

Research Report

Vera and Donald Blinken OSA

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Analysis of state formation and transformation, usually views culture as a product of the state. This line of argument is typically present in the discussion of dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, in which the subjectivity of actors within the fields of cultural production is minimized as compared to the democratic systems, where expressions of visions and interpretations is not sanctioned by the state and the quality of cultural products is decided - to a large extent - by the way of tastes and preferences of the public. The basic premise of my research is rooted in the proposition that culture - even in totalitarian states - is not simply a dependent variable. The relations between culture and power are dialectical, and the interactions within the networks that transgress the two spheres continuously produce new meanings and give rise to new social structures even in the political regimes where creative imaginations are formally bound by a state ideology. My empirical site for the exploration of these relationships is Soviet literary space, from roughly the 20th Congress of the Communist Party (known mostly as the beginning of "Thaw") to the fall of the Soviet Union. More specifically, I am interested in the formal and informal interactions within the Soviet literary space in organizations, literary journals, and political events.

The focus of my research is on literary journals (also known as "thick journals") as they constituted the key literary institution connecting the political/ideological agenda of the state with the public. These journals were subscription based and therefore demanded for the consistency of publications, which, in turn, gave their editors degrees of freedom from strict preemptive censorship. Literary journals could not be a site of the direct opposition to the state, but their organizational structure and purpose allowed for the confrontation and debate on political, ideological, literary, and personal basis.

Soviet literary journals cannot be studied in isolation. The journals and their participants represent a constellation of actors embedded in a multiplicity of institutions, formal and informal, and iterations among them continuously allow for unforeseen and unintended changes in the Soviet ideological context and distribution of power. So during my work at OSA I paid particular attention to the documents that were informative at the levels of production of literature, the work of the Party around cultural production, production of literature outside of censorship, and individual-level data.

The work at the Vera and Donald Blinken OSA was mostly explorative; and the process of data collection - iterative. The geographical span (Western, Soviet, and local (e.g. RFE, RL) origins) and temporal continuity of the collection allowed me to triangulate the data on specific historical events as a dynamic historical process; or put in sociological terms, construct a scaffold for the meta-narrative of interactions events.

1 Literary Field Documents

Documents on the state policies, politics, and rhetorics around the definitions, goals, and objectives of the Soviet literature. The holdings that I was interested in contained data related to the issues of Soviet **copyright** and **propaganda**. I paid particular attention to the documents that dealt with censorship of the works of fiction, formulations of state ideology in culture (socialist realism), and propaganda in literature.

- **300-80-1, Box: 1126** [1955-1961]¹

Keywords: censorship, Soviet press

- A report from "American Committee of Liberation from Bolshevism," following a visit of the Soviet press delegation (1955)
- A report from the *Institute for the Study of the History and Culture of the USSR* on the internal structure and function of *Glavlit*, main Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the press under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (1955)
- Radio Free Europe/Munich report: Background Information on censorship in the USSR (1961)

- **300-80-1, Box: 1127** [1965-1993]

Keywords: censorship

- internal RFE/RL reports on the state of censorship in the Soviet Union
- scholarly articles and book reviews on the subject of Soviet censorship
- a copy of an open letter to the 4th Union Congress of the Soviet Writers, demanding to cease state censorship
- publications in Soviet and foreign press about censorship and commentaries to them

- **300-120-3, Box: 52** [1970s]

Keywords: freedom of speech, mass media, freedom of information, ideology

- A large collection of clippings from Soviet, American, British press on the subject of the freedom of speech (1970s)
- several Soviet scholarly articles on the issues of mass media and freedom of speech (1970s)
- several RFE/RL reports on the tightening of the control over information (1970s)
- op-eds and articles on the role of writer in the modern world, broadly defined (1970s)
- reports and press clippings on the confrontations of writers with state censorship (1980s)
- reports and press clippings on alternative sources of information and aesopian language in literature
- discussions and debates around the end of censorship and *glasnost* (1980s)

¹The date ranges are specified only for the files I worked with, and don't necessarily reflect all the documents in the box.

2 Party Apparatus Documents

Documents and files on the structure and interactions within the Party apparatus and literary and media organizations

- **300-5-150, Box: 57** [1980 - 1990]

Keywords: secretariat, CPSU, politburo

Personalities: Yegor Ligachev, Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Gorbachev, Lev Zaikov

- Soviet and Western news clippings, analyzing the shifts in power in the Kremlin and the work of the secretariat [late 1970s and through 1980s]
- a detailed analysis of the work of the Secretariat by Alexander Rahl (RFE-RL) [November, 1984]
- news clippings, analyzing the ties between the literary and media establishments and the party apparatus

3 Samizdat Holdings

Within the Samizdat holdings I was particularly interested in documents that dealt with the use of technology in producing manuscripts, mechanisms of transfer of various underground writings from the East to the West, and analysis of samizdat as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

- **300-85-12, Box: 258**

Keywords: samizdat, propaganda

- samizdat on samizdat: samizdat documents on the history, meaning, and future of samizdat; RFE-RL documents primarily. Among the authors are Dovlatov and Darr [mostly 1980s]
- Clippings from the Soviet newspapers on "Western propaganda," and arrests of individuals involved in the reproduction of "ideologically harmful" and "anti-Soviet" materials from the West (specifically, audio tapes, typewritten copies and photographs of works of literature) [early 1980s]

- **300-85-48, Box: 40**

Keywords: samizdat, Soviet Laws

- correspondence about samizdat periodical *Veche* [1971]
- a samizdat piece by S. Grigoryants on the new Soviet Laws on the freedom of association [1988]

4 Biographical Files

The most informative for my research agenda were Biographical Files, as these files contained materials on the individuals of interest (literary functionaries, editors, and writers). RFE-RL reports by the staff members provided analytical points of view relative to the time they were written. Large number of press clippings provided a comprehensive guide not only on the career tracks of people, but also on the evolution of the public discourse about them and their works. Through the analysis of these materials I was able to, at the very least, sketch out the motivations and strategies the actors used to come to power and maintain - or loose - it across decades.

Aleksandr Tvardovdky

a major figure in the Soviet liberal literary establishment and chief editor of *Novy Mir*, 1950-1954 and then again between 1958 and 1970. He was removed from his post in 1954 after a number of publications in *NM* that caused discontent among the members of the Central Committee of the CPSU. When Tvardovsky returned to *NM*, in 1958, the publication began to unite liberal-democratic intelligentsia on its pages and in editorial offices. The content of *Novy Mir*'s publications on the whole reflected the anti-Stalinist tendencies that emerged in Soviet society in 1956 after the CPSU Central Committee's resolution "On overcoming the personality cult and its consequences" was issued. A significant event was the printing on the pages of the November 1962 issue Alexander Solzhenitsyn's story "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," with a foreword by Tvardovsky.

After Khrushchev's resignation in 1964, the new party leadership began to interfere more often in the editorial policy of *Novy Mir*, and censorship increased. In early 1970, Alexander Tvardovsky was forced to leave the post of editor-in-chief.

- **300-80-7, Box: 327** [1955-1971]
- **300-80-7, Box: 328** [1971-1992]

Konstantin Simonov

a major Soviet literary figure. Generally acknowledged as a talented writer, editor, and literary functionary dedicated to the Soviet state. He did, however, experienced periods of confrontation of with the state, and was the chief editor of the liberal between 1954 and 1958 *Novy Mir*.

- **300-80-7, Box: 300** [1959-1988]

Valentin Kataev

a popular writer, mostly known for children's and young adult works; between 1955 and 1961 he was editor-in-chief of hugely popular literary journal for young adults *Yunost*; had a reputation of a career opportunist and conformist, but in his memoirs published in the 1980s provided the more genuine accounts of his time, according to the Western and Soviet critics.

- **300-85-13, Box: 137** [1975 - 1987]
- **300-80-7, Box: 158**

Vsevolod Kochetov

a representative of the right-wing politics in culture and literature; writer and editor of the conservative literary journal *Oktyabr* [1961 - 1973]. Later on he would be known as neo-Stalinist, chauvinist, and obscurantist, especially among the representatives of the liberal wing. In November 1973, he took his own life.

The file on Kochetov contains various materials: press clippings, reviews of his literary works, commentaries about his political stances on matters that involve publications of literary works, and interviews.

- **300-80-7, Box: 176** [1958- 1987]

Vadim Kozhevnikov

One of the most politically involved literary functionaries. He was an ardent defender of administrative interference into literature, and often publicly stressed the importance of the "necessity to raise new generation of writers." He mostly belonged to the moderately conservative wing, and was often criticized after his death for his conformity to the official political line. He was a secretary of the Writers Union [1970 - 1984], and editor-in-chief of literary journal *Znamya* [1949 - 1984].

- **300-80-7, Box: 165** [1965 - 1985, but mostly 1970s]

Alexei Surkov

A well-known poet (belonged to the circle of "war poets"), editor of literary journal *Druzhba Narodov* [1958 - 1960] that specialized on translations of national literatures, editor-in-chief of popular magazine *Ogonyok* [1945-1953], literary critic, and high-profile nomenklatura figure known for his role in the prosecution of Boris Pasternak. He was one of the most outspoken proponents of strict adherence to the Party guidance in literature. Surkov was the head of the Writers' Union in 1953-1959, and toed mostly the conservative line.

- **300-80-7, Box: 323**

Sergey Mikhalkov

A prolific Soviet poet, satirist, script-writer and long-standing literary functionary. He was the head of the Moscow section of the Writer's Union [1970 - 1990]. Mostly known for his vocally oppositional views of liberally-oriented writers and editors, and for being a stalwart. At the same time, multiple sources and recollections, conclude that he structured his professional life mostly on predictions of desires of the high level party apparatchiks. His professional life motto reportedly was: "You need to know what preferences they have 'upstairs'."

- **300-80-7, Box: 222** [1972 - 1991]

Konstantin Fedin

One of the Soviet "program" novelists; in his lifetime he was a recognized classic of socialist realism. He was the 1st Secretary of the Board [1959 - 1971] and Chairman of the Board [1971 - 1977] of the Union of Writers of the Soviet Union. Fedin maintained a position almost in the direct center between the "conformists" and those generally labelled as dissidents.

- **300-80-7, Box: 342** [1959 - 1977]

Boris Polevoy

As a writer Polevoy was known for his book *Story of a Real Man* [1947]. He was involved in party politics and as a member of various literary organizations; and was an editor of the popular literary journal for young adults *Yunost* [1961 - 1981]. Polevoy was mostly centrist and is known for his siding with the writers, but never at the expense of his journal or administrative posts.

- **300-80-7, Box: 260** [1959 - 1977]