” (from the diary of 1919); “I read *The Trifles of a Bishop’s Life* [Melochi arkhieiereiskoi zhizni] by N .S. Leskov. I liked this book very much” (from the diary of 1919); “Yesterday I read the book *The Fortunes of Nigel*, and now I took it to my teacher. She gave me 2 volumes of Gogol’ to read. I began *The Government Inspector* [Revizor]. Terribly interesting” (from the diary of 1920); “In the evening we all went to bed, and my father read the tragedy *Henry IV*; I like Falstaff, his fatness” (from the diary of 1920); “My elder brother Kirill went to the Soviet library and brought D. S. Merezhkovskii’s *Death of the Gods: Julian the Apostate* [Smert’ bogov. Iulian otstupnik] [...] In the evening I read *Julian the Apostate*. A terribly interesting book” (from the diary of 1921); “I read *Dead Souls* [Mertvye dushi]. Very interesting” (from the diary of 1922). If Starodubov did not like some books at that time, he tried to be delicate in his assessments and, like Nechkina, read all the boring works to the end: “I finished the novel *No Way Out* in the evening. The novel is not that great, but you can read it” (from the diary of 1920).

Starodubov’s first uncompromising ‘protest’ decision in his reader’s practice was made in 1923 when he was fourteen years old; this decision was connected—as was typical—with an attempt to cope with a Revolutionary Soviet play by Vsevolod Ivanov, *Armored Train 14-69* (*Bronepoezd 14-69*). “I began to read *Armored Train* by Vs. Ivanov and dropped it—it’s boring,” he noted in his diary. Since that time, the books which he had to become acquainted with for educational purposes, began to alternate in Starodubov’s reading practice with typical teenage reading, i. e. with adventure and fantasy novels. He eagerly absorbed the books of Ernest Thompson Seton (in 1923),³² Rider Haggard,³³ Mark Twain,³⁴ Mayne Reid, Robert Louis Stevenson,³⁵ James Fenimore Cooper, Louis Boussenard, Edith Nesbit, H.

32 “I’ve been reading *Rolf in the Woods* by Thompson Seton. It’s a very interesting book.”

33 “The whole evening I was reading H. Rider Haggard’s novel *Montezuma’s Daughter* and I finished it. It’s a very interesting book! I went to bed at midnight.”

34 “I was sitting at home and reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It’s a very interesting book!”

35 “During the whole next day I was reading Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*. It’s a very interesting story”.

G. Wells,³⁶ Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Arthur Conan Doyle, as well as many of his imitators (in 1924). Interestingly, the reading of adventure literature prompted Starodubov to expand the volume of the reader's notes in his diary considerably: short evaluations were replaced by retellings, and sometimes by attempts to analyze what he had read.

The highest point of Starodubov's enthusiasm for adventure literature and, at the same time, his first, transitional step into the next stage (love affairs and poetry) was his acquaintance with the works of Alexandre Dumas père, especially with *The Three Musketeers* in 1924. "Zdanevich came in the evening. I gave him *The Counterrevolutionary Movement Led by Kolchak* [*Kolchakovshchina*] and *The Robbers of the Seas* to read and he gave me *The Three Musketeers*. I started reading this book," Starodubov says in his diary. "I was reading *The Three Musketeers*. I've read 27 chapters today," he wrote in a diary the next day. "Today I finished the first part of *Musketeers* and read 8 chapters of the second part. I'm reading slowly for pleasure's sake..." he added another entry in his diary a few days later. Starodubov noted parting with *The Three Musketeers* with such an extensive record:

I've finished reading *The Three Musketeers* on the 1st. D'Artagnan... Brave D'Artagnan strikes with his courage, purity, good nature. He is completely devoted to his comrades. How indecisive and at the same time desperately brave and generous he is, coming to Paris. Planchet, Grimaud, Bazin and Mousqueton also enrapture me, as well as de Treville, who always cares about his musketeers. But you remember the others with disgust... Anne de Breuil, Athos' former wife, is a branded criminal... Count Winter, Mrs. Bonacieux, Buckingham, the Lillian executioner's brother fall from her revengeful hand. Felton, Winter's officer, a strict puritan, becomes a criminal because of her. Or the formidable image of Cardinal Richelieu... Repentance hardly ever strikes his soul (when D'Artagnan talks about 'milady' Anne de Breuil's death during the interrogation). In general, this book is extraordinary!

Before proceeding to the description of the next stage of Anatolii Starodubov's development as a reader, it is necessary to mention an important and tragic circumstance of his biography, which left a purely individual imprint on his reader's experience. In January 1919 Starodubov hurt his leg badly, and often suffered pain in the following years. He did not go to school for months, and in 1926 he was diagnosed with osteoarticular tuberculosis.

³⁶ "...I've been reading Herbert Wells' *The Sleeper Awakes* and I've finished the book. It turned out to be very interesting. It describes future in 2 centuries from now. Giant airplanes fly in the sky, and there are small but lethal airsaws. Auto-moving streets are described there, and the cables through which people fly. Workers rebel against capitalists."

As a result of the operation, one of his legs was shortened, and he began to walk on crutches, and later, when he got better, with a stick. Therefore, Starodubov's school education took longer; he entered the institute only at the age of twenty-eight, in 1937.

All this resulted in a significant increase and expansion of the role of reading in Starodubov's life; for this reason, Starodubov's reading habits cannot be considered identical to the functions that reading performed in the life of his most well-read peers. The world of books turned into the space where his unachievable dreams and desires could be realized. This primarily explains a very large number of readers' entries in his diary—356. Cinema became another such space for the young man; Starodubov became passionately interested in it in 1925. From that time on, reading and cinema became closely intertwined in his life—not only because he now spent a lot of time examining cinema brochures and film actors' biographies, but also because Starodubov now perceived literature through the prism of cinema art. In his diary of 1927, he wrote: “Verochka gave me *Alaskan Adventures* to read (I saw the film *The Spoilers*, based on this novel). Therefore the book acquired a special interest and ‘picturesqueness’. I finished in the evening.”

The role of reading in his life increased greatly when he started falling in love. For obvious reasons, Starodubov was not very confident in his relations with girls, so he often benefited from examining possible romantic milestones by finding close and distant analogies to these events in the books he had read. This is how many insecure young men and women behave, but this became a therapeutic habit for Starodubov. In the diary of 1927 he wrote:

I was sitting in the park next to the central garden bed behind fir trees and reading Kuprin—*The Duel* [*Poedinok*]. I was reading and I couldn't put the book down. I was moved deeply by the image of Shurochka Nikolaeva. How strongly this woman reminded me of another! And Romashov, this dear, close person! And his pointless end. This book revived so many memories of joys and sorrows.

In the same year, Starodubov read Fedor Orlov-Skomorovskii's book *Platonic Love* (*Platonicheskaia Liubov'*) and reflected on what he had read:

A particularly interesting part is the author's diary. Abandoned, mutilated physically and morally, he was brought back to life by the love of a girl... All this is so close to me: his suffering, the desire to get free from illness, these painful desires of sex... Platonic love... The mystic ideal of a woman... After all, I experienced such love, love with no physical contact with a woman. Well, at

least he kissed his schoolgirl, I did not dare to do it, he talked, and I moaned... Skomorovskii was disappointed in his love. He did not find the ideal that he was looking for. The girl he loved was “not free from all the commonplace women’s quirks”... That could be the reason why I felt such aloofness, disappointment, watching the smartness, frivolity and inner emptiness of another woman—Nata.

Significantly, Starodubov’s most timid courtship for the main love of his youth—Nata (Anastasia Zarzhevskaja) was founded on discussions of books and movies. In the diary of 1927, Starodubov wrote:

Today I had a ‘continuation’ of yesterday’s talk with Nata (as I mentally call her). In the evening, when sneaking into my room (again, there is nobody there and she is alone with the book...) I stopped. “What are you reading?” She smiled, and said the name of the author. “And you are reading movie brochures again, as I can see. Do you like cinema that much?” I confessed... [...] Finally, she gave me George’s novel *A Bed of Roses* to read. The fact that she neglected the heroine increased my interest immediately: “What couldn’t she like about this woman, what does she condemn?” However, the fact that she had read this book made it a sacred object for me...

Later Starodubov continued to seek out special meanings in the novels Zarzhevskaja gave him to read. In 1928, he wrote in his diary:

Today I finished reading *Almond Blossom* by Wadsley. And strangely, I am at the mercy of the vaguest thoughts. She wrote: “the hero is my sort of man”: Rex—a nice clever young man, an ideal—at least for me. He’s lame (!). Wasn’t this the reason she compared me to him? Maybe this was the reason for my useless dreams of the previous year, my impulses for ‘ideals’; do I really mean something to her? And can I possess the qualities that one can love? And wasn’t it a hint that Dora had been an actress before! (Like her!) What did she want to emphasize with these associations? My being too far from the ideal hero or vice versa—identification with him according to some ‘anemic’ qualities?³⁷

37 Starodubov had a keen interest in fictional characters, who suffered from lameness like him. In a diary of 1927, he noted: “What a wonderful book I was reading today! This is *The Lame Master* [*Khromoi barin*] by A. Tolstoi. Grigorii Ivanovich, of course, is the closest character to me.”

Poetry in general and love lyrics in particular played a distinctive role in Starodubov's reading pantheon of the late 1920s. He first mentioned his voluntary reading of poetry in the diary of 1926, but at that point it was just a record of him copying several poems at the request of his brother: "I copied the poems from the book *100 Poets* for Kirill. I read Esenin." The situation changed dramatically after Starodubov met Zorzhevskaia. That experience was inseparable from the poems; the most powerful erotic experience recorded in his diary of 1927 was intertwined with the impression of reading the poems (Starodubov's older sister Tanya is also mentioned in the entry):

After the beach, about two o'clock, when Tanya came from the town where she had bought a book of poetry by Sologub, we got together to read it. Tanya and Nata were sitting on my bed... I was sitting on the chair next to them. Nata was leafing through the book, stopped in some places and read: 'Sniff, sniff, sniff! A little child whimpered.' Between the readings she patted her knee with her palm, uncovering her leg high... The recollection of this snow-white body...

At this point, the entry in Starodubov's diary breaks off. We must mention that in Fedor Sologub's poems and prose, the descriptions of naked bodies, and bare legs in particular, occupy a very significant place.

After that, one should not be surprised when reading Starodubov's diary in 1929 about his deeply personal perception of Akhmatova's love lyrics: "I read poetry by Akhmatova. Sometimes — due to the rush of feeling— I grabbed my chest. It's so good! Especially memorable are: 'I have a special smile,' 'As plain courtesy enjoins,' 'True tenderness cannot be confused'"

Therefore, young Starodubov's life as a reader unfolds by means of a double existence: the book reveals to him parallel worlds that romantically illuminate the boy's everyday life or, alternatively, compensate the young man's daily traumas. At the same time, his attitude towards the book evolves from the boyish world duality —the opposition of the book world and the banalities of Starodubov's existence—to the youthful search for lofty analogies between these worlds as a form of sublimation and therapy.

To sum up, reading played a much greater role than usual in Anatolii Starodubov's fate, as well as in the fates of Aleksei Oreshnikov and Militza Nechkina. This, in fact, might lead to the complication and individualization of quintessential reader "types" of the 1920s, as demonstrated by their diaries. For Oreshnikov, reading became a way of emigrating from Soviet modernity (typical) and gaining positivist knowledge about the world (individual). For Nechkina—a way of adapting to Soviet modernity (typical) and a means of self-discipline (individual). For Starodubov—an exciting alternative to boring everyday routine (typical) and a means of autothera-

py (individual). All three of them, despite their different attitudes towards contemporary Soviet reality (Oreshnikov's disgust, Nechkina's enthusiasm, and Starodubov's indifference), are united by the fact that they were not new readers fostered by Soviet authority. Even Nechkina combined her careerist knowledge of Marxist sources with enthusiastic reading of Modernist poems during the 1920s. While under the ideological pressure of the Soviet school curriculum, Starodubov continued to read adventure novels, film reviews, and love lyrics for the sake of his soul. And Oreshnikov tried not to look into the pro-Soviet books at all. Therefore all three distinctively stand out from the archetypal image of the Soviet reader, which is described in the works of many contemporary researchers.

A “SHADY AFFAIR”? READING THE RUSSIAN CLASSICS
IN LATE SOVIET CINEMA¹

Catriona Kelly

Filmmakers are among the most influential readers of literary texts. But are they good ones? Are these ‘readings’ like any others, or ones with a particular, perhaps seditious, influence and authority? How precisely does the ‘reading’ process work when a text is relocated from the domain of verbal signs to visual signs? In the “long century” since cinema began, these questions have preoccupied authors, cinematographers, critics, viewers, and more recently, dozens of cultural theorists and historians. While the making of (almost) any film requires a relocation from verbal to visual—from initial creative work in the form of treatments, scripts, budgets and other planning documents, as well as correspondence with regulatory and funding bodies, to the film itself as a sequence of images—this process is placed in plain view and becomes particularly controversial when it relates to a literary text that is generally considered to be a masterpiece. Adaptations of such texts reach audiences of millions and, if successful, may challenge or blur impressions of the written sources on which they are based. The

¹ The research for this chapter was carried out with the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council through a Leadership Award, for which I am very grateful. My thanks go also to the staff of the archives that I have used, TsGALI-SPb. (Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva, Saint Petersburg) and TsGAIPD-SPb. (Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov, Saint Petersburg) and to my project assistant, Marina Samsonova. At Lenfil’m, I would particularly like to thank Aleksandr Pozdniakov and Ol’ga Agrafenina, and the staff of Séance, including Aleksandra Akhmadshina, Konstantin Shavlovskii, and Liubov’ Arkus. An acknowledgement also goes to the many veterans of Lenfil’m who have provided interviews, including directors, camera and sound operators, costume and makeup staff, designers, and members of the administration. A round of applause also to the authors and editors of this collection, and an anonymous reviewer, for their helpful comments on earlier versions.

core assumption, whether among literary professionals or ordinary readers, is often that the process inevitably involves a significant shift not only of sign systems, but also of aesthetic status. Films diminish; they distort; they simplify. The very terms ‘original’ and ‘adaptation’ engrain such an interpretation, suggesting an inescapable *secondariness* in the results of the transformative process.

For the past 30 or 40 years, however, writers such as Linda Hutcheon, David Bordwell, David Macfarlane, Cristina Della Coletta and many others have energetically challenged this interpretation of how ‘reading’ in film works.² The new model of relations between literary and cinematic texts emphasises the autonomy of the latter. Rather than a transcendent ‘original’ and a ‘copy’ shaped, to more or less successful aesthetic effect, by direct contact with this, such analyses posit a whole range of ‘hypertexts’ that help to mould a director’s work. For instance, Luchino Visconti’s film version of Dostoevskii’s *White Nights* made such an enormous impact in the cinema that later movie versions of the story owed at least as much to Visconti as to Dostoevskii himself.³

Such a view of how film directors work as readers is significantly more sophisticated than the idea that they simply pick up a given book and attempt to impose their own interpretation on it. But all the same, the understanding has limitations. Particularly, it remains circumscribed by an auteurist view of the cinematic process, according to which important decisions are made by the director alone. Yet film is a collective art, its effects depending on large numbers of ‘readings’ by different artists (from camera operators to costume designers, sound engineers to conductors)—not to speak of editors, producers, and studio management. Nowhere was this more true than in the late Soviet film studio, where “film factories” were huge operations, employing staffs of many thousands, and where output was processed by government and Communist Party bureaucracies as well as the administrative hierarchy of the studio itself.⁴

The most familiar element of all this is the bureaucratic control that is usually referred to in the West as ‘censorship,’ and which tends to be perceived exclusively as an impediment to the creative process. In analyses of

2 See, for example, B. McFarlane, *Novel to Film* (Oxford, 1996); C. Della Coletta, *When Stories Travel: Cross-Cultural Encounters between Fiction and Film* (Baltimore, 2012); L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London, 2012). There is also a substantial literature in languages other than English, for instance G. Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris, 1982); J.-M. Clerc, M. Carcaud-Macaire, *L'Adaptation cinématographique et littéraire* (Paris, 2004).

3 R. Meyer, “Dostoevskii’s ‘White Nights’: The Dreamer Goes Abroad,” in A. Burry, F. H. White (eds.), *Border Crossing: Russian Literature into Film* (Edinburgh, 2016), 40-63.

4 The importance and specific profile of film studios in socialist countries makes it all the more odd that so little attention should have been given to their history, with the exception of the East German state studio, DEFA (perhaps because the films this studio made are universally acknowledged to be inferior to those in, say, the Soviet Union, Poland, or Czechoslovakia, encouraging concentration on the context of their production).

this kind, the editors working in studios and in regulatory bodies such as Goskino (the State Film Committee) are certainly perceived as ‘readers,’ but particularly slow-witted and obstinate ones, committed to imposing their own political, moral, and aesthetic perceptions on long-suffering filmmakers.⁵

Such an interpretation undoubtedly captures part of what making films in the socialist state was about. Both private diaries and semi-public materials such as discussions inside Soviet film studios make clear that filmmakers often found the process of regulation (in the term then in use, “control” [*kontrol’*] or “filtration” [*fil’tratsiia*]) annoying and deeply frustrating. But they also valued cooperation and advice. And a finished film, whether for worse or (in a significant number of cases) better, bore the traces of commentaries and criticism by editors, colleagues such as other directors and members of the film crew, associates, family, and friends—whether expressed in formal statements or in chats over cups of coffee in the studio café or over a drink in a private apartment. This process of ‘reading’ became still more fluid and unpredictable when the script for the movie was, so to speak, in ‘the public domain’ — a published literary work, and particularly when it was one bearing the lustre of generations of readership.

A case in point was director Igor Maslennikov’s ‘reading’ of Pushkin’s short story *The Queen of Spades* (*Pikovaia dama*, 1834) in his made-for-TV movie produced at the Leningrad film studio during 1981-1982. Contrary to the usual image of the lone genius struggling to realise his or her artistic vision in the teeth of opposition from obtuse bureaucrats, the history of the film was racked by vehement disputes about how to adapt Pushkin’s text and about the practices of interpretation more broadly. In turn, the comments and interpretations by different kinds of readers and viewers, rather than impeding the creative process, became part of this. It is this urgent, improvised work by many diverse and argumentative readers of Pushkin’s text, and its relation to the status of the cinema and literary classics and of the relationship between these in Soviet culture, which I propose to explore in this chapter. Discussion in the form of a case study allows recourse to a much wider range of documents than is usually employed for the analysis of Soviet film. But as I shall show, while the results of Maslennikov’s adaptation were in some respects unusual, the argument about it illuminates many typical features of reading practices in Lenfil’m, the studio where it was made, and indeed, the late Soviet cinema more generally.

5 See e.g. V. Fomin (ed.), *Polka. Dokumenty. Svidetel’stva. Kommentarii*, (Moscow, 1992); J. Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London, 2000); A. Golutva, L. Arkus (eds.) *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino*, 7 vols. (St. Petersburg, 2001-2004).

“I would like to thank Igor’ Maslennikov and his group for agreeing to get mixed up in this ‘shady affair’ [*temnoe delo*].” With these words film director Vitalii Mel’nikov, head of the television unit of Lenfil’m studio, introduced, on 22 April 1982, the studio discussion of *The Queen of Spades*.⁶ Mel’nikov’s comment had a partly humorous intent. What, after all, could be more respectable than the attempt to film this famous text, already adapted at least a dozen times on celluloid, and also the subject of Chaikovskii’s opera (which, in the late Soviet period, was no less canonical a work than the original novella)? In 1960, indeed, Roman Tikhomirov had made a successful ‘film-opera’ at Lenfil’m, making full use of opulent historical settings, with handsome leads, and received well both in the studio and outside.



Production still from Roman Tikhomirov’s *The Queen of Spades*, 1960, showing filming on the Winter Canal alongside the Hermitage. Courtesy Lenfil’m Studio.

Yet by the time the discussion took place, Lenfil’m’s *Queen of Spades* had been repeatedly blighted. Igor’ Maslennikov was in fact the third director officially engaged to transfer Pushkin’s story to the cinema. The first choice, according to archival records, was Mikhail Kozakov (1934-2011), an actor and stage director as well as a film director. Kozakov had worked extensively in 1979-1980 with writer Aleksandr Shlepianov (b. 1933) to produce the

⁶ TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 40, d. 81, l. 133 (record of discussion at the Artistic Council of the Television Unit of Lenfil’m), and *ibid.*, d. 37 (script file [*stsenarnoe delo*]).

original script. But on 13 October 1980 he cabled the studio pulling out “*because of my inability to find a successful directorial angle.*”

Lenfil'm's administration at first considered passing the project on to young director Konstantin Lopushanskii (b. 1947), who was just completing work on *Solo*, his debut film, set during the Leningrad Blockade. However, perhaps because of Lopushanskii's lack of television experience, the discussion came to nothing, and the next director with whom the studio signed a contract was Taganka actor Anatoly Vasil'ev (b. 1939), who had been pursuing a parallel career as a TV director since 1970. But in May 1981, Vasil'ev's relations with lead actor Aleksandr Kaidanovskii (1946-1995), cast as Hermann, the story's protagonist, broke down completely, and production halted again. With evident desperation, Vitalii Provotorov, General Director of Lenfil'm, wrote to the management of Soviet central television describing Maslennikov's candidacy as “the only possibility” of rescuing the film from ruin.⁷

It would have been much less surprising had difficulties of this kind overcome a movie on a contemporary topic, and particularly one with overtones of social criticism. The fall of Khrushchev in October 1964 precipitated a significant tightening of control over cultural output of all kinds, and cinema—the Soviet art form with the largest audience—came under especially sharp assault.⁸ Certainly, conditions were slightly easier in the Soviet Union than they were in the German Democratic Republic, where criticism of the state film studio's output on grounds of “irrelevance” and “nihilism” at the Eleventh Plenum of the Socialist Unity Party was accompanied by removal from screen of almost every film made in 1965.⁹ But while outright bans might be uncommon, “shelving” (*stavit' na polku*) (halting production or refusing to allow release of a given film) became increasingly widespread. More commonly still, a suspect film would simply not be approved for “all-Soviet release,” limiting the audience to members of cine-clubs and other self-defined enthusiasts.¹⁰ By the end of the 1960s, many Soviet directors

7 See the materials of the script file (*stsenarnoe delo*), TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 40, d. 37, ll. 1-57. Further references to this file in-text by abridged title and list [folio] number, as SD 1 etc..

8 See for example Woll, *Real Images*, and the documents collected in V. I. Fomin (ed.), *Kinematografottepli: Dokumenty i svidetel'stva* (Moscow, 1998).

9 See e.g. S. Allan, “DEFA: An Historical Overview,” in S. Allan, J. Sandford (eds.) *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992* (New York, 1999), 11-13.

10 During the process of final approval, a film was assigned a quality category on grounds of ideological soundness and aesthetic merit. A film in Category One would be guaranteed showings in premier cinemas, at film festivals, and so on, and would also be widely advertised and reviewed. A placing in Category Two, while less advantageous, was not a disaster, but Category Three films were subject to significant restrictions in distribution. Vitalii Mel'nikov's *Mother's Got Married* (*Mama vyshla zamuzh*, 1969) was an example of an adventurous film on a topical issue (the remarriage of a woman with a teenage son) that was well received in the studio, but snubbed by the regulatory bodies with an adverse classification. Since the assignation of a low category was not just a professional slight, but affected the remuneration of the entire film crew as well as the director, there were significant incentives to avoid this outcome.

avoided taking on “problem” films (despite Party exhortations to make exactly these), and the situation became worse rather than better over the next decade and a half.

One obvious way to escape the sensitivities of representing the present day was to make a feature set in a different era. Exactly this strategy was adopted by Nikita Mikhalkov in one of the most celebrated films of the 1970s, *Slave of Love* (*Raba liubvi*, 1975), loosely based on the life of the silent film actress, Vera Kholodnaia. But there were pitfalls here as well. If directors selected canonical subjects from revolutionary history or the Great Patriotic War, then they risked criticism for a presentation that was insufficiently orthodox. If they ignored such topics, they were likely to be accused of distorting history altogether. Cases in point were, on the one hand, Gennadii Poloka’s parody-musical *The Intervention* (*Interventsiia*, Lenfil’m, 1968), lambasted as a ‘mockery’ of Civil War history, and shelved till the glasnost era, and on the other, Andrei Tarkovskii’s *Andrei Rublev* (Mosfil’m, 1966), with its ‘mystical’ focus on the life of an icon-painter, rather than, say, the rise of the Moscow state or the liberation of the Rus from the oppressive domination of the Tatars. Tarkovskii’s film was forcibly shortened, placed on limited release, and finally circulated in the authorial version only in 1987.¹¹

A further alternative for the Soviet director who wished to make an “important” (*masshtabnyi*) film, but to avoid excess ideological risk, was to turn to a literary text that was securely ensconced in the Soviet cultural canon. This had also the secondary and significant attraction that the so-called ‘script dearth’ (*defitsit stsenariiev*) was an axiomatic feature of the Soviet filmmaker’s life. To begin making a film, a director required a “literary scenario” that had been approved by the studio’s in-house editors, the artistic council of the “creative unit” to which he or she belonged, and the government regulatory bodies (Goskino, or, if the film was made for TV, Ekran, the commissioning body of Gostelradio, the State Television and Radio Service). The Party authorities inside and outside the studio might also take an interest and impose their own priorities on the selection process. The path to approval was significantly easier if the author of the original “literary scenario” was a person of recognised stature—if not a professional script-writer or director, at the very least, an acknowledged major author—or if the “literary scenario” was an adaptation of a text by such a major author. Unknowns who sent their efforts to Soviet studios on spec were unlikely to receive a civil answer, if their work was acknowledged at all. But editors

¹¹ Another example of problems with an ‘orthodox’ topic was Andrei German’s war film about a repentant traitor, *Operation ‘New Year’* (*Operatsiia “Novyi God”*), completed in 1971, but placed on general release as *The Checkpoint* (*Proverka na dorogakh*) only in 1985; the same year saw the Soviet release of Elem Klimov’s *Death Agony* (*Agoniia*), completed in 1974, and based on the life of Rasputin, a patently “decadent” subject.

assiduously courted leading scriptwriters and authors, and reported with pride on successful efforts to secure submissions.¹²

Adapting work by a “Russian classic author” (*klassik russkoi literatury*) had certain specific advantages. Texts written in the Soviet period could become ideologically inconvenient if there was a change in the Party line. During the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, Lenfil’m studio ran into trouble with scripts by Iurii Tendriakov (whose stock fell sharply after Khrushchev’s dismissal from the political scene), Vladimir Maramzin (who went from a writer whom the literary establishment considered particularly promising to a habitu  of the literary underground), and even Mikhail Sholokhov.¹³ Added to this, if authors (or even worse, their literary heirs) were still living, there was a persistent danger of a push to wrest editorial control over the adaptation. In 1979, for example, studio management was sucked into an unpleasant wrangle with the widow of playwright Aleksandr Vampilov, who attempted to block further work on filming her late husband’s play, *The Duck Hunt*. Ol’ga Vampilova considered that the adaptation by Vitalii Mel’nikov as *Summer Holiday in September* was excessively free, despite the fact that the original contract had specified the film would be “based on motifs from” Vampilov’s play (*po motivam p’esy*), rather than a pious replication of its contents.¹⁴

Classic authors, on the other hand, were, as one would now say, “creative commons,” from the legal point of view at any rate. And filming a story, novel, or play with canonical status, yet set in a different era, was also a way of legitimating, in the eyes of a notoriously prudish censorship, areas of human experience that would have been off-limits had they been represented in the context of Soviet reality.¹⁵ The more film regulation was tightened up

12 I base these statements on detailed reading of Lenfil’m correspondence with authors: see e.g. the 1962 file of correspondence between editors at the Second Creative Unit and authors, including Iurii Trifonov, TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 18, d. 291, passim.

13 A script by Sholokhov was turned down by the cinema regulatory bodies in 1963, while scripts by Tendriakov and Maramzin were “spiked” in 1971. See the minutes of the studio-wide Party meeting held on 25 April 1963 in the Central State Archive of Politico-Historical Documents (TsGAIPD-SPb., f. 1369, op. 5, d. 57, l. 9) (Sholokhov), and the order of the Chairman of the State Committee on Cinema, 26 October 1971, “O spisanii zatrat kinostudii ‘Lenfil’m’ po literaturnym stsenariiam, ne imeiushchim proizvodstvennoi perspektivy,” TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 21, d. 443, ll. 103-104 (Maramzin and Tendriakov).

14 TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 40, d. 12, ll. 2-2 ob. (contract), ll. 22-33 (arguments with Vampilova).

15 For instance, a book on children’s cinema published in the 1970s argued that Franco Zeffirelli’s film *Romeo and Juliet* represented physical love (Romeo’s naked back at the side of the bed) as ‘pure and beautiful’ (L. R. Kabo, *Kino i deti* [Moscow, 1974], 76). A film showing the same scene in the context of contemporary Western (let alone Soviet) life would certainly not have attracted such warm approval. Equally, the adulterous relationship in Iosif Kheifits’ film version of Chekhov’s *The Lady with the Dog* (*Dama s sobachkoi*, 1960) did not raise eyebrows in the way a contemporary version of the same story would have done. The script file on the film (TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 17, d. 2868, ll. 1-21) indicates that editors and the cinema management, as well as literary historian Grigorii A. Bialyi (1905-1987), uniformly regarded

in the late 1960s, the more adaptations of literature appealed.¹⁶ As Grigorii Kozintsev summed up at a studio discussion in 1971:

Directors are stuck, there are no good scripts on contemporary themes, while classic works of literature have a story, they have strong feelings, they have great parts for actors. So why not make a picture like that? One director even directly stated somewhere or other, “Usually I make films on contemporary themes, but as I’m between projects right now, I’m going to adapt something from Chekhov.

Correspondence between Lenfil’m and Goskino from 1972 graphically illustrates the relative ease of pitching for a subject drawn from classic literature. The studio had to devote over a page to arguing the merits of *The Cellar* (*Podval*), despite the fact that its author, Leonid Zorin, was a well-known dramatist and established screenwriter. It was able to get away with just one line —“An adaptation of the eponymous story by I. S. Turgenev”— when putting forward Turgenev’s *Asya*.¹⁷

Certainly, those responsible for managing the Soviet cinema sometimes grumbled about the sheer number of adaptations proposed and realised by studios. In 1972, for instance, Filipp Ermash, the new head of Goskino, commented acidly, “Everything by Chekhov’s been shot down in flames.”¹⁸ But government bosses also had a vested interest in encouraging films that would “get through”: in the planned economy, a studio that only managed to release 80 per cent of its agreed output would lay Goskino as well as its own management open to accusations of poor work discipline. And it was highly unlikely that literary adaptations would cause, once released, the sort of rumpus endemic to a supposedly more relevant and worthy type of film, the “movie of contemporary life.” These latter were regularly the targets of outrage from provincial schoolteachers as well as — more dangerously— Party officials, a situation that likewise promised unpleasantness for Goskino.¹⁹

Chekhov’s story as the tale of a love relationship that was a positive and moving response to the constricting small-mindedness of petit-bourgeois morality at the time.

16 A second consideration was that filmmaking in the 1950s and 1960s was not a free-for-all either: at this point, ‘provocative’ films that addressed major social issues were preferred. When Iosif Kheifits proposed *The Lady with the Dog*, the response from a representative of the Ministry of Culture of the RSFSR (then responsible for regulating film output) was, ‘Why *The Lady with the Dog*? What’s it about? What’s the point?’ Attempts to explain were hopeless, but in the end he agreed that the Film Board could ‘indulge’ Kheifits. (Comment by A. A. Gol’burt at the Artistic Council of Lenfil’m, 27 January 1960, TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 17, d. 2835, l. 34.)

17 TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 21, d. 795, ll. 157–8, l. 163.

18 RGALI, f. 2944, op. 1, d. 855, l. 37, l. 71. Cf. *ibid.*, d. 771, l. 39: “Not one film in the 1972 thematic plan deals with the modern countryside. There are three films for children. Two comedies. And seven literary adaptations”—this in an output of fifteen full-length features overall.

19 An outstanding example of fuss over a film from contemporary life was Iulii Fait’s *A Boy and a Girl* (*Mal’chik i devochka*, 1966), which was pulled from the screen before its Moscow

All the same, interpreting historical literature was far from straightforward. The entire process of reviewing a Soviet film, after all, consisted in assessing how faithful the director had been to the 'literary scenario.'²⁰ The more exalted the reputation of a given text, the trickier the process of negotiating with that text became.

Young directors who undertook to film work by well-regarded Soviet authors were already under considerable pressure. In 1966, for example, Iulii Fait (b. 1937) was summarily dismissed from Lenfil'm studio after his film version of Vera Panova's script, *A Boy and a Girl*, excited the ire of Panova, the doyenne of Leningrad literary life, of senior figures at the studio, and of the Soviet cultural establishment. He was sacked from Lenfil'm as a result, and his career never fully recovered.²¹ Certainly, it was possible to expect that not everyone who watched a film during the in-studio approval process would necessarily have read the script with much attention, if at all (even though, strictly speaking, that was supposed to happen). But almost everybody in the studio, from management to porters, would pose as an expert when it came to a film version of a famous book by a leading nineteenth-century writer.²² Obviously, no Soviet studio would agree to release an untried director upon such a book; a leading director could have no automatic expectation of reverence. Even Sergei Bondarchuk's *War and Peace*, lavishly bankrolled by Mosfil'm studio (the budget, at nearly a million roubles per hour of film, was around three times the norm), had its detractors -- among cinema professionals, at least. Grigorii Kozintsev, noting with disdain that a "Czechoslovak costume jewellery company" was acknowledged in the credits, sniffed that the entire film took its tone from this. Natasha and Andrei's first dance was "like an Austrian ballet on ice," with little twinkling coloured lights, "cinematography as paste gems."²³

In the 1920s, Soviet filmmakers, like theatrical professionals, had a preference for "strong" adaptations of literary classics: Grigorii Kozintsev and

premiere after a run of largely negative reviews, and which attracted a substantial postbag from outraged members of the public, including a group of generals, not to speak of adverse comment from Vasilii Tolstikov, First Secretary of the Leningrad Communist Party. I have a chapter on this film in *Soviet Art House: Lenfilm Studio under Brezhnev* (in preparation).

20 For a good introductory discussion, see M. Belodubrovskaya, "Sound, Image, Text. The Literary Scenario and the Soviet Screenwriting Tradition," in B. Beumers (ed.), *A Companion to Russian Cinema* (Chichester, UK, 2016).

21 A detailed post-mortem on the film took place in the closed Party discussion "O prichinakh neudachi fil'ma 'Mal'chik i devochka,'" TsGAIPD-SPb., f. 1369, op. 5, d. 83, ll. 1-41. Iulii Fait's next film appeared after more than a decade of silence, in 1977, and from then on he was pigeonholed as a director for children.

22 As the discussion of *The Queen of Spades* on 22 April 1982 indicates (see below), only the General Director of Lenfil'm, Vitalii Aksenov, had the honesty (or gall, depending on one's point of view), to admit that his knowledge of Pushkin's writings was based exclusively on childhood reading.

23 G. Kozintsev, "Chernoe, likhoe vremya..." *Iz rabochikh tetradei*, ed. V. Kozintseva (Moscow, 1994), 97.

Leonid Trauberg's 1926 version of Gogol's *Overcoat* (*Shinel'*) was a striking example. But during the Stalin era, there was a fundamental shift in taste: the actor Aleksei Batalov's 1959 version of *The Overcoat*, with Rolan Bykov in the title role, was a remarkably well-acted and neatly made, but cinematically conventional piece of work.²⁴ While theatre directors such as Iurii Liubimov and Georgii Tovstonogov turned literary adaptations (Dostoevskii's *Brothers Karamazov* [*Brat'ia Karamazovy*], Lev Tolstoi's *Strider* [*Kholstomer*]) into artistic sensations, cinema directors stuck to safety in the form of historicised neo-realism. The most imaginative literary films of the late Soviet period (Nikita Mikhalkov's *An Unfinished Piece for a Mechanical Piano* [*Neokonchennaia p'esa dlia mekhanicheskogo pianino*, Mosfil'm, 1977]), say, or the same director's 1980 movie *A Few Days from the Life of I. I. Oblomov* (*Neskol'ko dnei iz zhizni I. I. Oblomova*, Mosfil'm, 1979) were adaptations of texts that, from the point of view of the Soviet canon, were of secondary significance. Pushkin was, in practice, more or less off-limits. If one looks at the list of *Queen of Spades* film versions, it turns out that the story, as opposed to the opera, had not been filmed in Russia since Iakov Protazanov's silent version of 1916. There were French, German, Polish, British, and even Hungarian versions, but no Soviet adaptation. Regular tributes to Pushkin as a pioneer of montage, from Eisenstein onwards, had not borne fruit in movies. In this context, it may be less surprising that Lenfil'm's version ran into trouble than that it got made in the first place.²⁵

The background to the emergence of the project was that the director of a made-for-TV film was in a different position from the director of a film made for the big screen. TV films were quicker and less expensive to make; they counted as less prestigious; and they were ephemeral, usually vanishing from screen into oblivion after a one-off showing. Despite the impressive, and increasing, share of the audience that TV films captured, and the shrinkage of audiences in the cinema, films made for "the blue screen" were, in terms of the Soviet cultural establishment, considered second-rate. State broadcasting in Western countries, particularly the BBC, was starting to make "the classic serial" an anchor of prime-time, but the first Soviet

24 Similarly, discussions in the official Soviet press from the post-Stalin era also adopted the conventional position that screen adaptations threatened the literary integrity of texts and should as far as possible aim to remain 'faithful' to the original. One obvious constituent of this was that translation of literary classics to a different time and place was off the aesthetic agenda.

25 Interestingly, another case at Lenfil'm where there were difficulties with filming a literary classic also related to a text that was firmly ensconced in the Soviet canon, Chekhov's "My Life." Director Viktor Sokolov, with several well-regarded films to his credit, was nevertheless subjected to sharp criticism from Ekran, though here primarily on ideological grounds — the film version allegedly gave too little weight to the social criticism that State TV and Radio's officials felt was the main purpose of Chekhov's story. Conflicts with the lead actor (Stanislav Liubshin) and camera operator (Dmitry Dolinin) exacerbated the difficulties, and eventually, Sokolov was replaced as director by Grigory Nikulin. For the long and troubled history, see the script file, TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 21, d. 812, ll. 1-61.

equivalent of *The Forsyte Saga* was... *The Forsyte Saga*, bought in from the UK.²⁶

All the same, within the profession, TV films were beginning to seem like a preferable alternative to features, however prestigious. The plain fact was that process of getting a TV film agreed was much simpler. Regulation was, compared with Goskino, extremely light, as Vitalii Mel’nikov described in 1979:

For instance, take the time I brought in for approval [a film based on Vampilov’s play] *Duck Hunting* [*Utinaia okhota*, 1967]. What did the comrades at the TV do? They realised it shouldn’t be sent off for to some mediocre editorial office to get the corners chewed off. We just sat down, me and two deputy ministers and the director of Ekran, no-one else at all. We had a thoroughly constructive discussion: no-one said, lose that word there, cut this and the other, they talked in broad-brush terms. They know perfectly well we understood the issues. No-one foisted specific changes on me. I could work out what they wanted and I had a better idea of how to get there. I was left with a real respect for that branch of the cultural administration.²⁷

What was more, Ekran had countenanced the idea of making *Duck Hunting* to begin with – at Goskino, officials had laughed in Mel’nikov’s face.²⁸ Il’ia Averbakh had a similar experience: “Goskino told me, no you’re not going to film Dostoevskii, so I told them, well, TV will do it, and that’s exactly what happened. And the same with Chekhov.”²⁹

Averbakh and Mel’nikov were by no means the only leading directors to have recognised the advantages of the upstart medium. At a crisis meeting of Lenfil’m’s studio-wide Artistic Council on 9 January 1979, Iosif Kheifits complained there was now a “total brain drain,” leaving the cinema units with ‘the odd debut feature and no more’. These days, when the First Creative Unit’s senior editor Frizheta Gukasian and he discussed whom to assign some promising script, there would just be “a long pause.” And where had the established directors gone? They were now making films for TV.³⁰

26 David Giles and James Cellan Jones’s 26-part adaptation of Galsworthy, first shown in 1967 and repeated in 1968, was the first British TV serial ever sold to the USSR, and was immensely popular there also, with over 30 million viewers per episode when first shown in summer 1971. Andrei Svetenko, “40 let nazad SSSR ‘podsadili’ na serialy,” <http://radiovesti.ru/episode/show/episode_id/11288> (accessed February 25, 2020).. The serial was, of course, also hugely popular in Britain, both when originally shown and when repeated in 1968 and later.

27 TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 31, d. 32, l. 387.

28 TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 31, d. 32, l. 386.

29 TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 31, d. 32, l. 391.

30 “Zasedanie prezidiuma Khudozhestvennogo soveta studii,” 9 January 1979,

If directors needed TV in order to make adventurous literary adaptations, for its part, the State Television and Radio Committee needed literary content as part of its push to cultural respectability.³¹ This can be sensed in the letter of 26 February 1980 sent by Boris M. Khessin to Vitalii Provotorov, General Director of Lenfil'm, in which he requested the studio to include *The Queen of Spades* in its creative plan for 1981,

bearing in mind the great significance that the State Committee attaches to the task of embodying the Pushkin theme on the TV screen, the traditions of Lenfil'm studio, which has such productive experience of work on the literary classics, and also the fact that the film must be shot in Leningrad [SD 2].

The particular manifestation of these “traditions” that Khessin no doubt had in mind was Iosif Kheifits’s 1960 version of another classic short story, Chekhov’s *Lady with the Dog*. Recognised both nationally and internationally as a contemporary masterpiece of literary adaptation drawn from a Russian source, Kheifits’s film had also provided filmmakers with an example of a private, intimate narrative filmed in the small-scale (*kamernaia*) manner that became Lenfil'm’s hallmark in the 1960s and 1970s.

But despite Lenfil'm’s pedigree, the process of making *The Queen of Spades* proved to be a great deal more complicated than anyone at the State Committee or the studio could have expected. Rather than a harmonious and consensual debate on how to realise an acknowledged classic, there was a vigorous and at times bad-tempered discussion about the authoritative interpretation of Pushkin’s story and how it should be translated to the screen.

In his entertaining book of memoirs, *Baker Street on Petrograd Side*,³² Igor Maslennikov represented the film’s troubled history as a kind of sinister magic tale. The “secret enmity” that the *Queen of Spades* is said to symbolise in the story’s epigraph vented itself on successive directors:

Director Mikhail Kozakov had signed a contract for *Queen of Spades*, but he sent a telegram from Israel in which he announced his decision not to film this “mystical history.”

TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 31, d. 312, l. 386.

³¹ For good discussions of the general history of Soviet television at this period, see K. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2011) and C. Evans, *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television* (New Haven, 2016), though neither of these books devotes substantive attention to literary adaptations.

³² Quotations here come from the online version, Igor’ Maslennikov, *Beiker-Strit na Petrogradskoi* (St. Petersburg, 2007), http://royallib.com/book/maslennikov_igor/beyker_strit_na_petrogradskoy.html (accessed February 25, 2020).

“I am shattered and destroyed by the grandeur of Pushkin’s prose!” Kozakov wrote, and feeling himself unworthy, declined the opportunity to make the movie.

The next “hero” was Anatolii Vasil’ev—the film director, not the theatre one—and he cast Aleksandr Kaidanovskii as Hermann. They filmed some of the story and... fell out for good and all. In sum, everything ground to a halt. Black magic or what?

In Maslennikov’s own account, he was saved from “the curse of the Queen of Spades” by his down-to-earth interpretation of the story’s meaning, as captured in a remembered (or perhaps invented!) conversation:

“As a trained literary scholar, I can tell you with complete authority: Pushkin was a remarkably clear-headed person and had no inclination at all to get tangled up with any dark forces. He had no inclination to mysticism at all.”

“So what about the ghost?”

“You just read what Pushkin actually wrote. Hermann got back home totally drunk and his batman had to put him to bed, and the old woman turned up when he was in that condition – the countess, that is, whom he really had pushed into a heart attack.”

By contrast with previous adaptors, as he saw it, when working with *The Queen of Spades*, Maslennikov and his team worked scrupulously from the story. “We treated Pushkin’s texts [*sic*] with the greatest care, making efforts not to leave out a single comma.”

This claim to unparalleled authenticity was hardly fair to Protazanov’s silent version of Pushkin’s story. Pruning details of dialogue because of the constraints of intertitles, Protazanov paid close attention to the atmospherics and characterisation of Pushkin’s text, as well as its plot. Particularly notable was his eye for gender politics: an extended sequence represented the Countess in her heyday as a spoilt and wilful beauty, while Liza, rather than the agonised victim of operatic tradition, more closely resembled a social go-getter such as Thackeray’s Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1848).³³

Equally inaccurate (or deliberately mythologised) was Maslennikov’s account of the previous efforts to film *Queen of Spades* at the Leningrad studio. The text of Kozakov’s telegram was completely different from the version

33 It is not clear whether Maslennikov had actually seen Protazanov’s film, which was not re-released until 1989, though it could be watched at Gosfil’mofond before then. An article published to mark Protazanov’s centenary (I. Vaisfel’d, “Effekt Protazanova,” *IK*, 8 (1981), 128-34) mainly considered his Soviet-era work, mentioning *The Queen of Spades* and *Father Sergius* only as examples of how the director had “believed in the future,” though a more appreciative view emerges in, say, A. Vartanov, “Mezhdū obrazom i illiustratsiei,” *IK*, 12 (1973), 104-10, or E. Ol’shanskaia, “V poiskakh utrachennykh podrobnostei...,” *IK*, 12 (1974), 130-5. Whichever way,

that he cited, and it arrived on an ordinary internal form from Moscow, not “from Israel” [SD 23].³⁴ Kaidanovskii and Vasil’ev did not fall out for curious and occult reasons, but because the former had concrete objections to elements of the shooting script [SD 50-51, 56-59]. Further, the interpretations that Maslennikov criticised for their distance from Pushkin’s original were justified by the directors who had worked on the story earlier by reference to the accuracy of these in terms of the text. As Kozakov put it on 12 April 1980, “On reading the script you might get the impression that we have done nothing to the story at all, but simply typed it out. And thank heavens! In that case, no violence has been done to the thing itself.” [SD 7]. These directors did not believe in a “jinx” any more than Maslennikov himself did, but were caught up, like him, in a series of aesthetic and artistic decisions. *The Queen of Spades* needed not just to be retyped, copied, or read aloud, but translated to the screen, and that process, as it turned out, was much more uncertain than any of those directly involved were prepared to admit.

By this I certainly do not mean that the film version of *The Queen of Spades* was, as it were, “designed by committee.” If inexperienced directors had little leverage during the process of editing scripts and producing films, the opposite was true when it came to big names. They did not have to take on projects, and when they agreed, this expressed genuine commitment. Before he sent his proposal to film *Queen of Spades* in June 1981, Maslennikov had already established himself as a director working for TV, and specialising in literary adaptations. In 1979, 1980, and 1981 had appeared the first three films in what was eventually to become a five-film series based on Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* stories. This transformed Maslennikov from a director who had tried his hand with modest success at a variety of genres— school stories, youth movies, film comedies — into one of the leading filmmakers in the Soviet Union. One could say that he was the number one pioneer of “the classic serial” for Soviet TV.

Yet Maslennikov remained versatile at heart. His Conan Doyle adaptations were notably idiosyncratic in their emphasis on Watson and their strong sense of humorous irony. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, for instance, was transformed from a masterpiece of Victorian Gothic into social comedy, gently poking fun at stereotypically “English” sangfroid. As Maslennikov recollected in *Baker Street on Petrograd Side*, when leading script writers Iulii Dunskaia and Valerii Frid offered to Lenfil’m their script based on *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Speckled Band*,³⁵ it was precisely the playful escapism of the proposal that appealed to him:

none of Maslennikov’s comments on his film mention the 1916 version.

³⁴ For the text, see above.

³⁵ Again, Maslennikov’s memoirs contain a small inaccuracy: the proposal sent by Lenfil’m’s TV unit to Ekran on 30 June 1977 proposed five films on groups of stories or single stories by Conan Doyle, mentioning specifically neither *A Study in Scarlet* nor *The Speckled Band*, but rather, *The Red-Headed League*, *The Five Orange Pips*, *The Man with the Twisted Lip*,

I’m not a particular fan of detective fiction and, as a trained literary historian, I don’t think Conan Doyle is up to much as a writer. The fact that I went for that script was strongly connected with the state of things in the country at the time. I wanted to follow the scriptwriters into some far-off place over the rainbow, to occupy myself with something pleasant that was totally unconnected with the contemporary world. And once more, my established desire to “act the Englishman” kicked in.

If Maslennikov’s method of operating when it came to Conan Doyle might be best described as pastiche —the self-conscious adoption of historical convention to ludic ends (or, to use the slang term current since the late Soviet era, *stioh*)— his adaptation of *Queen of Spades*, according to his own declared ambitions, had a very different purpose. It was, one might say, “hyperauthentic.” As he wrote in the original proposal to adopt the story for screen:

It seems to me that the directors who have tried to adapt *Queen of Spades* for screen have been inspired not by Pushkin’s story, but by the Chaikovskii brothers’ operatic version. Passionate love, mystical visions, the theme of fate, the gloom and mystery of Petersburg. You won’t find any of that in Pushkin. His work’s affinity lies not with the mystical Hoffmann (though he was extremely superstitious himself), but with the ironical Balzac. And the story’s true era is not the eighteenth century, when the opera was set, but the nineteenth – the period Pushkin himself selected.

The comments on other directors and on Pushkin himself are, to say the least, controversial in an objective sense. But what Maslennikov writes here is an accurate recollection of his motivation at the time when he took on the task of filming *The Queen of Spades*. The nature of the commission appealed, as he stated in his proposal to the studio, precisely because of the constraints upon it:

If Lenfil’m planned to produce *The Queen of Spades* as a film for the big screen, then I would have no idea how to direct it, but as a TV film, I’m prepared to have a go. [Emphasis original]. Pushkin’s compressed, laconic, “insolent” prose will be a good foundation for reading aloud by actors. The character of the

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle, *The Adventure of the Dancing Men* and *The Sign of Four* (TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 40, d. 77, l. 81). Of these, only *The Sign of Four* was ever filmed by Maslennikov, and that only in 1983.

TV broadcast will allow the classic text to be transferred to the screen comma to comma, from the first letter of the text to the last. Alongside this, the ‘scenic’ character of the story lies in Pushkin’s intuitive capacity to maintain a harmonious and equal proportion between the narrative as such and the live scenes in dialogue form.

Thus, I propose that [two actors], She and He should read *The Queen of Spades* aloud, epigraphs and translations from the French included, and make way to direct action in scenery and costumes only where the writer himself determines this. The reading should not be declamatory and respectful, but lively and witty, as the prose itself is. The scenes (eleven in all) must be presented with maximum attention to the character of the era. The theme of *money* is the main one in the story. [emphasis original].

This move towards “hyperauthenticity” was, however, in its own way revolutionary, and not just because Maslennikov aggressively assailed the point of view of an audience member who was less a reader of Pushkin’s story than a viewer of Chaikovskii’s opera. The crucial point was that the adaptation would include reading aloud as well as performance. And rather than opt for the time-honoured method of voice-over, Maslennikov had decided to place the readers of the story on-screen.³⁶ This bore the same relation to the dominant neo-realist conventions of the contemporary Soviet cinema as Bert Brecht’s use of slogans and prologues did to conventional romantic and sentimental stage action. There is no evidence that Maslennikov’s training in literary scholarship had actually included Brecht, or that he was otherwise interested in the author. But given the strong impact of Brecht upon the stagings of such influential late-Soviet directors as Iurii Liubimov and Georgii Tovstonogov, at the very least, there was “something in the air.”

For its part, Aleksandr Shlepianov’s original script was a freer treatment of Pushkin’s text than Maslennikov’s, but this, paradoxically, made it more conventional.³⁷ All the commentators on the script fully accepted the right

³⁶ Several publications appearing in *Literaturnaia gazeta* during 1982-1983 suggested that TV adaptations were closer to literature than ones for the big screen—because they were less fixated on visuals, because the intimacy of the small screen was closer to reading as a solitary practice, because the author’s narrative voice could be conveyed more easily, and so on (see V. Sokolov, “Chitaiushchaia kamera,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, September 1, 1982, 8; Iu. Smelkov, “Toropliivy ekran,” *ibid.*, October 20, 1982, 8; B. Khessin, “Proza na golubom ekrane: Perekrestok mnenii,” *ibid.*, January 16, 1983, 8). This non-interventionist stance (paralleled in Boris Galanter’s Pushkin biopic *I Am With You Once Again* (*Is vami snova ia*, Ekran, 1981), which consists of readings from letters and memoirs) was fundamentally different from the radical “hyperauthenticity” espoused by Maslennikov.

³⁷ For the standard view of ecranisation in the late Soviet period, see the comment by Grigorii Kozintsev in 1971: “When I read those discussions of whether literary adaptations are needed, I’m taken aback by the original question. Every film is an adaptation—starting with *Chapaev*. But when you begin work on a literary text, you should be very clear that you have a cultural treasure

of filmmakers to depart from the literary text —indeed, they expected this. Even the literary scholars consulted as part of the process of vetting the script – Nina Petrunina, Vadim Vatsuro, and Sergei Fomichev from the Pushkin House Institute of Russian Literature – paid at least lip service to this idea. “In the main, the scriptwriter follows the text of Pushkin’s story. There are few departures from that text, numerically speaking, and for the most part these are dictated by the specific character of cinema art,” Petrunina wrote [SD 9]. “The core plot of the tale is carefully preserved, as are the dialogues and characterisations,” as Vatsuro and Fomichev observed [SD 34]. The objections raised were at the level of good-natured historical pedantry: some of Shlepianov’s inserts were anachronistic, particularly a scene in which the Countess and her maid were seen visiting a patisserie in St. Petersburg (no aristocrat of the day would have set foot in a shop) (Petrunina), or a scene where sauerkraut was served to accompany champagne, considered an outlandish combination at the time and ever since (Vatsuro and Fomichev).³⁸

The fact that Shlepianov proposed supplying information withheld by the original writer (for instance, about the estate manager’s son, never mentioned before, whom Pushkin suddenly introduces as Liza’s husband in the epilogue) excited no resistance in itself. Vatsuro and Fomichev noted inserts from other texts by Pushkin, but commented that this was “skilfully done.” Even the smoothing out of the narrative order was not, so far as the literary historians were concerned, a significant problem. After all, film had its own logic. As Vatsuro and Fomichev pointed out, the viewer of a TV film, unlike a reader, did not have the opportunity of reviewing the earlier pages in the story if they found themselves confused by the action. Indeed, the main anxieties raised by these professional literary readers related to the fact that Shlepianov’s text might not go far enough to recognise the *spirit* of Pushkin’s story. Petrunina, for example, argued that the script had made insufficient use of the visual, cinematic effects that the writer himself used [SD 12], while Vatsuro and Fomichev contended that the “fantastical coloration” of the story was missing. “But that, in our view, is the right way to go about things; to lend a kind of irrational, fantastic tone is the job of the director” [SD 35].³⁹

in your hands and simply retelling it is totally pointless —it will always be stronger than what’s on screen. The point is to lend it a new life in the new time, while maintaining the huge cultural significance, the vast cultural force, inherent in the author’s entire personality.” (TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 21, d. 464, ll. 31-32.) Cf. the open admiration of Smelkov, “Toroplivyi ekran” and Khessin, “Proza na golubom ekrane” for Akira Kurosawa’s extremely free version of *The Idiot* (1951).

38 Petrunina’s report was much longer and was also more hostile to the cases of historical inauthenticity, but the fundamental tenor —a film adaptation would necessarily depart from the text in some ways— was similar.

39 In the same way, literary historian G. A. Bialyi accepted without question that Kheifits would need to augment and recast Chekhov’s “Lady with a Dog” for the screen, though taking exception to the introduction of named characters from other stories (TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 17, d. 2868, ll. 9-13). In Chekhov’s story, Gurov is a largely solitary figure, but in Kheifits’s film, he is —albeit sometimes reluctantly —very much part of a social circle that includes not just his wife’s salon guests, but the cronies with whom he drinks wine and discusses extramarital affairs.

The reaction of Aleksandr Kaidanovskii to the adaptation, on the other hand, was considerably less indulgent than the reaction of these professional literary historians. Not part of the original casting (the role was at first offered to Andrei Dubrovskii, then 24, and a relatively inexperienced film actor, but considered ideal in terms of his appearance and acting style), Kaidanovskii had been offered the part at a late stage, despite his point-blank refusal to consider screen testing. This capricious and self-assertive stance continued once work on the film had begun. On 28 April 1981, the first batch of rushes was approved by Lenfil'm's television unit, who noted excellent work by the cast, the "interesting and expressive visual realisation," and "the subtle sense of the era on the part of the director, camera operator, designer and the entire crew, and their convincing embodiment of this on screen." But they also noted signs of serious conflict on set:

Against this background, all the more unexpected and unconvincing was the announcement by the actor A. Kaidanovskii of his refusal to take any further part in the filming, as the film was turning out bland [*seryi*] and uninteresting, and particularly as he entirely failed to produce any convincing arguments, merely referring to his intuition and to the fact that he did not some scenes in the shooting script (which, by the way, have no direct relation to Hermann's part in the film).

All of this is peculiar at the very least, since as of today A. Kaidanovskii has appeared in a full 545 usable metres of winter location footage (shot between 23 March and 3 April) and has begun work on "Liza's Room" (from 20 April). On 23 April Kaidanovskii refused to appear on set, referring to the demands mentioned above [SD 48-49].

Conflicts between director and lead actor were not so rare in themselves, but rarely reached the level of written denunciations, as opposed to stormy scenes on set or violent exits accompanied by slamming doors. However, here the potential for disaffection was unusually great, given that Vasil'ev was himself primarily an actor and relatively inexperienced as a director, while Kaidanovskii, after playing the lead in Andrei Tarkovskii's *Stalker* (Mosfil'm, 1980), had a unique profile as an actor, and had started to nurture directorial ambitions.

Professional rivalry may have fuelled personal dislike of Vasil'ev, or his directing style. At any rate, in a letter of complaint to Provotorov as general director of Lenfil'm dispatched on 5 May 1981, Kaidanovskii referred darkly to "petty blackmail and constant absurd attempts to fudge things" on Vasil'ev's part [SD 51]. The main thrust of his criticism, both here and in a four-page commentary dispatched along with the letter, however [SD

56-59], was the inadequacy of the shooting script. While welcoming the idea of a film adaptation as a potential 'new reading' of Pushkin, Kaidanovskii systematically attacked the version in hand. Affecting "not to depart from Pushkin," Vasil'ev had in fact not been faithful at all. For some reason he cut from the story of the cards to footage of Hermann walking round St. Petersburg. A full thirty-two scenes not in the original, and often containing dialogue in unconvincing style, had been inserted. Borrowing of motifs from other texts by Pushkin, which Vatsuro and Fomichev had accepted with a knowing smile, excited fury in Kaidanovskii. Altogether, the adaptation was not worthy of a great work of art. Indeed, it was positively shameful.

The timing and tone of Kaidanovskii's commentary were at best unfair. The modifications to Pushkin's story had been set out as such in Aleksandr Shlepianov's original script, and approved in the studio, by Ekran, and by the studio's professional advisors. As Vitalii Mel'nikov and Alla Borisova, respectively the director and senior editor of Lenfil'm's TV unit, pointed out to Provotorov on 28 April 1981, the timing of Kaidanovskii's objections was also bizarre, given that he had seen the shooting script before agreeing to accept the part [SD 48-49]. The studio's immediate response was to stand by Vasil'ev, and attempt to replace Kaidanovskii (who by now was refusing even to speak to Vasil'ev) as lead actor (a solution accepted by Ekran on 12 May 1981) [SD 54].

Two weeks later, however, this outcome was itself vitiated by the departure from Lenfil'm of Vasil'ev, "as a result of the studio's decision to cease production of the film" [SD 60]. The background to this precipitate disappearance is unclear, but may well lie in the difficulty of finding an alternative Hermann. In failing to cast either of the two actors who had actually agreed to audition, Vasil'ev had put himself in a weak position to negotiate with them, even assuming they were now available.

All in all, despite the dismissal of Kaidanovskii's objections by Mel'nikov and Provotorov, the former lead actor's assault on Vasil'ev's production had, however indirectly, been successful. And his central point—that the film version of *Queen of Spades* should stick closer to Pushkin's story—was now to be tacitly accepted by everyone concerned with the production.

The ground had thus been thoroughly prepared for Maslennikov's "hyper-authentic" proposal of June 1981 [SD 61-63], which went through vetting in Lenfil'm and Ekran more smoothly than might otherwise have been the case. One important factor was certainly that Maslennikov's handling, with acting reserved for a number of key scenes, required only a modest financial outlay. The original budget was now reduced to 144,000 roubles, about a third of what would have been spent on a feature film of around 90 minutes. Added to that, Maslennikov's readiness to take on *The Queen of Spades* guaranteed the film a "big name" director, which was some compensation for the loss, last time round, of a "big name" actor in Kaidanovskii. At any rate, on 13 July

1981, B. M. Khessin approved the latest change of director, merely stipulating that the situation should be agreed with Shlepianov [SD 67].

Maslennikov's appointment as director was to survive a number of setbacks that might have unsettled someone of less professional and personal security. First came the non-availability of Oleg Basilashvili as the male narrator— as Maslennikov's proposal indicates, he originally planned to have the text read by two actors, a woman and a man [SD 61-63]. But in the event, only Alla Demidova was free to undertake the work at the necessary time.⁴⁰ Then came Shlepianov's severance of connection with the film (on 2 March 1982, he wrote to Alla Borisova requesting that his name be removed from the credits) [SD 68]. While this was probably a relief for Maslennikov, the rather lukewarm reception of the finished movie at Lenfil'm was certainly less encouraging. At the meeting of the TV unit's studio council that met to discuss the showing on 22 April 1982, most of the participants expressed tactful bewilderment at Maslennikov's approach, rather than approbation or enthusiasm.⁴¹

"Well, as a number on a concert programme, evidently, it's a success," observed the film director Iskander Khamraev. "But the effect is curious: not one line of *The Queen of Spades* is missing, indeed, two or three have been added, but as a feature film, this simply doesn't work. [...] Everything has been done to the highest possible standard, but it left me cold." "Sometimes Demidova appears on screen and sometimes she does a voice-over, but you can't understand when one thing happens and when the other," commented sociologist and former director of Leningrad TV, Boris Firsov. "This isn't a pioneering new interpretation of Pushkin's story; it's an artistic mish-mash." Other participants in the discussion also noted emotional coldness, "too much trust in Pushkin's text and not enough illustration," and a lack of logic in the handing of Demidova's appearance.

While conceding with respect the sheer innovativeness of Maslennikov's approach ("we have never had anything like this before – the refusal to construct any kind of a script and to make cinematic transformations of any kind"), Iakov Roshchin, one of the studio's most experienced editors, also argued that reading aloud had turned out to be inimical to cinematic tradition: "Sometimes you register what she's saying and sometimes you don't." The sketchy way in which Hermann's story was represented was at once intriguing and frustrating. "Even Liza does not inspire sympathy." Alla Borisova attempted to defend Maslennikov's approach, but even she concluded, "We wanted to film *The Queen of Spades*, but alas, we ended up simply by reading it aloud (*nam khotelos' postavit' "Pikovuiu damu," no k sozhaleniiu, udalos' tol'ko prochitat'*). Vasili Akse'nov (by now General Director of the studio) conceded he had read Pushkin for the last time "back in childhood," but

40 For the information about Basilashvili, see Maslennikov, *Beiker-Strit na Petrogradskoi*.

41 Here and below, I quote from TsGALI-SPb., f. 257, op. 40, d. 37, ll. 133-156.

all the same confidently asserted, “I think the result will be fairly tedious. Experiments of this kind interest no-one.”

Summing up the discussion, Vitalii Mel’nikov recommended “more daring cuts, to make the plot tauter,” and more focus on Demidova’s face. “I call for more courage.” Maslennikov, in his reply, refused to budge, however. Mel’nikov was mistaken in recalling that a scene between Lizaveta Ivanovna and the Countess had vanished from the film: “We simply put some music on the soundtrack,” he pointed out, a change that had made the scene unrecognisable to the careless viewer. He firmly reiterated his original position: “It was because no-one has read *The Queen of Spades* that I decided this way of doing things was essential.” The story was in no way mystical: “It is directed against mercantile calculation, money, the German attitude to life, and the fact that Pushkin hasn’t a good word to say for Hermann really appealed to me.” He conceded the emotional flatness of the results: “I was bored myself,” he admitted. But the essential point was to stick as closely as possible to the text: “This narrative is an effort to convey as accurately as possible how I see the text, to read Pushkin literally.” The results in cinematographic terms had indeed been peculiar, but “I am not trying to pass this off as a feature film —my task was not to falsify anything. [...] If you’re bored, then let Pushkin take the rap. [...] For people who love Russian literature, we have done something really good.”

Had *The Queen of Spades* been intended as a film for the big screen, Maslennikov’s words would surely not have carried the day. Sooner or later, someone at a Lenfil’m discussion would have raised the issue of how the movie would be received at 7 Gnezdnikovskii pereulok (the offices of Goskino), and —by this period of Soviet history— whether anyone would actually pay to see it.⁴² But in fact the participants conceded that the rules of the small screen were different, and that Demidova’s presence, strangely disorienting when the film was viewed in the studio’s movie theatre, would likely have a different effect when *The Queen of Spades* reached its intended auditorium and public.⁴³

42 From the point when Filipp Ermash became head of Goskino in 1972, more and more attention was paid to viewing figures. An example of the new trend was a detailed review held at Lenfil’m in 1977 that indicated only two films from the early 1980s, Vladimir Vainshtok’s 1973 adaptation of Mayne Reid, *The Headless Horseman* and Mikhail Ershov’s four-part series, *The Siege of Leningrad* (1973-1977) had reached 50 million or more (V. P. Ostashevskaiia, “Lenfil’m i zritel’,” TsGAIIPD-SPb., f. 1369, op. 5, d. 191, ll. 43-79). With its European art-film bias, the studio was beginning to look vulnerable commercially, as well as ideologically.

43 In similar vein, Smelkov, “Netoroplivyi ekran,” pointed out that TV could use its captive primetime audience, waiting for the news to come on, or idling away time on a holiday, to attract viewers’ attention to quality films. When El’dar Riazanov’s *The Irony of Fate* was first shown on 1 January 1976, he and friends had at first not felt much “hunger for art,” but this “funny, clever, and sad film captured our attention and the attractions of the festive table were somehow set aside till it was over.”

If Roman Tikhomirov had made an “opera movie” two decades earlier, Maslennikov had contrived to make a “story movie,” one as far as possible removed from filmed Chaikovskii. Where Tikhomirov chose the handsomest actors he could find as Hermann and Liza, Maslennikov selected for character rather than glamour. Indeed, Maslennikov’s entire project was an effort to undermine Tikhomirov: where the latter used actors (Oleg Strizhenov and Ol’ga Krasina) for the visuals, mugging to a sound track recorded by professional singers, Maslennikov employed actors’ real voices, and where Tikhomirov ranged panoramically through the famous centre of St. Petersburg, Maslennikov stuck to small cameo scenes and claustrophobic interiors. Where Tikhomirov’s director of photography, Evgenii Shapiro (1907-1999), employed splendidly saturated monochrome, echoing Lenfil’m’s “golden age” in the 1930s and 1940s, Iurii Veksler’s (1940-1991) grainer, nervy style typified the neorealism of the post-Stalin years.



Above: Ol’ga Krasina in Tikhomirov’s version; below: Irina Dymchenko in Maslennikov’s. Courtesy Lenfil’m Studio.

Where the musical score was concerned, Maslennikov challenged Chaikovskii’s declarative late Romanticism and elegant echoes of rococo with the reserved neoclassicism of Pushkin’s senior contemporary Dmitrii Bortnianskii. All in all, Maslennikov’s film championed self-conscious reflectiveness, rather than emotional drama. Its “authenticity” was a product of the late-modernist minimalism of its own age.

And indeed, its echo of contemporary taste proved exact. As a *succès d’estime*, the film amply justified Maslennikov’s obstinacy and paradoxical bravery. To the director’s lasting pride, the famous poet and intelligentsia hero, Bulat Okudzhava, voiced warm approval of the approach that he had adopted:

I was lucky enough to catch *Queen of Spades*—a Leningrad-made film led by wonderful Alla Demidova. This straightforward reading of Pushkin is far dearer to me than the sophisticated trickery you get from certain directors. In this Pushkin anniversary year, when there’s quite a rush of materials linked with the great poet, I am delighted that by the appearance of such a pure interpretation as this.⁴⁴

But whether Maslennikov’s film version of *The Queen of Spades* actually was a “pure interpretation” was a less straightforward question than Okudzhava’s assessment, or indeed Maslennikov’s own emphasis on his personal expertise in literary scholarship, might have suggested. If Petrunina (a scholar of the older generation) shared Maslennikov’s view that *The Queen of Spades* was a psychological study, with the appearance of a ghost testifying to the lead character’s state of morbid disturbance, Vatsuro and Fomichev understood the story very differently: for them, the fantastical was intrinsic to the nature of Pushkin’s narrative, not just to Hermann’s dislocated perspective. In this perspective, Maslennikov’s interpretation actually looked old-fashioned, rather than innovative. In his determination to stick to the text, Maslennikov was actually sticking to the reading of it current when he was a student at university some 30 years earlier.

Yet at the same time, Maslennikov’s “hyperauthentic” perspective was a compelling extension of the possibilities of *cinematic* interpretation at the time when his film was made. The film’s intercutting between Demidova, who is in sumptuous but obviously modern, dress (a three-quarter-length fur coat during the outside scenes) and the historical characters makes this much more than a costume drama, carefully researched though the costume designs (by Marina Azizian) certainly were. Base his interpretation though he might on an aggressively realist interpretation of Pushkin’s meaning, Maslennikov was required by his commitment to authenticity to filter meaning through the presence of an intrusive narrator who prevented the viewer from becoming lost in the emotional world of the story. Whether this is “authentic” in Pushkinian terms is a moot point, but it is certainly at the furthest possible distance from Chaikovskii. And this in turn suggests a motive behind adaptation that is perhaps insufficiently recognised in theoretical studies—the effort to *hide from view or excise from history* an existing adaptation, rather than *echo or assimilate* this.

In turn, the way in which Maslennikov interpreted the story points to an often overlooked resemblance between the creative world of late Soviet (more broadly, late socialist) cinema and late modernism. The emphasis on

44 Quoted from *Beiker-Strit na Petrogradke*. Maslennikov recalled that these comments were published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, but a search of the paper over 1982 and early 1983 did not turn up Okudzhava’s comments, though *LG* regularly reviewed film and TV in its ‘Arts’ section. Probably, Maslennikov had misremembered the newspaper.

interpretations of literary texts that at once suggest the tangible presence of historical reality and the strangeness of that reality was a characteristic feature of European cinema of the period overall. In its eerily affectless take on this story of a governing obsession, Maslennikov's film had striking resemblances, aesthetically speaking, to Eric Rohmer's 1976 version of Heinrich von Kleist's story, *Die Marquise von O*, in which the actors were encouraged to copy gestures used in historical portraits. The pressure to realise the cinematic possibilities of Pushkin's text that was paradoxically asserted by professional literary scholars would certainly have produced a less cinematographically adventurous version. And in that sense, though Aleksandr Kaidanovskii's assault on Vasil'ev's adaptation was the product of an amateur, untutored, and in sundry respects unfair response to the work of filming Pushkin, and though he proved quite incapable of evolving positive suggestions for how Pushkin should be reworked for the screen, his vehement critique of Vasil'ev's shooting script was fundamental to the emergence of a filmic interpretation of Pushkin's text that was not only "hyperauthentic," but artistically suggestive.

This case study of how the Soviet Union's most securely canonical writer was interpreted in a rare filmed version provides some thought-provoking insights into the act of reading in the last decades of Soviet power. There is, first of all, the contrast between the assumed familiarity of famous literary texts and the extent to which readers actually made contact with these directly. As Maslennikov correctly argued, Chaikovskii's opera (filmed in Leningrad in 1960) had in many respects obscured Pushkin's story. To use more technical language, a particularly authoritative 'hypertext' (or a multiplicity of these —different productions of the opera, in real theatres and on film) had come to stand in for the "hypertext" of the story itself. Yet the effort to return to the "original" proved quixotic, since the growing preoccupation of Soviet readers and creative artists with historical authenticity also created significant uncertainties about what "authenticity" might constitute.⁴⁵ After all, Maslennikov's picture of Pushkin the clear-thinking realist stripped out features of the writer that other readers/viewers valued: his irony and humour (Mel'nikov), his capacity for fantasy (Vatsuro and Fomichev), his meticulous depiction of historical detail (Petrunina). And to many viewers, Maslennikov's interpretation appeared to add nothing of his own. Indeed, by ambition, the film was not a 'reading' in the sense of an interpretation; it was a 'reading' in the sense of a performance. As a development, this no doubt reflected not just the emphasis on affectless enactment that was characteristic of international modernism at this period, but also the increasing alienation from emotional and moral discourse that had become a promi-

45 For a discussion of arguments about authenticity in the context of heritage preservation, see C. Kelly, *Remembering St Petersburg* (Oxford, 2014), chapter 3 (available online on academia.edu).

ment feature of late Soviet reality.⁴⁶ In Maslennikov’s own recollection, he had seen Sherlock Holmes as a way of escaping from uncongenial contemporaneity. But *The Queen of Spades*, on the other hand, was less an escape from Soviet reality than a strange echo of the anti-interpretive predicament that was characteristic of late Soviet intellectuals at the time when the film was made. The Pushkin interpretations made in the following years were of a very different order.⁴⁷ But that is another set of stories.

46 For an interesting first-hand recollection of this, see I. Smirnov, *Deistvuiushchie litsa* (St. Petersburg, 2008). A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The ‘Last’ Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ, 2006) sees the sense of alienation from social engagement and political and moral discourse as diagnostic for the intellectual culture of the period. Though Maslennikov did not belong to Yurchak’s “last Soviet generation,” his stance in the early 1980s was similar.

47 Aleksandr Orlov’s *These Three Trustworthy Cards...* (Lithuania Film and Lenfil’m, 1988) takes its tone from the supposed citation of Swedenborg that Pushkin uses as a chapter epigraph (“Late last night the lamented Baroness von W*** appeared to me. She was all in white and said, ‘Good evening, Mr Councillor!’”). The film inserts a mystical speech about cards and love from an anonymous gambler (played by Sergei Bekhterev, regularly cast as otherworldly eccentrics); much of it is presented as Hermann’s delusions, or otherworldly intuitions, set to spooky radiophonic surges; and it concludes with Gothic footage of Hermann in a Bedlam of shrieking lunatics. One of the scriptwriters was the very same Aleksandr Shlepianov who parted company with Maslennikov. Despite talented actors (Aleksandr Feklistov as a world-weary Hermann, Vera Glagoleva as a vulnerable Liza, and 83-year-old Stefaniia Staniuta as a frail but commanding Countess), the film is a stagey and melodramatic effort. Still more lurid is Pavel Lungin’s modernisation of *The Queen of Spades*, *La Dame du pique* (*Dama pik*, 20th Century Fox Russia, 2016), which intersperses footage from a performance of the Chaikovskii opera and a frame narrative of how the opera star director (also playing the Countess) seduces the young singer playing Hermann (her niece’s lover, to add a further injection of melodrama). The entanglement of “fiction” and ‘real life’ is all too familiar from, say, Carlos Saura’s powerful flamenco version of *Carmen* (1983), not to speak of a film that is closer to Lungin in its unabashed trashiness, Darren Aronofsky’s *Black Swan* (2010, also taken from a Chaikovskii crowd-pleaser, but this time *Swan Lake*).

PART IV

TOWARDS THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

FROM PRINT TO PIXEL: READING IN THE PERESTROIKA, POST-SOVIET, AND PRESENT ERAS, 1986-2017¹

Birgit Menzel

INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, reading in Russia has undergone fundamental changes. If Russians once appeared as “the most reading people of the world,”² today almost half of the adult population has turned away from reading books altogether.³ The loss of books as a cultural value is a general trend which cannot be separated from accelerating digitalization and global commercialization; indeed, the effects of such developments in Russia are comparable to those seen in similar industrialized countries of the West.⁴ However, in Russia these changes have taken on specific features, both in terms of their quantity and in terms of their lack of a historical precedent. Within three decades, the era of Soviet reading culture has moved from its peak time during the Perestroika years (1986–1991) into a long and agonizing decline. That

1 An abbreviated version of this chapter was published in German in *OSTEUROPA*, 1-2 (2019), 119-137. I would like to thank Manfred Sapper, Birgitte Beck Pristed, Henrike Schmidt, Rainer Goldt, Mikhail Bezrodnyi, and my anonymous reviewer for their critical comments.

2 This slogan most likely became a popular autostereotype during the Brezhnev era of the 1970s. Western correspondents promoted and kept emphatically reproducing it. H. Smith, *The Russians* (New York, 1976); K. Mehnert, *Über die Russen heute. Was sie lesen, wie sie sind* (Stuttgart, 1983).

3 “46 percent of the adult Russians do not read books any more.” See B. Dubin, N. Zorkaia, *Chtenie v Rossii–2008. Tendentsii i problemy, Federal’noe agentstvo po pechatu i massovym kommunikatsiiam. Analiticheskii tsentr Iurii Levady* (Moscow, 2008), 21.

4 For Germany, see the study “Buchkäufer – quo vadis?” for 2017. Between 2013–2017, 17.8% less people have bought books, including 37% less of the readers from the age-group 40–49. <https://www.boersenverein.de/markt-daten/marktforschung/studien-umfragen/studie-buchkaeuer-quo-vadis/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

culture has now almost disappeared, although its shadows are still visible in the present day. This era was characterized by a specific system of symbols and values in which the sacerdotal nature of books and literature remained a distinct feature. At present, the ongoing erosion of this reading culture—with its agents and state-control, deep-rooted in the nineteenth century—can be observed on all levels: book production and trade, reading audiences, habits, content, institutions, and media. Recent efforts have been made by the Russian government to re-establish a national, primarily culture of print reading. They point back to the Late Soviet 1970s, even as key problems for the post-Soviet period still remain to be solved: the reproductive institutions of literary communication, channels of distribution, various types of public libraries and an educational system to prepare young people for reading activities, and diverse functions of reading in an open society. While the book market has become part of the ongoing mechanism of global capitalism, reading Russia has turned into a continent of silent, passive-adaptive stagnation, with occasional segments of the culture leaping into a new digital age with new production forms, habits and material of (social) reading.

This chapter offers an overview of such changes with a focus on key areas of writing, reading, and selling literature: the book production and publishing business; institutions, agencies, and media of literary communication; reading audiences and habits; reading material (“who reads what where and how?”); and the educational system. It is structured both chronologically and systematically along four different time periods. Each part opens with a general outline of this period, and then addresses all the abovementioned aspects of reading culture.⁵ The following four different periods can be distinguished, primarily in accordance with political developments:

1986–1991: the years of Glasnost and Perestroika, with a boom of print-matter and the peak of Soviet reading activity on a mass scale;

1991–1999: a landslide of reading, in which the fall of the Soviet Empire and the privatization of the formerly state-governed culture in Russia resulted in a process of chaotic dissolution, agony, and crisis alongside a meteoric rise of popular culture;

2000–2008: under the new regime of president Putin, political power was transferred to the secret service and economic power concentrated in the hands of a few loyal oligarchs with their companies (including the main natural resources oil and gas). This was backed by features of state power and conveyed an impression of political and economic consolidation to the people. It was accompanied by a process of mass cultural adaptation to popular culture, an unprecedented increase of book production, and a rapid rise of the Russian Internet (Runet);

5 The term is used here in a descriptive sense, but as it also carries a normative meaning as a specific ideologized Soviet reading culture. I will differentiate in what follows between normative “reading culture” and the descriptive term “culture(s) of reading.”

2008–2017: after the financial crisis, reading activity steadily declined, which fueled the final period of Soviet reading culture, especially since 2014 with the new economic sanctions. In this past decade, state control was re-established over the media, in particular television—the dominating national medium of public communication—but also over the educational system. On the other hand, the general public entered the digital age, and with the spread of social media, as well as diversification of independent Internet-based communication, entirely new roles and channels for writing, reading, and selling literature have emerged. With a new generation of post-Soviet digital natives, the cultural gap between generations has deepened. The effects of this on modes of reading and attitudes towards media, as well as state political reading programs in the future, are as yet unpredictable.

I. 1986-1991: PERESTROIKA – THE AGE OF MOBILIZATION

Retrospectively, Perestroika represented a brief period of five years, during which the intelligentsia—engaged by President Mikhail Gorbachev as an ally for his reforms of Soviet socialism—became the main mobilizing force of society. Glasnost opened the gates of censorship, and an avalanche of publications coincided with political and, later, economic reforms that had the effect of accelerating the overall decomposition of the Soviet system. One of the basic foundations of this system was the Soviet reading culture. Before focusing on Perestroika itself, the most significant features of this culture should be reviewed:

- Literary centrism: authorities were represented by writers, critics, librarians, and literary journalists, who all served as political agents. Books were defined as primarily educational, i.e. having a cognitive and/or moral function, rather than serving as mere entertainment. In 1923, one librarian vigorously defended the task of Soviet libraries: “The reader should be given not what he wants but what he needs. Does a doctor or therapist prescribe medication according to the patient’s taste or wish? No! It is given to him for an objective purpose.”⁶

A centralized system consisting of a limited number of state-owned publishing houses which determined the production and business of print-matter.

6 V. Nevskii, “Iz zapiskoi knizhki bibliotechnogo instruktora, 2. ‘Entsiklopediia’ ili ‘Spravochnik elektrotehnika?’” *Krasnyi bibliotekar*, 2-3 (1923), 22; quoted from E. Dobrenko, “Iskusstvo prinadlezhit narodu,” *Novyi mir*, 12 (1994), 193-213, accessed at <http://www.library.ru/3/reflection/articles/dobrenko.php> (Fn 52) (accessed February 25, 2020).

The distribution of print-matter throughout the country. Books, magazines, and newspapers, promoted the authoritative texts to be read; the majority of readers shared similar topics, books, and texts.

A homogeneity of reading groups: the two metropolises, big cities, and small towns occupying the vast periphery of the empire all shared the same reading material. Literature, political journalism, and literary criticism coexisted side by side.

Intellectuals were considered to be “*vlastiteli dum*” (masterminds) educating the masses and transmitting their knowledge to the average and mass readers.

Since the 1930s, a strong, established canon of texts ruled homes, schools, universities, and indeed the whole educational system. While a great number of intellectuals were socialized by way of their home libraries,⁷ the majority of readers were bound to use public, so-called “mass libraries.” Since the 1970s, the book-shortage (*defitsit*) had become intentional policy, so that books were considered a status-symbol. Censorship and state-controlled book-production caused a gap between supply and demand, and limited access to on-demand availability in both bookstores and libraries; this led to a black market where (primarily in the two metropolises) print-matter of samizdat (texts from the underground illegal press), and also tamizdat origin (texts printed abroad and smuggled into the country), were traded.

As Gorbachev’s reforms and call for mobilization took on momentum, the intelligentsia was encouraged by hopes that the masses, after the fall of censorship, would turn to the suppressed legacy of Great Russian Literature (*velikaia russkaia literatura*), ranging from Mandelshtam and Nabokov to Solzhenitsyn, as their preferred reading matter. Most members of the older generations experienced Perestroika as their second historical opportunity for liberal reforms, after the end of Thaw and subsequent years of stagnation had strangled their hopes and drove them to internal emigration. Perestroika culture was dominated by representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia. It was their peak time and simultaneously the beginning of their long farewell. The Soviet humanitarian intelligentsia, which had developed in the 1930s.⁸ by incorporating and transforming prerevolutionary historical traditions, saw itself as a placeholder for enlightenment, a speaker for

7 This was especially the case since the 1970s, a decade which was dominated by a book shortage in which 96% of all people had problems finding the book they wanted to buy. L. Gudkov, B. Dubin, “Literaturnaia kul’tura. Protsess i ratsion,” *Druzhba narodov*, 2 (1988), 170; also in Idem, *Intelligentsiia. Zametki o literaturno-politicheskikh illiuziakh* (Moscow, 1995), 1-41.

8 K. Clark, *Moscow the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 169-209. For a comparative historical perspective

the silent people, charged to express and end all suffering. Some of their distinct features now characterized public discourse: the pathos of the mission to spread universalist values; becoming part of a world-culture of intellectuals; mythologizing moral authority and science as a place of freedom and objectivity. But there was also a culture of debate with high vulnerability and low tolerance for criticism, in which criticism was taken as personal insult and easily turned into a means of verbal warfare. What had most shaped the non-conformist Russian and Soviet intelligentsia was its fundamental moral opposition to any official power and ideology, and corresponding preference for a radical attitude over action and practical responsibility. This now got confused. The intelligentsia was called by the power itself to help mobilize the masses for reforms and act against the enemies of Perestroika. Their privilege, the “comfort of violence,”⁹ was shaken off, and they could no longer symbolically profit from the book shortage. But with the intelligentsia’s public mobilization—its shift from reading to acting—had impressive effects. The general public (even people in far-flung regions where reading was still one of the main forms of leisure activity and into which samizdat or tamizdat publications had not penetrated) swallowed the histories, novels, and information which had been withheld from them for decades. Even if journals and magazines were the most popular media, books were part of the pastime of reading: in the mid-1980s, about 40-50 million (20-30%) of the estimated 161.2 million readers in the Soviet Union were “active” readers (i.e. they read between 1 and 7 books per month); 50-60% of the adult population read at least one book per month.¹⁰ Even though TV had become a much more dominant medium than the ideologically censored, sociologically-inclined research on the soviet reader was allowed to admit or provide evidence for,¹¹ Glasnost triggered an enormous amount of reading activity in the country.

After 1986, thanks to the courageous efforts of intellectuals, artists, writers, critics, and editors—most of them *shestidesiatniki*, i.e. from the older Thaw generation of the 1960s—more and more formerly suppressed works

of Russian and European intelligentsia, see D. Sdvizhkov, *Das Zeitalter der Intelligenz. Zur vergleichenden Geschichte der Gebildeten in Europa bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen, 2006), 139-184.

9 “Komfort nasiliia” is an expression invented by the literary scholar Marietta Chudakova which alludes to the moral self-righteousness of the Soviet intelligentsia, which was paradoxically tied to the political leadership as long as they were ennobled by their special attention. M. Chudakova, “Pochto moi drug...” *Zvezda*, 5 (2010); <http://magazines.russ.ru/zvezda/2010/5/ch9.html> (accessed February 25, 2020).

10 Stel'makh V., “Otnoshenie k knige sil'no izmenilos',” (Interview) in *Mezhdunarodnyi Memorial: Proekt “Uroki istorii”* (26.8.2013), 2. <https://urokiistorii.ru/article/51818> (accessed February 25, 2020).

11 For an analysis of the culture of TV in Late Soviet Russia see E. Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York, 1981); Idem, *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia* (Cambridge, 2008) and B. Dubin, “Televisionnaia epokha: zhizn' posle,” in Idem, *Intellektual'nye gruppy i simvolicheskie formy. Ocherki sotsiologii sovremennoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 2004), 185-208.

of literature, philosophy, film, and music were published; censorship and ideological control were lifted; and nonconformist intellectuals were championed and, in many cases, reinstated into positions of cultural prestige and authority.¹² The peak time of reading can be exemplified by the fate of the thick literary journals. They experienced an unprecedented boom, which brought leading journals, such as *Novyi mir* (*The New World*), *Druzhba narodov* (*The Friendship of Peoples*), and *Znamia* (*The Banner*), to average monthly circulations of more than a million. In 1990, *Novyi mir*, in which Solzhenitsyn's major works were published, sold 2.7 million copies. In the same year, the weekly paper *Literaturnaia gazeta* (*The Literary Gazette*) was sold 4.2 million times.

	1986	1988	1989	1990
Nm	415,000	1.15 m	1.55 m	2.7 m
Dn	160,000	800,000	1.1 m	800,000
Zn	250,000	500,000	980,000	1 m
Zv	120,000	150,000	310,000	340,000
Mo	500,000	750,000	770,000	450,000
Ns	220,000	240,000	313,000	488,000
Ok	175,000	252,000	385,000	335,000
Lg				4.2 m
Vl	15,000	16,000	16,000	26,000

Nm = *Novyi mir* (*New World*); Dn = *Druzhba narodov* (*The Friendship of Peoples*); Zn = *Znamia* (*The Banner*); Zv = *Zvezda* (*The Star*); Mo = *Moskva* (*Moscow*); Ns = *Nash sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*); Ok = *Ogonek* (*The Spark*); Lg = *Literaturnaia gazeta* (*The Literary Gazette*); Vl = *Voprosy literatury* (*Questions of Literature*).¹³

These figures illustrate a hunger for information and knowledge about the country's cultural heritage. In the first period of Perestroika, a unification of culture was envisioned and welcomed by many intellectuals. Homogeneous only in hollow slogans, in reality, that culture had long been divided into many different spheres (official, unofficial, underground, émigré, etc.)

Perhaps the institutions of Soviet reading culture are best exemplified by the thick literary monthly journals (TLJ). Although there were other, less centralized fields of reading culture,¹⁴ TLJ were representative because they

12. Grigorii Baklanov became chief editor of *Znamia*, Sergei Zalygin of *Novyi mir* and Vitalii Korotich took over the weekly magazine *The Spark* (*Ogonek*). All three of these men had been popular writers since the 1960s.

13. B. Menzel, *Bürgerkrieg um Worte. Die Literaturkritik der Perestrojka* (Köln, Wien, 2001), 46; Idem *Grazhdanskaia voina slov* (St. Petersburg, 2006), 34.

14. Wallpapers existed, after being introduced top-down in the 1920s, for instance rather

embodied a literary culture that was distributed by the intelligentsia from the metropolises via postal service to the peripheries. Although they had a much longer history dating back into the middle of the nineteenth century, these journals, since the 1920s and then again the 1950s, published a specific mix of literature, literary criticism, and political journalism which was different from preceding tradition.¹⁵ The majority of new literary texts appeared first in thick monthly journals, including voluminous novels (published serially), and only after their successful publication in periodical form were they published as separate books. Partly due to the long process of censorship, a book's average time-to-publication was several years long. This bulky system of production and distribution had been established in the early 1930s and, thanks to the more backward technology operating in printing houses, basically never changed until the 1980s.¹⁶ A system for ordering books in bookstores, and thus a national system of book storage, did not exist and was never intended to do so. The political directive was that all published books should leave the printing press and local stocks within three months whether they were sold out or not. Thus, monthly journals (literary, popular-scientific, or children's) were pre-financed by annual subscription and distributed equally among Moscow and Leningrad households and smaller cities and villages throughout the whole Soviet Union alike. Together with the standardized programs of school-reading and the strongly canonized system of literary authorities, official literary culture created the "Soviet reader" via a process which Evgenii Dobrenko has called "infantilization." Dobrenko described the "ideal of Socialist Realism" in its totalitarian period as an "adult child."¹⁷ After Stalin's death, state-controlled culture gave way to more diversification. While in the early 1950s, only four thick monthly journals had survived the earlier period, seven new ones were founded after 1956; they included new profiles addressing young readers,¹⁸ and, as the grip of censorship was loosened during the Thaw, unofficial spheres of reading emerged.

But after the Thaw period, many titles disappeared from public and academic libraries: between 1969-1979, 8,000 books by 600 authors were removed from their collections. In the largest library of the country, Moscow's Lenin Library, as recent as 1983 as many as 1,131,559 titles were locked away

horizontally in the peripheries and were filled from below. Tamizdat trading routes went from border regions to the center, and even samizdat routes did not exclusively go from the center to the periphery.

15 Thick literary journals in the nineteenth century included also sections on natural sciences and were more cosmopolitan, reporting regularly about developments in Western Europe.

16 L. Gudkov, B. Dubin, "Literaturnaia kul'tura. Protsess i ratsion," *Druzhba narodov*, 2 (1988), 168-189.

17 E. Dobrenko, "Vse luchshee – detiam (Totalitarnaia kul'tura i mir detstva)," *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 29 (1992), 166.

18 See Menzel, *Bürgerkrieg um Worte*, 133.

into special safes (*spetskhrany*), 80% of them titles of foreign literature. Each year, an average of 33,000 more titles were added.¹⁹

While 85% of the reading population had access to printed literature only through public libraries, intellectuals began to establish alternative, private home libraries in the early 1970s—a period in which only about 10% of all published books could be obtained by public libraries.²⁰ People were informed by samizdat and tamizdat literature or by access to books which had previously been restricted by the intentional shortage. Texts circulated outside of the official publishing system, mostly among intellectuals of the two metropolises and some urban provincial cities. By the mid 1980s, 68.4% of all readers obtained their books on the black market. In 1987, 347 (21.2%) of all the 1,632 newly published literary books were exclusively available on the black market.²¹

After 1986, censorship was finally abolished; within just one decade, all of the previously forbidden texts and writers could be published and read by all readers. The privilege of restricted access to knowledge as symbolic capital—and with it, the formerly exclusive status of the Soviet intelligentsia—came to an end. At the same time, decades of ideological conflicts which had developed and existed in a dormant state now erupted, especially after 1990/1991, when all state subventions suddenly ended and the cultural sphere was forced to stand on its own feet economically. Unprepared for the opening of all borders, the boom of “returning” and new literatures from the West (i.e. Russian high literature as well as foreign pulp fiction), unprepared also for privatization, but thrown into market conditions almost overnight, most intellectuals were swept into a state of existential crisis.

2. 1991-1999: DISSOLUTION, DECLINE, EROSION

After the exuberant expectations of the early Perestroika years, the sudden unexpected end of the Soviet Union and dissolution of the Soviet state caused an avalanche of chaos in the cultural field and massive disillusionment among the intelligentsia. A surfeit of exciting reading material of all kinds entered the market from inside and outside of Russia. What followed was disorientation and, soon after, a deep economic, social, and moral cri-

19 Stel'makh, “Otnoshenie k knige sil'no izmenilos'.”

20 G. Wilbert, “Entwicklung und Perspektiven der sowjetischen Lesersozilogie,” in P. E. Dorsch, K. Teckentrop (eds.), *Buch und Lesen international. Berichte und Analysen zum Buchmarkt und zur Buchmarkt-Forschung* (Gütersloh, 1981), 650-664; B. Dubin, “Dinamika pečati i transformatsiia obshchestva,” *Voprosy literatury*, 9-10 (1991), 84-97; V. Stel'makh, “Sovremennaiia biblioteka i ee pol'zovateli,” in *polit.ru* (2004), <https://polit.ru/article/2004/03/30/library/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

21 G. P. Iakimov, “Chernyi knizhnyi rynek v defitsitnoi situatsii,” in *Kniga i chtenie v zerkale sotsiologii* (Moscow, 1990), 137-150.

sis. In 1992, the sociologist Sergei Shvedov stated that when people were asked about the current state of literature, they gave extremely different impressions: “Catastrophic visions about the downfall of culture, speculations about the taste of mass readers are widespread and range from ‘nobody is reading literature any more today’ to ‘readers pick the wrong stuff, just pulp fiction’.”²² What is expressed here is a trend towards separation and polarization of reading audiences. This trend developed both in the field of literary production and reception, and still continues into the present.

After the end of the communist system, not only social and economic conditions, but all traditionally defined roles of literary communication—writing, publishing, distributing, and reading—experienced fundamental changes. The boom of reading ended abruptly after 1991, and a precipitous decline in reading has followed ever since. This development is reflected in the average number of copies distributed by the thick monthly journals:²³

	1991	1993	1995
Nm	200,000	60,000	28,600
Dn	200,000	45,000	18,000
Zn	419,000	73,000	36,300
Zv	130,000	35,000	22,200
Mo	150,000	35,000	17,100
Ns	311,000	92,000	25,000
Ok	242,000	60,000	29,000
Lg			302,500
Vl	13,000	4-17,000	9,100

Let us look at the most important changes in social and economic conditions, not least of which are the results of shock privatization. In the early 1990s, all institutions of Soviet literary culture abruptly began to dissolve. The new press law (June 1990) ended the state monopoly in the field of publishing and allowed the founding of private businesses in the cultural sector. All financial support for publishing by party and state was eliminat-

22 S. Shvedov, “U knizhnogo razvala. Optimisticheskie zametki,” *Druzhba narodov*, 1 (1992), 212. Also: “There is a large field of literature which is popular among wide readerships, but goes unnoticed by professional critics. In this field two types of works can be distinguished: screaming success with mass-readers for books which are usually based on films and TV-series [...] and specialized books which critics have not even heard of. In this case we can speak of ‘unknown’ literature.” S. Shvedov, “Literaturnaia kritika i literatura chitatelei (Zametki sotsiologiya),” *Voprosy literatury*, 5 (1988), 3-31, here 5.

23 One should consider that the stated numbers of copies were often inaccurate; for various ideological reasons, intentionally higher numbers were given. However, the general trend is still reflected in these figures.

ed. Prices for paper, subscriptions, and ultimately for all products related to publishing were removed from state regulation and began to float on the not-yet-established “wild” market (1990–1992). As a result, prices for producing print-matter skyrocketed. Printing houses, printing presses, and large parts of the paper industry broke down after decades of failed modernization and lack of maintenance.²⁴

Commercialization was followed by political dissolution: writers unions separated and split, consumed by ideological feuds or (more often) fights over liquidation and heritage. State-run publishing houses and thick literary journals, once key transmitters of literature, went into existential crisis or collapsed. The educational system, too, was deeply affected. Libraries experienced a dramatic decline in the 1990s. Different from most other countries, public libraries in Russia were almost exclusively state-run.²⁵ During the 1970s, 120,000 public libraries in the Soviet Union had 90 million registered readers in 1995, only 55,000 such institutions and 59 million registered readers remained. The latter number equaled 21% of the population.²⁶

One of the most disastrous consequences of privatization after the implosion of the Soviet Union was the collapse of the traditional distribution system of print-matter, which coincided with the rapid decline of its main medium, the monthly literary journals. What once had created the abovementioned homogenous Soviet reading population, i.e. the continuous flow of texts and communication about literature that had connected millions of people, was now interrupted or ended altogether. People could not afford the annual subscription prices, or simply did not have or take the time to read journals any longer, or postal delivery to the peripheries of the country stopped. The centralized system of producing books and journals collapsed.

This process was accompanied by an outbreak of ideological fights within the literary community (a “civil war in literature”)²⁷ among writers, critics, and scholars with different political views about the evaluation of the past and future perspectives for Russia and its role in the world. The background

24 In the late 1980s, more than 60% of all printing machines in the country were more than sixty years old. Gudkov, Dubin, “Literaturnaia kul’tura. Protsess i ratsion,” 175.

25 From the late 1980s on, projects aiming at creating private libraries have never been able to survive or even help create new perspectives on such a system. V. Stel’makh, “Rossiiskie biblioteki segodnia: vozvrashchenie gosudarstva?” in *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia*, 2 (94), March–April 2008, 30–36.

26 B. Menzel, “Der sowjetische Leser als Thema der Forschung. Probleme, Methoden und Ergebnisse der empirischen Literatursoziologie,” in A. Guski, W. Košny (eds.), *Sprache-Text-Geschichte. Festschrift für Klaus-Dieter Seemann* (Munich, 1997), 193; Stel’makh “Sovremennaia biblioteka i ee pol’zovateli,” 2.

27 This widely quoted expression was first used by Vladimir Vigilianskii (*Ogonek*, August 1988), later explained by the literary critic Sergei Chuprinin. S. Chuprinin, *Russkaia literatura segodnia. Zhizn’ po poniatiim* (Moscow, 2008), accessed at <https://lit.wikireading.ru/11515>. (accessed February 25, 2020).

of these struggles was certainly the question of who gets power and influence over the huge material heritage of Soviet literary funds and real estate after its privatization/denationalization. Among the readers and writers articulating their views in public (critics, scholars, journalists), some promoted liberal, pro-Western models of reforms and clashed with nationalists who, as the decline proceeded, more and more frequently allied with their former adversaries. Religiously orthodox, anti-communist Russian nationalists unified with “neo-Bolshevist” Soviet patriots on a common basis of anti-Westernism/anti-modernism and the continuous endeavor to educate the reading public. Self-involvement kept the members of the literary and cultural field, especially the ones of the middle (*semidesiatniki*) and older generations (*shestidesiatniki*/ Sixtiers), from focusing on long-term problems and possible solutions. The crash of the Soviet literary system was perceived in apocalyptic terms and paralyzed the majority of its members for many years.

However, until the late 1990s, the total collapse of thick literary journals as well as the library system was prevented by massive financial support from abroad. A key role in this was played by several private foundations, in particular the foundation Open Society (Otkrytoe obschestvo), funded by the Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros, and the foundation Open Russia (Otkrytaia Rossiia), funded by the ex-Komsomol leader and new entrepreneur-oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovskii; these served as a buffer between radical privatization without a proper legal framework and led to a low-level consolidation from the year 2000 on. With the support of Open Russia, the cooperation of 1,000 publishing houses with libraries was initiated, and 15,000 libraries were able to obtain more than 15 million new books. The thick monthly journals were able to survive in the 1990s thanks to this foundation.²⁸ Numerous private persons and public institutions, associations, and philanthropists from abroad helped to keep these institutions from collapsing,²⁹ such that most of the traditional ones survived into the digital age. This process began in 1995/96, when the portal *Zhurnal'nyi zal* (<http://magazines.russ.ru/>) was founded to make many thick monthly journals available online through open access, in parallel to the (from that point forward) meager print edition.

²⁸ Stel'makh, “Rossiiskie biblioteki segodnia: vozvrashchenie gosudarstva?”; A. Chernykh, M. Polous, “Chinovniki vynosiat Sorosa iz izby-chital'ni” in *Kommersant* (5.8.2015); accessed at www.kommersant.ru/doc/2782240.

²⁹ See the paragraph on the Soros foundation below in this chapter.

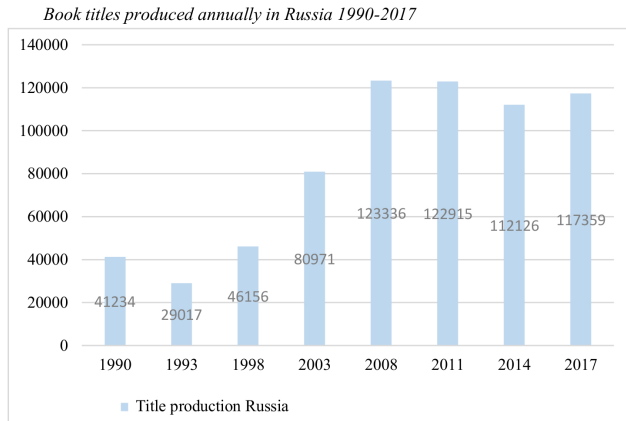


Table 1: Book titles produced annually in Russia 1990–2017

How did this chaos, all these changing conditions, affect the book-production which was supposed to provide reading material for the people? How did publishers react to the challenge of this chaos? In terms of quantity, the number of newly produced titles, which had been amazingly stable in late Soviet book production from 1961–1985, plunged by 30–40%. For instance, the publishing house *Sovetskii pisatel'* produced an average of 68 titles per year between 1973–1986; in 1991, it published only 10 titles. The total number of journals dropped to 1/12 of its highest production, i.e. from 5.010 m copies per year to 411 m.³⁰ What sold on the market, whether old or new, was often published hastily and in a disorganized manner. One and the same new book or even collected works by one and the same author were published in different versions, with different covers by different publishing houses, which mushroomed in Moscow and St. Petersburg within a few years. During the first half of the 1990s, not even the obligatory copy of each book published in Russia was given to the State Russian (previously Lenin) Library in Moscow and the other Libraries officially collecting each publication; consequently, the publishing of actual books, and not only the figures thereof, cannot be fully accounted for in this period. Forced to navigate for both popularity and economic success, larger publishing houses began to focus on series in their book production. Serialization became an important trend, not only for large, primarily commercially-oriented ones with a focus on genre literature (detective novels, science fiction, fantasy, etc.), but also for small publishers producing texts for the intellectual elite. Within four years, 220 book series in 1993 multiplied to 1,200 in 1997.³¹ Publishers of

30 Menzel, *Bürgerkrieg um Worte*, 47; russ. edit., 31–40.

31 A. Il'nitskii, *Knigozhdanie sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow 2002).

intellectual and avant-garde literature produced series dedicated to various types of literature (translated, historical, philosophical, psychological, esoteric, memoir, etc.) or new, award-winning titles.³²

The locations where people found and bought books changed: vending places ranged from tables in subway stations and boulevards, to specialized intellectual bookstores hidden in subterranean basements or backyards, to large supermarkets and bookstore chains. This diversification of place and setting also reflected the changes in people's reading-habits, methods of finding reading materials, ways to consume them, and—in case of the small intellectual bookstores—practices of communicating about literature.

But, just as all times of collapse and radical change in history also gave way to something new, the 1990s became a pioneering and even somewhat flourishing period for different types of private publishing. In the late 1980s there were only 250 publishing houses in the whole Soviet Union, a number which dropped down to 150 by 1991. In 1994, there were already 4,342, and in 2018, the Russian Federation had between 5,500-6,000 registered publishing houses. More than 10,000 licenses were given out for more planned publishing houses to be founded.³³ During the 1990s, many small publishers experimented with new models of private business. What naturally came along with this experimentation was a great diversification of both agents and models in the field of publishing and the book-production itself. Clear standards had not yet been established, such that neither national or international authors' and copyright laws nor translation standards were considered. As mentioned before, a wild market with many parallel publications emerged, and naturally many small publishers had to close soon after their founding. But others survived and developed their own profiles.³⁴

Together with the harsh new social and economic conditions for living and reading, the 1990s also brought a decline of traditionally defined literary and cultural authority: the traditional image of the writer as a moral and spiritual leader vanished. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn can serve as an example here. His return from American exile was planned as a glorious reinstatement of the "Great Russian Writer" ("Velikii russkii pisatel'"), but

32 After 2000, trying to survive in an accelerating process of re-monopolization, intellectual publishers followed even more ambitious series-driven projects and endeavors to win and keep their readers, such as the series "Intellectual history" (NLO), "Borges's Library" or the "Maks Frai" project (Amfora). In 2008, 41.7% of all printed books were serialized (L. A. Kirillova, K. M. Sukhorukov, "Statisticheskie pokazateli 2008," (Moscow, 2008), 5).

33 In the early 1920s, there had been more than 2000 publishing houses in Russia. Gudkov, Dubin "Literaturnaia kul'tura. Protsses i ratsion"; *Knizhnyi rynek v Rossii*, 2018, 9. See also P. Becker, *Verlagspolitik und Buchmarkt in Russland (1985 bis 2002). Prozess der Entstaatlichung des zentralistischen Buchverlagswesens* (Wiesbaden, 2003), 158.

34 Among the new intellectually avantgarde publishing houses were, for instance, "Ivan Limbakh," "Akademicheskii proekt" and "Amfora" in St. Petersburg, as well as Igor Zakharov with "Vagrius," "Zakharov," "Ad Marginem" and the publisher "Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie" (NLO) in Moscow.

in fact turned into a long process of demystification and deconstruction of the writer-prophet.³⁵

3. THE RISE OF POPULAR CULTURE

After the political frontiers fell, while culture and the publishing business was being privatized, Russia experienced a massive rise of popular literature and culture. Commercialization ended the long-term book shortage and with it the black market shadow economy which had turned books into status symbols. The variety of available printed material greatly increased. Book production and periodicals were forced into following the rules of the market instead of the interests of party and state, whose representatives abruptly refused to take responsibility in the field of culture. Nor did the market follow the interests of the intelligentsia who cultivated the values of classicism or Silver Age. Mikhail Iampol'skii stated in 1993 that mass culture served a more complex function in late and post-Soviet Russia compared to Western countries. While the rise of mass culture in the West was a result of commercialization processes that began in the mid-nineteenth century and were closely connected to the development of the literary market, Soviet conditions of total unification and ideological state monopolization had paradoxically turned twentieth century mass culture in Russia onto a path to diversification: money-driven markets now also channeled differences, individual dreams and desires to the people that had been formerly suppressed.³⁶

The majority of readers turned away from high literature to popular reading materials. Western pulp fiction boomed, and with it, new genres arrived. Hard-boiled detective novels, historical novels, romance, fantasy, mystery, and occult novels were first imported from Western editions. In the latter part of the 1990s, more home-grown Russian literature of this type emerged and flourished, especially the hard-boiled detective novel genre (*boevik*). Novels about the recent wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya, or just about the mafia wars of 1990s-era Russia, brought a wave of popular fame to authors (Daniil Koretskii, Aleksandr Bushkov, Aleksandr Prokhanov).³⁷ Female detective novels (Dar'ia Dontsova, Iulia Shilova, Alexandra Marinina, Polina Dashkova) and Slavophile fantasy novels (*fente-*

35 See B. Menzel, "Entmythisierung in der russischen Literatur am Beispiel von A.I. Solschenizyn," in B. Menzel, C. Friedrich (eds.), *Osteuropa im Umbruch. Alte und neue Mythen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 109-124.

36 M. Iampol'skii, "Rossiia: kul'tura i subkul'tury," *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, 1 (1993), <https://docplayer.ru/57307846-Rossiia-kultura-i-subkultury.html> (accessed February 25, 2020), 66.

37 Some of these authors had begun to publish their novels before the Perestroika. Prokhanov's first Afghanistan novel *The Tree in the Center of Kabul* (*Derevo v tsentre Kabula*) was published in 1981.

zi by Iurii Nikitin, Mariia Semeneva) introduced readers to not only everyday crime and formerly tabooed topics such as prostitution, human and drug trafficking, domestic violence, but also fashion, brands, and lifestyle patterns. Such genres established themselves and acquired a new, post-Soviet national flavor. Some of these writers were translated and made their way to an international audience. Others were made into films; such was the case with *Nightwatch* (*Nochnoi dozor*), Sergei Luk'ianenko's fantasy-detective novel which became a blockbuster movie in Russia and also saw release abroad. In some West European countries, these works served as a source of information about the Russian "Wild East." Series were established by large publishers, drawing from books by both classical (world classics, Russian classics etc.) and popular authors, covering a variety of genres and topics.

Freedom came along with disorientation for the readers. Even as they had a wealth of titles to choose from, absent legal framework concerning authors' rights and the vicissitudes of printing and publishing business complicated those choices. Bestselling novels and books by postmodern elite writers had the same dustjackets.³⁸ Often one and the same writer published his works in several publishing houses with different book covers and designs, often due to a lack of communication between publishers. The book market was utterly chaotic, filled with hastily composed editions, unprofessional translations; publications financed from abroad also appeared, and the market was flooded with what many perceived as "foreign trash." The 1990s saw an extreme increase of decentralization without the rules of market, without a balance between demand and supply. Thus, wild, unpredictable markets flourished even as—at least during the first half of the 1990s—the idea of the market was mythologized as a self-regulating system.³⁹

4. 2000–2008: COMMERCIALIZATION AND THE LONG END OF RUSSIAN/SOVIET BOOK CULTURE

After the traumatic experience of the 1990s, the Putin administration of the early 2000s set about achieving political and economic consolidation. For the first time, moderate wealth was accessible to a large part of the population thanks to economic growth based on the export of oil and gas, and a glamour wave grasped the country.⁴⁰ Since 2000, the book market and publishing business have observed the rules of commercialization: both the

³⁸ For an analysis of book covers in this "wild-market" period see B. Beck Pristed, *The New Russian Book: A Graphic Cultural History* (London, 2017).

³⁹ S. Zimmer, "Der Mythos von der Macht des Marktes," in B. Menzel, C. Friedrich (eds.), *Osteuropa im Umbruch. Alte und neue Mythen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 81-90.

⁴⁰ B. Menzel, L. Rudova (eds.), "Glamorous Russia," *Kultura*, 6 (2008); Strukov, Vlad, Goscilo, Helena (eds.), *Celebrity and Glamour in Contemporary Russia: Shocking Chic* (London, 2011).

principles of publishing and roles of decision making have changed considerably. Decision making has shifted from publishers and editors (and often writers and critics) to chiefs of publishing houses, sales managers, and marketing leaders. Book production peaked in 2008, but fell rapidly thereafter. A change of media took place. While print journals and newspapers slowly continued to die, online versions of printed texts came into being, often in parallel editions, without replacing the traditional print-culture altogether. And with political re-centralization and the re-establishment of a state monopoly on the politics of culture—which a limited number of powerful, loyal oligarchs helped to maintain—the former heterogeneous (if chaotic) landscape of the publishing business disappeared. Decisions were made with the aim of achieving a maximum increase of profit in a minimum amount of time. Therefore, much of the book selling business concentrated on serialized forms of publication (“illustrated fiction,” dictionaries, manuals, and hand-books). The visual appearance of books had become part of mass media, including TV public relations, and market technology design., including TV public relations.

In the early 2000s, a fascination with glamour manifested on all levels of society. The changes from a society of distributors to one of consumers, from a text-oriented culture to an image-oriented culture, from ideological to commercial slogans, became most obvious again in the medium of periodicals. Glossy magazines entered the market, many of which were international publications now licensed in Russia (such as *Glamour*, *L'Étoile*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Celebrity*, *GQ*, and *Hello*); others, such as *Karavan* and *Slon*, were newly founded in Russia. Genres of glamour-pulp fiction as well as anti-glamour pulp fiction (*glamurnoe chtivo*, *anti-glamurnoe chtivo*) came into being, and with them films and TV series.⁴¹ With an annual growth of 13%, periodicals became one of the most dynamic segments of the new Russian economy; in 2006 alone, it represented a 37.5 billion rouble market (equivalent to 1.4 billion US dollars).⁴² The reading of glamour literature and glossy magazines promoted and offered a civilized lifestyle and liberating sensuality in an upwardly mobile society now less constrained by norms. Glossy magazines represented—alongside TV series, fashion and celebrity talk-shows, and popular literature—the most notable means of cultivating glamour, making it the dominant aesthetic mode of the early 2000s. As Iampol'skii had stated, popular genres served for many readers as a means to reinterpret history, to process formerly tabooed realities such as crime, prostitution, and war, and to express collective desires for a more hedonistic life.⁴³

41 For films see *Gloss (Glianets)* by Andrei Konchalovskii (2007); for TV show *The Rublev Highway (Rublevskoe shosse)* (2005/06).

42 For the figures, see *ROSBIZNES Konsalting and TNS Gallup Media*. On Glamour in Russia see Menzel, Rudova 2008.

43 Iampol'skii, “Rossiia: kul'tura i subkul'tury,” 66.

As for book production in general, the number of titles (of books, journals, and newspapers alike) kept growing considerably and steadily since 1991, while the number of copies was now dramatically reduced. The number of book titles from 1990–2007 grew by a factor of 2.6 (with a record high of 127,000 individual titles in 2008). If between 2000–2007 the number of titles of newly printed books alone has doubled, the average number of printed copies went down by more than 25%.⁴⁴

Especially in the early 2000s, most of the smaller ambitious book publishers of the 1990s were swallowed up in the drive towards re-monopolization. Journals and periodicals also experienced change, with traditional periodicals particularly affected by the shift of media. Newspapers with a nationwide popularity almost disappeared, with the exception of TV guides and scant few central papers. One such case is the daily newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, which, after a long, loyal Soviet past and 1990s shift towards promoting liberal reforms, chose to adopt a profile somewhere between infotainment and yellow-press journalism in the early 2000s; it has since turned into a mouthpiece for the Putin administration's nationalist ideology.⁴⁵ At the same time, numerous new journals and magazines have appeared on the market. In 2006, the income from journals was 37.5 billion roubles (1.4 billion US dollars), i.e. 13% higher than the year before.⁴⁶

How did the shift in media correspond with the renewed institutional consolidation of reading culture? And what effect did the political re-monopolization have? As regards the public library system, an ongoing decline, dating back to at least the 2000s, can be observed. Of the 62,600 existing public libraries in 1990, only 48,300 were still functioning by 2006. In 1990, these libraries were used by 71.9 million readers; in 2006, by only 57.8 million readers. As mentioned before, the number of library goers had already gone down dramatically during the 1990s, especially in larger cities and in the two metropolises (albeit much less in rural areas). Between 2000 and 2008, most foundations which had supported the libraries in the 1990s and helped prevent the total collapse of the system were forced out, and the state regained almost total control over the library system.

Along with the abolition of pluralism in the media came the rise of a unified national TV culture, one that exhibited characteristic features of the centralized formats and content of the Soviet past. In the 2000s, state control resumed over the public communication sector after the new Putin administration eliminated the power of the media oligarchs Vladimir Gusinskii and Boris Berezovskii. This re-centralization included efforts

44 B. Dubin, N. Zorkaia, *Chtenie v Rossii–2008. Tendentsii i problemy* (Moscow, 2008).

45 According to the representative Levada study *Chtenie v Rossii–2008* from 2008, *Komsomol'skaia pravda* is the most popular newspaper in Russia today with 32% of the news readership, with *Argumenty i fakty* a distant second at 11%.

46 In 1990, there were 3,681 journals in Russia, in 2006, it was already 5,429. Dubin, Zorkaia, *Chtenie v Rossii–2008*. This is my main source in this paragraph.

to regain control over the printing business and the system of public libraries. Watching TV, now reduced to a few central stations, has become Russia's main leisure-time activity and, at the same time, the main source of information for the majority of the population throughout the Russian Federation.⁴⁷ In a situation of growing societal disintegration, when basic values like solidarity or communal responsibility seem to have vanished, TV has become the main instrument of national unification.

Even though television had already a much stronger impact on society than both official Soviet-era cultural politics and the intelligentsia would have conceded (both promoted the image of the “most reading country of the world”),⁴⁸ the massive popularity of rival media in the of TV series, talk shows, and news stations since the 1990s and especially the 2000s has probably been a major factor in the decline of Soviet reading culture. Next to popular TV shows like the reality show “House-2” (“Dom-2”) with the “polit-entertainer” Ksenia Sobchak and the Starcult TV series like “Rublevka Live!,” book series were released under the title “glamour-pulp.” Numerous classical Russian and Soviet novels became opulently reproduced as serialized TV films. After Vladimir Bortko's series of Dostoevskii's *The Idiot* (2003) and Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (*Master i Margarita*) (2005), new editions of classic series were published. Such television productions represent the only exposure that many younger people have of those novels. However, as we shall see further down in the following period, generational factors also play a role in this development.

If we take a closer look at the impact of these changes on literary communication, the general trend towards fragmented reading audiences becomes more obvious. As for the best-selling books of popular literature, hard-boiled detective novels with a high profile of explicit violence continue to be most popular. As sociologist Boris Dubin explains, they offer images

47 83% of the population of the Russian Federation watches an average of three to four hours TV every day and five to six hours on holidays. Generally, in the 2000s, leisure time spent outside of the home (i.e. with sports, cultural or other activities, with visits to friends or relatives excepted) also witnessed a precipitous decline. See Dubin, Zorkaia, *Chtenie v Rossii—2008*, 29. B. Dubin, “Televizionnaia epokha: zhizn' posle,” in *Intelktual'nye gruppy i simvolicheskie formy* (Moscow, 2004), 185-208. To conclude, however, that the general audience is nothing but numb, brainwashed masses, would be wrong. As Ellen Mickiewicz has shown, Russian TV viewers, unlike US audiences, were trained to be skeptical consumers of all state-controlled media from Soviet times, and now still have a generally ambivalent attitude to the news and information that they see on TV. Mickiewicz, *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia*. Between 2011-2017, 46% of the population expressed limited or no confidence in the mass media. D. Volkov, S. Goncharov, *Rossiiskii Medialandshaft: osnovnye tendentsii ispol'zovaniia SMI – 2017. Osnovnye rezul'taty issledovaniia* (Moscow, 2017), table 29; accessed at <https://www.levada.ru/2017/08/22/16440/print/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

48 For the intelligentsia, TV was a medium of official and popular ('low') culture as opposed to the high culture of reading printed books and journals. Zvereva mentions the lack of a general discipline of scholarly television studies for the Soviet and post-Soviet period. V. Zvereva, *Setevye razgovory. Kul'turnye kommunikatsii v Runete* (Bergen, 2012), 12.

of empowerment and moral orientation, especially for male readers. Other genres, like romance novels, operate more on the social periphery and attract primarily female readers.

With the collapse or change of former hierarchies, institutions, media, and cultural authority, the channels for transmitting literature have also changed. Literary criticism has almost completely disappeared from the public sphere into niches of Internet-based communication and specialized media for metropolitan intellectuals. New reading material is now transmitted much less frequently by the thick journals, libraries, and bookstores as it was in the past; now, recommendations by friends or popular TV stars on talk-shows tend to give books their exposure. In 2001, a “National Book Union” was founded as a non-governmental organization, publicly accessible as an online-platform (<https://bookunion.ru/>), which has initiated a number of programs, competitions, and mobilizing projects on both the regional and national level, supported by the government and civil society alike.

The literary community has reacted to these changes by developing new ways to publish, channel, and promote different levels of literature. Meanwhile, a very diversified system of literary awards demonstrates an ongoing transition from the old Soviet award system to new awards. Prizes differ in terms of their founders (federal state, regional, or local; non-governmental or private; literary organizations or media ones; etc.) status, function, and content (monetary, symbolic). They range from honoring literary quality (Andrei Belyi, *Triumpf*, Book of the Year, *Bol'shaia kniga*) to national bestsellers (*Natsbest*) and international visibility (The Booker Prize), from promoting outstanding first publications (*Debiut*) to works published within one journal (*Znamia*) or in certain genres (*Poet*). In sum, there exists a wide variety of prizes, all offering distinct means for readers to orient themselves in the literary field.⁴⁹ At the same time, book series and new editions, which distinguish themselves in terms of the literary quality or aesthetic outlook, seek to promote specific profiles (authors, genres, topics) and offer readers additional means of orientation.

Probably the most fundamental change was introduced by the rise of the Russian Internet (*Runet*). Its effects date back as far as the mid 1990s when the first electronic libraries were founded,⁵⁰ but its impact on the cul-

49 See the Russian Wikipedia-article on “Literaturnye premii Rossii” and the roundtable-discussion “Literaturnaia premiia kak fakt literaturnoi zhizni,” *Voprosy literatury*, 2 (2006); <https://voplit.ru/article/literaturnaya-premiya-kak-fakt-literaturnoj-zhizni/> (accessed February 25, 2020). For a comparison with prerevolutionary literary awards see A. Reitblat, B. Dubin: “Literaturnye premii kak sotsial'nyi institut,” *Kriticheskaia massa* 2 (2006), <http://magazines.russ.ru/km/2006/2/re4.html> (accessed February 25, 2020).

50 In 1994 the mathematician Maksim Moshkov founded the first online library <http://lib.ru.>, and another turning point was the shifting of thick journals and other periodicals to the online platform “[www. magazines.ru](http://www.magazines.ru)” in 1995–96. After 2004 Moshkov was convicted for illegal file-sharing and began to work with the Russian Federal Agency of Press and Mass

ture of reading became significant only in the 2000s, when the number of Internet users—especially in the two metropolises and in major cities—increased considerably.⁵¹ The rise of the Internet has brought about a shift in reading matter and new media trends, and has influenced reading habits.⁵² Along with the other social, cultural, and political changes, recent years have witnessed a rising percentage of non-readers compared to the Soviet epoch. According to empirical research conducted between 2016–17, 54% of the entire adult population in Russia today does not read journals at all.⁵³ If we compare today's situation with the 1980s and 1990s, it becomes clear that what used to be the Russian intelligentsia has fallen more or less into silence during the 2000s. The gap between center and periphery, between metropolitan intellectuals and residents of the periphery, has widened. On the other hand, online libraries and resources for literature are gaining frequency. This is certainly part of a global trend as many old favored journals and online sites fall to the wayside and go out of business, while Facebook, VKontakte, and other such online communities become the leading businesses.

5. 2008–2017: STATE CONTROL AND THE DIGITAL AGE

Since the late 2000s, two factors have pointed to more significant changes in the near future for the book-market and the culture(s) of reading in Russia: the re-establishment of ideological and state control of the political leadership as an authoritarian regime, and the digital revolution. These became the dominant features of Russia's new media age, even though some features of a more liberal cultural politics became noticeable during the four years (2008–2012) of Dmitrii Medvedev's presidency.⁵⁴ Political programs have been introduced to shape and control the culture of reading in the country.⁵⁵ From now on, scholarly analysis must distinguish between read-

Communication. Part of the material was removed, and the catalogue was professionalized. K. J. Mjør, "Digitizing Everything? Online Libraries on the Runet," in M. S. Gorham, I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture and Politics of New Media Communication* (London, 2014), 223–224.

51 V. Strukov, "The (Im)personal Connection: Computational Systems and (Post-)Soviet Cultural History," in Gorham, Lunde, Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia*, 11–33.

52 See SCHMIDT's "Virtual Shelves, Virtual Selves" in the present volume.

53 *Knizhnyi rynek v Rossii 2017. Sostoianie, tendentsii i perspektivy razvitiia* (Moscow, 2018), 61ff., <http://www.unkniga.ru/images/docs/kn-rynok-2018-1.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2020).

54 One of the problems, pointed out by some sociologists, is that statistics still make no distinction between print and online-reading activity so that it is hard to describe and document such trends adequately. G.V. Perova, K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie v Rossii v 2017 godu," in *Assotsiatsiia knigoraspredeleitelei nezavisimykh gosudarstv (ASKR)* (Moscow 2018), 3–5, accessed at <http://www.askr.ru/herald/73.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2020).

55 Such control is accompanied by an active politics of language, as expressed in the new Law of June 2005 declaring Russian the official State Language, and by this restricting the

ing printed books and reading online texts. At the same time, new agents and social networks have appeared since 2006/07. Massive changes have occurred in private and public communication, both in Russia and in the whole post-Soviet territory.⁵⁶ New perspectives and formats for reading, writing, and publishing have only begun to open up.

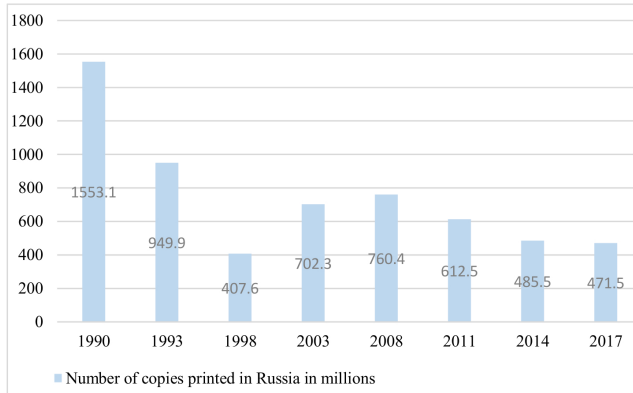


Table 4 here: Number of copies printed 1990–2017

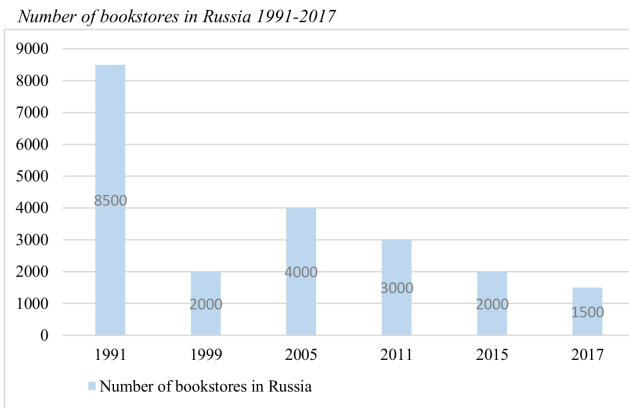
The year 2008 marked a peak, and at the same time, a turning point in Russian book production. Notwithstanding the global financial crisis, book production in Russia peaked after several years of sustained growth; the industry witnessed highs in terms numbers of titles and number of copies produced.⁵⁷ Russia held the third position in the world’s book production, following the USA and China. Even the number of translated books increased considerably. 11.5% of all national book-production in 2008 consisted of translations. Naturally, English was by far the most translated language (accounting for almost 2/3 of the total), followed by French and German. For the first time in many years, the average number of copies increased. These positive figures should not, however, disguise the fact that about 75% of all books were printed in less than 5,000 copies, or that the greatest diversity of titles is to be found in the two metropolises where the market is most heavily

public use of Language and criminalizing its violation. See <https://rg.ru/2005/06/07/yazykdok.html> (accessed February 25, 2020).

56 H. Schmidt, N. Konradova, “VKontakte,” *Dekóder* 8 (2016); accessed at <https://www.dekoder.org/de/gnose/vkontakte-soziales-netzwerk-russland> (accessed February 25, 2020).

57 In 2008, 123,336 new titles of books and brochures were produced, and 20,138 of them were literature. In the previous year of 2007, it was 108,791 titles. For comparison, in the Soviet period, book-production never exceeded 84,000 titles per year. In 2014, Great Britain released 184,00 book titles, and Germany 90,000. The average number of print copies for books of popular literature and educational textbooks is 50,000. See Kirillova, Sukhorukov, “Statisticheskie pokazateli 2008.”

concentrated. Thus, 57% of all titles and 85% of all copies were being produced in Moscow.⁵⁸ But after the peak came a turning point. In 2014, Russia was not among the world's leading book producers any longer, and did not even rank among the first six nations. One possible reason for that turning point was the rise of social reading. Following the example of similar initiatives in the United States (Goodreads.com), new e-reading platforms such as Livebook.ru, Livelib.ru (“zhivaia kniga,” or “the living book”), and Book-Mix.ru were founded in 2007–2008 (see BECK PRISTED “Social Reading in Contemporary Russia” in this volume). Maybe encouraged by the first years of President Medvedev’s liberal politics, a number of start-up e-publishers entered the market. Independent publishing business opened a new chapter of e-commerce on the bookmarket.



Annual revenues from the sale of books in Russia 2013-2017 (in millions of rubles)

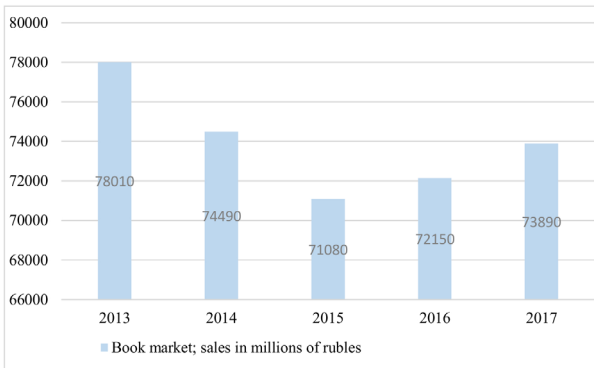


Table 2 and 3: Number of bookstores in Russia 1991–2017 and

⁵⁸ N. D. Strekalova, *Uchebnyi keis “Bukvoed”*: sostoianie i tendentsiia razvitiia knizhnogo rynka Rossii (Tekst doklada, 2014), online.

Annual revenue from selling books in Russia 2013–2017

After 2008, both printed book production as well as reading activity have dropped on all levels, and this trend continues into the present day. The economic situation has tightened, not the least because of the sanctions on Russia, which have been in place since 2014–15. Between 2008–2012, book prices increased by an average of 35%. In 2011, the largest company in the country that stored and distributed books (*top-knigi*) went bankrupt.⁵⁹ Within a few years, 600 bookstores throughout the country, many of them independent smaller businesses—they comprise about half of the private booktrade—had to close. Certainly, this corresponds not only to a general global trend from print to digital formats, but also with the rising competition of the online trade, which also began to boom in Russia during these years. Companies like *ozon.ru* (<https://www.ozon.ru/>), the first and leading Russian online retailer (since 1998), and *LitRes* (<https://www.litres.ru/>), a major competitor (since 2006), lead the market. Competing with bookstores are also free online resources for accessing literature (for example, *www.proza.ru*, and “Wikisource” [“Vikiteka”] at <https://ru.wikisource.org>). As small- and medium-size publishing houses disappeared, the monopolization trend continued. Of all 5,775 publishing houses operating in Russia in 2017, only 50 had a national profile and a leading position in the market. In June 2012, EKSMO, one of the four giants in the Russian publishing business (next to “Prosveshchenie” and “Drofa” for educational publications), took over AST, which had run 700 bookstores, the majority in the regions. As a result of this fusion, 300 more bookstores had to close, and the closing of 200 more was to be expected as of 2014.⁶⁰ In 2012, Russia held just the 10th position in the world in terms of title production, and in volume of printed copies, it dropped to the 30th position.⁶¹

Scholars expressed alarm and called for help from the Russian state as the gap between reading audiences, center and periphery, and different generations all widened. Many scholars saw traditional Russian culture, which they identified first and foremost as book culture, as endangered. The position of Aleksandr Chubarian, one of the authorities of Russian historiography, was shared by many scholars: “Books today are an absolutely necessary attribute of life. Without them, humans can have neither history nor culture nor any idea of the future.”⁶² The majority of intellectuals sees printed books as the basis of national culture in Russia. From the times when illiteracy was effectively abolished, book culture was thought to guar-

59 Strekalova, *Uchebnyi keis “Bukvoed.”* For comparison, in 1898 there were about 5,000 bookstores in Russia. In 1989, there were 8,455 bookstores, but in 2012 there were only 3,817 registered legal entities dealing with the selling of books in the country.

60 In this paragraph my source is Strekalova, *Uchebnyi keis “Bukvoed.”*

61 I. V. Bondarev, “Sovershenstvovanie organizatsii i upravleniia sferoi knizhnoi trgovli v sovremennykh rynochnykh usloviakh,” *Ekonomicheskie nauki*, 8, 93 (2012), 131.

62 A. O. Chubar’ian, “Znachenie knigi i biblioteki – neprekhdiaschchie!” *Bibliotekovedenie*, 5 (2001), 1.

antee respect for language, specifically in form of the printed word. New textforms and reading activities in different media, as well as novel reading habits, were perceived by many people as a danger to national culture rather than welcomed as a process of diversification of taste.

Returning to the question of media consumption after 2008, we can see that generational factors made books, TV, and the Internet into rivals for people's attention. As media studies of the Levada-Center in the years 2011–2017 have shown, young people watch 2-2.5 times less television than older generations. At the same time, the percentage of young people between 18 and 24 who get their news and information from the Internet, has been growing steadily since 2014; in 2017, it stood at 60-80%, even though still 60% of this age group watches news on TV as well.⁶³

The political leadership reacted to cries of alarm about these trends. Managers of public policy integrated this alarm into the generalized big-scary rhetoric of the 2010s: Russia was being threatened by the outside world, including by global slide into decadence. Since Putin has declared his policy to be a fight for basic values and culture, the decrease of reading as a central cultural activity is framed as a “fatal loss of the ability to compete” with the rest of the world (i.e. America and Western Europe); thus, maintaining the culture of reading has become a deadly serious matter, one that requires the mobilization of the entire population. Since the mid 2000s, the political leadership has been raising concerns about the state of public libraries, and their recovery became one of the priorities of cultural politics on the agenda for 2030. The Federal Council and President Putin himself addressed the crisis of libraries in his annual speech to the nation in April 2007:

In our country a unique system of public libraries was once established, one comparable to nothing else in the world. However, as this system has been underfinanced for many years, we have to acknowledge that it has collapsed. It is necessary to revive libraries in our country on a contemporary level.⁶⁴

In 2007, a new state program to develop the national reading culture was promulgated: the National Program for Support and Development of Reading.⁶⁵ This program has triggered a large number of central, regional, and local initiatives, as well as organizations, awards, competitions, and new institutions like the “years of literature” (2018), including the establish-

63 See Volkov, Goncharov, *Rossiiskii medialandshaft. Osnovnye tendentsii ispol'zovaniia SMI – 2017*.

64 V. V. Putin, *Poslanie Prezidenta RF Federal'nomu Sobraniuu ot 26.4.2007*; accessed at http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_67870/ (accessed February 25, 2020). (translated by the author, B.M.). See also Stel'makh, “Rossiiskie biblioteki segodnia: vozvrashchenie gosudarstva?,” 31.

65 Natsional'naia programma podderzhki i razvitiia chteniia (2007); accessed at <http://www.ifapcom.ru/files/News/Nats-progr-htenia.pdf> See also Stel'makh, “Rossiiskie biblioteki segodnia: vozvrashchenie gosudarstva?” 31.

ment of a unified national e-library network.⁶⁶ The same year, 2007, was also remarkable in the global digital age. The smartphone, a small portable telephone with an integrated personal computer, was commercialized and rapidly began to flood the market. The new generation of portable tablet computers marked a new stage in the digital revolution of communication technology. Putin's National Program aims at overcoming what was seen as a "systemic crisis" by "mobilizing the interest of the masses to read printed literature." Public libraries are advised by political administration not to be neutral any more, but to acquire books according to a national social and political program which aims at patriotic education, environmental enlightenment, shaping a positive image of Russia, and recruiting for election campaigns. The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation was also advised to make up a blacklist of book titles which are purportedly harmful to the basic interests of society and should not be tolerated. To achieve Putin's stated goals, and bring school reading materials into line with these new programs (as well as facets the official language policy), a new "Presidential Library System," named after Boris Yeltsin, has been founded throughout the Russian Federation, with a federal center as well as regional and local branches.⁶⁷ Libraries receive funding to fill and update their collections again, to restore old buildings, build new ones, and at least begin to modernize their technological system into the electronic age.

Experts like Valeriia Stel'makh, the former head of the Reading Section of the State Lenin Library, are not optimistic about such programs' ability to elevate levels of reading activity among the population and instead see more negative aspects in this new political agenda. It aims to preserve old book collections rather than institute reforms in the ways that would be necessary for a digital, twenty-first-century transformation. According to Stel'makh, its main goal is providing ideological directions and instituting a new state censorship apparatus; indeed, the program seems more similar to that observed in the Soviet 1970s—one ideology for all.⁶⁸ A blacklist of books which must not be obtained by public libraries has been established by the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation; since none of these books will be publicly available in libraries anymore and, like in the Late Soviet era, are kept only in closed collections of certain libraries with limited, controlled access, this represents state censorship in all but name.⁶⁹ The majority of the regional and local apparatus is still stagnating. Unlike the full-scale re-establishment of state control over public TV and radio, which today considerably shape the ideological and cultural mass consciousness of the population in Russia, neither the state's attempt to regain control

66 See *Natsional'naia elektronnaia biblioteka* (<https://нэб.рф/>)

67 For more federal, regional, and local bylaws of this program see <http://nlr.ru/prof/reader/metodsovet/dokumenty-v-podderzhku-chteniya> (accessed February 25, 2020).

68 Menzel, "Der sowjetische Leser als Thema der Forschung."

69 Stel'makh, "Rossiiskie biblioteki segodnia."

over the printing business nor its oversight of the public library system has had any serious effect on the masses' reading attitudes. Another sign of the new state program's ineffectiveness in encouraging and developing cultures of reading is that they are almost unknown to average readers. In 2008, 90% of the population did not know of the program's existence. This might change, however, if obligatory reading will be institutionalized and the digitalization of libraries progresses.

In January 2012, in a speech on the "National issue" (*Natsional'nyi vopros*) which (then Prime Minister) Putin gave before seeking a third presidential term, he expressed his core political agenda: the goal of establishing a "unified cultural code" in Russia. Putin directly appealed to the public for a program of a normative patriotic education with clear, obligatory reading lists, excluding titles blacklisted by censors. Blacklists of reading matter have a long tradition in Russia, going back to the pre-revolutionary Russian empire in the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ Taking as his model US universities' efforts to create a Western literary canon, Putin suggested establishing a list of 100 books which should become obligatory reading for every student in Russia. The pride of the "reading nation" should be re-established by way of "subtle cultural therapy" and ultimately molded into "one historical process." Concourses and competitions were to be organized along guidelines provided by these reading programs. In tracing the Russian nation back to its linguistic and literary roots in the Russian Primary Chronicle (i.e. the Nestor Chronicle) and indexing Dostoevskii's idea of a Russian mission to the world, Putin made it clear that reading should become a pillar of his national resurrection-of-values program: "The citizens' task in the education system is to give each and every one an absolutely obligatory amount of humanitarian knowledge which builds the foundation of popular self-identification." Thus, the path back to a strong canon—a norm to which Soviet citizens had been subjected for five decades under the doctrine of Socialist Realism—was reopened. In 2012, a list of 100 obligatory books for schoolchildren in Russia followed.⁷¹

So, what can be said about the status, role, and function of reading in this period? Along with a general decrease of reading activity and the rise of social reading, there is a widening gap between center and periphery, between generations, between attitudes towards books as objects and other technological means of reading, together with a further fragmentation of reading audiences and material. While education role and gender play a meaningful part in this process, it is probable that the most significant factor is the de-sacralization of reading printed books.⁷² Interest in a tra-

70 V. V. Putin, "Rossiia– natsional'nyi vopros," *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (23.1.2012); accessed at http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html (accessed February 25, 2020).

71 For more decrees following the National Reading Program see <http://nlr.ru/prof/reader/metodsovet/dokumenty-v-podderzhku-chteniya> (accessed February 25, 2020).

72 M. V. Zagidullina, "Podrostki: Chtenie i Internet v povsednevnoi zhizni," *Sotsiologicheskie*

ditional canon of books which had intellectually and morally shaped the mindsets of several generations has almost disappeared, especially in the young generation. During the first decade of the new millennium, the number of people who never read books, buy books, or even enter a library has increased considerably. While 83 % of the respondents in a representative study admit that they watch several hours of TV per day, another study from 2014 shows that, since 2003, 59-67% of all adult readers never read any journal with political or economic content.⁷³ According to studies conducted by the Levada Center, the number of non-readers increased from 19% to 36% between 2000 and 2009; 60% (previously 30%) never buy a book or even take books from friends; and about 90% of all population never enters a library or orders books online.⁷⁴ As much as Russian culture has traditionally been defined as “book-culture” and the function of reading has been framed as educational, this new abstinence from reading print books can be understood as a reaction against authoritative norms, even when the influence of the digital media is accounted for. After Putin’s suggestion of establishing a canon of 100 must-read books, many organizations, journals, and even the Moscow radio station “Ekho Moskvyy” sent out calls to the population for nominations to this list. The response was massive and often enthusiastic. “Ekho Moskvyy” received 2,000 letters with 2,700 suggested books. However, journalists concluded that these letters were mostly sent by members of the intelligentsia, who still maintained that reading was a sacralized activity, the fulcrum of culture and the main—indeed, the only—way to change one’s life. Hence, the decline of book reading would mean the end of culture itself.⁷⁵

However, attitudes towards reading and reading activity among intellectuals remains highly ambivalent.⁷⁶ While men read much less, the cultural

issledovaniia, 5 (2016), 115-123; http://socis.isras.ru/index.php?page_id=453&id=6190&jid=&jj= (accessed February 25, 2020); E. A. Kolosova, “Chtenie rossiiskikh detei i podrostkov v transformiruiushchemsia obshchestve,” *Vestnik RGGU. Seriya “Filosofia, Sotsiologiya, Iskusstvovedenie,”* <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/chtenie-rossiyskih-detey-i-podrostkov-v-transformiruyushchemsia-obshchestve-1> (accessed February 25, 2020).

73 Volkov, Goncharov, *Rossiiskii medialandshaft. Osnovnye tendentsii ispol'zovaniia SMI – 2014*.

74 L. Borusiak “Kakie by knigi v spisok ni voshli, oni ne budut pročitany,” *Troitskii variant*, 113 (25.9.2012), 10. Accessed at <https://trv-science.ru/2012/09/25/kakie-by-knigi-v-spisok-ni-voshli-oni-ne-budut-pročitany/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

75 For the suggested list see <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/921868-echo/> (accessed February 25, 2020).. After long discussions, the writer Dmitrii Bykov published a list of 100 titles as an alternative canon; see <http://readrate.com/rus/news/100-luchshikh-knig-mirovoy-literatury-versiya-dmitriya-bykova> (accessed February 25, 2020).

76 This is based on a study (conducted by Liubov’ Borusiak from the Levada Center in 2009–2010) of 5,000 blogs written by the highly educated metropolitan middle-class elite (aged between 30-40). The goal was to investigate changing cultural codes and values regarding reading attitudes (especially childhood reading) expressed by parents. Borusiak, “Chtenie kak tsennost’ v srede molodykh rossiiskikh intellektualov.” For some critical comments on this study, see B. Dubin, “O chtenii i nechtenii segodnia,” *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia*, 3, 105

code of reading is still strongly defended by women, and more so in the provincial middle class than in the metropolises. In online discussions (populated mostly by young, primarily female parents) concerning the uses and problems of reading, it is often suggested that classical literature, including Pushkin, Tolstoi, Lermontov, etc., is written in an alien style not understood and therefore no longer accepted by children. Three different attitudes among parents can be distinguished. One group of parents continues to read regularly and convey their love and value of high literature (including Russian and foreign classics as well as contemporary literature) to their children. Another group has, for a long time now, not read for themselves, but continue asserting to their children the importance of reading as an educational necessity, treating it like a bitter medicine. Some of them express shame about this, especially when they helplessly face conflicts with their children's opposition to their own normative, hypocritical behavior. The third group of mothers openly, sometimes even aggressively, desacralizes reading. They declare book culture a thing of the past and dismiss reading books and literature as an odd legacy of the Soviet age which should be overcome. Sometimes the topic even shifts from culture to medicine, as these mothers consider reading to be damaging to their children's health. There are young wives, who defend ways of life without reading: "My husband has a successful career without reading any book!" The majority of women in these blogs, however, belong to the second group with ambivalent attitudes.

A different perspective is offered when we look at attitudes and preferences of the younger generation itself, attitudes expressed mostly on the Internet. Several studies of blogs and VKontakte (the Russian equivalent of the Facebook social media platform) offer information about the extent of the youth's abstention from books and literature, attitudes towards and preferences of reading activity, and reading habits and content.⁷⁷ An ever-growing number of young people has come to prefer communicating online. But does social reading help to promote books, or does it tend to replace them? We do not yet know.

What we do know is this: the educational system, especially in the form of schools, seems to play a crucial role in the young generation's rejection of book reading. Even if there is a general quantitative decrease in reading among families, the vast majority of children still grow up observing some degree of reading activity—mostly being reading aloud to by female family members (mothers and grandmothers), and later by themselves. The international PISA Study⁷⁸ of 2005 confirms that Russian children learn to read faster, more readily, and love to read more than Western European chil-

(2010).

⁷⁷ Borusiak, "Kakie by knigi v spisok ni voshli, oni ne budut pročitany."

⁷⁸ The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide Study by the OECD to evaluate educational systems in member and non-member nations. PISA was first performed in 2000.

dren.⁷⁹ Here, it is remarkable how stable the canon of children's literature remained through the turmoils of the 1990s and 2000s. Kornei Chukovskii is still, in the long term, the most popular children's writer in Russia today.⁸⁰ But the situation changes significantly when young people enter high school and college. Outside of obligatory school reading, leisure-time reading for the majority of young people ends altogether. Some of Glasnost's banner inclusions to school curricula, such as Solzhenitsyn's documentary novel *The GULag Archipelago* (*Arkhipelag GULag*) and George Orwell's dystopian science fiction novel 1984, sought to establish the liberatory power of reading and the oppressive nature of censorship; although these texts remain obligatory on school syllabi, the younger generation's generally negative attitude about reading literature seems to prevail over the stirring content matter of such texts.

Liubov' Borusiak's representative analysis "Reading of the Russian Youth," based on a 2012–2014 study by the Levada Center, sheds some light on the context.⁸¹ Only 20% of all young people in these blogs responded that they read regularly, while 43% said that they read only sometimes, and 37% never read any literature at all.⁸² The column "My favorite reading" in the online personal profile card was filled only by 9% of the users. More remarkable are the numerous explicitly critical statements in this column, such as "I don't read!" "I hate reading!" and "I've had enough of these books!" As for material that *is* actually read, foreign fantasy literature and horror genres tend to dominate. There does not seem to be much difference between the preferences expressed by those in the metropolitan centers and the periphery. Conclusions about the relationship between off- and online reading activity among the younger generation (age 11 and up) remain controversial. Some people, like the scholar of book history Vladimir Vasil'ev and the poet Iuri Kublanovskii, see in the Internet a threat to book culture and hold it responsible for the general decline in (offline) reading activity,⁸³ while other, often younger scholars, such as E. V. Krylova, Elena Kolosova,

79 O. Karpenko, M. Bershchaskaia, Iu. Voznesenskaia, "Mezhdunarodnoe issledovanie PISA i problemy razvitiia vysshego obrazovaniia," *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia*, 5 (91) (2007), 38–47.

80 *Knizhnyi rynek v Rossii* 2018: 16. For children's reading see Kolosova, "Chtenie rossiskikh detei i podrostkov v transformiruiushchemsia obshchestve."

81 L. Borusiak, "Liubimye avtory, liubimye knigi: chto chitaet sovremennaia molodezh'. Po dannym analiza seti VKkontakte," *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniia*, 1 (2015), 90–105. The study concentrated on the 17–23 age group.

82 For comparison, some results from earlier studies: In 1991, 48% of youth responded that they read regularly; in 2005, only 28% said the same. Posts about reading and literature on the platform VKkontakte are small (less than 10%), especially when compared to posts about music and films.

83 Vasil'ev, "Istoriia knigi i knizhnoi kul'tury. Ot tipografskogo iskusstva k knizhnoi kul'ture"; Iu. Kublanovskii (interview), "Internet ubivaet chtenie," *Literaturnaia gazeta* 26.4.2001, accessed at <http://lgz.ru/article/-16-6595-26-04-2017/Internet-ubivaet-chtenie/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

and Marina Zagidullina,⁸⁴ paint a more complex picture; they see youths who have adopted positive reading habits and attitudes and make more specific and distinctive use of the Internet to enrich the information about or context of their reading experience. According to some of these younger scholars from the Moscow Higher School of Economics, the youth prefer (inter-)active forms of reading. They would rather be co-authors instead of passive receivers of educational, intellectual, and moral instructions or messages. Being readers and viewers at the same time, by films—often books turned into movies, both in movie-theatres and on TV –, they see reading as an entrance into alternate realities. Russian and most Soviet classics are alien to them not only because of the texts' language and style, which they often find strange and inaccessible, but also because they cannot establish any personal connection to the narratives and stories that they encounter in these texts. For many, reading is a way to deliberately escape actual reality. For others, it is an access to an alternate world which serves their wish to be free, to imagine, and communicate personal matters.

But what can be said about the people who still continue to read books, literature, and contemporary literature offline? Their number has massively shrunk compared to the 1990s and before, but qualitative studies show that these readers make distinctive choices, derive much more intense satisfaction from their reading experience and often communicate as much to a small circle of like-minded readers.⁸⁵ The most active—if not the most numerous—readers today in Russia have become the young, even youngest citizens. The subgroups of readers who engage in reading consume not only newspapers, textbooks, pragmatic material (i.e. encyclopedias and dictionaries), and literature, usually find what they look for and are quite satisfied with this experience.

According to current empirical studies, active readers (i.e. people who regularly read books in print or/and on the Internet) are to be found today mostly among urban, metropolitan, highly educated youth and women between the ages of 30-40. Women generally read more often than men (and quantitatively more, though different material) in the provincial regions than in the metropolises.⁸⁶ Since readers can choose whatever they want to read, the most active readers have expressed great satisfaction with their reading experience. Of the approximately 25% of people who read books on a regular basis,⁸⁷ many pass along recommendations, and there is a wide-

84 E. V. Krylova, "Knizhnaia kul'tura segodnia. Podkhody k opredeleniiu i sodержanie poniatiia," *Vestnik Russkoi Khristianskoi Gumanitarnoi Akademii*, vol. 13 (3), 185-191; Kolosova "Chtenie rossiiskikh detei i podrostkov v transformiruiushchemusia obshchestve"; Zagidullina, "Podrostki: Chtenie i Internet v povsednevnoi zhizni" .

85 Dubin, Zorkaia, *Chtenie v Rossii-2008*.

86 According to the study of 2008, 51% of the adult male population never reads a book versus only 42% of the female population; among the young adults (age 18-24), 40% read only occasionally, and 42% never read any book. See Dubin, Zorkaia, *Chtenie v Rossii-2008*.

87 Regular readers of books today are more female than male, and typically number among the young, urban, and educated section of the population rather than the highly educated older

spread communication about reading and books in private circles and communities. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the main channels by which readers encounter new reading material have become recommendations by friends and family, followed by texts advertised in bookstores and recommendations by public figures on radio and TV talk shows.

If we look at online-based evidence of the reading audience (which applies more to the younger generation), there are about 50,000 closed groups—often very small—of people dedicated to literature and reading on the VKontakte platform.⁸⁸ When it comes to these users' favorite authors, any sense of a homogeneous canon has vanished. In the abovementioned study, 1,516 authors and 4,757 books were selected as favorites. While contemporary foreign authors are among the most favored, contemporary Russian writers are among the least, as is poetry and most literature from before the nineteenth century. Only 3% of the users mention contemporary literature, including authors such as Pelevin and Akunin.⁸⁹ Authors of the Soviet era, both of the official and the unofficial canon, are practically absent in users' list of favorite authors; few exceptions, such as Venedikt Erofeev and Sergei Dovlatov, exist. The one overall favorite author of all readers is Mikhail Bulgakov, whose novel *The Master and Margarita* provides the frequently posted quotes from all literature (specifically the mantras "To each man it will be given according to his beliefs," and "Never ask for anything! Never for anything, and especially from those who are stronger than you"). The second favorite author as indicated by these online users is Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian best-selling writer, and his novel *The Alchemist* is often cited specifically. His image among professional critics is often negative, but Coelho remains very successful on an international level (and in Russia is favored more by female than by male readers). The third favorite author is Fedor Dostoevskii, followed by Lev Tolstoi, J.K. Rowling, Steven King, and John Tolkien, all who are listed before Aleksandr Pushkin, which ranks only on the 8th position.

Among all posts regarding users' favorite readings, there is one remarkably unanimous exception. Among all users of the VKontakte platform, the top-ranked author is the German writer Erich Maria Remarque. Metropolitan, highly educated, and provincial users alike all name this author as one of their most favorites. He is among the top-translated authors of foreign literature, and the online-group on Remarque has 200,000 members. Thanks to his anti-fascist novel *Three Comrades* (1936), this author was one of the leading foreign authors of the official Soviet canon, appearing on obligatory school reading and recitation lists from the 1930s on. According to online evidence, Remarque ranks even before George Orwell and Hermann Hesse. Thus, we

generation. Dubin, Zorkaia, *Chtenie v Rossii-2008*, 34ff.

88 Borusiak, "Liubimye avtory, liubimye knigi," 93.

89 Pelevin was ranked 37th among leading authors, Vladimir Sorokin 295th, Eduard Limonov 435th. Borusiak, "Liubimye avtory, liubimye knigi," 96.

might conclude that some continuity in literary authority has survived the Soviet era, both from the official and from the unofficial canons.⁹⁰

6. CONSISTENT TRADITIONS, HYBRID FORMS, AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

So, despite political efforts to counteract the desolation of the public library system, the three basic problems of the post-Soviet book market and the culture(s) of reading, which have been described above, remain at present unsolved and suggest a problematic persistency of traditions:

1. the insufficient and ineffective distribution of printed matter and books throughout the country stand in the way of a demand-based book market economy (remember the bankruptcy of one of the largest distributors, “Top-knigi,” in 2011);

2. the widening gap between, on the one hand, a very small sector of printed books and material with a maximum diversity of titles available to a highly educated minority that interacts with a global reading culture; and, on the other hand, a huge segment of non-metropolitan, non-highly educated readers, i.e. the majority of the population, for which rates of illiteracy have unfortunately been rising and for whom the stock of accessible titles is becoming more and more reduced;

3. the weakness or absence of literary cultural institutions, channels of distribution, various types of public libraries, and an educational system that inadequately prepares young people for a variety of reading activities.

But as a growing number of culturally and technologically advanced intellectuals become aware of these problems, more innovative and interesting paths to non-traditional solutions are likewise opened. The digital age will certainly continue to have an effect on the structure of publishing, bookstores, and libraries in Russia, but also on the production of literature itself, and indeed on the whole process of literary communication. While prices for electronic publishing have begun to drop since the 2000s, book production becomes ever more expensive. Apart from mass-produced bestsellers, as mentioned before, available copies of most given titles tend to be dropping. The journalist and literary critic Aleksandr Arkhangel’skii predicts, on the one side, an upcoming division into printed book production with a minimal number of copies (1,000-5,000) for a variety of readership niches, and on the other, a more robust e-book production providing pulp fiction for the mass reader and contemporary literature for the more highbrow reader. He sees some new opportunities connected with this transformation for the Russian book market. A *tabula rasa* of sorts allows for a more radical break with traditional institutions and could help create new structures. What can already be

⁹⁰ Bondarev, “Sovershenstvovanie organizatsii i upravleniia sferei knizhnoi trgovli”; Perova, Sukhorukov, “Knigoizdanie v Rossii v 2017 godu.”

observed in the metropolitan cities is that this situation speeds up the process of creating a new, young generation of digital native readers. Another feature is that authors' rights have not been as strongly regulated in Russia as in other European countries, which allows for experimentation with new models of publishing. New opportunities are likewise available for authors themselves. They can now directly communicate with their readers or even sell their books online. Traditional intermediary institutions for the production, promotion, and distribution of literature such as publishing houses, journals, libraries, and organizations will eventually diminish or even lose their basic functions. This should have an effect even on the contents and poetics of literary texts and on the future role of the author in society.

Radical changes in the production of printed matter in Russia have already taken place in the 1990s, when the whole system collapsed. The scale of challenges and changes that correspond with the digital revolution are similar. At present, this effect is still much less noticeable in the United States, but it is already more palpable in Russia than in other European countries. The first ones to explore new strategies and ways to shape this future book market and culture(s) of reading were those writers who took the process of writing, publishing, and even selling books into their own hands.⁹¹ In 2011/12, the popular science fiction writer Sergei Luk'ianenko began to sell some of his novels himself online—an experiment Stephen King had first made in 2010 with some success. In spite of the moderate economic result and the fact that 90% of the books were downloaded illegally and began to be circulated via Internet-piracy, this experiment served as a breakthrough and inspired more to follow. In 2012, Aleksandr Arkhangel'skii published his novel first electronically and immediately afterwards in print. Moreover, the electronic publication was accessible both through contracts with electronic publishers and bookstores throughout the country and directly online for individual readers who paid a voluntary price. A third experiment was made by Boris Akunin, the popular author of historical detective novels who, in 2012, sold one of his novels in two different editions online directly to the readers, one for a low price and another version for a higher one, depending on design and illustrations. Since 2012, videoclip trailers have been introduced in Russia which promote new books, a form of advertisement not meant for TV nor public places but exclusively designed for online trade. Writers can produce and design their own commercial packages for selling their books. Some writers have begun to finance certain typographically ambitious publications through

⁹¹ Arkhangel'skii states that there has been a certain tradition in Russia: whenever new technologies have blocked typographical or other innovations, it was writers themselves who found new ways to communicate with their readers. Pushkin's pragmatic decision to sell his novel *Evgenii Onegin* as a serial novel in a periodical journal turned out to be a revolution for the book market, and had an effect on language and style, as can later be seen, for instance, in Dostoevskii's novels. Aleksandr Arkhangel'skii, *Opyt izdaniia i rasprostraneniia elektronnoi knigi. Proekt, Muzei revoliutsii*, unpublished manuscript 2015.

crowd-funding.⁹² This multimedia format will probably also further diminish the distance between textual and visual presentations of literature. New generations of readers might call for a much more multimedia-based production and presentation of literature, a process which may bring writers, artists, and directors into a much closer relationship with each other.

These few experiments allow us to cautiously sketch some predictions on the effect of the digital revolution on the future cultures of books and reading in Russia:

The possibility to publish literature online will diminish, if not abolish the strict division between professionally and independently/individually produced, published, and distributed texts. But perhaps self-publishing and professional publishing, as two co-existing models, will, in the long run, reinforce each other, just like samizdat coexisted with state-run publishing in the late Soviet period. The first type may become a niche defined by low download numbers, while the second grows exponentially, as projects such as “stih.ru” and “proza.ru,” where people can upload their own poetry and prose, have shown.⁹³ However, while the mass of texts will drown in the online ‘pit of graphomania,’ long-acknowledged, canonical literary texts will appear only in the form of printed publications which, in this process, would regain prestige. Some young authors who began on the ‘graphomania platforms’ and whose texts were eventually published in thoroughly edited printed books—and, what is more, translated into several languages—have confirmed this.

One of the most promising innovations for the Russian book market is the print-on-demand business model. Together with online bookstores and the distributors which began to establish themselves in the first years of the 2000s, as well as the transfer of central literary periodicals to online portals and the establishment of online libraries, related Internet-based phenomena have come into existence. For example, the platform www.ridero.ru, established by a team in Ekaterinburg in 2014, presents an interesting solution for the problem of distribution: any author can place a text into a variety of layouts, upload it to the site, and sign contracts with Internet bookstores in Russia or abroad to secure authors’ rights. Together with the online-publication and distribution of literature, readers anywhere in the country can order print-on-demand versions of the books which will then be sent to them by mail.⁹⁴ Although this segment of the market is growing fast, it is still relatively small and brings up a host of legal problems.⁹⁵

92 Since 2010, the writer Linor Goralik, for example, collected money for several children’s book publications. Aleksandr Arkhangel’skii *Budushchee russkoi literatury*, unpublished manuscript (2016).

93 The number of texts on these portals has grown into several tens of millions and became a successful business for the founders. Arkhangel’skii, *Budushchee russkoi literatury*.

94 Arkhangel’skii, *Opyt izdaniia i rasprostrneniia elektronnoi knigi*.

95 Perova, Sukhorukov, “Knigoizdanie v Rossii v 2017 godu”; Strelkova, *Uchebnyi keis “Bukvoed,”* assumes that 80-90% of all downloads from the Internet violate authors’ rights and are therefore illegal.

Finally, the library sector, which has primarily been discussed here as an institution in decline with a mountain of barely solvable problems, has likewise profited from the digital revolution. As part of the National Reading Program, the “National Electronic Library” (NEL)⁹⁶ was founded by the Russian Ministry of Culture in 2008 with the goal of creating “a unified space of knowledge.” All public, academic, national, regional, and special libraries are being digitized to provide open access online. This amazing innovative step offers the entire Russian population open access to the country’s largest body of printed matter. It is also a great achievement for the international scientific community. The project of the National Electronic Library initiated by the state, together with some of the private publishing entrepreneurs discussed here, permit the cautious prospective that, realized on a large scale, Russia might solve many current problems by leaping right into the next technological generation.

CONCLUSION: THE LONG SHADOW OF SOVIET BOOK CULTURE AND SOME SPARKS OF NEW BEGINNINGS

The few years of Perestroika, with their unprecedented boom of reading, highlighted the cache of the Russo-Soviet intelligentsia one final time, turning them into an ally of the leader for political reforms and using them to mobilize the masses. People hungered for previously suppressed information and literature. Hundreds of thousands of periodicals, thick literary journals, and illustrated magazines passed through the hands of readers around the country, and the intelligentsia once again hoped to realize their historical mission of bringing high culture to the masses. But with privatization, commercialization, and the downfall of the Soviet Union, the boom of reading abruptly ended.

Some achievements were made and remain in effect, however. The Soviet system of censorship was abolished, and even if new cases of censorship have occurred since then, it is incomparably less onerous than in Soviet times. The notorious book shortage of the planned economy ended, making it possible for readers to purchase the books they really wanted to read, provided that they had the money and access to an online or physical bookstore. The number of newly published books has been continuously growing ever since the early 1990s, and has now long surpassed the Soviet records both in terms of sheer numbers titles and copies produced. In 2008, more book titles were produced in Russia than ever before.

Nevertheless, after 1991, fundamental changes to the book industry occurred, and a long decade of dissolution began. The whole system of traditional literary communication—public libraries, schools, universities, literary

96 See <https://nel.rfl/about/> (accessed February 25, 2020).

criticism, journals, the system of distributing printed matter—collapsed. This was followed by a massive devaluation of the intelligentsia and an erosion of Soviet reading culture. Former institutions of literary culture not only lost their high symbolic value and authority, but also their previous role as organizers of literary and cultural life and modelers of literary reception and interpretation.

What changed along with the historical conditions was also the material that people read. In the past few decades, the culture of reading has been shaped by two interests: obtaining pragmatic information and knowledge (in handbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc.) and acquiring entertainment. People of all social strata, genders, ages, and regions have turned primarily to recreational reading. Popular genre fiction now dominates reading activity. Foreign fantasy and detective lead the way, regardless of readers' age, region, social status, or level of education. More than anything else, genre fiction and materials on fashion have become decisive reading trends. Middle-aged and aged readers mainly use literature to escape from the reality of everyday-life, especially women and readers in the provincial regions.

Over the past two decades, as the number of books produced kept increasing, the number of actively reading people has continuously and significantly fallen. Today, half of the population has stopped reading books altogether. This includes printed periodicals, either purchased individually or accessed through public libraries. In speaking about reading here, we mean the traditional reading of printed texts, not the reading activity as such, which may have even increased considering the time people now spend in front of monitors, smartphones, and screens. Certainly, the Internet and the whole shift in media which digital technology brought along with it, has had a major impact on this development. This can be observed particularly after 2007, when portable digital media entered the mass market. The Internet has not yet been able to compensate for this loss or to significantly shape the general culture of reading.⁹⁷ Scholars and critics have correlated the general collapse of reading with a general loss of basic moral values, with the increase of nihilism in society, with the ever more prevalent impact of the Internet, and with the negative influence of mass-culture generally.

However, a closer look at reading audiences, habits, and preferences has revealed a more complex picture. One of the characteristics of Russian society in the 2000s is the absence of general authority in culture, including literary culture. Disorientation and disillusionment go hand in hand. As Internet-based communication about reading has shown, children and young people especially have little access to the traditional canon of literature, both classical and Soviet. This literature has become largely alien to them due to its language, style, and content. But many young people also show little interest in contemporary Russian literature. The younger generation has embraced

97 *Knizhnyi rynek v Rossii 2017*, 51-65.

changes in technologies of reading, and their abstention from the printed book has been explained as a general opposition to the sacrosanct status of books in Soviet and post-Soviet culture and to obligatory reading for purely educational reasons, as mandated by authorities, school, and state, rather than the family. Reading books outside of the obligatory syllabus at school seems to be met by many with silent rejection of cultural authority and the Soviet past, which is another reason behind the general abstention from literature among young people.

A National Program for the Support and Development of Reading was launched in 2007 by President Putin in order to mitigate the alarming decline of public libraries, raise the reading activity among the population, and proceed with the centralized digitization of printed matter. But given the patriotic intention at work in the creation of a unified space of culture and new obligatory reading lists, much of this program clearly aims at re-establishing the Soviet past—and in this respect, it fails to capture the interest of the young generation of digital natives. Thus, to a certain extent, both the state and several generations of the educated intelligentsia might be held responsible for their failure to meet the challenges of transforming the culture(s) of reading.⁹⁸

The main groups of active and regular readers in the population today, outside of children, are middle-aged women and highly educated urban youth. It seems that reading activity (including the reading of literature) continues only when young people were socialized in families with home libraries, where the love of books and reading could be passed on to the next generation. These readers are more satisfied with their reading experience, and adopt open, cosmopolitan attitudes and reading habits and often exchange recommendations with others. In-groups of readers independently navigate both the book-market and the Internet, choosing for themselves what they want to read, but rarely stepping outside of their circles.

Several problems of the culture(s) of reading in Russia still remain unsolved. Almost half of all books produced do not reach readers throughout the country. For smaller towns and villages, new books often remain entirely inaccessible. Consequently, the number of copies has considerably been reduced, while the number of public libraries, which represented the most popular place to obtain reading matter in the late Soviet period, has dramatically been reduced. In print communication—books, journals, newspapers—there has been a clear fragmentation of readerships, a break-up into various small groups and segments of readers that practice almost no communication with each other.

The fragmentation of reading audiences has caused a widening gap between social and cultural groups, between various communicative communities (center versus periphery, more versus less educated groups, more versus less successful professionals, leading versus rank-and-file workers, etc.). At the same time, a national pseudo-unification has emerged. As cultural activity

98 In a demand-based book market economy, the publishers would be the ones to blame.

in public space has decreased over the course of the 2000s, for the majority of the population, the act of reading books, journals, and newspapers has been replaced by watching TV, a medium which has been taken over by, and is now again fully controlled by, the state. Compared to the late Soviet period, the years of Perestroika, and the 1990s—that is, a wide-ranging period defined by systematic projects seeking to transform Soviet society—contemporary Russian society treats culture and reading quite differently. Both the social fragmentation and, paradoxically, popular unification into a “society of TV watchers” should be seen, however, as related phenomena. If we compare attitudes toward reading alongside the general leisure time activities from the late Soviet period until the present, we locate a general trend among the population of the Russian Federation since at least 2000: a tendency towards passive adaptation to social changes, to private communication in closed small circles, and to the avoidance of active communication with people outside these circles of relatives and friends.

We can conclude that both the definition and the idea of reading have drastically changed during the past three decades: from the inviolable, sacralized union of reading and the printed book as a defining aspect of Soviet culture, which was preserved and inherited from the prerevolutionary intelligentsia—to a number of unspecified modes and reading formats printed on paper or projected on screens. While reading used to be a standard part of literary and societal communication, for the contemporary public, reading is primarily a pastime, and everything beyond that pastime is determined with reference to function. There is a self-evident trend towards the separation and polarization of reading audiences which might cause alarm, as in the reactions displayed here by some scholars, or it can be seen simply as an ongoing, not necessarily negative process of diversification of taste. However, it would be too early to answer the question of what exactly has changed: the role of reading as such, or the reading of print-literature.

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VIRTUAL SHELVES. VIRTUAL SELVES.
RUSSIAN DIGITAL READINGSAPES AS RE/SOURCES
OF CONTENT AND IDENTIFICATION

Henrike Schmidt

*Everything started with the hunger for books.
Maksim Moshkov¹*

I. WREADERS, PROSUMERS, INDIES AND OTHER HYBRID BEINGS OF READING IN
THE DIGITAL AGE

If in the 1960s post-structuralism proclaimed “the death of the author,” then in the 1990s and with the digital ‘revolution’ we seemed to witness the ‘death of the reader,’ at least as far as we knew her (since women read more than men—across the globe² and in Russia—I will maintain throughout this article use of the feminine pronoun, which is meant to include male readers). Different scholars’ arguments substantiate this vision. Techno-utopian notions postulate the birth of such hybrid beings as the ‘wreader’ (George Landow) or the ‘prosumer’ (Henry Jenkins).³ According to the former, digressive and interactive hypertext, perceived as a liberation technology, emancipates the wreader from the narrative power of the author. The

1 A. Kostinskii, “10 let internet-biblioteka Maksima Moshkova,” *Radio Svoboda*, November 22, 2004, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/24203692.html> (accessed January 8, 2019).

2 C. Ingraham, “Leisure Reading in the U.S. is at an All-Time Low,” *Washington Post*, June 29, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/29/leisure-reading-in-the-u-s-is-at-an-all-time-low/> (accessed January 8, 2019, accessible in free usage mode with acceptance of cookies and target group advertising).

3 “Technology transforms readers into reader-authors or ‘wreaders’”; G. Landow (ed.), *Hyper/Text/Theory* (Baltimore, 1994), 14; H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, 2006).

neologism ‘prosumer’ describes, on a more anthropological than philosophical level, the blurring boundaries between producing and consuming (writing and reading) as a result of the democratization of publication technology (understood here in a structural, not a normative sense). Furthermore, in networked multi-media surroundings, literal and oral communication fuse in a ‘secondary orality’ (Walter Ong),⁴ which is based on writing but resembles informal, spontaneous discourse. Last but not least, we witness in a further twist the emergence of a ‘mediated orality’ (Claudia Benthien), when literary texts are orally performed, recorded, and disseminated on the Internet (as audio books or video poetry).⁵ All these media-induced transformations change the concept of the reader, emancipate her (the postmodern vision) or revitalize pre-modern social practices as shared reading and a kind of salon culture revisited.⁶

At the same time, the cultural pessimists assert that in times of increasing media competition, the consumption of audio-visual information and related forms of entertainment (e.g. videos or computer games) have replaced reading. The average daily media consumption in Russia in 2019 clocks in at more than eight hours, with only 15 minutes devoted to the reading of books⁷ (the ratio is almost the same in the US, with approximately 10 hours of media consumption and 17 minutes of reading, an “all-time low”).⁸ And among those media ‘consumers,’ who still prefer or at least combine literature with video gaming or communication on social network sites (SNS), readers are rapidly turning into writers themselves.⁹ The latter is underlined by the amazing popularity of self-publication platforms, where authors independently (per their ‘indie writer’ moniker) create their own reading publics, bypassing such traditional gatekeeper institutions as literary criticism and publishing houses. Last but not least, reading itself as a cognitive activity seems to be under threat, with attention being dispersed among a multiplicity of communication channels.¹⁰

Naturally, the changing conditions of literature in the digital age affect reading practices on a global scale and are not unique to the Russian context. Nevertheless, such changes are to a certain extent modified by local

4 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982).

5 C. Benthien, “‘Performed Poetry’: Situationale Rahmungen und mediale ‘ÜberSetzungen’ zeitgenössischer Lyrik,” in U. Wirth (ed.), *Rahmenbrüche, Rahmenwechsel* (Berlin, 2013), 287-312.

6 See BECK PRISTED, “Social Reading in Contemporary Russia,” in the present volume.

7 “Knizhnyi rynok Rossii. Sostoiianie, tendentsii i perspektivy razvitiia v 2017 godu,” Federal’noe agentstvo po pečati i massovym kommunikatsiam (Moscow, 2018), 51, <http://www.fapmc.ru/rospechat/activities/reports/2018/teleradio/main/custom/o/o/file.pdf> (accessed January 8, 2019).

8 Ingraham, “Leisure Reading in the U.S.”

9 K. Dubicheva, “Tolstye zhurnaly v toshchie gody,” *God literatury 2015*, June 8, 2015, <https://godliteratury.ru/events/tolstye-zhurnaly-v-toshhie-gody> (accessed January 8, 2019).

10 N. Baron, “Reading in a Digital Age,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99, 2 (2017), 15-20, accessed January 8, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721717734184> (accessed January 8, 2019).

factors and occasionally coded into national narratives that relate to specific cultural myths. Among such persistent cultural stereotypes is the supposedly outstanding significance of reading in Russia (its literature-centrism),¹¹ which links the Tsarist epoch (when literature compensated for the lack of a functioning public sphere) to the Soviet era (when literature was an important medium both for official propaganda and among dissidents). The collapse of the Soviet Union then led to a desacralization of literature, and against this backdrop the story of the literary ‘Runet’ (the colloquial term for the ‘Russian Internet’) might be told in two different ways. The positive version interprets the impressive literary wealth on Russia’s virtual shelves as evidence for the resurrection of Russia as ‘the most reading country’ precisely in the digital sphere, whereas offline cultural infrastructure experienced a period of decline, especially post-Perestroika.¹² The negative view, by contrast, bemoans the loss of a national reading culture with regard to changing patterns of media consumption.¹³ An example of such narrative ‘nationalization’ of global discourses, is the translation of such modern phenomena into concepts long present in Russian cultural history—such as, for example, assimilating ‘prosumers’ and ‘indie writers’ into the concept of *samizdat*. *Samizdat* (from Russian ‘sam’ = ‘self’ and ‘izdat’ = ‘publish’) has traditionally connoted self-publication induced by political censorship, but it is applied to today’s self-publishing practices on the Runet as well.¹⁴

Reading on the Runet evidently encompasses a multiplicity of activities and features which cannot be covered in a single chapter: discourses on digital reading concerning its cognitive and/or normative specificities; governmental policies stimulating or regulating reading practices in the digital realm; reader interaction and social reading; and empirical studies of reader preferences, just to name some of the most evident and urgent topics. The present chapter focuses on the ‘virtual shelves’ of the Runet, or in other words, the question where and how books are accessed. It maps the field of literary content platforms (online libraries, e-book stores, self-publication platforms), based on an aggregated reading of existing research and deeper drillings into exemplary cases. It does not, however, tackle the question of *what* is read on the Runet, although it does give some consideration to the very early phase of the mid 1990s. The quantity of relevant data for such an analysis of readers’ preferences is so large that it requires an empirical,

11 E. Dobrenko, M. Lipovetsky, “The Burden of Freedom: Russian Literature after Communism,” in E. Dobrenko, M. Lipovetsky (eds.), *Russian Literature since 1991* (Cambridge, 2015), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107705951.001> (accessed February 25, 2020).

12 S. Kuznetsov, “Podderzhite svobodu publikatsii v Internetе,” *Computerra Online*, April 7, 2004, <http://www.computerra.ru/focus/libwar/33087/>, cited from <https://biography.wikireading.ru/1129> (accessed June 30, 2019).

13 Dubicheva, “Tolstye zhurnaly v toshchie gody.”

14 For more detail see: H. Schmidt, “Postprintium? Digital Literary Samizdat on the Russian Internet,” in F. Kind-Kovács, J. Labov (eds.), *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media during and after Socialism* (New York, Oxford, 2013), 221-243.

long-term study, which is beyond the aims and possibilities of the present chapter. A complementary but minor matter of investigation is the question of how readers and authors interact on the Runet and social media platforms specifically, renegotiating their respective roles and expectations, or, in other words their ‘virtual (reading) selves.’ I will do this in the form of two illustrative case studies devoted to the blog by prominent scriptwriter and actor Evgenii Grishkovets (1967-) and the Facebook account of renowned Russian novelist Tatiana Tolstaia (1951-).

I am well aware that the term ‘virtual self’ is a debatable one, and I obviously chose it for the language play ‘shelves/selves,’ standing emblematically for the two poles of my analysis: content and communication/community building. The concept of the virtual self, which has many additional, no less problematic designations (identity, for example), has significantly changed throughout the roughly thirty years of ever-increasing usage of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). In early explorations of the Internet as a non-hierarchic communication network, it was associated with the emergence and performance of fluid, programmatically unstable identities and role-play.¹⁵ Ironically, with ubiquitous digitization and skyrocketing audiences, ICT seemed to encourage and express the paradoxical search for authenticity in highly mediated digital spheres.¹⁶ Concerning not the individual, but user collectives, processes of emotional and affective community-building came to the fore.¹⁷ Here, a further remark on terminology seems appropriate: the terms ‘Internet’ and ‘(World Wide) Web’ as well as ‘digital,’ ‘electronic,’ or ‘virtual’ are not congruent. But as this study is not devoted to technological specificities, but rather to reading practices on the Internet broadly defined, they are used as synonyms here.

The present chapter thus seeks to describe and discuss (in varying degrees of depth) two aspects of central significance for reading on the Runet, namely where and how readers access books—and their respective authors. In my explorations of these two aspects, I am guided by the following working hypotheses, relying on existing research: 1. Literary digital platforms function simultaneously as resources of literary content and as “sources of identification” (Kåre Mjør).¹⁸ They allow readers to take part in debates about the literary canon, bypassing traditional gatekeepers (i.e. canon formation from below, per Vlad Strukov)¹⁹ and forming translocal or even global tem-

15 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York, 1995); for the Russian context, see E. Gorny, *A Creative History of the Russian Internet* (Saarbrücken, 2009).

16 A. Kitzmann, *Saved from Oblivion. Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams* (New York, 2004).

17 G. Lovink, *Social Media Abyss: Critical Internet Culture and the Force of Negation* (Bielefeld, 2016).

18 K. Mjør, “Digitizing Everything? Online Libraries on the Runet,” in M. Gorham, I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture, and Politics of New Media Communication* (London, 2014), 215-230, here 219.

19 V. Strukov, “Digital (After-)Life of Russian Classical Literature,” *Notes from the Virtual*

poral communities, a fact which is important for a readership as geographically dispersed as the Russian-language one. Often, the “reading writing interfaces” (Lori Emerson)²⁰ of these platforms are experienced as intimate communication settings regardless of their coded ‘nature.’ Such opaque interfaces and their hidden algorithmic depths guide and partly streamline reading behavior and preferences. 2. Social media allow for a new intimacy in reader-author communication, which expresses and contributes to general cultural tendencies such as a new authenticity (Andreas Kitzmann)²¹ or, for the Russian contexts more specifically, sincerity (Ellen Rutten).²² At the same time, they affect established literary concepts such as the distinctions between ‘intended’ / ‘implied’ and ‘empirical’ reader on the one hand,²³ and ‘author persona’ and ‘empirical author’ on the other.

This study is methodologically grounded in qualitative analysis, and does not operate with quantitative data sets or methods derived from the digital humanities.²⁴ Instead, it focuses first on the digital content providers, offering a comparative analysis of their institutional and technological/functional frames (bibliographical codes; copyright policies; navigation and content organisation; incentive systems; payment modes). Then it provides a close reading of exemplary reader-author communication in representative social media applications (blog, Facebook account).

2. READING ON THE RUNET. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

2.1. ‘The Runet.’ Russian (global) readingscapes

The status of ‘the Runet’ as a tenable object of study is not self-evident. The term emerged in the late 1990s, when Internet penetration into the Russian Federation started to grow (if slowly), and reflected the idea of the Russian Internet as a space, distinct not only in terms of language, but by a shared historical experience and cultural background.²⁵ Tellingly, the term

Untergrund. Russian Literature on the Internet. Special issue of Kultura. Russland-Kulturanalysen 1 (2009) <https://d-nb.info/100116136X/34>, 9-10 (accessed January 8, 2019).

20 L. Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound* (Minneapolis, 2014).

21 Kitzmann, *Saved from Oblivion*.

22 E. Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism: A Cultural History* (New Haven, London, 2017).

23 W. Schmid, “Implied Reader,” in P. Hühn et al. (eds.), *the living handbook of narratology* (Hamburg, last modified April 7, 2014), <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/implied-reader> (accessed June 30, 2019)

24 Quantitative approaches are tested and implemented at Yale University, *Digital Humanities and Russian and East European Studies* (DHREES; Marijeta Bozovic) and by the *Digital Humanities in the Slavic Field* research association.

25 For a more detailed discussion of the limits of the term “Runet” see, for example, V. Zvereva, *Setevye razgovory. Kul’turnye kommunikatsii v Runete* (Bergen, 2012), 12-14; H. Schmidt, N. Konradova, “From the Utopia of Autonomy to a Political Battlefield: Towards a

was coined by Raffi Aslanbekov, one of the early Runet columnists, who at the time was living not in Russia but in Israel.²⁶ Since then, it has found its way even into dictionaries, albeit with different meanings. Thus, the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary* defines it as “Russian-language internet” (*russkoiazychnaia chast’ Interneta*),²⁷ the *Dictionary for the Technical Translator* as “the part of the Internet belonging to the Russian Federation” (*Rossiiskaia chast’ Interneta*).²⁸ The latter, territorially-based understanding,²⁹ is not appropriate for the geographically dispersed reading audiences using Russian-language online libraries, e-book stores, or self-publication platforms. They form temporary communities that produce productive cultural encounters, but just as often lead to communicative battles or even “web wars,”³⁰ with audiences united by language but separated by different political or ideological standpoints. Furthermore, recent research might suggest that official Russian Internet policies are characterized by cyber-imperialist attitudes and rely on Russian-language websites to consolidate their influence in countries that previously belonged to the Soviet empire.³¹

The term Runet will be employed here as a tribute to language convention and for the sake of brevity, but should be understood as the Russian-language Internet. Additionally, I work with the term ‘Russian readingscape/s’ as a modification of the ‘scape’ metaphor, which was introduced by Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in the 1990s in order to describe the global flows of data and communications in the emerging network society.³² Where I refer to aspects characteristic for online (read-

History of the ‘Russian Internet.’” in M. Gorham, I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture, and Politics of New Media Communication* (London, 2014), 34–36.

26 Velikii Diadia [Raffi Aslanbekov], “Chto Velikii Djadja dumal 11-go iunია 1997-goda,” July 30, 1997, archived copy, <https://web.archive.org/web/19970730114907/http://www.cityline.ru/uncle/thinks/110697.html> (accessed January 8, 2019).

27 “Runet,” *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’* (2009), cited from *Slovari i entsiklopedii na Akademike*, <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/es/87393> (accessed January 8, 2019).

28 “Runet,” *Spravochnik tekhnicheskogo perevodchika* (2009–2013), cited from *Slovari i entsiklopedii na Akademike*, https://technical_translator_dictionary.academic.ru/200274/Рунет (accessed January 8, 2019).

29 Even such a territorially based and seemingly uncomplicated approach cannot be precisely defined. Thus, state institutions rely on different interpretations of the term; see I. Karpiuk, “Tolkovanie Runeta,” *Polit.ru*, May 16, 2018, <http://polit.ru/article/2018/05/16/runet/> (accessed January 8, 2019).

30 E. Rutten, J. Fedor, V. Zvereva (eds.), *Memory, Conflict and New Media: Web Wars in Post-Socialist States* (London, 2013). See as well: M. Bassin, M. Suslov (eds.), *Eurasia 2.0: Russian Geopolitics in the Age of New Media* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, 2016).

31 D. Uffelmann, “Is There a Russian Cyber Empire?” in M. Gorham, I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture, and Politics of New Media Communication* (London, 2014), 266–284; Bassin, Suslov, *Eurasia 2.0*.

32 Appadurai distinguishes “ethnoscapes,” “technoscapes,” “financescapes,” “mediascapes,” and “ideoscapes.” See A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 2008). See as well Mjør (“Digitizing Everything?”), who uses the term “technoscape” for characterizing the Runet.

villages. Gender inequality in digital access has likewise been reduced over the course of the last two decades: men and women use the Internet in the Russian Federation almost to the same amount.³⁴ The generational gap, on the other hand, remains significant, with a saturation of almost 100 percent among the younger population (age 16 to 20) but only 36 percent among the elder generation (54 plus). This gap is still wider if we consider frequency of Internet access via mobile devices (smartphones), which stands at 83 percent for the younger generation and only 14 percent for the elder one.³⁵

Thus, in Russia, not all people enjoy benefits of the Internet equally or in the same way. Elder people in the rural areas are particularly disadvantaged. That being said, differences in living conditions between the urban and the rural spaces are not limited to the digital realm. Indeed, the offline cultural and literary infrastructure is no less dire: libraries are being closed, and regional bookstores are experiencing serious shortcomings.³⁶ Thus, regardless of persistent inequalities between different regions, the Internet may at the same time compensate weaknesses in offline cultural infrastructure in the peripheries,³⁷ leading to cross-media usages and synergies.

2.2. *From liberation technology to third-generation control. Political frames*

Quantitative implementation of a new communication technology is one story (and, in the case of the Internet in Russia, a story of success); however, its inscription into cultural traditions and narratives another one. In the Russian context, a decisive factor is the coincidence of political and digital ‘revolutions’ in the early 1990s.³⁸ In his seminal works devoted to the information era, sociologist Manuel Castells put forward the hypotheses that the Soviet Union collapsed because its radical control of information

34 “Internet v Rossii: dinamika proniknoveniia. Zima 2017-2018gg,” *Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie FOM*, April 4, 2018, accessed January 9, 2019, <https://fom.ru/posts/13999> (accessed January 8, 2019).

35 Federal’noe agentstvo po pechati, “Knizhnyi rynok Rossii,” 54.

36 See MENZEL, “From Print to Pixel,” and BECK PRISTED, “Social Reading in Contemporary Russia,” in the present volume.

37 See MENZEL, “From Print to Pixel,” in the present volume, as well “Literaturnaia karta Rossii: vse ottenki krasnogo,” *Informatsionno-analiticheskii zhurnal Universitetskaiia kniga*, August 28, 2015, <http://www.unkniga.ru/bookrinok/knigniy-rinok/4689-literaturnaya-karta-rossii-vse-ottenki-krasnogo.html> (accessed January 9, 2019); “Obshchedostupnye biblioteki: monitoring seti i situatsiia v regionakh,” *Informatsionno-analiticheskii zhurnal Universitetskaiia kniga*, July 5, 2018, <http://www.unkniga.ru/biblioteki/bibdelo/8484-obshchedost-biblioteki-monitoring-seti-i-situatsiya-v-regionah.html> (accessed January 8, 2019) l.

38 This sub-chapter is based on: N. Konradova, H. Schmidt, “History of the ‘Russian Internet’” and the following studies: R. Hauser, *Technische Kulturen oder kultivierte Technik? Das Internet in Deutschland und Russland* (Berlin, 2010); S. Kuznetsov, *Oshchupyyaia slona [Zametki po istorii russkogo Interneta]* (Moscow, 2004); A. Soldatov, I. Borogan, *The Red Web: The Struggle Between Russia’s Digital Dictators and the New Online Revolutionaries* (New York, 2015).

technology was not fit for the advent of the network society.³⁹ Against this background, the new media environment was experienced as a liberation technology after the decades of Soviet censorship. Symbolically speaking, the vertical structure of the totalitarian regime was followed by the horizontal nature of the new communication networks. With Russian literary theory embracing postmodern paradigms, such communication networks were likened to the rhizomatic knowledge patterns and de-hierarchized author-reader relations typical for post-structuralism, as can be seen from the following citation by Pavel Afanas'ev:

The horizontality of the Internet-Runet matched perfectly with the total horizontality of the 1990s, expressed in “postmodernism,” [borrowed from] the times of Lyotard, with a bit of dust removed and slightly edited.⁴⁰

At the same time, other theoretical approaches embedded the new technology into specifically Russian cultural contexts. Philosopher Mikhail Epshtein, for example, explained the phenomenon of the Internet as a technological embodiment of Russian philosophical concepts as ‘*sobornost'*’ (‘spiritual community’) or ‘*vseedinstvo'*’ (‘all-unity’).⁴¹

From the 2000s onwards—stimulated especially by the change of oligarchic nepotism (the Yeltsin era) to the authoritarian power vertical (the Putin era)—the Internet has been increasingly integrated into official discourses that rely on cultural identity politics,⁴² part of which are the narratives of the ‘great Russian language’ and ‘great Russian literature.’ These neo-conservative identity politics have challenged linguistic and literary practices which have developed so far on the Runet, including obscene language or intentionally distorted language such as that of the so-called ‘*padonki'*’ (‘scumbag’) slang. The “landslides of the norm”⁴³ have been countered by State initia-

39 M. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (Malden, 1997), 10. Benjamin Peters proposes another explanation as to why the Soviet Union proved unable to ‘invent’ the Internet. “Beyond the binary” logics of the cold war era, he locates this failure in the competing “private” interests of the state actors behaving like “capitalists”: B. Peters, *How Not to Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet* (Cambridge, London, 2016), 191-194.

40 P. Afanas'ev, “Rulinet. Nabroski nekrologa,” *Setevaia slovesnost'*, November 16, 2001, <https://www.netslova.ru/afanasiev/rulinet.html> (accessed January 9, 2019).

41 M. Epshtein, “‘SEVERNNAIA PAUTINA.’ Virtual'nye miry russkoi kul'tury. Zhurnal pod redaktsiei Mikhaila Epshteina. Vvedenie,” no year, http://old.russ.ru/antolog/intelnet/zh_sever_pautina.html (accessed January 8, 2019).

42 Freedom House, “Russia Country Report | Freedom on the Net 2017,” October 10, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/russia> (accessed January 8, 2019).

43 I. Lunde, T. Roesen (eds.), *Landslide of the Norm. Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Bergen, 2006); I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *From Poets to Padonki: Linguistic Authority and Norm Negotiation in Modern Russian Culture* (Bergen, 2009).

tives re-implementing an official canon (grammar websites, official awards as the Runet premiia).

Throughout the roughly 25 years since the implementation of the Internet in the Russian Federation, a regulatory and juristic framework has been gradually developing alongside it; this framework also affects reading practices.⁴⁴ This regulation encompasses initiatives as varied as the registration of private blogs as mass media entities, the implementation of international copyright regulations (as a facet of accession into the World Trade Organisation), or the installment of the Unified Register of Forbidden Internet Resources, controlled by Roskomnadzor, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media (Federal'naia sluzhba po nadzoru v sfere svyazi, informatsionnykh tekhnologii i massovykh kommunikatsii). Sites are blacklisted for allegedly propagating not only extremism, but also pedophilia, drug consumption, or suicide. Individual literary works or whole Internet resources are occasionally blocked, as in the case of the popular self-publication portal Samizdat, discussed in more detail below.⁴⁵ Critics assume that the deliberately broad definition of extremism is instrumentalized for silencing political protest. In the late 2010s, new laws also led to personal persecution for reposts and likes on social media.⁴⁶ Comparative research on global Internet control differentiates between first (technological), second (legislative), and third generation (discursive) forms of control, with the latter 'creatively' mixing oppressive and propagandistic measures.⁴⁷ Deibert et al attribute to Russia the dubious fame of being at the avant-garde of sophisticated third generation control: it relies on a mix of repressive measures and cultural narratives, with writers taking actively part in the shaping of the latter.⁴⁸ In 2019 President Putin signed the "sovereign internet bill," leading to a potential isolation of an "autonomous" Russian Internet from the global networks.⁴⁹ In rather formulaic over-simplification, the horizontal 1990s were followed

44 Roskomsvoboda, "Itogi gosregulirovaniia Runeta v 2018 godu," December 28, 2018, <https://roskomsvoboda.org/44118/> (accessed January 8, 2019); Roskomsvoboda, "Reestr zapreshchennykh saitov," <http://reestr.rublacklist.net/> (accessed January 9, 2019).

45 Roskomsvoboda, "Rostelekom zablokiroval razdel 'Samizdat' Biblioteki Maksima Moshkova," December 8, 2012, <https://roskomsvoboda.org/3618/> (accessed January 9, 2019); J. Revich, "Za chto provaidery blokiruiut 'Samizdat,'" *Computerra Online*, May 28, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100819110328/http://www.computerra.ru/print/534983/> (accessed January 8, 2019).

46 O. Robinson, "The Memes That Might Get You Jailed in Russia," *BBC*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-45247879> (accessed January 9, 2019).

47 R. Deibert et al, *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, 2010), 7.

48 *Ibid.*, 7.

49 A. Roth, "Russia's Great Firewall: Is It Meant to Keep Information in—or Out?" *The Guardian*, April 28, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/apr/28/russia-great-firewall-sovereign-internet-bill-keeping-information-in-or-out> (accessed January 9, 2019).

by the vertical 2000s.⁵⁰ Reading on the Runet takes place in a highly politicized environment.

2.3. Codes and contents. Machine-reading and double-tracked remediations

Reading in the digital realm is framed as much by technological environments as by cultural and political ones. In the roughly two decades since the broad implementation of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) worldwide, a complex terminology has been elaborated with regard to digital or electronic texts (used here like synonyms), which correspondingly affects understandings of reading as well.⁵¹ Research typically distinguishes digitized from digital literature. The former refers to texts that made their first appearance exclusively in print form, and the latter to ‘born digitals’—works originally produced on a computer and thus lacking a genuine, ‘originary’ paper format, or those that cannot be adequately ‘displayed’ on physical paper (such is the case with hypertext, animated poetry, code works, etc.). In their essence, such terminological battles concern(ed) the question, if and to what extent the aesthetic core of the text is affected by its digital ‘nature’ (media determinism). Especially in the early period of media euphoria, terminological quarrels were reined by an implicit normativity, attributing to digital literature a higher innovative (and empowering) potential than to digitized texts, perceived as trivial remediations.

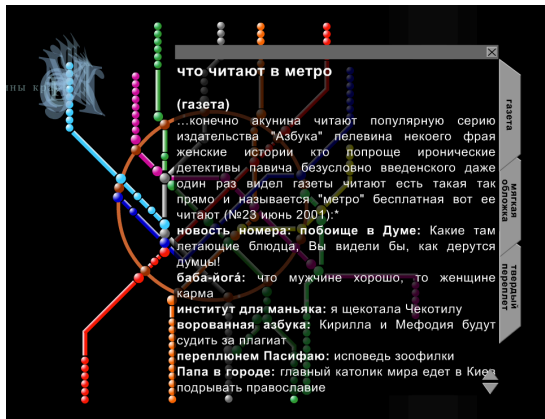
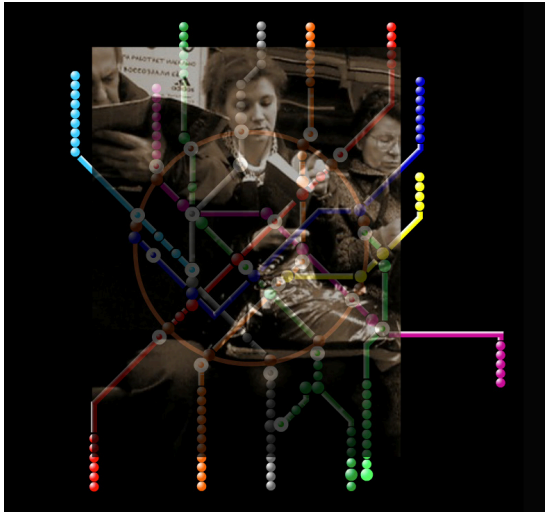
Let me give here one example from Russian digital literature, namely the multimedia hypertext poem “In the subway (and outside). Observations” (*V metro [i snaruzhi]. Nabludeniia*)⁵², co-authored by Sergei Vlasov (text), Georgii Zherdev (concept and animation) and Aleksei Dobkin (photography). The textual organisation of this poem is based on the map of the Moscow metro. Readers navigate through the work as if they are travelling with the subway. With every click on a station, they enter a text fragment, poem, or prose impression. The work tackles the topic of reading on a thematic level as well. Animated photographs show passengers reading books and newspapers in the metro—the stereotypical illustration of Russian literature-centrism. “What is read in the subway?” asks the header of one text fragment: Boris Akunin’s postmodern crime novels, Viktor Pelevin’s cyberfiction, the ubiquitous romances. In other words: the canon of popu-

⁵⁰ Dobrenko, Lipovetsky, “The Burden of Freedom.”

⁵¹ S. Bouchardon, “Towards a Tension-Based Definition of Digital Literature,” *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*, 2, iss. 1, article 6 (2017), <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/jcws/vol2/iss1/6>, 3 (accessed January 13, 2019); P. Gendolla, J. Schäfer (eds.), *The Aesthetics of Net Literature: Writing, Reading and Playing in Programmable Media* (Bielefeld, 2007); K. Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (Paris, 2010).

⁵² S. Vlasov, G. Zherdev, A. Dobkin, “V metro (i snaruzhi). Nabludeniia,” *Setevaia slovesnost'*, October 30, 2001, <http://www.netslova.ru/vlasov/metro/index.html> (accessed January 15, 2019).

lar reading as it evolved since the mid-1990s as a reaction to the highbrow literary tastes of the Soviet period. The poem thus invokes and parallelizes two central myths of Russian and Soviet culture: first, the metro as an outstanding, almost mythical achievement of Soviet technology and architecture; and second, the stereotype of the ‘most reading country in the world.’



2. 3. Screenshots from Metro poem, comparing reading to a metro ride.

Hypertext literature has not become a productive genre—neither in the ‘Western’ segments of the Internet, nor in Russia. Hypertext as liberation technology vanished with the more general ‘net delusion,’ as Evgeny

Morozov—one of the most prolific critics of techno utopia—has titled his book that seeks to dismantle technodeterminism.⁵³ As concerns more specifically literary matters, hyperlinking, as a narrative strategy, has been criticized as unable to produce intriguing stories and true immersion. Against this backdrop, Roman Leibov's iconic co-writing project *Novel (Roman, 1995-1996; programmer Dmitrii Manin)*⁵⁴ was conceived as a conceptual experiment with the im/possibilities of turning readers into co/writers.⁵⁵ The title has a trifold meaning, denoting the genre (novel), the style (romance) and the alphabet (Latin), to say nothing of the allusion to the author's name. Its core consists of a short text fragment, a juvenile love story with an open end. Readers were invited to send in alternative versions. A dozen author-readers produced up to 200 pages of text. After a year of organic growth, the text became unreadable and Leibov stopped the experiment, which from the beginning was intended as a philological critique of hypertext theory. The reader's involvement appeared to be banal and predictable, and the 'wreader' as the digitally emancipated reader became outdated. Soon, the most advanced and intriguing methods of storytelling could be found within computer games and transmedia storytelling in the form of internet memes⁵⁶ or fan fiction, which in this book is covered by a separate case study.

What unites all sorts of digitized and digital texts, however, is the fact that they are computer-processed and thus rely on code. The (literary) texts which the readers perceive on the surface of the computer screen are 'secondary,' products of the underlying 'primary' text of the computer code. They tend to either hide their computer-generated nature (opaque interfaces) or to display it openly (exposure of their mediated 'nature'). Media historians David Bolter and Jay Grusin describe such phenomena with the terms "immediacy" and "hypermediacy."⁵⁷ A multimedia hypertext experiment such as the *Metro* poem aesthetically explores the added poetic value of digital devices, while e-books tend to emulate a physical experience of literature by reproducing traditional bibliographical codes, including page area and pagination.

For most readers, reading in the digital format is reduced to surface experiences. While we know that those texts are code-generated, we tend to ignore the underlying computing and algorithmic processes. This is true not only for the individual text but also for the platform interfaces, which

53 E. Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York, 2011).

54 R. Leibov, *ROMAN*, 1996, http://www.cs.ut.ee/~roman_1/hyperfiction/ (accessed January 15, 2019).

55 R. Leibov, "Kniga dlia vsekh i ni dlia kogo. Besedu vel Dmitrii Popov," *Klassika russkoi pautiny*, <http://kulichki.com/classic/leybov.htm> (accessed January 15, 2019); A. Gagin, "Gumanitarnoe izmerenie. S Romanom Leibovym i Kubom besedet Anton Borisovich N.," *Internet*, 2 (7), accessed January 15, 2019, <http://www.gagin.ru/internet/7/6.html>.

56 M.-L. Ryan, J.-N. Thon, A. Shahan (eds.), *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology* (Lincoln, 2014).

57 J. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, 2000), 6.

determine (and monitor) our reading habits—for example, by proposing algorithmically generated reading recommendations.⁵⁸

A performative critique of these opaque user interfaces is represented by ‘codework,’ understood as “text-based digital art that appropriates computer languages for reasons other than formal coding functions.”⁵⁹ It reveals the role of computer code, which is ‘read’ not by the human readers, but by the computer machines. By provoking malfunctions (glitches), code art draws our attention to the algorithmic depths of our everyday ICT usages,⁶⁰ thus problematizing the political influence they have for prosumerism on the Internet—even in its participatory modes.

Codework is not much present on the Runet, unlike prominent cases of media activism that have gone viral, such as those of art collectives like Voina (War) or Pussy Riot. However, the ‘raw’ material of the latter’s actions is not code, but the human body and emblematic elements of Russian / Soviet mythology. I have argued elsewhere that from the beginnings of the Runet code was dominated by content, because digitized literature was not only a complementary channel of book distribution (as in ‘the West’) but satisfied urgent reading needs after decades of state censorship, book deficit, and territorial isolation.⁶¹ This initial focus on content still prevails, furthered today by the abovementioned eminent politicization of (literary) communication.

While code determines the appearance of all texts in the digital sphere, whether they are digitized or ‘born digital,’ in today’s ubiquitous data worlds, on the other hand, the online and offline continuously merge. As Katherine Hayles puts it in her influential book *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*: “Digital technologies are now so thoroughly integrated with commercial printing processes that print is more properly considered a particular output form of electronic text than an entirely separate medium.”⁶² As a consequence, constant remediations or cross-media usages determine today’s reading practices. Remediation describes the transfer of an artistic work (text, picture, sound) from one media format to another, with content always being affected by these processes of reframing. Such remediations are never unilateral; David Bolter and Richard Grusin, who made the con-

⁵⁸ For a recent critique of platform capitalism see G. Lovink, *Sad by Design. On Platform Nihilism* (London, 2019). For an earlier analysis of Russian-language platforms and their emancipatory potential see O. Goriunova, *Art Platforms and Cultural Production on the Internet* (London, 2012).

⁵⁹ C. Hope, J. Ryan, *Digital Arts: An Introduction to New Media* (Bloomsbury, 2014).

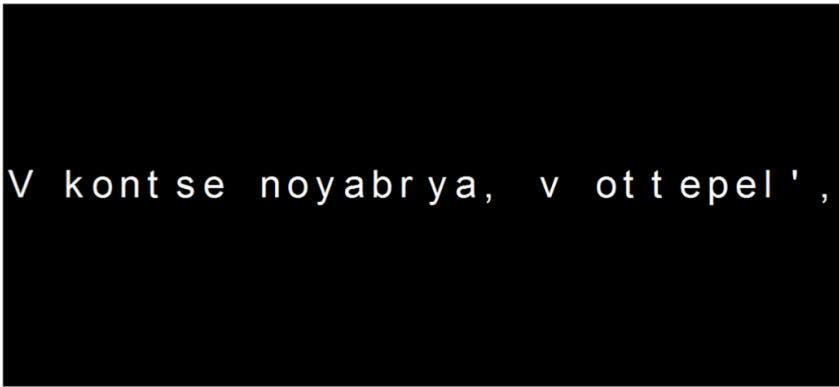
⁶⁰ L. Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound* (Minnesota, 2014).

⁶¹ H. Schmidt, “Russian Literature on the Internet: From Hypertext to Fairy Tale,” in M. Gorham, I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture, and Politics of New Media Communication* (London, 2014), 177-193.

⁶² Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, 5.

cept popular in the early 2000s, have underscored as much.⁶³ They can be “respectful” vis-à-vis the original or produce—wittingly or unwittingly—dissonances. Concerning literature and the digital, today’s remediations are double-tracked: from analog to digital (print books to digitized manuscripts), and from digital to analog (Twitter posts to poetry collections; on-line blogs to print diaries). The latter is sometimes referred to as post-digital or post-Internet literature.⁶⁴

An example of a disrespectful remediation is Aleksroma’s [Aleksandr Romadanov] digital version of the novel *The Idiot* (1868) by Fedor Dostoevskii rearranged as a news ticker (2001).⁶⁵ ‘Reading’ the text would take 24 hours and is intentionally inconvenient. Aleksroma’s animated *Idiot* underlines how disrespectful remediation can demonstrate the specific gains and losses that a text witnessed when being transferred from an analog to a digital format.



4. Dostoevskii’s *Idiot* as a news ticker. A disrespectful remediation by Aleksroma (2001).

After having framed the elusive object of this study—reading on the Runet—in both its parts, I will now turn to my first thematic priority, namely digital content providers (online libraries, e-book sellers, and sharing platforms). Dostoevskii’s *Idiot*, to stick to this example, is available here in a multiplicity of remediations maintaining different bibliographical codes,⁶⁶

63 Bolter, Grusin, *Remediation*.

64 F. Cramer, “What Is ‘Post-Digital?’” *APRJA. A Peer-Reviewed Journal About* <http://www.aprja.net/?p=1318> (accessed January 14, 2019).

65 Aleksroma <Aleksandr Romadanov>, “F. Dostoevskij. IDIOT,” *Setevaia slovesnost’*, May 4, 2001, <http://www.litera.ru/slova/alexroma/idiot.htm> (accessed January 14, 2019). Copy available in *Internet Archive*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20040123170327/http://www.russian-writer.com/flash/idiot/idiot.swf>.

66 See Mjør, “Digitizing Everything?,” 215.

from simple html versions to annotated editions, including pagination and sophisticated e-book versions, convenient for being read on the screen. Mjør speaks about just such a “scale of ‘bookness,’”⁶⁷ reaching from text mode to image mode.

3. READING AND RATING. DIGITAL CONTENT PROVIDERS

3.1. *Online libraries. The formation of the canon from the bottom up*

The riches of online libraries are part of Runet mythology.⁶⁸ They transfer the myth of Russia as a reading country from the analog to the digital realm, in a time of alleged cultural decline and crisis of the book in the offline world. I instead argue that the textual wealth of Runet online libraries can be just as adequately explained by the dramatic dynamics of the times and prosaic infrastructural reasons: the book hunger of the (post-)Perestroika period, the ideological and practical neglect of copyrights, the dispersed readership of the Russian readingscapes.

The first digital libraries appeared on the Runet in the early 1990s; these include the library by Eugene Peskin (1970-) in 1992 and, two years later, the still famous library founded by and named after programmer Maksim Moshkov (1966-). Both are typical in the sense that they were initiated by passionate readers, and not by professional librarians. Initially they constituted personal text collections, mirroring the individual tastes of their founders, both of whom were representatives of the technical intelligentsia. The libraries rapidly acquired huge audiences, and Maksim Moshkov in particular soon radicalized the concept of the readers’ library by inviting his audience to contribute their own proposals for its collection. This is how Moshkov himself has put it in a citation that has grown famous: “The structure and text quality of this library are defined by its readers; I am only standing at the reception.”⁶⁹ Enthusiastic do-it-yourself librarians sent in individually digitized text files often containing mistakes and typos. Texts were published on the website with minimal design, which reduced file size—an important asset in the early times of the Runet, when Internet connection was often poor and rates were expensive—and thus inconvenient for reading. The visually ‘poor’ design of the library contrasts with the opulence of its contents. It has only slightly been refurbished since its foundation in 1994, and has become a visual landmark of the (early) Runet.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶⁸ Kuznetsov, *Oshchupyyaia slona*; Kuznetsov, “Podderzhite svobodu.”

⁶⁹ M. Moshkov, “Instruktsiia dlia blagodetelei i tekstodatelei,” March 10, 2013, <http://www.lib.ru/TXT/incoming.txt> (accessed January 8, 2019); English translation following Mjør, “Digitizing Everything?,” 217.

As regards content, the Moshkov library represents an eclectic mix of high-brow and low-brow texts that were previously censored or marginalized within the Soviet value system: avant-garde poetry and anti-Soviet literature, fantasy and science fiction, but also philosophical or esoteric literature and foreign authors in Russian translation.⁷⁰ As such, it is comparable to similar open library projects in other segments of the Internet, such as the (initially) US-based Gutenberg project (founded 1971). But Moshkov—unlike his foreign and, to a certain extent, his local analogues—did not restrict his collection to texts from the public domain: he included works published by contemporary authors as well, so long as they did not manifestly refuse. If such informal handling of authors' rights was accepted in the early period of the Runet with marginal user numbers and low economic potential, Moshkov's do-it-yourself copyright policies in the following decade of rapid Internet growth collided with new rules and players in the increasingly institutionalized field of Runet culture. The turning point was the year 2004, when the library was accused of violating authors' rights. In the outcome, the 'readers' librarian' changed his rules, restricting the collection of new publications to texts in the public domain, while simultaneously opening a new portal where authors could publish their own texts themselves. This new sub-project was programmatically called Samizdat, alluding to the abovementioned system of politically motivated self-publication in the Soviet era. Moshkov's Samizdat in fact is no library anymore, but rather a self-publication portal profiting from the symbolical capital already aggregated by its host institution with the well-known, iconic URL lib.ru.

The Moshkov project is often analyzed within a troika of prototypical online libraries, namely the Russian Virtual library (Russkaia virtual'naia biblioteka, or RVB; founded 1999)⁷¹ and The Fundamental Digital Library of Russian Literature and Folklore (Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka "Russkaia literatura i fol'klor," or FEB; founded 2002).⁷² Both represent to varying degrees a professionalization of the literary Internet: trained librarians and philologists reclaim their gatekeeper functions, promoting different concepts of how to re/construct the literary canon, and receiving limited or no financial support from government entities.

A similar project in the field of periodical literary journals is the Reading Room (Zhurnal'nyi zal, founded in the year 1995-1996), which brought the institution of the so-called 'thick' journals (*tolstye zhurnaly*) to the Internet. The thick journals have been a peculiarity of Russian reading culture since the late 18th century. They publish literary works as well as literary critique

⁷⁰ Quantitative long-term studies of canon formation in the Russian electronic libraries are, to my knowledge, still missing.

⁷¹ Russkaia virtual'naia biblioteka, 1999-2019, <https://rvb.ru/#lib> (accessed January 8, 2019).

⁷² FEB: Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka 'Russkaia literatura i fol'klor,' 2002, last modified December 31, 2015, <http://feb-web.ru/> (accessed January 14, 2019).

and stand symbolically for the allegedly outstanding significance of Russian literature, fulfilling not only aesthetic, but also ethic and political functions in a restricted public sphere. As such, they contribute to the essentialist view of Russia as a ‘reading country.’ The Reading Room assembled, for free and online, the most prestigious Russian literary journals. By doing so, it reacted to drastic losses in the journals’ offline audience. The thick journals were sick: subscription had become too expensive, dissemination into Russia’s various regions and abroad was difficult, and subscribing institutions (such as academic and public libraries) lacked the financial resources to subscribe.⁷³ Paradoxically, the Russian Internet provided a remedy for diminishing circulation and influence, representing at the same time a diametrically opposed attitude of non-hierarchic literary communication. Reading Room coordinator Sergei Kostyrko represented a new type of Runet protagonist, and typically voiced demands for qualitative control and selection mechanisms in order to correct the “distorted picture” and sort out the “half-marginal concoction” (*perekoshennoe, polumarginal’noe varevo*) that represented early digital culture.⁷⁴ Literary critic Alla Latynina, herself active as a columnist for the thick journal *New World* (*Novyi mir*), took sides with the undisciplined readers and their anarchic reading habits by ironizing the normative approach to reading culture advocated by Kostyrko and the like:

The “reading folk” did not behave adequately. It cleare[d] the shelves of detective novels, discusse[d] in countless Internet corners some strange fantasy novels (all the stuff which the thick journals would never let pass through their doors), and avoid[ed] these same journals like the reserves for endemic flora.⁷⁵

The Reading Room, contrary to Latynina’s predictions, has been a success story until very recently. In autumn 2018, the project announced that the website would not be updated anymore, due to the lack of support from its previous webhost.⁷⁶ At the time of writing, the editorial team has started a crowdfunding campaign for a re-launch.⁷⁷ Observers interpret changes and

⁷³ See MENZEL, “From Print to Pixel” in the present volume.

⁷⁴ S. Kostyrko, “WWW-obozrenie Sergeia Kostyrko,” *Novyi mir*, 3 (2006), 195-204, cited from *Zhurnalnyi zal*, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2006/3/ko18-pr.html (accessed January 8, 2019); S. Kostyrko, “WWW-obozrenie Sergeia Kostyrko,” *Novyi mir*, 8 (2001), 211-217, cited from *Zhurnalnyi zal*, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2001/8/oboz.html (accessed January 8, 2019).

⁷⁵ A. Latynina, “Sumerki literary,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 47 (5857) (November 27, 2001), cited from *WikiChtenie*, <https://lit.wikireading.ru/37520> (accessed January 8, 2019).

⁷⁶ S. Pavlova, “‘Kul’turnaia katastrofa.’ Sud’ba literaturnogo proekta ‘Zhurnalnyi zal,’” *Radio Svoboda*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29519090.html> (accessed January 8, 2019); N. Vasil’ev, “Bol’shim literaturnym zhurnalom ‘otklichili internet,’” *Literaturnaia Rossia*, October 5, 2018. <https://litrossia.ru/item/bolshim-literaturnym-zhurnalom-otkluchili-internet/>.

⁷⁷ “Zhurnalnyi zal—2,” *Planeta.ru. Kraudfanding v Rossii*, 2019, <https://planeta.ru/>

challenges of the Reading Room as the sign of a double crisis: The potential shutdown is seen as a symptom of insufficient support of literary institutions—on- or offline—by the State, despite proclamations to the contrary and official events like the “Year of Literature” (*God literature*), celebrated in 2015. At the same time, it reflects the penetration of recent global trends in cultural communication into the Runet, as content-oriented projects are ousted by social media activities.

Since the year 2014-2015, a major new player in the field has emerged: the National Electronic Library (Natsional’naia Elektronnaia Biblioteka; hereafter NEB).⁷⁸ The NEB differs from the abovementioned online libraries insofar as it represents an association of already existing libraries, whose collections it mirrors digitally. Possessing numerous partners and receiving funding from the Russian Ministry of Culture, it represents an impressive text repository, one that offers various bibliographical codes, from image to searchable text. The NEB seems to be the long-awaited “broad cultural initiative[s] aimed at digitizing Russian print culture,”⁷⁹ comparable to projects like the French Gallica or the Europeana. However, it aims primarily at an audience of professional readers.⁸⁰

Alongside these well-known and -studied⁸¹ online libraries, many smaller private initiatives and websites have existed and continue to exist. While not satisfying many philological standards, they are nevertheless of interest as objects of philological study, insofar as they express bottom-up visions of the literary canon. Peter Shillingsburg has ingeniously called them the “dank cellar” of literature on the Internet.⁸² Vlad Strukov underscores that especially these early, anarchic ‘reader’s libraries’ challenged classical literary canons, which have traditionally been quite strong in Russia and have been regaining importance within the new identity politics established under Vladimir Putin.⁸³

With the advent of NEB and other forms of state engagement in the digitization of Russia’s literary heritage, the professional but (semi-)pri-

campaigns/98872 (accessed January 8, 2019).

78 NEB Natsional’naia elektronnaia biblioteka, <https://n3b.pf> (accessed January 14, 2019).

79 Mjør, “Digitizing Everything?,” 225.

80 For a critical account of the conception of the NEB see V. Stepanov, “Kakuiu Natsional’nuu elektronnuu biblioteku my poteriali,” *Gosudarstvennaia publitskaia nauchno-tekhnicheskaiia biblioteka Rossii*, 2015, <https://elis.gpntb.ru/node/1008> (accessed January 14, 2019).

81 Mjør, “Digitizing Everything?”; E. Gornyi, K. Vigurskii, “Razvitie elektronnykh bibliotek: mirovoi i rossiiskii opyt, problemy, perspektivy,” in Moskovskii tsentr Karnegi (ed.), *Internet i rossiiskoe obshchestvo* (Moscow, 2002), <http://www.zhurnal.ru/staff/gornyi/texts/dlib.html>. Archived copy, <https://epub3.livejournal.com/33143.html> (accessed January 14, 2019); K. L. Zuikina, D. V. Sokolova, A. V. Skalabian, *Elektronnye biblioteki v Rossii. Tekushchii status i perspektivy razvitiia* (Moscow, 2017), <http://vernysky.ru/pubs/6894> (accessed January 14, 2019).

82 P. Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (Cambridge, 2006), 138ff.

83 Strukov, “Digital (After-)Life.”

vate initiatives like the RVB and the FEB⁸⁴ have been put under pressure. The Moshkov library persists like a dinosaur, a relic of the ‘romantic’ period of the Runet, having morphed behind its library walls into a successful self-publication forum, thus serving the needs of the authors more than those of the readers.

5. Functional and nostalgic. Retro design of the Samizdat journal based at Moshkov library, <http://samlib.ru>

The development of the literary libraries on the Runet, as outlined above, is closely linked to copyright questions. In the early 1990s, when the first collections emerged, the Internet in the Russian Federation was a marginal sphere. State institutions as well as publishing houses representing economic interests were absent. Intellectual property rights were either pragmatically ignored or programmatically violated. After decades of Soviet censorship, (some) authors as well as readers propagated positions of a digital enlightenment, namely that information had to be free, and that often meant free *of charge* as well.⁸⁵ Such copyleft policies, popular among data activists and protagonists of the commons movement worldwide, were sometimes embedded into the abovementioned narratives of a specific national (reading) culture, explained and justified by either pre-revolutionary concepts of communal property (the *obshchina*) or Soviet experiences of collective ownership. With Russia's accession to the World Trade Organisation WTO in 2012, the country obliged itself to implement international authors' rights regulations. But copyright is as much a political as an economic asset. Since the year 2015, Roskomnadzor has had the right to block websites for the illegal publication of copyrighted materials.⁸⁶ Critics suggest that the fight against copyright violations may be misused for taking down websites

⁸⁴ The FEB has not been updated since the end of 2015 and the reader forum, once a place of lively discussions, seems to be abandoned, without moderation and flushed with spam.

⁸⁵ Strukov, "Digital (After-)Life," 9-10.

⁸⁶ Federal'noe agentstvo po pečati i massovym kommunikatsiiam, "Internet v Rossii v 2017 godu. Sostoianie, tendentsii i perspektivy razvitiia," (Moscow, 2018), 12-13, <http://www.fapmc.ru/rospechat/activities/reports/2018/teleradio/main/custom/o/o/file.pdf>.

propagating politically undesirable positions. Under the double pressure of state-implemented copyright policies and an emerging commercial e-book market (which will be discussed in a subsequent sub-chapter), ‘pirate’ libraries emerged. Among the most popular is Librusek (lib.rus.ec, initiated in 2007 by Il’ia Larin), based in Ecuador and thus beyond the bounds of Russian legislation.

Regardless of the widely shared notion that the Runet leads the world in sheer amount of online libraries, such online libraries represent a global, Internet-wide phenomenon of literary culture; Russia is the rule rather than the exception. In his extensive analysis, Kåre Mjør has concluded that Runet libraries are specific only in the sense that they present bottom-up initiatives. Other than in the English-speaking segments of the Internet, centralized initiatives—commercial (Google) and (trans)governmental ones (Gallica, Europeana) alike—have no dominant position. Canon formation from below thus took place on the level of structure and content.

But Mjør highlights yet another pivotal aspect of digitized literature and its being collected in the many kinds of online libraries, from the readers’ library type to the enthusiast/professional one: networking. The portrayed Russian e-libraries (primarily Moshkov and FEB) provide(d) in their forums extensive possibilities for exchange among readers. Users look for books whose titles they have forgotten, discuss reading experiences, give recommendations and rate literary works, making apt usage of this down-to-earth means of amateur literary criticism. Let us take once again our reference text, Dostoevskii’s *Idiot*, as an illustrative case: This novel, deemed a classic of world literature, receives on the Moshkov library a score of 8.77 on a ten-point scale, and has generated roughly 2700 user comments since 2004.⁸⁷ The intensity of discussions varies, with irregular peaks, sometimes after years of calm. Readers engage in discussions of the main characters, interpretive topics, and the author’s philosophical intentions. But they also discuss on a meta-communicative level questions of how to adequately rate works, specifically those which are already canonized. A negative ranking for a work firmly entrenched within the Russian and world literature canon is a provocation, triggering ardent debates. A continuous topic is the comparison of compulsory school reading and reading for pleasure in leisure time, with the latter being clearly preferred. Concerning specifically Dostoevskii and his *Idiot*, the novel is frequently discussed in terms of a user’s coming-of-age experience, yet one curiously detached from biological age. Initiation through reading—of the *Idiot* or other works by Dostoevskii—depends on the reader’s individual maturity, be it at the age of 16 or 60. While maintaining a strong connection to the concept of a literary canon, national and

87 F. Dostoevskii, “Idiot,” *Biblioteka Moshkova, Klassika*, http://az.lib.ru/d/dostoevskij_f_m/text_0070.shtml (accessed January 8, 2019); “Kommentarii k Idiot,” *Biblioteka Moshkova, Klassika*, http://az.lib.ru/comment/d/dostoevskij_f_m/text_0070 (accessed January 8, 2019).

international alike, readers express a strong discontent with compulsory school curricula and official educational politics.

By providing communicative contexts, these libraries turn into reading networks and serve as “sources of identification,” as Mjør has put it.⁸⁸ This is especially relevant for the Russian language and Russian literature, which are territorially dispersed within what was once called ‘diasporas’ and in the constant flux of today’s societies is referred to as “global Russians.”⁸⁹

3.2. *Opaque reading interfaces. Transparent readerships. Commercial content providers.*

3.2.1. *The e-book market. Diversification and cross media consumption.*

The turning point for when the Runet transformed from an unregulated sphere of self-publication of all sorts into a commercial market is the year 2004, the year which saw, simultaneously, the Moshkov trial and a growing Runet audience. At the same time, the book market as a whole becomes more diversified, with more titles and less circulation (on the average 1,000 copies). Specialized publishing houses produce books for small, select audiences, relying partly on print-on-demand technology.⁹⁰ The e-book-market is part of this overall diversification.⁹¹ It developed some few years later than, for example, it did in the US, but now shows comparable dynamics to ‘Western’ markets, albeit at a lower level.⁹² The estimated growth rates in the late 2010s have ranged from 15 to 30 percent,⁹³ while in this same period, print publication stagnates or shows only slight changes due to the generally unstable economic situation (driven not least by international sanctions imposed following the annexation of the Crimea).⁹⁴ In total numbers, however, the e-book segment in 2017 constituted not more than 4 to 7 percent of actual book production (compared to 15 percent in the US).⁹⁵ The bigger publishing houses release up to 30 percent of their book production as e-books (which equals to 6 percent of their turnover in roubles), with a

88 Mjør, “Digitizing Everything?,” 219.

89 K. Platt (ed.), *Global Russian Cultures* (Madison, 2019).

90 Federal’noe agentstvo po pechati, “Knizhnyi rynek Rossii,” 6.

91 *Ibid.*, 57.

92 *Ibid.*, 5; S. Anur’ev, “Rynek elektronnykh knig. Tendentsii razvitiia i predvaritel’nye rezul’taty 2017 goda,” *LitRes*, no date, 2, <https://bookunion.ru/upload/iblock/f83/f833d535c095e199fb6206c056d03eb.pdf> (accessed January 9, 2019).

93 E. Makarova, “Elektronnym knigam ozvuchili prognoz,” *Kommersant*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3668709> (accessed January 13, 2019); Federal’noe agentstvo po pechati, “Knizhnyi rynek Rossii,” 57.

94 Federal’noe agentstvo po pechati, “Knizhnyi rynek Rossii,” 6; Federal’noe agentstvo po pechati, “Internet v Rossii v 2017 godu,” 29-30.

95 Federal’noe agentstvo po pechati, “Knizhnyi rynek Rossii,” 57; S. Anur’ev, “Rynek elektronnykh knig,” 2.

slight decrease in 2018.⁹⁶ For the regional publishing houses, the situation is different. Only 1 percent of their production and incomes are related to digital content. Thus, the e-content sector is located almost exclusively in the capital.⁹⁷

E-books cost on average a third less than their print equivalent,⁹⁸ but expenses have to be added for Internet access and the purchase of a computer or mobile reading devices. Most readers use smartphones and, to a lesser extent, tablets and e-book-specific readers.⁹⁹ The market leader in the field of the latter is Pocketbook, which outmatches the global champion, Amazon's Kindle. Pocketbook was founded in 2007 in the Ukrainian capital Kiev and was later sold to a Swiss company. It is globally active, but particularly widespread in the Russian Federation and in the Russian readingscapes. A further point of specificity is the popularity of the .fb2 format for e-book-content, which is marginal in English- or German-language digital readingscapes, where .epub or .azw dominate. Audio books have become especially popular, showing the highest growth rates since approximately 2016. Aside from local suppliers, the Swedish company Storytel has also established itself, since the year 2017, as a major player on the Russian market.¹⁰⁰

Although the market is developing dynamically, about half of all e-books are still read for free. These free copies are taken either illegally from torrents and social network sites or legally from no-cost segments of commercial e-book sellers or book clubs.¹⁰¹ Three types of legal e-content distribution have established themselves: Aside from the purchase of individual products (pay per download, or PPD: 79 percent), subscription models get more and more popular (19 percent), while advertisement-based schemes are losing ground (2 percent).¹⁰²

In Russia, women read more than men, which is the case globally, as well as when accounts for the electronic vs. print variable. Surveys reveal a high percentage of cross-media usage. Readers who use e-books read more print as well (the ratio is 15 books per year for cross-media readers compared to 11 for adherents of print only).¹⁰³ These findings are in line with media theory,

96 Federal'noe agentstvo po pechati, "Knizhnyi rynek Rossii," 27.

97 Ibid., 26.

98 Ibid., 57.

99 Federal'noe agentstvo po pechati, "Internet v Rossii v 2017 godu," 22-23; Federal'noe agentstvo po pechati, "Knizhnyi rynek Rossii," 65. The e-book-aggregator LitRes reports slightly different data, with 46 percent of their clients using smartphones, 38 percent e-book-readers, 9 percent stationary computers and only 5 percent tablets (Federal'noe agentstvo po pechati, "Knizhnyi rynek Rossii," 61).

100 Ibid., 27-28.

101 Anur'ev, "Rynek elektronnykh knig," 6.

102 Data for the year 2016, Federal'noe agentstvo po pechati, "Internet v Rossii v 2017 godu," 68.

103 Federal'noe agentstvo po pechati, "Internet v Rossii v 2017 godu," 68; Anur'ev, "Rynek elektronnykh knig," 5.

stating that new media generally do not lead to extinction of former ones, but rather to coexistence and remediations.

A dominant trend, in Russia and the wider world alike, is self-publication (indie publishing). Authors distribute their books independently from the established publishing houses, relying on convenient technologies provided by (semi-)commercial platforms.¹⁰⁴ The market leader in Russia is the company Rideró, which allows authors to publish their texts as e-books and in print (on demand). Rideró is a ‘freemium’ service, which means that it offers most of its services without payment and generates its profits by additional ‘pay-for’ options. Self-publishing and indie authors specifically rely on and work with their readership in order to promote their works outside the traditional gatekeeper institutions (literary agents, publishing houses, and literary criticism).

In addition to content providers, there exists a multiplicity of commercial platforms which function as social networks or social cataloguing applications specifically for readers.¹⁰⁵ The largest on the Runet is LiveLib¹⁰⁶—the Russian equivalent to Amazon’s rating and recommendation portal Goodreads—with 15 million book recommendations and up to a million book reviews (as of January 15, 2019). A similar project is Readrate,¹⁰⁷ initiated in 2013 by the company Pocketbook, which produces the e-book-reader of the same name. Otherwise similar in function to LiveLib, Readrate is distinct in the sense that it has access to the data of those readers who read their e-books via the company’s devices (according to statements on the website, these are collected only with the users’ permission).¹⁰⁸ On that basis, it compiles “the most objective” book ratings on the Runet. Such a data corpus exposes reading audiences to commercial (and potentially political) monitoring.¹⁰⁹

3.2.2. *Hybrid monopolies. E-book stores and book clubs*

A functioning e-book market is not so easily praised as a glorious achievement of national culture as the online libraries might be. On a practical level, online libraries and commercial content providers logically compete with

104 Federal’noe agentstvo po pechati, “Knizhnyi rynek Rossii,” 62-65.

105 An in-depth-analysis of social reading sites on the Runet is provided in BECK PRISTED, “Social Reading in Contemporary Russia,” in this volume.

106 LiveLib—sait o knigakh, sotsial’naia set’ chitatelei knig (2007-2019), <https://www.livelib.ru/> (accessed January 15, 2019).

107 ReadRate. Knigi: novinki, reitingi i otzyvy (2013-2019), <https://readrate.com/rus> (accessed January 15, 2019).

108 Readrate, “O proekte ReadRate,” <https://readrate.com/rus/about> (accessed January 15, 2019).

109 C. Lynch, “The Rise of Reading Analytics and the Emerging Calculus of Reader Privacy in the Digital World,” *First Monday*, 22, 4 (3 April 2017), <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i4.7414> (accessed January 15, 2019).

one another. Their coexistence, at least on the early Runet, is conflict-laden—not least because the first and (to this day) most significant e-book store LitRes itself emerged from the field of online libraries. At the moment of writing, it positions itself as the leading Russian portal for e-content, with about a 1 million e-books in Russian and foreign languages and 12.5 million visitors monthly. LitRes opened its virtual doors in 2006, soon after the Moshkov trial, with the catchy slogan “*Odin klik do knig*” (“Books only a click away”), reducing the distance between the old (‘book’ / ‘kniga’) and the new medium (click) to a mere exchange of letters in sound harmony. The new platform soon started to actively oppose literary platforms, promoting copyleft policies or pledging for free access to information and literature as a ‘traditional Russian virtue’ or enlightenment project.¹¹⁰ Its fight against copyright violations likewise assured its monopoly in the market. Since 2009, the Russian publishing house Eksmo holds a share of the company.¹¹¹

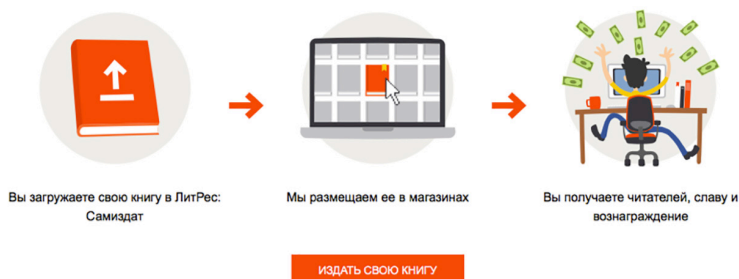
LitRes is not only a successful bookseller, but also provides a multiplicity of additional services. Besides e- and audio books for paid download, it offers—once the user has registered—a large collection of texts which can be used free of charge and amounts to the impressive number of roughly 50,000 books. Additionally, the company has initiated its own library system, which has embraced on- and offline: Readers who hold a reading card at a public library are offered free access to more than 200,000 e-books and audio books, which they can access directly on their mobile devices. But the e-book provider also hosts a self-publication platform, characteristically called Samizdat¹¹² With this at least semi-commercial offer, LitRes again refers to the historical tradition of samizdat, as Moshkov did a little earlier in his famous library and as a reaction to the trial against him. On the LitRes self-publication platform, readers—as potential authors—are offered the possibility to publish their own manuscripts without charge and with a professional design (further paid options make the service profitable). Finally, it uses the advantages of the multimedia environment of the Internet and moves away from literature as a primarily written phenomenon. In a separate subdivision of the website, readers are invited to produce and upload their own recordings of literary works—and potentially make money out of them.¹¹³ However, the visual style, with its multiple icons, continues to evoke the emblems of print culture with book covers and shelves.

110 J. Il'in, “Sergei Anur'ev (“LitRes”) ob elektronnom knigozdanii,” *Computerra Online*, November 30, 2010, <http://www.computerra.ru/interactive/579337>, archived copy, <https://litra.pro/kompjyuterra-pda-n76-27112010-03122010/kompjyuterra/read/8> (accessed January 15, 2019).

111 LitRes—biblioteka elektronnykh knig, <https://www.LitRes.ru/> (accessed January 14, 2019).

112 LitRes: Samizdat, <https://selfpub.ru/about/> (accessed January 15, 2019).

113 LitRes: Chtets, <https://www.LitRes.ru/reader/> (accessed January 15, 2019).



6. How to generate “readers, fame and revenue”. The Samizdat self-publication platform hosted by e-book-seller LitRes. <https://www.LitRes.ru/selfpub/>

ЛитРес: Чтец
запишите аудиокнигу сами!

ЛитРес: Чтец

Участвуйте в премии
«ЭЛЕКТРОННАЯ БУКВА»

Запишите три аудиокниги
в проекте
с 1 февраля до 1 июля 2019 года

7. Mediated orality. From shelf to microphone. LitRes reading contest. <https://www.LitRes.ru/reader/>

Furthermore, LitRes issues its own competitions, awarding the best new e- and audio books.¹¹⁴ All of these sub-segments, surrounding the commercial core of the LitRes portal are endowed with their own communication channels, where readers and authors come together, exchanging praise and criticism. With their competitive character, they are part of the ‘gamification’ of the online literary worlds, which Birgitte Pristed describes in her chapter devoted to social reading on the Runet (see BECK PRISTED, “Social Reading in Contemporary Russia” in the present volume).

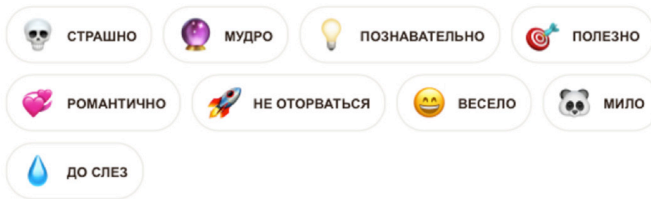
LitRes has thus turned into a hybrid monopoly, building up a universe of digital content, incorporating the functions previously fulfilled by its competitors, that is, the online libraries, the awards of the Internet community, the self-publication portals. With reference to the Russo-Soviet phenome-

¹¹⁴ Literaturnaia premia – “elektronnaia bukva,” <https://ebukva.LitRes.ru/> (accessed January 14, 2019).

non of samizdat, it furthermore inscribes itself into the traditions of a Russian reading culture, albeit emptying the term of any political meaning.

Alternatives to the ‘classic’ e-bookstore are subscription models, in which users pay a monthly fee for accessing the content collection. We could call it the ‘Spotify’-model. For the Russian readingscape, the leading company offering subscription services is Bookmate. Initially founded in 2010 as a non-pay service, it developed quickly and today offers 850,000 books (representing 600 publishing houses) to 6 million readers. Books are available in twelve languages, which is among its outstanding features. Bookmate is a freemium service, which means that it offers parts of its services without payment; in our case study, this means literary works which are not subject to copyright regulations (mostly classics in Russian and foreign languages). The e-books can be read in a web version on stationary computers and tablets or on mobile devices with the Bookmate app.

Aside from providing book content in the proper sense, Bookmate, much like the other players in the field, functions as a kind of internal social network. It offers its subscribers the opportunity to upload their e-books onto the platform and thus to compile own book collections on their virtual shelves (*sozdat’ polku*). Readers can also share their reading lists with their bookmates and, of course, exchange recommendations, which are tellingly called “impressions” (*vpechatleniia*), reducing the critical aspect to a mere subjective reflex. For that goal, they even do not have to formulate a written comment, but can rely on a range of icons.



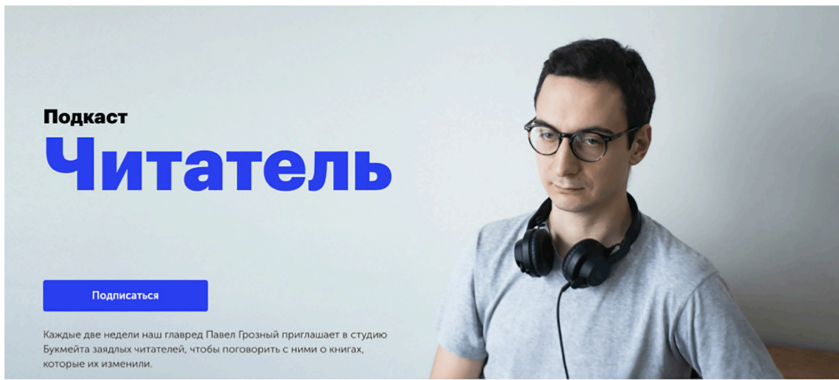
Что скажешь...одним словом...Классика!

8. Iconic reading. Reader comment to Dostoevskii’s novel *The Idiot*, <https://ru.bookmate.com/books/OQDFm28s/impressions>

Dostoevskii’s *Idiot*, to stick with our example, has generated 266 such reading impressions. The one reproduced on the screenshot classifies the experience as “frightening,” “useful,” “romantic,” “thrilling,” “funny,” “nice,” and “moving to tears,” among others. An in-depth analysis of reader ratings is beyond the focus and the scope of this chapter, but a quick comparison with readers’ discussions in the Moshkov library is instructive. The two

groups of raters share the perception of Dostoevskii as a canonical author not suitable for mandatory reading at school—an implied critique of official educational policies. An obvious difference here lies in the fact that almost no discussions occur among readers. Appealing impressions are liked, but almost never commented on. Thus, the ‘bookmates’ inscribe themselves into the communicative model of a click economy, replacing the argument with the like button.

Bookmate organizes the rich content it provides with the help of such readers’ “impressions” and editors’ recommendations. Regularly prominent authors are invited to virtual talks documented in form of a podcast, which is called “Reader” (“Chitatel”). Here, the Bookmate editors chat with “addicted readers,” but discuss questions of (digital) reading with researchers or publishers as well.



9. The “Reader” as listener. Podcast series at e-book-sharing platform Bookmate. <https://ru.bookmate.com/specials/reader-podcast>

Bookmate thus offers a service similar in quantity to LitRes, but likely appeals specifically to avid readers, given that the subscription costs about the same as three to five print books would.¹¹⁵ Like its competitor, the sharing platform is interested in making readers identify with the service via personalization, interaction with other readers, and prominent authors. Both services provide a large segment of books free of charge and thus compete with the electronic libraries, while offering more convenient reading-writing interfaces. Bookmate claims to be the market leader for book subscription in Russia and the Russian-language readingscape. Unlike LitRes, which even lacks an English-language version of its website, it has designs on a global market. The first non-Russian-language branch of Bookmate

¹¹⁵ A service similar to Bookmate is Mybook.ru, associated to LitRes. Thus, the latter strives to cover the whole range of payment models for e-literature.

was launched in Singapore, followed by countries from Latin America and later by Belorussia, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan.¹¹⁶ Today's readingscapes globalize beyond Europe and the US.

In 2007, another Russian-language sharing platform for music, art, and literature named Kroogi (from the Russian word "krug/i" = 'circle/s') went online. Based on a 'pay what you want' strategy, Kroogi (as its name indicates) foregrounds socializing and networking as the main features of the Internet-based sharing culture. Kroogi also offers crowdfunding opportunities. Readers can support their favorite artists, once again bypassing traditional gatekeepers such as music labels or publishing houses. Kroogi is particularly popular among musicians; literature generally plays a minor role in the crowdfunding sector.

3.3. *Literary prosumers. Self-publication portals*

Last but not least, commercial content providers are complemented by the thriving self-publication platforms. But how do these relate to reading? Are they not, in the first place, a phenomenon of digital *writing*? With mass amateur creativity, the borders between readers and authors blur, fusing into the abovementioned 'prosumer.' Prosumer communities that gather on self-publication platforms represent a vital part of the ongoing diversification of the literary field (market). They form audiences which are huge in numbers but, at the same time, highly specialized: every author finds her—sometimes sole—reader. Readers' collectives may promote an author's work and make her popular without the support of traditional publishing houses. This mingling of the categories of readers and authors in 'amateur' or 'naïve literature' is reflected in the hybridity of the abovementioned commercial content providers, which incorporate such diverse functions as self-publication platforms, literary criticism, and awards.

For the Russian readingscape, the twin projects proza.ru¹¹⁷ and stikhi.ru play a formative role. Proza.ru and stikhi.ru were founded in the year 2000 by the literary entrepreneur Dmitrii Kravchuk and have since then constantly grown. They are enormous in terms of authors and texts published: on these respective platforms, roughly 290,000 authors have published up to 8 million prose works, and more than 810,000 poets have published up to 44 million poems. They attract an accordingly huge audience, with approximately 200,000 daily visitors (according to the data on the website). Most visitors are author and reader, combined in one person. Publication on the

¹¹⁶ A. Burchakov, "9 rossiiskikh kompanii, razvivaiushchikhsia na vneshnikh rynkakh," *vc.ru*, June 21, 2016, <https://vc.ru/tribuna/16372-russian-companies-2> (accessed January 15, 2019).

¹¹⁷ Proza.ru. Rossiiskii literaturnyi portal, <https://www.proza.ru/> (accessed January 15, 2019).

platforms is free, but authors are offered paid options for publishing their works as e-books or in print (on demand). The overwhelmingly rich content is organized with the help of awards that partly express a patriotic agenda (The Russian Heritage Award). These awards function as incentives motivating readers to turn themselves into authors.

A significant number of readers turn to indie literature for an unsophisticated read at a reasonable price, be it on Amazon's Kindle self-publisher platform, or on native-Russian services as *proza.ru* and *stikhi.ru*. However, as philosopher Oleg Aronson points out, *proza.ru*, *stikhi.ru*, and their like can be considered auto-poetic text production machines. Their aim is not to produce meaning, but to facilitate participation in a "primary affective communion" (*pervichnaia affektivnaia obshchnost*).¹¹⁸ Natalia Samutina in a similar vein describes more specifically (Russian) fan fiction portals as "emotional landscapes of reading,"¹¹⁹ which reverberates with Mjør's cited earlier description of the Runet online libraries as "sources of identification."¹²⁰

At the same time, while reading in these digital environments may resemble such "emotional landscapes" on the surface, it is always based on the underlying code and algorithms. Readers' activities are pre-structured by the "reading writing interfaces,"¹²¹ which then are tracked and evaluated for the sake of customization and marketing. For that goal, the coded nature of such reading activities is coated in sensual narratives, presenting reading as a culinary pleasure or physical challenge, as Brigitte Pristed has shown in her analysis of Russian social reading (the functional-retro style of the Moshkov library and its Samizdat section is a telling exception). While the reading surfaces are intentionally opaque, the electronic readership is transparent. This is how a user of the *stikhi.ru* platform has put it:

As you can see, every step is closely monitored. Be aware that not only the walls have ears (that's banal and well known), but behind every corner sits a bot, protocoling every sneeze you do. You leave a lot of fingerprints on a multitude of pages, and it is not always possible to cover up your tracks.¹²²

¹¹⁸ O. Aronson, "Narodnyi siurrealizm (Zametki o poezii v internete)," *Sinii divan*, 8 (2006), cited from *Polit.ru*, <http://www.polit.ru/research/2006/08/04/aronson.html> (accessed January 15, 2019).

¹¹⁹ For Russian fan fiction more specifically, see N. Samutina, "Fan Fiction as World-Building: Transformative Reception in Crossover Writing," *Continuum*, 30, 4 (2016), 433-450, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1141863> (accessed February 25, 2020); N. Samutina, "Emotional Landscapes of Reading: Fan Fiction in the Context of Contemporary Reading Practices," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20, 3 (2017), 253-269, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877916628238> (accessed February 25, 2020).

¹²⁰ Mjør, "Digitizing Everything?," 2019.

¹²¹ L. Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces*.

¹²² "Kak chitateli nakhodiat proizvedeniia," *stikhi.ru*, 2008, <https://www.stihi.ru/2008/12/29/4388> (accessed February 25, 2020).

This insight is of general significance for global readingscapes; nevertheless, one might sense in the formulation of the “walls with ears” (*u sten est' ushi*) a slight echo to the experience of totalitarian surveillance in the Soviet era.

4. MEETING AT THE VIRTUAL FIREPLACE. SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE RENEGOTIATION OF READER-AUTHOR CONTRACTS

The Internet does not only change the ways by which we access books, but the ways by which we interact with their authors as well. Readers and authors are not only conflated into novel concepts, as in the terminology of the ‘wreader’ or ‘prosumer’; they also come together and communicate on the Internet with a new, digital intimacy—so long, of course, as the author allows for it and the reader looks for it.

4.1. *Literary blogs as a shared readingspace*

A telling example of such an interaction between author and reader/s is the blog maintained by Evgenii Grishkovets, a popular Russian scriptwriter, author of monodrama theatre plays, short stories, and novels who stands as a premier representative of the ‘new sincerity’ that emerged after the end of post-modern irony.¹²³ In literary Internet studies, SNS—from blogging platforms to social media accounts—are interpreted in terms of a renewed life-writing.¹²⁴ The feature that distinguishes it from pre-digital types of autobiographical writing is the author’s direct communication with the addressed readership.

Since the 2010s, Grishkovets has been a prolific blogger, and continues to actively communicate with his audience. His posts are a mix of professional and private stories and anecdotes that turn individual experiences into short, emblematic interpretations of contemporary life. He addresses his readers as friends and outlines the space of the blog as shared time-place, called “HERE” (*ZDES'*)¹²⁵:

¹²³ Rutton, *Sincerity after Communism*.

¹²⁴ A. Poletti, R. Julie (eds.), *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online* (Madison, WI, 2014); E. Rutton, “(Russian) Writer-Bloggers: Digital Perfection and the Aesthetics of Imperfection,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19, 4 (2014), 744-762, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12086> (accessed February 25, 2020)..

¹²⁵ E. Grishkovets, LiveJournal post, July 17, 2007, <http://e-grishkovets.livejournal.com/> (accessed March 25, 2011).

My friends! I read a lot of what you have written HERE today. I am awfully happy! It is so important, when you work on a book, to feel clearly whom you are addressing. In other words: to feel the people who want to read what I write here. Believe me, regardless of how much I have already written, I always doubt whether anyone aside from myself needs this. I read what you have written HERE, and understood: I have to write.

The blog entry is interesting in two aspects. First, it shows how the virtual communication ensures the author a seemingly direct contact with his readership. The coded ‘nature’ of the blog as communication interface is ignored. Second, it is instructive in the sense that it expresses a meta-communicative reflection on the functions and roles of authors and readers in digital space. The author, in ‘direct’ confrontation with his otherwise amorphous readership, adopts a “posture of anticipation,” as Andreas Kitzmann formulates it with regard to autobiographical communication (including diaries and web cams) on the web.¹²⁶ With regard to reception theory, one could say that the ‘intended’ / ‘implicit’ reader is replaced or at least conflated with the ‘empirical reader.’

In the heyday of his blogging activities in the 2010s, Grishkovets had approximately 40,000 “friends,” i.e. regular subscribers, and up to 100,000 readers a day. The blogger turned into a mass medium in his own right. But he soon went post-digital as well, publishing excerpts from his weblog in a series of books, a typical remediation in the sense of Bolter and Grusin’s term.¹²⁷ The experience of such life-writing which is exposed to a huge, amorphous audience so infiltrates the narration, that the latter can be detached from its digital environment and transferred to paper.

Grishkovets experiments with multiple alternative methods for spreading his books in cross-media formats. He was among the first Russian authors to use sharing platforms as Circles (Kroogi) in order to popularize their writings. His active communication with his impressive readership thus serves as a self-marketing tool as well, bypassing or supplementing classical institutions such as literary critics (which, according to the author himself, do not view his work favorably¹²⁸) and publishing houses.

The Grishkovets blog is a good example of what I call a Russian readingscape. The writer positions himself as a decidedly provincial author, living in Kaliningrad. He travels Russia extensively beyond the ‘two capitals’ Moscow and St. Petersburg. A significant part of his readership lives in smaller

¹²⁶ Kitzmann, *Saved from Oblivion*, 160.

¹²⁷ E. Grishkovets, *God zhzhizni* (Moscow, 2008); *Prodolzhenie zhzhizni* (Moscow, 2009), *Izbrannye zapisi* (Moscow, 2014).

¹²⁸ N. Fedorova, “Esli proizvedenie antigumanno, eto ne iskusstvo. Interv’iu s Evgeniem Grishkovetsom,” *Real’noe vremia*, June 10, 2018, <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/101909-intervyu-s-evgeniem-grishkovcom> (accessed June 30, 2019).

towns. Grishkovets is also popular among Russian-speaking readers living in the post-Soviet states such as Ukraine or Georgia. In his plays, the author criticizes the totalitarian social order of the Soviet era; at the same time, however, he depicts its geographical expanses as a “territory of love” (“territoriia liubvi”)¹²⁹. In a similar vein he positioned his blog as a translocal readingscape of shared values and emotions. However, the Russian blogosphere—like the Internet in general—did not function as such a place of harmonious conversation; in its heyday, it was characterized by quarrels and flamewars.¹³⁰ After some years of participation in these open territories, Grishkovets took a further step towards the creation of a private channel for communicating with his readers. In early 2011, he deleted his account at the popular blog provider LiveJournal and moved his web diary to his private homepage, “far away from the highways and noisy junctions.”¹³¹ His readers appreciated this still more intimate communication setting and perceived the aura of the author as even more authentic:

Good evening!!! What a comfortable place!!! A snowstorm outside, a house with lighted windows, the wood in the fireplace cracking ... and Evgenii’s unhurried voice!!!¹³²

The rather prosaic digital context of a computer screen or mobile device becomes coated with a romantic sheen, an imagined space of shared reading and communication, completely unmediated, where reading turns into listening.

While Grishkovets has been among the most popular Runet bloggers, he has by no means been the only one. Since the worldwide advent of Web 2.0 applications, blogging soon became very popular on the Runet, in particular among intellectuals. A noteworthy number of prominent authors set up blogs; these would include the already mentioned novelist Tatiana Tolstaia, the author of postmodern crime fiction Boris Akunin, or genuine ‘heroes’ of Internet culture such as Linor Goralik, a prolific writer and analyst.¹³³ The amazing success of literary blogging which culminated in the early 2010s is explained by a number of factors: the geographically dispersed readership

129 E. Grishkovets, *Prodolzhenie zhzhizni*, 53.

130 Gorny, *A Creative History*; G. Gusejnov, “Divided by a Common Web: Some Characteristics of the Russian Blogosphere,” in M. Gorham, I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture, and Politics of New Media Communication* (London, 2014), 57-71.

131 E. Grishkovets, LiveJournal post, “Poslednii post v ZhZh,” February 17, 2011, <https://odnovremenno.com/archives/category/lj-archive> (accessed June 30, 2019)..

132 Reader commentary in E. Grishkovets’ LiveJournal, February 18, 2011, accessed March, 25, 2011, <http://e-grishkovets.livejournal.com/>. Post and comments by readers are cited anonymously for data protection purposes. The comments can be accessed following the given links or are archived by me.

133 Rutten, “(Russian) Writer-Bloggers”; G. Howanitz, *Web texten. Text leben. Leben weben (Auto)Biographische Praktiken im literarischen Runet*, PhD thesis (Passau, 2017).

within and outside the Russian Federation; the highly controlled official mediascape (especially TV); the distorted public sphere; the ‘historically’ dense literary communication on the Russian Internet, which compensated for, at least in the early years, the crisis in the offline book market and literary infrastructure.¹³⁴

Russian blogging is characterized by the peculiarity that it is closely linked to one specific blog provider: the US-based LiveJournal.com (LJ). Blog researcher Evgenii Gornyi explains these circumstances with reference to cultural psychology: thanks to its specific technological features, LJ fostered the integration of individual blogs into the wider LJ-community, and by doing so appealed to the collectivist psychology of Russian society.¹³⁵ Others offer politically-oriented arguments:¹³⁶ The emergence of blogging coincided with a new wave of control on the Runet, and the fact that LJ servers were based physically in the US was perceived as a protection from surveillance at home. The recent descent of the LJ-era was directly linked to these political issues. According to Russian data localization laws,¹³⁷ LJ moved its servers to Russian territory in 2016. At the same time, the company changed its terms of conditions, prohibiting “political agitation.” Bloggers and observers interpreted this as a kowtow before Russian authorities. Prominent authors abruptly deleted their ZhZh accounts—and moved to Facebook.

4.2. “Like” your author. Renegotiating author-reader contracts in social media

If the choice of Facebook among the multiple social media services seems to be self-evident for English-speaking contexts, the situation for the Runet is a different one, as there exist popular local alternatives. In the early 2000s, the social networks Odnoklassniki (Schoolmates) and VKontakte (InContact) were launched and soon accumulated large audiences among Russian-speaking users.¹³⁸ VKontakte, founded by the glamorous new media entrepreneur Pavel Durov, soon outplayed both its local and global competitors. The reasons for the popularity of VKontakte are, among others, a convenient user interface and a laissez-faire politics with regard to copyright

134 Gusejnov, “Divided by a Common Web”; Howanitz, *Web texten. Text leben. Leben weben*.

135 Gornyi, *A Creative History*, 253.

136 Howanitz, *Web texten. Text leben. Leben weben*, 4-5.

137 M. Newton, J. Summers, “Russian Data Localization Laws: Enriching Security & the Economy,” in *The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies* (blog), February 28, 2018, <https://jisis.washington.edu/news/russian-data-localization-enriching-security-economy/> (accessed January 8, 2019).

138 T. Roesen, V. Zvereva, “Social Networking Sites on the Runet: Exploring Social Communication,” in M. Gorham, I. Lunde, M. Paulsen (eds.), *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture, and Politics of New Media Communication* (London, 2014), 72-87.

issues. Thus, to this very day, copyrighted content—music, videogames, and even e-books—are illegally shared on the platform.¹³⁹

Why Facebook then? The Zuckerberg network globally enjoys a rather dubious reputation of facilitating the spread of fake news and hate speech; however, its Russian-language version (and the associated community) are perceived as the ‘better Runet,’ where intellectuals and the new dissidents from multiple countries assemble in a free, if controversial, exchange of opinions. VKontakte in comparison hosts younger audiences who are interested in entertainment and local topics.

In a conscious simplification, one could say that the Russian Facebook, a decidedly intellectual (and metropolitan) phenomenon with global outreach, attracts the literary elite, both writers and readers, within and outside of the Russian Federation, and from all ideological standpoints, from émigré-dissident to patriotic-nationalist. The author’s persona determines the extent to which a given writer invites and reacts to comments made by her readers. Interaction often goes beyond the promotion of the author’s literary work and symbolic capital, but affects both sides of the communicative process. Russian authors’ audiences are, in sheer numbers, not comparable to those of international star writers such as, for example, Paulo Coelho (more than 28 million followers) or J.K. Rowling (5 million followers on Facebook), but they too reach significant audiences. The postmodern crime writer and liberal public intellectual Grigori Chkhartishvili aka Boris Akunin, currently living in London, is among the most popular writers (Akunin Chkhartishvili [a combination of his pen name and his surname]: 250,000 followers). Zakhar Prilepin represents the patriotic and nationalist wing (98,000 followers), even as he is occasionally banned for posting comments about his military engagement in the undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine in the Donbas. (In one of his posts devoted not to politics but to contemporary culture, Prilepin—by the way—complains that in Russia, which still claims the title of ‘most well read country,’ nearly any random user’s Instagram account is more popular than those of award-winning writers.)¹⁴⁰

Now let me turn to my second case study of author-reader interaction on the Internet: Tatiana Tolstaia has approximately 206,000 followers on Facebook. She abandoned her blog as a consequence of the decline of the Russian blogosphere as outlined earlier.¹⁴¹ As previously in her blog, she presents herself as a private person, mixing invitations to her reading events with personal photographs, political commentaries with reports of her trav-

139 V. Kozlov, “Again Labeled ‘Notorious,’ Russia’s VKontakte Vows to Keep Fighting Piracy in 2017,” *Billboard*, December 23, 2016, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/7633166/russia-vkontakte-piracy-2017-licensing-content> (accessed June 30, 2019).

140 Z. Prilepin, Facebook post, December 17, 2018, 10:14, <https://www.facebook.com/zaharprilepin/posts/2207564002621242> (accessed January 14, 2019).

141 See her comments in A. Genis, “Poetika Feisbuka,” *Radio Svoboda*, September 14, 2015, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27247869.html> (accessed January 8, 2019).

els and memories of her youth. She publishes approximately one to two posts daily and engages regularly in direct communication with her readership. Her Facebook posts have turned into an integral part of her prose writing and book publications as well.

I will concentrate on one characteristic post from the month May 2019, during which she published 34 total posts, which variously generated between 80 and 6,000 likes and between 5 and 430 commentaries.¹⁴² The entry I will focus on is dated the 26th of May. It contains a photograph of the author at the age of eighteen, taken in the year 1969 in Koktebel', an iconic summer retreat at the Crimea. As of this writing, the post has received 4,185 likes and 152 comments and is thus among the most popular of that month. The photograph shows young Tolstaia as she bites into a fruit; it is accompanied by a rather laconic remark concerning the (questionable) joys of youth. Roughly thirty posts comment on the appearance of the author, especially her hairstyle and her fingernails. Her looks are praised either for their authentic style, or for expressing a wild and untamed character. "A wonderful photograph—atmosphere, passion for life. You are beautiful in your very authentic appearances." Curiously, almost as many comments refer to the fruit. Is it an apple, a peach, or even a patisson? What seems to be an insignificant detail is, in the course of discussion, turned into a marker of time, one referencing a collective memory of youth (specifically a Soviet youth) and the simple pleasures that it held. More relevantly to the concerns of this article, readers on a meta-level discuss how they interact with 'their' authors in the semi-public spheres of social media environments. The controversy is stirred by a commentary diagnosing from the picture not Tolstaia's taste for unfiltered life but rather an expression of her purportedly bad character. Tolstaia reacts to that commentary personally, turning herself from an authentic author into a literary character: "The better to eat you with" a loose reference to the wolf in grandmother's clothing from the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale. Readers take over Tolstaia's defense more seriously. They discuss the extent to which a reader is allowed to criticize an author for her personality, and not just the literary work itself. The dispute, encompassing 25 posts, ends with the following consensus concerning reader-author interactions on social media:

you are free to read or not to read the works of a writer, but to comment on his character or the like is none of my business; my mistake! on this issue you are right!¹⁴³

¹⁴² T. Tolstaia, Facebook post, May 26, 2019, 18:27, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10157117723658076&set=a.10151053606083076&type=3&theater> (accessed June 24, 2019).

¹⁴³ Post and comments by readers are cited anonymously for data protection purposes. The comments can be accessed following the given links or are archived by me.

Authenticity on (social) media is always carefully constructed and staged, as Tolstaia herself underscores,¹⁴⁴ but its coded nature merits but infrequent reflection on the part of users. The seemingly direct proximity between author and audience leads to renegotiations of their relationship, as can be seen from the two examples of Grishkovets's blog and Tolstaia's Facebook account. From the author's perspective, 'intended' / 'implicit' and 'empirical reader' (con)fuse; from the readers' point of view, the boundaries between the 'empirical author' and the 'author persona' blur.

VIRTUAL SHELVES. VIRTUAL SELVES. RUSSIAN GLOBAL READINGSAPES. CONCLUSIONS

Russian readingscapes are global in terms of audience; they consist of readers living in the Russian Federation and 'global Russians'¹⁴⁵ who move between countries of self-directed 'exile' or temporary residency and their previous home country. But they are also global in terms of their digital reading infrastructure, with regard to the "shelves," i.e. the platforms providing content (online libraries, e-book stores and self-publication portals) on the one hand and the "selves," the social networks providing opportunities for community building and socializing on the other. With increasingly standardized interfaces, reading practices worldwide converge—which does not mean that they completely align. Global services (which are frequently, in fact, based in the US, such as the blogging platform LiveJournal or the social network Facebook) are incorporated into the Russian digital reading landscape and adapted to its needs. The latter are often politically determined. Readers and authors take part in the political discussions for and against the verticalized power system of the Putin era and its neo-imperialist strategies in such a way that the Internet remains—regardless of all attempts of control—the only more or less functioning public sphere in the Russian Federation. But national Internet legislation affects the global communicationscapes, yielding an increasing drift towards a new 'digital sovereignty.' Data localization laws, if vigorously applied, may redirect reading audiences, as has been the case with the collective exodus of the Russian blogging community from LiveJournal to Facebook. Other suppliers of reading services and experiences like LitRes or Bookmate are local brands, with the former being the local monopolist and the latter expanding into the global readingscapes.

Some remnants of the early 'romantic' times persist, as in, for example, the oft-praised, almost mythological riches of Russian online libraries. Less marketable literary genres (poetry, for example) still defend their indigenous niches. This content orientation of the Runet, as I have argued, is grounded

¹⁴⁴ See Tatiana Tolstaia in Genis, "Poetika Feisbuka."

¹⁴⁵ Platt, *Global Russian Cultures*.

in the historic coincidence of political and media ‘revolution’ rather than in the myth of Russia as a logocentric culture. Local specificities thus relate more to discourses and explanatory patterns than to reading practices themselves. The samizdat metaphor, for example, is so strong that it can even be exploited by commercial e-book sellers like LitRes and summarily emptied of any political connotation, thereby ennobling a global trend such as indie publishing as a national achievement stemming from a glorious past.

The significant presence—and approachability—of prominent authors on the Runet may as well be explained by the dispersed reading audiences within and beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. The Internet offers a chance not only to the global Russians, but as well for readers beyond the metropolises to communicate with their chosen authors. The digital divide within the Russian Federation is constantly diminishing, although inequalities persist. Accordingly, today it is the digital literary infrastructure that—if only partially—compensates for the blank spaces on the ground, i.e. the often poorly equipped regional libraries or bookstores. Digital platforms thus fulfill a double function as resources for content and virtual meeting points, “sources for identification” (Mjør).

On the more abstract level of literary theory, readers in the digital era are at least potentially empowered, but in a different way than was expected by hypertext philosophy. The wreader has not superseded the author. On the contrary: In the new intimacy of networked communication, readers are attaching themselves more closely to the author, with the boundaries blurring between empirical author and author persona. Reader-writer contracts have to be renegotiated, as illustrated by the exemplary case study of Tatiana Tolstaia’s Facebook profile. But as readers and writers engage on the Internet with new intensity, they potentially bypass established literary institutions as literary critics, literary journals, or even publishing houses (remember Evgenii Grishkovets establishing his blog as a private communication and promotion channel). The new digital audiences do not change the existing canons, they may still alter them (by ‘rearranging’ the libraries) and along with them the new literary tastes (by ranking works on publication platforms and effectively promoting their favourite authors). But the opaque “reading writing interfaces” (Emerson), which hide their mediated nature, also allow for the monitoring of an increasingly transparent readership for further commodification or, potentially, political control.¹⁴⁶

Last but not least, secondary orality (Ong) and mediated orality (Benthien) manifest themselves not only in the growing popularity of audio books and do-it-yourself recordings that turn readers into listeners. They also foster the perception that highly mediated digital reading- and communicationscapes are actually direct and immediate, a place where readers and writers come together at the virtual fireplace listening to each other’s unhurried voices.

146 Lynch, “The Rise of Reading Analytics.”

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SOCIAL READING IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

Birgitte Beck Pristed

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL READING AS A GLOBAL AND RUSSIAN PHENOMENON

For the last decade, Russian social reading sites, based on social media technology and specializing in books and interactive exchange between readers, have been on the rise. The online reading practices of such Russian sites' users are part of an ongoing globalization of digital reading and the debate surrounding it. Technological developments of the late 2000s and the worldwide spread of tablets and other portable mini computers have added new meanings to the hitherto allegedly 'solitary' activity of reading a printed book; the reading device itself has transformed into a point of interconnectivity, and enables readers' instant, sometimes synchronous, exchanges of/about content during the reading process. Consequently, the concept of 'social reading' has emerged in a number of Western reading studies. While some scholars embrace the possibilities of new social reading platforms for sharing reading experiences through user-generated book comments, reviews, readers' rankings and recommendations, in-text highlighting, reading lists, and the like,¹ others warn against the perils of commercially and/or

1 J. A. Córdón García, J. A. Arévalo, R. G. Díaz, D. P. Linder Molin, *Social Reading: Platforms, Applications, Clouds and Tags* (Oxford, 2013); for a broader understanding of 'social' reading practices and contemporary, literary event culture, see D. Fuller, D. R. Sedo, *Reading beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*, Routledge research in cultural and media studies 49 (New York, 2013); D. Pleimling, "Social Reading – Lesen im digitalen Zeitalter," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 41-42 Theme issue: "Zukunft des Publizierens" (2012), 21-27. <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/145378/social-reading-lesen-im-digitalen-zeitalter> (accessed February 8, 2018).

politically motivated mass surveillance of reader behavior and the problem of copyright infringements that these technologies enable.²

Lutz Koepnick has argued that while the shift from analog to digital *writing* went unquestioned and digital writing has today become the tacit, daily, socially accepted norm, digital *reading* is continuously considered problematic and subject to biased views in both camps.³ Advocates and experiment-minded authors of digital literature celebrate the emancipation of the active, participating reader from authoritarian structures of traditional authorship and editorial control, and consider increasingly free and fast global access to digital reading matter a vehicle of democratization. In contrast, critical quantitative and qualitative surveys of reader behavior skeptically argue that digital reading technologies invite fast skimming, scanning, distraction, and multitasking, and represent an obstacle to in-depth concentration and comprehension of complex texts, and thus ultimately contribute to the decline of reading.⁴

Russian social reading networks are subject to high fluctuations. They pop up and disappear faster than academic research on them is published.⁵ The present study does not attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of current Russian social reading networks, but instead seeks to analyze select, representative examples with special attention to the largest, Moscow-based platform, LiveLib.ru, and the mid-sized St. Petersburg-based platform, BookMix.ru. The comparison of two different multifunction platforms gives an impression of the varied offer of social reading services, at the same time, the two selected platforms are relatively stable and have been operational for the decade under study. The study analyzes how the social reading sites frame the reading experience and alter the users' modes of reading by examining platform functions, layouts, and user statistics, supplemented with personal and published interviews with representatives of the two sites. An obvious limitation of the study is its focus on the 'sender'

2 N. M. Richards, "The Perils of Social Reading," *Georgetown Law Journal*, 101 (2013), 689-724; B. Wassom, "Navigating the Rights and Risks in Social Reading," *Pub Res Q*, 31 (2015), 215-219.

3 L. Koepnick, "Concepts of Reading in the Digital Era," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, August 2016. <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-2> (accessed February 12, 2018).

4 N. S. Baron, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World* (New York, 2016).

5 More than half of 17 Russian social reading sites, categorized by Ekaterina Krylova in a research survey, based on 2011 data, are today closed down or inactive, while new sites have appeared. See E. V. Krylova, "Sotsial'nye seti knizhnoi tematiki kak osobaia kommunikatsionnaia sreda dlia sub'ektiv knizhnogo rynka," *Trudy Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta kul'tury i iskusstv*, 201 (2013), 131-140, see list 139-140. Irina Lizunova provides a chronological list of some of the major Russian social reading services. I. V. Lizunova, "Sotsial'nye seti knizhnoi tematiki - innovatsionnyi trend popularizatsii chteniia," in E. B. Artem'eva, O. L. Lavrik (eds.), *Biblioteka traditsionnaia i elektronnaia: smysly i tsennosti: Materialy mezhregional'noi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii* (Novosibirsk, October 4-6, 2016), 12, 2 vols. (Novosibirsk, 2017), II, 5-18, see list 8-14.

side, which is of course a problematic term when one is dealing with ‘user-generated’ content. The article aims at discussing the intentions behind the Russian social reading sites (i.e. both their business models and ideal concepts and purposes), but does not provide any reader survey of the users’ reading preferences and habits, motivation for choice of platform, and the like. In the case of social reading, such empirical reader research is growing almost obsolete, because the platforms are permanently monitoring the behavior of digital readers, whose data are always already collected.

Instead, this article situates the social reading networks in the larger context of digital reading in Russia. It discusses how the social reading ‘prosumers’ are subject to a double exploitation: they produce unpaid content and, at the same time, are targeted as ‘transparent’ consumers.⁶ The article argues that social reading sites ‘gamify’ reading by applying incentive systems, developed by the computer game industry, onto reading. However, it seeks to avoid a reductive view on the resulting Russian reader as a self-optimizing, book-consuming subject, caught in never-ending, neo-liberal or social-Darwinist competition. In a Russian context, social reading platforms and informal, social exchanges of and about reading matter have a special significance, due to weakened institutional reading infrastructures. Hence, social reading networks become an important part of digital compensation strategies to counteract contemporary deficits in libraries and bookstores, and outbalance the distribution of and sales problems associated with the printed book. As I will demonstrate, Russian social reading networks are based on *both* exploitation-ware *and* seemingly self-organized mutual aid systems that extend the small community of the physical book club or local study group to a widespread Russian-language reading audience both inside and outside Russia’s borders.

LiveLib.ru and BookMix.ru, together with a mushrooming number of smaller social reading sites, partly developed their functions and interfaces as Russian language parallels to Anglophone platforms. Both were likewise prompted by the global development of social media marketing. LiveLib.ru was founded in early 2007, shortly after the American site Goodreads.com was launched, and BookMix.ru followed in 2008.⁷ Yet in comparison with Western discussions and perceptions of digital reading, notions of a reading ‘decline’ versus reader ‘emancipation’ appear even more polarized in Russian public and scholarly debates.⁸ One reason is that the advent of

6 G. Ritzer, N. Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital ‘Prosumer,’” *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10, 1 (2010), 13-36.

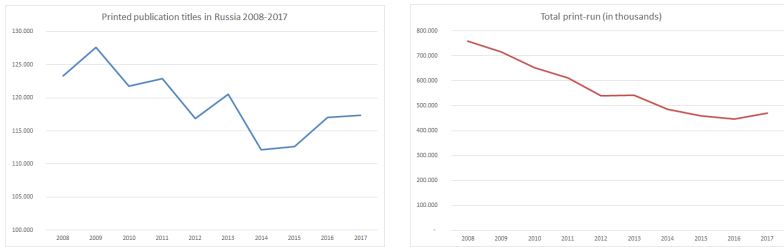
7 The social reading sites are accessible at: <https://www.goodreads.com/>; <https://www.livelib.ru/about/>; <https://bookmix.ru/about/> (accessed May 23, 2018).

8 On a ‘decline’ discourse, for example V. E. Barykin uses the expression “padenie kul’turny knigi” in Idem, “O nekotorykh aspektakh kul’turny knigi v sovremennykh usloviakh,” *Kniga: issledovaniia i materialy*, 74 (1997), 81-82. B. B. Pristed, *The New Russian Book: A Graphic Cultural History* (London, 2017), 75-78. On the internet as a vehicle for the humanities that

the digital revolution in Russia coincided with the historical shift from a Soviet state publishing system and strongly normative culture of the book and reading to a post-Soviet private book market, which involved economic and societal ruptures and fundamentally changed the context of reading, writing, and publishing.⁹ However, today's Russian term for social reading networks, “*knizhnye sotsial'nye seti*” (social book networks) still reflects the sacrosanct status of the traditional, printed book for the Russian intelligentsia and the acclaimed special role of literature in both nineteenth and twentieth century (Soviet) Russia.¹⁰ “*Knizhnye sotsial'nye seti*” persistently refer to the “book” as a printed entity, a material object with a beginning and end, shielded by a protective cover, rather than the process of reading or the ‘liquid,’ open-ended nature of shared, digital texts.

I. RUSSIAN READING BETWEEN PRINT AND ELECTRONIC BOOKS

At first glance, the Russian Book Chamber's statistics of the national, annual production of print publications seem to confirm the notion of a decline of the printed book over the last decade.



I. 2: Both tables are generated on the basis of the Russian Book Chamber's annual statistics and do not include periodicals and newspapers.¹¹

sustain readers' gramotnost', see for example, Roman Leibov's analysis of expert-user dialogue sites such as gramota.ru, R. Leibov, "Expert Communities on the Russian Internet: Typology and History," in H. Schmidt, K. Teubener, N. Konradova (eds.), *Control + Shift: Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet* (Norderstedt, 2006), 98-100.

⁹ See SCHMIDT, "Virtual Shelves, Virtual Selves," in the present volume.

¹⁰ M. B. Remnek (ed.), *The Space of the Book: Print Culture in the Russian Social Imagination* (Toronto, 2011).

¹¹ K. M. Sukhorukov, "Statistika knigoizdaniia: pliusy i minusy 2009 g.," *Bibliografiia: nauchnyi zhurnal po bibliografovedeniiu i knigovedeniiu*, 366, 2 (2010), 3-12; E. I. Kozlova, K. M. Sukhorukov, "Statistika knigoizdaniia Rossii za 2010 g.: itogi i problemy," *Bibliografiia: nauchnyi zhurnal po bibliografovedeniiu i knigovedeniiu*, 373, 2 (2011), 22-35; L. A. Kirillova, K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie Rossii v 2011 g.," *Bibliografiia: nauchnyi zhurnal po bibliografovedeniiu i knigovedeniiu*, 379, 2 (2012), 10-19; L. A. Kirillova, K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie Rossii v 2012 g.," *Bibliografiia: nauchnyi zhurnal po bibliografovedeniiu i knigovedeniiu*, 384, 2 (2013), 9-17; K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie Rossii v 2013 g.," *Bibliografiia: nauchnyi zhurnal po bibliografovedeniiu i knigovedeniiu*, 390, 1 (2014), 3-14; K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie

Russian book publishing peaked in 2008-9, but since then, the 2008 global financial crisis, declining oil prices, the 2014-16 ruble crisis, the partly sanction-based, partly self-inflicted isolation from parts of international trade after the Russian annexation of Crimea have all negatively impacted the Russian publishing industry and book consumers' purchasing power.¹² The resulting drop in production, sales, and circulation of print books has been reinforced by a parallel weakening of reading infrastructures, including the closure of local public libraries and physical bookstores.¹³ Notwithstanding a slight trend towards recovery in 2017, the preceding decade witnessed a drop in total print runs, which are down 40% from the 2008 maximum of around 760 million print publications. However, Konstantin Sukhorukov and Galina Perova, specialists of the Russian Book Chamber, convincingly bust the myth that "before [in Soviet times] everything was better" in terms of title output. Despite a stagnation in title diversity over the last decade, their comparison demonstrates that the recent 2017 title output of printed publications for the Russian Federation alone is still more than twice as high as any annual title output from the late Soviet and Perestroika publishing eras, 1960-90.¹⁴

It would be hasty to equate the crisis of the printed book, as evidenced by figures from the Russian Book Chamber, with an apparent crisis of reading in Russia without taking into account a countervailing rise in electronic publications and reading over the last decade. Rather than having stopped reading, the new generations of Russian readers have *changed* their preferred *medium* and *modes* of reading.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the Russian Book Chamber does not keep a similar systematic record of electronic books and publications; instead, Russian publishing houses are obliged to register electronic publications with the Russian Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media, Roskomnadzor, which is mostly

Rossii v 2014 g.," *Bibliografiia i knigovedenie*, volume not indicated, 1 (2015), 4-13; K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie Rossii v 2015 g.," *Bibliografiia i knigovedenie*, 402, 1 (2016), 19-30; K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie Rossii v 2016 g.," *Bibliografiia i knigovedenie*, 408, 1 (2017), 3-17; G. V. Perova, K. M. Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie Rossii v 2017 g.," *Bibliografiia i knigovedenie*, 414, 1 (2018), 4-29.

12 L. A. Kirillova, K. M. Sukhorukov, "Vse vyshe, i vyshe, i vyshe...: Rekordnye statisticheskie pokazateli rossiiskogo knigoizdaniia v 2008 godu," originally published April 4, 2009 on the website of The Russian Book Chamber: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090612042252/>. The article is no longer online available, but recoverable at: http://www.bookchamber.ru/content/stat/stat_2008.html (accessed June 26, 2018).

13 See MENZEL, "From Print to Pixel," in this volume.

14 Perova, Sukhorukov, "Knigoizdanie Rossii v 2017 g.," 6 and 13, table 2. In recent years, Russian title output seems impressive even by international standards, but such figures must be read with some caution due to the widespread Russian publishing practice of issuing the same book in several different book series, with different ISBNs and cover designs, all in diminutive print runs, and without identifying these as reprint editions.

15 V. P. Chudinova, "Chtenie 'tsifrovogo' pokoleniia: problemy i perspektivy," in I. V. Lizunova (ed.), *Kniga: Sibir' - Evraziia: Trudy I Mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo kongressa: Tom 3* (Novosibirsk, 2016), 349.

infamous for an allegedly all-encompassing registering and frequent ‘black-listing’ of Russian websites.¹⁶ However, in fact, the official registration of the Russian publishing industry’s electronic publications by the Roskomnadzor Scientific Technical Center, Informregistr, is limited to only physical discs, such as CD-ROMs and DVDs containing textual or multimedia content. Since the Informregistr catalog was launched 1994, it has accumulated only approximately 53,700 such titles, a far from complete registration which primarily consists of scientific electronic encyclopedias and dictionaries.¹⁷ In contrast to the ISBN practices of Western publishers, Russian publishers usually do not register e-book and print book editions of the same title with separate ISBN numbers, which complicates a systematic and comprehensive mapping of the development of legal Russian electronic book publications.¹⁸

Of course, both international and Russian market research companies carry out surveys of the sales and consumer trends within the Russian e-book market, but such surveys are not neutral and objective, as they serve the interest organizations of the publishing industry and local authorities, and often focus on certain segments of urban readers whose consumer patterns surpass those of the general population.¹⁹ Thus, to a wide extent, Russian electronic books and publications still belong to a gray zone of publishing. Despite the 2014 ‘anti-piracy law’ and Roskomnadzor’s increasing efforts to combat online piracy, in a 2016 survey, 80% of reader-respondents indicated that they access electronic books ‘for free,’ without distinguishing between legal and illegal electronic sources.²⁰ Readers associate the printed book with notions of ownership, with an (often inaccessibly expensive) object to be possessed and displayed in a home interior. The printed book differs from the ‘less valuable’ electronic publication, which is shared, used, and circulated (often for free) by readers without necessarily belonging to them. But as Anna Gerasimova indicates, the act of writing a short reader’s

16 On the censoring role of Roskomnadzor and the recent so-called “anti-piracy” and “anti-extremism” internet laws, see I. Kiriya, E. Sherstoboeva, “Russian Media Piracy in the Context of Censoring Practices,” *International Journal of Communication*, 9 (2015), 839-851, esp. 845-846.

17 The Scientific Technical Center Informregistr. *Depozitarii elektronnykh izdaniy*, <http://catalog.infoereg.ru/> (accessed June 26, 2018).

18 According to recent amendments to the federal law on depository copies, Russian publishers (since 2017) have been obligated to deposit electronic copies of all printed publications (not to be confused with e-books) in the Russian State Library and Russian Book Chamber, but due to the obvious risks of copyright infringements, publishers are very reluctant to do so. See Perova, Sukhorukov, “Knigozhdanie Rossii v 2017 g.,” 4-6.

19 One such source is Rossiiskii knizhnyi soiuz and the Moscow government’s *Monitoring moskovskogo knizhnogo rynka*, which includes development trends of the digital book market, annually published from 2012 to present, online available at: <https://bookunion.ru/analytics/monitoring/> (accessed June 26, 2018).

20 Rossiiskii knizhnyi soiuz. *Monitoring sostoiianiia moskovskogo knizhnogo rynka (2017)*, 56. Online available at: <https://bookunion.ru/analytics/monitoring/> (accessed June 27, 2018).

review on social reading sites could be interpreted as a strategy of personalizing or taking ownership of digital publications.²¹

2. RUSSIAN SOCIAL READING NETWORKS: READERS' OR MARKETING INTERESTS?

As a special communicative means of engaging texts, social reading emerged as a result both of recent developments in electronic publishing and broader information technological developments, including the increased availability and speed of internet broadband and the 2004 introduction of Web 2.0, that enabled the creation and exchange of user-generated content and facilitated the rise of social media.²² Bob Stein, a pioneer of digital reading, has suggested a taxonomy of social reading, differentiating, on the one hand, between readers' *formal* and *informal*, *offline* and *online* discussion and exchange about a text and, on the other hand, between shared *IN-text* comments etc. (e.g. in the margins of digital texts) and discussions *outside* the (printed or digital) text.²³ When examining Russian social reading networks, the present study focuses primarily on platforms that facilitate readers' participatory, user-generated *online* communication about books, a digital exchange which takes place *outside* the given text. Extending Gérard Genette's notion of the 'epitext' of a literary work, it suggests understanding social reading as the formation process of a digital, reader/user-created 'epitext' that serves as an *informal* response to a given work.²⁴

Reader-receivers' appropriation of the message is an inherent part of any communication and interpretation process.²⁵ To claim or celebrate the current, digitally driven, paradigmatic shift from an individual book consumer's introverted, private, and silent reading of a printed book to shared and participatory reading of network texts in an online community makes even less sense in a Russian context than in a Western one. 'Social' reading, in its

21 A. V. Gerasimova, "Ob odnoi spetsificheskoi praktike: otzyvy na knigi v internete," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny*, 1 (2018), 226.

22 Cordon García et al., *Social Reading: Platforms, Applications, Clouds and Tags*, 143. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define "social media" as a "group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." A. M. Kaplan, M. Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons*, 53, 1 (January-February, 2010), 59–68, esp. 61.

23 B. Stein, "A Taxonomy of Social Reading: A Proposal," *The Institute for the Future of the Book*, 2010 <http://futureofthebook.org/social-reading/matrix/index.html> (accessed June 28, 2018)

24 G. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1997). Genette's examples of 'epitexts' are authorized by the writer, e.g. in the form of author interviews, responses to a literary critic, or author diary entries, and do not refer to 'ordinary' readers' responses to literary works. For a discussion of how digital reading technologies challenge precisely this authorization of the paratext by enabling reader additions in and around the text, see D. Birke, B. Christ, "Paratext and Digitized Narrative: Mapping the Field," *Narrative*, 21, 1 (2013), 65–87, esp. 78–79.

25 Cordon García et al., *Social Reading: Platforms, Applications, Clouds and Tags*, 2.

broader, non-digital sense, is not a new phenomenon, but was constitutive for constructing a community of Soviet print culture. To a higher degree than twentieth-century capitalist consumer societies which — reductively speaking — primarily perceived readers as receivers of available, mass published and distributed entertainment and educational offerings,²⁶ the socialist reading regime not only encouraged, but also required participatory reading of its citizens: Pre-digital, ‘reader-generated’ content, social activism, and reader responses were integrated aspects of Soviet reader didactics and editorial policies, ranging from the reader-correspondents’ self-made wall newspapers and readers’ diaries of the 1920s to the reader-respondents’ letters to journals and newspapers of the 1950s and 1960s.²⁷ Likewise, late Soviet readers actively participated in the production and distribution of samizdat and tamizdat literature as copyists, smugglers, and black market traders to compensate for and subversively respond to book shortages and restricted access to texts.²⁸ Hence, the most recent social reading chapter in the Russian history of reading must be seen as a continuation of such Soviet practices rather than a break with them. Nevertheless, the technological and ideological media conditions for the interconnectivity, speed, and scope of social reading exchanges have significantly changed with the digital advent of social media in the twenty-first century.

Today, both major, international social media networks such as Facebook (launched 2004) and large, popular Russian platforms, such as Odnoklassniki and VKontakte (both launched 2006), host more than a hundred thousand Russian-language groups and fora devoted to topics such as books, reading, literature, and libraries. At VKontakte, reader groups range from small, specialized communities with less than 1,000 participants to mid-sized groups such as “What to read?” (*Chto chitat?*), currently with more than 90,000 members, to large communities such as “Books that changed my life” (*Knigi, izmenivshie moi zhizn'*), with more than 300,000

26 Readers of twentieth-century capitalist consumer societies, of course, also participated in ‘social reading’ in formal and semi-formal networks, such as the classroom and book club.

27 On wall newspapers, see M. S. Gorham, “Tongue-Tied Writers: The Rabsel’kor Movement and the Voice of the ‘New Intelligentsia’ in Early Soviet Russia,” *The Russian Review*, 55, 3 (1996), 412–429; J. Hicks, “From Conduits to Commanders: Shifting Views of Worker Correspondents, 1924–1926,” *Revolutionary Russia* (2006), 131–149; C. Kelly, “A Laboratory for the Manufacture of Proletarian Writers’ The Stengazeta (Wall Newspaper), Kul’turnost’ and the Language of Politics in the Early Soviet Period,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54, 4 (2002), 573–602. For a comparison of the 1920s readers’ diaries and contemporary readers’ online reviews, see Gerasimova, “Ob odnoi spetsificheskoi praktike,” 227–230. On reader letters of the 1950s and 1960s, see D. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), and also his chapter in the present volume.

28 On Soviet self-publishing practices, see ZITZEWITZ, “Reading Samizdat” in the present volume. On the continued post-Soviet, digital uses and redefinitions of the Soviet term “samizdat” see H. Schmidt, “Postprintium? Digital Literary Samizdat on the Russian Internet,” in F. Kind-Kovács, J. Labov (eds.), *Samizdat, Tamizdat & Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism* (New York, 2013), 221–244.

members—not to mention “The best verses of great poets” (*Luchshie stikhi velikikh poetov*), with more than 5,400,000 members.²⁹ Though mass publication of classic poetry was a phenomenon associated with Soviet print culture, and print-runs of poetry steeply declined in the post-Soviet period, the above number suggests that the activity of sharing and quoting poetry is still a living part of popular reader culture in Russia today; it just does not necessarily involve reading a printed book. Hence, the mode of ‘liking’ differs from ‘reading’ great poets. ‘Reading,’ in its traditional, hermeneutic sense, connotes a critical reflection and meaning-seeking interpretation of ‘great literature,’ which is, ideally, systematically scrutinized from the beginning to the end. ‘Liking,’ on the other hand, is associated with the uncritical enjoyment of a ‘good quote’ that randomly pops up with attached, photo-shopped sunsets, rustic flowers, raindrops, pixelated black-and-white poet portraits, love scenes, or video clips from Russian TV talent show poetry recitations. Other fora are dedicated to great novel writers whose devoted ‘followers’ engage in sharing similarly styled prose citations. The mediation of literature on Russian social media sites removes socio-cultural barriers between fan culture and high literature, and it does not discriminate between ‘great’ poetry and ‘occasional,’ imitative verses written by the group members themselves.³⁰ However, as the title of the reading group “Books that changed my life” suggests, the members of Russian social media reading groups still observe elements of the hermeneutic tradition of reading, such as ascribing to the literary work a transformative power to alter the consciousness of the reading individual, if not society as a whole.

With the advent of social media, Russian niche social media platforms specializing in books and reading also began to appear. The oldest, now extinct Reader2 (<http://ru.reader2.com/>) was launched in 2005, and was followed by LiveLib.ru in 2007, currently with more than 1.5 million registered users, and Bookmix.ru in 2008, currently with more than 100,000 registered users. From a reader perspective, the main motivation for using such networks is that the social reading platforms ‘help’ the reader to find a suitable book, based on other users’ recommendations, reviews, and comments. Unlike (legal and illegal) electronic libraries, social reading platforms do not provide full texts or electronic books, but only book excerpts and web links to online

29 The groups are available at: <https://vk.com/bookpower>; <https://vk.com/knigijizn>; <https://vk.com/1poetry> (accessed June 29, 2018). For a more detailed description of the popularization of Russian reading in the large, *general* social media networks, see I. V. Lizunova, E. M. Lbova, “Prodvizhenie knigi i chteniia v sotsial’nykh setiakh,” in I. V. Lizunova (ed.), *Kniga: Sibir’ - Evraziia: Trudy I Mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo kongressa: Tom 3* (Novosibirsk, 2016), 388; and I. V. Lizunova, “Sotsial’nye media kak interaktivnaia tsifrovaia sreda popularizatsii knigi i chteniia,” *Ibid.*, 92–108, esp. 95–99.

30 The right sidebar of the VKontakte site “*Luchshie stikhi velikikh poetov*” includes the menu point “*Vashi stikhotvoreniia*,” which encourages members to upload their own verses (“Let us hear your personal poetry here. No cursing or flooding”) https://vk.com/topic-38683579_28127274 (accessed June 29, 2018).

bookstores and libraries. Instead, the platforms encourage readers to share their reading experiences and discuss works they have read or intend to read in the future.³¹ Based on her PhD dissertation research, Ekaterina Krylova has even argued that “social networks specialized in book topics were created and exist thanks to the interests *not of publishers but of readers*, and *sometimes bookstores*,”³² (emphasis added) and she suggests that readers’ activity is stimulated by “sharing” reviews, recommendations and opinions.³³ This is in line with the self-understanding of LiveLib.ru whose founders present themselves in public interviews as enthusiasts and successful dreamers. In the words of its general director Nikita Petrushin, the main mission of LiveLib.ru is “assistance in the search for like-minded individuals in the sphere of reading. The resource unites users, who can help each other select books across the most diverse fields and genres.”³⁴ The founder, Aleksei Vasenev, rhetorically states, “this is a place created by the people for the people.”³⁵

It is true that LiveLib.ru began very modestly as a bottom-up platform programmed by a group of students at the Faculty of Applied Mathematics of Moscow State University, originally created to share information about unavailable academic literature within narrow, specialized fields. However, LiveLib.ru was only able to grow into the largest Russian social reading platform today because of its successful attraction of investors to the project.³⁶ Today, as an online recommendation service, LiveLib.ru belongs to the LitRes.ru group, whose largest shareholder is the Russian publishing conglomerate Eksmo-AST, followed by Ozon.ru, the Russian “copy” of the American online retailer Amazon.com.³⁷ LitRes.ru itself is today Russia’s leading e-bookstore. It was founded 2006 by a conglomerate of online li-

31 N. V. Tokareva, “Knizhnye sotsial’nye seti kak populiariizatory chteniia i knigi, proekty kompanii Pocketbook,” in K. V. Ovsiannikova, N. V. Tokareva (eds.), *Kniga i sovremennom mire: Krizis logotsentrizma i / ili torzhestvo vizual’nosti: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, VGU, filologicheskii fakul’tet, 28 fevralia - 2 marta 2017 goda* (Voronezh, 2018), 197–204.

32 Krylova, “Sotsial’nye seti knizhnoi tematiki,” 131.

33 Cf. also the title of Katharina Lukoschek’s recent study of German social reading networks, “I love to share with you,” K. Lukoschek, “‘Ich liebe den Austausch mit euch!’ Austausch über und anhand von Literatur in Social Reading-Communities und auf Bücherblogs,” in A. Bartl, M. Behmer, M. Hielscher (eds.), *Die Rezension: Aktuelle Tendenzen der Literaturkritik*, Konnex Band 22 (Würzburg, 2017), 225–52.

34 R. Kaplin, “Bol’shie dannye v pomoshch’ chitateliyam” (Interview with LiveLib managers Nikita Petrushin and Roman Ivanov), *Universitetskaia kniga*, March (2016), 68. <http://www.unkniga.ru/bookkrinok/bookraspr/5701-bolshie-dannye-v-pomosch-chitatelyam.html> (accessed June 27, 2018).

35 A. Gromov, “Uspeshnym chelovekom mozhet stat’ tol’ko mechtatel’” (Interview with LiveLib founder Aleksei Vasenov), *Banki i delovoi mir*, January-February (2014), 135. <http://www.bdm.ru/zhurnal/bdm-1-2-2014/#/134/> (accessed June 28, 2018).

36 *Ibid.*, 135.

37 A. Sukharevskaia, “Krupneishii knizhnyi onlain-magazin v Rossii v pervye stal pribly’nym,” *RosBiznesKonsalting* (May 31, 2016). https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/31/05/2016/574d80249a7947f0d8b20888 (accessed April 29, 2019).

braries consisting of pirated materials; they legalized their earlier practice through paid access and thus turned it into a viable business.³⁸

The Russian publishing industry was relatively late in discovering the economic significance of social media for marketing purposes, as Krylova has demonstrated. However, today almost all Russian publishers have their own profiles on the larger social media sites, and the largest publishers actively advertise on the specialized social reading sites to promote their books.³⁹ Advertisement revenues and/or direct investments, especially from the large online bookstores, fund all larger networks, although smaller, non-commercial Russian social reading sites do exist. In addition, social reading sites also link to Russian-language online bookstores abroad, such as Kniga.de, testifying to the sites' extensive geographical outreach. Hence, when users click on their choices within the different categories (such as books, authors, genres, quotes, and reviews) at the navigation menus, the social reading sites redirect them by linking to the sites of online bookstore and publishers, where readers can buy the preferred books.

At most social reading sites, users register and create an individual profile, storing their personal data in the databases. However, as Elena Tsykina has remarked in her study, the Russian sites are relatively modest in their harvesting of personal data, and still allow users to register just with a nickname; this is in marked contrast with the most popular international social reading platform, Goodreads.com, which requires users' full name, information about their age, gender, occupation, interests, reading preferences, and the like.⁴⁰ The sites accommodate readers' individual virtual bookshelves or libraries, in which they can rank and review books that they have read or list books and 'like' recommendations of books that they wish to read in the future. The degree to which social reading sites 'read' their readers differs from platform to platform. Bookmix.ru claims not to sell user data for consumer-tailored advertisement purposes, but only receives commission from advertisement partners based on the user's level of activity and number of clicks that lead to the partners' sites.⁴¹ Registering at LiveLib.ru involves being targeted with daily email offers, to which, however, the user may choose to unsubscribe. Hence, the commercial interests of publishers and online bookstores in social

38 H. Schmidt, "LitRes: Elektronischer Buchhandel zwischen Business und Piraterie," *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*, 5 (2011), 76. <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue05/henrike-schmidt/> (accessed June 27, 2018).

39 In her 2011 study, Ekaterina Krylova found that only eighteen out of the hundred largest Russian publishers used social media; E. V. Krylova, "Ispol'zovanie sotsial'nykh setei v PR-deiatel'nosti krupneishikh izdatel'stv Rossii," *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta kul'tury i isskustva*, June (2011), 111-113.

40 E. V. Tsykina, "Knizhnye sotsial'nye seti v kontekste sovremennykh chitatel'skikh praktik," in E. B. Artem'eva, O. L. Lavrik, O. N. Al'shevskaia (eds.), *Biblioteka i chitalel': dialog vo vremeni: Materialy mezhrregional'noi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, 24-26 sentiabria 2013 g., Novosibirsk*, 7 (Novosibirsk, 2014) 691.

41 Interview with A. Tananaeva, editor and PR representative of Bookmix.ru, on June 9, 2018.

media marketing consist not only of banner promotion of both print books and electronic books, but also data analysis of users' costumer preferences and behaviors for tailored marketing purposes. This global trend in social media marketing has caused international controversies about the 'transparent' digital reader's privacy rights.⁴² The 2013 sale of Goodreads.com (which by 2012 had already reached 13 million registered users of its reader-to-reader recommendation system) to the market monopolist Amazon.com for 150 million dollars shows the strong marketing value of readers' ranking data.⁴³ Thus, to the claim that Russian social reading sites exist because of and for the sake of readers one must add that the Russian users are inscribed within a global, digital development of "prosumer capitalism" that crosses hitherto established boundaries between producers and consumers.⁴⁴ Russian readers are subject to a double exploitation of their passion for reading, both as unpaid producers of user-generated content and, at the same time, as targeted, transparent consumers for book advertisers, both of which disrupt the only recently gained post-Soviet private sphere of reading.

From the perspective of digital marketing companies that host social reading networks, it is not important if users actually read the recommended and discussed books or not. Instead, the networks' main purpose is to maximize the number of users and increase those users' online activity (views, clicks, and comments), with the overarching goal of increasing the attraction of their site for advertisers of the book industry. Sometimes registered readers are offered symbolic awards, e.g. a discount in an online bookstore, or particularly active users may be offered 'free' review copies of newly published or as-yet unpublished books in exchange for a review. In return, publishers are free to use excerpts of 'readers' choice' as cover blurbs.⁴⁵ In other cases, popular 'wreaders,' who have crossed the reader/writer distinction and shifted to the sender side in the communication circuit, use social reading sites to build up an audience as independent book bloggers or booktubers (*bukt'iubery*).⁴⁶

3. MEMBERS OF SOCIAL READING GROUPS VERSUS A READING PUBLIC

Nevertheless, the mobilization of users for profit purposes has a significant side effect: social reading sites indeed appear successful in motivating a certain segment of Russian readers to read (and thus produce and consume)

42 See Pleimling, "Social Reading – Lesen im digitalen Zeitalter," on the transparent reader ("gläserner Leser"), 24-25.

43 Cordon García, et al., *Social Reading: Platforms, Applications, Clouds and Tags*, 175-176.

44 Ritzer, Jurgenson, "Production, Consumption, Prosumption," 13-36.

45 Kaplin, "Bol'shie dannye v pomoshch' chitateliam," 70.

46 Interview with Tananaeva, June 9, 2018. The rather large topic of Russian booktubers deserves a separate investigation; for a brief survey of currently popular profiles, see A. Stolbova, "Ia - bukt'iuber," *Ponedel'nik* (May 17, 2017), <https://ponedelnikmag.com/post/ya-buktyuber> (accessed June 29, 2018).

more texts—and, significantly, this segment is one that public reading campaigns by governmental institutions, schools, and libraries usually do not reach. This is not to suggest that Russian public institutions do not aim to use social media to encourage young audiences to read. As Irina Lizunova and Ekaterina Lbova have noted, the #litgeroi initiative, which was launched during the national 2015 “Year of Literature” by the state-funded Pushkin Library Foundation that supports publishing, education, and new IT, would represent one successful example of such encouragement.⁴⁷ During the #litgeroi campaign, 400 schoolchildren created 104 virtual social media profiles for their favorite literary heroes, including Neznaika, Karlson, and others.⁴⁸ However, in comparison with commercially-oriented social reading platforms, such singular projects from above do not achieve any mass penetration of the Russian readership and are unlikely to have a lasting effect.

The vast majority of social reading platform users, around 80%, are in their twenties, thirties, or forties, and belong to the actively working population with middle or higher income.⁴⁹ Unlike children, students, and pensioners, this age group and relatively privileged social segment does not have to check out books at the boring, old-fashioned, user-unfriendly and often insufficiently funded and equipped public libraries, but can afford to buy their own books, which makes them particularly interesting as consumer segment.⁵⁰ The users do not all belong to the more highly educated intelligentsia, but reader preferences for mainstream literature, sci-fi, and fantasy titles dominate the top-hundred lists. Other users’ interests in topics such as home, family, health, and travel reflect the non-advanced tastes and preferences of ‘ordinary’ readers.⁵¹

Strikingly, 61% of the audience at Bookmix.ru and 66% at LiveLib.ru consists of female users.⁵² Anastasiia Tananaeva, an editor and PR representative of Bookmix.ru, explains the predominance of female users with reference to general perceptions of gender roles in Russian families, according to which reading is considered a domestic, “feminine” activity. Buying books and caring for the education of children and family are primarily the housewife’s or working mother’s responsibilities.⁵³ In contrast to libraries,

47 Lizunova, Lbova, “Prodvizhenie knigi i chteniia v sotsial’nykh setiakh,” 388.

48 Federal’noe agenstvo po pechatu i massovym kommunikatsiiam, “Chtenie 21,” <http://chtenie-21.ru/heroes> (accessed June 29, 2018).

49 LiveLib.ru, “Reklama,” 2018. <https://www.livelib.ru/advertising> (accessed June 29, 2018); BookMix.ru, “BookMix.ru: Sotsial’naia set’ liubitelei knig: Prezentatsiia dlia partnerov i reklamodatelei,” 2017. <https://bookmix.ru/partners/> (accessed June 29, 2018).

50 Interview with Tananaeva, June 9, 2018.

51 *Ibid.*

52 BookMix.ru, “BookMix.ru: Sotsial’naia set’ liubitelei knig..”; LiveLib.ru, “Reklama,” 2018. <https://www.livelib.ru/advertising> (accessed June 29, 2018). A 2015 general reading survey, carried out by The Levada Center, “Rossiiane o chtenii,” confirms this pattern of a gendered imbalance in Russian reading: <http://www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/chtenie.pdf> (accessed June 29, 2018).

53 Interview with Tananaeva, June 9, 2018.

Bookmix.ru does not address child readers, but have groups entitled “Books and Children” (*Chtenie i deti*), “Pseudo-Intellectual Girl” (*Obrazovanka*) and so on, facilitating discussions on children’s literature and educational literature while targeting their purchase-responsible parents.⁵⁴

LiveLib.ru maintains a library section with links to hundreds of local institutions, but apart from occasionally announcing literary events taking place in public libraries, the commercially-driven social reading platforms currently do not actively collaborate with public libraries in the same way as they do with their book industry partners.⁵⁵ In her PhD research, Elena Tsykina has argued that Russian public libraries experiencing a declining popularity (especially among young readers) do not take full advantage of the communication potential of social media technology. Instead, young readers recommend literature to each other online and become each other’s ‘favorite librarians.’⁵⁶ These findings differ from those of Julia Melentieva’s earlier, 2009 survey of Russian high school students’ reading habits, which did not yet take social media or social reading into account. This study found that while socializing with friends was the top priority leisure activity for the youth, only a few respondents received or exchanged information about book-related topics from their peers.⁵⁷ Despite the buzzword of ‘interconnectivity’ often associated with social reading in research literature, there is a growing communication gap between the public library and commercial reading networks that operate separately from each other in Russia today. Despite the misleading name, the ‘social’ reading networks do not carry any particular *social* responsibility of promoting reading, much less servicing or sustaining a cohesive reading public; rather, they represent a *segmentation* of readers into two groups—various digitally active purchasers who organize closed interest groups of ‘like-minded’ readers, and readers who don’t have sufficient purchase power or digital skills and remain outside this paradigm.

4. THE IMAGE OF READING AS A SWEET PASTIME

In line with their predominantly female audience, Russian social reading sites often frame books as things to digest in domestic interiors; they prominently feature images of coffee, tea, sweets, fruits, and berries to suggest

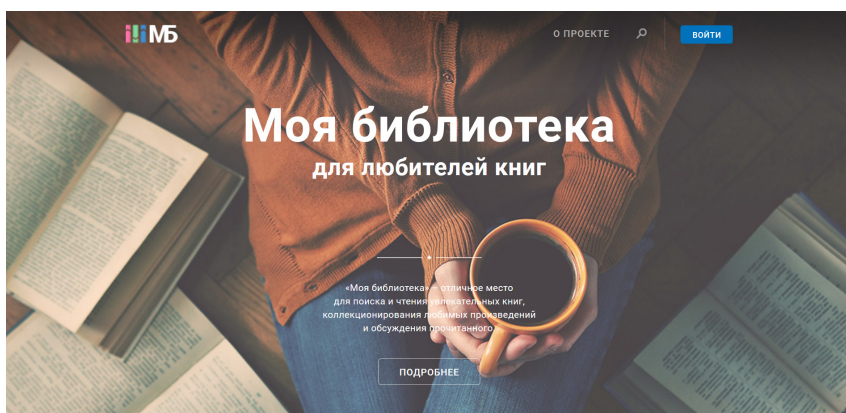
54 BookMix.ru, “Obrazovanka,” <https://bookmix.ru/groups/index.phtml?id=284> (accessed June 29, 2018); “Chtenie i deti,” <https://bookmix.ru/groups/index.phtml?id=300> (accessed June 29, 2018).

55 LiveLib.ru, “Biblioteki,” <https://www.livelib.ru/groups/filter/category:000000001/~2> (accessed June 29, 2018). Interview with Anastasiia Tananaeva, June 9, 2018.

56 Tsykina, “Knizhnye sotsial’nye seti,” 687 and 694.

57 J. Melentieva, “Reading Among Young Russians: Some Modern Tendencies,” *Slavic & East European Information Resources*, 10, 4 (2009), 304–321.

that reading is a luxurious pause from one's busy, noisy, daily life. While the multifunction portals LiveLib.ru and Bookmix.ru both maintain a neutral graphic interface, Anatolii Lavrin's more minimalist social reading platform Moia biblioteka (My Library) operates with a more ambitious design created by Stanislav Bolotov. The opening page features an anonymized female torso surrounded by open books; her legs are crossed and her arms are covered by long sleeves, while her thin fingers with bitten nails encircle a warm cup of coffee. By connoting the stereotype of a desexualized bookworm, the image appears as a striking antidote to the oversexualized exposure of the naked female body that users encounter elsewhere on the RuNet. Instead, it invites new users into an alternative sphere, an intimate, safe space for reading where time stands still for a moment.



3. Screenshot of entrance page to Moia biblioteka (My Library), <http://my-lib.ru/> (accessed July 4, 2018).

Bookmix.ru has extended the metaphor of reading as a self-rewarding sweet pastime in some of its many user-engaging reading riddles. Hence, in the reading game “Literary Compote” (Literaturnyi kompot), around 80-100 literary quotes are mixed together, and participants compete by guessing from which works the quotes originate.⁵⁸ The social reading sites’ occasional cooperation with advertisement partners outside the book industry may increase the metaphorical link between digesting literature and enjoying food. In autumn 2015, Bookmix.ru launched a literary “ChocoCompetition” (ShokoKonkurs) in cooperation with a local company specializing in personalized chocolate gift boxes.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Bookmix.ru, “Literaturnyi kompot,” <https://bookmix.ru/groups/index.phtml?id=351&uid=125928&action=add> (accessed July 4, 2018)

⁵⁹ Shokobox.ru, “Kvatro: “Fedor Dostoevskii,”” <http://shokobox.ru/chocolate/vse/mini-nabor-fedor-dostoevskiy/?page=732&rm=bookmix> (accessed July 4, 2018).



4. 5. Advertisement for the joint ShokoKonkurs campaign by BookMix.ru and Shokobox.ru.

During the marketing campaign, a BookMix.ru jury would award readers for the best reviews of books, related to chocolate topics (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and the like). The winners would receive a chocolate box featuring a cover portrait of Dostoevskii, Oscar Wilde, or Balzac with quotes of these writers printed on the wrapping paper of the nine Swiss milk chocolate pieces in the box.⁶⁰ In contrast to the early Soviet revolutionary ideal of a *collective* reading space—as expressed, for example, in Aleksandr Rodchenko’s famous 1925 workers’ club interior, in which modern, pure wooden furniture disciplined enlightened workers’ bodies by forcing them to keep their spines straight while reading—⁶¹ here, a century later, the ideal of *social* reading removes reading from the institutionalized, public sphere of the school and the library, in which foods, drinks, and greasy fingers are all prohibited for the sake of proper book handling, and into a new social space of comfortable, ‘luxury’ consumption.

5. THE IMAGE OF READING AS SPORT AND THE GAMIFICATION OF READING

An opposite strategy is to frame reading as a fitness or extreme sport activity. The editors of social reading sites organize games and competitions to stimulate and increase user activity, borrowing their incentive systems from the technologies of online multiplayer computer games to optimize readers’ virtual achievements.⁶² Some game activities involve reading groups, and others

60 S. Aison, “BookMix.ru i kompaniia Shokobox ob”iavliaut ShokoKonkurs!” October 1, 2015, <https://bookmix.ru/groups/viewtopic.phtml?id=3668> (accessed July 4, 2018).

61 C. Kiaer, “Rodchenko in Paris,” *October*, 75 (1996), 3-35.

62 S. P. Walz, S. Deterding, “An Introduction to the Gameful World,” in S. P. Walz, S. Deterding (eds.), *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 2.

individual readers; some organize different thematic readings and literary riddles, and others quantitatively measure reading activities.⁶³ Among the most popular games, LiveLib.ru hosts an annual “Book Challenge” (*Knizhnyi vyzov*) during which close to 60,000 readers sign up with the goal of reading and ranking a personally defined number of books, the average challenge being 49 books per year.⁶⁴ The LiveLib.ru team coaches the readers by monitoring their individual statistics, and updating lists of the participants according to their progress and plan fulfillment. Hence, while readers rank the books, the social reading platform ranks the readers. In doing so, they combine a rhetoric of sport, victory, struggle, and (over)fulfillment, all of which perhaps echoes the Stakhanovite encouragement to Socialist competition, but is defined primarily by digital technology—for example, wearable, lifelogging fitness trackers. After only 6 months of competition, an unemployed male Muscovite with the nickname “Ivan2K17” led the reading race, with 1,699 books done out of the 1,675 he planned to read during a full year. For his astonishing achievement, he obtained the virtual status of “guru.”⁶⁵ Despite the honorable guru title, the reading challenge encourages fast scrolling, rather than spiritual-meditative contemplation as the most suitable, competitive reading mode.



6. “The book is the best exercise machine / And power is in knowledge” Parodic, “demotivational” poster, blending the concept of reading and fitness, posted August 2, 2013 in the self-organized VKontakte group “Knizhnyi marafon, klub chteniia, knigi”, https://vk.com/knigomarafon?z=photo-51310303_308066104%2Falbum-51310303_00%2Frev (accessed July 4, 2018).

⁶³ Gerasimova, “Ob odnoi spetsificheskoi praktike: otzvyv na knigi v internete,” 232-234.
⁶⁴ LiveLib.ru, “Knizhnyi vyzov 2018,” <https://www.livelib.ru/challenge/2018> (accessed July 4, 2018).

⁶⁵ LiveLib.ru, “Vyzov uchastnika Ivan2K17,” <https://www.livelib.ru/challenge/2018/reader/Ivan2K17> (accessed July 5, 2018).

Similarly, BookMix.ru organizes an annual “Book Marathon” (*Knizhnyi marafon*) with more than 1,000 participants who sign up for different “distances;” the “light” distance consists of reading and reviewing 10 books, “medium” is based on a half-marathon of 21 books, “hard” of a full marathon of 42 books, while “super-hard” breaks the limits of the marathon metaphor with 50 books. Readers select books according to their own preferences within broader, predefined categories, which might include lists of “book titles consisting of one word” to “Nobel Prize winners.”⁶⁶ Though electronic texts are often accused of depriving readers of the haptic, bodily experience of touching, smelling, and flipping through a physical book, social reading networks reframe reading as challenging physical exercise. From being perceived primarily as a mental activity with potentially damaging effects on the back, neck and eyesight, reading is here virtually enchanted as a dynamic movement, which ensures that the reader remains of sound mind and body. The social reading sites gamify reading with ranks and scores and add the rhetoric of quantified self-improvement and self-tracking systems of the health industry. Whereas mass sports of the Soviet period aimed to become high culture by ‘cultivating’ the worker’s body and mind, and was correspondingly conceptualized as “physical culture” (*fizkul’tura*), today the social reading sites turn such value hierarchies upside down, transforming the culture of the book (*kul’tura knigi*) into a “physical culture of the book” (*fizkul’tura knigi*).⁶⁷

However, to dismiss social reading sites as mere exploitation-ware, to regard the ‘gamification’ of reading as another confirmation of the self-optimizing reader’s lamentable fate within global performance society, or to mourn the dehumanization of reading in the hamster wheels of the Web 2.0, will still not explain why users retain their profiles.⁶⁸ Leaving aside the critical concerns of the humanities and turning to the pragmatic side of the game industry itself, we might consider the simple but vital observation of game designer Bernard DeKoven: “We play games because they are fun. When they stop being fun, we stop playing them.”⁶⁹

6. VOLUNTEER OFFLINE READER INITIATIVES

Dividing the registered users of the platform into three main groups, BookMix.ru estimates that approximately the upper 10% are “active users”

66 M. I. Nova, “Pravila Knizhnogo marafona 2018,” <https://bookmix.ru/groups/view-topic.php?id=6355> (accessed July 4, 2018).

67 On the origin of the Soviet concept of *fizkul’tura*, see S. Grant, “The *Fizkul’tura* Generation: Modernizing Lifestyles in Early Soviet Russia,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 37 (2010), 142–165.

68 For a further discussion of the negatively loaded term “gamification,” see Walz, Deterding, “An Introduction to the Gameful World,” 6.

69 B. DeKoven, “Position Statement. Monkey Brains and Fraction Bingo: In Defense of Fun,” in Walz, Deterding (eds.), *The Gameful World*, 297–299.

who frequently visit the site, organize groups, exchange recommendations with other users, write reviews and comments, etc. The middle group consists of “passive” users (approximately 40%), who maintain a personalized bookshelf, read recommendations, but do not publish reviews themselves, while up to 50% of the users are inactive profiles, “dead souls” (*mertvye души*) who once registered but soon left (presumably because it stopped being fun).⁷⁰ Despite virtual points and other incentive systems, users of social reading sites are far from loyal readers, as reflected in the high fluctuation of the platforms’ use. In addition, a high degree of social mobility characterizes the main age group of users, the 20-40 year olds, and rather than being a fixed habit, the prioritization of reading may change with a new life or work situation.

To the editors of the social reading sites, the competitions are important because they are capable of turning the “passive” bookshelf-keepers into “active” review writers. Tananaeva explains the popularity of reading competitions not in neo-liberal terms but by their socializing and psychological functions. For newly registered users, who are inexperienced in writing reviews and not necessarily highly educated, it is, in fact, intimidating to publish one’s opinion about a literary work to an unknown community. The game rules of the competition welcome and include newcomers into the social group and provide a clear, instructive framework for the users to overcome their initial shyness.⁷¹

While Goodreads’ algorithms are capable of generating refined, tailored recommendations to individual user profiles based on accumulated big data, the Russian sites do not yet have the necessary investments and data volume to work at this level of precision. “I have ranked 19 books within the genres of fantasy and children’s literature, and the recommendation service handed out Viktoriia Tokareva. How can that be?” journalist Roman Kaplin wonders in a 2016 interview with the LiveLib.ru managers.⁷² Hence, the users of Russian social reading sites rely more on the direct recommendations by their friends and group communities than on computer-generated dysfunctions. At LiveLib.ru, the most active users are promoted to “favorite librarians,” “LiveLib experts” and “coryphaei,” and receive extended “rights” to edit permanent content, such as author descriptions. The site administration is largely maintained by a general staff (*genshtab*) of volunteer (i.e. unpaid) representatives, who also answer questions and guide inexperienced users. At LiveLib.ru’s annual “live” event, hundreds of devoted members, from all over Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus gather offline in Moscow to attend the award ceremony of the best users.⁷³

70 Interview with A. Tananaeva, June 9, 2018.

71 Ibid.

72 Kaplin, “Bol’shie dannye v pomoshch’ chitateliyam,” 2016, 68.

73 See reportage from annual LiveLib event, O. Barabash, “Nachinaetsia obsuzhdenie, nachinaetsia zhizn’,” *God literatury*, April 4, 2015. <https://godliteratury.ru/events-post/>

Such active users also organize offline meetings at a local level. In several Russian cities, user-organized monthly book club meetings take place, and readers agree online which book to discuss and then meet up in parks or other public places.⁷⁴ Another example, which gives the now extinct person-to-person concept of pen pals a second life, is LiveLib.ru's "Book Surprise" (*Knizhnyi siurpriz*) campaigns, during which members sign up and, seemingly altruistically, send each other anonymous book gifts, packed with small surprises such as tea and chocolate. The campaigns are not limited to the Russian postal system, since users have also initiated the gift exchange of Russian and foreign language books with Russian language readers living abroad.⁷⁵ Furthermore, users organize gatherings without any reading or book-related purpose but rather for sheer pleasure.⁷⁶ Indeed, the virtual books of the social reading sites seem to yield real friends and real fun.

7. A DISENCHANTED ANARCHY OF READING AND MUTUAL AID

Like all global social reading networks, the Russian platforms establish an enchanting world with a virtual plentitude of books. However, at the same time, a distinctive feature of the Russian social reading groups is that they also provide fora for disenchanting readers, and partly frame themselves as micronetworks that compensate for weaknesses in contemporary Russian macronetworks of public libraries and physical bookstores.⁷⁷

In 2012, LiveLib.ru and the book branch journal *Book Review* (*Knizhnoe obozrenie*) conducted a non-representative reader survey of around 2,000 respondents (who were primarily among the younger users) of the social reading site, asking the non-neutral question: "According to your opinion, which books are lacking in the Russian book market? And in the shops of your city?" and presented the results under the header "Deficit books" (*Defitsitnye knigi*), thus alluding to and reintroducing the Soviet shortage economy discourse of "book hunger."⁷⁸ Both the highly suggestive question of the 'survey' and readers' responses seemed to imply that supply/demand equilibrium does not exist in the contemporary Russian book market, and contributed to a (re-)establishing of an online reader community based on a

nachinaetsya-obsuzhdenie-nachinaetsya-zh (accessed July 6, 2018).

74 LiveLib.ru, "Blizhaishe meropriiatiia," <https://www.livelib.ru/events> (accessed July 5, 2018).

75 LiveLib.ru, "Mezhdunarodnyi knizhnyi siurpriz," <https://www.livelib.ru/game/ks-world> (accessed July 5, 2018).

76 Interview with A. Tananaeva, June 9, 2018.

77 See MENZEL, "From Print to Pixel," in the present volume.

78 O. Kostiuikova, "Nepравil'nyi chitatel': Kakikh knig nam ne khvataet?" and "Defitsitnye knigi," *Knizhnoe obozrenie* 384, 16 (2012), 1, and 4; 13. On restricted book access and intentional shortage in the late Soviet era, see MENZEL "From Print to Pixel" in the present volume.

common perception of a contemporary book shortage. Hence, only 24% of respondents indicated that they found bookstores sufficiently equipped and only lacked space on their bookshelf. In general, readers found the bookstore chains to be well stocked with bestsellers and newly published fiction books, but respondents—especially students—complained about the difficulties of obtaining textbooks and academic literature, foreign language books in the original and quality translations, and high-quality editions of the classics.⁷⁹ Thus, today’s perceived “deficit” completely inverts the Soviet supply situation, which was characterized by a shortage of popular fiction and a surplus of annotated academic editions of certain classics.

Not surprisingly, the current supply situation appeared most difficult in the peripheries. Maria from Irkutsk, under the username “VolchicA19,” wrote: “Earlier (1999-2005) there were many small shops in our city with a good selection and pleasant prices. Then the small shops closed, large bookstore chains appeared ... and after all this, it became terrible to shop there [given the] wild prices and mediocre selection...”⁸⁰ Another user from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii in the Far East, a pedagogue named Anastasiia who posted under the username “kamrakurs,” complained: “In our place, books are very expensive, presumably due to their cost of transportation; because of this, I don’t buy anything any longer, but use library services and read electronic books.”⁸¹ In response to this ‘deficit’ situation, which has worsened since the 2014-2016 Russian financial crisis, the niche of ‘book crossing’ services on the social reading sites has grown increasingly popular, enabling readers to offer and request secondhand books online and subsequently exchange these physical print books, either face-to-face or via the postal system.⁸² In the LiveLib group “Help to the Libraries” (*Pomoshch’ bibliotekam*), village librarians post calls about the catastrophic lack of books (especially children’s books and schoolbooks) to cover the changing syllabi, and active users respond by sending voluntary book donations.⁸³ Not merely a case of exploitative, digital prosumer capitalism, which sustains the system of an increasingly monopolized and centralized book industry, the Russian social reading networks thus also support mutual aid among reader ‘anarchists,’ who insist on book redistribution despite the challenging conditions of an ailing, unfunded public library system. When local libraries are no longer capable of providing their readers with books, readers provide the libraries with books.

However, readers’ rights are far from secure when they must rely on fluctuating social reading networks as virtual replacements for physical public

79 Kostiukova, “Defitsitnye knigi” (2012), 1 and 4.

80 *Ibid.*, 4.

81 *Ibid.*, 13.

82 Kaplin, “Bol’shie dannye v pomoshch’ chitateliyam,” 2016, 70.

83 LiveLib.ru, “Pomoshch’ bibliotekam” <https://www.livelib.ru/group/425-pomosch-bibliotekam> (accessed July 6, 2018).

and commercial reading channels, as has been demonstrated by the case of online recommendation service Imhonet.ru, a site maintained by Aleksandr Dolgin, a professor of economics and author of a book on economic symbolic exchange.⁸⁴ After its founding in 2007, Imhonet (its name derived from the English acronym of the phrase “In My Humble Opinion”) quickly expanded from book reviews to a broad recommendation system of films, TV, theater plays, concerts, and the like, and experienced an explosive growth in the number of registered users. However, because of increasing difficulties with a stricter anti-piracy legislation and users’ illegal sharing of film and book downloads, as well as investor problems, Dolgin decided to close down Imhonet in 2017. Overnight, users lost their entire personal archives, such as book and film collections, personal annotations, and reading logs, all without warning or any protection against copyright infringement of readers’ user-generated data.⁸⁵

8. THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL READING AND REBUS

Social reading sites take advantage of books that evoke a maximum of emotions, positive or negative, without requiring longer, rational arguments, because such books prompt the highest number of instant user responses. On the negative end of the emotional spectrum, communities of disenfranchised readers gather around the reader-generated version of the bad literary review subgenre. The amateur ethos of ‘everyone can write,’ supported by reader reviews written ‘from below,’ rather than by authoritative, educated literary critics, contains a certain anti-establishment protest potential that frequently leaps into direct ‘book-bullying,’ or online mocking of unpopular reviewers. The tone of the unedited, largely self-organized and self-sustained groups may represent a challenge to the administrators of social reading sites, who sometimes experience users deleting or exporting their profiles due to personal harassment.⁸⁶ Furthermore, educated literary critics like Vladimir Bolotin, a graduate from Maxim Gorky Literary Institute who wrote extensively on and about social reading networks under the user nickname “eretik” before embarking on a professional writing career at the newspaper *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (*The Russian Newspaper*), has experimented with a negative Russian version of the Twitter-based reading log I’ve Read @ivread. In 2011 Bolotin launched the short-lived (and now blocked)

84 A. Dolgin, *Ekonomika simvolicheskogo obmena* (Moscow, 2006). Now inactive domain: <http://imhonet.ru/> (accessed July 6, 2018).

85 See hundreds of users’ frustrated comments on the news article, A. Khabibrakhimov, “Vladelets rekomendatel’nogo servisa ‘Imhonet’ zakryl proekt iz-za resheniia sosredotochit’sia na drugom biznese,” *vc.ru*, April 28, 2017. <https://vc.ru/23539-imhonet-theend> (accessed July 6, 2018). For a general discussion of the copyright question of reader-generated content, see Wassom, “Navigating the Rights and Risks in Social Reading,” 215–219.

86 Interview with A. Tananaeva, June 9, 2018.

Fucktionbooks.ru. If readers did not like a book, he invited them to send it to hell by addressing it, symbolically, to this simple Twitter-based ‘service’.⁸⁷

After ten years of existence, the traditional Russian social reading networks must now compete with the popularity of Twitter and the new generation of social media mobile apps for sharing photos and videos via instant messaging. The change of device formats from laptop and iPad to cell phone screens requires a further compression of content. Hence, while the length of an average reader review at BookMix.ru is currently around 500 characters, it is likely to decrease in the future, when readers stop using the keyboard-operating ten-finger system, and shift to their thumbs.

Especially Instagram (which mimics the old-fashioned media of *telegrams* and the square format of *instant* camera Polaroid photos for the sake of retro fashion) enjoys a high popularity among Russian users. It is far more successful than the app Snapchat, which by default deletes text exchanges and has recently experienced problems with Roskomnadzor, who requires the service to store user data for at least six months.⁸⁸ In 2015, a popular and active user, with the nickname “Apel’sinka,” declared her entire literary life had moved to Instagram, and BookMix.ru thus had to respond to users’ changed reading mode patterns and virtual migration by launching BookMix.ru at Instagram.⁸⁹ Here, BookMix.ru posts picture series, for example, of modern, user-friendly glass cathedrals of library architecture from metropolises around the world. Such library buildings that take up a function as public prestige objects abroad prompt envious comments by Russian readers and users, whose government prioritizes investments in soccer stadiums and Olympic game infrastructure instead.⁹⁰ BookMix.ru has also invented new rebus puzzles that ask users to decode four linked Instagram picture fragments, each of which hinting at the title, protagonists, or content of a famous literary work.⁹¹ An illustrative example is the remediation of Nikolai Gogol’s nineteenth-century novel *Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi*), which requires

87 V. Bolotin, (@eretik), “Knizhnye seti Runeta: Vzgliad pol’zovatelia,” *Geektimes.ru*, September 24, 2008. <https://geektimes.ru/post/40589>. Idem, “Fucktionbooks.ru - samoe mesto dlia plokhikh knig,” *Piat’ stranits o...*, January 27, 2011. <https://5pages.net/2011/01/27/fucktionbooks-ru/>. See also, <https://twitter.com/ivread> (accessed July 6, 2018). A similar site for negative book reviews was vtopku.ru. I thank the anonymous reviewer for this information. The domain is now closed or blocked, but its title, referring to the internet slang expression “into the oven” (“ftopku,” i.e. alluding to the crematoria of the Nazi extermination camps), suggests the level and style of review argumentation.

88 Roskomnadzor, “Roskomnadzor vnes kompaniiu-vladel’tsa prilozheniia Snapchat v reestr organizatorov rasprostraneniia informatsii,” press release from August 10, 2017, (accessed July 6, 2018).

89 Apel’sinka, “Bukmiskchane v Instagram,” September 26, 2015, <https://bookmix.ru/blogs/note.phtml?id=14481>; #bukmiks at Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/букмик/?hl=en> (accessed July 6, 2018).

90 #bukmiks at Instagram, “Kak vam takaia biblioteka?” <https://www.instagram.com/p/BkzbWg1A1eA/?hl=en&tagged=букмик> (accessed July 6, 2018).

91 Interview with A. Tananaeva, June 9, 2018.

slow and lengthy reading, into four compact pictures for instant sharing.⁹² This does not per se confirm a reduction of reading, but rather an addition of meaning to the work, and testifies to the preservation of the classics in Russian reading culture as a common point of reference. Without such a framework the game would not work.

CONCLUSION: ENCHANTED AND DISENCHANTED READING

As demonstrated in the two cases of BookMix.ru and LiveLib.ru, Russian social reading networks seek to re-enchant reading by establishing user communities around a self-generative but simulated plenitude of books. They appeal to individual users' pleasure and competitive instincts by linking the non-contemplative and non-solitary reading experience to friendship and fun, the digestion of luxury food, and domestic entertainment, but also gamified self-optimization and self-education. While ideally bringing readers together, social reading platforms also—not surprisingly—exploit prosumers by targeting these user-deliverers of unpaid reviews, site activity, and content with tailored social media marketing from investors and advertisement partners of the publishing industry. That being said, Russian social reading networks are not as advanced in harvesting readers' user data for marketing purposes as major international players such as Amazon.com and Goodreads.com.

Instead, Russian social reading networks prove successful in reaching reader segments whose demands public libraries and governmental reading campaigns do not address. Rather than a broad reading public, the social reading networks form reading groups of 'like-minded' individuals, especially female users in their twenties to forties. However, these groups do not depart from reality when browsing the social reading sites' enchanting virtual book shopping windows; rather, they demonstrate a disenchanting awareness of the limitations of actual access to or possession of physical print books beyond the seemingly transparent but impenetrable world of illuminated screen reading. Hence, in their 'deficit book' survey, LiveLib.ru actively framed a critical discussion among its users about which books were missing. Several of the social reading sites facilitate 'self-help' groups, enabling readers to exchange second hand books or redistribute books by voluntary, solidary donations to unfunded local libraries in the remote areas. These digital compensation strategies for the unavailability or inaccessibility of books in public libraries and private bookstores continue a long Russian tradition of sharing reading materials through self-organized networks. Likewise, Russian social reading networks testify to a continued interest in and social valuation of reading among population segments whose reading demands are not met by the Russian book market and public library system today.

⁹² #bukmiks at Instagram, Gogol's *Mertvye dushi* https://www.instagram.com/p/BhYcwiAA_WI/?hl=da&tagged=букмикс (accessed July 6, 2018).

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