

Russian Literature and Its Historical Background

Russian literature was developing in the country which was under ceaseless pressure of Eastern raiders. For centuries, Russia actually acted as a European barrier – the fact the Europeans were not always aware of, and, on the contrary, the fact made the Russians to believe in their messianic role and right to the world leadership. Face to face with the outer danger and due to internal arrangement, which was given by important historical events which were moving Russia away from the rest of Europe (the East-West Schism or the Mongol invasion), in Russia the individual was suppressed (Karel Havlíček Borovský mentions in his *Pictures from Russia, 1843-1846*, that the price of a Russian peasant, a serf, is much lower than the price paid for an English thoroughbred), while collectiveness and group spirit (*sobornost'*) is accentuated. In this historical context, literature had a number of further functions and partly substituted for the non-existing or weakly manifesting philosophy and science. Literature also served as a convenient tool to express political views: behind the curtain of a sentimental book of travels *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow (1790)* by Alexander Radishchev a severe political attack on the autocratic system of government is hidden; also the literature of the Decembrists (members of illegal groups and later also the participants in the crushed uprising of the 14th of December [December = *dyekabr*, in Russian] – 1825). In the liberal atmosphere of the 1850s and the 1860s, literature was often seen as more or less direct reflection of political movements.¹

The Russian Empire gradually started to present itself as a typical multinational and multicultural country with a changeable attitude of the majority ethnic group towards other nations and their freedom and also as a target country of a number of foreign families and individuals (under Peter I and also before the Germans, later on the Dutch and the English, after the revolution the French, and continuously also the Poles, etc.). Russian became a language of everyday as well as artistic inter-ethnic communication. After all, it is manifested in the descent of many Russian writers (A. Kantemir, A. Zhukovsky, A. S. Pushkin, N. V. Gogol, M. Lermontov, A. Gercen or Herzen, and in a way even F. M. Dostoyevsky and others; later also Y. Olesha, A. Grin, B. Yasensky, C. Aytmatov, V. Sangi, Y. Rytgev, etc.).

The beginnings of Kievan Rus date back to the 7th century and its peak was in the 10th and 11th centuries; in the 12th century, the process of splitting and regionalization, decentralization and weakening of the centre in Kiev started, which was completed with the Mongol invasion in the first half of the 13th century (1223 the battle of the Kalka river – the first defeat of the Russian princes, 1240 the capture of Kiev by Batu Khan, *Baty* in Russian).

Kievan Rus literature is connected with writing and language; these were Glagolitic script and Cyrillic alphabet. Life of Constantine says that a system of writing was reportedly found in Crimea (“*russkyia pismena*”), however, probably Gothic runes were found there. Nevertheless, it can be said that until the scripts through which Old Slavonic was conveyed were accepted, no other system of writing had been used relevantly in the areas inhabited by Eastern Slavs. As far as the first standard East Slavonic language, i. e. Old Church Slavonic, is concerned, it was an artificial language based on South Slavonic dialects of the so-called Aegean Macedonia, the area around Thessaloniki in what is now northern Greece, and the superstructure of the language was represented by Greek word-forming and grammar models. Writing and language appeared in Kievan Rus with Christianisation under the rule of Prince Vladimir who was later referred to as Saint Prince Vladimir. In the *Primary Chronicle*, often translated into English as *Tale of Bygone Years*, the Christianisation of Kiev is vividly described: according to the *Primary Chronicle*, there had been several religions to be chosen from - Vladimir finally chose the Byzantine form of Christianity (after their expansion in the 13th century, the Mongols were also choosing their religion and Christianity was one of the options – finally, they obviously decided to choose Islam), while an important role was played by the then Eastern Slavs customs (including drinking alcoholic beverages) and pragmatic context. It was actually an act of a violent nature; waves of Christianisation were moving forward rather slowly, so that even in the High Middle Ages there were some areas of Russia actually pagan or Christianity was accepted only half-heartedly and together with magic and pagan rituals formed one whole – as well as in other areas. Geographic closeness of great Eastern religious systems led to the fact that even unofficial texts which were not approved of by the Church spread easily: both Kievan Rus and Muscovy were breeding grounds for apocryphas in terms of ideology connected especially with Manichaeism and Gnosis. Strong position of oral literal language was prominent, obviously it was meant for either singing or declamation: these features of East Slavic rhetoric is intertwined with the older period and modern Russian literature as well; it has been preserved in the form of stylisation or poetologic chains (Dostoyevsky, Leskov, or Remizov).

¹ See our introductory materials in: *Slovník ruských, ukrajinských a běloruských spisovatelů (Dictionary of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian Writers)*. Publishing house: LIBRI: Prague 2001. ed. Ivo Pospíšil, *K celku východoslovanských literatur (On the Complex of East Slavic Literatures)*, p. 15-19. *Ruská literatura (Russian literature)*, p. 19-59, *Běloruská literatura (Belarusian literature)*, p. 74-80.

Generally, Slavic literatures are – much more than others in Europe – connected with folklore, which has been kept especially by the Eastern Slavs until the 20th century.

The process of intertwining and unification of the South Slavic language (Old Church Slavonic) and the local East Slavonic language (generally called “general East Slavonic” or “obshevostochnoslavnyanski”) continued for several centuries: from the original diglossia (the state of factual bilingualism) and the Lomonosov’s theory of three styles (shtil’) to the synthesis of Karamzin and Pushkin. The formation of standard Russian as a language, in which one of the most prominent world literatures is written, took place from the 11th to the 19th centuries.

The oldest stage of the Russian literature development is traditionally called Old Russian literature (drevnyaya russkaya or, more commonly drevnerusskaya, formerly also starinnaya russkaya literatura) and in the form as we know it today it has existed since the 20th century when it was modelled by several generations of medievalists and culminated in the works by D. Likhachov.

Artificial literature started to appear with the spread of Christianity; at first, typically, in the form of the Books of the Bible translations. From the Old Testament (Vetkhyi zavet) Pentateuch (especially Genesis and Exodus – Bytie and Iskhod in Russian, Books of the Prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, Book of Job – Iov in Russian, Ecclesiastes – Ekkleziast, Song of Songs – Pesn pesney and Sulamit - Sumalif) were translated, from the New Testament (Novyi zavet) the Four Gospels (Evangeliye ot Matfeya and others) and especially the most popular book of the New Testament The Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse (Otkrovenie ili Apokalipsis Ioanna Bogoslova), which has been a model for modern literature numerous times. Apart from these, there was a number of the so called Apocryphas, among which there were also apocryphal gospels, i.e. gospels which the Church never approved of to be a part of the Bible – the Gospel of Thomas (evangeliye ot Fomy), the Gospel of Nicodemus (ot Nikodima) and the Gospel of James (ot Iakova). Apocryphal gospels are connected with dualism (the concept of the dualistic nature of the world as the product of the good and evil, God and devil) and are linked to the Eastern philosophy development, especially with the so called gnosia the literary basis of which is now represented by the gnostic library discovered in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt after WWII. The first notable authentic apocryphal text originating in the territory of the Eastern Slavs is probably Khozhdenie bogorodicy po mukam (the 12th century).

The Old Russian literature is characterized by the genre syncretism, presence of several genres in one text and genre plurality even more than other European medieval literatures. The genre which is not imminently bound to liturgy is chronicle or annals. An example of an authentic text is the so called incipient Russian chronicle called the Primary Chronicle or also Tale of Bygone Years (Povest vremennykh let, the 11th century). Another genre was represented by hagiography (zhitie, zhitiynaya literatura). Apart from translated texts there is one authentic text which is genetically linked to the Czech Old Old Slavonic and Latin legend of the Legend of Saint Wenceslaus and Saint Ludmila, his grandmother – Lives of Boris and Gleb, two sons of a prince, who were murdered by their elder half-brother Sviatopolk. In the pinnacle of Kievan Rus under the rule of Prince Vladimir Monomakh (the 12th century) his Pouchenie (Monomakh’s Instructions to His Children) again manifested the genre syncretism of the Old Russian literature: it is also a military (war) story (voinskaya povest), hagiographic biography and a didactic exemplum calling for concord. A typical religious genre is sermon (propoved), the oldest one is Slovo o zakone i blagodati (Sermon on Law and Grace, between 1037 and 1050) of Hilarion, the Metropolitan of Kiev. In the context of religious genres, descriptions of pilgrimages to holy places or to Palestine to see the Holy Sepulchre, the so called palomnicheskaya literatura, palomnichestvo v svyatuyu zemlyu (palomnik, pilgrim = pilgrim travelling to holy places, from Latin peregrinus, originally foreign, alien) played an important role. Khozhdenie v Palestinu igumena Daniila is an original text: the author was granted unlimited freedom of movement by the Crusade king so that he could provide detailed description of places.

The Tale of Igor’s Campaign (the end of the 12th century, according to the Chronicle, the battle against the Polovtsians took place in 1185 according to the Gregorian calendar) is a truly extraordinary text. In the 20th century, apart from others, the French Slavist A. Mazon and the Russian academic D. Likhachov confronted each other with the issue of its authenticity, Czech philologist Frček was indirectly involved in their dispute when he referred to the filiation between the Tale and a text from the 14th century which describes the first defeat of the Tatars by Russian princes – Zadonshchina – the dispute then, however, was not settled. Nowadays, the Tale describing the tragic campaign of Prince Igor against nomadic Polovtsians (Cumans) is axiomatically taken as authentic (N. M. Karamzin was suspected of the authorship, he was also the one who informed Western Europe about the text).

Russian Middle Ages – as well as the Middle Ages in other areas – would not appreciate authenticity (originality) but rather imitations and paraphrasing. There were many translated texts in Old Russian (perevodnaya literatura): some texts seem to be of Czech origin, or they happened to get to Russia from the Czech background, sometimes Czech origin is more or less legendary. As well as in other literatures, we come across Alexandreis (Aleksandriya), originally perhaps of Persian origin and later a Greek legend about an ancient ruler which was adapted many times to medieval chivalric tradition, Devgeniyovo deyaniye (Acts of Digenes) and a paraphrasis of Buddha’s biography Story about Varlaam and Iosaf: the Old Russian literature becomes a

crossroads of Eastern influences. From the second half of the 12th century Kievan Rus experienced a period of crisis which is usually referred to as Feudal fragmentation: the centre in Kiev weakened, regions became stronger, and regional literature started to emerge. When united Russian princes suffered a defeat during the Mongol invasion at the battle of the Kalka river in 1223, the fall of Kievan Rus was inevitable: in literature, it is described in numerous texts of litanic and elegiac nature, e.g. *A Lamentation upon the Destruction of Ryazan* (*Slovo o razorenii Ryazani Batyiem*, 1237), deeply touching *Slovo o pogibeli Ruskyia zemli* (*Lay of the Ruin of the Russian Land*). The fall of Kievan Rus resulted in extensive relocation of inhabitants, actually the central part of the empire with Kiev was depopulated, and Kiev became an insignificant provincial town at the edge of the steppe: centres moved north-westwards and north-eastwards; one centre merged with Poland and Lithuania, another one with the centre in Vladimir and Suzdal and later in Moscow formed the basis for the new great Russian Empire, which went through various stages of centralisation and the “gathering of the Russian lands”, i.e. imperial aggression to the detriment of the neighbours. In terms of ideology, the newly emerging structure turned to ancient empires and their stories: e.g. *Povest ob Indiyskom carstve*, *Povest o Vavilonskom carstve* (about India and Babylonia) were extremely popular: the tendency grew stronger especially with the fall of Constantinople in 1452; its reasons and course are described in Nestor Iskander’s *Tale on the Taking of Tsargrad* (*Povest Nestora-Iskandera o vzyatii Caregrada*) where, apart from others, the Council of Florence is mentioned here. In the 15th century, authentic Russian book of travels of the merchant of Tver, Afanasy Nikitin, *The Journey Beyond Three Seas* (*Khozheniye za tri morya*): the journey took place between 1466 and 1472. The concept of Moscow as the third Rome (and there will be no fourth) led to the pressure of power on literature which became the propagator of the greatness of Moscow in the form of allegories. In the 16th century, the process of political, ideological, and also cultural centralisation culminated with the territorial expansion of Ivan IV the Terrible: texts were gathered to become later the grounds for future literature, e.g. *Velikiye Chetyi Minei* (*Great Reading Menaion*), 24,000 pages of hagiographic stories, *Knih stepenna carskogo rodosloviya*, a basic moralizing and practical text *Domostroy*, legal literature, *azbukovnik*, which is in fact a kind of embryonal encyclopaedia, texts celebrating the decline of the power of the Tatars (*History of Kazan Tsardom*), autocratic power apologetics of Ivan Peresvetov, stories about Emperor Constantine reminding of the Byzantine Empire (*Skazanie o tsare Konstantine*) and especially the ideological and stylistically vivid letters of Ivan IV the Terrible which he had exchanged with his former general who fled to Lithuania Andrey Kurbsky writing about aristocratic democracy and autocracy. Literature of the period following the death of Ivan IV and the dynastic chaos, and which continued with several invasions of the Polish and Lithuanian army to Moscow, peasant uprising and the enthronement of the House of Romanov, was characterised by elegiac themes which resembled the literature during the Mongol invasion. Russia recovered once again and expanded to the Baltic and the Black Seas: the expansion is described in dramatic *Tale of the Azov obsidional sitting* (*Povest ob Azovskom osadnom sidenii Donskikh kazakov*, 1637). Chains of satires and the so called secular short stories (real-life stories, *bytovaya povest* in Russian) rank among modern times (e.g. *Tale of Woe-Misfortune* and the *Tale of Savva Grudtsyn*). In the 17th century the Russian Empire experienced europeanization, secularisation and modernisation – the grounds for later reforms of Peter I was set. Nevertheless, attempts to reform the Church only remotely resemble fragments of massive European reformation, which – as well as the Renaissance, Humanism or Baroque – did not form a compact and balanced system in Russia compared with Europe – however, the manifestations were researched again in the 20th century and it was proven that they had been much stronger than originally thought, were strongly rejected by the Old Believers. Old Believers were represented by Avvakum Petrov, a literary competent protopope and the author of an autobiographic hagiography. The whole 18th century, starting with the radical reforms of Peter I and ending with the indecision of Catherine II, Pavel I, and Alexander I whose rule takes us to the first third of the 19th century, was characterised by imitating European literary models and also seeking own path. The pioneers were Feofan (or Theophan) Prokopovich, Antiokh Kantemir, Vasily Trediakovsky and M. V. Lomonosov, who made further steps to form Russian literary (standard) uniform language, especially in his treatise *On the usefulness of religious books in Russian language* (1757). Russia in the 18th century absorbed condensely the last cultural epochs or their fragments from the Renaissance, Humanism, Reformation and Baroque, Late Baroque to Classicism, and Sentimentalism and the beginnings of Pre-Romanticism in the dispute between utilitarianism of Lomonosov and A. Sumarokov’s traditional conservatism of the Russian nature. Efforts to form Russian novel fit well in these attempts by imitating gallant Late Baroque texts and existing plots of F. Emin, his son Nikolai Emin and M. Chulkov who was cultivating picaresque plot. At the same time, the features of modern times of the quite mature Enlightenment were present in the comedies of D. Fonvizin and in the classicistic reserve of the poet G. Derzhavin, as well as in the attempts to write satires of the Empress Catherine II herself, satirist N. Novikov and originally tart-tongued satirist and comedigrapher I. Krylov, who later deliberately stylised himself in the role of the children’ fables author. The key works the Russian literature of the 18th century culminated with, were *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (*Pisma russkogo puteshestvennika*, between 1791 and 1792) by N. M. Karamzin and A. N. Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (*Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, 1790), which laid the foundation of the original Russian novel.

A common feature shared by the works of Russian writers, prose writers in particular, is leaving literature or “surpassing literature” towards journalism and history. It is evident in the overall modern development, literally from Pushkin to Solzhenitsyn. Lomonosov’s progressive concept of three styles (shtil) seemed to be too tight at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries: this manifested in a permanent debate between two aesthetic groups – the Arzamas Society and the Colloquy of Lovers of the Russian Word which culminated in the works of Pushkin. After the period of Sentimentalism and Pre-Romanticism (Radischev, Karamzin) a half broken tradition of picaresque stories based on the so called secular short stories from the 17th centuries came to life in Russia: Narezhny’s *A Russian Gil Blas*, as well as Pushkin’s paradoxical “novel in verse”, *The Captain’s Daughter* resembling Sir Walter Scott’s style and *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*, point out to the value of writing novels. Adventurous picaresque stories represented a source of inspiration for the secret police agent and also competent literary initiator and organizer Faddey Bulgarin, and also the author of a new type of novel M. Lermontov, the same source was exploited in Gogol’s heterogeneous in terms of genre *Dead Souls*, which, together with the tradition of the Natural School formed the grounds for great Russian novels of the second part of the 19th century in the works of I. Turgenev, L. Tolstoy and F. Dostoyevsky.

New social situation following the defeat in the Crimean War in the 1850s, the death of Tsar Nicholas I and general liberalization and freedom of press led in literature to the search of the so called new man who would help build new Russia. In his novel *What is to be done?* (Chto delat?, 1862) Nikolay Chernishevsky sees the future in working groups, in a “crystal palace” of the future machine civilization which had already been admired by N. M. Karamzin, when he first saw the mass consumption society of the 18th century England; F. Dostoyevsky, on the contrary, shows the unsuppressibility of human individuality, dark side of human souls, twisted thirst for wealth and power, and the contradiction of beauty and morality. I. Turgenev ponders on the new materialistic generation of Russian intelligentsia represented by the characters in *Rudin*, *A Nest of the Gentry* and *Fathers and Sons*, I. Goncharov strives to find a fixed point in the world of conservative values and in the equilibrium neo-classically translated from Antiquity and its aesthetic reception, N. S. Leskov anchored Russian peculiarities in the distinctive skaz and reconciliation of time waves in chronicles.

In the course of the 1840s and 1860s, a model of prose different from the European model appeared in Russian literature; the dramatic Balzacian type of novel was refused and seeing reality from various angles of perspective was preferred, the traditional love story form changed and chaotic heterogeneity of Leo Tolstoy in his *War and Peace*, which was seen as an unbelievably amorphous jumble with no order by the first reviewers, was becoming common – Tolstoy himself withdrew from this epic river to more schematic models in *Anna Karenina* and the absolutely exempt *Resurrection*. On the other hand, Dostoyevsky in his novels prefers dialogues and polyphony of the narrative (M. Bakhtin) and uncertainty so much typical of Modernism and Post-Modernism. A. Chekhov represents the last gasp of the Golden Age of the Russian literature of the second half of the 19th century; however, he restored its authenticity in the documentary-like *Sakhalin* where touches of reality take turns with monological contemplations.

From the 1880s, Russian literature experienced the “crisis of repetitions”. According to D. Merezhkovsky and his lecture *On the Causes of the Decline and on the New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature* (1893), literature should have withdrawn from rude materialism, it should have left utilitarianism and turn back to religion. This was the path taken by V. Solovyov and V. Rozanov in their works as well as the authors of the collection *Vekhi* (1909, *Landstones*) together with the collection’s leading author N. Berdyaev. Such approach is in harmony with the decadent symbolic movement in Russian prose, and especially in poetry and drama, represented by A. Bely or A. Remizov, sometimes even with the features typical of the neoromantic aesthetics of V. Korolenko and M. Gorky or intersecting Art Nouveau perception and Impressionism of I. Bunin and the interest in sexual life labyrinths of M. Artsybashev, A. Kuprin and L. Adreyev. Significant shifts from Classicism to Modernism can be traced in the works of authors who represented the so called Golden Age, Fyodor Dostoyevsky (*The Brothers Karamazov*, *Brat’ya Karamazovy*, between 1879 and 1880), Leo Tolstoy (*The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Kreitzerova sonata*, 1890, *The Living Corpse*, *Zhivoy trup*, 1911, *Father Sergius*, *Otets Sergiy*, 1912) and Anton Chekhov (especially his dramatic works *The Seagull*, *Chaika*, 1896, *Uncle Vanya*, *Dyadya Vanya*, 1897, *Three Sisters*, *Tri sestry*, 1901, and *The Cherry Orchard*, *Vishnevyi sad*, 1904): especially in comparison with their early works, pessimism, hopelessness, and seeking path away from the society and away from the mundane worlds is stressed.

A breakthrough had already been dawning in the pre-decadent the so called pure poetry of A. A. Fet (1820-1892), A. N. Apukhtin (1840-1893), K. M. Fofanov (1862-1911) and others. Ideas and concepts of the symbolists were often based on the unprecedented bloom of the Russian religious philosophy which was, apart from L. Tolstoy and F. Dostoyevsky, cultivated by Konstantin Leontyev or Leontiev (1831-1891), a literary critic, who spent the rest of his life in the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius (monastery), Vladimir Solovyov, also spelled Soloviev (1853-1900), an expert in Eastern thinking and the literature of the period, a translator of Plato and Kant, and an author of studies on Pushkin, Lermontov and Dostoyevsky and Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919), a predecessor of the Russian version of Existentialism, an author of the analysis of *The Grand Inquisitor* in

Brothers Karamazov of F. Dostoyevsky. The sign of the change, especially after the defeat of the Russian revolution of 1905-1907, was represented by Landmarks (Vekhi, 1909) with the subtitle Collection of Essays on Russian Intelligentsia, where the philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev (1874-1948), who was writing from exile from 1922, an author of a number of texts (The Soul of Russia, Dusha Rossii, 1915, The Meaning of History, Smysl istorii, 1923, to name but a few), where he advanced the idea of the renaissance of European Christianity, and philosophers and historians S. Bulgakov, N. Gershenzon, P. Struve, and others. In the 1890s the **Golden Age of the Russian literature** was gradually replaced by the **Silver Age**.

While the predecessors and initiators of the Russian decadent symbolistic movement were rather represented by philosophers expressing themselves through literature, the beginnings of the Russian poetic Symbolism were represented by Valery Bryusov (1873- 1924). Russian symbolists introduced the cult of Latin and sometimes even Catholicism (see titles of some collections of poems) and were interested in themes dealing with history, occult, esoteric and magic. The theoretician of the major change in the Russian literature, Dmitry Sergeevich Merezhkovsky (1865-1941), who came from the family of a high ranking official of the Tsarist Russia, introduced symbolism by his symptomatic collection of poems entitled Symbols (Simvoliy, 1892) and later he actually tackled all areas of fiction and non-fiction literature, and his wife, a poetess and prose writer Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945) contributing to the magazine of the so called early symbolists entitled Severny Vestnik.

The father of the Russian poetic symbolism Valery Bryusov, among others also the author of collections of poems Tertia Vigilia (1900) and Urbi et Orbi (1903) and of the historical prose The Fiery Angel (Ognenny angel, 1908) and The Altar of Victory (Altar pobedy, 1913), decided to stay in the post-revolutionary Russia and attempted to merge with the new literature also in terms of ideology. He had published literary magazine The Balance (Vesy, 1904-1909) before the First World War – many representatives of Russian Modernism contributed to the magazine entitled Mir iskusstva (1899-1904).

Symbolism in Russia became the river where impulses of other movements and aesthetics were emptied into, such as Art Nouveau or Impressionism: the features of which are present in the works of Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949), an archaeologist and expert in Antiquity (a student of Th. Mommsen in Berlin), sometimes he was labelled as Neo-classicist and the author of the collection of poems Cor Ardens (1911-1912), a high ranking official of the Bolshevik government, then an expatriate and a Catholic convert in Vatican, and also the poet and prose writer Konstantin Balmont (1867-1942), who later became an emigrant too, who became famous for his collection of poems Let Us Be Like the Sun (Budem kak solntse, 1903), and a poet and prose writer Fyodor Sologub (born Fyodor Teternikov, 1863-1927), prominent figures of the Russian decadent poetry and prose at the beginning of the 20th century similarly to Mikhail Artsybashev (1878-1927) and his novel Sanin (1907) the value of which was at his period overrated. Russian decadent symbolist literature is based – similarly to other countries – on the combination of erotism, death and the transcendent and exploiting local traditions and religious sources. Russian Symbolism, similarly to nearly all movements which were implanted in Russia from the West, has a peculiar form: it builds a bridge between Romanticism and Neo-Romanticism and in the works of some authors it even heads towards Neo-Classicism, e.g. in the works of Innokenty Annensky (1856-1909).

Only the second wave of Symbolism, the so called second generation, attempted to implement synthesis of various kinds of art and the concept of Symbolism as a doctrine exceeding the borders of fiction. Andrei Bely (born Boris Bugaev, 1880-1934) was an acknowledged theoretician of symbolism, the concept of which he embedded especially in his book entitled Symbolism (Simvolizm, 1910) and Arabesques (Arabeski, 1911), but also a forceful poet in his volume of essays Gold in Azure (Zoloto v lazuri, 1904), an experimental prose writer putting together literature and music and the author of the novels The Silver Dove (Serebryany golub, 1910) and Petersburg (Peterburg, 1916), the novel based on the stream of consciousness entitled Kotik Letaev (Kotik Letaev, 1922) and memoirs published in the 1930s. Andrei Bely, whose poetics is compared with the works of Marcel Proust and James Joyce, was a major influence on the 20th century prose in Russia: his literary disciples were Boris Pilnyak, Artyom Vesolyi, Vsevolod Ivanov, etc.

The most prominent figure of Russian Symbolism, also involved in tumultuous political events, was Alexander Blok (1880-1921). In the 1910s, the natural reaction to symbolism appeared: a peculiar return to the clarity of Russian literature in the Acmeist poetry (acme = peak in Greek), especially in the works of Nikolay Gumilyov or Gumilev (1886-1921), who was executed by Bolsheviks. Clarism and adamism of Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966), the author of acmeist collections *Rosary* (Chetki, 1913), *White Flock* (Belaya staya, 1917) and *Plantain* (Podorozhnik, 1921), and later the author of vast poetic pieces on bitter themes connected to political oppression in the Stalinist Russia *Requiem* (between 1935-1940) and *Poem Without a Hero* (Poema bez geroya, between 1940 and 1960). The movement theoretician and one of the most distinctive lyric talents of the 20th century Russian poetry was Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938), the author of the manifesto entitled *The Morning Of Acmeism* (Utro akmeizma, 1919) and collections of poems *The Stone* (Kamen, 1913), *Tristia* (1920) and *Second Book* (1923) and several prose pieces. Tragic death ended the life and career of Marina Tsvetaeva (1898-1941), whose life was connected with the inter-war Czechoslovakia.

At the same time, neo-realistic literature represented by the self-learner Maxim Gorki, also spelled Maksim Gorky (born Aleksey Maksimovich Peshkov, 1868-1936), whose most vivid works are connected to authentic experiences in the so called Bossack stories about Russian vagrants (Makar Chudra, 1892), in the drama *The Lower Depths* (Na dne, 1902) and in the autobiographic trilogy *My Childhood* (Detstvo, 1913), *In the World* (V lyudyakh, 1915-1918) and *My Universities* (Moi universitety, 1923). Gorki's ideological growth was rather complicated: his works were influenced by nietzscheism and the religious and philosophic movement - bogoisakatelstvo (god-seeking). In the centre of attention appeared to be his prose pieces *Mother* (Mat, 1906) and *A Confession* (Ispoved, 1908) dealing with the issue of faith, revolution and the human life. Chronicle-like texts "Okurov City" (Gorodok Okurov, 1909) and "The Life of Matvey Kozhemyakin" (Zhizn Matveya Kozhemyakina, 1910-1911) were a loose sequel to them and Gorki there goes deep into the structures of old, provincial Russia on the eve of the social turn of events. His life's work was meant to compete with vast dramatic canvases of Dostoevsky; "The Life of Klim Samgin" (Zhizn Klima Samgina, 1925-1936) remained a torso.

In a sense, his ideological opponent was Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919), who vigorously pointed out to the far side of the revolutionary ethics balancing on the precipice of erotics, life and death, the good and the evil, in painfully rationalistic prosaic structures. Similarly to Gorki, he was also acclaimed for his drama, such as *Tsar Hunger* (Car-Golod, 1907). His most famous prose texts, e.g. *The Seven Who Were Hanged* (Rasskaz o semi poveshennykh, 1902) or *Governor* (Gubernator, 1903) examine the human being on the existential edge and question the rational and optimistic concept of the human being. Boris Zaytsev (1881-1972), a story-writer and writer of novels, who refined his talent in exile where he had gone in 1922 (*Strange Journey*, *Strannoye puteshestvie*, 1927), ranked in the group of Russian neo-realists, too.

In fact, in the group of Russian neo-realists there was also the first Russian writer to receive the Nobel Prize, Ivan Bunin (1870-1953), who debuted as a symbolist poet and later achieved fame for his dense lyric stories with bitter amorous themes on the background of melancholic Russian scenery (*Light Breathing*, *Legkoye dykhaniye*, 1915, *Mitya's Love*, *Mitina lyubov*, 1925). His autobiographic novel *The Life of Arsenev* (Zhizn Arsenyeva, 1930) was the impulse for awarding him the Nobel Prize.

While Bunin once and for all discontinued contact with Soviet Russia, Alexander Kuprin (1870-1938), the author of a two-volume novel about prostitutes *The Pit* (Yama, 1909, 1915), returned to the Soviet Union in 1937. Similar attitudes had already been adopted by Count Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1882-1945) back in the 1920s: similarly to his realistic peers he debuted with neo-romantic, symbolic verses, tackled science-fiction genre (*Aelita: Queen of Mars*, 1922-1923) and settled in vast epic canvases describing the contradictory period of pre-war, wartime and revolutionary Russia in *The Road to Cavalry* (*Khozhdenie po mukam*, 1922-1941) and in the historical fresco *Peter I* (Petr I, 1930-1945).

The beginning of the Russian avant-garde is considered the constitution of the Futurist movement in the 1910s, the development of which was different in Russia compared with the country of its origin – Italy. The Russian Futurism ranged between two lines – Egofuturism, represented especially by Igor Severyanin (born Igor Lotarev, 1887-1922), and more prolific Cubo-Futurism. For example, in the case of the most interesting cubo-futurist Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) the orientation towards the future gained the features of utopia and was linked to the search of the roots of the language. Aleksey Kruchenykh, also spelled Kruchonykh, (1886-1968), one of the Russian Cubo-Futurism theoretician, was the author and theoretician of the so called zaum (trans-rational language) (*The Word As Such*, *Slovo kak takovoye*, 1913) – he was actually the most inspiring Russian futurist and a predecessor of the so called phonic poetry.

The most famous futuristic oriented poet who, nevertheless, contained expressionistic features in his poetry too, as well as layers of theatrical and poetic biblical, medieval and renaissance tradition, was Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930) contributing to the Futurist manifestation collection *A Slap in the Face of Public* (*Poshechina obshestvennomu vkusu*, 1912). Among his most important epic poems from the 1910s there are *A Cloud in Trousers* (*Oblako v shtanakh*, 1915) and *The Backbone Flute* (*Fleita-pozvonochnik*, 1915); allegoric portrait of the revolution was presented in his play *Mystery-Bouffe* (*Misterya-buff*, 1918) and pathetic poem

150,000,000 (1921). Boris Paternak (1890-1960) also based his works on Futurist poetics, especially his first collections *Twin in the Clouds* (*Bliznets v tuchakh*, 1914) and *Over the Barriers* (*Poverkh baryerov*, 1917), however, later it became obvious that the poet with training in philosophy was following his own independent evolution and that he kept the poet's autonomy face to face with brutal reality (*My Sister, Life, Sestra moya – zhizn*, 19717, published in 1922).

Russian intellectual life was put to enormous chaos due to the social unrest Russia was smitten with after the Russians had lost in a war with Japan and continued with a short regress in 1917 and the two revolutions. Revolutionary events, which in large measure defined the character of the world development in the 20th century, inspired philosophers, poets, prose writers and playwrights to create works which are – similarly to the events they were describing – of a contradictory nature. If the series of post-revolution works show utopian features, the works of a number of writers, e.g. Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937), among others the author of the novel *We* (*My*, 1920), Leo Luntz (1901-1924) and Andrei Platonov (born Klimentov, 1899-1951), the author of the novella *Chevengur* (1928-29) and *The Foundation Pit* (*Kotlovan*, 1929-1930), and the “villager” and later also imagist Sergey Yesenin (1895-1925), the author of *Moscow of the Taverns* (*Moskva kabatskaya*, 1924), poem *Anna Snegina* (*Anna Snegina*, 1925) and *The Black Man* (*Cherny chelovek*, 1925), are rather anti-utopian or doubtful reflection of Russia.

Unnaturalness of the Russian cultural development which was set by feverish absorbing of European ideas from the epoch of Peter I is multiplied after the October Revolution due to internal rift of Russian intelligentsia, forced deportations (the “Ship of Philosophers” used by Lenin to transport forcibly philosophers who had not identified with the ideological concepts of the revolution, to Germany in 1922), and self-imposed exile of the Russian Silver Age elite. The interruption of continuity, the gaping abyss in the Russian culture in the 1920s provoked great shifts: new people were appearing. On the outside they highlighted novelty, new age, however, inwardly they were deeply linked to the Russian classic tradition and poetics of the “Silver Age” and the avant-garde of the 1910s.

Core of the literature of the period were doubts-provoking texts which were examining the role of man in the history from various points of view. In his fantasy novel *Chief City's Death* (*Gibel Glavnogo goroda*, 1918), Efim Zozulya (1891-1941) presents the far side of social utopia on the background of revolutionary events, Yury Olesha (1899-1960) in his novel *Envy* (*Zavist*, 1928) observes the “old” and the “new” kind of human and the essence is seen – similarly to Zamyatin – in the conflict between sensitivity and force and the lack of culture of the new times. Vsevolod Ivanov (1895-1963) invented new style of revolutionary events in the novel *Colored Winds* (*Cvetnye vetra*, 1922), Boris Pilnyak (born Wogau, 1894-1937), a victim of Stalinist purges, described the mechanic nature of the revolution and the danger of mechanization of man portraying Bolsheviks as “people wearing leather jackets” in his fragmentary novel *The Naked Year* (*Goly god*, 1921), using the new style resembling the American method of John Dos Passos' camera eye. In the early 1930s, the method was still exploited by Artem Vesely (born Kochkurov) in his novel *Russia Washed in Blood* (*Rossia krovyu umytaya*, 1932). Isaak Babel (1894-1941) documented the absurdity of the war events in the collection of short stories *Red Cavalry* (*Konarmiya*, 1926) through the eyes of the author-narrator.

Noteworthy, albeit controversial figure of the period between 1920s and 1960s was Ilya Ehrenburg (1891-1967), a poet, playwright and prose writer, essayist and journalist, who was, through his life, values and friendship, linked to the West-European Modernism and avant-garde and who documented its dominant tendencies, especially the inclination to farce, absurdity, political science fiction and confessional narrative, e.g. in the novel *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julia Jurenito and His Disciples* (1922), *Trust D. E.* (1923), *The Love of Jeanne Ney* (1924) and *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* (1927), and in the collection of stories entitled *The Thirteen Pipes* (1923).

Relative tolerance, typical of the 1920s, in the relationship between the party in power and literature permitted for the development of satirical novel and prose. Anti-utopian, satirical features of Leo Luntz's (1901-1924) tragedy *City of Truth* (*Gorod pravdy*, 1924) pointing out the danger of ideological fanaticism of new bearers of the revolutionary truth as well as the hypocrisy of the new period shown in satirical stories of Mikhail Zoshchenko (1895-1958), for example, the cycle of stories entitled *The Tales of Nazar Ilyich, Mr. Bluebelly* (*Rasskazy Nazara Iliche, gospodina Sinebryukhova*, 1922) and satirical stories-tragedies with science fiction features of Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) *The Fatal Eggs* (*Rokovye yaytsa*, 1925) and *Heart of a Dog* (*Sobachye serdtse*, 1926) and the celebrated satirical novel of (born Faynzilberg, 1897-1937) and Yevgeni Petrov (born Kataev, 1903-1942) *The Twelve Chairs* (*Dvenadtsat stulyev*, 1928) and *The Little Golden Calf* (*Zolotoy telyonok*, 1931) and a series of their satirical short stories.

In the 1920s, when various factions quarrelled within the leadership of the Bolshevik party, literary life concentrated in literary societies the existence of which had been legalized by the resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviks) *On Party policy in the sphere of literature* (1925) where plurality of literary methods were mentioned. Literary groups varied in their artistic and ideological bases: number of outstanding literary individualities grew from their platforms.

After the October Revolution in 1917, the educational organization Proletkult (proletarian culture) was

established, with about five hundred thousand members in the early 1920s. The leading figure of Proletkult was Alexander Bogdanov (born Malinovsky, 1873-1928) who attempted to join together literary and production practice in his theory. Disputes between Proletkult and the Bolshevik Party over the dominance of culture were solved by the resolution On the proletarian culture which interpreted Proletkult as part of the educational labour union sphere where it existed until 1932.

Avant-garde poetics was further cultivated by the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOJAZ), core of the so called Russian formalist school connected with the poetic and prosaic practice analysis and represented by Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Yuri Tynianov, Viktor Vinogradov, Boris Tomashevsky and Roman Jakobson, who later became co-founder of the Prague linguistic circle as the basis of the Czech structuralism and also a professor of Masaryk University in Brno. Press authority of the avant-garde was considered LEF (until 1925), from 1927 Novy LEF promoting non-fiction literature, documentary production, operational motion picture arts and rejecting psychological realism typical of Russia in the 19th century and its advocates. Fascination by the works craftsmanship became the foundation for the so called literary approach (priyom, also spelled priem) and defamiliarization or estrangement (ostranenie), i.e. new non-automatized view of reality. It was not a coincidence when, in the context of Babel's Red Cavalry, Viktor Shklovsky mentioned that the author speaks about the events as a physician of the expedition of Napoleon to Russia and in one breath mentions the stars and gonorrhoea.

The OBERIU collective (the Union of Real Art or the Association of Real Art, Obyedinenie realnogo iskusstva) existed between 1927 and 1930 and attempted to go deep in reality through literary experimenting exploiting cubo-futuristic poetics for that purpose (decomposing the artefact wholeness in associated fragments, alogicality, putting together what is seemingly incompatible), which resembled surrealism. In the group two prominent prose writers appeared: Daniil Kharmis (born Juvachev, 1905-1942), a poet and playwright Alexander Vvedensky (1904-1941) and Konstantin Vaginov (1899-1934).

In the late 1930s the most powerful literary union was represented by RAPP (The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, Rossiyskaya asociaciya proletarskikh pisateley), with the prominent figures of e.g. Dmitry Furmanov (1891-1926), author of the novel Chapayev (1923), and Alexander Fadeyev (1901-1956), whose best work is his early novel The Rout (Razgrom, 1927). The October group (Oktyabr) was related to RAPP in terms of organization: its members were authors who stressed everydayness and psychology of characters. Gifted writers with various path of development were united in the Serapion Brothers (or Serapion Fraternity), the name of the union referring to the prose of German romanticist E. T. A. Hoffmann. In the group, there were Vsevolod Ivanov, Mikhail Zoshchenko, Veniamin Kaverin, Konstantin Fedin, Nikolay Tikhonov, to name but a few. Perhaps the most interesting group, which endeavoured to restore humanistic traditions of the classic Russian literature, was Pass (Pereval) the theoretician of which was a critic Aleksandr Voronsky (1884-1943) and the leading figures were represented by A. Vesely, Mikhail Prishvin, Eduard Bagritsky, etc.

The creative ferment of the 1920s gave rise to two great talents of the Russian prose whose careers were very promising at first but then became unstable. Konstantin Fedin (1892-1977) wrote excellent novellas and novels Cities and Years (Goroda I gody, 1924) and Brothers (Bratya, 1928), where the tragic fate of a creative man in social turns is depicted, Leonid Leonov (1899-1994) followed the aesthetic code of F. M. Dostoyevsky when writing The Badgers (Barsuki, 1924) and The Thief (Vor, 1927).

As usual in Russia, during the period the literature documented several returns in terms of ideology as well as the form: seemingly naïve romantic production of Alexander Grin (born Grinevsky, 1880-1932) in his novels Scarlet Sails (Alyie parusa, 1923) or She Who Runs on the Waves (Begushchaya po volnam, 1925-1926) break into bitter stories Jessie and Morgiana (1929), Krysolov (1924) or Brak Avgusta Osborna (1926) which experiment with human intellect and open new space and time which bring peril and fear. Romantic-elegiac line of Grin's works was followed by his follower and interpreter Konstantin Paustovsky (1892-1968) in miniature stories about writers.

The early 1930s, symbolically defined by Vladimir Mayakovsky's suicide, were also the beginning of an end of freedom of writers working in unions: under ideological and political pressure the orientation towards building or historical themes started to prevail. On the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s, several the so called building novels appeared the existence of which was connected with the industrialization policy. Nevertheless, also the works which surpassed the horizon of the period were written and by the means of which the 20th century Russian literature reached the world fame in spite of the stifling and oppressive conditions. The nineteen-thirties are connected with the mature works of Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), who, being the son of a Russian Provisional Government minister, lived nearly all his life in German exile, studied in England and then in France, later also in the USA and in Montreux, Switzerland. Approximately at that time great novels, which present their own interpretation of events related to Russian revolutions and controversial view of the fate of a man in the context of these historical cataclysms, were written. The first Russian writer to win the Nobel Prize Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) wrote his autobiographic novel The Life of Arseniev (Zhizn Arsenyeva, 1930) in exile, in the novel images of the disappearing aristocratic Russia, liberal intelligentsia and revolutionary tragedy are embedded.

The Cossack community represents a milieu from which point of perspective the life of Grigory Melekhov is observed in the novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* (Tikhy Don, 1928-1940) of Mikhail Sholokhov (1905-1984), the third Russian writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature (1965). In the late 1920s Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) started to write his mythic novel *The Master and Margarita* (Master i Margarita, 1928-1940, published between 1966 and 1967), a novel in a novel in the centre of which lies the story of a writer – the Master, who writes the story about Joshua Ha-Nocri and Pontius Pilate. The 1930s represented the culmination of the Soviet regime tragedy, which disposed of its own followers in the series of political processes and the culmination of building of the totalitarian system, which used the secret police and the system of concentration death camps extensively. These facts, even though they had already been discovered by the expatriate literature, became the part of literature in Soviet Russia much later, roughly from the 1950s. The beginnings of the Stalin's unrestrained dictatorship were in literature connected with administrative ban on the activities of literary unions. In 1932 there was the resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on literary and artistic unions reorganization; immediately afterwards the organization committee of the Soviet Union of Writers or Writers' Union of the USSR, which prepared the First Union Congress (1934). On the Congress the method of Socialist Realism was officially proclaimed by Maxim Gorki in his speech which made it into the statutes of the newly constituted Soviet Union of Writers.

Escalating world political situation, the commencement of the Second World War and the German invasion of the Soviet Union which had been preceded by signing the non-aggression pact and the power partition of Europe (the Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union, occupation of the Eastern Polish and Romanian territories), allowed a rather narrow corridor for the official literature: its role was to be topical and operative. In this endeavour, journalism and also poetry, and sometimes even drama, were successful while it took a bit longer for the prose to reach high quality. Only a few articles, stories and poems out of many written stood the test of time: in the poetry, existential lyrics of Konstantin Simonov (1915-1979), the symbol of which was almost magic poem *Wait for Me* (Zhdi menya), and Leonid Leonov in drama and prose: drama *The Invasion* (Nashestvie, 1942) and the prose *The Taking of Velikoshumsk* (Vzyatie Velikoshumska, 1944), which – although they never achieved the ultimate aesthetics, they actually foreseen the new generation poetics of the 1950s and the 1960s.

War years and a certain easing of ideology were idealistically linked with the possibility of internal changes of the Stalinist regime. From the war times, Russian literature started to draw breath: there was the important peripeteia of the years between 1945 and 1948 with the works of Vera Panova (1905-1973) *The Train* (Sputniki, 1946) and especially the novellas *The Star* (Zvezda, 1947) and *Two on a Steppe* (Dvoye v stepi, 1948) of Emmanuil Kazakevich (1913-1962) which reintroduced tragic sensation and absurdity of life and existence. The period ended with persecution of Anna Akhmatova, Mikhail Zoshchenko and literary journals in Leningrad. The Russian Forest (Russky les, 1953) of Leonov documents the period and the years following 1953 and 1956 with Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *The Thaw* (Ottepel, 1954) and the prose *Not By Bread Alone* (Ne khlebom yedinnym, 1956) of Vladimir Dudintsev (1918) had already foreshadowed the new literary generation.

The basic feature of the literature in the period between 1953 and 1954 and 1956 and 1968 – i.e. between Stalin's death, the Second Union Congress, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with the secret speech of the First Secretary of the Party Nikita Khrushchev containing the criticism of the so called Stalin's cult of personality and the gradual re-Stalinization at the end of the 1960s concluded with the occupation of Czechoslovakia – is the criticism, confessionality, individualization of the language, style and ideologically thematic grounds. The literature in the form of revue poetry enters the streets with prominent critical and exhibitionist verses often of poor artistic value, theatre revitalizes romantic schemes by the return to the revolutionary romanticism of the 1920s or even the individualistic rebellion and sensitivity of the 19th century, the aim of the prose is to confess and to present individual, often non-conformist point of view.

Poets who entered literature in the 1950s shared the same basis, but they often were very different; this proved later in their further development: Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1933) formulated his inclination to journalism, actuality and shallowness (*Promse, Obeshchanie*, 1957), Robert Rozhdestvensky (1932-1997) was famous for his pathos and distinct rhythm (*Requiem*, 1962), Andrei Voznesensky (1933) was renowned for his metaphors (among others *The Triangular Pear*, 40 liricheskikh otstupleniy iz poemy "Treugolnaza grusha", 1962; *The Antiworlds, Antimiry*, 1964).

Newly, non-pathetically and objectively formulated war theme and the tense atmosphere of the Stalin's Russia is to be found in Yuri Bondarev (1924), for example in the novel *The Battalions Request Fire* (Batayony prosyat ognya, 1959), Grigory Baklanov (1923) in the prose *Mertvye sramu ne imut* (1962) and Vladimir Bogomolov (1926) in the collection of stories *The Pain of My Heart* (Serdtsa moyego bol, 1965). The "Period of Thaw", as this period is known in English speaking countries, brought the analysis and criticism related later with the "thick journal" *Novy mir* the chief editor of which was Alexander Tvardovsky (1910-1971), the author of the famous poem *Vasili Tyorkin*, also known as *A Book About a Soldier*, (Vasili Terkin, 1941-1945) and later aggressive verses relentlessly assaulting the crimes of the social system. The journal published critical literature

regularly – the first works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918) – *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den Ivana Denisovicha*, 1962), and *Matryona's Home* (*Matrenin dvor*, 1962) were published in the journal, while other novels such as *Cancer Ward* (*Rakovyj korpus*, 1968) and *The First Circle* (*V krughe pervom*, 1968) were published abroad.

One work stands aside the aggressive and political journalism: the novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) by Boris Pasternak, the inner polemics in the novel *Zhizn Kilma Samgina* by M. Gorki with all the apotheoses of the revolution. Boris Pasternak was the second winner of the Nobel Prize for literature.

Besides the official, legally published literature there was also samizdat literature from the 1950s, the strong influence of which upon the literature did not show until the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century – it was the so called Liazonov School represented by Y. Kropivnitsky (1893-1979), I. Kholin (*1920), G. Sapgir (*1928), Vsevolod Nekrasov (*1934) and their circle of authors as well as G. Aygi, whose works were not published in Russia for 30 years (between 1960 and 1990). They are characterised by their focus on the language and sound, reductionism, allusiveness and the role of pause and silence.

Gradual growth of Neo-Stalinism since the mid 1960s resulted in the single-minded suppression of the explicitly critical literature in the 1970s. In this vacuum, the village prose won recognition, which, in fact, was actually a concealed criticism of the social system. The development was quite logical: it began with little shifts in the theory and criticism. It is not a coincidence that a Russian prose writer and a later reformatory chief editor of the *Novy mir* journal Sergey Zalygin (1913-2000) says in his novel entitled *South American Variant* (*Iuzhno-Amerikansky variant*, 1974) that the Russian countryside will happen to be of the same significance to future generations as the significance of Ancient Rome for Europe.

The village prose (*Derevenskaya proza* in Russian) was a dominant literature movement in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Its origin lies in the tradition of classical literature and from the trace, which started to appear in the Soviet literature since the 1950s, especially in the work of Valentin Ovechkin (1904-1968). Probably the most important, most read and the most popular representative of this type of literature was Vasily Shukshin (1929-1974), the author of the short-story collections entitled *There in the Distance* (*Tam v dali*, 1968), *Conversations Under a Clear Moon* (*Besedy pri yasnoy lune*, 1974) and the cinematized novel *The Red Snowball Tree* (*Kalina krasnaya*, 1973). Long before Shukshin, the theme of village was adopted by the traditionalist Vladimir Soloukhin (1924-1997), the author of travelogue reflexions *A Walk in Rural Russia* (*Vladimirskiye proselki*, 1957), *Kaplya rosy* (1960), poetic collections and essays *Letters from the Russian Museum* (*Pisma iz Russkogo muzeya*, 1966) and their loose continuation *Prodolzhenie vremeni* (1982). Apart from him, the motif of the North Russian countryside was also cultivated by Vasily Belov (1932), the author of distinctive stories and novels *Business As Usual* (*Privychnoye delo*, 1966) and *Eves* (*Kanuny*, 1979). Probably the most distinctive talent of this period was represented in Valentin Rasputin (1937), who evolved from his earlier stories to critical and nostalgic novellas such as *Money for Maria* (*Dengi dlya Marii*, 1967), *The Last Term* (*Posledniy srok*, 1970), *Live and Remember* (*Zhivi i pomni*, 1974), *Farewell to Matyora* (*Proshchanie s Matyoroy*, 1976) and *The Fire* (*Pozhar*, 1985). Parallel to this movement, there were works of Yury Trifonov (1925-1981), an analyst of broken city life, as he presented it in the “Moscow novels” *The Exchange* (*Obmen*, 1969) or *Another Life* (*Drugaya zhizn'*, 1976) and post-humously published novels *In Time and Place* (*Vremya i mesto*, 1981) and *The Disappearance* (*Ischeznovenie*, 1987), where the Stalinist repression theme was addressed. The historicizing fresco was favoured by the renowned singer-songwriter Bulat Okudzhava (1924-1997), who was also the author of the novel *Nocturne: From the Notes of Lt. Amiran Amilakhvari, Retired* (*Puteshestvie diletantov*, 1979). Starting with the late 1960s, the repressive methods of the authorities against some writers reappear: in 1966 there is a trial against Andrei Sinyavski (pen-name Abram Terc) and Yuli Daniel (pen-name Nikolay Arzhak) for publishing their works abroad, later there was a trial against Iosif Brodsky for the so called freeloading and social parasitism (*tuneyadstvo* in Russian), in reality, he was oppressed due to his non-conformist writing, at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s there was a change in the situation in the formerly progressive “thick journal” *Novy mir* – the chief editor A. Tvardovsky was removed from office and he died soon after. At that time, the emigration increased – especially to the Federal Republic of Germany, France and the USA. In the late 1950s samizdat appeared, i.e. illegal print, which is published by the author himself instead of the government controlled publishing houses.

In the period between 1978 and 1979 there was the so called *Metropol* affair, an almanac, which the authors failed to promote against the political party supervision; therefore it was published in the form of samizdat and later it was also published abroad (*tamizdat*). The sanctions (especially the expulsion from the Union of Writers) and further police repressions led to the disbanding of a certain generation group (Aksyonov, Bitov, Lipkin, Kozhevnikov, Akhmadulina, Viktor Yerofeyev, Iskander, Popov) and resulting in emigration of the most prominent Russian writers (Aksyonov, Lipkin, Lisnyansky, Aleshkovsky).

The third wave of emigration was becoming stronger, among the expatriates where people of various professions (the ballet artists Rudolf Nureyev, 1938-1993, Mikhail Baryshnikov, 1948, ca omposer, conductor and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, 1927, his wife, opera vocalist Galina Vishnevskaya, 1926, film director Andrei Tarkovsky, 1932-1986, founder of the theatre *Na Tagance* Yuri Lyubimov, 1917, sculptor Ernst Neizvestny,

1925, etc.) writers were also included in their numbers. The most important were Viktor Nekrasov (1911-1987), author of the famous prose *Front-line Stalingrad* (*V okopakh Stalingrada*, 1946), who lived in Paris since 1974, the dramatist, screenwriter and actor Alexandr Galich (1919-1977), songwriter and novelist Iosif (Yuz) Aleshkovsky (1929), critic and novelist Andrei Sinyavsky (pseudonym Abram Terc, 1925-1997), known for the trial from 1966, publisher of the Parisian revue *Syntax* (*Sintaksis*), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), Anatoly Kuznetsov (1929-1979), Anatoly Gladilin (1935), novelist and essayist, a son of the secretary of the former People's Commissar for Education A. Lunacharsky, commentator and journalist, director of the Parisian editorial office of *Radio Svoboda*, the mentioned novelist Vasily Aksyonov (1932-2009), story writer Sergey Dovlatov (1941-1990), novelist Vladimir Voynovich (1932), prose writer Georgy Vladimov (1931-2003), novelist and story writer, founder of the Russian emigrant's magazine *Kontinent* Vladimir Maximov (1930-1995), and others.

In the atmosphere of the political control over literature works which represent the underflow renewal movement of a kind. Its natural par was the novel of Vasily Grossman (1905-1964) *Life and Fate* (*Zhizn i sudba*, 1961, published abroad in 1980, publ. in the USSR 1987) and the essay *Panta rhei* (*Vsyo techet...*, 1955-63, published abroad in 1970), novels by A. Rybakov *Children of the Arbat* (*Deti Arbata*, 1963-86, pub. 1987), V. Dudintsev *White Garments* (*Belye odezhdy*, 1966, pub. 1986), Y. Dombrovsky *The Faculty of Useless Knowledge* (*Fakultet nenuzhnykh veshchey*, 1964-75, pub. 1988) A. Bek *The New Appointment* (*Novoye naznachenie*, 1964, pub. 1986), V. Tendryakov *Pokushenie na mirazhi* (pub. 1987), a book of essays from the life in the Stalin camps by V. Shalamov *The Kolyma Tales* (*Kolymskie rasskazy*, pub. in New York 1966-67). The above mentioned novels by Alexander Solzhenitsyn belong in the group too, including the documentary prose *The Gulag Archipelago* (*Archipelag GULAG*, pub. in Paris 1973-75) and the generously laid out but unfinished novel saga *The Red Wheel* (*Krasnoye koleso*, pub. 1983-86).

Another expatriate from the third emigration wave, Vladimir Maksimov (1930-1995) in his novel *The Seven Days of Creation* (*Sem dney tvorenia*, 1971) follows the process of estrangement within the totalitarian system. However, Maksimov did not identify himself with the Russian liberal emigration, which was represented by the above mentioned A. Sinyavsky: who returned to the Christianity foundations and the Russian conservatism. Vladimir Vojnovich (1932) has been renowned for the novel adapted for the screen *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin* (*Zhizn i neobychnyye priklyucheniya soldata Ivana Chonkina*, 1963, second publishing abroad in 1975), where he shows the absurdity of Soviet reality using a style similar to Hašek's *Švejk*. The last Russian winner of the Nobel Prize for literature Iosif Brodsky, also known as Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996), was forced to emigrate, who found a refuge in the USA, where he published poetic collections and he also wrote in English. In the 1960s he was writing his poems *Ostanovka v pustyne* (*Halt in the Dessert, or A Halt in the Wilderness*, 1965, pub. 1970), *Elegy for John Donne* (*Bolshaya elegia Dzhonu Donnu*, 1963) and *Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot* (*Pamyati T. S. Eliota*, publ. 1967 in Leningrad). Brodsky himself said he was a man of two cultures – the Russian and Anglo-Saxon culture (*Less Than One*, 1984). In his collections of poems, which were published since the 1970s, Brodsky expressed his vision of the cosmos and human existence within this cosmos: *A Part of Speech* (*Chast rechi*, 1977), *The End of a Wonderful Epoch* (*Konets prekrasnoy epokhi*, 1977), *Fin-de-siècle* (1989).

After the wave of the village literature had subsided and after the village prose writers (*derevenshchiki*) had become less prominent in the Soviet literature, the renewed movement of mythological literature returned with full force. It was inspired by the world literature of the first half of the 20th century (Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, James Joyce, Marcel Proust etc.), but mainly by the Latin American prose, the conjuncture of which started with the publishing of the novel written by the later winner of the Nobel Prize Gabriel Garcia Márquez *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967). The representative of the Russian written mythological literature is the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov (1928), who exploited myths since the beginning of the 1970s. In 1970 his novel *White Steamship* (*Bely parokhod*) was published followed by the publication of the mythological novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (*I dolshe veka dlitsjya den'*, 1980, in one of the book versions it is entitled *The Buranny Railway Stop, Buranny polustanok*) ten years later, connecting three thematic planes: the plane of myth, the present (reflection of the Stalinist period) and the future (cosmic flights). He continued in the same manner in the novel *The Scaffold* (*Plakha*, 1986), which reveals the critical state of the modern world and aims for the renewal of its spiritual foundations.

In the period between the 1960s and the 1980s the genre of musical poetic production, the so called "author Song", gained popularity. It was promoted, because it could express "forbidden" ideas and notions in a concealed form (e.g. B. Okudzhava, V. Vysotsky, A. Galich). However, the singers were not only performers but, most importantly, also the authors of the music and lyrics, although the quality and originality of these activities were not at the same level; while their activities encompassed a wider range (while Vysotsky was primarily an actor, Okudzhava was an author of historiosophic novels).

The production of Bulat Okudzhava (1924-1997) expressed the life impressions and feelings of a young man, his protest against the falsehood and hypocrisy, the theme of love and freedom: he expressed these with youthful bitterness in the novel *Good-bye, Schoolboy!* (*Bud zdorov, shkolyar*, 1961). His song lyrics are in fact poems valuable for their aesthetics (the collection *Arbat, My Arbat, Arbat, moy Arbat*, 1976). Vladimir

Vysotsky (1938-1980) produced hundreds of songs, many of which were distributed in the form of samizdat and on recorder tapes. Only after he had died his collection *The Nerve* (*Nerv*, 1981) was published in the USSR. Unlike Okudzhava, Vysotsky's settings were more grotesque, he employed satire, irony and sarcasm.

A noteworthy character of the Russian poetry of the period between 1960 and 1980, who followed the concept of interpreting poetry as a magical act and partly as experiment of modernism and avant-garde, was Gennady Aygi (1934), of Chuvash descent, who was writing in Russian. He had great difficulties with publishing his poems: majority of his poetic books – with the exception of *Zdes* (1991) – were published abroad, and also in the Czech and Slovak translation – his poetry was actually not published in the USSR for 30 years.

Gorbachev's perestroika and the "new thinking" changed the existential conditions of the literature since the 1980s: the censorship and the party supervision diminished at first and later disappeared completely; the fact exploited mainly by Russian "thick journals" to start to publish works, which could not be published before due to ideological reasons – even though many of them were published in the West (often far earlier). A situation arose when the early produced works ("vozvrashchennaya literatura" – returned literature) were incorporated into the new literature context, and many readers interpreted them as new texts. In this way, several works of Andrei Platonov were introduced, as well as the novel *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak, which was first published in Italy in 1957, some of the works by Mikhail Bulgakov (*Heart of a Dog*, *The Fatal Eggs*) not published in the USSR, novels by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and other Russians, who emigrated "outside Russia" either voluntarily or by force. The Russian fiction literature also went through a change: just like everywhere else in the world, there was a trend of the post-modernism which is manifested by using "other people's" texts, in the meta-text understanding of the artistic work (a novel about novel), in the playfulness and ambivalence. In one of the works, published in the form of samizdat in the USSR before it was published in the West, there are post-modern and, at the same time, traditional Russian methods present even in the 1960s: the novel *Moscow-Petushki*, also published as *Moscow to the End of the Line*, *Moscow Stations*, and *Moscow Circles* (*Moskva-Petushki*, wrote between 1969 and 1970, the complete Soviet publishing in 1989) by Venedikt Yerofeyev or Erofeev. Lyudmila Petrushevskaya (1938) began publishing short stories in the 1970s; her prose and drama were published in Russia and abroad. Her stories and especially the novel *The Time: Night* (*Vremya noch*, 1992) show the life in the present world as an illogical and nonsensical commotion of events. Another prominent figures are the granddaughter of Alexei Tolstoy (1883-1945) Tatyana Tolstaya (1951) and Valeria Narbikov (1958): her prose represents another stage of human estrangement from reality and at the same time highlights the anti-allusiveness of the literature as a manipulation with language and reader by its post-modern, deconstructive game with classical texts of Russian literature and its sacralised names. There is also a loose connection to Yuz (Iosif) Aleshkovsky (1929) and Vladimir Sorokin (1955), the author of bold prose sometimes of pornographic nature, based not only but also on the poetry of the Russian artistic group of the 1920s OBERIU.

Satirical and parody line in the "new wave" is represented by Vyacheslav Petsukh (1946), author of *The New Moscow Philosophy* (*Novaya moskovskaya filosofia*, 1989) and especially the novel *The Enchanted Land* (*Zakoldovannaya strana*, 1992). Viktor Erofeev (1947), a contributor to the *Metropol* almanac, prose writer and a scientist, has been known for years. However, he reached the world renown with his novel *Russian Beauty* (*Russkaya krasavitsa*, 1990), a confession of a Soviet prostitute. A similar theme appears in the scandalous work of the Russian emigrant writer Eduard Limonov (1943) *It's Me, Eddie* (*Eto ya – Edichka*, 1979) – Limonov's openness continues in the works of the most significant Russian homosexual writer Yevgeny Kharitonov (1941-1981). Yevgeny Popov (1946) belongs to the intellectual prose writers of the "new wave" or the "alternative literature".

In the poetry of the 1990s, a major role was played by Mikhail Aizenberg (1948), the prominent of the *Lichnoye delo* (*Personal File*) almanac, in the concept of which the world is a space where the man is sentenced to eternal solitude. His poetry is based on the principle of minimalism and on the peculiar inner rhythm, and it oscillates between the classical tradition and the post-modern aesthetics; he formulates it as a "critical sentimentalism", where the critical and ironic relation to reality is connected to the harmony establishment; allusiveness is a characteristic feature of his poetry. The 1990s – mainly the second half – also document the rise of the popular or mass literature: it is foreshadowed by the pornographically oriented prose of V. Sorokin and the sensational production of the loose follower of the conceptualism Victor Pelevin (1962), the author of the anti-sci-fi novel *Omon Ra* (1992, 1997, *Amon Re*) and many others (Chapayev or Void, 1996). His work is a manifestation of a relatively light transition from the elite literature for experts to the literature for mass consumption.

The dissolution of the USSR and the disruptive tendencies within the present Russia has influenced the literature so that it demonstratively averts from the ideology and creates its own system of values to protest against the traditional social and ethical role which was attributed and often forced to the Russian literature. Nevertheless, in the works of Russian post-modern writers new poetry and literature inclining to commerce not only the description of filth in life, the hopelessness and pessimism, apocalyptic atmosphere and deformation of language can be seen, but also a pressing interest in history, albeit on the level of parody, and return to the

traditional literature. The meaning of historicity is captured mainly by Vladimir Sorokin in the novels *Blue Bacon Fat* (Goluboye salo, 1999), *Day of the Oprichnik* (Den oprichnika, 2006) and *Telluria* (2013).

Best-sellers of Yevgeny Vodolazkin (1964), which are highly appreciated in Russia, may serve as examples of a different concept of “permeable historicity“, Vodolazkin is a philologist, medievalist, whose works balancing between fiction and non-fiction call for attention, e.g. the fascinating novel *Laurus* (rus. Лавр, Laurus, 2014) with the characteristic subtitle “неисторический роман“, a story from the 15th and 16th centuries describing the life of a boy who ends up a healer and a hermit with exceptional spiritual abilities. The inner connection of a medieval man thinking with the present age is a proof of what is the author convinced of: the non-existence of time; his characters surpass their era, as visionaries they enter our present era, living and the dead become one whole. Similar, yet somehow different are the proses of Dmitry Danilov (born 1969), e.g. *Horizontal position* (Горизонтальное положение, 2010), *Black and Green* (Черный и зеленый, 2004) and *Description of A City* (Описание города, 2012) or works of Sergey Nosov (born 1957), among others *The Member of a Society or Hungry Time* (Член общества или Гогодное время, 2000), *The Secret Life of St Peterburg's Monuments* (Тайная жизнь петербургских памятников, 2008). The delicate, cultural and historical oriented literature composes an attractive contrast to the trivial (mass) literature in Russia. The post-modernism, which was predominant at the end of the 20th century, has slowly dissolved in the “new realism“, “new romanticism“ and the “new sentimentalism“ where the style succession of the tradition and at the same time the shocking, often dystopic themes and their interpretation seems to be prevalent.