

« A journey through XIXth and XXth Century Russian Literature »

(The present work is largely inspired by C.A. Moser's book)

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Literature plays a pregnant role in the life of intellectual Russia. « Here literature is not a luxury, not a diversion. It is bone of the bone, flesh of the flesh, not only of the intelligentsia, but also of a growing number of the common people, intimately woven into their everyday existence, part and parcel of their thoughts, their aspirations, their social, political and economic life. **It expresses their collective wrongs and sorrows, their collective hopes and strivings.** Not only does it serve to lead the movements of the masses, but it is an integral component element of those movements. In a word, Russian literature is **completely bound up with the life of Russian society**, and its vitality is but the measure of the spiritual vitality of that society » Thomas Seltzer.

I - RUSSIAN SENTIMENTALISM AND PREROMANTICISM (1790-1820)

This period can be considered as a period of transition to the modern age.

Let me give you a few characteristics of this period: it is the aftermath of the French revolution, the period is characterized by the rise of Napoleon and the Napoleonic wars, the French invasion of Russia in 1812. In Russia, the intellectual ferment will lead to the Decembrist uprising (1825) and it is a culturally chaotic period.

A- Change :

What was the development in European literary life in the XVIII th century ?

In the middle of the eighteenth century, new literary trends began to contest the place of classicism

Classical mind of the Enlightenment : a unitary human standard (the individual seen as a universal, immutable, uniform for every **rational being**)

Classicism viewed man not so much as a personality, but as **the bearer of a particular idea or feeling**, as a molecule within a particular **hierarchically constructed social system** (a hero in a tragedy, a gentle shepherd in an idyll...)

In the literature of **sentimentalism** man is viewed and depicted as an individual, as an **independent personality** of value in and of itself (and not acting under the influence of duty or its surroundings)

Sentimentalism treated the peaceful and slightly **idyllic existence** of the individual, Preromanticism is generally seen as dealing with the exploration of man's tragic sense of the world

Romantic mind : belief in **diversity** for its own sake, **the individual** (the individual sensibility) rather than society came to be at the center of literary perception.

Such an individual often turns out to be **lonely** and feeble in **the threatening world** around him

For the romantics the culture of each nation within the context of other world cultures was just as particular and individual as was each human personality.

These developments in European literary life began to have an impact on Russian cultural life toward the end of the eighteenth century (Richardson's novels were translated into Russian, Sterne, Young, Ossian)

B- Constants:

- Primacy of poetry

- Linkage between writers and the state (Karamzin – official historiographer-, Derzhavin – Minister of Justice-, Zhukovsky- advisor **and tutor for** the royal family)

- **Characteristic** of this period was the existence of formal and **informal literary circles**.

Authors were well acquainted personally with one another (prepared the ground for the flowering of nineteenth-century Russian literature which would begin with the work of Alexander Pushkin.

- **Alexander Radishchev** (1749-1802)

Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow

It consists of chapters bearing the names of towns and posting stations located between St. Petersburg and Moscow : Sofia, Lyubani, Torzhok, Tver, and others.

Radishchev is critical of state authority but, if the tsar will seek truth, then proper order can be established within the state.

He also describes the difficult situation of the serfs. A peasant might have to labor six days a week on the land of a cruel landowner.

In order to keep himself and his family alive he would work for himself at night and on Sundays (« sofia »)

But there was nothing unusual in this condemnation of the cruelty and monstrosity of the system of serfdom in eighteenth-century literature. (**Fonvizin**, *The Minor*, **Novikov** in his satirical journals, etc..)

When Catherine II came to power she issued several liberal *ukases*, one of which permitted citizens to establish « free printing presses » for the publication of anything their owners wished .

In 1790 Radishchev prints his Journey... in 650 copies.

But the Empress was frightened most of all by events in France, where the revolution had broken out, a Constituent Assembly had been formed, and Louis XVI had abdicated his throne.

All this caused the Empress to keep very close track of public opinion in Russia.

Catherine found Radishchev's Journey very dangerous and ordered the writer to be sent to Siberia for ten years.

Russian writers in the eighteenth century were not very numerous ; as a rule they felt isolated.

By the end of the eighteenth century that situation had changed.

Writers by then regarded themselves as representatives of public opinion.

The « *Colloquy of Lovers of the Russian Word* » (« *Beseda lyubiteley russkogo slova*, 1811-16)

The major literary grouping of the early nineteenth century was the « *Colloquy of Lovers of the Russian Word* » (« *Beseda lyubiteley russkogo slova*, 1811-16) The members of the colloquy were against the Karamzinists. They were archaists.

They were conservatives and opposed to Alexander I's liberal reforms.

They looked to the **Church Slavic language, folklore and national cultural traditions** in an effort to create a cultural and historical utopia rooted in the past. In this sense the activities of the Colloquy may be linked to the early history of Russian romanticism (**Shishkov**)

Within the Colloquy some obsolete classical genre were developed as **the heroic poem** (but transformed in the romantic period : the Homer's *Iliad* was viewed as a spontaneous expression of Greek national culture and character)

Another classical genre was developed and modernized thanks to Krylov :the fable

- **Krylov (1769-1844)**

Krylov's fable

He had **conserveative, monarchist, anti-western and anti-Enlightenment views**.

He demonstrates that a dedication to the ideas of the Enlightenment leads to the moral corruption of particular individuals and of entire states, just as an evil smell of wine remains forever in a barrel which has been filled even once with it (« The barrel » « Bochka »).

The fable « **The writer and the bandit** » (« *Sochinitel i razboynik* ») describes a France which has perished thanks to the spread of Enlightenment doctrine and Voltairianism.

In his fable « **The lion's education** » (« *Vospitanie lva* ») he mocked the Emperor Alexander I 's French tutors who had trained the King of Beasts to « build nests », i.e. had alienated him from the needs and interests of his country by filling his head with worthless liberal ideas.

But Krylov's fables are distinguished by their **artistic perfection**.

They contain precise descriptions of the ordinary peasant's way of life along with witty characterizations of various human-but simultaneously Russian-types/ the lazy miller, the hard worker, the wastrel.

Krylov's fables became incredibly popular within all classes of society

- **Griboedov. (1795-1829)**

He was the most important figure among the young archaists.

His life was brief and intense.

He completed the literary, law and natural science and mathematical faculties, learned French, German, English and Italian and was preparing to take his doctorate.

From 1817 he worked for the Foreign Ministry.

He was appointed as first secretary of the Russian embassy in Persia and commenced a diplomatic career in 1818. He quickly learned Arabic and Persian.

In 1828 Russia signed the peace of Turkmanchay with Persia.

He was appointed the Resident Minister (Ambassador) to Persia. He knew how much the Persians hated the Russians.

On 30 January 1829 an enraged mob, urged on by fanatic mullahs, invaded the Russian embassy and slaughtered all the Russian representatives. Griboedov perished in that bloody episode.

He wrote a verse comedy **Woe from wit**(*Gore ot uma*) in 1823 , a satire on Russian aristocratic post-Napoleonic society.

Griboedov's dialogue has the natural rhythm of conversation and is more easily colloquial than any prose. It is full of wit, variety, and character, and is a veritable store book of the best spoken Russian of a period.

Almost every other line of the comedy has become part of the language, and proverbs from Griboyedov are as numerous as proverbs from Krylov.

The play depicts certain social and official stereotypes in the characters of Famusov, who hates reform; his secretary, Molchalin, who fawns over officials; and the aristocratic young liberal and Anglomaniac Repetilov.

By contrast the hero of the piece, Chatsky, an ironic satirist just returned from western Europe, exposes and ridicules the weaknesses of the rest. His words echo the outcry of the young generation in the lead-up to the armed insurrection of 1825

II- NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIAN ROMANTICISM (1820-1840).

This period is the beginning of Russian literature's greatest period, which extended from approximately 1820 to the time of the First World War.

Russian romanticism began with a strong emphasis on poetry but in the course of its development shifted toward prose.

The great poet **Pushkin** turned definitely toward prose in 1830 with his *Tales of Belkin*, a cycle of works which laid the foundations of the Russian short story yet to come

Gogol was a writer of elaborate prose

Lermontov was not only a fine poet but an excellent prose-writer. His novel *A Hero of Our Time* (1840), although plainly romantic in its thrust, marks the end of Russian romanticism.

The new literature emphasized the individual spirit, generally **the extraordinary man who stood on some way above society**, who had something peculiarly his own to offer.

It is during the romantic period that the Russian writer began to view himself as normally an **adversary of the existing order**. (especially after the suppression of the Decembrist uprising of 1825 and the execution or exile of many of its participants).

During the romantic period, literature became more commercialized. During the eighteenth century, writers had been members of the landowning aristocracy or else supported by the government but in the nineteenth century they became more and more dependent upon the reading public.

So the so-called « **thick journals** » were created. Such journals published writing of various sorts : poetry, prose, history, commentary, in a volume the size of a book which appeared monthly.

The « thick journals » also had another significant function. With the virtual disappearance of the literary societies, they supplied focal points for literary life.

They sowed division as well as unity among writers.

Works in verse formed the centerpiece of Russian romantic literature. This period has been termed « **The Golden Age** » of Russian poetry (**Baratynsky, Tyutchev, Delvig, Yazykov, Pushkin, Lermontov**)

But by 1830 prose was preeminent.

Almost without exception, the romantic poets belonged to **the gentry class**. Most knew French at least as well as Russian, and used French in conversation, in correspondence, and sometimes in their compositions.

Meanwhile men of a new social class were entering the literary arena, not only as writers but as

journalists, publishers, and critics.

This new group of litterateurs were professionals who sought-often with pathetic results- to gain a livelihood from their efforts injected a new note of economic necessity into the general literary scene.

Social protest was implicit in some of the poetry and prose of the late 1820s.

This was particularly true of prose after it began to dominate literature in the early 1830s.

- Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)

The dominant figure of this period was the poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837).

He is considered by many to be **the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian literature.**

Born in Moscow, Pushkin published his first poem at the age of fifteen

Alexander Pushkin introduced Russia to all the European literary genres as well as a great number of West European writers. **He brought natural speech and foreign influences to create modern poetic Russian.** Though his life was brief, he left examples of nearly every literary genre of his day: lyric poetry, narrative poetry, the novel, the short story, the drama, the critical essay, and even the personal letter

Lyrics :

He possibly made his greatest contribution to Russian literature **through his lyrics.**

Their range is extensive, from epigrams to serious statements of the lyric « I », from scenes of nature striking in pictorial vividness and mood to expressions of friendship and solidarity.

Contemporary critics agree that Pushkin's **verse is more classical than romantic**, for it does not display the high passion and unsublimated emotion, the lack of control one usually associates with romantic poetry.

Example : « *Ja vas liubil* » is unornamented

Pushkin's verse, resembles a Crystal goblet, elegant, symmetrical, and transparent, which gives forth a clear and resonant sound when struck.

Much of Pushkin's lyrics displays a whole range of emotions from tender concern and joy to jealousy and despair.

Pushkin wrote **several poems with political implications**, including « *Liberty* » (Volnost, 1817), an ode calling for the lawful punishment of tyrants, and « *To Chaadaev* » (Chaadaevu », 1818, in which he pledges himself to the cause of freedom.

Pushkin was exiled to the south of Russia.

Eugene Onegin (1823-1830)

While still in the south, Bessarabia, Pushkin began his most famous work, the « novel in verse » *Eugene Onegin (Evgeny Onegin)*. He completed it in 1830.

The humorous and effervescent verse of the early cantos later gives way to a more serious tone.

It is the story of Eugene, a jaded member of the St. Petersburg *jeunesse dorée* in Tatyana Larina, a naïve provincial miss.

The story is interwoven with extensive digressions containing the author's ars poetica, ars amatoria, autobiography, literary criticism and parody, and social commentary.

Settings range from provincial Russia to Moscow and St-Petersburg, the seasons are described, social customs are depicted, and food, dress, education and current events are discussed. Eugene and Tatiana's portraits are in fact psychological ones, the secondary characters-Olga and her poet-fiancé Lensky- are purely satirical.

Onegin appears a bored fop (vain man) who hopes to overcome his ennui when he inherits his uncle's country estate.

Tatyana is a solitary dreamer under the spell of European preromantic literature, instantly identifies Onegin as her fated lover.

Defying convention, she writes him a poignant letter declaring her love, to which Onegin responds with a stern lecture on the dangers of imprudent behavior.

As the story unfolds we sense a diminution of the author's sympathy for Onegin.

Tatyana embodies an ideal Russian ethos.

« Onegin and Tatyana are the forefathers of a whole race of characters in Russian fiction » (Mirsky).

Indeed **the opposition of the morally strong woman and the « superfluous man »**- an individual who can find no productive role in society despite intellect, education and even wealth- became typical for the Russian novel of psychological realism.

Boris Godounov « a romantic tragedy » (1825)

Pushkin combines the somber and the comic. The play describes the conflict between Tsar Boris and the pretender to the throne, the false Dmitry.

- *Historical basis:*
- 1584 – Ivan IV "**The Terrible**", the **first Grand Prince of Muscovy to use the title Tsar (Caesar), dies**. Ivan's successor is his feeble son Fyodor, now Fyodor I, who cares only for spiritual matters, and leaves the affairs of state to his capable brother-in-law, boyar Boris Godunov, now de facto régent.
- 1591 – **Ivan's other son Dmitry dies** under mysterious circumstances in Uglich. An investigation, ordered by Godunov and carried out by Prince Vasiliy Shuyskiy, determines that the Tsarevitch while playing with a knife, had an epileptic seizure, fell, and died from a self-inflicted wound to the throat. Dmitry's mother, Maria Nagaya, exiled with him to Uglich by Godunov, claims he was assassinated. Rumors linking Boris to the crime are circulated by his enemies.
- **1598 – Tsar Fyodor I dies**. He is virtually the last representative of the Rurik Dynasty that has ruled Russia for 7 centuries. Patriarch Job of Moscow nominates Boris to succeed Fyodor I as Tsar, despite the rumors that Boris ordered the murder of Dmitry. **Boris agrees to ascend the throne only if elected by the Zemskiy Sobor**. This the assembly does unanimously, and Boris is crowned the same year.
- 1604 – **A pretender to the throne appears**, claiming to be Tsarevich Dmitry, but believed to be in reality one Grigoriy Otrepyev

Tales of Belkin (Povesti Belkina)

These tales are five short stories recorded by a provincial gentleman who had heard them from various narrators.

The pieces are ironical treatments of romantic types, situations and styles.

One of them is « **The Stationmaster** » (*stantsionny smotritel*) is in part a parody of « Poor Liza »

(1792).

A naïve traveller recalls three visits to a provincial post station.

The first introduces a robust and cheerful stationmaster whose pride and joy is his flirtatious daughter Dunya.

The report of the second visit depicts a now demoralized and alcoholic stationmaster, whose « poor Dunya » has run off with a hussar officer and is living with him in St. Petersburg.

In his account of the third visit the narrator ruefully reports the stationmaster's premature death, but also informs us that a beautiful lady had recently visited his grave : Dunya is Alive and well in St Petersburg.

Is it a **compassionate tale of a poor father** whose daughter has been seduced or an **ironic depiction of a man** who needlessly drank himself to death because he believed his daughter would inevitably end up badly ?

- **Nikolay Gogol (1809-1852)**

He is one of the « big three » of Russian romantic writers.

Evening on a Farm Near Dikanka (Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki, 1831-32)

Born into a Ukrainian family of the petty gentry, he achieved success with *Evening on a Farm Near Dikanka (Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki, 1831-32)*, a collection of stories.

They derived from the puppet theatre and Ukrainian folklore : there were devils, witches, river spirits...

Probably, Gogol was responding to the literary market.

Gogol believed in the devil and saw his hand behind any human behavior which seemed unworthy of man's High mission with *poshlost* as his instrument.

Gogol was the unmasker of **poshlost**, a term peculiar to Russian suggesting, banality, self-satisfied mediocrity, phony sentiment and vegetative existence.

The Petersburg Stories (1836-1842) constitute his finest work.

It includes : "The Nevsky Prospect ", "The Portrait » « the "Diary of a Madman " "The Nose » , "The Overcoat", "The Carriage ", and the fragment, "Rome " .

-**The overcoat** : though it was first conceived as a sort of anecdote, it kept moving in a different direction as Gogol worked on it, away from grotesque commentary in the direction of a **religious parable**

It follows minutely the stations of Jesus' life -- his appearance, the circumstances of his human birth, his occupation, his teaching, the temptations he faced in the desert, his betrayal and death; and, finally, his Resurrection. In order to investigate the elements which appear to be meaningful for such an interpretation, we should begin with a description of the place where the hero first appears, the "Department".

"Gogol's plot can in no way be termed anecdotal, humorous nor sentimental," he remarks. "Gogol's basic idea here is serious and gloomy; the fate of his hero is terrible and not ridiculous." (Cizewski)

Akaki does what a holy man is supposed to do: he copies the *logos* , the Word. Not he, but the world which has separated the Word which was in the beginning from its written, now bureaucratic

representation, has rendered Akaki's occupation grotesque and ridiculous.

(*Gogol's Art : A Search for Identity* by Laszlo Tikos 1996).

Throughout his work, **the Devil's temptations prove to be more powerful than man's ability to resist them**, as Merezhkovsky and other critics have observed. The overcoat here represents the temptation to which poor Akaki Akakievich is subjected.

Akaki Akakievich as teacher ? He barely ever says a word, the narrator records only his mumbling , his muttered "that is"(*togo*) and his "even" (*dazhe*) and other inarticulate babble , he can never finish a sentence. Only at one point is he quoted as having, if only in his mind, uttered a complete statement, the famous **humanitarian question**, "**I am your brother, why are you tormenting me?**" Does his teaching lie in these words? Yes, indeed, as their *effect* indicates.

Materiality, by which men are governed, in this case, the bitter weather of St. Petersburg, mocks their higher aspiration.

But, ironically, accepting the temptation of the prospect of a new overcoat leads him down the selfsame path: **he must leave his former, spiritual self**, exposed as it is to the bitter winds of winter, and accept the logic of the world he inhabits.

He experiences a change in his entire outlook, his entire personality -- where the new overcoat may have given him a temporary feeling of happiness, warmth and security, the final outcome is as cruel as if he had frozen to death in his old overcoat in the first place.

There is still the story's fantastic ending to consider: The ghost -- or ghosts -- which go around robbing overcoats

The denouement (ending) consists merely in a tiny correction to the laws and customs of this physical world.

The realistic detail itself is presented with **comic distortion** and the reader becomes aware that **verbal play, comic names** and the patterning of incidents are leading him away from realism.

The Inspector General (Revizor), 1836 (or The Revizor)

In 1836 appeared Gogol's play *The Inspector General* usually categorized as a satire upon corrupt officials.

It is the greatest of Russian comedies.

The Revizor marks a revolution in the world of Russian letters. In form it was realistic, in substance it was vital. It showed up the rottenness and corruption of the instruments through which the Russian government functioned. It held up **to ridicule, directly, all the officials of a typical Russian municipality**

In Russia each petty town-governor was almost an absolute despot.

Gogol was not a radical, nor even a liberal. He was strictly conservative. While hating the bureaucracy,

yet **he never found fault with the system itself** or with the autocracy. Like most born artists, he was strongly individualistic in temperament

If any lesson at all was to be drawn from the play it was **not a sociological lesson, but a moral one**. The individual who sees himself mirrored in it may be moved to self-purgation.

Yet the play lives because of the social message it carries.

The «hero», a brainless young clerk named Khlestakov, is mistaken for a government inspector travelling incognito by the worthies of a provincial town, who give him bribes to overlook their many transgressions.

Dead Souls (1842)

Gogol's masterpiece «**Dead Soul**»s (*Myortvye dushi*) was first published in 1842.

Gogol saw it as an «epic poem in prose».

In the Russian Empire, before the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, landowners were entitled to own serfs to farm their land. To count serfs (and people in general) the measure word «souls» was used. The plot of the novel relies on 'Dead souls' which are still accounted for in property registers.

The first part of the novel was **intended to represent the Inferno of the modern-day Divine Comedy**

The social criticism of *Dead Souls* is communicated primarily through **absurd and hilarious satire**.

Chichikov's whole idea is **of buying and selling dead souls**.

Chichikov, a mysterious new arrival in the town of N., visits a series of local landowners for that purpose.

Of all Gogol's creations, Chichikov stands out as **the incarnation of** poshlost. His psychological leitmotiv is complacency, and his geometrical expression roundness. He is the golden mean. The other characters — the squires Chichikov visits on his shady business — are typical "humors" (for Gogol's method of comic character drawing, with its exaggerations and geometrical simplification, is strongly reminiscent of Ben Jonson's).

Sobakevich, the strong, silent, economical man, square and bearlike;

Manilov, the silly sentimentalist with pursed lips;

Mme Korobochka, the suspicious and superstitious widow;

Nozdryov, the cheat and bully, with the manners of a hearty good fellow — are all types of eternal solidity.

- **Mikhail Lermontov** (1814-1841).

He is the stereotype of « **the romantic poet** ». He was killed in a duel at the age of twenty-seven

The child of an ill-matched marriage, while still an infant he lost his mother.

Through adolescence he was **sensitive and alienated**. At the University of Moscow he was aloof and contemptuous of his fellow students and the faculty.

His frivolous and dissolute life changed suddenly in January 1837, when Alexander Pushkin was slain by Georges d'Anthès. .

Lermontov **became the conscience of Russian liberals** with his poem « *Death of a poet* » (« *Smert poeta* ») an elegy blaming the aristocrats of the Imperial court for Pushkin's death. Subsequent exile to the Caucasus, heroism in battle, a duel with the son of the French ambassador along with a rapidly developing literary reputation enhanced his position.

He gave the image of a **romantic Genius, the poète-maudit**, the rebel, the judge and the prophet.

A Hero of Our Time (Geroy nashogo vremeni, 1840)

It is Lermontov's prose master piece. There are five books :

Book I : Bela : *The Heart of a Russian*

Book II : *Maksim Maksimych*

Book III : The First Extract from Pechorin's Diary : *Taman*

Book IV : The Second Extract from Pechorin's Diary : *The Fatalist*

Book V : The Third Extract from Pechorin's Diary of Princess *Mary*

It is the first fully developed **novel of psychological realism** in Russian literature. It presents an intimate portrait of the protagonist, Grigory Pechorine, an intelligent but totally egocentric young officer who destroys the happiness, even lives, of others.

The reader is both attracted by the man, who is analytical, aloof, and clearly **superior** to his social milieu, and at the same time repelled by his arrogance, cruelty, and **moral ambivalence**.

III - The natural school (1840-1855)

This is a period of transition, from the great years of romanticism to the time of the Russian realists, from an age of poetry to an epoch when **prose writing** dominated the literary arena.

Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) was at the philosophical and literary center of the 1840s. He was a literary critic.

He decreed that the multi-faceted Gogol should be interpreted as a writer whose works were models

of social commitment ans that « *the Overcoat* » of 1842 should be regarded as an apotheosis of the « **little man** ».

The « natural school », a literary tendency, which developed at that time may be termed « **prerealism** »

If during the romantic period the emphasis was on the extraordinary individual, during the 1840s the focus shifted to **the ordinary individual** , to the « little men » of urban society (such as clerks) or peasants.

During the 1840s the Russian political climate was dominated by the figure of Tsar Nicholas I.

The official values of the regime, formulated by the Minister of Education, Sergey Uvarov, as « **Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality** », impinged on cultural life in a direct way.

The third element was a matter of some debate : **what was Russia's national identity ?**

Did Russia belong to Europe. ? This debate lays at the heart of **the controversy between Slavophiles and Westernizers in the 1840s .**

On the one hand, Moscow with the values of the old Russia, on the other hand St. Petersburg with those of the new, Europeanized Russia.

The literature of the period is marked by a sociological « writing », **a growing interest in social categories** : humble clerks, the urban poor, beggars and Petty tradesmen, the peasants..

This literature has also **humanitarian concerns** (an attempt to see the individual behind the representative of the group).

Works : *Dead Souls*, *The Overcoat*, which has been seen as a cornerstone in the building of the Russian realistic tradition : « We have all come out from Under Gogol's « Overcoat », Dostoevsky is supposed to have said.

It is also the moment when the humanitarian line, the **concern for the little man**, became firmly established in Russian literature.

Dead Souls belongs to the comic world of the Gogol of the 1830s but there are distinct elements of Gogol's new esthetic outlook of the 1840s : **the need for art to reveal an inner truth**, to propound a **positive message** and thus for the comic vision to yield to one that is serious and **didactic**.

Turgenev : *The Sportsman's Sketches (Zapiski okhotnika)* 1852

In *A Sportsman's Sketches* Turgenev portrayed the peasant as a human being with finer feeling and even with artistic sensitivity. By contrast, their masters often appeared as inhuman, insensitive and cruel. The stories are loosely linked by the theme of hunting , hunting is not a chief concern.

Turgenev's enemy was serfdom .

Dostoevsky's first work : *Poor Folk* (*Bednye liudi*)

The very title calls attention to poverty . The author seems to continue the theme of the little man but Dostoevsky **humanizes** Gogol's tale and « **psychologizes** » it.

Bashmachkin has no inner world as he is very inarticulate. In Dostoevsky's work clothing is a mark of this hero's psychological sensitivity and or his acute awareness of himself in the outer world, whereas in Gogol clothing manifests his hero's inner deadness. Bashmachkin loves a coat, Devushkin a girl.

- **Ivan Gontcharov (1812-1891)** *Oblomov*

- **Mikhail Saltykov Schedrin (1826-1889)**

IV- NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIAN REALISM (1855-1880)

The years from 1855 to 1880 were the time when the **Russian realists flourished**. **Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gontcharov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Ostrovsky, Leskov.**

These years coincided with the reign of Emperor Alexander II and **a period of far-reaching reforms**.

1855 is the year which saw the publication of Chernychevsky's « *Esthetic Relations of Art to Reality* » (Chernychevsky believed art should serve utilitarian purposes) and 1881 witnessed the violent assassination of Tsar Alexander II. (Dostoevski and Pisemsky died in 1881, Turgenev in 83)

It was also a stimulating period **for criticism** (Chernychevsky, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev among the radicals, Grigorev among their opponents).

A younger generation known as the *raznochintsy* appeared. (*raznochintsy* meaning « of various ranks ») They were of non noble origine, They included members of the clergy, merchants, petty towns-people, peasantry, minor officials but were self-educated.

From the 1840s the *raznochintsy* had a significant influence on the development of Russian society and culture, and became the main social stratum for the formation of the Russian intelligentsia in the 1860s.

They worshiped education and had a cult of science, believed that the main principles of life should be materialism, utilitarianism and scientism.

They thought that art should serve utilitarian purposes.

The hero of the novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862) by Ivan Turgenev, Evgeny Bazarov was a typical *raznochinets* and nihilist. Nihilism was wide spread at that time. They denied the traditional values of the society, such as marriage and private property. They called themselves « developed individuals », « thinking realists », « new people ».

They were « **radicals** » or « **revolutionary democrats** ». They were very intolerant of the contrary opinions , were **idealists** and dreamt about creation of an ideal and fair state. They played a crucial role in the formation of the revolutionary intelligentsia.

By the 1870s **nihilism** as a social phenomenon almost disappeared and *raznochintsy* transformed into part of the Russian intelligentsia.

Opposed to such « radicals » was the « **liberal** » wing of the intelligentsia, those of an older generation who looked to the West for inspiration. To the far right of such liberalism were **the Slavophiles**, who abhorred revolution and western influence and advocated that the Russian intelligentsia should return **to religious bases of Russian life**.

Russian intelligentsia in the 1870s had a growing conviction that Russia should seek a **non-capitalist path of development**. A movement (*populism, narodnichestvo*) emerged believed in the Russian peasantry the means of challenging the tsar 's power and achieving the changes which the intelligentsia envisaged.

In 1874 several thousand young populists, mostly university students, left the cities and undertook « **a going to the people** » (*khozhdenie v narod*).

They aimed to instil in the peasant masses an awareness of their role in promoting agrarian socialism.

In 1876 a clandestine party was formed : « **Land and Freedom** ».

But the dream of a morally rejuvenated society deteriorated into terrorism.

Another organization broke away from *Land and Freedom*, « **The People's Will** ». It was a **terrorist organization**. It led to the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 .

The major novelists, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, helped to form a public opinion and a national awareness of problems and purposes . Literature had engendered hopes for freedom and a new society. **Russian realist literature was concerned with the inherent value of the individual, with freedom, equality and brotherhood.**

- **Ivan Turgenev** (1818-1883) lived and wrote for many years in Europe and was profoundly Western in his outlook and he first brought Russian literature to the attention of European readers, but at the cost of often being considered an alien in his own land.

His greatest novel is *Fathers and Sons* (1862).

He confronts two generations of the intelligentsia, the older generation of the « fathers » represented by Paul Kirsanov and the younger generation of « children » represented by Bazarov. Ideological victory goes to the latter.

It was the two giants **Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky** whose work exploded out of Russia in the 1870s to overwhelm Europeans with their imaginative and emotional power. To many readers it must have seemed as if this distant, obscure country had suddenly leaped to the forefront of contemporary letters. Both were profoundly influenced both by European Romanticism and Realism, but their fiction offered characters more complex and **impassioned** than those Europeans were used to.

- **Tolstoy (1828-1910)**

Tolstoy (is known chiefly for his two masterpieces, *War and Peace* (1865-1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1875-1877)). These works which wrestle with life's most **profound questions** earned Tolstoy the reputation of perhaps the world's greatest novelist.

The first is a **vast portrait of Russia during the period of the Napoleonic wars**, and the second **the story of a tormented adulterous woman** treated far more seriously than Flaubert's *Emma Bovary*. Tolstoy sought to do more than entertain or even move his readers, taking the writing of fiction seriously as a **moral enterprise**. In the end Tolstoy became a **Christian utopian**, abandoning fiction altogether.

Tolstoy's works

Childhood (*Detstvo*, 1852) : Childhood is an exploration of the inner life of a young boy, Nikolenka, and one of the books in Russian writing to explore an expressionist style, mixing fact, fiction and emotions to render the moods and reactions of the narrator.

The *Sevastopol Stories* (1855), a first-hand reportage from Sevastopol (he had been an artillery officer during the Crimean war).

He claimed that the hero of his study of the Crimean campaign « *Sevastopol in May* », was « **truth** » « whom I love with all the strength of my spirit, whom I have striven to depict in all his beauty »

He describes the mental and physical process of violent death, just as it points up the vainglorious character of martial heroism.

War and Peace (1869) is the masterpiece of historical fiction. It is an epic work on the Napoleonic invasion of 1812.

It blends the historical and the fictional into a single monolithic whole.

A historical fatalism governed the development of events in *War and Peace*. Tolstoy went back to the Decembrist revolt of 1825. In seeking a source for that revolt of the nobility against their tsar, Tolstoy regressed historically to the Napoleonic invasion of 1812 and the the battle of Austerlitz in 1805. The impacts of the Napoleonic era on the Russian society are seen through the eyes of five Russian aristocratic families. — the Bezukhoffs, the Bolkonskys, the Rostoffs, the Kuragins and the Drubetskoffs—

As a family chronicle it is based largely on his own and his wife's family.

There is a large scale of characters.

An interesting one is **Pierre Bezukhov**, the illegitimate son of a wealthy count, who resembles Tolstoy himself :

Much of Book Two concerns his struggles with his passions and his spiritual conflicts to be a better man. Now a rich aristocrat, he abandons his former carefree behavior and enters upon a philosophical quest particular to Tolstoy: **how should one live a moral life in an ethically imperfect world?** The question continually baffles and confuses Pierre. He attempts to liberate his serfs but ultimately achieves nothing of note.

Pierre is vividly contrasted with the intelligent and ambitious **Prince Andrei Bolkonsky**. At the Battle of Austerlitz, Andrei is inspired by a vision of glory to lead a charge of a straggling army. He suffers a near fatal artillery wound. In the face of death, Andrei realizes all his former ambitions are pointless

and **his former hero, Napoleon (who rescues him in a horseback excursion to the battlefield), is apparently as vain** as himself.

Thirteen-year-old **Natasha Rostov** (Natalia Ilyinichna) believes herself in love with Boris Drubetskoy, a disciplined young man who is about to join the army as an officer.

Later young Natasha, in Petersburg, is caught up in the excitement of dressing for her first grand ball, where she meets Prince Andrei and briefly reinvigorates him with her **vivacious charm**. Andrei believes he has found purpose in life again.

Another important though episodic character is **Platon Karataev** whom Pierre encounters as a French prisoner during the retreat from Moscow. Platon embodies roundness, wholeness and total acceptance of life's goodness. His intuitive identification of life with the divine acts upon Pierre to make him realize that « **Life is all. Life is God**. All is change and movement and this movement is God.... To love life is to love God »

A **fatalism** dictated both the course of history and the destinies of the Tolstoyan heroes and heroines.

At work was a **moral mechanism that indicated the right and wrong paths** of social conduct.

The greatness of *War and Peace* lies in the very multiplicity of its many locales, characters and viewpoints, in its boldness as a fiction that makes experience of the past more realistic than any historical record, and in its power **totally to absorb the reader in a range of emotions and ideas**.

Anna Karenina (1877)

Tolstoy's second masterpiece, *Anna Karenina* is pure, elegant and refined. It deals with contemporary themes as the « woman question », the peasant question, the role of the family in marriage as the basic social contract, the relationship between the nobility and peasantry, between city and country, between old patriarchal ways and the industrial nineteenth century.

Tolstoy intended to **point a moral lesson**. But in the very portrayal of Anna the moralizing yields to a growing sense of the tragic dimension of her life.

This is no romantic heroine but a **vital woman** of her time who seeks the happiness which her husband cannot give her and, in pursuing that happiness with Vronsky, slowly becomes a **social pariah**.

The two stories of Anna Karenina and Konstantin Levin are almost separate narratives, but they illustrate a similar morality.

Tolstoyan morality, concerned in this novel so obviously with **marriage as the basic social contract**, insists that **violation of that contract brings tragedy** in its wake, while observance brings the possibility of an ultimately meaningful life.

- Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881)

Dostoyevsky is famous for his **complex analyses of the human mind**. Unlike Turgenev or Tolstoy, he pays little attention to details of setting or the personal appearance of his characters, instead concentrating on their thoughts and emotions.

Dostoyevsky had a sensational life which is variously reflected in his fiction.

He believed his father to have been murdered by his own serfs, a belief which led him to be **obsessed with murder** as a subject in many of his greatest works, such as *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1881). After being arrested for his involvement in a radical group (the model for *The Devils* (1872) he was abruptly notified that he was about to be shot, but was spared at the last minute and sent to Siberia for several years. He often described the traumatic effect which this mock-execution had on him in his fiction, and devoted another novel (*The House of the Dead*) to the story of his time in prison.

Though his characters always seem to be undergoing some sort of torment, he creates **the extreme situations and emotions** in his novels not out of mere sensationalism, but to plumb the depths of human experience.

- *Crime and Punishment* (1866) focuses on the mental anguish and moral dilemmas of Rodion Raskolnikov, an impoverished ex-student in St-Petersburg who formulates and executes a plan to kill an unscrupulous pawnbroker for her cash. Raskolnikov argues that with the pawnbroker's money **he can perform good deeds to counterbalance the crime**, while ridding the world of a worthless vermin. He also commits this murder to test his own hypothesis that **some people are naturally capable of such things, and even have the right to do them**. Several times throughout the novel, Raskolnikov justifies his actions by connecting himself mentally with **Napoleon Bonaparte**, believing that **murder is permissible in pursuit of a higher purpose**.

- *The Brothers Karamazov* (1881)

Compelling, profound, complex, it is the story of **a patricide and of the four sons** who each had a motive for murder: **Dmitry**, the sensualist, Ivan, the intellectual; **Alyosha**, the mystic; and twisted, cunning **Smerdyakov**, the bastard child. Frequently lurid, nightmarish, always brilliant, the novel plunges the reader into a sordid love triangle, a **pathological obsession**, and a gripping courtroom drama.

But throughout the whole, Dostoyevsky **searches for the truth--about man, about life, about the existence of God**. A terrifying answer to man's eternal questions, this monumental work remains the crowning achievement of perhaps the finest novelist of all time.

The Grand Inquisitor is a parable told by Ivan to his brother Alyosha in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–1880). Alyosha is a novice monk and Ivan questions the possibility of a personal, benevolent God.

The Grand Inquisitor is an important part of the novel and one of the best-known passages in modern literature because **of its ideas about human nature and freedom**, and because of its fundamental ambiguity.

VII- THE NINETEENTH CENTURY : BETWEEN REALISM AND MODERNISM (1880-1895)

The period from 1880 to 1895 was a time of lesser cultural energies, although it continued writers such as Chekhov;

In 1895 was created **Chekhov's** *The seagull*, the first of his four outstanding plays and which incorporated modernist and even symbolist elements, foreshadowing the cultural revival to come. This period was dominated ideologically by the late **Tolstoy** who after his spiritual crisis of 1879-80

turned to moral didacticism in literature, developed a viewpoint known as Tolstoyanism (advocating non-violent resistance to evil) and gathered disciples around him;

In his short story « *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* » he argued that the most ordinary life is the most terrible life.

In « *The Kreutzer Sonata* » he suggested that since sexual passion was the root of all evil, human beings might abstain from sexual relations even if this meant the end of the human race.

The reformist Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881 and his successor, **Alexander III**, ushered in a reign of severe repression. So it led to a palpable sense of disillusionment and depression among a large segment of the intelligentsia in the early 1880s.

Chekhov wrote about his entire generation in a letter of 1892: « We have neither immediate nor remote goals, and there is an **emptiness in our souls** »

- Anton Chekhov: (1860-1904)

Both as a short-story writer and as a playwright, Chekhov was the finest Russian writer of his time. Unlike Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, he avoided sermonizing in his fiction. He preferred subtle understatement to bold generalizations.

He proclaimed the **the aim of art is unconditional truth** and exposed hypocrisy and deception wherever he found it. His world contains **a wide range of Russian types**, from peasants to priests.

Trained as a doctor, Chekhov once declared that a writer must possess the objectivity of a chemist but this does not imply an indifference to good and evil or the absence of ideals and ideas.

He has been called the « **voice of twilight Russia** », the chronicler of the landowning class which was becoming ever less economically viable after the liberation of the serfs in 1861, the observer of the intelligentsia which had somehow lost its spiritual moorings

Chekhov was the historian of the age of « small deeds » which had succeeded the era of great dreams of the 1860s.

« When I write, **I rely fully on the reader, presuming that he himself will add the subjective elements** missing in my story ». This is a basic principle of Chekhov's art.

Tolstoy called Chekhov's manner « **impressionist** »: Chekhov suggested the emotional atmosphere of a moment, melding a small number of meaningful details with subtle touches of color, allusive and rhythms.

Chekhov was the son of a grocer and the grandson of a serf, he moved in 1879 from Taganrog to Moscow, where he enrolled in medical school.

He made contributions to popular humor magazines.

VIII- TURN OF A CENTURY : MODERNISM (1895-1925)

This period is complex and is characterized as the era of modernism in its various manifestations: **decadence, symbolism, avant-gardism, futurism, acmeism, formalism.**

1893: the critic and writer **Dmitry Merezhkovsky** wrote « *On the reasons for the decline and on the new currents in contemporary Russian literature* »

1925 the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union passed a resolution on questions of literature and art.

It asserted its right to exert its control over literature and art in the future.

The epoch of modernism began as a clear **rebellion against the materialist legacy** of the 1860s.

Symbolism expressed a philosophical dualism (with its orientation toward other worlds)

The new intellectuals took a keen interest in religions of all sorts, in literary language (the formalist school of the 1920s).

Different groups: **symbolists** (the poet Blok) **futurists** (Mayakovsky) and **acmeists** (Akhmatova)

The year 1917 brought about the **first mass cultural emigration** in Russian history. These emigrants wanted to preserve the traditional values of Russian culture abroad.

Russian literature in the early 1920s was divided into two important but unequal segments.

Two opposing movements in the early years of the XXth century: realism and symbolism.

Realism was the survival of the great age of the Russian novel (Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, etc..) and in a different form Chekhov's short novels from whom all the XXth century realists stemmed. Symbolism was the product of the general modernist movement in European art and literature. But Russian symbolism had more mystical and religious strivings than in Europe.

a- Realism

- Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

Anton Chekhov's plays

His four major plays, written and staged from 1896 to 1904, were a new departure not only for Russian drama but for the European theater as a whole: he used symbols and leitmotifs as well as the techniques of mirroring society and revealing the inner psychological motivations of individuals.

The Seagull (*Chayka*, 1896) Designated as a « comedy », describes two generations of artists caught in a period of rapid cultural change. The fame of established artists is shown to be tainted by self-love, coldness and stinginess.

The play's symbol is the seagull. The death of the seagull seems to signify the death of desire, or the destruction of youth and innovative energy.

Uncle Vanya (*Dyadya Vanya*, 1899) describes an eminent professor Serebryakov, who has exploited his first wife's family and especially her brother Vanya, for 25 years., a fact to which Vanya has suddenly awakened just before the play begins.

Serebryakov has taken a second and much younger wife, a provocative beauty named Elena

The local doctor, Astrov is a positive character: he is dedicated to the planting of trees in the service of ecology.

Sonya is another positive symbol. She is Serebryakov's daughter and she suffers from Elena's allure by contrast. Her devotion to work comes to seem sterile.

The Three sisters (*Tri sestry*, 1901). There is a dramatic contrast in this play between the lively and well-educated sisters and the **stifling provincial society** in which they must live even as they long to return to Moscow as a token of their desire for spontaneity, fulfillment and achievement.

All these still vital people are **frustrated**: there is not any happy love in the play.

The Cherry Orchard (*Vishnevy sad*, 1904) is about the displacement of a declining aristocracy by crass parvenu merchants: in this instance the symbol of the cherry orchard points not only to the economic transition from which the landowners are suffering, but also to their cultural heritage and love of beauty. The new world is embodied in the merchant Lopakhin, the old world by Madame Ranevskaya.

- Maxim Gorky (1868-1936)

Gorky was a politically engaged writer. In 1905 he joined the Bolshevik party and became a friend of Lenin's.

He had lived abroad a long time (he had lived on the Island of Capri from 1906 to 1913, then returned to Russia. He supported the Bolshevik revolution. But in 1918 he wrote an essay « Untimely thoughts » : « Lenin and his associates consider it possible to commit all kinds of crimes... the abolition of free speech and senseless arrests.. » He then left his country in 1921 and went to Capri in 1924. After 1929 he went back to USSR several times on the invitation of Staline and in 1932 he stayed in USSR.

He formulated **the doctrine of socialist realism** in 1934.

He published a novel, *Mother* (*Mat*) in 1907. This work was destined to be the **founding document**

of socialist realism it describes the miserable lives of factory workers in a provincial town: the men have no other entertainment but drinking, fighting, and beating their wives.

This is the background against which the lives of the exemplary young people who are secret Social Democrats lived. They print and distribute political pamphlets, are in constant danger of night searches, arrests, and the brutality of the police.

Paul's mother learns to be a political activist, when her son is arrested. She will become a martyr to the cause.

Maxim Gorky displayed a typically Russian compassion for his characters, who were often economically deprived.

- **Ivan Bunin** (1870-1953) began simultaneously with poetry and prose, produced several of the finest Russian stories and novels. He went into emigration after 1917 and received the **Nobel Prize** for literature (in 1933).

His works deal with love and death. His fiction is impressionistic and open-ended. A number of his stories and lyrics are set in exotic locales because he traveled extensively in Europe, the Near East, India and Ceylon.

The Village (Derevnya, 1910) reflects the revulsion that the violence of the 1905 uprisings aroused in Bunin.

In « *the Gentleman from San Francisco*, 1915, the sudden death of a rich American on vacation in Capri exposes the emptiness of his self-important, avaricious and relentlessly busy life.

b- Symbolism

In France « a symboliste ra » with Marcel Proust and Paul Valéry. The Russian symbolist school was more **religious** than the French in its orientation and absorbed more from **German romantic thought** (Hegel, Fichte)

This literary trend had **mystical** and religious strivings

The Symbolists worshiped music as the most spiritual art form and strove to convey the « music of divine spheres », which is a common Symbolist phrase, through the medium of poetry

- **Alexander Blok** (1880-1921)

Alexander Blok, a mystic symbolist, was the greatest poet of this time. Mysticism laid at the core of the school of Russian symbolism.

His masterpiece is generally considered to be *The Twelve (Dvenadtsat, 1918)* a depiction of revolutionary soldiers patrolling the streets of Petrograd in 1918

The action of *The Twelve* is set during a blizzard. Later he said that while writing the poem he « heard » the sound of the old word « crumbling »

The poem contains a religious element. The Red Guardsmen number twelve and are inescapably associated with the group of Christ's disciples: and the work is divided into twelve parts.

The poem's conclusion is enigmatic: Christ appears before the Red Guards almost as their leader, but they, blinded by the snow, shoot at Him.

c-Futurism

Even as symbolism was at the height of its influence in Russia, a reaction in the form of an avant-garde movement centered in Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Italy began to take shape, with the graphic arts leading the way.

The pioneer in the field of literary avant-gardism was **Filippo Marinetti**, who began publishing futurist manifestos in Italy in 1909 in which he rejected the heritage of the past in favor of modern machines and energy.

In Russia avant-garde literature was dominated by futurist groups

- **Vladimir Mayakovsky** (1893-1930), a cubo-futurist poet. Cubo-futurists were the most vociferous, and extrême group. They were familiar with contemporary western currents.

Their principal manifesto was published in 1912 « *A slap in the face of public taste* » (*Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu*). In it they rejected the culture of the past.

Mayakovsky had joined the Bolshevik party in 1908. His poems scandalized the provincial bourgeoisie.

He published in 1905 *A Cloud in Trousers* (*Oblako v shtanakh*), an autobiography of Mayakovsky

He was an enthusiastic supporter of the new regime, wrote propagandistic works, created propaganda posters.

But **his mind was divided**. On the one hand, he hated bourgeoisie and its way of life, but he believed that personal love was a valuable part of that existence.

And on the other, he longed for a perfect social order while at the same time he understood the potential boredom of a utopian system and the dangers of political tyranny.

In 1930, Mayakovsky took his own life while he was working on a love poem.

- **Marina Tsvetaeva** (1892-1941)

Another great and very original avant-garde poet of the era, **Marina Tsvetaeva** wrote much like a cubo-futurist and yet clearly revered the achievements of the past.

d-Imaginism

This school advocated the absolute independence for the artist. And believed in the primacy of images in poetry. And their major theme-an obvious one at a time of rapid urbanization-was the doom of the lonely individual in the modern city.

- **Sergey Esenin** (1895-1925) a « peasant » lyric poet had avant-garde links and became a popular idol in the 1920s. He became the legendary peasant who succumbed to the temptations of urban bohemia. He used rural imagery and unpretentious language. He depicted the beauties of the Sunset, stars, forests, fields, snow and ice. Another favorite subject was romantic love, presented in the stylized folk tradition.

He was known for his evocations of the Russian countryside, of village life and the Russian landscape (*I left the Native Home* -1918), *Hooligan* (1919) *I am the Last Poet of the Village* (1920) *A Letter to Mother* 1924, *Goodbye, My Friend, Goodbye* 1925 (his farewell poem).

After welcoming the revolution, he rejected the policies of the Bolshevik regime and at 30 he committed suicide.

Letter to Mother

Still around, old dear? How are you keeping?

I too am around. Hello to you!

May that magic twilight ever be streaming

Over your cottage as it used to do.

People write how sad you are, and anxious

For my sake, though you won't tell them so,

And that you in your old-fashioned jacket
Out onto the highroad often go.

That you often see in the blue shadows
Ever one dream, giving you no rest:
Someone in a drunken tavern scuffle
Sticks a bandit knife into my chest.

Don't go eating your heart out with worry,
It's just crazy nonsense and a lie.
I may drink hard, but I promise, mother,
I shall see you first before I die.

I love you as always and I'm yearning
In my thoughts for just one thing alone,
Soon to ease my heartache by returning
To our humble low-roofed country home.

I'll return when decked in white the branches
In our orchard are with spring aglow.
But no longer wake me up at sunrise,
As you used to do eight years ago.

Do not waken dreams no longer precious,
Hope never fulfilled do not excite.

e- Acmeism.

In contrast with the Symbolists, the Acmeists turned to **the visible world** in all its triumphant **materiality**. They focused on the portrayal of human emotions and aesthetic objects ; replaced the poet as prophet **with the poet as craftsman** ; and propoted **plastic models** for poetry at the expense of music.

- **Anna Akhmatova** (1889-1966) acmeist

Passionate, earthly love and religious piety shaped the oxymoronic nature of her creative output. Her rhymes are exact and precise, her sentences are short, her syntax is simple. Her writing is perfectly clear and logic even if what she expresses can be complex.

In the Evening

1913

« The garden's music ranged to me
With dole that's beyond expression
The frozen oysters smelled with freshness
And sharpness of the northern sea.

He told me, "I'm the best of friends!",
And gently touched my gown's laces.
Oh, how differs from embraces
The easy touching of these hands.

Like that they pet a cat, a bird...
Or watch the girls that run the horses....
And just a quiet laughter poses
Under his lashes' easy gold.

And the distressing fiddles' voice
Sings me from haze that's low flowed,
"Thank holly heaven and rejoice –
You are first time with your beloved."

ВЕЧЕРОМ (1913)

Звенела музыка в саду
Таким невыразимым горем.
Свежо и остро пахли морем
На блюде устрицы во льду.

Он мне сказал: "Я верный друг!"
И моего коснулся платья.
Так не похожи на объятия
Прикосновенья этих рук.

Так глядят кошек или птиц,
Так на наездниц смотрят стройных...
Лишь смех в глазах его спокойных
Под легким золотом ресниц.

А скорбных скрипок голоса
Поют за стелющимся дымом:
"Благослови же небеса -
Ты в первый раз одна с любимым".

Akhmatova's work ranges from short lyric poems to intricately structured cycles, such as *Requiem*

(1935–40), her tragic masterpiece about the Stalinist terror.

Requiem is a lyrical cycle of elegy, lamentation and witness written between 1935 and 1940. It depicts the suffering of the common people Under the Stalinist Terror. It was not published within the USSR until 1987. Some poems reference the grief and agony she faced when her son, Lev Gumilev was arrested by the secret police in 1938. She writes, « one hundred million voices shout » through her « tortured mouth » :

« Seven months I've pleaded
For you to come home.
Flung myself at the hangman's feet.
My terror, oh my son.
And I can't understand.
Now all's eternal confusion.
Who's beast, and who's man ?
How long ill execution ? »

- **Osip Mandelstam** (1891-1938) one of the finest Russian poets of this century.
He was a member of the Acmeist School of poets.

Mandelstam's own prophecy was fulfilled: "**Only in Russia is poetry respected, it gets people killed. Is there anywhere else where poetry is so common a motive for murder?**"
He was arrested in 1938 and died in prison.

There were many different modernist literary trends in the 1920s.

f- the formalist school.

It started in 1916 as the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOYAZ). It is a school of literary criticism. It includes some leading writers as **Viktor Shklovsky** and **Yuri Tynyanov**. This formal method was concerned first of all with formal or artistic quality (the message of a work of art was secondary). The formalist movement began to disintegrate in 1927 but it has been a fertile source of new critical ideas and a stimulus to many writers.

g- Constructivism

This work was applied throughout Europe in the 1920s to a wide range of modernist tendencies in all the arts. In literature it appeared as a further development of some trends in part of the futurist movement; worship of modern technology and the belief that a poem is a « construction » to be designed and put together like a product of the engineer's drafting board.
The « Literary Center of the Constructivists » was founded in 1924

All the early Soviet movements with pretensions to aesthetic innovation died of inanition or were suppressed

Prose writers :

- **Eugene Zamyatin** (1884-1937) is the author of novels, short stories, dramatic works. He was the

most intellectually stimulating of the Russian **prose modernists**.

He was trained in St Petersburg as an engineer, pursued a dual career as a practical scientist and as a writer.

He was twice exiled for his political activities. He wrote satires depicting the English as cunningly hypocritical in defending their petty bourgeois lack of individuality.

We (My) 1920

He became famous because of his anti-utopian novel *We*, written in 1920). It is a direct **precursor of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984***.

We describes events supposed to be taking place in a United State of the future and is cast in the form of the diary of an engineer in charge of construction of a spacecraft intended to bring the message of social perfection to non-terrestrial creatures outside the United State, which is surrounded by a Green Wall, there still live retrograde human beings subject to motivations of sexual love and ideals of personal freedom.

- **Boris Pilnyak (1894-1938)**

He was a major supporter of anti-urbanism and a critic of mechanized society. These views often brought him into disfavor with Communist critics. His most famous works are *The Naked Year* (*Golyj God*, 1922), *Mahogany* (*Krasnoe Derevo* 1927) and *The Volga Falls into the Caspian Sea* (1930)

- **Isaac Babel (1894-1940)** playwright, literary translator, and short story writer. He is best known as the author of *Red Cavalry* (1920), *Tales of Odessa*, all of which are considered masterpieces of Russian literature.

Babel witnessed a military campaign of the Polish-Soviet War of 1920

Babel's honest description of the brutal realities of war infuriated Marshall Budyonny who did not like Babel's unvarnished descriptions of marauding Red Cossacks. He demanded Babel's execution without success because Gorky protected him.

The Tales of Odessa (1923-24) deal primarily with a group of Jewish thugs that live in a ghetto of Odessa. The leader is Benya Krik, known as the King.

The satirists :

- **Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940).**

He wrote a realistic novel *White guard* (*Belaya gvardiya*, 1924) which portrayed the opponents of soviet power rather sympathetically.

He had a gift for **grotesque satire**.

The Diavoliad (*Dyavoliada*, 1925) includes three short stories depicting soviet bureaucrats and managers as both corrupt and criminally stupid and *Heart of a Dog* (*Sobache serdtse*, 1925).

- **Mikhail Zoshenko (1895-1958)**

- **Yury Olesha (1899-1960)**

One of his most popular works: the novel *Envy* (1927) is a biting satire. It thematically contrasts the old and new order, as well as individualism and collectivism in Soviet Russia.

The novel is about a pathetic young man named Nikolai Kavalero, who **refuses to accept Communist values** and is consumed by loathing and envy for his benefactor Andrei Babichev, a model Soviet citizen who manages a successful sausage factory. With Andrei Babichev's brother Ivan, Kavalero attempts to stage a comeback of all the old petty feelings that were crushed under communism.

IX- THE ERA OF SOCIALIST REALISM :1925-1953

1925 is the year when the newly established communist regime asserted its **authority over literature and culture, 1953 is the year of Joseph Stalin's death.**

Literature and politics were more **intimately interconnected** than at any other time.

By the mid 1920's the clash between old and new, town and country, man and machine, anarchy and discipline, is the predominant theme of Soviet prose.

The political pressures brought about **the division of Russian literature into two major if unequal parts:** the principal one of Russian literature within the Soviet union and the lesser one of the « **first wave** » of the emigration which began to assume definite form around 1925.

Many gifted writers suffered from the regime.

Zamyatin was forced into exile,

Pilnyak was compelled to alter his literary approach, **Olesha** was silenced, **Bulgakov** wrote works which would not see publication for many years and even **Mayakovsky** ended his own life in 1930.

By 1925 most writers in exile had established a more or less permanent residence : **Bunin, Khodasevich, Remizov, Mereshkovsky, Zinaide Hippus** (who lived in poverty).

In the early 1920s Berlin was the hub of Russian intellectual life (several Russian publishing houses : *Epoch, Petropolis*, etc..)

Paris after 1925 became the center of *émigré* literary life.

The regime's ultimate objective was to establish a single literary approach, known as « **socialist realism** ». It has dominated the field of Soviet culture ever since its introduction in the early 1930s.

« Socialist realism, **the fundamental method of Soviet artistic literature** and literary criticism, demands of the artist a truthful and historically specific depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. this truthfulness... must be linked to the **task of ideologically remodeling** and educating the workers in the spirit of socialism ».

Andrey Zhdanov, Stalin's right hand man in cultural affairs, said that Stalin had described writers as « engineers of human minds » and urged them to depict life not merely in terms of « objective reality », but rather « in its revolutionary development ».

It was called upon to depict **the new socialist man as hero of Soviet industrialization** as he overcame the obstacles placed in his way by the remnants of the past and even by an intractable reality.

Modernism was henceforth prohibited. Writers should learn from the classics of nineteenth-century realism and not from innovative western writers such as **Joyce** or **Kafka**.

1934 was the year when Stalin's great purges began : they continued until 1938. Hundreds of writers either perished or spent years in prison or labor camps. Prominent victims **were Babel, Mandelstam, Pilnyak, Ivan Kataev, Artyom Vesoly.**

Many writers not arrested were reduced to inactivity and disappeared from the literary scene for long periods ; for example, **Erdman, Platonov, and Bulgakov.**

The proletarian novelists :

- **Fyodor Gladkov (1883-1958) :** *Cement* (1925). The novel, a monumental proletarian novel about the Revolution. It depicts the struggle of post-Revolutionary reconstruction in the Soviet Union. It is the prototype of the socialist realist « production novel.

-**Alexander Fadeyev (1901-1956)** the secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers. He fanatically believed in socialist realism, a proletarian novelist (committed suicide in 1956)

- **Nikolay Ostrovsky (1904-1936) :** *How the Steel Was Tempered* : a socialist realist novel on the

Russian Civil War.

After the Second world War, literature was even encouraged to become « **conflictless** » as Soviet society supposedly moved toward the elimination of all class distinction.

The state's primary instrument for the enforcement of socialist realism was the **Union of Soviet Writers, formed in 1932**, which held its first congress in 1934.

Union members enjoyed **distinct privileges** and expulsion from the union was ordinarily tantamount to literary annihilation.

Literature was so important to the life of the state that it must be **strictly regulated**: erring writers must be punished, and conforming writers rewarded.)

Many writers perished during the great purges of the 1930s.

Soviet Russian cultural life had an artificial quality during the period of high Stalinism

The principal focuses of émigré literary activity after 1925 were Paris, Berlin Prague, Belgrade, Warsaw, Riga, New York and San Francisco.

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party , dated 1 July 1925, was stressing that « in a class society there is and can be **no neutral art** »LEF, the journal of the avant-garde, was revived as NEW LEF in 1927. it propoted a utilitarian and formalist esthetic and a « literature of fact » (sketches, documentaries, biography, travel notes...) whose main function was to raise the consciousness of the citizenry of the proletarian state.

The **Literary Center of Constructivits**, founded in 1924, advocated ideas close to those of LEF. They supported the Soviet regime.

In 1929, the Party granted **the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP)** hegemony over the lettered world. Publishing houses and literary journals were placed in the hands of **self-proclaimed worker-writers**, many of whom had little experience writing or running institutions. They did have experience sloganeering: "**For the Hegemony of Proletarian Literature! Liquidate Backwardness!**" What these imperatives meant was hard to fathom; their consequences, which included the silencing of the most gifted voices of the era, soon became apparent. The compromises of the 1920s were swept aside with the same vigor that introduced **Five-Year Plans** and shock workers into the industrial world. **Literature no longer had autonomous value; its utilitarian tasks** were to reflect the "unvarnished" reality of the working class and **optimistically** describe its new world. Literature was not to create, but to respond to "**social demand**" (*zakaz*). Observers who noted contradictions were hounded out of the literary world.)

There were some less visible and smaller groups also: **OBERIU (obedinenie realnogo iskusstva, or the Association of the Art or Reality**, a radical avant-garde group existed between 1927 and 1930. It promoted **formal experimentation** and continued certain cubo-futurist practices. They were close to surrealism. They sought to uncover a deeper reality.

- **Andrey Platonov** (1899-1951)

He emerged as a major figure of twentieth-century literature only after Stalin's death. He was a **very original writer**.

Of working class background and self-educated, he worked as an electrical engineer

Although Platonov was a Communist, his works were banned in his own lifetime for their skeptical attitude toward collectivization and other Stalinist policies. His famous works include the novels the « **Foundation Pit** »(*Kotlovan*) and **Chevengur** (*Чевенгур*), written in the late 1920s.. In 1914, at the age of thirteen and a half, he began work first as an office clerk at a local insurance company, then as smelter at a pipe factory, assistant machinist on a private estate, worker in a plant making artificial millstones, warehouseman, and at other jobs, including on the railroad

He joined the Communist Party in the spring of 1920 but Platonov was deeply troubled by the terrible famine of 1921, and he openly and controversially criticized the behavior (and privileges) of local communists at the time

He produced his two major works, the novels *Chevangur* and *The Foundation Pit*, between 1926 and 1930, overlapping slightly with the beginning of the first Five-year plan in 1928. These works are an **implicit criticism of the system**.

His '*Foundation Pit*' is pessimistic. A team of workers has gathered to erect a huge edifice which will one day house the entire proletariat of the region in brotherly harmony. But all they do is dig an ever deepening hole which will be their grave. **The pathos of this allegory** derives from the cruel contrast between the trustful expectations of these simple people and the utter hopelessness of their dream. The novel also treats the collectivization of agriculture, presented as not just cruel but absurdly stupid as well.

Platonov uses a combination of **peasant language with ideological and political terms** to create a sense of **meaninglessness**, aided by the abrupt and sometimes fantastic events of the plot. Joseph Brodsky considers the work deeply suspicious of the meaning of language, especially political language. This exploration of meaninglessness is a hallmark of existentialism and absurdism.

- Mikhail Sholokhov (1905-1984) :

His novel *The Quiet Don* (1928-1931-1940) covers **life in a Don cossack settlement from 1912 to 1921**.

It contains a panoramic picture of Cossack life in peace, in wartime, and in the years of revolutionary turmoil.

The *Quiet Don* brought Sholokhov the 1965 **Nobel prize** in literature.

The period of the first five year plan saw the development of **the canon of the « production novel »** which was to become the flagship of socialist realism.

During the period before 1934 genuine satire was still possible in the Soviet Union and several writers excelled at it.

- Mikhail Zoshchenko (1895-1958)

He was for many years the most popular Russian writer in the Soviet Union.

Zoshchenko's **sharp and original satire** offers a marvelous window on Russian life in the 20s and 30s

He was bringing relief from the heroic or militant tone of soviet literature and public life. His stories of everyday Soviet life emphasized its absurdities and are told in the language of a soviet polu intelligent (« semi-intellectual), i.e. a **semiliterate philistine** who has adjusted to the Soviet order.

Typical targets of Zoshchenko's **satire are the Soviet bureaucracy**, crowded conditions in communal apartments, marital infidelities and the rapid turnover in marriage partners, and "the petty-bourgeois mode of life, with its adulterous episodes, lying, and similar nonsense ».He **satirized Communist red-tape, corruption, inefficiency**, and so on.

His devices are farcical complications, satiric understatement, humorous anachronisms, and an ironic contrast between high-flown sentiments and the down-to-earth reality of mercenary instincts.

Zoshchenko's short stories are written with a lot of **humor**, with comic effects and comic characters, ridiculous situations : there is a big contrast between the mediocrity and pettiness of the hero, who is himself the narrator and his pretention to philosophize.

The principles of socialist realism were enounced at the first session of the Organizing Committee of the Union of soviet Writers (1932) and conveyed to the writers in **1934**.

Andrey Zhdanov, Stalin's right hand man in cultural affairs, told his audience that Comrade Stalin had

described them as « engineers of human minds ».

In the same year Stalin's great purges began: they continued until 1938. Hundreds of writers either perished or spent years in prison or labor camps. Many writers not arrested were reduced to inactivity or disappeared from the literary scene for long periods: for example, Erdman, Platonov and Bulgakov. Stalin's great terror ended by 1939. Paradoxically, the imminence of war brought with it a general **relaxation of ideological pressure.**

The reorientation from class struggle to **patriotism, national pride, and other conservative values** was a relief to most writers.

Films would now show orthodox priests praying and fighting for the Motherland.

Once the war started, Soviet literature immediately supported the war effort, as writers became war correspondents or concentrated on patriotic topics.

World War II produced a veritable flood of literature.

- Victor Nekrasov (1911-1987)

In the Trenches of Stalingrad (*V okopakh Stalingrada*, 1945)

It is an honest account of the great battle but also presents Soviet officers and soldiers as credible individuals.

« Acts of heroism » are performed by patently unheroic individuals in a unheroic manner.

With the war over, the Soviet government decided that soviet citizens whose only crime was that they had seen too much of the west had to be sent to labor camps.

A wave of repression under the name of *Zhdanovshchina* after **Andrey Zhdanov**, was initiated and layed down the party line in matters of art and literature.

Anna **Akhmatova** and **Zoshchenko** were expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers, which meant that they could no longer be published.

X- IN SEARCH OF NEW WAYS : 1953-1980

During Stalin's reign the nation had lived through war and political oppression.

The nation had been traumatized and dumb. It needed to recover its voice.

The period after Stalin's death was called *the thaw*, a name adopted from **Erenburg's** novel published in 1954.

With Stalin's death **the cultural pressures and official censorship diminished.**

Although Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* was not published in the Soviet Union for 30 years, began a process of **cultural liberalization.**

The period from 1953 to 1980 saw Russian literature develop in many different directions both inside and outside the Soviet Union.

- Vasily Grossmann (1905-1964)

After World War II, Grossman's faith in the Soviet state was shaken by Joseph Stalin's turn towards antisemitism in the final years before his death in 1953.

While Grossman was never arrested by the Soviet authorities, his two major literary works *Life and Fate* and *Everything Flows* were censored during the ensuing Nikita Khrushchev period as unacceptably anti-Soviet,

Grossman was told by the Communist Party's chief ideologist Mikhail Suslov that the book could not be published for two or three hundred years and told the author that, if published, his book could inflict even greater harm to the Soviet Union than Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.

The book was published in 1980 in the West and in Russia in 1988.

The novel at heart narrates the history of the Shaposhnikov family and the Battle of Stalingrad.

Life and Fate is a multi-faceted novel, one of its themes being that the Great patriotic War was the **struggle between two comparable totalitarian states**¹. The tragedy of the common people is that they have to fight both the invaders and the totalitarianism of their own state.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918- 2008)

The early 1960s saw the rise to prominence of **Alexander Solzhenitsyn**, following the publication of this *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1962.

He was an eminent Russian novelist, historian, and tireless critic of Communist totalitarianism . He helped to raise global awareness of the gulag and the Soviet Union's gulag and the Soviet Union's forced labor camp system. While his writings were often suppressed, he wrote many books most notably *The Gulag Archipelago* and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, two of his best-known works. "For the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature", Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970. He was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974 but returned to Russia in 1994 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich The story is set in a Soviet labor camp in the 1950s, and describes a single day of an ordinary prisoner, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov.

The attitude of the authorities toward the energies of the new literature passed through certain phases. By mid-decade the government was seeking to rein in free expression through legal repression. But there were methods of informal publication (**Samizdat**).

So the authorities started to **expell from the country** many writers, artists, and intellectuals (for example **Solzhenitsyn** in 1974)

This « **third wave** » combined the characteristics of the preceding waves. Like the « second wave », its members had grown up in the Soviet period and therefore were intimately acquainted with Soviet reality. The linkages between Russian writers inside and outside the Soviet union were stronger than they had been previously.

With Stalin's death the method of socialist realism fell into disrepute.

Although **Andrey Sinyavsky** recommended fantastic literature as the accurate means of representing the fantastic nature of Soviet reality but from 1953 to 1980, the chief line of development has been **realistic**.

The Soviet reader **was hungry for straightforward information** about Soviet reality, for works which seek to present the truth, to grasp the essence of Soviet society and depict it truthfully. This was the objective of such writers as **Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov, Tendryakov, Trifonov and Rasputin as well as the younger writers**.

During the preceding generation, they had lived through social change, war and oppression , yet had been prevented from attempting to absorb and digest these experiences by an official **ensorship and cultural monopoly** of unique thoroughness.

Perhaps no nation has ever **needed its literature** as pressingly as did the Soviet peoples in 1953.

A considerable role was played by the legacy of Russia's great literary past, a legacy which **emphasized literature's civic mission**.

The actual example of the nineteenth-century writers taught to every Soviet school-child- **Gogol, Nekrasov, Tolstoy, Chekhov**- suggested that the writer had a **duty to be compassionate**, concerned about the individual and frank in his exposure of social evils.

In the post-Stalin period became available the literature of the West .

The non-conformist organ of the Soviet Writers' union, *New World*, under its editor **Alexander Tvardovsky** (1950-54 and 1958-70) was « a modest embryo of democratic socialism » and had a big social impact. In 1953 **Vladimir Pomerantsev** sketched out the esthetic program of *New World* in his article « *Sincerity in literature* »

The journal both reflected and formed public opinion.

It reflected the changes which had taken place in soviet society.

In the post-Stalin period were published such authors as **Babel** (1894-1940), **Zoshchenko** (1895-1958), **Olesha** (1899-1960), **Bulgakov** (1891-1940) and **Platonov** (1899-1951) who were criticizing to some extent the Soviet order itself.

If in the nineteenth century, educated young Russians had longed to merge themselves with the people, their twentieth-century counterparts had had no choice but to do so, in very difficult conditions: on the battle front, on building sites, on the shop floor, on the collective farm, in the communal apartment, and worst of all, in the labor camps, where they lived not only with the « ordinary » narod, but with criminals as well. It produced a massive cross-fertilization of Russia's cultural strata.

This irruption of popular culture provided both an alternative language and an alternative view of the world to the officially propagated ones: songs, jokes, political anecdotes describing the suffering of the ordinary people.

Understanding the recent past was the dominant preoccupation of the period.

2- A second phase of the « thaw » began in **1956, Nikita Khrushchev's « secret » speech at the Twentieth Party Congress denouncing Stalin's cult of personality and many of his crimes.**

Writers sought ways of acquiring some degree of autonomy and a closer link with the reading public. They did it through public poetry readings. Tens of thousands of listeners would gather to hear **Evgeny Evtushenko** or **Andrey Voznesensky** declaiming their verse.

- **Alexander Yashin** (1913-1968) wrote a story « *Levers* » (« *Rychagi* ») about four collective farmers gathering for a party meeting. For Yashin the responsibility for authoritarian mismanagement lay not only with Them (the superiors, the bureaucrats) but with Us (the ordinary people).

In 1956 after the Polish and Hungarian troubles, Khrushchev reasserted the party's duty to exercise guidance over literature, to exclude both the « embellishers » and the indiscriminate « anti-embellishers ».

Boris Pasternak (1890-1960)

He was a great Russian poet and novelist

Boris Pasternak was awarded **the Nobel Prize** in 1958 (because of his novel *Doctor Zhivago*). The Writers' Union expelled him and he was deprived of his Soviet citizenship. Pasternak declined the award.

The novel which takes place between the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Second World War. Nadezhda Mandelstam about Pasternak's novel :

« Pasternak... was drawn by **the need to « externalize »**, to look at things from the outside, « objectively » . As a poet, he was wholly **dominated by his feelings**, ... But he was prey to a nagging urge to analyse, to look at things from a distance, to see them in larger perspective... Pasternak's novel is a remembrance of things past, an attempt to determine his own place in the swift-flowing movement of days, and to seek understanding of this movement itself »

3- A third and deepest phase of the « thaw », of destalinization began in 1961-2. The years 1960-2 witnessed an upsurge of « **youth prose** », revealing and criticizing many aspects of Stalin's rule.

Khrushchev gave his personal authorization for the publication in 1962 of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel: *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

At the time of Khrushchev's fall in October 1964, there was open conflict in the literary world, a

tightening of party policy towards literature.

In 1965, **Andrey Sinyavsky** and **Yuly Daniel** who had published in the west **surrealist satires** on Soviet society were arrested. They were sentenced to seven and five years imprisonment respectively for « anti-soviet propaganda ».

63 Moscow writers wrote to the Supreme Soviet, warning that the sentencing of writers could impede the progress of Soviet culture.

Lydia Chukovskaya wrote: « literature does not come under the jurisdiction of the criminal courts. **« Ideas should be fought with ideas, not with camps and prisons ».**

Two camps remained: the non-conformist around *new World*, the dogmatists around *October*.

A third one appeared: they were mostly Russian nationalists, but of an un-Stalinist kind: they lamented the devastation of Russian culture (the poverty and demoralization of the villages). They were « **village writers** », focused on peasant life.

The village was a microcosm which concentrated the symptoms of a wider spiritual disorder. Their work was full of the humanity and concern for the community.

After Khrushchev's fall, **western radio stations** transmitted to Soviet listeners works of Russian literature which they could not obtain at home. (= possibility of foreign publication, *Samizdat = self-publishing*, 1959).

Samizdat was a technique of typing out one's words in multiple copies and circulating them among friends.

An underground journal « *The Chronicle of Current Events* » was established in 1968 and a human-rights movement was formed.

Late in 1973, the KGB discovered and confiscated a copy of the *Gulag Archipelago* (a huge history of the prison and labor camps). Soljenitsyn was deported from the USSR. In the 1970's some writers left the country.

It was **the third wave of Russian « émigré » literature** (keeping close links with the homeland): **Andrey Sinyavsky, Joseph Brodsky, Vladimir Maksimov, Victor Nekrasov, Alexander Zinoviev, Vladimir Voynovich, Georgy Vladimov, Vasily Aksyonov.**

By the early 1980s there was thus **one Russian literature in two homelands.**

In Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago*, the action occurs between 1905 and 1929. In this novel one may find all the cardinal features of Soviet Society.

- **Andrey Siniavsky (1925-1997)** was for an art « in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life » (*Fantastic Tales*, 1956-61) *Unguarded Thoughts* (« *Mysli vrasplokh* », 1966), After his 7 years in labor camp he assembled a series of thoughts in *Voice from the Chorus* (*Golos iz khora*, 1973)

- **Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008)** wrote in 1968, *The Cancer Ward* (*Rakovy korpus*) tells the story of a small group of cancer patients in Uzbekistan in 1955, in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. It explores the moral responsibility — symbolized by the patients' malignant tumors — of those implicated in the suffering of their fellow citizens during Stalin's Great Purge when millions were killed, sent to labor camps or exiled.

Another novel was written in 1968: *The First Circle* (*V krughe pervom*)

The novel depicts the lives of the occupants of a *sharashka* (a R&D bureau made of gulag inmates) located in the Moscow suburbs. This novel is highly autobiographical. Many of the prisoners (*zeks*) are technicians or academics who have been arrested under **Article 58 of the RSFSR Penal Code** in Joseph Stalin's purges following the Second World War Unlike inhabitants of other gulag labor camps,

the sharashka zeks were adequately fed and enjoy good working conditions; however if they found disfavor with the authorities, they could be instantly shipped to Siberia.

The title is an allusion to Dante 's first circle of Hell in *the Divine Comedy*, wherein the philosophers of Greece and other non-Christians, live in a walled green garden. They are unable to enter Heaven as they were born before Christ, but enjoy a small space of relative freedom in the heart of Hell.

Solzhenitsyn's cosmos is built on **moral caterories**. Its inhabitants must decide moral questions: whether to capitulate to the demandes of a perverted system , or to retain a measure of inner freedom.

- **Varlam Shalamov** (1907-1982) spent 17 years in Kolyma, a frozen continent. He is a **chronicler of the Gulag**. He touched « those depths of bestiality and despair towards which life in the camps dragged us all ».

Shalamov selects the short story and adopts a studiedly neutral tone, avoids moral statements beyond the assertion that « the camps are a negative school of life in every respect. Nobody will ever learn anything useful or necessary from them ».

The overall effect is of a merciless and humiliating dissection of human nature at its basest.

The writter comes over in his own narration as a person who reacts to adversity by retreating into inaction, while continuing to observe a minimal code of duty.

"*In the Night*" portrays Glebov, a former doctor, stealing underwear from a frozen corpse to trade for bread or some tobacco. In "Dry Rations" Shalamov writes: "We had no pride, vanity, or ambition, and jealousy and passion seemed as alien to us as Mars, and trivial in addition. It was much more important to learn to button your pants in the frost. Grown men cried if they weren't able to do that. We understood that death was no worse than life, and we feared neither. We were overwhelmed by indifference."

In "*Lend-Lease*," an American bulldozer arrives with a barrel of machine grease, and the starving convicts break open the barrel. "In the hunger, they claimed the machine grease was butter sent by Lend-Lease and there remained less than half a barrel by the time a sentry was sent to guard it, and the camp administration drove off the crowd of starving, exhausted men with rifle shots . . . for this was food for machines -- creatures infinitely more important to the state than people."

The refection of the immediat past provoked by the Twentieth party Congress brought many young writers into literature: **Anatoly Gladilin** (1935-1976), **Anatoly Kuzentsov** (1929-1979), **Andrey Bitov**, **Vasily Aksyonov**.

The **theme of the conflict of generations** was givern a new intensity by de-Stalinization.

The young were dressed in jeans and sneakers, danced rock-and_roll, were reading Sartre, Hemingway and Salinger, spoke a language full of westernisms.

But for all their rebelliousness of style, language and outlook, they were not deeply disillusioned with Soviet society. Rejection of the father was mixed with a hope of reconciciation withe them in mutual devotion to the common purpose.

- **Andrey Bitov** (1937..) evokes in *Pushkin house*, (1978) the cowardice of the intelligentsia.

- **Vasily Aksyonov** (1932-2009) merges fantasy with reality (like in Russian prose of the 1910s and 1920s). He published in 1980 in the United States *The Burn (Ozhog)*, (1969-75) . The main theme is the rediscovery of the cruel father (Aksyonov's own mother had spent many years in the labor camps and

he himself had grown up in Magadan (the Kolyma region).

- **Georgi Vladimov** (1931-2003) his *novel Faithful Ruslan (Verny Ruslan)* was published abroad in 1975. Its subject is a dog.

Faithful Ruslan is set in a remote Siberian depot immediately following the demolition of one of the gulag's notorious camps and the emancipation of its prisoners.

The dog has all the qualities required in a guardian of prisoners: he gets «high marks for malevolence» and «excels in mistrust toward outsiders». But he is not simply vicious. On the contrary, he finds gratuitous cruelty repugnant. The true reason for his zeal is **his belief in the ideals of the Service**, to which he has been trained and from which he has received his sustenance.

The guard dog is a **true socialist realist hero**, as pointed out Sinyavski. He believes in the ideals of the Service.

- **Vladimir Voinovich** (1932...)

His finest work is *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of private Ivan Chonkin (1975-9)*

The book is set in the Red Army during World War II, satirically exposing the daily absurdities of the totalitarian Soviet regime. It was rejected by *Novy Mir*, circulated by *Samizdat*, and first printed by an emigre magazine in West Germany, allegedly without author's consent, after which Voinovich was banned from publishing his books in the Soviet Union.

On the eve of World War II, Ivan Chonkin, the most dispensable soldier, was sent to guard a disabled military crash landed on a kolkhoz (collective farm). Forgotten by his command, he earns favors of a nearby kolkhoznik woman Nyura and moves in with her. Nyura's cow eats the patch of experimental tomato-potato hybrids of the local mad genius agronomist Gladyshev, and in a retaliation the latter sends an anonymous note to NKVD that Chonkin is a deserter.

Ivan Chonkin, a combination of a Russian folk hero Ivan the Fool and The Good Soldier Svejk, is now a widely known figure in Russian popular culture.

Rural writers were seeking to return to a more distant and healthy past.

Many writers were themselves peasants by origin (Vasily **Belov**, 1932, Sergey **Zalygin**, 1913, Fyodor **Abramov**, 1920, Valentin **Rasputin**, 1937, Vasily **Shukshin**, 1929.

The tendency of Russian writers to seek an ideal in the past has been matched by **non-Russian writers**. Soviet literature claims to be **multi-national**. Most of the non Russian writers are strongly influenced by the Russian literary tradition. **Non-Russian writers** made a very significant contribution to Soviet literature (Vasily **Bykov** (born in Belorussia), Chingis **Aitmatov** (born in Kirgiztan, Fazil **Iskander**, born in Abkhazia)

- **Alexander Zinovev** (1922-2006) is a major Russian writer. The Stalinist tradition was a formative- albeit largely negative- influence.

For 22 years Zinovev was a member of the Institute of Philosophy and his contributions to the field of mathematical logic were internationally known.

He writes *Yawning Heights (Zyajajushie vysoty)* a surrealist presentation of Soviet society. In a sense it is the absolute negation of the socialist realist novel. Soviet society is haunted by the absence of those « magnificent prospects » which Zhdanov used to insist were an indispensable part of Soviet culture: that is why the distant heights no longer « gleam » (siyayut) but « gape » or « yawn » (ziyayut).

Human beings have lost their individuality. They are designated by such appellations as Thinker, Chatterer, Slanderer, Schizophrenic and so on.

Zinovev has distilled the **essence of Soviet society** under Brezhnev in a manner not found elsewhere.

-Mikhaïl Bulgakov (1891-1940).

His most famous novel is « *The Master and Margarita (Master i Margarita)*. Bulgakov began the novel in 1928 and worked over it for the rest of his life until 1940. It was published in 1966.

It is a picaresque novel about the adventures of the devil and his companions in Moscow in the late 1920's or early 1930's.

It is also a retelling of the Faust legend in a Soviet setting. The subplot is a imaginative version of the condemnation and execution of Christ.

It is a novel within a novel which tells the story of Pontius Pilate confronting the historical Christ. The « Master » of the title is the author of this inserted novel, and his relationship with Margarita points to a connection with Goethe's Faust, from which the epigraph to the entire novel is taken.

In the early stages of the thaw, lyric poetry seemed best to answer the public need for renewed sincerity. **Alexander Tvardovsky** reflects the popular mood during the late 1950s thanks to the fame of his verses about the simple Red Army soldier Vasily Tyorkin. (*Vasily Tyorkin*).

The genre which best captured the new narodnost was the so-called « **author's song** ». This genre is a complex synthesis derived from a variety of antecedents.

There were the official mass anthems, sung by the Red Army Choir and etched into people's consciousness by blaring loudspeakers (which could not be switched off!) in every factory floor and village square in the land.

Characteristic of this genre was **a naive patriotism, heroic figures**.

Then there were the semi-tolerated romances and gypsy songs.

And as a final component, there were the strictly forbidden underworld song (blatnaya pesnya) and labor camp song (lagernaya pesnya) with their raw realism and their satirical irreverence towards the authorities and official ideology.

Three singers :

There were **three well-known singers: Okudzhava, Galich, Vyssotsky**

The romantic and melancholic **Bulat Okudzhava** (1924.-1997). who was singing his songs before groups of friends. The intimacy of the initial audience was crucial: genuine ideas and real culture could be promoted that way.

He has been the most authentic voice of his country. **Alexander Galich** (1919-77). His most characteristic songs are **the songs of everyday life** (bytovye pesni) in which he takes a typically Soviet personality or incident and describes it from inside. A song of Galich very often resembles a miniature play (tragedy or comedy), complete in itself.

Efim Etkind has pointed out that Galich's work constitutes a kind of miniature soviet Comédie humaine.

Like Galich, **Vladimir Vysotsky** (1938-80) was an actor and one of the most well-known singer.

He was unruly, disrespectful and even **down-right subversive** at times but he was the most authentic voice of his country.

He cultivated the persona of the criminal and zek though he had never been arrested. He was a man of such hypertrophied, even hysterical dynamism that he exhausted himself. He died in 1980 at the age of 42.

- **Joseph Brodsky** (1940- 1996) received the **Nobel Prize** for his poetry in 1987.

A recurring theme in Brodsky's writing is the **relationship between the poet and society**. In particular, Brodsky emphasized the power of literature to positively impact its audience and to develop the language and culture in which it is situated. He suggested **that the Western literary tradition was in part responsible for the world having overcome the catastrophes of the 20th century**, such as Nazism, Communism and the World Wars.

He was influenced by the poet *Mandelstam*, for they both **saw man as in essence a cultural animal** (rather than a biological product or, as Aristotle would have it, a political animal) In a world where politics had become dehumanized but the rudiments of culture were being transmitted more widely, that anthropological conception was inspiring and fruitful. It entailed rescuing Russian poetry from the sterile isolation it had endured under Stalin and **restoring its links with world culture**, with what Stalin had vilified as « cosmopolitanism ».

It is an open and **existential poetry**, searching for the elements out of which human beings can shape a culture to sustain them in the present. In effect, words become a reality more real than the object they denote: « By itself reality isn't worth a damn. It **is perception that promotes reality to meaning** ».

Brodsky was also deeply **influenced by the English metaphysical poets** from John Donne (1572-1631) to W. H. Auden (1907-1973)

The decade of the 1980s divides neatly into two equal halves.

The so-called « secretarial literature » flourished at that time, during the period of Brezhnev stagnation.

Genuine literature, on the other hand, was being created by writers, who wrote books as their consciences dictated (Anatoly **Rybakov** (1911... *Children of the Arbat*, Anatoly **Pristavkin** (1931... *A Golden Cloud spent the Night*, Izrail **Metters** (1909... *Fifth Corner*, Vasily **Grossman** (*Forever Flowing*, Alexander **Bek** *New Assignment*, and so on...

In the 1970s and 1980s there existed a **third method of circulating literary texts**. A limited number of copies would be printed marked « secret », « for official use only ». These editions were meant for those at the top of the nomenclatura: members of the Central committee, or even only the Politburo.

Alongside the « secretarial » literature there was a **black market literature**. « Undesirable » literary works continued to spread their influence.

« Secretarial literature » was dominant, but there appeared writers who contrived to speak of reality in a conscientious and honorable way -**the « village writers »** such as **Viktor Astafev's** *Melancholy Detective Story* (*Pechalny detektiv*, 1986) which offers a nightmarish depiction of soviet provincial life from which there is no escape : drunkenness, violence, general hostility among people, and irreversible **social decomposition** are its hallmarks.

- **Valentin Rasputin** (1937...) *Fire* (*Pozhar*, 1985) describes the degradation of people incapable of forming any sort of community.

The topic of the Second World War was still not been exhausted for it permits greater honesty than do subjects from contemporary everyday life.

At this same time there emerged on the scene the so-called « **generation of the forty-year-olds** » among whom are to be found several remarkable prosewriters: **Vladimir Makanin** (1937) **Anatoly Kurchatkin** (1944) **Lyudmila Petrushevskaya** (1938-) the playwright **Anatoly Kim**.

The three years 1987-89 will go down in Russian cultural history as miraculous ones.

A new period commenced with **Mikhail Gorbachev's** accession to power. After the eighth Congress of Writers in the summer of 1986, Russian literature experienced **an upheaval surpassing anything known** to the history of Russian culture: the walls of censorship suddenly collapsed.

Gorbachev proclaimed the **superiority of general human values over class values**. This formulation amounted to an ideological revolution.

Gorbachev formulation played an enormous part in the reorientation of Soviet ideology.

One by one, the restrictions isolating the USSR from the West were eliminated. The Supreme Soviet restored citizenship to **Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Vladimir Voynovich, Georgy Vladimov, Vasily Aksyonov**, and others.

Two Russias have been united: on exiled, the other exiling. Russia discovered or re-discovered its own remarkable writers: Vladimir Nabokov, Maksim Gorky, Pasternak, Grossman, Solzhenitsyn, Platonov, Zamyatin, Shalamov, Dombrovsky, a pleiad of twentieth-century religious thinkers: Paul Florensky or Sergey Bulgakov.

Russia discovered numerous memoirs published long since in the West: **Nadezhda Mandelshtam**,

Lydia Chukovskaya, Evgeniya Ginzburg

Thus profound changes accrued within Russian society.

The literary atmosphere of the Gorbachev era has been defined by the **discovery of that great twentieth-century Russian literature** created both inside and outside Russia.

In the shadow of that great literature, contemporary writers of the 1980s have found it difficult to grow. The intellectuals have tried to comprehend contemporary society **and ask questions. What sort of social order prevailed within the country for seventy years, what type of social order exists there now? Should socialism of any kind be rejected, or merely the militarized distortion of it which Stalin created?**

The principal literary works of this period are all **symbolic generalizations** (Chingiz Aitmatov's place of *the Skull* (*Plakha*, 1986), **Vasily Bykov's** *Round-up* (*Oblava*) of 1990

The second half of the 1980s will go down in history as the time when all the artificial barriers came down between the Russian literatures of East and West, between modernism and realism, between the underground and the world of legality, between socialist and antisocialist. Contemporary literature, displays one consistent tendency, to break away from the Soviet past, **through irony, and through a rebirth of the idea of culture.**

George Gilian : « Russian literature has a unique magnetism specific as to time and place, it is also eminently **universal**. Reading it leads us into the heart of a strange **fascinating, sometimes bizarre country**. Immersing ourselves in Russian literature is the best way to feel the distinctiveness of Russia » (

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