

## RSN 105 Russian Society and Culture

### ***Russian Literature (Literatura)***

Reading: chapter 8 in *Modern Russian Culture* (pp.161-204)

In 1886 Russian poet **Fyodor Tyutchev** wrote:

<i>Umom Rossiyu ne ponyat'</i>	Russia cannot be understood with the mind,
<i>Arshinom obshchim ne izmerit';</i>	Or measured with a common yardstick;
<i>U ney osobennaya stat' –</i>	She has a unique stature –
<i>V Rossiyu mojno tol'ko vyerit'.</i>	One must simply believe in Russia.

Russian literature is closely linked with Russian music, art, culture, traditions, history, education and religion. For Russian people it is greater than an art form: “it has helped to define what it is to be Russian, what Russia is” and what to become of it (Webber, 2004, p.42).

Russian Orthodox Church played an important part in the development of Russian literature. One of the first literary works included the *Sermon on Law and Grace* (*Slovo o zakone i blagodati*) and was written in 1050 during Kievan Rus' period. Early Russian literature presents significant historical documents. For example, the *Tale of Bygone Years*, which is also known as a *Primary Chronicle* (*letopisi*) and is a historical narrative about the significant events in the eleventh century. *Tale of Igor'* (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*) is another historical record about the Russian and East Slav nations. Written records on the lives of saints were produced, as well as the writings on struggle against the Tatar domination, such as *The Battle Beyond the Don* (*Zadonshchina*).

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian interest towards West European countries increased. Peter the Great (1682 – 1725) promoted the development of

Russian drama as part of the modernisation process to advance Russia forward. Catherine the Great (1761 – 1796) introduced reforms in education, law and provided a strong impact on the Russian literature and the arts in general. Russian language was used instead of the Old Slavonic language. Old Slavonic language existed in Russia before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Mikhail Lomonosov (1711 – 1765) has made a significant contribution to the study of Russian language. Both Gavrila Derzhavin (1743 - 1816) and Nikolai Karamzin (1776 - 1826) have significantly influenced the development of Russian literature, providing a base for the 19<sup>th</sup> century authors. Derzhavin's poetic language was not an imitation of foreign poetry, but "was full of colors and sounds, unorthodox diction and mixed 'high' and 'low' styles (Old Church Slavic archaisms together with striking realistic details), possessed of a kind of shaggy splendor and love of the phenomenal world" and he was able to make "the neoclassical genres, above all the ode, strangely and charmingly Russian" (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.176). Karamzin's great success in "reforming the literary language and cultivating a new more aware, more cosmopolitan Russian reader" was achieved with his *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (1797), his prose works as *Poor Lisa* (*Bednaya Liza*, 1792) and the *History of the Russian State* (1818 - 26).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century is known as the "Golden Age" (*Zolotoi vek*) in Russian literature. Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin (1799 - 1837) is considered as "the father of modern Russian literature" (Torchinsky, 1994, p.93). His first poems were published while he was still a student at the progressive lycee at Tsarskoe Selo. In 1820, he was sent from Moscow for writing anti-tsarist poems. During the six years of exile, Pushkin continued to create masterworks. He excelled in all of his chosen domains – writing poetry, short stories and novels. Aleksandr Pushkin is a famous Russian author, who was born more than 200 years ago and his remarkable literary work is alive and well appreciated today. In Russia, every generation grows up with Pushkin's fairy tales, *Skazka o rubake i rubke* (*the Tale of the Fisherman and the fish*, 1833), *Skazka o tsare Saltane* (*the Tale about Tsar Saltan*). His amazing novels written in verse *Yevgenii Onegin* (1823 - 1831), *Ruslan i Lyudmila* (1820) and *Mednyi vsadnik* (*The Bronze Horseman*, 1833) are only some of

the examples of his great work. During one of the winter balls in 1828 Pushkin fell in love with a beautiful Natalia Goncharova, who was 16 years old at that time. Due to her young age they could only marry after one year. During the six years of marriage they had four children. Pushkin's life finished abruptly in a duel with D'Anthes. Pushkin challenged D'Anthes to a duel to protect his wife's honour. He was 37 years old.

An extract from **Pushkin's poem *Ya pomnyu chudnoe mgnovenie (I recall a wonderful moment, 1825)*** presents just how amazing his poetry could be:

<i>Ya pomnyu chudnoe mgnovenie:</i>	I recall a wonderful moment:
<i>Peredo mnoi yavilas' ty,</i>	You appeared in front of me,
<i>Kak mimoletnoe videnie,</i>	Like a fleeting glimpse,
<i>Kak genii chistoi krasotii.</i>	Like the genius of pure beauty.

Pushkin is seen as a "master of genres", as he expanded the horizons of writing, whether it was lyrical poetry, prose *The Queen of Spades* (or *Pikovaya dama*, 1834) and *The Captain's Daughter* (*Kapitanskaya dochka*, 1836) or verse drama, prose fiction and historiography. Through his work Pushkin powerfully conveys historical drama in *Boris Godunov* (1825) and captures historical events in *Time of Troubles, legacy of Peter, Pugachev Rebellion*. Pushkin presents a variety of characters, which capture reader's hearts and engage their thoughts. In his verse novel *Yevgenii Onegin*, Pushkin presents "the story of unrequited love between Yevgenii, a Petersburg sophisticate, and the naïve Tatyana" while describing life among Russia's high circles and the poet's own journey of discovery (Webber, 2004, p.46). When reading Pushkin's poetry beauty is everywhere and it is presented so elegantly and romantically, whether through Russian folk traditions or nature that the reader can almost feel enchanted and amazed.

Mikhail Lermontov (1814 - 1841) is a well known Russian poet and writer, who "managed to take Russian romanticism to its highest point" (Webber, 2004, p.46). Born as a Russian Byron, he grew up under his grandmother's guidance, as his mother died when he was not even three and father left soon after her death. At 22 years of age he was arrested and sent to Caucasus for

writing a powerful poem *Death of a poet* which was written soon after Pushkin's death and was dedicated to him. His poem was seen as a revolutionary message by the tsar. For Pushkin's death Lermontov "blamed high society" (Torchinsky, 1994, p.94). Besides writing, Lermontov was a talented artist. He was a "haunting nature worshiper and landscape painter (he was also an accomplished graphic artist, especially of the Caucasus)" (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.179). The poem *Borodino* was written in 1837 and was dedicated to the battle at Borodino 25 years ago. In this poem, an old Russian soldier tells the young soldier about the battle. He describes the night before the battle, the battle, the mood of the Russian soldiers before the battle and the great love of Russian people to their country. In his novel *A Hero of Our Time* (1840) Lermontov presents the main character, Pechorin as "the 'fatalist' who is so adept at trapping others in their melodramatic roles because he is more ruthless, more willing to play out the deadly consequences of his society's masquerades, to the bitter end" (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.179). Tragically he was also killed in a duel and died at the young age of 27.

An extract from **Lermontov's poem *Death of a poet*** from Brooke's *Moscow* (*A Cultural and Literary History*, 2006, p.116).

*A poet's dead – entrapped by honour,  
Felled by slanderous rumours spread  
A bullet in the breast, with vengeful anger,  
He bowed at last his noble head.  
His soul could not endure the legions  
Of trifling insults and their shame,  
He stood against the world's opinions,  
Alone, as always – and was slain!*

Two famous poets Fyodor Tyutchev (1803 - 1873) and Afanasii Fet (1820 - 1892) are well remembered for their beautiful romantic poetry, their passion for love and nature. Both poets did not achieve success during their lifetime and were only recognised by the Russian symbolists Andrey Bely and Alexander Blok in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Sample of Tyutchev's verse**

***Silentium***, written in 1830, it is remarkable for its rhythm and images! As one Russian critic put it, "the temporal epochs of human life, its past and its present fluctuate and vacillate in equal measure: the unstoppable current of time erodes the outline of the present."

*Speak not, lie hidden, and conceal  
the way you dream, the things you feel.  
Deep in your spirit let them rise  
akin to stars in crystal skies  
that set before the night is blurred:  
delight in them and speak no word.  
How can a heart expression find?  
How should another know your mind?  
Will he discern what quickens you?  
A thought, once uttered, is untrue.  
Dimmed is the fountainhead when stirred:  
drink at the source and speak no word.  
Live in your inner self alone  
within your soul a world has grown,  
the magic of veiled thoughts that might  
be blinded by the outer light,  
drowned in the noise of day, unheard...  
take in their song and speak no word.      (translated by Vladimir Nabokov)*

The poem was transformed into a song by an early-20<sup>th</sup> century composer, Georgi Catoire and inspired Boris Tchaikovsky (1925-1996), in his 1974 cantata "Signs of the Zodiac". Another Tyutchev's poem "O chem ty voesh' vetr nochnoy" influenced Nikolai Medtner's creation of *Night Wind* piano sonata (#7) of 1911. In 2007, Icelandic musician Björk used the lyrics from *Silentium* in her album *Volta* in "The Dull Flame Of Desire". In 2008 the song was released as a single.

Afanasii Fet's poem *I Have Come to You, Delighted* (*Ya prishyol k tebe s privetom*, published in 1843) can also be evoked as a song, and can be seen to portray Fet's "lirical portrait". The repetition of the verb "to tell" signifies Fet's desire to share his joys of the Russian poetry, to tell the reader about the happy brightness of the sunny morning, to present the passionate quivering of the young spring life, to convey the desire of the affectionate soul for happiness and the irrepressible song that is ready to flow into the merriness of the world (Tarhova, 1983).

### **Afanasii Fet's poem "I Have Come to You, Delighted"**

*Ya prishyol k tebe s privetom, -  
Rasskazat', chto solntse vstalo,  
Chto ono goryachim svetom  
Po listam zatrepetal;*

*I have come to you, delighted,  
To tell you that sun has risen,  
That its light has warmly started  
To fulfil on leaves its dancing;*

*Rasskazat', chto les prosnulsya,  
Ves' prosnulsya, vetkoi kajdoi  
Kajdoi ptitseii vstrepenylsya  
I vesenneii polon kajdoi;*

*To tell you that wood's awaken  
In its every branch and leafage,  
And with every bird is shaken,  
Thirsty of the springy image;*

*Rasskazat', chto s toi je strast'yu,  
Kak vchera, prishyol ya snova,  
Chto doosha vsyo tak je schast'yu,  
I tebe slujit' gotova;*

*To tell you that I've come now,  
As before, with former passion,  
That my soul again is bound  
To serve you and your elation;*

*Rasskazat', chto otovsyudu  
Na menya vesel'yem veyet,  
Chto ne znayu sam, chto budu  
Pet', - no tol'ko pesnya zreyet.*

*That the charming breath of gladness  
Came to me from all-all places,  
I don't know what I'll sing, else,  
But my song's coming to readiness.*

(Translated by Yevgeny Bonver, March, 2001)

The work of Nikolai Gogol (1809 - 1852) provides a significant input in Russian literature. He is well-known as a Russian dramatist, humorist and novelist. "An utterly brilliant stylist, he used his native ties with Ukrainian folklore and a dark Christianity laced with pagan elements to create a world that was, by turns, comic and haunting" (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.180). In his novel *Dead Souls* (1842 – 1852), and play *The Inspector-General* (*Revizor*, 1836), he presented in satirical form the vices of greed, legalised corruption,

ignorance and self-interest of the bureaucracies that are found in absolute governments. It was difficult for Gogol to publish his novels as they had “dangerous” content and was only possible with friends’ help. When his work was finally published great arguments arised. Those who recognised themselves as the characters presented in the book were angry and wanted Gogol to be imprisoned and sent to Siberia. However, his play was staged in theatres with support from the Tsar Nicholas I and received enormous success. Gogol himself left Russia to travel and live abroad for a long time. He began writing part two of the novel *Dead Souls*, but was unhappy with it and the continuation ended up in the fire place. Gogol’s early work *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1831 - 1832) convey a unique style of writing where he innovatively combines the horrid with the humour. Presented in two parts as a collection of short stories, his writing is enriched with the Ukrainian folklore and provides a perspective on life in the country at that time. Gogol’s work was appreciated and explained by the respected Russian critic and editor Vissarion Belinsky (1811 - 1848). Belinsky was seen to be “responsible not only for discovering some of the greatest nineteenth-century writers but also for explaining to them, both subtly and not so subtly, what their works should be saying” (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.181). Gogol’s work continues to influence the development of dramatic plays, films and musicals all over the world.

The middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is associated with the “Age of Realism” in Russian literature. Ivan Turgenev (1818 - 1883) is a well - known Russian author. The influence of Pushkin and Lermontov are evident in the beauty of language in his poems, stories and novels, while his close partnership with the critic Belinsky have influenced and shaped his ideas further. His poetic philosophy portrays people as part of nature and provides hope for Russia’s better future (Aksyonova, 2001). His work *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album* (*Zapiski okhotnika*, 1852) is composed of short stories, which bring the beauty of Russian nature and struggles of peasant life, presenting “an understated and elegantly written protest against the inhumanity of serfdom”. It played a great part in influencing the abolishing of serfs in 1861 (Webber, 2004, p.47). One of the stories from *Zapiski okhotnika: Bezhin Lea* inspired Sergei

Eisenstein, a well known Russian movie director to produce a film *Bezhin Meadow* in 1937.

Through his novels Turgenev is able to “reflect rising political and social questions” of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Torchinsky, 1994, p.95). This is evident in his novel *Rudin* (1855), where Rudin is the main character, who has a gift of making great speeches, yet unable to cope in the real world. After gaining love and trust, he steps down at the arrival of first obstacle, mother’s approval for her daughter’s marriage. He is also terrified to take responsibility and flees. The novel *A Nest of the Gentry* (*Dvoryanskoye gnezdo*, 1859) presents a romantic story, where the main character Lavretskiy spends a long time overseas and gets married. After learning that his wife is not loyal to him he returns to Russia and as if anew falls in love with the Russian nature. Lavretskiy soon meets his real love, Liza and the two plan to get married, but when his first wife, who was considered dead arrives their plans are ruined. Liza leaves to live in monastery, while Lavretskiy is left alone. Both Liza and Lavretskiy possess highest personal qualities. Resemblance of Liza can be seen in Pushkin’s Tatiana (in *Evgenii Onegin*) and Tolstoy’s Natasha Rostova (in *War and Peace*), while Lavretskiy’s character can relate to Tolstoy’s P’er Bezuhov (in *War and Peace*).

Turgenev’s famous novel *Fathers and Sons* (*Ottsy i deti*, 1862) presents “a telling account of the gulf that was apparent between the cautious liberal reformers of the 1840s and the more aggressive Nihilists of the 1860s, represented by the novel’s hero, Bazarov” (Webber, 2004). A *Nihilist* individual was someone, who did not believe in any theories or beliefs. Turgenev’s ability to understand and poetically convey to the reader the different classes of people and characters, as well as their ideals, feelings and thoughts is clearly visible in his masterwork.

Fyodor Dostoyevskii (1821 - 1881) is a well-known author, whose literary work provided a powerful contribution to the “development of the novel as an art form” (Webber, 2004, p.49). His novels *Crime and Punishment* (1865 - 1866), *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879 - 1880), *The Idiot* (1868 - 1869) and *The House of the Dead* (1861 - 1862) “explore a wide range of complex



philosophical and moral issues and serve as a vehicle for the discussion of trends of thought” (Webber, 2004, p. 49). Dostoyevskii’s novels are characterised by his choice of melodramatic plots and the ability to present the “verbal consciousness” and thought development of his characters (Rzhevsky, 1998). Dostoyevskii’s work continues to engage thoughts of the contemporary reader, who is able to discover new meanings and appreciate the significance of his talent.

Lev (Leo) Tolstoi (1828 - 1910) has made a prominent mark in the world of literature. His earliest works include the autobiographical novels *Childhood*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* (1852 - 1856), which present the experience of growing up, changing ideas and thoughts (Aksyonova, 1999). The trilogy is written from the perspective of the main character, Nikolen’ki Irten’yeva and reveals much about Tolstoi’s childhood and youth. In 1859 Tolstoi founded a school for children of peasants at his family estate Yasnaya Polyana. To teach them to read he wrote their first reading book *Azbuka*, composed of short real-life stories. Tolstoi’s novels provide a realistic view of the Russian society he lived in. *War and Peace* (1865 - 1869) is considered one of the greatest novels in literature. The novel captures Russian history events between 1805 and 1820 and provides a wide perspective on Russian life. Characters’ destinies are closely interwoven with the historical events as the author creatively sequences “historical” chapters with the “family” chapters. Tolstoi’s characters in *War and Peace*, such as Kutuzov and soldier Platon Karataev don’t have any hesitations, instead they acquire almost intuitive true knowledge and have realistic perspectives on life. Other characters: P’yer Bezuhov and Andrei Bolkonskii go through a complex life journey that requires them to change their inner self and discover what is most important in life. While young countess Natasha Rostova, who is truly a poetic nature and is full of life, is able to retain her natural qualities. Tolstoi’s novel *Anna Karenina* (1875 - 1877) “explores and pronounces judgement on the morals of Russian society, through his depiction of the descent of the novel’s tragic heroine, Anna” (Webber, 2004, p.50). In the late 1870s Tolstoi evaluated all his life and came to a decision that he needed to change. Among Tolstoi’s ideas, were his views on the journey to happiness, which was not based on the social or

economical changes, but on the combined effort of every individual's moral beliefs. "He continued to act as a social and religious critic in the final years of his life, attacking the actions taken by the authorities during the 1905 Revolution" (Brooke, 2006, p.123). In 1910 Tolstoy left home to pilgrimage, but soon caught a fever and died. He was buried in Yasnaya Polyana and his home was converted into a museum.

Anton Chekhov's (1860 - 1904) short stories are famous both in Russia and internationally, while his plays continue to be staged around the world. During his study at university to become a doctor, Chekhov began writing short stories, which were printed in newspapers and helped him financially. Chekhov is well-known not only as a writer, but also as a doctor, who was involved in building schools and churches, and helped in establishing provisions of food for the hungry. Chekhov's unique style of writing brings a humorous light to the everyday situations, which is characterised by "his clinical eye and compassionate questioning irony, his penchant for smaller, 'transitional' genre forms (absurdist miniature, travel sketch, longer story, one-act play, etc.), his implicit understanding of life's 'gray areas' and lack of resolution", where the reader can search for the answers (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.187). Chekhov's humour can be entertaining and harmless as in his short story *Surgery* (1884), sarcastic or sympathetic in others (Aksyonova, 1999). When presenting characters, he was able to step in their shoes and be able to feel and think as those characters. An example can be drawn from Chekhov's short story *Rotshil'd's Violin* (1894), where the reader feels an instant connection with *Yakov*, a coffin maker: "The town was small, worse than a village, and mostly old people lived there, who died so rarely that it was annoying. In the hospital and the castle jail there was very little demand for the coffins. Another words, they were awful state of affairs." Some of the celebrated Chekhov's stories are: *The Steppe* (1888), *Lady with a Pet Dog* (1899), *Ward No.6* (1892) and *Gooseberries* (1899). His well-known plays include: *The SeaGull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1899), *Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1903). Chekhov's plays are often referred to as "mood plays" as the "plot is secondary to details of everyday life, while the use of mood, produced often by sounds from offstage" (Webber, 2004, p.52).

Chekhov is a remarkable and innovative writer, whose plays and stories can provide a variety of interpretations, as if inviting the reader to take on a journey of their choice.

### Twentieth century Russian Literature

Twentieth century Russian Literature can be presented in four subdivisions: modernism (1895-1925), socialist realism (1925-53), the “thaws” and twilight of the Soviet period (1953-87), and the decade of glasnost’ and post-glasnost’ (1987 - ) as conveyed by Rzhevsky (1998). Russian writers were significantly affected by the events in Russian history. Many were forced to leave Russia during the October Revolution of 1917 or after the war. The Russian *émigré* literature emerged. Others suffered from torture during the Communist period, where individuality and any form of writing without Soviet ideology were forbidden. Writers had to follow the official propaganda standards of socialist realism, which placed strict limitations on all artistic expression. The inability to write and publish literature other than Communist propaganda during the three “thaw” periods (1953-54, 1956, 1961-63) and the radical changes introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987 have greatly influenced the formation of Russian literature.

Twentieth century can be characterised by the rise of Russian poetic movements. For example, the symbolists Aleksandr Blok (1880 - 1921) and Andrei Belyi (1880 - 1934) believed in the power of symbolic expression in poetry. “Blok’s verse epic *The Twelve* (1918) and Bely’s novel *Petersburg* (in various editions, especially 1916 and 1922) are symbolist culture’s two greatest statements about the Revolution...” (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.192).

While the acmeists Nikolai Gumilev (1886 – 1921), Anna Akhmatova (1889 - 1966) and Osip Mandelstam (1891 - 1938) preferred to express the essence of beauty without the direct use of symbols. Their poems were characterised by their “clarity, precision, restraint” (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.193). The tragic fate of acmeists is evident in their literary work and will be remembered by the younger generations. Nikolai Gumilev married Anna Akhmatova, but in 1921 was accused of a conspirator and shot by the secret police, *Cheka*. Their son

was arrested a number of times and in 1949 he was sent to Siberian camp for ten years. Mandelstam was sent to Gulag labour camp, where he died. Akhmatova's literary work was banned. She was under constant surveillance by the *Cheka*. However, she did not stop writing secretly and reading her poems to friends. Akhmatova's powerful *Requiem* (1935 - 1940) includes a cycle of poems that convey the suffering of the Russian people during the terror years. *Requiem* was possible to publish in Munich in 1963 and in Soviet Union in 1987, twenty years after her death. Akhmatova's *Poem Without a Hero* (1940 - 62) that presents the 900 days siege of Leningrad during World War II is dedicated to all the Russian people, who have perished during the siege.

The Futurist writers included Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893 - 1930) and Velimir Khlebnikov (1885 - 1922), whose writing presented the significance of the revolution, which was very important for the Soviets. They "pushed the possibilities of a revolution in language to its outer limits" with propaganda poems (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.192). However, both writers also had a tragic fate. Mayakovsky committed suicide, and Khlebnikov died "as a forgotten tramp in a provincial hospital" (Rzhevsky, 1998, p.193).

Another outstanding poet, who has suffered due to Communist regime is Marina Tsvetaeva (1892 - 1941). Tsvetaeva and her family were forced to leave Russia due to her anti - Bolshevik views in 1922. When they returned to Moscow in 1939 Tsvetaeva's husband and daughter were arrested. Her daughter was sentenced for eight years of prison, and her husband was shot. Isolated and traumatised Tsvetaeva committed suicide in 1941. Tsvetaeva will always be remembered for her striking poetry. Tsvetaeva's "collections of verse, especially *Craft* (1923) and *After Russia* (1928), and her many long poems, dramas and essays constitute an artistic legacy inexhaustible and exhausting in its energy and variety" (Rzhevsky, 1998, p. 194).

Some of the most remembered émigré literature has been produced outside of Russia. Ivan Bunin (1870 - 1953) was never a supporter of the Communist values. He moved first to Odessa, in Ukraine, than Turkey, Bulgaria and Serbia and finally emigrated to France, where most of his work was published

(Aksyonova, 1999). Living outside of Russia allowed Bunin without Soviet control to express freely his thoughts about life and death, passion, love and solitude. This would not be possible if Bunin was to stay in Russia. Bunin's celebrated literary work includes poems, short-stories, such as *Dark Alleys* (1943) and novels *Life of Arsenyev* (1927 - 1933) and *The Village* (1910). He was first Russian writer to receive Nobel laureate.

Boris Pasternak (1890 - 1960) decided not to emigrate from the Soviet Union. He was lucky that his poetry was admired by Stalin and Pasternak's name was crossed out from the execution list. Pasternak tried to help his fellow writers and poets, during the terror years, by protesting against Osip Mandelstam's arrest and by seeking contact with Stalin, to which there was a negative response. Pasternak's early work is characterised by his unique poetic beauty and his feelings of wonderful life, which are presented in the poems *My Sister Life* (1922). Pasternak gained international recognition and a Noble Prize award, which he had to decline for his novel *Doktor Zhivago*. Pasternak worked on this book for ten years, but during the Communist regime it was impossible to publish it. Through his novel Pasternak is able to express the terror of the Stalinist times as he presents the destinies of two people, whose lives are left permanently damaged. Two years after he completed *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak "chose to take the ultimate 'anti - Soviet' route of publishing it abroad, in Italy, in 1957" (Brooke, 2006, p.135). He was expelled from the Writers' Union and did not live long after the Soviet scandal. Pasternak died in 1960, but *Doctor Zhivago* was only published in Russia during the *glasnost* period in the late 1980s.

Maxim Gorky (1868 - 1936) can be seen as one of the founders of "socialist realism" in literature. He supported the Marxist - Leninist social democratic principals, including the aims of socialist realism literature, which was to be historical, objective and educational. The method influenced the development of tight censorship controls of all forms of writing and artistic expression, where Communist propaganda was the most important factor.

Mikhail Bulgakov's (1891 - 1940) was among many writers, whose literary work was banned and who was asked to leave the Soviet Union due to his

satirical stories and plays, that “provided stinging and poignant commentary on the early years of Soviet rule” (Webber, 2004, p. 56). Bulgakov declined to leave, which resulted in his literary work becoming unpublishable and his masterwork unrecognised. Some of his well - known stories are *The Heart of the Dog* (1925) and plays *Days of the Turbins* (1926). Many words and expressions from his work became very popular in the Russian culture and are still popular today. Bulgakov’s most celebrated work is his novel *The Master and Margarita*, which was only published after 27 years since the author’s death.

After Stalin’s death and during the “thaw” (zastoi) periods Russian writers continued to be arrested and imprisoned. This is well presented by Rzhevsky (1998) in “the arrest and sentencing to hard labour of the young Leningrad poet Joseph Brodsky in 1964 for ‘social parasitism’; the imprisonment and trial of the dissident writers Yuly Daniel (Nikolai Arzhak) and Andrei Sinyavsky (Abram Terts) in 1965-66; the arrest and expulsion of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn from the Soviet Union in 1974 following the publication abroad of *The Gulag Archipelago*; and the *Metropol affair* of 1979” (p.199). However, this did not stop writers. Authors continued to publish their work, where “self - printing” (or “samizdat”) became possible, while others managed to send their work overseas.

During the *glasnost* period between 1985 and 1991 Russian writers were provided with freedom to convey their experience and views about the Soviet period. The public had a wider access to literature that was banned from publishing during the Communist regime. When Mikhail Gorbachev introduced *glasnost* period, which meant the “rebuilding” of the Soviet Union with new, more open policies, literary works of authors who lived abroad began to be published in the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 “the process of rediscovering the Russian literary heritage has continued” (Webber, 2004, p.58). Writers faced new problems with publishing, where they had to have financial resources or support to produce their literary work.

Some of the new writers include Boris Akunin (1956 - ), whose crime fiction stories and novels are well-known by the contemporary readers. His novel

*Azazel* or *The Winter Queen* and *The Turkish Gambit* are famous for their beautiful language and a very realistic and unpredictable crime plot, set in the Imperial Russia. Akunin's innovative and powerful work inspired Russian film makers to produce films, such as *The State Counsellor*, where the events of political mystery, tied with the Russian terrorism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century raise many questions to the public.

Dmitry Likhachov's life (1906 - 1999) can be seen as a legend, where he experienced most dramatic events in the Russian history. He is well-known as an honorary doctorate of universities around the world. After completing his study, he was arrested for his brave speech about the oppression and destruction of the Russian Orthodox churches by the Communist Party and sent to the working camp in 1931, where he spend five years. Likhachov's strong interest in old Russian literature and culture is evident in his numerous works. Among many of his celebrated historical works are *Russian Culture at the Times of Andrei Rublev and Epiphanius the Wise* (1962), *Development of Old Russian Literature: the Epochs and Styles* (1973), *Articles on Intelligentsia* (1997) and *Essays on Russian Culture* (published in 2000).