CHAPTER II

STATE AND LITERATURE

i) State Control on Soviet Literature during Stalin period

The abdication of the last Romanov tsar in February 1917, the establishment in Russia of a democratic republic, as well as its destruction a few months later in a communist coup d'état, took place within a context in which revolutionary changes in literature, music, and painting were already an accomplished fact. Symbolist and Futurist Russian poetry, abstract canvases, daring new religious and philosophical treatises, and modernist music were created when monarchy still appeared stable.¹

The communists established censorship of the press and the performing arts within weeks of seizing power in 1917, and state ownership of the means of information and communication has remained a hallmark of the system. The party announced censorship as a temporary measures necessitated by the military dangers facing the young Soviet republic.² All other political parties within their jurisdiction during the civil war period were suppressed. The Mensheviks-Fellow-Marxists who had

split a way from the Bolsheviks within the Russian Social Democratic Party, were also eliminated.

Bolsheviks operated a system of severe economic and social control during the civil war - which was named - War Communism. It involved the complete nationalization of industry and commerce, compulsory levies of food stuffs from the peasants, payment in kind for workers and the imposition of compulsory labour on the bourgeoisie. Literature could not flourish under these conditions. The civil war virtually came to an end in 1921. Economic chaos, which led to the abolition of War Communism, was replaced by the New Economic Policy (NEP). Adoption of First Five Year Plan allotted small business, including publishing firms, to operate under private ownership. Private trade, growing crops for the markets were permitted.

The Russians writes after 1917, whatever literary grouping they might previously belonged to or now joined, were greatly influenced by historical events and happenings through which they had lived. The Russian literature emerged after the Civil War carried the true picture of that period and then it mirrored the gradual development and emergence of a new society with changed ideas and perceptions.

What decisively marks off Soviet Literature from Russian literature is a radically altered relationship between writers, society and the state and
the fact that the choice of subject matter was inevitably dictated by the great historical and social changes wrought by the October Revolution.\(^3\)

The Russian intelligentsia, not least the writers, were divided in their attitude to the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. Many like Ivan Bunin, Leonid Andreyev, Alexander Kuprin, Boris Zaitsev, and others, could not reconcile themselves to Lenin’s usurpation of power and emigrated at the earliest possible opportunity. Others like Ilya Ehrenburg, Alexei Tolstoy, and Maxim Gorky were more ambivalent in their attitude. At first skeptical of the new regime, they made their peace with it - for different reasons – and loyally served it, once they had convinced themselves that it was there to stay. Another category of writers, notably Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and Sergei Esenin, greeted the October Revolution with enthusiasm. Blok and Bely greeted the Revolution with poems steeped in Christian imagery. Esenin, too, used religious symbols to convey his vision of the revolution as the dawn of golden age for the Russian peasants. Mayakovsky was too anxious about the Revolution, though Boris Pasternak, one of the greatest poets, was not spellbound by the Revolution.

In the first decade after the Revolution it was possible for such

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moods as these to be expressed with more or less freedom. From 1918 to 1929, the literary activities did not face any direct and strict political control. The Revolution could not live in peace with the arts. Indeed, it promised them greater freedom and offered material facilities for the creative intelligentsia to carry on its work without deprivation. This honeymoon, however, was short-lived. The struggle between the arts and authority became one of concepts and since one concept had power to enforce itself, it smothered others. For literature, the really appalling consequence of the Revolution was that realism, which had contribute so much in so many ways to its achievement and success became the death sentence for the arts.  

By a decree of the Council of People’s Commissars in 1922, it restablished “Censorship” on the literary activism. Under the name “Glavlit” (Chief Directorate for Literary Affairs and Publishing). It was established to ensure political, ideological, military, and economic security in the press, and in manuscripts, photographs, and other materials intended for publication and distribution. It had the power to prohibit publication of anything which militates against the Soviet regime and the goals of the party, discloses state secrets, arouses nationalistic or religious fanaticism, or is of pornographic nature. Lectures, exhibits and some aspects of broadcasting were also subjected to Glavlit censorship. Censorship was imposed both before and after publication to be sure that

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the printed text actually conforms to that which was approved.⁵

In the early Soviet literature, almost all the human problems which arose in the aftermath of the great upheaval - the conflict between town and country, the collapse of utopian illusions, the inner doubts of the intellectuals, the material hardships of the populations as a whole-all these and many other problems were presented truthfully. Most of the best writers of the period belonged to the category dubbed by Trotsky as the "fellow travellers". They were able to write their own kind of literature while yet accepting the fact of the Revolution. For the most part intellectuals by origin, they varied considerably in the degree of their loyalty to the new regime, having protected themselves from excessive interference by the so-called "proletarian" writers.

With the tolerant and sophisticated Anatoly Lunacharsky in charge of cultural affairs, one of the most cultivated of the old Bolsheviks and himself a writer of standing, exercised great tact in his handling of cultural problems. Under his aegis there was an uneasy co-existence between the "fellow travellers", grouped mainly in the All-Russian Union of Writes, and the "Proletarians" of the Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPPA). It was understood that in the arts, as well as in science and technology, the new society would have to lean on pre-revolutionary tradition and achievement.
The majority of the “fellow travellers” settled down in the years of NEP (New Economic Policy) to a relatively detached consideration of recent history and of the new social realities. Block died in 1921, already deaf to the “music of revolution”, Yesenin committed suicide in 1925; and only Mayakovsky seemed able to sustain the epic charge which the revolution had given his poetry—“Vladimir Iliich Lenin,” 1924, and “All Right”, 1927.

The death of Lenin on 21 January 1924, was the beginning of a new era. After Lenin’s death a fierce struggle ensued in the party leadership - a development foreseen and feared by Lenin who in one of the last letters, he dictated to the Party Congress to be held after his demise asked for the removal of Stalin from the newly created post of General Secretary, to which he had been appointed in 1922, because of his rudeness and lack of consideration for other comrades. Factional interests prevented Stalin’s removal. Stalin was appointed as a Secretary-General of the Party’s Central Committee. After obtaining power, Stalin, adopted a policy of self-sufficiency under the title ‘Socialism in one country’. Stalin was clever enough to bring all the key interlocking party organs under his control. The actual doctrine of ‘Socialist realism’ was launched only in 1932. The idea, and the term itself, were introduced to the literary community, without any previous public debate. The Party had suddenly

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announced the liquidation of all the existing literary organizations and groups.

The basic Socialist Realism formula contained the concept of an all-embracing ideal goal in the direction of which Soviet life was, unerringly, advancing. The writers were prescribed to fulfill the impossible task of depicting that goal in term of nineteenth-century realism, that is portraying a "should-be" or "will be" future as if it already existed and creating from ideal communist types, positive heroes who were supposed to represent actual soviet Man.\textsuperscript{7} ‘Socialist Realism’ dictated that it was the individual citizen or the individual administrator that was wrong, not the policy or the party, and ‘never the system’. Praise for the system, criticism of the individual who had failed, and damnation of the non-Soviet way constituted the major themes of Soviet publications – even the most technical journal would usually carry at least one of these elements. All communications media had spoken only that which the party leadership had willed and that leadership had become increasingly astute in the means of controlling even world-of-month exchanges among the citizenry.\textsuperscript{8}

The 1920s – particularly the second half-were an unhappy and, at least in terms of publication, a rather barren time for poetry. The centre of the


stage was held by Mayakovsky. Despite the relative mildness of censorship during the 1920s, some poets, in particular Mandel'shtan, were virtually banned from publishing in the Moscow literary periodicals. The general atmosphere caused a kind of 'dumbness' which affected Akhmatova, Pasternak and Mandel'shtan in varying degrees.

A resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, dated 1 July 1925 was published in all Soviet newspapers, establishing the position of the Soviet authorities with regard to literature. While stressing that "in a class society there is and can be no neutral art", it also made clear that art and literature should be allowed to approach Soviet reality from different viewpoint. It refused to grant proletarian writers any institutional "hegemony", but promised them the Party's wholehearted moral and material support in earning the right to such hegemony. "Fellow travellers", insofar as they were willing to march along with the proletariat, were to be treated as skilled specialists who provided valuable services and whose full acceptance of communist ideology should be encouraged.9

After all, the Party's basic policy in the first decade after the Revolution, until the last years of the 1920's, when Stalin triumphed completely over his rivals was to work for the adherence of writers to the

revolutionary cause, to lead them to a social and political commitment which it was hoped, would make them real allies, in the attainment of the party's distant goals, as well as in its day-to-day struggle to achieve moral authority over the population. The most memorable prose of the 1920s, is perhaps that which exploited the rich social incongruities of post-revolutionary society. The Satire of Il’f and Petrov, Bulgakov and Zoshchenko triumphantly revived the spirit of Gogol. At a more solemn level, the prose literature of the 1920s was preoccupied with recent history and the changed status of the individual, particularly the intellectual, in society. Problem of national and individuals identity was always a paramount concern. By the mid-1920s the clash between old and new, town and country, man and machine, anarchy and discipline, is the predominant theme of Soviet prose. Yet with all this there was generally a strong element of doubt and ambiguity in the literature of the NEP period. Throughout the 1920s there was no certainty that the 'New' would really triumph.

Nevertheless, pre-1930 period witnessed relatively a society, where writers enjoyed freedom to a considerable extent, writers of that period did not publish materials directly attacking the new political and social set-up, but they were free to write as they pleased and in whatever style they choose. Although 1920s witnessed persecutions and oppressions of
writers, in a milder form. Tyranny was imposed on the writing fraternity as a whole a single authors' association, the "Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) from the late 1920s, until its dissolution in 1932.

In 1929, after the final breaking of his opponents in the Party, Stalin allowed RAPP to start a campaign of intimidation against the uncommitted writers. Two leading fellow travellers, Boris Pil’nyak and Yevgeny Zamyatin were hounded on account of work which had been published abroad. Pil’nyak’s “Mahogany” appeared in Berlin in 1929. Zamyatin’s anti-utopian novel “We” had been written in 1920 and was published abroad in 1924.

There was no law against Soviet writers publishing abroad, but these two particular cases were used as a pretext for impugning the political reliability of the two anothers in question and of the fellow-travellers in general. The process started whereby pre-selected scapegoats have been publicly denounced as a device for disciplining the writing fraternity in general.

Compulsory optimism had tended to be the most basic of all ingredients in Socialist Realist writing. Miseries, doubts and failures should either not be presented at all, or should be heavily outweighed by positive elements. Heroes whiter than white and villains blacker than night, obligatory happen endings; the suggestion that the Stalinist world was the best of all possible worlds, while the non-Stalinist world was the worst;
the relegation of famines, concentration camps and mass executions must not be discussed, or which may be invoked only distantly - such were some of the results under fully developed Stalinism, of offering truthful, historically concrete depictions of reality in its revolutionary development. Imposed with maximum harshness, as it was in Stalin’s post-war years, Socialist Realism in effect converted authors into advertising copy writes on behalf of the regime.

In April 1932 the central committee of the CPSU unexpectedly issued a decree ordering the disbandment of RAPP, All Russian Union of Soviet Writers and other residual groups and setting up in their place the Union of Soviet Writers. It was made clear that membership in this new unitary organization would be essential for anyone who wished to make writing his livelihood.\(^\text{10}\) The writers, authors who became the members of the newly formed “Union of Writers” were kept under formal obligation and were pressurized to write in accordance with a newly enunciated and obligatory method, that of Socialist Realism adherence to which still remains a condition for publication in the Soviet press. It was announced that writers were now to belong to a ‘Unified organization’ which would be open to all, irrespective of their class antecedents (i.e. whether they had been proletarians or fellow travellers), as long as they were prepared to

\(^{10}\) Patricia Blake and Max Hayward (ed.), *Dissonant voices in Soviet Literature*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), p.XX.
give their general assent to party policy and to the literary doctrine of Socialist Realism. Anybody who in the 1920s had supported the Soviet regime or given an optimistic appraisal of its prospects was later described as a Socialist Realist. The principles of socialist realism were conveyed to the assembled writers of the Soviet Union at the first all-USSR Congress of writers in August 1934. The Keynote address was given by Andrey Zhadanov, Stalin’s right hand man in cultural affairs, who told his audience that Comrade Stalin had described them as “engineers of human minds” and urged them to depict life not merely in terms of “objective reality”, but rather “in its revolutionary development.”

Since 1934 the prime instrument for inducing authors to monitor each other had been the Union of writers of the USSR with its several thousand members, male and female. Censorship and the Writers’ Union, both played their respective roles. Censorship performed the function of an ideological and political watchdog: nothing could be legally published without the imprimatur of the censorship (Glavlit, as it is widely known). Though the writers’ union was ostensibly there to look after the material welfare of the creative writers, it did the exact opposite.

In the year 1934, Stalin’s “Great Purge” or “Great Terror” began: they continued until 1938. December 1934, witnessed the assassination

of the Leningrad Party leader Sergey Kirov. It is thought likely that Stalin himself ordered the killing, thus simultaneously removing a popular junior rival and providing a pretext for the vast new wave of arrests and executions that reached their peak in 1937. Hundreds of writers either perished or spend years in the Soviet prison or labour camps. Since nearly all highly-placed persons, in whatever walk of life, were Party members, the new attack fell with particular severity on the Party. Writers like, Mandel’shtam, Pil’nyak and Babel being the best-known among several hundred who lost lives through the terror.

Stalin’s great terror ended by 1939. While not many of those already arrested were released, there were few new arrests.

Hitler’s unprovoked attack on the USSR was unleashed on 22 June 1941, and took Stalin by surprise. Paradoxically, the war brought with it a general relaxation of ideological pressure. The reorientation from class struggle to patriotism, national pride, and other conservative values, which had actually begun around 1936, was a relief to most, especially after “proletarian” activists had been eliminated in the purges. The anti religious campaign which had peaked in the early 1930s was relaxed, and films would now show Orthodox priests praying and fighting for the Motherland.\textsuperscript{12} The relaxation of the period affected literature. In the initial

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p. 503.
phase of the war, however, and whatever the regimes reason were for relaxing controls over literature, the war poets cast the overwhelming theme of patriotism in a popular mold. In any case the majority of writers were concerned with recording the war - either in journalistic despatches or in novels and poems praising the wise leadership of Stalin in the accepted formulas. Pasternak and Akmatova, neither of whom had published original work for some years, were able to bring out books and to place some of their verses in the press.

Adoption of policies in the immediate post-war period, by the Soviet leader were of no less harsh and militant, in their very different way, than those of the 1930s. Internal policies were comparably harsh, leading to the widespread incarnation in concentration camps of returning prisoners of war released from German captivity. Those repatriated were in many cases summarily shot, or consigned in bulk to outposts of the camp empire. Solzhenitsyn, in February 1945, was arrested, tried and found guilty of anti-Soviet agitation and of organising an anti-Soviet group. He was sentenced to eight years imprisonment.

The seventies of post-war Stalinism did not spare those citizens who remained at liberty. Literary policy became the main vehicle for proclaiming state’s authority over the literary figures and on their writings.

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Relatively relaxed and ideologically neutral atmosphere of war time was disrupted. Akhmatova and Zoshchenko, were singled out as scapegoats and subjected to extravagant officially orchestrated abuse. By a Party decree dated 14 August 1946, two Leningrad-based journals, “Zvezda” (the Star) and “Leningrad” were denounced for publishing items by the two pilloried authors. Akhmatova and Zoshchenko were also expelled from the Union of Writers, but were not imprisoned\(^\text{14}\) Andrey Zhdanov, the high party official responsible for cultural affairs, made the policy statements so harsh and to such effect that the year 1946-53 are sometimes called the “Zhdanov Era”, even though Zhdanov himself died in 1948.

For the remaining years of Stalin’s life the Soviet creative intelligentsia lived in a constant state of fear, and the political demands made on writers were so excessive as to destroy even the propaganda value of literature Socialists realist were now required to ignore the grim realities of Soviet post-war life and present instead fanciful pictures of material abundance and social harmony. Any writer showing insufficiency of zeal in these matters were liable to be denounced and persecuted. Soviet literature had clearly reached an impasse. The theory and practice of a new “conflictless” literature were a visible symptom of this condition. The firm attitude of the party toward literature was first felt as early as

\(^{14}\) Ibid, p. 44.
February, 1952. The theoretical basis of “conflictless literature” (or ‘No-conflict’ theory) was the notion, first expressed as early as 1938, after the conclusion of Stalin’s second First Year Plan, that “Socialism” had been achieved in the Soviet Union and that the Soviet people were now living in a society free of class conflict.¹⁵

Some authors were awarded Stalin prizes for their writings, which obviously did not question Stalinist authority and his policies. The prize committees, sometimes consisting of more than a hundred influential individuals have been guided principally by political considerations.

In fact all this led to intellectual and cultural stagnation so extreme that even the authorities who imposed it, led by Stalin himself, began to saw mild signs of dissatisfaction, with what they and wrought. So closely had the arts been harnessed to the needs of political propaganda that they had become ineffectual even in their propaganda role. The death of Stalin in 5 March 1953 had a liberating effect far greater even than that of the war.

ii) **Relaxation on Ideological and Administrative Controls of Soviet Literature during Khrushchev Period.**

After Stalin’s death in 1953, Soviet literature has benefited from a gradual abatement of the paralysing terror which had been the chief instrument of rule since the early 1930s. During the preceding generation the Soviet people lived through social change, total war and political oppression. From the period 1953, Soviet literature saw its development in many different directions both inside and outside the Soviet Union.

Stalin’s death lifted Zhdanovist terrorism, and a resurgence of hope swept through the Soviet literary world. The years 1953 through 1956 are known as the time of the “thaw” (taken from the tittle of Ilya Ehrenburg’s novel) that marked a melting away of the constraint and restrictions of Stalinist literary policy. Censorship became less strict, former rigid Central Committee decrees were replaced by more relaxed confrontations between high state officials and writers, who were now emboldened to protest against conformism in articles, speeches, and creative writings. Suddenly for the first time in twenty years, it became possible to engage in open debate on theories of literature without fear of official reprisal.\(^{16}\) However, in theory the party has continued to maintain that literature must be

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regulated by ideological and administrative controls, but in the absence of total terror these controls became progressively less effective.

First and foremost there has been a revival of poetry. It is as if the contemporary Soviet Union has found its voice through the verse, telegraphic, concentrated language of poetry rather than prose. Love and death, and the whole spectrum of private emotions associated with the term “lyric” - subject matter that had been forcibly muffled in the Stalin era - reappeared mainly through the medium of verse. At the same time, poetry became aggressively political. Andrei Voznesenskii, Evgenii Evtushenko, and other members of a discontented and relatively daring younger generation began voicing demands for creative freedom, greater openness, and diversity of opinion.

The first sign of “thaw” was the publication in June, 1953 of Tvardovskiy’s poem “Horizon beyond Horizon”, but it was not until the winter of 1953-54 that the whole of orthodox Soviet literary theory and practice was called into question by Vladimir Pomerantsev’s famous essay ‘On Sincerity in Literature’ and other outspoken critical articles in “Novy Mir.”

Towards the end of 1953, Ehrenburg’s article in the magazine,

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“Znamia”, “On the Work of a Writer”, and that of Pomerantsev in the “Novy Mir” attacked bureaucratic regimentation and argued for the writer’s privilege to choose his materials and depict what is available to him and in the light of his own writer’s experience. Both wrote against the simplification of personality into accepted stereotypes, deploring the inauthentic or evasive portrayal of private, emotion-charged life that Ehrenburg has to bring out into the open in his novel; “The Thaw.”

Ehrenburg’s novel “The Thaw” was published in May, 1954 in “Znamia.” Conservatives attacked “The Thaw” Ehrenburg tried to defend his position. The exchange took place at the Second Writer’s Congress in December 1954. The Congress opened with a clarion call for strict adherence to socialist realism supported by heavy Stalinist rhetoric from the Union Secretary, A. Surkov, and his second-in-command, F. Gladkov. It called for an art without false embellishments, genuine aesthetic criticism, and pointed out the writer’s need to follow his creative bent. Anna Akhmatova was readmitted into the Union, and Tvardovsky, who had been dismissed as chief editor of the “Novy Mir” for publishing Pomerantsev’s article, was elected to the Union’s executive board. More indicative still of increased tolerance on the part of the authorities was the rehabilitation during 1955 of writers such as Babel, Bunin, and Pilnyak,
who had been purged during the thirties and forties.\(^9\)

Literature since the death of Stalin had become less utopian in several senses term. Writers now have a stronger inclination than previously to privatism, to limiting themselves to this life, and utopianism to some degree a turning away from the present. Moreover, Soviet Writers felt strongly that "the truth must be told" and "people must be trusted."

Khrushchev's selective denunciation of Stalin's 'mistakes' at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 was a fatal blow to the myth of the party's infallibility.\(^{20}\) Reduction of ideological pressures, combined with a relaxation of the requirements enforced in the name of Socialist Realism, has freed authors from the obligation to infuse their work with optimistic political messages. This has made possible descriptions of everyday life, of urban and rural conditions, and of domestic and moral predicaments - all portrayed without militantly improving overtones such as were obligatory under Stalin. Among such politically detached works are the short stories of Sergey Antonov, Irina Grekova, Yury Kazakov, Yury Nagibin, Vasily Skuskshin, Vladimir Trendryakov and Yury Trifonov. No longer, moreover, does fiction exclusively purvey the plain, straightforward - albeit lengthy

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and often blatantly falsified - statements of the Stalin era, since scope now exists for hints, half-statements and narrative creatively blurred to the point where the author's intentions may even become a matter for heated dispute. Alongside this more sophisticated, less explicit narrative technique - which to some extent represents a return to the traditions of the 1920s - practitioners of the more direct approach, as familiar from the Stalin era, continue to ply their trade.\textsuperscript{21}

The dethronement of Stalin stimulated writers to depict what they considered to be the deficiencies in Soviet Society and lessened the fear that frankness would lead to arrest or repression. The summer and autumn of 1956 were marked by the publication of a number of controversial works, such as Granin's story "Personal Opinion" and Dudinstev's "Not by Bread Alone." The most significant literary event of 1956, however was the publication of the two volumes of the anthology "Literaturnaya Moskva" by a group of authors who attempted to establish an independent organisation of Moscow writers outside the party-controlled Union of Soviet Writers.

But soon after the de-Stalinization Congress of February 1956 came the 'October Revolution' in Poland and the more violent anti-Russian uprising in Hungary. For a time, a sharp brake was put on 'liberalization' in

\textsuperscript{21} Ronald Hingley, \textit{Russian Writers and Soviet Society 1917-1978}, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., p.82
literature and the arts. On the 13 May 1957 Khrushchev himself met writers at a dacha near Moscow and warned them to adhere to the principles of socialist realism and to remember that they were servants of the party.22

The conventional interpretation of literary politics in the year 1956-57 is that Shepilov sanctioned the cultural “thaw”, and that after Khrushchev’s defeat of his political opponents in the ‘Anti-Party Group’, including Shepilov, in July 1957, he turned his attention to literature and dismissed Simonov, the current editor of “Novy Mir”, for his liberal publishing policy. Tvardovsky was reappointed as editor of ‘Novy Mir’ in July 1958.

After the ‘Anti-Party Group Affair’ Khrushchev felt secure enough to attempt to establish an equilibrium between the two camps of writers. The return of liberal Tvardovsky was balanced, in the wake of the scandal caused by the publication of Boris Pasternak’s ‘Doctor Zhivago’ and the award of the Nobel Prize to its author in October 1958, by the establishment in December of the reactionary Writer’s Union of the Russian Republic(RSFSR), designed to counteract the influence of the rebellious Moscow Writers.

Now, the conformist writers realized that the cultural monopoly they had enjoyed was being challenged, by the new organ, the Writer’s Union of the Russian Republic (RSFSR). RSFSR started its own weekly newspaper “Literary Russia” [Literaturnaya Rossiya - initially known as Literature and Life (Literatura i Zhizni)], and the journals “Moscow” (Moskva) and “Our Contemporary” (Nash Sovremennik). Henceforth conflict became more open, with the battle between conformists and non-conformists (or, less accurately, conservatives and liberals) being umpired by a party ideological apparatus which was no longer always automatically on the side of the conformists. Each side had its bastions in certain journals, publishing houses and local branches of the Writers’ Union. The most notable was the non-conformist stronghold in the long-established organ of Soviet Writers’ Union. “New World”, under its editors Alexander Tvardovsky (1950-54 and 1958-1970) and Kanstantin Simonov (1954-1958).

The social resonance of “New World”, and of the other journals, reflected the changes which had taken place in Soviet society since the 1920s. The introduction of universal primary education meant that the great majority of the population could now read, and formed part of the potential audience for literature. The nature of Soviet education ensured, moreover, that most graduates of schools and colleges had had some contact with the classics of Russian and Soviet literature, and had
absorbed the elements of a systematic - however narrow - way of studying them. The greatest transformation had taken place, however, in the nature of the creative intelligentsia. For the first time, many peasant and working-class lads were receiving a good education, and some of them were studying at the Gorky Institute and becoming writers. Russian people were provided both an alternative language and an alternative view of the world to the officially propagated ones.

Sufferings of the ordinary people were described and reflected, not only in songs but also jokes and anecdotes - and directed with cheerful cynicism at their oppressors, helped to nourish the return to authenticity from the censored and politically controlled Stalinist official literature.23

Techniques of fiction-writing have undergone considerable modification from the mid-1950s onwards. Since then many of the most notable authors have come to favour the short story or “povest” rather than the novel, or the short novel of manageable length rather than the multi-volume “block-buster” of the Stalin era; which is not by any means to say that novel has died out, or lost all its importance, in recent years.24

Khrushchev’s specific interventions in literary matters, particularly

his speech to the Third Writer’s Congress in 1959 was a step forward for granting liberty to the writers to a certain extent. On this occasion he said that the writers should not come running ‘to the government’ for the settlement of all their disputes, thus implicitly suggesting that literature and the arts were an area of Soviet life which could not, or should not, be an object of absolute party control. Whatever his reason for this concession, the immediate result was a certain tolerance, for the public airing in circumspect language of differences of opinion in literary matters. An open fissure was thus allowed to develop in the “monolith” of ideological unity which Stalin had maintained by repeated waves of terror. In this unprecedented situation, the party began to pursue a policy of balancing a balance between the so-called “conservatives” and the “liberals” who sometimes refer to themselves as “progressives”. The former are joined together by a vested interest in maintaining the rule of mediocrity and are clearly nostalgic for the straightforward situation of Stalin’s time; they militantly uphold the doctrine of socialist realism, put loyalty to party discipline above artistic independence and are identified with a scarcely veiled nationalist, even Chauvinist, mood.25

The concentration camp system was not abolished, but reduced to considerably smaller dimensions, while the ever-present danger of

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unheralded arrest was largely removed from the population in general. The powers of the security police were curbed too, but the organization was not dismantled, merely brought under more stringent party control.

Relaxations of Stalinist vigours were instituted, partly owing to a widespread reaction against the methods of the past, and partly because Khrushchev sought to gain political credit by espousing the cause of reform. But these beliefs were received with such excitement and enthusiasm that they seemed to threaten the system’s ultimate stability, thus requiring correction by the reimposition of restrictions.

By 1959 the focus of attention in Soviet literature shifted from prose to poetry. The Third Congress of Soviet Writers was dominated by discussions of the works of such popular poets as Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, Rozhdestvensky, and Kirsanov. During the next two to three years many of their poems, especially those written by Yevtushenko, were used by Soviet critics in their effort to clarify the desired tempo and limits of the de-stalinization campaign in literature. Although a certain degree of difference of opinion was tolerated, whenever an argument seemed to have gone to far, the matter was quickly settled by Khrushchev or some other Kremlin leaders.²⁶

The doctrine of Socialist Realism remained immune from attack in the Soviet Press and at Writer’s Congress, Liberals opposed to traditional Socialist Realism, but not permitted to say anything so openly. Nagibin, Tendryakov, Kazakov, Aksyonov were beginning to make names for themselves. It was new writing, different from almost anything seen in the last thirty years - except for outcasts like Akhmatova and Pasternak.

The politically neutral area of Soviet-published post-Stalin fiction includes one particularly flourishing genre, that of Village Prose. Its main achievement is to chronicle rural life affectionately and faithfully, with respect for traditional features. Some of the writers in this group have tended to emphasize a more positive aspect of the countryside as a repository of traditional values which are disappearing in the towns. This is a remarkable feature of some of Tendryakov’s stories. Sometimes there are distinctly religious undertones, as in the sketches and stories of Vladimir Soloukhin. Other interesting ‘village’ prose has been written by Vasily Belov, Valentin Rasputin and Vasily Shukshin.27 Village prose, mainly, includes novels, short stories and documentary sketches, and some of the village prose is remarkable for its political neutrality. But much of it conveys outspoken criticism of party policy as imposed on the villages, and this despite the fact that several of the authors concerned - including

Abramov, Ovechkin, Soloukhin, Tendryakov and Yashin - wrote as members of the party. Village Prose authors are above all hostile to the all-pervading bureaucracy that has filled the countryside with town-bred officials. These authors of Village Prose do not, as a group, confine themselves to negative criticism, for some go out of their way to portray Russian rural life as a worthwhile cultural milieu wholly distinct from that of the towns.

Liberalization in literature was making headway throughout 1961 and 1962. Thousands of young people flocked to the Luzhniki Stadium to hear those new young idols of Soviet poetry, Yevtushenko and Voznesensky. At the end of 1961 The Twenty-Second Party Congress took place; it was much more outspokenly anti-Stalinite than the Twentieth had been; not only was Stalin denounced, but even some others such as Zhdanov.\(^{28}\) It was followed by ‘an event of still greater symbolic significance: the removal of the deceased dictator’s embalmed remains from the Red Square Mausoleum, where they had reposed for eight years alongside the mummified Lenin. This episode marks the political high watermark of “de-Stalinization”, as the process came to be called.

It was in October 1962 that Yevtushenko wrote one of his most famous poems - “The Heirs of Stalin”, which, with Khrushchev’s approval,\(^{28}\)Alexander Werth, *Russia Hopes and Fears*, (Penguin Books, 1969), p. 296.
was published in "Pravda." To sum up it must be said that the Twenty-Second Congress brought further encouragement for the "liberals." For the first time being at any rate, it is clear that liberals, as represented by Tvardovsky, have greater political influence, and have little to fear from the neo-Stalinists.

In November 1962 "Novy Mir" published, again with Khrushchev’s approval, Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" - describing an ‘Ordinary day’ in a Siberian labour camp. The ‘slave camp’ story was no longer taboo; ‘Novy Mir’ continued to publish Ehrenburg’s "Memoirs", talking freely of Western art and enormously ‘widening the cultural horizon’s’ of the young generation, who came to regard Ehrenburg as one of the great liberal leaders of Soviet literature.

The years 1960-62 also witnessed an upsurge of "Youth Prose" and an unprecedented stream of articles, memoirs, essays and fiction, mostly but not entirely in "Novy Mir", revealing and criticizing many aspects of Stalin’s rule.29

One of the important features of the Khrushchev years was the rehabilitation of many leading figures purged and liquidated under Stalin. Deceased writers falling into this category could not be restored to life, but at least their works could be republished. In keeping with the policy of de-

Stalinization as a whole, literary rehabilitations were implemented selectively, hesitantly and with many delays.

Khrushchev's creation in 1962 of a special Ideological Commission of the Central Committee under Leonid Ilyichov, a member of the Party Secretariat from 1916 to 1965, has generally been interpreted as evidence of Khrushchev's intention to give higher priority to literature and the arts.

But worse was to come. In December 1962, Khrushchev visited the Manège exhibition of modern painting and sculpture, and his comments on what he called 'abstract' art were, to say the least, lavatorial and scatological. On 8 March 1963 Khrushchev himself delivered a 20,000 word speech in which he not only defended Stalin from complete condemnation but launched ferocious attacks on Ehrenburg, Yevtushenko, Nekrasov.30

There was a certain irresolution in cultural policy until another shift occurred in August 1963, when Khrushchev made the extraordinary gesture of asking Tvardovsky to read his unpublished poem "Tyorkin in the Other World", a powerful satire on the Stalinist bureaucracy, before an audience of Soviet and foreign Writers. However, an unstable equilibrium between liberals and dogmatists persisted throughout 1963-64, the party continued to sanction continued de-stalinization.