

# The Art of Criticism? Criticism as Art!

Natalia Ivanova

The study of Russian-Soviet and post-Soviet literary criticism in the second half of the twentieth century (henceforth denoted in the text as RLC) has been largely based on the chronological principle.

By way of introduction, I will begin with a brief overview of the RLC phenomenon—its origins, fundamental characteristics, and processes of change.

The first part, “Criticism is Literary Journals,” explores the role of literary criticism during the first period of de-Stalinization (1954-1964), which became known as “the thaw” after the publication of Ilia Erenburg’s well-known novel. During this “thawing” period (following Stalin’s death and before the ousting of Khrushchev), the literary-critical struggle did not inspire aesthetic passions so much as it directed social thought and gave rise to informal parties whose organs became literary-artistic and socio-political periodicals. Critical methodology grew out of a renewed sense of life and social freedom within the relatively liberal framework of the regime. In the words of Anna Akhmatova, these were “vegetarian” times—as opposed to the bloodthirsty years of Stalin’s rule.

The second part, “Criticism is the Critics,” deals with the art of criticism during the years of “stagnation” (from the second half of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s). Under these harsh conditions (compared with the preceding epoch), limited freedoms and censorship sparked the dissident movement; the struggle of ideas and aesthetics was forced underground. The journalistic “parties,” which included editors and

editorial collectives, disappeared with the onset of these changes, and the leading critics expressed themselves more individually than collectively under such altered circumstances.

In the period which lasted from the beginning of “perestroika” and “glasnost” to the abolition of censorship, literary criticism readily took on its former social and ideological responsibilities, focusing on the struggle to define the direction of Russia’s development—not only in terms of literature, but also of society, and

**(Page 2 missing)**

a relatively young critic in the pages of a new periodical.<sup>1</sup> “Criticism belongs in the servants’ quarters,” declared the critic and novelist Viktor Erofeev not so long ago.<sup>2</sup> Between the two extremes of public response—ecstatic and disparaging—criticism thrived, and as many observers remarked, its defining tendency soon became an inability to mind its own business and stay in its own place.

The question arises: Was Gorbachev’s “perestroika” solely responsible for this peculiarity in Russian criticism—that is, not merely discussing its obvious subject (literature) but using it as a *vehicle* to discuss politics and society, man and the state? “Having a well-defined position... is no less important than talent.”<sup>3</sup> This was said during a period when criticism had resumed its position as a leader of public consciousness; said not impetuously, but with reason and conviction, by one of the leading critics writing for the renowned journal *Novyi Mir*. Yet was there ever (or is there) a time when criticism became concerned with art for its own sake, and became art in itself? In fact, one could view that peculiarly public and publicity-oriented nature of Russian criticism as its own form of art.

We know that Stalin enjoyed—in his own way, of course—literature and film. He read thick literary journals, kept up with new developments, forced his own taste on everyone through his rigid control of the decisions made by the Commission for Government Literary Awards.<sup>4</sup> In Stalin’s era, criticism was a means to control the literary element, the Union of Soviet Writers. One might view the establishment of a Central Committee on Literature (lasting through the 1930s and ‘40s) as an exquisitely cunning literary-critical device used to monitor and control literary development. At the core of Stalin’s conception of literary criticism lay condemnation, sentencing, and the carrying out of that sentence: criticism became not only director and watchdog, but also executioner (for example, A. A. Zhdanov, who edited Stalin’s texts and delivered the unfortunately famous address “On the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*” in 1946; or his henchmen, such as V. Ermilov, author of numerous rabid diatribes against true, genuine literature).

Bolshevik ideology made effective use of RLC’s inherent peculiarities. The Bolshevik newspapers *Iskra* [The Spark], *Pravda* [Truth], and *Zvezda* [The Star] continually printed articles about literature—generally railing against the decadents and eulogizing realism and folk spirit. In 1905, Lenin published one of the seminal articles directing the fate of Russia’s literary future, entitled “Party Organization and Party Literature.” Lenin worked out the principle of Party spirit, which augmented the principles of class and nationality espoused by Democratic-Revolutionary critics, in a series of articles on Leo Tolstoy (1910) and a piece called “In Memory of Herzen” (1912). Here Lenin presents literature as the “little screw” holding together the common aims of the proletariat. Lenin’s conception of literature as a “mirror for the revolution,” a

utilitarian class- and Party-based approach to the grace and complexity of written language, was heavily laden with ideology. Thus, literature became nationalized. Literary organizations, unions, and various other groups became responsible for constructing an aesthetic dogma, for molding the consciousness of the new reading masses, and generally for the “engineering of souls” (in Stalin’s words).

While RLC has undoubtedly benefited liberation movements in numerous ways, it also deserves its fair share of blame for the establishment of the totalitarian system. It has two faces, like any other literary form or genre under a totalitarian regime. On the one hand it propagandized and helped to realize the urge for freedom; on the other, it resembled something of a totalitarian sect. “The Russian mind’s merciless sense of reason” (a phrase which one of the founders of “organic criticism,” Apollon Grigoriev, used to explain the thought of radical democrat Vissarion Belinsky), the all-powerful and hence not only blameless, but also deceptive mental logic that characterized RLC, proved so irresistible to the government that it began to be used—in a narrow, “correct” form—to weld together the political and social spheres. Lenin writes articles on Leo Tolstoy, Trotsky publishes a book called *Literature and Revolution*, Stalin (through his henchmen) graces RLC with a new genre of dictatorial Postulates, Khrushchev “encourages” the young artistic intelligentsia. Brezhnev proudly participated in the ideological molding of public consciousness by writing his memoirs (over which an entire brigade of ghostwriters toiled for years); Andropov committed the even more unpardonable sin of writing poetry. It is no wonder that the speedy decline of Soviet rule followed closely on their heels.

The structure of Russia's thick monthly literary journals, with their leading role in literary criticism, carried on into Soviet times. The first Soviet literary journals (such as *Krasnaia Nov* [Red News], which began publication in 1921, and *Novyi Mir* [New World], started in 1925) were initially produced and edited by literary critics, who aimed to unify and focus the power of the new Soviet literature. However, an emerging tone of militant anti-elitism soon prevailed, fueled by the postulates of vulgar sociological methodology. In his article "I Am Afraid" (1921), Evgenii Zamiatin gave a pessimistic prognosis for Russian literature if it were robbed of spiritual autonomy. The defense of creative and spiritual freedom in art, and aesthetic formal analysis (such as that of B. Eichenbaum, I. Tynianov, V. Shklovsky, "the Serapion brothers," and the "Pereval" group) were officially subjected to stern condemnation. From the Central Committee resolution passed on June 18, 1925 on "Party Politics in the Realm of Creative Literature," to the 1929 campaign, the ideological pressure placed on independent literature mounted steadily. After a period of robust development in all manner of literary schools of thought, intellectual tendencies, languages, and styles, in every type of literary discipline including criticism, Soviet literature came under the ever-more-watchful eye of the censors and began to be controlled first by the Proletarian Writers' Confederation, and after 1932, by the Union of Soviet Writers. Criticism's roles, positions, and functions were severely limited and regimented. The literary monthlies lost the principal journalistic function that they had exercised since the nineteenth century—the formation of ideas and aesthetics.

The first new stirrings of this function appeared in *Novyi Mir* in the beginning of the 1950s, after Stalin's death and at a point when criticism's authority was at its nadir thanks to years of serving as an ideological lackey. This reawakening began with the publication of Vladimir Pomerantsev's trailblazing literary-critical article entitled "On Honesty in Literature,"<sup>5</sup> which marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Russian literary criticism, its rebirth as a socio-cultural expression of the country's spirit and tendencies.

This new criticism had to rebuild itself in the wake of Stalinist criticism, which had been dogmatic, enforced the clichés and stereotypes of socio-realism, kept a close eye on those who failed to conform to ideological demands, and vehemently upheld the edifying schemas of Soviet literary orthodoxy. Official criticism had dictated its will to writers and sternly reprimanded those who strayed from the path. After Stalin's death in March of 1953, a leading article in the *Literaturnaia Gazeta* [Literary Gazette] exhorted writers to:

"...depict our nation's great deeds, its heroic battles for Communism, with dignity, truth, and genuine skill, in all creative endeavors. This is the crucial challenge for all Soviet literature. The Party and the people expect meaningful artistic production from Soviet writers, which brings to life the Soviet man, the builder of Communism, in all his richness of spirit and moral strength."<sup>6</sup>

Yet the time had come when a single, all-encompassing opinion could be accompanied, if not by a discussion of its merits, then at least by something similar:

"A writer most assuredly has the right to respond to criticism and defend the truth of his words... Creative discussion and an active interchange among literary tastes and opinions is necessary to our artistic development."<sup>7</sup>

The historical significance of Pomerantsev's article lay in its debunking of the monolithic myth, the myth of Soviet literature's uniform worldview and aesthetics. Suddenly, differences of opinion were discovered, public positions clarified. Various conflicts came to light—conflicts between "fathers" and "sons," "innovators" and "conservatives," "Stalinists" and "neo-Stalinists." Literary criticism brought these conflicts out into the open arena of public discussion. Battles fought on the literary

battlefield illuminated the paths of ideological dissemination in society. Literary criticism began to remark upon the harmful effects of preset patterns, on the simplified schemas that had taken the place of real life (which literature was supposed to reflect), on the discrepancies between the superheroes portrayed in literature and real people, on “artificiality” and “varnish,” on writers as the faceless “producers of the standard,” turning out “stupefyingly homogenous,” turgid” books:

“Everything in them is a stereotype: characters, plot, beginnings, endings. These aren’t books, they’re twins—read one or two, and you know exactly what the third will be like. All of them proclaim the same trite commonplaces. One might imagine that they were produced on a conveyor belt rather than by a human being. Having read one, you’ll be merely indifferent, but after the third you will begin to feel insulted.”<sup>8</sup>

Pomeriantsev constructs his article in a novel manner for the time, not only in terms of content but also in terms of style; he writes boldly, with a strong sense of paradox and humor, freeing himself from the obligatory, ponderous journalistic rhetoric, modernizing his style by weaving vivid images of reality into the text, and even establishing a dialogue with an imaginary “producer of the standard,” whose defensive voice shifts the blame for this standard onto official Soviet criticism: “I was trying to write with the critics in mind. They convinced me that they had your [the reader’s – *N. I.*] confidence, and, acting in the name of the readers, they declared themselves infallible, while I was charged with all kinds of faults.” Through the “outside” voice of this imaginary writer, the “producer of standards,” Pomeriantsev answered his own critics (“There were never any thought-provoking, discussion-producing reviews written about me. There were only indictments”) and reported the true state of affairs in the editorial business (“...the only thing left to do was to come riding into the office on a tractor,” that is, to compose “‘proletarian’ novels”) and in the Union of Soviet Writers (“endless speeches”<sup>9</sup>). This energetic piece, which mocked the pompous, self-righteous literary establishment,

expressed a hope for positive communication in the literary world, as well as in Soviet society at large.

The literary politics of *Novyi Mir* were shaped by Alexander Tvardovsky, with the help of several critics working in the editorial department: Vladimir Lakshin, Igor Vinogradov, and Iuri Burtin. Having set literary *truth* as its precondition and goal, *Novyi Mir* became a legalized center for liberal-democratic thought. Throughout the 1950s and '60s it was not so much the prose published in *Novyi Mir* (including documentary pieces) as the criticism that defended democratic values, working under complicated semi-censorious circumstances to bring to light the aggressively conservative ideology which was largely propounded by the officious journal *Oktiabr* [October].

During the “thaw,” literary journals existed in a state of relative pluralism resembling that of the 1920s, before the Central Committee resolution of 1932 on “The Restructuring of Literary-Artistic Organizations” and the establishment of socialist realism as the only officially acceptable style. Within the framework of Khrushchev’s relative liberalism, *Novyi Mir* stood for the betterment of state and society; after Khrushchev’s removal from power and the tightening of censorship, it began to oppose the regime outright—within a very limited legal framework, of course. The orthodox *Oktiabr* also protested the official line of the Central Committee’s Committee of Soviet Writers, but from the opposite, conservative viewpoint. The journal *Iunost* [Youth] channeled the fresh energies of the new generation of anti-Stalinists, “children of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress,” dubbed *shestidesiatniki* [lit. “of the Sixties” – trans.] by one of the younger critics, Stanislav Rassadin. This journal preached “socialism with a human face,” and printed prose, poetry, and criticism which were open to creative experimentation. The



editors of *Molodaia Gvardia* [The Young Guard] were united by a concern for the specifics of Russian nationhood, which by the beginning of the 1970s had mutated into chauvinism.

Criticism in *Novyi Mir* brought back to life and advanced the liberal tradition of “realistic criticism,” yet at the same time preserved a foundation of materialist philosophy and aesthetics which often hearkened back to the old socio-class-based, utilitarian approach to art and reflected not only a tactic of survival in ideologically complex circumstances but also a certain organic viewpoint uniting the journal’s publishers.<sup>11</sup>

Although criticism in *Novyi Mir* was primarily content-driven, it also began to develop as an art.

This type of criticism was accurately characterized by one of its creators as “a complex intermediate literary form, allowing the possibility of exploring reality using the materials of literature, in the public arena.”<sup>12</sup> This method allowed criticism, which compared literature to life, to use the criterion of truth as an aesthetic one. Thus *Novyi Mir*’s criticism was based in critical, rather than socialist, realism. The journal tirelessly insisted on its loyalty to its own traditions. In his article “On the Occasion of Our Anniversary” (written for the fortieth anniversary issue), Tvardovsky outlined the ideological/aesthetic credo of his publication:

“The journal gives preferential attention to works which reflect reality truthfully and with verisimilitude; are simple in form, but in no way simplistic; shun formalistic pretentiousness; are closer to the classical tradition, but do not avoid innovative forms of expression if they are warranted by the content.”<sup>13</sup>

The makeup of the department of literary criticism and the selection of manuscripts for publication unwaveringly followed the literary-critical program which was systematically implemented by state colleagues and the journal’s writers. *Novyi Mir*’s articles, surveys, and reviews, as well as the special addresses “From the Editors” which

were printed in every tenth issue from 1958 to 1965, constantly discussed the principles of literature (and, in a larger sense, the tendencies of the reality reflected in it) which was based on democratic values. The journal also took on the battle against what it dubbed “grayness”—not only aesthetically helpless, but also deceptive, and hence harmful (in *Novyi Mir*’s conception) writing:

“We attribute special significance to the struggle against grayness, rote production, churning out shoddy, superficial nonsense. Such writing is not merely useless, but actually causes direct harm by upholding the illusion that, in the complex and difficult business of literature, one can get by with no work, no mental effort.”<sup>14</sup>

The prevailing genre of criticism in *Novyi Mir*, which can be traced back to “realist” criticism, involved a predictable article with the inevitable reminder about democratic values, with a detailed retelling of plot, deconstruction of characters, and invariable comparisons between them and the surrounding reality. One might consider Vladimir Lakshin’s article on Solzhenitsyn’s “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich”<sup>15</sup> as a classic of this genre. Like other articles of this sort, Lakshin’s piece is characterized by its serious tone, focused argument, a preliminary defense of the analyzed text against possible attack, a sharpened awareness of the reader, the gradual expansion of the thesis, the inevitable moralistic conclusions, and the subjugation of artistic analysis to the challenges of moral-philosophical enlightenment.

Vladimir Iakovlevich Lakshin made his *Novyi Mir* debut in 1954 (No. 4), joined the staff as a writer and critic in 1958, and in 1962 became a member of the editorial board for the departments of criticism and bibliography. From 1967 onward, Lakshin was essentially the journal’s co-editor-in-chief—a highly representative position. In his article on Solzhenitsyn, Lakshin attempted to attribute not only democratic, but also collectivist, Soviet traits to the character of Shukhov:

“Shukhov accepts this labor solidarity as a natural fact, as well as an inveterate sense of collectivism—yet another paradox. It is as though all these various qualities necessary for a free socialist society were inherent to human relationships...”

Thus the article distorts the essence of Solzhenitsyn’s thought, though it succeeded in defending him from attack by the Soviet orthodoxy, who had paradoxically but correctly identified the author’s anti-Soviet bent. Lakshin simultaneously advocates democratic values and tries to wash communist ideology free of the Stalinist taint. He uses a rich historical-literary background; the appeal to the classical legacy; rejection of artificial norms; the pathos of enlightenment. Among the problematic works published by Lakshin in *Novyi Mir*, the most significant (apart from the piece on Solzhenitsyn’s novella) were “The Reader, the Writer, the Critic” (No. 4, 1965; No. 8, 1966); “Journalistic Pathways” (No. 8, 1967); “Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*” (No. 6, 1968); and “Sowing and Harvest” (No. 9, 1968). Lakshin’s style was frequently personal and emotional, juxtaposing life and literature with his own experience; for example, in the article on Solzhenitsyn, he writes:

“I don’t know about anyone else, but as I read this book my mind kept returning to the question, What was I doing, how was I living at the time? I remember how I walked to my classes at the university along Mokhovaia in the mornings, snow crunching under my feet. I remember passing the Kremlin and how I loved seeing its beautiful, inaccessible walls, bleached by the frost... I was plowing my way mindlessly through the mandatory class on “Stalin’s Teachings on Language”...

But how could I not know about Ivan Shukhov?

How did I not feel that on this frosty morning he was being led outside the camp gates by a convoy and dogs, along with thousands of other prisoners, to a snowy field...? How could I live so peacefully, so contentedly back then?”

Without overstepping the boundaries of the journal’s official platform, Lakshin managed to propound the principles of artistic truth, democracy, and social progress. This

is the source of both his success (in terms of widening the horizons of the public's consciousness) and of his essentially limited scope of thought.

Another famous *Novyi Mir* critic, Igor Ivanovich Vinogradov, made his journalistic debut in 1958, and served as a staff writer from that point onward. In 1965 he became a member of the editorial board and headed the prose department; in 1967 he was chosen as the director of the criticism department. Vinogradov's literary criticism published in *Novyi Mir* can be divided into two categories: 1) pieces which recalled the ideology of the nineteenth-century revolutionary democrats, emphasizing the pathos of building "socialism with a human face" (for instance, "On the Modern Hero" [1961, No. 9] and "Regarding a Certain Eternal Theme" [1962, No. 8]); 2) existential pieces, which were marked by philosophical soul-searching, contemplation of the principles that shaped the world and the meaning of man's existence ("Lermontov's Philosophical Novel" [1964, No. 10]; "Existentialism Faces the Tribunal of History" [1968, No. 8]; and "The Master's Legacy" ["Questions of Literature," 1968]). Vinogradov's earlier work is characterized by its tone of civic pathos; its defense of revolutionary-democratic ideals; a didactic approach to public enlightenment; a polemical contempt for grayness and oversimplification; antidogmatism; the search for truth; and insistence on the true, fundamental values of a socialist society. Thus, in his first *Novyi Mir* article, he writes:

"The best minds foresaw the historical inevitability of one of man's greatest challenges—liberation from the murky entanglements of the religious worldview, which is incompatible with the only approach truly worthy of man's dignity: the scientific worldview.

In our time the loftiest and most righteous principle shaping society's worldview can only be the humanistic principle, which sees the good of mankind as the highest goal and the highest measure of all social values."<sup>16</sup>

During the second half of his career at *Novyi Mir*, Vinogradov evolved in the direction of intense spiritual seeking and contemplation—a direction which, if not

directly opposed to the civic and political goals championed by the journal, at least evidenced the critic's increasingly independent, individualized conception of the world. "Real," publicly-oriented criticism, which constantly compared literary phenomena with life and saddled the text with social implications, gave way to philosophical criticism in Vinogradov's work:

"...man is more than a convergence of circumstances. And he is more than mere existence. As a living creature he can struggle against fulfilling his moral duty with all his might, and he will find countless supporters—in the thirst for life, in habit; but as a spiritual creature, possessed of moral consciousness, he is always responsible to his conscience, and always faces it alone."<sup>17</sup>

Vinogradov's articles expanded the scope of criticism in *Novyi Mir* and

challenged the journalistic canon of "problem-essays" which had become entrenched over the years. It comes as no surprise that Vinogradov's later, post-journalistic writings were collected in an anthology with a precise and expressive subtitle which accurately reflected the evolution of the author's thought: "The Spiritual Seekings of Russian Criticism" (Moscow, 1987).

The most diverse genre in *Novyi Mir*'s criticism was the book review. Among the classics one might mention Iuri Burtin's reviews, which displayed the author's characteristically precise choice of subject, applied analytic skill, stern and authoritative tone, the actualization of civic problems against the backdrop of a literary work, and the exploration of society's socio-economic structure and spiritual condition. Iuri Grigorievich Burtin became a permanent staff writer at *Novyi Mir* in 1959, and joined the publicity department in 1967. Later, during the "perestroika" years, Burtin defined his method of "real" criticism as "public research." Many of his pieces for *Novyi Mir* focused on the problems of rural life. But he did not merely use the village as a model to study the life of the entire nation; he had a lively interest in various aspects of social life, and in his

reviews of specialized books—on sociology, economics, legal and political issues—he analyzed and criticized the Soviet regime. Thanks to his careful selection of books, Burtin had a wealth of factual material at his disposal and managed to challenge and broaden the reader’s mind by juxtaposing facts and focusing on real, serious matters. By directing the thoughtful reader’s attention to the hypocrisy of official propaganda and giving straightforward instructions on how to read this or that book, Burtin created vivid essays, giving life to political problems and arming the careful reader with facts and arguments. From his naïve pieces of the late 1950s, in which he (like his colleagues Lakshin and Vinogradov) expressed a commonly delineated mode of thinking, Burtin evolved during the following decade and came to a profound understanding of the processes operating in society. Burtin moved toward a sober consideration of the reasons for Russia’s economic decline (the death knoll tolled by collectivization) and the possibilities for economic growth (legal support of private property):

“A love of the land and peasant labor... the feeling of ownership is, doubtlessly, one of the most basic and defining aspects of the village’s social psychology. These are natural, healthy feelings; without them it is practically impossible to farm successfully. Without them, plainly speaking, there is no peasant. At best, there is only an honest, obedient, ‘materially invested,’ etc., ‘farm laborer.’”<sup>18</sup>

**(page 14 missing)**

to protect the writer whose text they were interpreting from attacks made by officious, reactionary critics. That is, they had to follow the writer’s thought through to the end and then surpass it, yet at the same time conceal the true extent and direction of that thought. Their task was to leave hints which could be decoded by the intelligent reader without saying anything outright. In recent times, the critic Stanislav Rassadin explained this complicated problem, which he had often faced himself:

“The critic’s professional responsibility is to say... well, if not more than what was said by the novelist or poet, then at least to clarify and expand upon their thought. And we were constantly stuck in this quandary, when clarifying the thought of Bykov or Iskander would mean to denounce them, with all the foolishness of honesty...

The most well-known article of the Tvardovsky era, Lakshin’s “Ivan Denisovich: His Friends and Enemies”—could it have gone so far as to reveal completely Solzhenitsyn’s thought and his anguish? The inevitable and seriously respected role of the critical review was to protect a great work of art, to surround it with provisos and apparent reservations, give it some padding, to disarm the lightning-quick informers who were ready to pounce at a moment’s notice.”<sup>20</sup>

The stylistic peculiarities of criticism in *Novyi Mir* were tied to its characteristic

methods of doublespeak: direct speech (open and precise formulations) and the widespread use of Aesopian language (allusions, hints, comparisons, historical parallels).

Both methods were directed at two different audiences: the first included readers who were being guided and enlightened by the critic (hence the importance of logical progression and well-planned, flawless argumentation); the second was made up of readers-as-friends, readers-as-equals, sympathetic and intelligent readers who knew how to read between the lines (*sapienti sat*, for the intelligent it’s enough: many reviews of sociological, historical, and philosophical books were written with this principle in mind).<sup>21</sup>

The codes and genres used by *Novyi Mir*’s critics in those years all served a common purpose: an understanding of the political situation; the reawakening of civic activity; and the encouragement of democratic values among readers. “A ray of light in a dark kingdom,” *Novyi Mir*’s literary criticism modernized the aesthetics of the genre as well. Nonetheless, this “art form” aimed itself not toward art, but toward society.

It is hard to overestimate the role that *Novyi Mir*’s literary criticism played in the 1960s. The criticism published in such journals was not only the key organizing element of the whole literary world—it also stimulated and directed the flow of social thought, bolstered readers’ hopes for democracy, inspired civic activity, encouraged taste and

ethical behavior, and increased the number of thoughtful, questioning readers. The reactionary “letter from eleven [writers]” in the journal *Ogoniok* [Little Light] (No. 30, 1969, p. 27), which attacked *Novyi Mir*, was no accident. It was elicited in large part by *Novyi Mir*’s literary criticism, which irked and insulted the retrograde faction and led them to accuse *Novyi Mir* of anti-patriotism. This letter brought about the dissolution of *Novyi Mir*’s editorial staff; at the beginning of 1970 Alexander Tvardovsky was forced to step down, and the critics Lakshin, Vinogradov, and Burtin followed soon after. Thus ended an entire epoch, not only in the life of a literary journal but also in the life of Russian criticism in Soviet times.

### Criticism is the Critics<sup>22</sup>

By the beginning of the 1970s, despite the fact that *Novyi Mir*’s division of literary criticism had been disarmed and stripped of its leadership, the progress of literary criticism (indeed, the very art of criticism) had become unstoppable. The effort to destroy Tvardovsky’s publication had been successful, but *Novyi Mir*’s staff writers, including the literary critics, remained active. Some continued to publish their work in the “new” *Novyi Mir*, while others went over to *Druzhba Narodov* [Friendship Among Nations], *Nash Sovremennik* [Our Contemporary], and the journal *Moskva*. By this point the direction taken by literary criticism was no longer determined by a specific journal’s policies; more and more, the critic himself became responsible for his views, independently of the previous editorial units. Perhaps for the first time in several decades, critics found themselves faced with choosing their own personal direction and genres.



Each succeeded—or failed—in his own way, but one could blame nothing but the circumstances of the times, and oneself.<sup>23</sup> The heady period when *Novyi Mir*, *Iunost*, and *Molodaia Gvardia* held sway, a time of euphoria and struggle, was replaced by the grim sobriety of individual survival under new, harsher historical circumstances.<sup>24</sup> Hence the urge felt by some critics to make radical changes in their style and subject matter—a departure from modernism, since modernity had become so hard to talk about, even in the most indirect terms. In the course of a few years, Igor Zolotusky wrote a popular biography of Gogol<sup>25</sup>; Lev Aninsky immersed himself in the study of Leskov’s work<sup>26</sup>; Vladimir Turbin turned to Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol<sup>27</sup>; and Rassadin began to examine Sokhovo-Kobylin.<sup>28</sup> Russian classics supplanted modernity as the subject of literary criticism. Active critics during this period were remarkable for their free-essay approach to their subject, which distinguished their work both from the socio-realist “biographies” and “surveys of literary achievement,” and scholarly studies. The escape from modernity to the classics was often characterized by meticulous, text-based research—a method favored by Marietta Chudakova. The classics, which had been manipulated and distorted in the 1940s and ‘50s to suggest a precursor and progenitor of socio-realism, came back into their own.

This retreat into the past often seemed like the only practical response to a situation in which even the cautious, relative freedom of the 1960s appeared impossibly remote.

And yet in the 1970s and early 1980s, individual works of criticism dealing with contemporary literature formed and entrenched the reputations of those critics who, one might say, had a constant practice—those who actively put out articles and reviews in

*Literaturnaia Gazeta*, in “thick” literary journals, in the journal *Voprosy Literaturnykh* [Questions of Literature], and in *Literaturnoe Obozrenie* [Literary Survey], a journal formed in 1972. The sheer volume of literary-critical articles and reviews continued to grow, but critics’ influence on social consciousness underwent a paradoxical turnaround: the readers’ trust in critical opinion dropped sharply.

The style of critical writing changed as well. As the period of rote ideological journalism ended, criticism became centered around thematic essays and surveys. Professionalism, not politics, determined an article’s worth. Most analysis, including social analysis, was replaced by plot overview and detailed commentary. Reviews lost any personal flavor, and their authors began to seem interchangeable. The field of criticism was now open to hack writers with varying degrees of literacy, fulfilling editorial assignments. The pages of journals became clogged with trite, expressionless word-mongering on such artificial subjects as “Can Literature Be Publicized?”, “Heroes of Our Time,” “How Intellectual is the Intellectual?”, and so on.

Against this bleak background, a few individual critics stand out by developing their own personal styles of writing. This includes choice of subject matter (books, artistic problems as well as ideological ones), analytic methods, language, etc. The greatest achievement of the critics of the 1970s was their hard-won freedom of opinion, at times even freedom of judgment (which included designating books as “gray” or “secretarial”), the right to argue an opposing viewpoint, and even to mock the so-called “categorical” writers.

One of the brightest minds in this dull period, Igor Dedkov, chose “rural” and “war” fiction as his subject, analyzing it from the perspective of a contemporary urban

citizen who had never fought, and who was therefore free of the militant patriotism and other ideological trappings of the war generation.

Dedkov placed literature within an ethical framework, seeking qualities such as honesty, integrity, and persistence. In many ways, the new critics inherited *Novyi Mir*'s legacy (the influence of the "real" criticism of the 1960s extended well into the '90s). Literature's social responsibility dominated Dedkov's work and informed not only his ethical framework, but his critical methods as well. Yet at the same time, this position limited his possibilities, since his normative criteria would not allow him to understand and accept the work of up-and-coming writers who had transcended the boundaries of social problematics—Vladimir Makanin, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, Anatolii Kim. As a matter of principle, though, Dedkov clung to the past, to "his" literature—social realists such as Adamovich, Semin, and Trifonov.<sup>29</sup>

Lev Anninsky was a critic who evolved independently of the general flow, having never been attached to any of the strident journals of the 1960s. His creative and personal focus was the freedom of choice; much of his writing centered around his own quest to "find himself. Essentially, Anninsky did not care what or whom he wrote about. His lack of formal structure, confessional tone, and vivid imagery all underscored that the art of criticism was more important to Anninsky than its practical goals. This was the source both of his achievements (control over the development of his own literary career, which allowed him to survive as a critic under any circumstances, regardless of the general degree of censorship) and his shortcomings (lack of discrimination—to the point of publishing articles in the ultra-nationalist newspaper *Zavtra* [Tomorrow]; lack of precise literary reference points; and repetitiveness).

Another critic of the same order, Vladimir Turbin, also attempted a unique approach to literature. His paradoxical juxtapositions on the aesthetic “boundary lines” between traditional Russian classics (which he interpreted as freely and originally as one might interpret contemporary works) and contemporary literature (which he analyzed from the viewpoint of sociological poetics) guaranteed Turbin a distinctive place in the world of literary criticism. Bakhtin, Tynianov, Eichenbaum, and Vygotsky all influenced his approach to modern literature; Turbin made none of the customary distinctions between “high” and “low” art—his decisive criterion was innovation. Turbin rejected the ritualized schemas of Soviet literary criticism,<sup>30</sup> and invented his own unique genre back in the 1960s with “Turbin Comments.”<sup>31</sup> In this column, which appeared regularly in the journal *Molodaia Gvardia*, Turbin declared that the critic’s mode of thinking, his originality, was more important than the subject on which he mused.

Other individualists included critics of different generations, both of the “old school” and the “new.” They had no journal or tribunal of their own, and were thus free to choose any outlet for their work (bearing in mind, of course, the boundaries enforced by censorship and various editors): *Novyi Mir*’s liberal successor, *Druzhba Narodov*,<sup>32</sup> and its heir (at least according to its editor-in-chief, Sergei Vikulov), *Nash Sovremennik*<sup>33</sup>; the journal *Oktiabr*, which was rather successfully exchanging its ultra-conservative Soviet image for a cautious liberalism<sup>34</sup>; and *Molodaia Gvardia*, which continued to develop its communal/patriotic position.

Yet one cannot say that literary criticism in the 1970s was without ideological conflict. This conflict did not ripen out in the officially sanctioned open--thus the exposure of “internal” conflict in the literary world during a discussion entitled “Classics

and We” was so shocking. In it, the “patriots” (Vadim Kozhinov, Iuri Seleznev, Peter Palievsky) battled it out nose to nose with the “liberals” (Benedikt Sarnov, Lazar Lazarev, and others).<sup>35</sup>

During the period of “stagnation,” literary criticism attracted the particular attention of the Central Committee of Soviet Writers, which decreed in 1972 to establish a special literary-critical journal. Indeed, criticism of the *Novyi Mir* variety, “real” criticism, encountered substantial difficulties and one might say that its development (or at least its influence) had practically ceased. Yet this period also witnessed the formation of a new literary-critical approach, one which differed significantly from both “real” criticism and the officious sort. All of this does not preclude the accuracy of Viktor Astafiev’s ironic statement about these wishy-washy opportunists, that “like waiters or hairdressers, they switched over to the private service of 'aristocratic' literary figures.”<sup>36</sup> I only wanted to draw attention to those positive events and additions which occurred in the world of literary criticism during the 1970s. However, when it comes to reality, in which the old mixed with the new, rigid officiousness with attempts to gain artistic independence, I bring to bear the words of Marietta Chudakova:

“Editors of the ‘70s! Do you remember us? No, I haven’t forgiven you. I still can’t forgive you those chunks of our lives that we left on editors’ desks, in exchange not for life or liberty, not to feed your children... but for playground awards and prizes, to maintain your somehow convenient positions.”<sup>37</sup>

On a personal note: Although at the beginning of the ‘70s I was working in the poetry department of *Znamia* [The Banner], my experience in publishing reviews was limited to a piece on an anthology of Voznesensky’s poetry; after the department of criticism slammed the “negative” half of the text, my desire to write and publish was dampened for a long time. The critic Andrei Nemzer, who worked for *Literaturnoe Obozrenie* from 1983 to 1990, testifies:

“By that period’s standards, it was quite an intelligent and liberal journal with an editorial board that was by no means reactionary. Yet so many depressing, shameful memories about this ‘decent’ work still haunt me: cajoling the obstinate (that is to say, the best, boldest, smartest) authors; maneuvering back and forth between them and the management; double-edged editorial conclusions and ‘precautionary’ insertions; the unspoken impossibility of rejecting certain kinds of terrible writers; rewriting half-literate articles written by various quasi-academics and ‘full’ secretaries of the Union of Writers; acknowledged cynics commissioning reviews of ‘important’ books (important? to whom? to me? as if I didn’t know their real worth!); inventing ‘Soviet’ topics for articles that were supposed to counterbalance the normal ones; polite approval of ‘necessary material’ at last-minute ‘emergency’ meetings...”<sup>38</sup>

And yet criticism did acquire new, practical traits and parameters:

--rejection of its “servile” role;

--refusal to cater to opportunists;

--indifference to pseudo-ideological problematics of any kind,

dismissing ideological banalities;

--a change in language--with the vocabulary reserves of ‘60s

criticism now taboo, critics gleaned inspiration from the criticism of the first third of the century;

--textual analysis for its own sake, with particular attention devoted

to poetry;

--acknowledgment of achievement in the literary world (naturally, everyone’s opportunities differed);

--pursuit of variety among ones own texts, including variety among

genres (exploring the genres that had overcome expressive homogeny, replicas, “round table” discussions, “two different opinions” on the same book; the search for individual genres--“autographed portraits,” “marginalia,” etc.), the quest for one’s own style, developing personal methods of imagery (metaphorization, chopped-up phrases, rhetorical tactics, compositional variety, etc.).

The normative vocabulary of 1970s criticism excluded “Soviet” (ideologically tainted) words such as “party,” “socialist,” and so forth. Sabotage--critics’ refusal to kowtow to literary officials--was more than just a rejection of authority; it was a refusal to serve mass expectations and mass taste. All of these processes led to the complication

of criticism itself, and of literary-critical texts. Criticism had emancipated itself, openly declaring its right to choose--books, personalities, problems to address. Criticism refuted the necessity of simple conclusions and the inevitability of condemnation. Finally, criticism insisted on its artistic relevance.

### Criticism is War

The period known as "perestroika" allowed for new and, I daresay, unprecedented opportunities for literary criticism, which had confidently assumed an avant-garde position in society's mind during the years 1986 to 1990. Once again, criticism became not just an interpreter, but an arbiter of social consciousness, instrumental in its democratization--obviously, through literature, which was used in turn as another indispensable instrument of social change. During this exceptional period, when a mighty flow of texts which had been banned for over seventy years flooded the literary market, criticism was able to return, at least partially, to the tenets of Tvardovsky-era "real" criticism, to a renaissance of lengthy "problem-centered" articles, in which the annotated retelling and interpretation of the now "liberated" text was inevitably tied to a heated debate about social problems. Once again, criticism aimed to expand the parameters of socially and historically meaningful information, translating complicated works of poetry and prose into the language of "real life." For a period of several remarkable years, civic society became a never-ending literary conference, discussing in turn various texts as they became available to the public--everything from *White Clothing* and *Children of the Arbat* to *Doctor Zhivago* and *The GULAG Archipelago*, from *The Faculty of Necessary*

*Things to Requiem*, from *Life and Destiny* to *The Serene Cemetery*. Every stage, from publication to public discussion in print, was another step toward the total abolition of censorship.

Literary study and criticism were, on the one hand, a cultural vanguard (an article written by the first secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers, V. Karpov, on the topic of destiny in Gumiliev's poetry, appeared in the anniversary edition of *Ogoniok*, with a portrait of Lenin on the cover) and on the other, undermined their own professional hopes and goals by simplifying and adapting their language to the level of the masses. The key characteristic of this period's criticism became accessibility, a pathos with which anyone could "identify"; this came at the cost of a certain hard-won and, shall we say, refined language style which had developed during the 1970s. The critic himself suddenly rose to the rank of public hero, becoming something of a Prometheus figure who brought fire to a people chilled to the bone by their ignorance. The populace responded with enthusiasm; the critics published in thick literary journals such as *Ogoniok* and *Moskovskie Novosti* [Moscow News] awoke to find themselves famous.

Polemics became the leading genre of literary criticism. The conflict arose between two groups of publications and their writers, many of whom were prominent ideological critics: *Ogoniok* (its faction also included *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Znamia*, *Druzhiba Narodov*, and a recent recruit, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*) and *Nash Sovremennik* (along with *Moskovskii Literator*, *Molodaia Gvardia*, and *Den* [Day]). Back during the "Classics and We" discussion mentioned in the last section, Iuri Seleznev, a critic from the patriots' ranks, formulated a thesis that the third World War had already started, and that its nature was ideological:



The literary critic fought on two fronts simultaneously: *for* the reader (for social opinion) and *against* the opponent (if not outright enemy). The image of the "enemy of the people" was shaped by the efforts of "patriotic" critics who published their opinions in the informational press, which was generally comprised of liberal and democratic critics.<sup>40</sup>

During the "perestroika" era, criticism continued on its trans-national path: once more it returned to what was called "real" criticism, appealing to social problems through literature, and once more it fulfilled the role of a social tribune and director of civic opinion<sup>41</sup>; once again it split, figuratively, into "Westernizing" and "Slavophile" factions.

The so-called "literary civil war" took place over the course of several years (1987-1991) and ended (in the words of critic Sergei Chupinin) in "a state of apartheid, two cultures forcibly coexisting, yet fundamentally separate, within a single national culture."<sup>42</sup> Literature, which found itself in a state of constant battle (war?) and literary criticism, which fueled this ideological battle (war?) became perhaps the most prestigious intellectual undertakings. Criticism began to attract people who had never read a word of it in their entire lives.

"The ferocity of today's literary-critical debates rests on the clash not only of literary opinions on the novels of Rybakov and Dudintsev, the works of Bulgakov, Mandelstam, and Pasternak, but more so on the clash between opinions about the nation's destiny, its cultural heritage, its history; it is a clash of values. And the course of this polemic will determine, to some degree, the kind of society we are to become."<sup>43</sup>

Critics were not only consulted as authoritative judges and experts, they were also venerated as authorities on life itself.<sup>44</sup> They were expected to be the vanguard, pushing the boundaries of possibility further and further. In truth, during this period critics tended to view books more as catalysts for sweeping and heated debate about life than as objects for aesthetic analysis. "Pluralism" became a fashionable term in literary-critical circles--this meant that critics could hold varying opinions both on life and on literature.

Nonetheless, as early as 1989, the literary-critical almanac *Vzgliad* [The View], which was published by Sovetskii Pisatel, (its very appearance attested to criticism's growing importance--it was one of only three issues), featured an editorial which put "pluralism" in its place and defined its boundaries:

"Naturally, as we embrace new literary phenomena and tendencies, a pluralism of opinion arises; however, this does not preclude our common goal to preserve and enrich our intellectual and spiritual values."<sup>45</sup>

All these references to a "socialist pluralism of opinion," sanctioned by high Party authority, resulted in the dilution of *Vzgliad*'s liberalism by the participation of some none-too-radical critics from the national-patriotic ranks.

And yet, the defining, fundamental characteristic of the "perestroika" period was ultimately not this notorious pluralism but struggle. Most critics (both liberal and conservative) spent several years in this unremitting struggle, while a smaller group--or rather, a few loners--stood back to comment upon the situation, trying to keep themselves "above the fray": "Since when in the history of Russia's great, magnificent literature has it become acceptable to defend artistic truth with the help of pinpricks?"<sup>46</sup> This rhetorical

question hung in the turbulent air between journalistic skirmishes, which proved quite a bit more intense and provoking than “pinpricks.”

Those critics who tried to remain “above the fray” sought parallels in the nineteenth-century tradition, juxtaposing the journalistic examples of Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dobroliubov (“on whose essays we currently base our study of literary history”) with the work of Kireevsky, Khomiakov, Shevyrev, and Aksakov (“whom we don’t study--but might”). However, the experience of previous years had already shown that it was precisely polemics and bitter literary-critical struggle, rather than harmonious cooperation, that determined the direction taken by literary criticism in the nineteenth century; similarly, this struggle also determined the course of social thought at the end of the ‘80s and beginning of the ‘90s in the twentieth. The literary struggle had very real political underpinnings--it is no accident that in 1988, for example, a nationalist-patriot critic writing for *Nash Sovremennik* accused me personally of nothing more nor less than “selling out my Homeland” after my presentation at a conference in Denmark.<sup>47</sup> Nor was the scandal whipped up by nationalist-patriots after *Oktiabr* published an excerpt from Abram Tertz’s *Strolls with Pushkin* anything but a fully predictable, political rather than literary, event.<sup>48</sup> The schism in the critics’ ranks was not superficial, could not easily be overcome. It splintered the Union of Writers and deepened the rifts among various writers’ groups. The fracture went far deeper than good-natured observers, who were frequently amused by the scandals, could have supposed.

The division between two battle camps, which was decreed by a political situation of undeclared civil war (an ideological war which twice flared into true civil unrest--in August of 1991 and October of 1993), could not help but to influence the artistic life of criticism. It was reduced, on the one hand, to agitprop--a strident, dogmatic, "enlightening" social commentary (witness Tatiana Ivanova's articles in *Ogoniok* and *Knizhnoe Obozrenie*) and unabashedly pedantic, edifying pamphlets (such as Benedict Sarnov's pieces in that same *Ogoniok*), and on the other hand, a polemic--both in form and in content. The propagandistic genre, characterized by an openly argumentative stance against its opponent's position, was supplanted during this period by several lighter, more dynamic variations: parodies, editorials, feuilletons, notes, commentaries, leaflets, and lampoons.<sup>49</sup> These genres can be compared to large- and small-caliber weapons. Every bullet, satire, and retort was answered by another. A critic's political position meant far more than his professional standing.

Tatiana Ivanova is a typical representative of this flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants criticism. In her sweeping literary reviews, the assessment had almost nothing to do with the actual quality of the texts mentioned and recommended (or not recommended). A black and white division between "us" (democrats) and "them" (retrogrades, "patriots," those who questioned the rightness of Gorbachev's decisions) determined her level of delight or condemnation--no subtlety was necessary. For Ivanova, literature was nothing more than a convenient platform for propaganda and the dissemination of simplistic democratic schemas. This was criticism aimed directly at the mass of readers, at the *people*--and let me reiterate that subscription rates to literary periodicals at this time were astronomical: in 1990, *Novyi Mir*'s circulation reached 2.5 million and *Znamia*'s reached

one million (back in 1987, the circulation of *Druzhba Narodov*, in conjunction with *Deti Arbata*, grew tenfold and reached 1.6 million subscribers). These brand-new subscribers (who would invariably let their subscriptions lapse after a short time) needed a simple and accessible interpretation of contemporary published works--commentary from the easily understood "common sense" viewpoint. Ivanova's sketches, which ran regularly in *Ogoniok* and later in *Knizhnoe Obozrenie*, served this purpose admirably, and earned the derision of literary-critical professionals and heavyweights. This was truly a reader-oriented, elucidating sort of criticism.

Two recent recruits from the old cadres, Benedict Sarnov and Stanislav Rassadin, played a far more complicated role in this same democratic "camp." Tatiana Ivanova was about as erudite as the average reader, differing only by expounding her half-formed ideas on paper. Stanislav Rassadin "knew" much more, but selectively chose and simplified this "knowledge" in order to reach his readers. Benedict Sarnov worked in a similar fashion, but always peppered his reviews with additional historical anecdotes and pithy stories from the lives of great writers and leaders. All in all, the group included Tatiana Ivanova, Stanislav Rassadin, Benedict Sarnov, and myself (I also published literary criticism in *Ogoniok*), as well as Vladimir Lakshin, who perked up the democratic pathos of his *Novyi Mir* years with a new enlightened patriotism, and Natalia Iliina, who also injected some *Novyi Mir* poison into the *Ogoniok* ranks (at least with regard to the literary "higher-ups"--that is, the dim-witted but successfully published members and secretaries of various commissions). These critics comprised the vanguard of literary criticism, the activists writing for a "penetrating," responsive publication which continued to shock the world of literary journalism with its commentary.

The most socially resonant pieces published during this period were mainly exposés of Stalinism in the past and its present-day heirs, denunciations of the totalitarian system and its threat to culture (but tending to shy away from literary examples). These sensational articles were written by critics who had turned themselves into social activists, such as Iurii Kariakin and Andrei Nuikin.

A staple of literary criticism became the regular publication of readers' letters, in which various works of literature were debated. Journalistic articles, reviews, and responses expressed diametrically opposed opinions on the prose of Vasilii Grossman, Vladimir Dudintsev, Anatolii Pristavkin, and Anatolii Rybakov; the plays of Mikhail Shatrov; the novels of Chingiz Aitmatov, Iurii Bondariev, and Vladimir Bely. Full-scale frontal battles, drawn-out clashes such as Igor Shafarevich's slinging match with the ideologies of "lesser nations" and "emigration" (and the consequent attacks on Shafarevich), were supplanted by local skirmishes, fueled every month, if not every week, by new sparks. (A motive was never lacking; one had only to reach out and pick up the latest issue of *Nash Sovremennik*, *Molodaia Gvardia*, or the newspaper *Den*). A great many professionals of all different calibers, from both sides of the political fence, were drawn into the mêlée; but at the same time, an entirely new type of periodical journalism was emerging and demanding literary criticism of an entirely different sort.

### Criticism is the Press

The end of litero-centrism naturally coincided with the flowering of journalism. The proliferation of new newspapers and magazines, television channels, and radio stations was reflected in diminished attention paid to books and traditional journals. As

life changed, so did literary life: to the chagrin of some and the delight of others, literature became an optional accessory to life, not its judge or prophet. The power struggle among writers ended in the loss of power. Whoever could not accept the new circumstances was firmly pushed aside into the shadows. However, those who "didn't mind" losing so ephemeral a thing as power, who had no pretensions to being arbiters of thought, whose goals were different, private, literary problems and challenges, managed to profit from the situation. Literature had become a market commodity, on a line with every other product in a consumer culture. Now it had to struggle for its audience against a new force--the power of newspapers and audiovisual media. A new battle had begun, complicated and fierce in an entirely new way. The viability of a market commodity is determined not so much by its quality as by fashion and advertising. The law of the marketplace dictates that advertising should be ubiquitous and constantly changing. Consequently, the roles of literary criticism changed as well, allowing for the emergence of two new categories—critical “couture” and the ad-man.

Once cannot claim that “real” criticism, which was inextricably linked to civic life, analyzing changes in the social fabric and keenly noting their shifts and advances, disappeared completely. This was not so. But the untimely deaths of Vladimir Lakshin and Igor Dedkov seemed to draw a boundary line between the present and an entire epoch, now gone. These critics set as their main goal a positive, guiding influence on society. By the very nature of their natural gifts and societal roles, and despite the difference in their ages, they were the movers and shakers of social consciousness, educators and preachers, simultaneously critics and ideologues.

Yet at this very moment in time, when literary criticism unexpectedly turned its gaze inward, when critics became public figures—or at least easily identifiable social entities, when practically every previously banned, clandestine work of literature became available to the public and duly commented on, with the new breed of journalism nimbly responding to events which the thick literary journals picked up only belatedly—at this moment a new kind of literary critic emerged. These critics came from the ranks of marginal publications such as the disdainfully ignored “highbrow” newspaper *Gumanitarnyi Fond* [The Humanitarian Fund], which was unified not by ideology but by virtue of its (tusovka...??). These critics suddenly appeared on the pages of the new daily and weekly newspapers, which regularly changed their skin, and even showed up on the small screen.

But the established authorities did not disappear overnight. At first, the new journalistic criticism played only a supplementary role. Critics of the literary-journal type needed a wide format, open space—they needed room to maneuver, to speak *ab ovo*, to unfold their arguments unhurriedly, to retell literary plots with meticulous commentary, to pass careful, measured judgment. The seemingly lightweight newspaper journalists did not want to be tied down to profound subtexts, graceful examples, the establishment of context, and so on. The appearance of the “new journalist” critics also coincided with a certain weariness among the older “realist” critics, who were now occupied not only with criticism, but with other forms of literary and post-literary activity.

In addition, the period of “Aesopian” language, which the “realist” critics were used to (and forced to use), had come to an end. It was not as though the realists were



simply deciphering text by means of their annotated retelling—no, their work required far more complex methods, methods which they used on text that had already been encoded by, say, Iskander or Bitov, comprehensible only to the like-minded reader. Sometimes this need to disorient the reader led to some very strange results. I don't know whether all the “muddle” surrounding Iurii Trifonov's prose was deliberate or not, but by the time of his death, nothing had been stated clearly about any aspect of his work except the most obvious “problems”—was it acceptable to write about “real life” or wasn't it, was the intelligentsia a boon or a burden, and so on. I don't know whether Iskander's writing was jumbled deliberately or not, but in terms of literary criticism, all that is left of his work is a selection of highly bland humanitarian tracts.

Poetry was one subject that this criticism had never liked. The critics discussed verse as they discussed prose—once again only in terms of the universal humanitarian dialogue. Bakhtin and Tynianov, Eichenbaum and Lydia Ginsburg, all were separate from “contemporary literature”; their spheres of influence hardly ever touched.

The question arose: Should one give up his accustomed style, then, and switch to plain speech? It was possible, of course, but more often than not this tactic revealed a paucity of new ideas, gaps in knowledge, a lack of understanding of the universal literary and literary-critical context. One must admit that few of the respected, authoritative critics of the 1960s and '70s were seamlessly integrated into the new cultural circumstances. Being of one generation, these “old-school” critics, who had independently overcome dogmatism, had under their belts not only the inspirational experience of true friendship but also the subservience bred of forced unity. Whatever a

friend wrote, the pens of supportive, like-minded critics could produce nothing but glowing praise. They protected their own, and historically speaking, dared not do otherwise. Hence, total freedom of personal thought was something that these critics only dreamed about.

The new crop of critics started out in the opposite corner. Initially, their strategy was specifically one of independence. But their assertion of personal disengagement quickly gave way to an easier path—the preliminary clearing of the field, winnowing out any naysayers, and declaring civil war along generational lines. The slogan of ideological disengagement and independence turned out to be purely decorative. Antagonism and prejudice grew excessive, along with ideology. But more about that later.

At first, literary criticism in the *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* [Independent Gazette] was marked by its openness, graceful rubrics, authentic erudition, plays on culture and logic, and the absence of pathos. Their elegant, witty style made Boris Kuzminsky's observations, Vladimir Novikov's paradoxes, and Andrei Nemzer's sketches almost musical. This newspaper seemed remarkably fresh and original—especially compared to *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, which at that time had lost face as “First Lady” and taken on the aspect of a dour, touchy spinster who had suddenly found herself aged. In all of the games, skips, tumbles, and energetic romps displayed by the new criticism, frolicking gaily in the grass, she saw ill intent—a threat to the holy shrines. *Literaturnaia Gazeta's* critics saw themselves as keepers of the flame and fiercely asserted the sacredness of literature; *Nezavisimaia Gazeta's* critics asserted nothing, believing that literature did not “owe” anything—not to the fatherland, not to the people, the Party, the state, the nation,

or tradition. This polemic was reflected in style as well as meaning: *LG* maintained the high style of reasoned deliberation; *NG* did not deliberate, but informed.

The main findings of these active newspaper critics concerned the distance between literature and literary criticism. Critics writing for *Kultura* or *NG* assuredly saw themselves on a par with the writers of literature. They sensed that writing “about literature,” according to the standards of the past, was now impossible. Moreover, as the amount of literature being written dwindled, the output of literary criticism had to increase. Criticism was coming to resemble literature more and more and at the same time emancipating itself from it. Its likeness to journalism did not embarrass critics, but inspired them.

The press transformed literary life. In seemingly no time, the new literary journalism had fostered a salon-like atmosphere—analogueous to the intelligentsia’s kitchens at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the ‘80s. While in the past, literary life had, generally speaking, been rarefied, unspoken, and exclusionary, taking place behind the walls of editorial board rooms, the Center for Writers, or literary houses, now—in the altered socioeconomic context—prohibitory boundaries crumbled, life turned inside-out, and everyday existence became open to discussion, a subject worthy of artistic depiction. Describing the various scenes and scandals played out at writers’ conferences became one of literary criticism’s new genres. Outwardly, the style of these sketches was “correct,” but essentially their tone was (*ernicheskii...???*), snobbish, and condescending.

Newspaper criticism began to see a change in its repertoire of genres. In addition to “real life” sketches of writers’ spats, there appeared airy, graceful vignettes about

literary holidays and literary presentations. Critics themselves began to perform not just in one, but in various roles: the serious analyst might don a jester's mask, the expert might turn into a tennis player, lobbing back his opponent's serve, the cultural observer could become an informant, the man of letters could be a reporter. Critics felt constricted within the bounds of their title—now they began to play with pseudonyms, even to the point of changing sexes. This criticism abandoned its role as literature's midwife. Critical judgment was hidden in the subtleties of tone, read between the lines; Aesopian language was replaced not by plain speech but by a new code, based upon metaphorical and stylistic plays, esoteric allusions which could be decoded only by the "initiated," innuendoes, polemical moves, and associations.

Such elaborate, all-encompassing games needed space to be played out in, and since frequently no more than one newspaper page was allotted for criticism, space could be gained only by changing the layout. Accordingly, the page was divided into multiple compartments—short columns, études, brief sketches, replies, observations, parodies, and straight information. The new minimalism frequently reduced articles of literary criticism to an epigrammatic summary.

The old-school liberal critics and the newcomers had very different attitudes toward their audiences. If the former addressed their articles to "society," "the readers," "the subscribers" ("the people" and "the state"), then the latter directed their work toward one another. Despite all their differences in manner and conviction, Anninsky, Rassadin, Sarnov, Lakshin, or Vinogradov would find the awareness that "no one was reading (them)" tragic. The new critics, however, saw this as a norm that elicited no emotion.

These developments coincided with a period of political crisis; disappointment and general apathy permeated society as the new “liberal-democratic” regime suffered one failure after another. And so the “neo-new” criticism (as opposed to the “old” editorial board of *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, which had merged with the newspaper *Segodnia* [Today]) became, once again, ideological in nature. This was evidenced by a whole slew of publications in a genre which, in Soviet times, had been called “the forefront” and which *NG* dubbed *carte blanche*. Here, for the first time, writers openly cut their former ties with the forces of democratization. The democrats were being exposed as laughingstocks and worse, along with those writers and critics who cooperated with (or directed) the government. The campaign of exposure reached its peak during the events of October, 1993—from that moment, newspaper criticism unequivocally chose a political (op)position and ideology.

Exacerbating the generational gap, the “neo-new” critics decided on a strategy of picking off the ‘60s liberals (all the responsibility and blame for the results of perestroika were laid at their doorstep). The critic chose a personal target and destroyed it, relentlessly and thoroughly, in print. The task was to ruin a reputation. No proof was really needed (optionally one might refer to a text here and there). However, the most important thing was to paint a portrait in which the most unsightly aspects (according to the high-minded, enlightened individuals writing for *NG*) were doggedly sought out and highlighted. The point was not literature, but everything else teeming around it. This sort of activity demanded the use of marginal genres such as “society pages,” letters to the editor, poetic epigrams, “behavioral” studies, even limericks. Any objective critical interest in the text itself vanished, to be replaced by interests of a very different sort.

Literary life gave way to a tabloid culture, and literature lost its meaning against the background of a rabid interest in the private life and behavior of this or that person; image vastly outweighed the importance of literary reputation.

All of these changes were tied to the general atmosphere in literary life, to the emergence of what might be called a trend: In the new audiovisual culture, the outward depiction of an artist's behavior became far more attractive than the results of his creative endeavor. The process, the performance, the action pushed aside the actual product. Presentation became more important than the book itself. In this environment, "neo-new" criticism turned to the (tusovochnyi steb... ???), and employed its unprincipled principles: superficial conjecture, a highly egotistical author's point of view, a lackadaisical air that carried over into cynicism.

Yet even in this situation, newspapers and magazines served as a conduit for a new type of critic, personified by Dmitri Galkovsky and his book/essay entitled *Endless Dead End*. He was above ideology. Any suspicion of partisan leanings quickly fell away from him. During the artillery battle between *Nash Sovremennik* and the liberal intelligentsia, he strategically maneuvered to be published not only in *Nash Sovremennik* and *Moskva*, but also in *Novyi Mir*. Heaping derision on those who fawned over him, Galkovsky was interviewed by the journal *Kontinent* and promptly became its editor-in-chief. His style, conceptualizations, and energy could not be denied. Most important, though, he embodied the kind of total critic who fought against the whole system, a system perpetuated by various, at times opposing, factions—Soviet and anti-Soviet, "left-wing" and modernizing. Needless to say, this totality had its own negative charm. This

was a truly “underground” critic, though not in the popularized sense of the word. This was an independent, unhappy, neurotic writer who wrote about his neuroses with utter frankness and finally overcame them in print, before the astonished eyes of readers unaccustomed to such public soul-baring. Especially since it was, at least partially, playful. Galkovsky found not only literature, but life itself to be full of pretense; he immediately assumed the mantle of the orphan, the outcast. Through criticism, Galkovsky created his entire outlook on life—and on literature as its primary embodiment, “bearing the brunt” of reality. Hence the global ambition, hence the revision to which he subjected literature after it had denigrated and rejected him for so long. Of course, this ambition bespoke a dependency—that is, a lack of freedom; yet Galkovsky had his own sort of freedom—freedom from a generation or a group, everything that restricted both the 1960s critics and the so-called underground. Galkovsky was a loner, the bastard son of Russian literature, now demanding his inheritance. Pathos separated Galkovsky from other “new” critics. His self-abnegation was coupled with great pride, and it was precisely this pride that finally placed him outside the common framework of print and literature. Galkovsky was insulted totally, now angry at everyone across the board. At this point he began his “samizdat”—the journal *Razbityi Kompas* [The Broken Compass] and the book *Endless Dead End* were both published independently.

Compared to Galkovsky, the other “new” critics seem to be of an entirely different breed and temperament. What Galkovsky depicts as fate (however comical it might appear to some), critics such as *NG*’s staff writer Efim Liampart present as parody. Galkovsky’s negative charm is turned into petty nihilism; his painful exploration of his place in the world becomes a trifling spat over space in a communal kitchen; jealousy

becomes envy; sarcasm (which Galkovsky internalized only with great difficulty) is shown as common rudeness. Ultimately, *NG*'s rejection of Galkovsky was no accident; the "underground man" was replaced by a collective Smerdiakov. Collective, herdlike—hence the moniker "wandering dog." "Bad" manners were elevated to almost a cult-like status. Any misfortune was hailed with satisfaction, exhilaration, joy; good fortune, on the other hand, immediately had to be besmirched. Against such a revolting background, the "new" critics of *NG* stood out in white robes as the sole directors of social ethics and morality, as well as leading experts in aesthetics.

Curiously, the almost universal negativity of this sort of criticism rarely touched the older generations. On the contrary, they were treated with marked piety. A few personalities were even venerated as cult figures—for example, Vladimir Lakshin, who made an ideological shift toward "enlightened patriotism" at the end of his life. This is telling of *NG*'s supremely ideological bent—obviously, Lakshin was not lionized for the aesthetics of his traditional, realist literary criticism.

Liberal ideology remained the key target; everyone complicit in it, in whatever way, was subject to ostracism. However, "new" criticism's weak spot was not so much its pugnacious ideology as the critics' shaky knowledge of literature and lack of professionalism, supported only by superficial sound-bites from the Soviet literary history. In this context, only *Segodnia*'s department of literary criticism stood out for its sophistication and polemical sharpness. It had an entire arsenal at its disposal: erudition, irony, literary abundance. Quality plus quantity.



In terms of prolific writing, few literary observers could compare with the indefatigable literary news commentator Andrei Nemzer. Practically none of the at least somewhat remarkable publications of the period escaped his liberal appraisal, which frequently digressed into lengthy asides, peppered with references to the “above-mentioned.” This studious chronicler at *Segodnia* worked bibliographically, never letting an opportunity slip by. If a reader moves from one of Nemzer’s reviews to another, without ever immersing himself in the actual text being reviewed, he is left with a feeling of deep satisfaction at the ever-growing volume of Russian literature. However, there is also an aftertaste: after such reading, it is hard to shake the sense of wasted effort, which has left you with neither a greater understanding of the text under review (textual information is watery, if elegantly stated) nor insight into reviewer’s personality, which is an odd mixture of literary delight and philosophical ennui. Artistic pathos was another entrenched quality of *Segodnia*’s Arts page, along with an unspoken, wistful yearning for high creativity—the legacy of previous generations of critics, whose texts were invariably embellished with elaborate imagery.<sup>50</sup>

“Light” magazine criticism played a historically positive role as a gadfly, easily mastering and even perfecting the “thick” literary journals’ methods and spurring the latter to widen their repertoire of genres. It became achingly apparent that criticism needed a more entertaining style, and if the quantity and quality of actual ideas suffered as a result, then it was only because colloquialism had been deployed inappropriately and indiscriminately.

The further “divisions” in contemporary Russian media (partitions, separations, etc.), the emergence of new, so-called “at-a-glance” publications, and the continuing “de-literaturization” of culture all profoundly affected RLC’s position. Let us first address the mutation of genres.

The “wise, lengthy” article focusing on contemporary literary problematics, characterized by keen arguments and timely material, was squeezed out by:

-- sweeping articles on an array of cultural phenomena (the stage, architecture, film, opera, and pop culture), which comprised about 90% of the material published in *Russkii Telegraf*, *NG*, and *Kommersant-Deili* [The Commercial Daily];

-- more local articles, organized around a particular place and time rather than a new phenomenon—surveys such as “The Literary Landscape” in *Znamia*;

-- articles combining different genres (the memoir-article, the essay-article).

“Portrait” articles on various personalities,<sup>51</sup> surveys of important writers’ life and work, the thorough, comprehensive analysis of problematics and poetics in the context of contemporary literature and twentieth-century Russian literature as a whole—all of these were supplanted, or at least supplemented, by:

-- essay-articles which examined art in terms of a particular critic’s overall conception of contemporary literature (see A. Genis, “Besedy o Novoi Slovesnosti” in *Zvezda* [The Star] [1997]);

-- articles grouped under the umbrella of “Nomenclature,” in which the work of various well-known writers is interpreted in a biting, level-headed, and frequently ironic manner (as in *Znamia*);

-- articles classified as “the new untouchables,” whose (stebnyi....???) style obviates the need for evidence or argumentation (*Obschaia Gazeta*) [The Communal Gazette].

In this way, the new genres made the particular pathos of “portrait” articles and monographs obsolete—if a critic did choose that path, his article was interpreted as nothing less than a monument to a living “cultural hero.”

However, the “cultural hero” rubric did appear—in fact, it appeared in a magazine whose nature was not at all literary: *Itogi* [The Upshot]. This magazine focused not on culture, but on the new (partially intuited, partially derivative) Russian civilization, which was stubbornly placed in a global context (along the lines of *Newsweek*) by writers and editors. One of its recent “cultural heroes” was Osip Mandelstam, lionized by the poet and critic Mikhail Aizenberg.

The critical book review genre also underwent significant change, and was augmented by mutant variations:

-- the lighter, more accessible review, written in a freer tone than had been previously acceptable (*Nabliudatel* [The Observer], *Znamia*);

-- brief annotations with the critic’s judgment buried in the subtext;

- minimal critical responses (a single paragraph in *Kontinent*,<sup>52</sup> a few lines in the Bookshelf and Periodicals sections of *Novyi Mir*,<sup>53</sup> the wider-format Response section in *Oktiabr*<sup>54</sup>);
- reviews expanded to the size of a feature article, outgrowing their own parameters (“Kniga kak Povod” in *Znamia* [1997]);
- annotated reviews with their own fill-in-the-blank responses (see *Literaturnaia Gazeta*);
- reviews with a wider focus than that of the actual work and its author<sup>55</sup>;

**(page 40 missing)**

- analytic skill, the depth of interpretation, and the quest for stylistic perfection.

Is criticism doomed?

Some believe that criticism has risen to the level of creative writing and has even surpassed it, in the literary sense—see the essays written by the newest generation of critics, who despise “poetry” and “prose,” not to mention “publicity”; others maintain that it has fallen from its terrible totalitarian heights, where it had functioned as a cunningly perverse prison guard looming over literature, to a normal existence in its naturally prescribed niche (as in “other civilized countries”).

In the meantime, keenly aware of the *changing fate* awaiting them and their publications, critics formed their own union at the end of 1997—The Academy of Contemporary Russian Letters (ACRL). The Academy was made up of 37 critics, united by their professional interest in specifically contemporary literature. Initiation was based largely on the critic’s liberal credentials; among the new members were representatives of both the “old school” (A. Turkov, I. Vinogradov, L. Anninsky) and the “new” (V.

Kuritsyn, R. Arbitman, D. Bavilsky, N. Eliseev). The ACRL established its own literary prize, awarded to the most brilliant literary masterpiece published during the course of the year. The award is named for a critic well-known for his independence of thought and creative bent, Apollon Grigoriev.

The establishment of the Academy was eagerly discussed and interpreted by the press—in fact, by the Academicians themselves. Some said that this event reflected the critics' desire to elevate their professional status, to declare (or to remind the public of) their crucial role in society—primarily as creative experts. The literary prize resulted from their dissatisfaction with the outcome of existing awards, both government-sponsored (which exist up to this day) and private. And also, as one of the Academicians quipped, the Academy was formed in response to the “museum-ification” of the profession—today it remains perhaps one of the rarer, more exclusive, disappearing arts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Viacheslav Kuritsyn, “Russkii Suvenir: Tolstye Zhurnaly” in *Russkii Telegraf* (October 25, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Viktor Erofeev, “Moskovskie Novosti.”

<sup>3</sup> Iu. Burtin in *Novyi Mir* No. 6 (1966), p. 243.

<sup>4</sup> K. Simonov, “Glazami Cheloveka Moego Pokolenia” in *Znamia* Nos. 3-4 (1988).

<sup>5</sup> V. Pomeriantsev, “Ob Iskrennosti v Literature” in *Novyi Mir* No. 12 (1953). This truly seminal article in *Novyi Mir* was followed by other groundbreaking pieces of literary criticism, such as ““Russkii Les' Leonida Leonova” (Mark Scheglov, 1957) and “Liudi Kolkhoznoi Derevne v Poslevoennoi Proze” (Fiodor Abramov, 1957).

<sup>6</sup> “Dostoino Pokazyvat Velikie Dela Naroda” in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (March 24, 1953).

<sup>7</sup> “Pisatel i Kritika” in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (May 7, 1953).

<sup>8</sup> V. Pomeriantsev. Op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> V. Pomeriantsev. Op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically, *Novyi Mir*'s conception of “nationhood” led one of the journal's leading ideologues, Vladimir Lakshin, to refute the genius of Pasternak's lyricism in a review that was published in V. Alexandrov's anthology of literary criticism called *Liudi i Knigi* [People and Books] (1956).

<sup>12</sup> Y. Burtin

<sup>13</sup> A. Tvardovsky, “Po Sluchaiu Iubileia” in *Novyi Mir* No. 1 (1965), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> “Ot Redaktsii” in *Novyi Mir* No. 10 (1964).

<sup>15</sup> V. Lakshin, “Ivan Denisovich, Ego Druzia i Nedrugi” in *Novyi Mir* No. 1 (1964).

<sup>16</sup> I. Vinogradov, “Optimisticheskaia Tragedia Rodki Guliaeva” in *Novyi Mir* No. 9 (1958), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> I. Vinogradov, “Zaveschanie Mastera” in *Voprosy Literatury* No.8, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Iu. Burtin, “O Chastushkakh” in *Novyi Mir* No. 1 (1968), p. 231.

<sup>20</sup> S. Rassadin

<sup>21</sup> Iuri Trifonov, one of the journal's staff writers, defined this principle in a conversation with A. Bocharov as a "pact with the reader" (*Voprosy Literatury* No. 10 [1974]).

<sup>22</sup> S. Chuprinin also gave this title (*Kritika—eto Kritiki*) to his book, published in 1983, which was largely concerned with individual literary critics.

<sup>23</sup> Iuri Trifonov acutely depicted the isolation felt by writers in the 1970s with the character Antipov in his last novel, *Vremia i Mesto* (1979).

<sup>24</sup> "Hey fellows! Let's work together!" cries Klimuk, one of the characters in Trifonov's *Drugaiia Zhizn* (1975).

<sup>25</sup> I. Zolotussky, *Gogol* (Moscow: 1977); part of the *Zhizn Zamechatelnykh Liudei* [The Lives of Remarkable People] series.

<sup>26</sup> L. Anninsky, "Leskovskoe Ozherelie. Tri Eretika: Leskov, Pisemsky, Mamin-Sibiriak" in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (4/12/91).

<sup>27</sup> V. Turbin, *Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol* (Moscow: 1978).

<sup>28</sup> S. Rassadin, *Sukhovo-Kobylin* (Moscow: 1978).

<sup>29</sup> I. Dedkov, "Kogda Rasseialsia Liricheskii Tuman..." in *Literaturnoe Obozrenie* [Literary Review] No. 8 (1981).

<sup>30</sup> S. Chuprinin notes some examples of this "anti-rhetorical" conviction in his book *Kritika—Eto Kritiki*, in the chapter entitled "Gde Plameneet Stremlenie k Unikalnomu, ili Vladimir Turbin" [Where the Yearning for Originality Flares up, or Vladimir Turbin] (p. 231): "I know, I know. One must also speak of the "shortcomings." To make everything proper, one must include the melancholy "unfortunately..." and the reproachful "however..." and the mincing "nonetheless, I would like that..." Ritual and rhetoric demand it! But I can't do it. Not about those "shortcomings" and "artistic lapses." Let someone else find them, reveal them, enumerate and deconstruct them."

<sup>31</sup> For an entire year, Turbin published under this banner in the journal *Molodaia Gvardia*; his critical essays covered not only literary innovations but also art, cinema (Abuladze, Parazhdanov, Iliencko), theater, and architecture.

<sup>32</sup> Along with several of *Novyi Mir*'s writers and publicists (Trifonov, Bykov, Semin, and others), many of *Novyi Mir*'s critics joined the staff of *Druzhba Narodov* after their journal was disbanded. These included Kardin, Vinogradov, Kramov, Lebedev, Turkov, Andreeva, and Mann.

<sup>33</sup> By the 1970s *Nash Sovremennik* was publishing articles and reviews by former *Novyi Mir* writer O. Mikhailov, who subsequently joined the editorial staff; *NS*'s recruits became the new anti-liberals Sakharov, Bondarenko, and others.

<sup>34</sup> A. Ananiev, who replaced V. Kochetov as *Oktiabr*'s editor-in-chief, sought to renew literary activity and change the journal's reputation by shifting around the editorial board and bringing in some new writers, including some former *Novyi Mir* members (Baklanov, Rybakov), as well as new critics (Anninsky, Bocharov, Rassadin, Turkov). For quite a substantial period of time, the director of the criticism department was the future ideologue behind the newspaper *Zavtra*, Vladimir Bondarenko.

<sup>35</sup> The stenographer's recording of the discussion "Klassika i My" did not come out in print until 1990 (*Moskva* No. 5).

<sup>36</sup> From Astafiev's speech at the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers.

<sup>37</sup> M. Chudakova, in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (4/12/91).

<sup>38</sup> A. Nemzer, "Strast k Razryvam: Zametki o Sravnitelno Novoi Mifologii" in *Novyi Mir* No.4 (1992), p. 229.

<sup>40</sup> See Natalia Ivanova, "Ot 'Vragov Naroda' k 'Vragam Natsii'" in *Gibel Bogov* (Moscow: 1990).

<sup>41</sup> G. Popov, in *Nauka i Zhizn* No. 4 (1987). Here Popov formulated his conception of *administrative-commanding systems* (based upon A. Beck's novel) for the first time.

<sup>42</sup> S. Chuprinin, "Elegia" in *Znamia* No. 6 (1994).

<sup>43</sup> A. Latynina, "Kolokolnyi Zvon--ne Molitva" in *Novyi Mir* No. 8 (1988).

<sup>44</sup> With the growing social attention focused on them, many critics began to attribute inflated importance to their roles and activities as well, overestimating their actual influence on social and political processes of change. Some critics had too high an opinion of themselves--but that is apparent only in hindsight. During the euphoria of the late '80s, it seemed as though the "word" would continue to determine the "deed," and that as soon as we had "talked everything through" (it had to be *everything*), examined every horror and triumph of the nation's past and present, we would enter, if not into heaven, then at least into a world resembling that of "the rest of civilized humanity."

During this period, critics were constantly meeting with their readers, lecturing in great auditoriums, and receiving countless letters and queries. Finally, one even witnessed "private" literary evenings featuring this or that critic--all at the request of the readers.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from the Editors in *Vzgliad, Kritika, Polemika, Publikatsii* No. 2, compiled by L. B. Voronin, A. M. Turkov, and S. I. Chuprinin. "We asserted and supported critics' right to hold different opinions, to view this or that subject in different ways," say the editors, and then immediately reassert their "right" to "(ilfism...???) with a reference to the Central Committee of Soviet Writers: "This is a key moment, a wave which received the authoritative approval of the Central Committee at the beginning of this year. At this meeting, proponents of science and culture freely argued about this tendency toward 'widespread democratization, equal rights, and the assertion of a socialist pluralism of opinion'"(p.5). It appeared as though *Vsqliad* was once more fulfilling the party's assignments, not simply commenting on the "spirit and trends of our time" (not the "party-fied" language).

<sup>46</sup> A. Latynina, "Kolokolnyi Vzgliad--Ne Molitva" in *Vzgliad* No. 2, p. 355.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kazintsev in *Nash Sovremennik* (1988).

<sup>48</sup> *Progulki s Pushkinom (Strolls with Pushkin)* served as a convenient catalyst for the persecution of Siniavsky--a campaign which ceaselessly bandied about a phrase which Siniavsky used in an entirely different piece, referring to Russia as a "bitch." In an attempt to take advantage of the situation, the leaders of the Union of Soviet Writers even took steps toward the removal of A. Ananiev from his post as editor-in-chief of the journal *Oktiabr*. A clash flared up after the publication of Iuri Trifonov's reminiscences about Tvardovsky. The explosion was sparked by the remark that "(A)ll of this stems from the undigested jingoistic fanfare of the nineteenth century, which contributed little to Russian art as a whole, yet flattered our thinkers with a great many pleasant, heart-warming convictions: from Dostoyevsky's genius to Shevtsov..." The nationalist-radicals felt themselves insulted and replied by resuming old hostilities (the two-tiered model of the late '60s and early '70s included the polarity between the neo-chauvinistic *Molodaia Gvardia* and the democratic *Novyi Mir*).

<sup>49</sup> Poetry was another possibility--see for example, T. Beck's satire in *Ogoniok*. There one can also find Tatiana Tolstaia's literary editorial aimed against the anti-Semitic ideology which characterized national-patriotic publications.

However, authors who trembled over maintaining their status quo "above the fray" tamped down the theme of anti-Semitism, which not only characterized, but indeed informed the national-patriot ideology. See A. Arkhangelsky, "Mezhdu Svobodoi i Ravenstvom: Obschestvennoe Soznanie v Zerkale *Ogonka* i *Nashego Sovremennika*" in *Novyi Mir* No. 2 (1991).

<sup>50</sup> Scattered here and there by the critic's liberal hand were "the cry for freedom, bursting forth from literature's breast" or the cataracts of oppression, which "only the strong can tear from their eyes. That is, if they can cover the eyes of the strong in the first place." The artistic critic could not avoid the "knife blade" with which true literature "slits reality open," or "the popular masses" or "paralysis," from which society needed to "awaken" (medical imagery and references to various diseases were beloved staples of artistic criticism's lexicon), or "the Herculean effort to cleanse the people's consciousness, to lead them into the light of day." I've taken these examples from I. Zolotusky's article "Krushenie Abstraktsyi" in *Novyi Mir* No. 1 (1989), but the penchant for heavy-handed imagery was by no means his alone. Thus, in his seminal article on Vladimir Maksimov's place in Russian literature (I touch only upon style here, not content), I. Vinogradov cannot restrain himself from sweeping imagery: "The Communist monster, having overcome the threat of Khrushchev's thaw without any real difficulty, grew fat on its own cynicism and lawlessness; its insolent ideological, terrorist, and openly militaristic expansion oozed over the whole world, sucking the nation's lifeblood" ("Mezhdu Otchajaniem i Upovaniem" in *Kontinent* No. 83). Stylistically, this differs little from the imagery regularly deployed by *Pravda*—there too one invariably encountered that old friend, the "monster" (only in this case, a capitalist monster), who "grew fat" and "oozed," always "over the whole world," and naturally "sucked the lifeblood" from Mexico, Latin America, Africa, or what have you. Book and article titles of the period also sported metaphorical imagery—for instance, "The Warm Breath of Righteousness" or "The Walnut's Core"—and the text opened with some metaphor for the times, an edifying example from life, or a parable: "Recently I found myself at a certain high-ranking conference, like a chicken on the chopping block," and so on.

<sup>51</sup> A recent example of this is S. Rassadin's article on Inna Lisnianskaia in *Kontinent* (No. 93), where his analysis of her work is necessarily preceded by several pages of scattered musings about Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva.

<sup>52</sup> *Kontinent*'s Bibliography section billed itself as "a detailed annotated survey of everything significant appearing in Russia's newspapers and magazines, on the subjects of fiction, literary criticism, history, religion, and philosophy, during the last quarter." In the editors' minds, the Bibliography section was to combine the evaluative tone of a critical review with an annotated retelling of text, with the accent alternately on one or the other. *Literaturnaia Gazeta* hailed it as a "unique treasure": (M. Remizova, "Voznik Novyi Kriticheskii Zhanr" in *LG* No. 45 (1996).

<sup>53</sup> The Bookshelf section's compiler, S. Kostyrko, deliberately avoids passing judgment, unlike the Periodicals section's A. Vasilevsky, who never let an opportunity pass to comment sardonically, even derisively, on the publication at hand (for example: "A. Arieu, 'Neskuchnye Pesni Zemli' in *Zvezda* No. 5 [1997]—In honor of staff writer Boris Paramonov's sixtieth birthday. The very first paragraph compares the honoree with Chubai..." in *NM* (1997), p. 247.

<sup>54</sup> The choice of books and publications reviewed in *Oktiabr* is haphazard and coincidental.

<sup>55</sup> For instance, the review of Anton Utkin's novel *Khorovod* can be read on many different levels, in the context of the 1997 Booker Prize (for which the novel was a finalist), in the wider context of the general state of affairs among literary journals, and in the even wider context of literature as a whole: 1) a devastating review of the book ("It isn't really worth retelling the heavy-handed plot, dragged down by petty provincial yearnings and awkward mysticism... for this plot hasn't one seed, one kernel of sense to it..."); 2) a devastating review of the author ("Little boys enthralled by post-Pushkinist prose... have existed everywhere and have always stuffed desk drawers to the point of overflowing with their earnest exercises"); 3) a devastating review of the publisher ("Far more curious is the allegiance exhibited by urban-provincial journals [perhaps with the exception of *Znamia*] to such opuses"); 4) a devastating review of the Booker Prize jury ("beguiled by his inimitably derivative manner"); 5) a devastating review of the general literary situation ("It looks as though the trend of literary filth is being followed by an overflow of smooth talk. It's a bit like scratching your heels: no medical value, but it sure feels good")—Boris Kuzminsky, "Anton Utkin—Naibolee Realnyi Pretendent na Russkogo 'Bukera-'97'" in *Kommersant-Deili* (October 25, 1997).