

## Literature and Power in the New Age: Institutions and Divisions

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## Literature and Power in the New Age: Institutions and Divisions

The last time literature had a serious influence in this country and stood up to the authorities was during the period of so-called “*perestroika* and *glasnost*.” That period was marked by an incredible jump in the circulation of books and, even more so, of journals (2,500,000 for *Novy mir*, 1,800,000 for *Druzhba narodov*, 1,000,000 for *Znamya*, with comparable figures for other periodicals). Another indicator of the writers’ high status was their success in politics. Parliamentary elections were direct, open, and honest; they empowered real writers – Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Vitaly Korotich, Fazil Iskander, Sergei Averintsev, Boris Oleynik... Literary criticism flourished, and even non-specialists dabbled in it. A good example is Gavril Popov’s acclaimed review of Alexander Bek’s novel *The New Appointment* in which he discussed the “administrative-command system” (Popov 1986). Real criticism was in the lead during *perestroika*, apprising readers of previously banned books that finally saw the light of day when censorship ended in 1990.

Over time, the trove of “banned” books emptied out, publications decreased, circulations went down, and literature went into decline. Its impact turned out to be largely illusory. Little by little, literature turned upon itself, while criticism abandoned its lofty mission of enlightenment and returned to its traditional concerns. No wonder the first independent award for critics founded in the new era was named after the 19<sup>th</sup>-century critic Apollon Grigoriev whose “organic criticism” privileged aesthetic analysis over public engagement.

New fault lines surfaced in the 90s when society and readership splintered and unprecedented literary institutions sprang up across the country. Two names frequently mentioned in this period served to highlight the new trends: Soros and Booker. Both came to Russia from the West, both referred to institutions of key significance to the literary world. One, initiated by the Soros Foundation (Open Society Foundations), aimed to boost literary periodicals in Russia. The other, the Booker (Russian Booker), was a non-state literary award for the best Russian novel. The Apollon Grigoriev prize also had no state sponsor; it was sponsored by two Russian billionaires, Mikhail Prokhorov and Vladimir Potanin, and ONEXIM Bank.

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As for the institution known in Russia as “thick literary journals,” it remained stable (you might even say “conservative”) for a quarter century, busily adapting to evolving conditions. Meanwhile, the number of subscribers has been steadily dropping off. What do I mean by *stability*? Primarily, the literary journals’ content, but also their ideological preferences. During *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the journals grew increasingly divided along political lines. Endless recriminations that sometimes degenerated into personal insults between “patriots” and “democrats” came to be known as the “civil war in literature,” while belligerent attitudes were termed the “barricade mentality.”

In the war between the self-proclaimed patriotic periodicals (*Nash sovremmenik*, *Molodaya gvardia*, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, and *Literaturnaya Rossiya*) and “liberal” publications (*Znamya*, *Zvezda*), critics deployed martial metaphors and the language of combat. In the end, this trench warfare accomplished little more than mutual isolation and self-imposed segregation. It’s not that the opposing parties, whose positions hardly changed, made peace; they just stopped noticing each other. In the end, the polemics ran out of steam, and the audience before which mutual accusations could be paraded disappeared.

An analysis of cross-references shows that communications between competing journals evaporated by the early 90s. Each publication stuck by its political guns, be this

patriotism, conservatism, or liberalism. These concepts underwent historical changes, their sharpness noticeably diminishing over time. In the early 2000s, a “buffer” group connected by the Yasnaya Polyana award (founded in 2003) emerged that played an important role in cooling down the polemical heat and arresting the slide toward mutually assured destruction. This new literary institution hovered above the traditional journals and institutions. Meanwhile, the writers tended to coalesce around an award consistent with their ideology and supported by substantial funds. The importance of this group, subsequently labelled *tusovka* (“the scene”), could be gleaned from the certain look on the faces of its members, as well as in rituals distinguishing its adherents and dramatizing their values. Literary figures belonging to this group were not bound by membership; they were, and still are, bound by a sense of unity. For example, before the 2014 Olympics, all members of the Yasnaya Polyana circle took turns bearing the Olympic torch across Tolstoy’s Yasnaya Polyana, wearing special athletic outfits and hats inscribed with the Olympic symbol and the Russian coat of arms.

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The schism that broke apart the USSR Writer’s Union in August of 1991, the premier literary institution, revealed the true fragmentation of the literary community by exposing two new groups – the “patriotic” and “democratic” (the Letter of Russian Writers, 1990). Further divisions brought in their wake several more groups: “April” (the informal democratic association of writers in Moscow), the Writers’ Union of Russia, the Union of Russian Writers, and the Moscow Writers’ Union. Regional professional organizations split along the same lines.

The mood varied among the writers themselves, ranging from enthusiasm (Anatoly Pristavkin, Alla Gerber) to despair (Lev Anninsky). “I was naïve... That writers from the republics would bring down the Union seemed plausible to me. But that the writers in Moscow would bring down their own organization – such madness I could hardly imagine” (Anninsky, 1999). What followed this monumental breakup? “[F]rom afar,” writes Anninsky, “I can hear the sound of them dividing things up between the ‘unions of writers.’” They split up property, assets, the writers’ union(s), and, most importantly, the Literary Fund, a subsidiary of the Writers’ Union overseeing plumb possessions like the Creative Center in Yalta, Koktebel in Crimea, Komarovo near St. Petersburg, and Maleyevka and Peredkino near Moscow; kindergartens, polyclinics, hospitals, dachas, etc. Writers themselves joked that in the fight between democratic and patriotic writers, commerce won – commercial (mass) literature and the “phenomenon of the book stall” (Roman Arbitman). The path to compromise was necessitated not by ideological but by economic conditions, and it cut through the proudly pure arthouse and the self-consciously incorporated mass lit.

Starting in 1990-1991, several dozen writers’ organizations were founded, some in existence even today. The status and position enjoyed by their leaders was the foundation on these organizations were built. Here is a partial list:

- Academy of Zaum (Tambov, avant-garde forms of art)
- Academy of Poetry (founded in 1998 – “a public association of the spiritual movement of Russian peoples”)
- Academy of Russian Literature (founded in 1996; in 2009, Metropolitan (later patriarch) Kirill was appointed president emeritus)
- Academy of Modern Russian Literature
- Antipodes (Australia)
- April (founded in April 1990 and shut down in 2008)

- Association of Russian Writers of the Republic of Moldova
- Babylon (founded in 1989)
- Congress of Ukrainian Writers (an alternative to the National Union of Ukrainian Writers), which also includes the South Russian Union of Writers (Odessa)
- Crimean Literary Academy (founded in November 2005, Simferopol)
- International Association of Writers and Publicists (Riga, and then later in London)
- International Federation of Russian Writers (founded in 2005, Munich)
- International Federation of Russian-Speaking Writers (headquarters in Budapest)
- International Association of Writers' Unions (founded as a successor of the Writers' Union of the USSR on May 14, 1992)

The trend toward partition, division, and divergence continued. The schism among intellectuals and the creative intelligentsia intensified after Crimea and Donbass (2014). Neologisms demarcated the ideological borderlines: *krymnash* ("crimea-ours") with the kindred *krymnashest* (crimea-is-ours) stood against *krymnenash* (crimea's-not-ours"). The split ran through many cultural institutions, each schism tied to a specific event:

- 1993 — constitutional crisis following the assault on the "White House"
- 1994 — first Chechen war
- 1996 — presidential election
- 1998 — second Chechen war
- 2001 — election of Putin

While the movement toward restoration grew more visible after 2012, it had its origins in 1994. The conservative group, stubbornly turning history inside out by recourse to Soviet discourse, spearheaded this process. But the liberal intellectuals contributed to the restorative tendencies as well, as they enjoyed playing with Soviet era clichés in the post-modernist key. As for average consumers, they couldn't give a damn whether Soviet rhetoric, pop songs, art exhibitions, or movies were recycled in earnest or in the spirit of mocking parody.

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*Literary sphere* is a word signifying a phenomenon without rigid boundaries, open to ingress and egress, infinitely fluctuating, sporting more or less the same content yet varying in form according to the changing time.

*Schism*, on the other hand, connotes a sharp division, a clear break with the past. Where there is a schism, there is an axe chopping (in the best-case scenario) a wooden log. We are concerned here with a schism of the sphere.

The history of the Russian intelligentsia is a story of schisms, starting with the split into Westernizers and Slavophiles and ending with the events and divisions we witness today. The schism in the creative sphere started before the current *counterperestroika*. Creative organizations and cultural institutions began to fall apart even before Putin came to power. The early signs came to light in the 1990s.

Each schism in the post-Soviet period has been triggered by an ideological cause. To oversimplify, the key division is between the state and "state-sponsored patriotism," on one hand, and free society and individual freedom, on the other. Looking back at Russian literature, we can see that Pushkin created a template for these future conflicts in his poem "The Bronze Horseman." The schism revolved around the choice of Russia's path forward.

Its current incarnation is the debate about “sovereign democracy” and “Russia’s special path.”

The defining schism during perestroika was between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. It revolved around the intelligentsia’s response to the “Preobrazhensky Revolution” (August 19-21, 1991) that split the conservatives (Novomir-Solzhenitsynites), liberal conservatives (like Irina Rodnyanskaya), and democrats (*Moskovskiye Novosti*, *Ekho Moskvy*, *Znamya*) (see Tolts, 2006).

The next schism took place in October 1993, and it pitted those who supported president Yeltsin against those who denounced him. Critics calling the incident the “shooting up of the White House” (“shooting up Parliament”) split off from the liberals, now frequently referenced as “so-called liberals.” The writer Alexander Prokhanov penned the editorial “A Letter to the People” that was published in the *Sovietskaya Gazeta* on the eve of these dramatic events. Writers supporting Yeltsin’s stance against the Parliament signed the “Letter of 42,” which was denounced as “bloodthirsty” by the literary notables aligned with Ruts koy, Khasbulatov, General Makashov, and other conservative politicians.

The next schism among writers was tied to military actions in Chechnya (in 1994). The writer Grigory Baklanov, who served on the front line in World War II, published an open anti-war letter in *Izvestiya*, his example followed by the writers and war correspondents of the new generation (Arkady Babchenko).

While the liberals were in retreat, the conservatives (“patriots”) went on the offensive. Their numbers grew thanks to the influx of former liberals (“renegade liberals”). After the return of Alexander Solzhenitsyn to Russia, this conservative alignment gained more ground.

Former ideological allies addressed this topic in a roundtable discussion sponsored by the journal *Znamya* (2002, No. 1). Among those who took part were Alexander Ageev, Renata Galtseva, Denis Dragunsky, and Lyudmila Saraskina (“Schism of the Liberals,” 2002). With a new president at the helm, observed forum participants, the intelligentsia was forced to take a stance. “A new schism appears to be brewing among the liberal intelligentsia radically split in their views on Putin’s policies, i.e., on the military intervention in Chechnya, the “humanitarian” bombardment of Serbia and Iraq...the NTV conflict [and other events that became] kind of ‘identifying texts’ and points of divergence for the previously like-minded.” The main sticking point was “the present-day government that...remains the main threat to freedom and civil rights.”

The literary critic Alexander Ageev doesn’t think the term “schism” is applicable here. He compares the literary domain to a “pile of sand” where each person’s attitude varies according to the situation. What we see is not a “liberal reaction” or “conservative reaction” but “multiple reactions” that do not always add up. Thus, a liberal might value freedom and independence while rejecting mass culture and a gay lifestyle. The philosopher Renata Galtseva points out that “bad” (meaning inconsistent) representatives abound in both camps. Some liberals resemble “revolutionary democrats”; liberals in Yeltsin’s circle didn’t want to rid the country off communists; certain government employees inveighed against the government (e.g., Yury Afanasyev, the rector of the Russian State University for the Humanities). According to Galtseva, these liberals weren’t liberals at all; they were “anarchists, radicals, who want to overthrow the foundations of existence.”

The writer Denis Dragunsky believes that the state is to blame for the “endless schisms” and the “die-hard rejection” of state institutions. He ends his observations with the phrase “Herzen is on our side, after all!” – the stance Galtseva finds unconvincing. The previously ardent liberal Lyudmila Saraskina (who published a hagiography of Solzhenitsyn) separates herself from the liberals, passionately attacks the “liberal party,” and is quick to define the new standards: “In his first year in office, President Putin clearly articulated that Russia had its own national interests...so the heart of this former liberal, long suffering from

the disgrace and humiliation visited upon her country, has been healed.” Saraskina is ready to hold “liberals” accountable for everything from Yugoslavia to Hiroshima.

After Putin was elected president (note that both the state-liberals and liberal-conservatives backed him up), new schisms formed in literary, cinematic, and theatrical organizations. Interestingly, these schisms were both political and aesthetic in nature.

The conflict with Ukraine added more fuel to the schism among the intelligentsia that was bitterly divided over the annexation of Crimea, the separatist movements in Donetsk and Lugansk, and the project “Novorossiia.” A seminal event in this period was the “Collective Address to the Russian Public by Russian Artists Supporting the President’s Position on Ukraine and Crimea” published in *Izvestiya* on March 11, 2014 (“Collective Address,” 2014). Among the eighty five intellectuals who signed this letter were the venerable Oleg Tabakov, Vladimir Spivakov, Stanislav Govorukhin, A. Uchitel, Pavel Lungin, Valery Fokin, Nikolai Tsiskaridze, and Karen Shakhnazarov. However, we find only two writers on this list – the poet and critic Dmitry Bak, identified as the director of the State Museum of Literature, and Alexei Konstantinov, author of *Criminal Petersburg*. More writers later added their names to the list, which eventually grew to 511, including the literary critic V. Y. Kurbatov and the writer Yury Polyakov, then editor-in-chief of the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (now president of the editorial board). Interestingly, Vladimir Gergiyev disavowed his signature when touring in the U.S. In the end, the percentage of writers signing this letter was 0.5%.

Rustam Abdullin (Republic of Mari El) published on his blog an alternative document, titled “List of Russian Artists Against Putin’s Policies in Crimea! People of Conscience and Honor” (03.13.2014). Many more writers added their signatures to this list, which included Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Gandlevsky, Grigol Chkhartishvili (Boris Akunin), V. Dolina, A. Arkhangelsky, B. Dubin, N. Ivanova, M. Chudakova, L. Rubinstein, S. Parkhomenko, A. Illichevsky, O. Kuchkina, Y. Sidorov, S. Stratanovsky, N. Katerli, N. Sokolovskaya, Y. Chizhova, Y. Yermolin, M. Stepanova, G. Morev, I. Kukulín, M. Rybakova, N. Gromova, M. Lipovetsky, K. Azadovsky, M. Yasnov, Y. Solonovich, D. Dragunsky, and many more. Here are a few angry comments that visitors left on the Abdullin blog: “Our cultural figures have demonstrated their ‘level of culture’ to the West” (Valery), “Putin is the pride of Russia, and this is just a list of pathetic bastards” (Ellina), “This is the Russia’s fifth column” (Nikolai).

The signatures gathered in the course of the campaign helped consolidate the opposition to Putin’s regime by providing liberal writers with a sense that they shared a certain cultural niche. Similar divisions and consolidations were taking place in other creative organizations.

As far back as 2010, the Union of Cinematographers split into two rival organizations, with some of its members successfully petitioning the government to set up a Cinema Union (*Kinosoyuz*) and elected Boris Khlebnikov as its chairperson. This happened after Nikita Mikhailkov had practically wrestled this position from Marlen Khutsiev, the duly elected chair who secured the requisite majority vote. Following the split, the movie director Alexei German, Jr. offered this insight into the “divergent stance” of competing organizations: “The fight around the Cinema Union is precipitated by the fact that a single person holds a monopoly on communication with the state which has power to determine the industry’s fate.” This person is, of course, Nikita Mikhalkov. “It is impossible to consider the Cinema Union in isolation from the existence of the state” (*Novaya*, No. 106, September 24, 2010). Critics accused German of causing the schism, but he insisted that the union’s goal was to consolidate and integrate cinematographers, that the “relationship with the government would be one of partnership.”

A similar schism occurred in the theater world. Its focus was the Zolotaya Maska (Golden Mask) award. Through Deputy Minister Vladimir Aristarkhov, the Ministry of

Culture accused the festival of “violating moral norms” and promoting “Russophobia” (Ministry of Culture, 2015). It seems proper to include here a statement by Aristarkhov: “When the classics are reduced to coarse instincts, when under the banner of the right to interpretation Pushkin, Gogol, and our other great playwrights [are mangled], we realize...that under the mask – under the Golden Mask – the predators have dragged in values alien to us” (“Russophobia in the theater or creative freedom?” – *RIA Novosti*, 05.28.2015).

Following the Culture Ministry reprimand, the festival director Georgy Taratorkin, Golden Mask recipient Konstantin Raykin, and jury member Igor Kostolevsky published an open letter where they stressed that the Golden Mask was an independent award established in 1993 by the Union of Theater Workers of Russia and designed to honor dramaturgical achievements in all genres. It’s worth noting that the scandal and subsequent schism in the theater world erupted following the Culture Ministry insistence on reinstating “artistic councils” with the power to preview plays selected for the festival (effectively bringing back censorship). Another factor contributing to this controversy concerned the composition of the expert council empowered to identify the prize nominees.

The grim implications of this clash between state officials and theater workers became clear after the opera “Tannhauser” (staged by the 24-year-old Timofey Kulyabin) was banned in Novosibirsk. The Minister of Culture Vladimir Medynsky fired Boris Mezdrich, director of the Novosibirsk Theater of Opera and Ballet where the opera had its premier. Incredibly, the minister had the gall to proclaim in the aftermath of this crude interference that “artistic freedom remains unchallenged.”

Sometimes, established artists weigh in on the controversy and try to shield their younger colleagues. Thus, Oleg Tabakov sought to protect young non-conformist directors like Konstantin Bogomolov who staged at his theater the controversial “Brothers Karamazov,” “Ideal Husband,” and “The Prince” (based on “The Idiot”). Support from the older generation hasn’t always helped avant-garde directors and nonconformist artists. Bear in mind that Oleg Tabakov himself jumped on the *#krymnash* bandwagon. Yet, his support for Putin’s policies in Ukraine didn’t prevent him from defending directors of an entirely different ideological mindset. Valery Fokin is another example of a major theater director who sided with *krymnashists*. To be mentioned here is also Maria Revyakina, director of the Golden Mask award, who defended Kirill Serebrennikov, Alexey Malobrodsky, and Sofia Apfelbaum after these well-known figures in the theater world faced an arrest. Following Revyakina’s lead, several other major artists (Alla Demidova, Lev Dodin) voiced support for their persecuted comrades. All this happened during an award ceremony broadcasted on state television.

In 2016, the Golden Mask administrators agreed to compromise with the Ministry of Culture and add to the expert council members approved by the state officials. The change allowed this organization to preserve itself as an institution, which remains formally independent and in charge of administering an important award.

Coming back to the literary world, we now focus on the Russian PEN Center which faced its own schism following the expulsion of writer and journalist Sergey Parkhomenko. Lev Timofeev, a noted human rights activist, posted on his Facebook page a chronicle titled “The Loss of the Pen Club.” “Since I’m no longer interested, and sometimes even ashamed, to take part in the work of the Russian PEN, I have decided to leave.” In September of 2014, Lev Timofeev offered an extensive review of the crisis at PEN Center, which he introduced in this way: “Here I will provide a documentary account of my attempts (mainly only my own, although others have tried as well) to keep the PEN Club working effectively in Russia – attempts that were, as should be clear, unsuccessful... Along the way (indeed in *passim*), I will spell out certain features peculiar to the worldview of the social stratum known as the

“writers’ community.” I am talking about that part of the writers’ community that voluntarily joined the PEN Club, which we now call the ‘Russian PEN Center’” (Timofeev 2014).

After Lyudmila Ulitskaya, the former vice president, left the PEN Center, she was sharply criticized in absentia at the December 2014 meeting where she was accused of trying to commandeer the organization. The name of Ulitskaya was removed from the organization’s official site. In an open letter she wrote to the organization in January 2015, Ulitskaya summed up her actions as follows:

*“I am aware that the schism which arose in PEN is perfectly natural, and fully reflects the schism in our society as a whole. In all strata of society there are people who unconditionally support government actions and the “general party line,” and there are people who do not approve or support it. To call the first “patriots” and the second “national traitors” and “fifth columnists” is to follow an old Soviet tradition employed by the state against any critical opposition, from either the right or the left.*

*Do I really need to justify myself to prove that it is only the pain of our people, growing ever poorer, brought about by shortsighted leaders causing the economic collapse of our country, and shame for the greedy and unscrupulous leadership pushing the world towards war, that compel me to speak my mind frankly? Not out of a desire to defend myself, but solely to clarify the situation, which is murky and abhorrent.*

*Until the end of this past year, I served as vice president of PEN and was on its executive committee. After a meeting with PEN’s international leadership over a year ago where I faced its bewilderment over the Russian PEN’s inactivity – bewilderment with which I fully agreed – I made an effort to encourage several dozen young and active writers, journalists, and publishers to join the organization. With the assistance of other like-minded members, we set up a Facebook page and updated the PEN Center website. Some fairly critical documents were indeed published there, most originally posted elsewhere. Traffic to the site jumped a hundred times. I was admonished by the executive committee for my failure to choose the right agenda for PEN, which is a human rights organization, not a political one. Need I comment on the impossibility under current conditions of drawing a line between human rights and political activity? Otherwise, we will turn into an organization defending the rights of dogs and cats. As soon as Bitov’s letter was published (To what end – I was prepared to meet with him and immediately cease my work for PEN), I divested myself of all authority, as I announced prior to the general meeting.” (Ulitskaya, cited in Timofeev 2014)*

After more than one hundred PEN Center members signed a petition supporting the Ukrainian Library in Moscow, the PEN Center’s executive committee attempted to expel a number of active members who had joined during Ulitskaya’s vice presidency (PEN Center 2014). The young writers’ initiative spearheaded by Ulitskaya was supported by other organizations, including the Free Historical Society and Memorial Human Rights Center (the latter accused by the Justice Ministry in undermining the constitutional order).

Russian PEN Center Vice President Yevgeny Popov “on behalf of ‘colleagues from the Executive Committee’” denounced the opposition:

*Certain PEN members, mainly among the “neophytes” who have recently joined, who are unfamiliar with the history of our organization and with a strange idea of its main objectives, are once again attempted to stir up controversy and intrigue, publicly accusing the president, executive committee, and directorate of all the seven deadly*



*sins. The president, you see, is president for no apparent reason, the directorate knows what, and the executive committee knows what, and they all respond too slowly with official statements regarding important events... These statements are not “sharp,” not politicized, AS THEY SHOULD BE, but are weak, maybe even conformist. They didn’t care that each such DOCUMENT must be justified, verified, not dashed off, that an OFFICIAL statement or protest is not some general public blah-blah-blah, but is discussed and edited by ALL members of the executive committee, and is not published, as it was in the past, at the whim of a single person in charge. Meanwhile, they all, without any permission, used the prestigious brand of the Russian PEN Center. That was the name given to the chat on Facebook created by public figure and radio journalist Sergey Parkhomenko, who used it to collect signatures of respected poets and writers.*

*It was in that chat that the authors saw fit to call their colleagues vulgar words like “scum,” “crazy,” “in delirium,” to call for PEN to split, for a demonstrative mass exit, to withhold payment of membership dues. For the life of me, I can’t understand the reason for all this!” (Popov 2014).*

The differences between the “breakaway” group and PEN (headed by Yevgeny Popov, a former member of MetrOpolya who was denied membership in the Soviet Writers’ Union) may seem marginal, but stylistic differences mean a great deal in political statements. That is how the PEN Center lost its human rights orientation. Here is the statement about Oleg Sentsov, the Ukrainian film director captured in Crimea and sentenced to 20 years in prison, that illustrates the current PEN: “The Russian PEN Center is concerned about the fate of Oleg Gennadievich Sentsov and asks the President of the Russian Federation and the Russian courts to assist in *mitigating the conditions* of this film director and writer’s detention...” The statement ends thus, “We will be merciful, *but we will not be unlawful!*”

Sergey Parkhomenko offered the following comment on this petition: “Bold, isn’t it? Decisive. A defense of human rights. Freedom-loving. Calling to ‘*assist in mitigating the conditions of detention.*’ What could be bolder and timelier than this appeal on behalf of Oleg Sentsov?... The PEN leadership then went on to state in detail, with references to several articles of the Criminal Code, why pardoning Oleg Sentsov is impossible. So that His Excellency wouldn’t have to trouble himself looking for reasons to reject the petition. So that he wouldn’t get angry, God forbid” (Parkhomenko 2016).

The conformism of the PEN executive committee is of piece with Andrey Bitov’s letter condemning Lyudmila Ulitskaya for her human right initiatives as the Center’s vice president. It is also evident in the PEN’s failure to defend German Sadulayeva when she was threatened by the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov or to offer help with printing Sergey Khazov-Cassia’s prison memoirs. Such examples could be multiplied.

Conformism is a failure to defend the freedom of culture, which is exactly what the PEN Center was invented for. Now its leaders are afraid to be labeled “foreign agents,” as they convert PEN from a human rights organization into a decorative one.

Today we witness the emergence of a “new dissident.” The cultural institutions that came into existence in the late 1980s and 1990s at the peak of democratization in Russia are being gradually dismantled. Step by step, the government has taken back the freedoms it yielded to cultural institutions, plunging them into a deep crisis, promoting schisms, and forcing the creative intelligentsia into compromises. It is to protest these ominous trends that over a hundred members left the Russian PEN Center and set up a new organization, the Free Speech Association.

And so, the age-old debate over the Russian intelligentsia and its mission has come full circle. This debate flared up at critical junctures of Russian history, starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, following the 1905 uprising, in the aftermath of Khrushchev's "Thaw," during Gorbachev's perestroika, and once again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" in the dawning age of counterperestroika. Now we talk about the intelligentsia's responsibilities as moral beings and professional intellectuals, critics and supporters of the government, commercial interests and creative imperatives. Alexander Arkhangel'sky (2007) wrote a book featuring two voices, one belonging to an intellectual and to the old-fashioned *intelligent*. As I see it, this distinction, if it exists, is generational. The old school intelligentsia, preoccupied with its art, has barely noticed it.

Whatever fissures the Russian cultural organizations have developed in the last three decades have mirrored the divisions in society at large – a constructive engagement with the government à la Solzhenitsyn in his post-Soviet incarnation; a symphony with the state attempted by Nikita Mikhalkov whose father had written the Soviet national anthem (and whom Putin honored with a call to his dacha); the writers' spirited confrontation with Putin when the future ruler visited the PEN Center in 1999; the tongue-in-cheek conformity of such luminaries as Oleg Tabakov and Alexander Kalyagin; the submission to authorities by Galina Volchek and Valery Fokin under the guise of protecting their artistic groups; the grand gestures of Yevgeny Yevtushenko concealing his conformism behind a passionate appeal for national unity; the PEN center leaders trading their conscience for state handouts; the conspicuous nonconformism and political indifferentism of Sergey Gandlevsky and Mikhail Eisenberg; or the vigilant autonomy and public engagement chosen by the St. Petersburg PEN and Free Speech Association.

Intelligentsia's dealings with the authorities abound in contradiction. Its members are willing to look the other way when its servile leaders meet with government officials – as long as handouts in the form of government grants keep coming in. A fierce critic of the government, Solzhenitsyn demonstratively refused to accept the highest state order of Andrei Preobrazhensky bestowed on him by Yeltsin, but when Vladimir Putin approached him he was more than happy to host Russia's president. Or take Alexander Kalyagin attending the reception with Vladimir Putin. The former was overjoyed when the president informed him that 2019 would be designated as the Year of Theater. Did Kalyagin take this opportunity to ask Putin to reduce the penalties imposed on Kirill Serebrennikov? Nothing of the sort. Whatever concerns he might have had for the plight of his colleagues were drowned out by his breathless enthusiasm about the Russian artists' good fortunes.

So much money will be handed out! And just think what demand there will be for comedic performers!

### **About the Author:**

Natalya Ivanova is a literary and art critic, essayist, and historian of Russian literature. She served as president of the Academy of Modern Russian Criticism (1998-2000) and played a part as the founder, coordinator, and jury member for several literary prizes. Ms. Ivanova holds an advanced doctorate of philology, and is a professor in the literary theory department of the faculty of theology at Lomonosov Moscow State University. She is also the first deputy editor-in-chief of the literary journal *Znamya*. Her works include books, articles, and essays about modern Russian literature, documentary film series on the life and art of the Russian Nobel-prize winning writers Ivan Bunin and Boris Pasternak, as well films about Anna Akhmatova, Varlam Shalamov, and others. She has won the Tsarskoye Selo Award. Her books include the monograph *Proza Yuriya Trifonova* [The Prose of Yuri Trifonov],

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