

SCTMG 2020**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the
Context of Modern Globalism»****CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE USSR: FROM FROST
TO “THAW” AND BACK AGAIN**

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Abstract

The article touches upon the issue of the cultural transformation of Soviet Russia in the 50-70s. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the activities of Soviet literary scholars and their interaction with Western literature. The last years of the Stalin era were particularly intolerant to all Western art. Soviet Americanists were engaged in the competition with Soviet The changes in cultural life were inseparable from the changes in governing party and state leadership. The XX Congress inspired even more hopes. The series of young poets was formed; they included E. Evtushenko, A. Voznesensky, R. Rozhdestvensky, B. Okudzhava, B. Akhmadulina which later became known as the “sixtiers”. The first dissidents such as V. Aksenov, V. Nekrasov, A. Galich, V. Voinovich appeared. The Khrushchev thaw despite the obvious contradictions, lasted ten years and ended together with his “release” from the duties of the First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. In 1970, the “thaw” officially ended with the final dismissal of Alexander Tvardovsky from the post of editor-in-chief of the “New World”. As a result, a legitimate conclusion is made that the “thaw” uniquely influenced the perception by Soviet people of the figure of Stalin and his company. However, it became possible to tell about the truth only in our time. The example of this is the brilliant (but tragical) end of the series of novels about Isaev-Stirlitz – “Despair” by Julian Semenov, in which the whole truth about Stalinism is expressed.

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1. Introduction

Globalization changed the world. The processes of globalization began to affect the socio-cultural life in the USSR long before the “invention” of the term itself. The processes of globalization are objective in nature and are formed regardless of the will of those in power (Franklin, 2003). It also affected the USSR.

The last years of the Stalin era were particularly intolerant to all Western art. Soviet Americanists were engaged in the competition with Soviet propagandists in order to reveal who would more negatively express their recent brothers in the anti-Hitler coalition. Everyone unanimously tried to contribute to the campaign against the worship of the West.

2. Problem Statement

Raising the question of globalization processes, it is necessary to identify the causes of it. These processes are caused by the changes in Soviet society, a sense of the need for change after the death of Stalin, the changes in the USSR itself, the inability of the country to live in self-isolation.

“The Thaw” clearly influenced the perception by Soviet people of the figure of Stalin and his company. However, it became possible to tell about the truth only in our time. The example of this is the brilliant (but tragical) end of the series of novels about Isaev-Stirlitz – “Despair” by Julian Semenov, in which the whole truth about Stalinism is expressed.

3. Research Questions

The subject of this article is the study of specific processes of socio-cultural transformation that took place in the USSR in the period following the death of Stalin, during the Khrushchev “thaw” and the following return of the party-state apparatus to the old structure.

All literary science was devoted to the topic of the Cold War. The memoirs of Evnina (1995), a member of the Institute of World Literature evidenced it very brightly. Immediately after the war in 1947, the Volume I of the History of American Literature written long before that year was published. The authors of the volume gave an objective assessment to American writers. However, the editors did not take into account that times changed, and an objective assessment was clearly contrary to the requirements of the Stalin era and the political situation. All the authors of the volume were fired, the leading specialists in English and American literature were among them.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to identify the processes of globalization that occur objectively outside the will of the “leaders”, contrary to the desire of the ideological machine.

5. Research Methods

The main research methods were system-analytical, comparative and biographical. In addition, other methods were used adequate to the purpose of the study: the method of linguistic observation, description, linguistic and cultural analysis. These methods have led to reliable conclusions.

6. Findings

A real ideological war started in the Soviet literary criticism of that time. Literally all the work of American writers was declared “moral plague” and “moral leprosy” (Yakovlev, 1950).

The February edition of “New World” reveals one another opus on Western literature. It attracts attention, first of all, with a pretentious and meaningful title: “On the priests of human spirit and traitors of human race”. Reading such headings which fully coincide with the content, which have little meaning, but a lot of revealing invectives, a reader involuntarily recalls the words of the oldest American Sovietologist Slonim (1964): “The Stalin era gave birth to its own style. He was pompous, monumental, lying, loud and vulgar” (p. 194). It is hard to disagree with his opinion, because the above mentioned article completely lies in the mainstream of this “Stalinist style”.

The year 1948 was the 80th anniversary of the proletarian writer. On this occasion, the article by Shumsky and Korablev (1948) “Gorky and the culture of dollar” was published. In this article the authors refuted all Gorky's kind words about America. They attack the American culture, trying to prove that Gorky's attitude towards it has always been negative. “American culture is anti-human and reactionary in its very essence, as it does not serve the advanced ideals of mankind, but a bunch of slave owners and planters ... It is bourgeois culture that is fertile ground for the flourishing of robbery and banditry in their perverted forms,” Shumsky and Korablev (1948, p. 75) wrote.

As an example of “vulgarity” and “deceit” it is possible to cite the title of Mendelssohn's (1949) article “Copper-faced Eliot”.

The first indicator of “The Thaw” was the Beria amnesty, as a result of which many prisoners, including seasoned felons, were released. However, it was an attempt to disorganize society in order to prepare for a coup. Then many commanders were rehabilitated and returned from the camps. Zhukov was returned to Moscow from the Urals. In September 1954, Khrushchev was elected I Secretary of the Party Central Committee. Even earlier, “the case of doctors” was terminated. The changes were obvious and seemed irreversible.

However, the relative freedom of creativity began to worry the party apparatus and the conservative wing of party writers. There was a confrontation between two journals – “New World” edited by Twardowski and “October” edited by V. Kochetov. In the summer of 1954, Khrushchev, at a meeting in the Central Committee of the CPSU, declared that hopes that the party would change its course were completely unjustified. The Khrushchev thaw, despite the obvious contradictions lasted ten years and ended with his “release” from the duties of the First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. Already in 1964, Joseph Brodsky was convicted of “parasitism”. In 1965, A. Sinyavsky and Yu. Daniel were arrested. Even under Khrushchev, B. Pasternak was subjected to shameful, humiliating persecution.

In 1970, the “thaw” officially ended with the final dismissal of Alexander Twardovsky from the post of editor-in-chief of “New World” journal.

However, the tendency toward liberalization was unstoppable. In 1968, four volumes of Hemingway (1968) were published. Its sale was accompanied by a patrol of mounted militia, so great was the excitement of buyers. Hemingway's (1968) work was a window into another world, free of ideological clichés. It was like a breath of fresh air in the suffocating atmosphere of those years. The story about a group of young people who went by car from France to Spain for fishing seemed unthinkable in the USSR, filled with literature about the successes of socialist construction and shock construction projects. In the apartments of the Soviet intelligentsia, the presence of a portrait of an American writer in a rude sweater was considered a sign of good manners.

The style of literary journals changed. Soviet criticism abandoned the sweeping criticism of Western literature (Sklavou, 2018). In 1955, the second discovery of Hemingway occurred. He suddenly appeared not as a drunkard and a pessimist, but as a wise philosopher reflecting on life and death in connection with the publication of his story “The Old Man and the Sea”.

However, not everything was so clear with Hemingway's (1968) novel “For Whom the Bell Tolls”. Even after the writer's “second birth” in the USSR, his novel was not completely accepted by literary officials. Even publishing a novel in English at the Progress Publishing House, the publishers made 18 ideological notes in the book. Not everyone could like that Hemingway (1968), portraying the civil war in Spain, showed the unjustified cruelty of not only phalanxists, but also the defenders of the republic, showed a complete “mess” in the camp of the Republicans. The uncut novel was no longer published in the USSR, but it was issued in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During the “thaw”, the “second discovery of America” took place (Thornton, 2000). In 1959, Khrushchev made an official visit to the United States. This was preceded by a trip of a group of Soviet cultural figures to America in 1955. The Soviet authorities attached great importance to this trip. The group was received by Minister of Foreign Affairs V.M. Molotov. At this meeting, a “very important question” was raised: “Do the trip members drink the notorious Coca-Cola? The answer was unequivocal: “Abstain, as from the personification of American imperialism and expansion” (Ajubey, 1989, p. 80).

In 1959, one of the leading figures of Soviet literature Kataev (1969), the author of the widely known novels “Time Forward” and “The Lone Sail Whitens”, the creator of the orthodox socialist-realist tetralogy “Waves of the Black Sea” visited the US. After a trip to America, Kataev (1969) writes a surrealistic philosophical novel, The Holy Well. Inspired by American impressions, the writer turns to searching for his “I”, determining his true destiny in life (Burrows, 2016). Initially, America provoked vague anxiety in Kataev (1969), but then he realized that the following negative stereotypes led to a distorted perception of reality. As a result, he even “dared” to expose the “KGB agent” accompanying the group in a ridiculous light, who did not “pass” the test, about which the Soviet man was warned when he went abroad: taking pineapple compote in a crystal violet for flavored water for rinsing his hands.

However not all positive reports on the West, in particular about America, ended as well as in the case of Kataev (1969). Different situation was with Victor Nekrasov, the front-line writer, the author of the famous story “In the Trenches of Stalingrad,” which Stalin liked so much. In the December issue of New World journal, his travel essays, which we would call “travelogues” – “On Both Sides of the Ocean”

were published. In his travelogue, the writer created a very positive image of America and Americans, emphasizing their kindness and openness. However, he noted that, despite his good attitude towards the Russians, he did not make friends with any of the Americans, that he was disappointed in meeting with American students who did not ask a single question. His impressions of the skyscrapers, which “did not suppress at all,” but, on the contrary, they were surprisingly “light”, also looked dissonant. Travelogue written by Nekrasov was characterized by impartiality and the destruction of negative stereotypes inherent in Soviet journalism of those times. Like Kataev, Nekrasov (1991) made fun of the head of the tourist group, “a man of glory, but frightened, obviously, since childhood” (p. 12).

Travelogue of Nekrasov appeared in “New World” journal in December 1962, and on January 20, 1963, the “Tourist with a cane” feuilleton was published in “Izvestia”, in which Nekrasov was accused of “grave ideological sin” – a commitment to peaceful coexistence in ideology. In addition, the writer was guilty of the fact that he liked the Chicago skyscrapers, and the fact that he was “tactless” and “offensive” to his comrades in the tour group. As a rule, a critical article in a central newspaper was followed by “organizational conclusions”. This time they followed Khrushchev’s speech on March 8, 1963, at a meeting with creative intelligentsia held under the slogan “High ideological and artistic excellence – the great power of Soviet literature and art”. Ironically, all those who believed in the Khrushchev “thaw” were at the center of criticism. The last deserved the disapproval of a high person for being “imprudent in his statements during a trip to America”. After Khrushchev’s criticism, Nekrasov was literally “squeezed out” of the Soviet Union.

7. Conclusion

Globalization influenced the changes taking place in the world and undoubtedly had a powerful impact on the socio-cultural processes in the USSR. Khrushchev's “thaw” which followed the death of Stalin weakened the frosts of the Stalin era. It discovered, to some extent, Soviet Russia to the outside world. A whole layer of literature and forgotten names turned out to be available to Soviet readers (Adagbabiri, 2015). The attitude towards Western writers changed. However, the USSR soon returned to previous structure, wilting the sprouts of freedom. However, update processes could not be reversed. Finally, the processes of globalization took shape in the post-perestroika time.

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