

Talk at the University of Bergen/Norway, April 9, 2008

Clash of Reading Cultures.

Writing, reading and selling literature in Russia since the 1990s

Let me begin with a quotation:

„Our history has made such a leap, that between the recent past and present there is an enormous emptiness, which is psychologically aching, like an open wound. Everything around us has changed: not only the political structure and all social relationships, but also the general order of things, the rhythm of life, conditions, style, everyday life. We have new habits, morals, clothes, even fashions. (...) The world around us became a different one. And the changes which have occurred, are deep and long-term (...) the old times don't come back. A return is impossible, neither historically nor psychologically.“

(Vladislav Chodasevič 1921 in a speech to celebrate the Pushkin-anniversary in Berlin)¹

These words applied to the situation after 1917, but, indeed, they might well be suited to express the “floating gap” of 1991. The end of communism, the end of the cold war, of the East-West-conflict, which has determined and polarized world-politics and history for more than eight decades, has created a “post-communist condition” (Boris Groys) both in the East and in the West. The globalization of the economy, along with the revolution of electronic communication, progressing its accelerated development, have added to closing gaps by creating unified conditions worldwide. Since about 1995 and more so since 2000. Russia has made a vigorous move towards Nationalism and re-establishing the myth, if not the reality of the Empire, lost in 1991, if not in 1917.

For Russian literature and culture, the clash of communism has created “a landslide of the norm”, as you called it in your book, quoting Roman Jakobson, first and foremost a crash of a literary system, which had been established in some essential parts in the 1920s, in others even long before 1917 (system of production and distribution), in the first half of the 19th century (thick journals, censorship, notion of literature).

In my talk, I want to give you an overview of the current post-soviet situation of the conditions for literature and print culture and present some theses about its meaning and possible perspectives. (topic material)

In order to understand both the scale of the radical change and some of the mental blockades of today's present, we need some flashbacks into the past:

¹ Vl. Chodasevic: Koleblemy trenoznik, in: Ders.: Sobr. soc., Ann Arbor 1990, tom 2, S. 309-316, hier S. 312.

Flashback No. 1) into the Soviet period

- **Centralized book market** since early 1930s. No supply and demand-system, but centralized production of books, released after passing (5-11 stages of) censorship, to be distributed all over the country by mailing system. All books to be sold within 3 months (i.e. no stock-system);
- **Normative literary education.** Literature was defined primarily as an institution of ideological and moral education, transferring ideology into emotions and minds. Literature AND culture were promoted as a homogenous, comprehensive body of works, hierarchically structured by value and accessible to everybody. Literature was distributed by a wide-spread system of mass-libraries, which incorporated the idea of a strong canon (the Making of a Soviet Mass Literature, esp. in the 1970-80s). Literary criticism was assigned to explain, evaluate and structure this corpus of “Soviet literature”, “world literature”, “kul’tura reci”; “kul’turnost”.
- This system was effectively incorporated by the “**thick journals**” as the leading print media. By their combination of fiction and criticism, as well as through the social and political journalism they offered, these publications had shaped literary life in Russia and the Soviet Union ever since the early nineteenth century, throughout the country, thereby creating a certain **stability and homogeneity of the readership and participants of literary culture.** (longterm hierarchies of literary authorities, strong canons of both official and unofficial literature), literary taste and value systems, a strong connection between center – the capitals – and periphery,
- Since the 1970s, due to paper-shortage and censorship politics, a **deficitary economy** became part of the official State-supplied policy in Soviet print culture, creating a dual system of canons and values. 85% of readers supplied themselves with reading-material from **public libraries**, while at the same time, between 1965-85 only 10% of all books produced were available in public libraries. The number and amount of private **home libraries** rose considerably. Obtaining deficitary books (including Berezka-purchases or presents, samizdat and tamizdat) for private libraries became more meaningful, as “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu), than obtaining material goods, and created a monopoly for both official and unofficial intelligentsia on “access to and interpretation of” the most valued works of art and literature.
- The State itself, paradoxically, supported this duality and thereby the separation of culture into official, unofficial and underground cultures as well as the gap between urban, mostly Moscow-Leningrad intelligentsia and readers in the rest of the empire.

Several times, an effort was made to deal with this paradox and balance the dysfunctional book market, i.e. to both meet to some extent the needs and wishes of wide readership AND shape or manipulate their taste. For example the **“makulatura project” (1974-1985)**: Citizens could submit books which they hadn’t read or didn’t want to read as “old – makulatura – paper” in exchange for a set of newly published books from certain series (like from the series “roman-gazeta”, historical novels etc. Per series: 10-12 titles from different genres, incl. childrens lit, Russian and non-Russian fiction, classical and contemporary, like roman-gazeta bestsellers: Valentin Pikul’, V. Rasputin, A. Christie, A. Dumas, Geoffrey Chase, G. Baklanov, and series “plamennye revoljucionery”, “prokljatye koroli”) Before: 100.000-200.000 was considered mass-production. In “roman-gazeta” 4-5 Mio.) Within 10 years 125 books in 200 Mio. copies in Soviet houses (standardized library).. **CARICATURE Lovell makulatura**

Flashback 2) into the perestroika period (1986-1991):

- The groundbreaking changes in Russian society since the mid-eighties, which led to the downfall of communism, to the decline of the Soviet empire and opened up a longterm transition were to a large extent prepared and pushed forward by the literary elite. Writers and critics played a key role in the dynamics of the political, cultural and mental opening of Soviet society during the years of the perestroika.
- Since 1986/7 artists and intellectuals, whose hopes for reforms had been disillusioned since 1968, joined the cause of reform-communist intellectuals as they struggled for power against the defenders of the old regime. The overwhelming interest of the population in all the revelations served up in the journals raised the hopes of the reformist intelligentsia, the *shestidesiatniki*, that the utopian goals of the Thaw period, and even those of the 1920s, could be achieved: these intellectuals set their sights on a renewal of socialism and the unification not only of the intelligentsia with the newly enlightened political leadership, but also with the masses who, by assimilating the moral values of classical and more recent unofficial Russian high culture, would raise themselves to the challenge of creating a civilised modern society. Thanks to the courageous efforts of intellectuals, artists, writers, editors, many formerly suppressed works of literature, philosophy, film and music were published, censorship and ideological control were lifted, nonconformist intellectuals were championed and in many cases brought back to

positions of cultural prestige and authority.² The thick monthly journals experienced an unprecedented boom, which brought the leading journals *Novyi mir*, *Druzhba narodov* and *Znamia* average monthly circulations of more than a million.

Novyi mir even reached a figure as high as 2.7 million.

- Much like in the 1860s – after the abolition of serfdom – and the 1960s, Aleksandr Tvardovskii (*Novyi mir*: Solzhenitsyn: *Odin den'*), certain critics became the “*vlastiteli dum*”, speaking for a whole generation or voicing opinions which had to be suppressed for decades: *shestidesiatniki* ‘socialism with a human face’: The period from 1986-89 can therefore be called the period of mobilizing a mass audience for the perestrojka.
- Emigrants returning by text or in person (f.e. Andrei Siniavskii), challenging their norms which in spite of ideological differences were similarly conservative in terms of aesthetic and moral standards;
- With the opening and gradual abolition of censorship, ideological conflicts in both official and unofficial culture came to the surface, the “civil war of words” (a metaphor quoted from the liberal critic Vladimir Vigilianskii in 1988) broke out, which had latently polarized literary life since the 60s, 70s. These ideological conflicts merged with a fight for power and material privileges, for many simply existence (2500 prof. writers only in Moscow!)
- Ideologically, there were three opposing positions/parties: 1.) liberal, reform-oriented critics (Alla Latynina, Iurii Burtin, Igor' Dedkov, Lev Anninskii) , 2. national-bolshevist, neo-stalinist critics (Aleksandr Baigushev, Iurii Bondarev, Aleksandr Prokhanov; 3. neoslavophile, anti-marxist-leninist critics (rural prose) (Irina Rodnianskaia, Renata Gal'tseva, Igor' Vinogradov, Vadim Kozhinov) – all belonged sociologically and biologically to one (thaw) generation;
- but also a new conflict of generations emerged between young and old critics (middle-aged generation of forties was less significant), in which young critics – some protagonists of postmodernism – enforced a moral and aesthetic confrontation and attacked the old ones for their ONE and the SAME cultural attitudes and paradigms (didactic attitude, moral, normative notion of literature, modelled after the classics, mission of the great writer as authoritarian).

² Grigorii Baklanov became chief editor of *Znamia*, Sergei Zalygin of *Novii mir* and Vitalii Korotich took over the weekly magazine *Ogonek*. All three of these men had been popular writers since the 1960s.

The Boom of Journals during the Perestroika period (here: 1985-1993)

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Nm	430,000	415,000	495,000	1.15 m	1.55 m	2.7 m	200,000	241,300	60,000
Dn	156,000	160,000	150,000	800,000	1.1 m	800,000	200,000	100,000	45,000
Zn	175,000	250,000	270,000	500,000	980,000	1 m	419,000	192,000	73,000
Zv	120,000	120,000	140,000	150,000	310,000	340,000	130,000	70,000	35,000
Mo	500,000	500,000	430,000	750,000	770,000	450,000	150,000	85,000	35,000
Ns	200,000	220,000	220,000	240,000	313,000	488,000	311,000	163,000	92,000
Ok	156,000	175,000	185,000	252,000	385,000	335,000	242,000	114,000	60,000

Nm = *Novyi mir*; Dn = *Druzhba narodov*; Zn = *Znamia*; Zv = *Zvezda*; Mo = *Moskva*; Ns = *Nash sovremennik*; Ok = *Oktjabr*';³

So what went wrong?

Which role does the literary intelligentsia play in the discourse of cultural reorientation and national identity esp. since the mid-90s?

Were the new conditions of marketing literature responsible for this marginalization, or is it the influence of imported Western mass culture, as some critics have argued?

How far have literature and criticism enabled the process of mental liberation and democratisation, and how far have they failed to adapt to new challenges, slowed down or even blocked this process, in other words, how far can we speak of their own responsibility for the devaluation?

Flashback 3) into the Post-Perestroika period (1991-1995)

The hopes of the intelligentsia, both the conformist and the non-conformist one, turned out to be an illusion. Twenty years later, in 2005, both literature and literary criticism have lost most of their former status, authority and influence. Over the past decade, it has become marginal and rather meaningless. Copies of the monthly literary journals have fallen from once 1.2Mio. to an average of 5000. Both the writer, *Velikii Pisatel' Russkoi Zemli*, as some postmodern critics called it ironically, and his eternal rival, the critic, have been replaced by the publisher – the PR face of literature – in a radically commercial environment. What we see today, is a massive erosion of the intelligentsia, a dissolution of all the state institutions that had ruled literary life since 1917, the commercialisation of culture and a changing impact of new mass media, which has massively devaluated the status and role of literary criticism, the intelligentsia in general.

³ Birgit Menzel, *Bürgerkrieg um Worte. Die russische Literaturkritik der Perestrojka*, Köln-Wien, 2001, p. 46.

After 1991 the situation took another radical turn: by the almost overnight commercialisation of culture, critics and intellectuals were confronted with several new realities at the same time
What were the new conditions, challenges?

- **Privatization of the print culture**

- A new law on the press (June 1990) opened up process of privatization of print culture, which changed the working conditions, subsequently the image of the author and the very station and notion of literature in society altogether.

- Not only book production but also periodicals began to follow the rules of the market instead of the interests of the intelligentsia. While in 1985 across Russia 3,869 periodicals (not including newspapers) were published with an annual total of 2,726 million copies, in 1994 there were 3,007 periodicals with only 306 million copies and, in 1999, 3,358 periodicals with 601 million copies.

- **Commercialization of literature**

- Once prices went up and everyday concerns took over most people's lives, once the reforms lost their dynamic speed, and once people had satisfied their initial craving for suppressed art and information, the majority of society reverted to political indifference. The boom was over, the mass reader turned partly to mass literature, and partly away from literature entirely.

- Popular and mass literature and media, which the intelligentsia had ignored and despised all along and thus not noticed before, but now gained considerable influence.

- Russian mass readership was transformed from the mass mobilisation of the late 1980s to mass consumption and entertainment in the 1990s. If in the Stalin era readers had been infantilised,⁴ and in late Soviet times they had been socialised as collectors of shortage cultural material, in the 1990s they underwent a period of socialisation as consumers.

- **Dissolution of all the state institutions**

Writers' Union, Fond pisatelej (as supplying existence), thick journals, publishing houses.

The Introduction of competition

- Competition for material existence: state retreated, privileges lost, access to publishing (publishing houses, journals),

⁴ About the infantilisation of the Soviet reader, see Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader. Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, Stanford, 1997, pp. 282-306; in Russian, *Formovka sovetskogo chitatelia*, M, 1997; idem, 'Vse luchshee – detiam (Totalitarnaia kul'tura i mir detstva)', *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 29, 1992, pp. 159-174.

- Competition of formerly officially approved writers (in Moscow alone in the early 1980s more than 2000!) and writers who returned from abroad in person or with their books, or appeared from the underground, from the margins, some of them moved into the center (Pelevin, Sorokin).
- Competition with other media, mostly TV, but since the new millennium also the Internet: Although TV even in the 1970s accounted for a much greater proportion of the population's leisure time than was admitted either by the authorities or by the intelligentsia, in the 1990s Russia advanced to become one of the most TV-addicted countries in the world. According to 2001 survey data, 91 per cent of the population watched TV daily, only 24 per cent read a newspaper, and only 4 per cent read magazines.⁵
- **Devaluation of the intelligentsia, literature and literary criticism**
- What followed was an avalanche in the quantity of publishing accompanied by a radical devaluation of the intelligentsia's status, activities and values.⁶
- For decades, Soviet literary life had maintained a stable hierarchy of leading writers among readers in both the official and unofficial spheres. The canon stood firm. But reader requests in the 1990s have shown that there is no longer an established pantheon of favourite writers. A survey on the ten greatest Russian writers of the twentieth century revealed such a diversity of preferences and levels of literary quality that no homogenous imagined author can be discerned any more.⁷

⁵ The spread of personal computers, as well as of the Russian internet, has been much less impressive than in the United States or some countries in Western Europe, and has only begun to grow significantly since 1999. In 2000, only 5 per cent of the population (15.6 million out of 103.9 million adults in Russia) had access to a computer and to the internet. But in the past few years, the young urban generation in particular has massively transferred to this new medium, which for certain genres of literary expression, like popular fantastic literature and criticism, has changed the system of communication altogether.

⁶ Let us take a closer look at the production of 'mass' literature. In 2001 only 2.3 per cent of all newly published titles were published in more than 50,000 copies, while 35.5 per cent of all titles were published in print-runs ranging only between 500 and 5,000 copies. The bestselling authors of detective novels publish several million books a year. About one third of all fiction titles (36 per cent counted by titles; 47 per cent counted by copies) are still of foreign origin (most of all English, followed by French and German), which indicates that the process of catching up still continues. In the mid 1990s, three out of five new published books were translations. The balance between Russian and foreign authors did, however, vary according to genre in the second half of the 1990s. Romance literature was still dominated almost exclusively by English writers: several of the new Russian authors of romance novels used English pseudonyms. Russia did not seem to offer favourable conditions for generating images of beautiful and happy lives. As for the still heavily favoured detective genre, there was a clear turn to novels set in Russian everyday life written by Russian authors (many of them women). The same re-nationalisation can be observed in science fiction, fantasy and children's literature.

⁷ Reader response research in the late Soviet era was highly manipulated, but after 1985 VTsIOM (the All Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion) in Moscow has regularly conducted reliable reader surveys. B. Menzel, 'Der sowjetische Leser als Thema der Forschung. Probleme, Methoden und Ergebnisse der empirischen Literatursoziologie', in *Sprache-Text-Geschichte. Festschrift für Klaus-Dieter Seemann*, München, 1997, pp. 184-200; idem, *Bürgerkrieg um Worte*.

- Change of image of writer (success as a paradigm, including economic success)
- Within a short time, the high hopes collapsed to the opposite and an almost apocalyptic disillusion took over most of the intellectuals. Especially the members of the older thaw-generation were in shock about the decline of readership, threatened by the economic crisis in their own professional existence and appalled both by the boom of the popular both Russian and Western in literature and by a new radically different literature from the former aesthetic underground. One of the consequences was an ideological radicalization and a new alliance between the formerly fiercely opposed nationalists of the neostalinist and the anticommunist neoslavophiles on the grounds of a common anti-Westernism, anti-Reform-orientation. (growing Soviet nostalgia – reevaluation of the Soviet past and pre-revolutionary literature;)
- Especially since the second half of the 1990s, the members of the older *shestidesiatniki* generation – the former activists of the unofficial culture and the opinion leaders of perestroika – have almost disappeared from the public stage, due to disillusionment, resignation and despair.

The Post-Soviet Reading Cultures: A Transition with a National Face into the Global Market:

Print culture:

- **Progressing withdrawal of the State** (2004: 68% of all published books were non-state produced)

In 1991 only 8 per cent of all book titles and 21 per cent of total copies were released by private publishing houses; by 2002 these figures had risen to 66 per cent and 87 per cent respectively.

- **Accelerating commercialization:**

More mass-production with less and less variety

1) After perestroika and post-perestroika's (between 1985 and 1995) (boom of journals! Then economic crisis) radical decrease of both quantity and number of books published (in 1998 the average number of copies was about half of the number in the 60-70s), since then (see

In 1994, the five writers with the highest reputation were Lev Tolstoi, Mikhail Sholokhov, John Chase, Valentin Pikul' and Aleksandr Pushkin (Dubin, *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, 1994, 10); in 2001 the five bestselling writers in Russia were Chingiz Abdulaev, Marina Serova, Barbara Cartland, Daniela Steele and Ioanna Chmielewska. In 1998, the five best Russian novels of the twentieth century were considered to be Mikhail Sholokhov's *Tikhii Don*, Anatolii Ivanov's *Vechnyi zov*, Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master i Margarita*, Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov's *Dvenadtsat' stol'ev*, and Konstantin Simonov's *Zhivye i mertvye*. See B. Dubin, 'Veshchi veka, Roman veka v kontse stoletia, prorochivshogo konets romana', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 30 December 1998; also idem, 'Rossiiskaia intelligentsiia mezhdru klassikoi i massovoi kul'turoi', in his *Slovo – pis'mo – literatura*.

1995-2004) there has been a radical increase of titles (specify: series-masslit “vary” within same patterns:), which is, however, deceiving, if looked at closely:

The greatest variety exists in editions under 500 copies: scholarly, and artistic literature, but most never reach a wide audience or even the periphery or even readers at all (foundation-productions/translations). General copies of mass-literature decrease of copies, strong serialization (2004: 35% of all book-production by titles, by copies even 53%).

Number of titles and copies of books, published in Russia (RSFSR, RF) (1985-2005)⁸

Year	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 (first half)
Titles	51 094 (7 books per pers.)	41 234	33 623 (less than 3 per ps.)	59 543	79 332	69 749	80 971	89 066	47 404
Copies (Mill.)	1 725,0	1 553,1	475,0	471,2	542,3	591,3	702,3	685,9	303
Average copies	33 761	37 665	14 127	7 913	7 710	8 478	8 673	7 701	6 392

2) Literature and books become trade-objects. From Writer of “proizvedenie” (Velikij Russij Pisatel’ Russkoj Zemli) to producer, manager, agent of “book” – trading literature.

Writer: concept of success: from authority by f.i. status in canon: emigration, underground, non-conformist classic etc. (vs. Nabokov, Pasternak etc.) to authority: by selling numbers, , cult-status, “oblozhki”/cover-design and public appearance – scandalous (for example Akunin, Pelevin, Prokhanov, and Sorokin: Led, 35.000, from “Ad marginem” to “Zacharov”)

- Dissolution of distribution system, devastating clash of library – system throughout the country:

Decrease of number of big book-stores from more than 4.500 in RSFSR to less than half in RF. Only 10% of all yearly book-production get distributed to libraries. Only 19% readers get their books in public libraries (comp. 82-92% in early 1980s!) – scholarly literature only 9% - , 39% buy them in stores, and 60% obtain books from friends and colleagues.

⁸ Additional explanation:

80.000 books throughout the Soviet Union in 1985.

Popular books had around 200-300 000 copies, roman-gazeta about 1,3 Mill., today detective novels have an average number of 15-20 000 copies; artistic prose about 5 000 average copies.

In the RSFSR 7 books per person

1995 less than 3 books per person

2001 3,4 books per person; out of these 11.000 titles were literature

To compare with Germany:

2002 78.896 titles of first prints, 13,9% of these literature;

general number of copies: 701,1 Mio. (i.e. 15 books per person, 33% more than in 2001), fiction and non-fiction 29.9%; academic books 3,1%.

The Russian book market

Year	Number of publishing houses	Book stores
1982	250 in RSFSR*	
1990	280**	approx. 4500
2002	2000 active (20 000 registered)	
2005		Only approx. 2250 + 10-20 000 street table stores***

Additional explanations:

*Out of the 250 publishers in RSFSR in 1982, 70 were centralized.

**In 1990 there were less publishing houses in the RSFSR than had been in Tsarist Russia in 1913.

In 2005 out of the approx. 2 250 countrywide book stores (RF) , there are about 2000 independent, and 500 net-stores.

***Per book store in Russian cities there are about 60 000 clients, in West European countries its about only 10-15 000.

Re-Monopolizing: Two thirds of all books published by only 40 publishers. Within this number, absolute monopolists: (besides “DROFA” and “PROSVESCENIE”). Two thirds of all book-production (28% in terms of titles) are being produced by only 40 publishers, many of whom are so called “packages”, filiales of the market-leading tycoons AST and EKSMO.

A Word on literature in translation:

Translated books in Russia (1990-2004)

	Number of titles	General copies	Average number of copies (books by 1000)
1991	3763	470,2	124 953
1994	4655	184,6	39 656
1997	5802	97,9	16 873
2000	7233	72,7	10 051
2004	10 959	86,8	7 922

Additional information: 1995 Out of 5 published books 3 were translated. The number of translated books published between 1991 and 2004 increased by 2,9 times, while the average number of copies decreased by 15,8 times.

Consequences for Reading cultures:

- **Decline of reading altogether:**

Do you read books, papers, journals? (2003-2005)

	Books		Papers		Journals	
	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005
regularly	26 %	29	43	38	21	19
occasionally	40	42	43	46	47	48
never	34	37	14	16	32	33

2003: percent out of 2100 respondents,

2005: percent out of 2400 respondents.⁹

Reasons: Old and new media

TV-Culture

85% of the Russian population considers TV main source of information and media. Increase by 9% since 2000 (VTSIOM).

Internet later than in the West (since 1996-97), first only for military functions. In 2001 only 1,9% of population used Internet at all. Catching up fast (today worldwide greatest piroting marked); in 2005 7% of population use Internet daily, 22% once a month, increase since 2000 by 20%. An island of freedom of press, no state-controll, proportionally radical in expression of all, new law plans limitation. 20-50 000 visit daily political sites of rambler.ru. Estimated 40 Mio. Internet users out of the 142Mio. population of the RF. Medvedev reassured Web Users last week at the opening of the 12th annual Russian Internet Forum in Gorky-10, as plans to introduce a new law in the Duma to tighten control and regulation of the populations last and most vibrant venue for political and cultural discussion. Medvedev: "The answer to this question is fairly simple: Laws must be respected everywhere...At the same time, the state should talk a calm, fair position." (Moscow times Friday, April 4, 2008, p. 3). The last word has by far not been said in this.

Using the Internet in Russia (2003; N=2100)

For obtaining various information	70%
For electronic communication	64%
For tracking down news	50%
For listening to music	29%
For electronic databases and libraries	29%
For checking brands for shopping	25%
For Chatting	24%
For Compter games	23%
For watching films	13%

Poll of Levada-Center in 2003. N= 2100 people, 81% under the age of 39.

- New types of readers, functions of reading

Leisure time reading, vacation, visual effects,

Reflecting acceleration or reflecting slowing down,

Decrease of distance, texts without commentaries.

Texts of Russian classics rapidly disappear.

⁹ Dubin, Boris/Zorkaja, Natalja: Knigi v segodnjasej Rossii: vypusk, rasprostranenie, ctenie, in: Vestnik obscestvennogo mnenija 5 (2005)

Widening gap between center and periphery

40% of all printed books never get to their readers. Cities with less than 100.000 cut off from distribution system of stores and libraries. Library system, even central libraries, in radical decline. Desastrous socio-cultural consequences of clash of thick-journal-system: vulgarization, criminalization, backlash to national, conservative preferences of reading-material:

Widening gap between readerships: advanced elite and mass-readers at the periphery:

Majority of all readers prefer mass-produced genre-literature (detective: more female, ironic than hard-boiled male, science-fiction and fantasy, historical novel, romance in foreign (pref. English) translation)

Majority of educated readers non-urban and small towns, middle and older generation prefer Russian literature to foreign translated literature, patterns of first period of Modernity (turn of the century)

Advanced readers with higher education, mostly young (between 19-30), urban, prefer: selected authors of Russian 1960-70s non-conformist poetry and prose, non-canonical genres with merging traditions, high-low levels and dynamic value-systems and non-classical literary regions (South-Eastern Europe, Balkan, Scandinavia, Turkey, Japan, Latin-American), post-modern literature (centre-periphery-problems, multiethnic problems.)

Theses on the Post-Soviet Clash of Reading Cultures and questions for discussion:

Long echoes of the past:

1. Shortcomings in both elite and mass-reading material
2. The effect of long-term isolation: closed circles of reception (“cechovoe povedenie”)

Transition into the Global Market:

1. **An amazing activity of vibrantly translated books from philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, literary criticism to journalism is, however, barely reaching a readership of any remarkable amount** and thus failing to have any broader effect on the countries state of the humanities, as the equally accelerating turn of book-production into a trade with re-monopolized structure and return to large-scale regulation via series, ideological channelling and – mostly – TV-media.
2. **The gap between center and periphery and elite and mass-readerships enforces alienation within the Russian population.**
3. **The intellectual elite was not prepared for the challenges and dynamics of cultural life in the new Russia as well as for the challenges of the global market:** it did not come

naturally for them to market literature, to compete with foreign or domestic bestsellers, to advertise their literary works through TV appearances or internet publications. Their place has been taken by ambitious professionals of the younger generation, with language skills and international know-how, whose concerns are often less moral than material.

Although there are some remarkable, competent and even brilliant young new critics, esp. among those who are open towards both “complex artistic” and “popular” genre-literature, Post-Soviet literary criticism generally failed to help liberate people’s minds and enable them to re-evaluate the past. While the extensive growth of the book market and the disappearance of a clearly defined literary field make significant new demands on professional critics, the majority of them has not been prepared to encourage more pluralistic notions by putting forward alternative concepts of literature, by widening the corpus of books reviewed and by re-shaping the aesthetic tastes of the readers.

They were not prepared to meet the challenges of an open competition of different Russian and foreign literatures, of the new media, of globalization, in part responsible for rollback to nationalism and mental blockage, going conform with the new strong leadership’s populist politics, xenophobia, ethnogenetic concepts in humanities, resisting differentiation.

With a National Face:

Nats Best and other National awards; reconstruction of the public library-system and establishing a canon of National Literature (series, mostly TV, promotion of Imperial and Orthodox Slavic paradigm), rages against opposition, school and College reading programmes (Religious education)

Questions for discussion:

Thesis Gudkov/Dubin: What we currently observe in Russia, is NOT, as many assume, a revival of the Soviet system, typical cultural patterns indicating a return of the Soviet past, but it is a historically unprecedented state of longterm period of decay of authoritarian system with specific qualities and elements which need to be described and analyzed.

Or rather

Global convergence of conditions as a common frame of reference for transformation of post-communist societies in East and West alike.

To add:

Historical preconditions:

- literary criticism claimed to be superior to literature
- syncretism, a large-scale-approach – bol’shoi, masshatabnyi – to big questions and ideas. Big articles discuss texts, often not new, presuming that the readers are familiar

with the texts (i.e. AFTER reading), almost no information or discussion of aesthetic qualities, mostly no books, but texts, published in the journals;

- Stalin 1947: literary critics: “hosts of the literary process”

Effect on literature itself

More clearly in popular genres:

Crisis of maleness,

Lack of Russian romance literature

Ironic zhenskii detektiv more than boevik in last years

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