In Russian history, the twentieth century was an era of unprecedented, radical transformations – changes in social systems, political regimes, and economic structures. A number of distinctive literary schools emerged, each with their own voice, specific artistic character, and ideological background. As a single-volume compendium, the *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* provides a new perspective on Russian literary and cultural development, as it unifies both émigré literature and literature written in Russia. This volume concentrates on broad, complex, and diverse sources – from Symbolism and revolutionary avant-garde writings to Stalinist, post-Stalinist, and post-Soviet prose, poetry, drama, and émigré literature, with forays into film, theatre, and literary policies, institutions, and theories. The contributors present recent scholarship on the historical and cultural contexts of twentieth-century literary development, and situate the most influential individual authors within these contexts: among them Boris Pasternak, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Joseph Brodsky, Osip Mandelshtam, Mikhail Bulgakov, and Anna Akhmatova.

**Evgeny Dobrenko** is Professor of Russian at the University of Sheffield.  
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*A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.*
## CONTENTS

- **List of contributors**  
- **Acknowledgements**  
- **Note on names**  
- **Chronology**  
- **Preface: Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina**

### 1 Poetry of the Silver Age

**Boris Gasparov**

### 2 Prose between Symbolism and Realism

**Nikolai Bogomolov**

### 3 Poetry of the Revolution

**Andrew Kahn**

### 4 Prose of the Revolution

**Boris Wolfson**

### 5 Utopia and the Novel after the Revolution

**Philip Ross Bullock**

### 6 Socialist Realism

**Evgeny Dobrenko**

### 7 Poetry after 1930

**Stephanie Sandler**

### 8 Russian Epic Novels of the Soviet Period

**Katerina Clark**
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prose after Stalin</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marina Balina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Post-Soviet Literature between Realism and Postmodernism</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mark Lipovetsky</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Exile and Russian Literature</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Bethea and Siggy Frank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Drama and Theatre</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Birgit Beumers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Literature and Film</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julian Graffy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Literary Policies and Institutions</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maria Zalambani</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Russian Critical Theory</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caryl Emerson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to our contributors for their enthusiasm and skill, and their support of our collective efforts in completing this project. We gratefully acknowledge the help of Jesse Savage: his skilful translations and his invaluable and unstinting help with various aspects of this manuscript's preparation deserve special recognition. We want to express a special thanks to our copy-editor at Cambridge University Press, Barbara Docherty, whose investment of time and energy went far beyond her call of duty. Our wholehearted thanks goes to Lauren Nelson for her assistance with this project. We would also like to thank the Isaac Funk Foundation at the Illinois Wesleyan University and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Sheffield for providing financial assistance for this project. Finally, we are grateful to Linda Bree, Maartje Scheltens, and Christina Sarigiannidou, our editors at Cambridge University Press, for their support, confidence, and patience during the completion of this volume.
Every time that a writer discusses some aspect of a people who use a different writing system, the same problem arises: ‘How do I spell the names?’ To take just one Russian name, the ‘romanized’ spellings Juri, Jurij, Yuri, Yury, luri, and even Uri, might all represent (and most have represented) the name Юрий. In this collection, the editors have chosen to (mostly) follow the Library of Congress system for romanizing Cyrillic names, as it is widely used by the libraries and booksellers of Great Britain, Australia, and North America, with very few exceptions. We have upper-cased only the first letter of digraphs of that system (Ia, Iu, and Ts instead of IA, IU, and TS) when they are upper-case in Russian, and have not used the ligatures that join any such digraphs. Within the text of the articles (but not within note sources and Further reading), we have omitted the primes (′ and ″) used to represent the Russian ‘soft sign’ ъ and ‘hard sign’ ъ, and have romanized both ‘short i’ й and ‘i’ и as i. All surnames ending in –skii are simplified to –sky, and first names are omitted for (Fedor Mikhailovich) Dostoevsky and (Lev Davidovich) Trotsky. The first name Aleksandr is spelled Alexander, and omitted for (Alexander Sergeevich) Pushkin; forenames are also omitted for (Anton Pavlovich) Chekhov. The surname of Vladimir (Vladimirovich) Maiakovskii is further slightly altered to ‘Mayakovskii’, and that of Andrei Belyi to ‘Bely’. The poet Iosif Aleksandrovich Brodsky is probably as well known for publication in English, so herein he is called Joseph Brodsky. Maksim (Aleksei Maksimovich) Gor’kii is called ‘Maxim Gorky’. For notes and Further reading, ‘Evgeny’ (not ‘Evgenii’) will be used as the co-editor’s forename, whether the source is in Russian or in English; similarly, the German critic/theorist Hans Günther will be so called also for Russian publications cyrillicizing his name as ‘Khans Giunter’. Within the body of notes, the names are spelled as they occur on the source. Any significant variations that arise on sources are accommodated by cross-references in the index.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894–1917</td>
<td>Reign of Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Chekhov, <em>The Seagull</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Publishing house <em>Knowledge</em> and magazine <em>The World of Art</em> are founded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Tolstoy, <em>Resurrection</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Chekhov, <em>Three Sisters</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Gorky, <em>The Lower Depths</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904–1905</td>
<td>Russo-Japanese War, ending in Russia’s defeat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905–1907</td>
<td>First Russian Revolution leads to a semiconstitutional regime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Lenin’s article, ‘Party Organization and Party Literature’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Musaget Publishing House and journal <em>Apollon</em> are founded. Miscellany <em>Landmarks</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Chronology**

1911  
The Poet’s Guild (*Tsekh poetoiv*) is founded.  
Bunin, *Sukhodol.*

1912  
Manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste.*  
Akhmatova, *Evening.*  
Rozanov, *Solitia.*

1913  
The literary groups *Mezzanine of Poetry* and *Centrifuge* are founded.  
Bely, *Petersburg.*  
Gumilev, *Acmeism and the Precepts of Symbolism.*  
Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov, opera *Victory over the Sun.*  
Mandelshtam, *The Stone* and *The Morning of Acmeism.*

1914–1918  
First World War.

1914  
Akhmatova, *Rosary.*  
Sologub, *The Created Legend.*  
Shklovsky, *Resurrection of the Word.*

1915  
*OPOJaZ* is founded.  
Bunin, *The Gentleman from San Francisco.*  
Rozanov, *Fallen Leaves.*  
Mayakovsky, *The Backbone Flute.*

1917  
The February Revolution. Abdication of Nicholas II. The October Revolution establishes Soviet power.  
Proletkult is founded.  
Shklovsky, *Art as Device.*

1918–1921  
Civil War.

1918  
Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts.*  
Mayakovsky, *Mystery-Bouffe.*  
Rozanov, *The Apocalypse of Our Time.*

1919  
The State Publishing House (*Gosizdat*) is established.  
Mayakovsky, *150,000,000.*

1920  
The Smithy literary group and the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (VAPP) are founded.  
Zamiatin, *We.*

1921–1928  
Era of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

1921  
*Serapion Brothers* literary group emerges.  
Blok, *On the Poet’s Calling.*

1921  
Blok (b. 1880) dies.  
Gumilev executed for his alleged participation in an anti-Soviet conspiracy.  
Ivanov, *Armoured Train No. 14–69.*  
Journals *Red Virgin Soil* and *Press and Revolution* are founded.  
Aleksei Tolstoi, *Sisters.*  
Tsvetaeva, *Mileposts and The Swans’ Demesne.*
1922
FEKS group publish manifesto of Eccentrism.
Glavlit, the censorship authority, is established. Soviet government decides to deport over 160 intellectuals.
LEF, Young Guard and October literary groups are founded.
Akhmatova, Amno Domini.
Khlebnikov, Zangezi.
Khodasevich, The Heavy Lyre.
Libedinsky, The Week.
Mandelshtam, Tristia.
Pasternak, My Sister Life.
Pilniak, The Naked Year.
Tikhonov, The Horde and Mead.
Zoshchenko, Tales of Nazar Ilich, Mr. Sinebriukhov.

1923
Pereval literary group is founded.
Journal On Guard is founded.
Babel, The Odessa Tales.
Furmanov, Chapaev.
Mandelshtam, The Noise of Time.
Mayakovsky, About That.

1924
Journals October and The Star are founded.
Trotsky, Literature and Revolution.
Bulgakov, White Guard.
Fedin, Cities and Years.
Leonov, Badgers.
Seifullina, Virineia.
Serafimovich, The Iron Flood.
Tsvetaeva, Poem of the End and Poem of the Mountain.

1925
Central Committee’s Resolution On the Policy of the Party in the Sphere of Artistic Literature.
Babel, Red Cavalry.
Bulgakov, The Days of the Turbins.
Erdman, The Mandate.
Esenin, The Black Man. Suicide of Esenin (b. 1895).
Gladkov, Cement.
Trenev, Liubov Yarovaia.
Shklovsky, On the Theory of Prose.

1926
Journal On Literary Guard is founded.
Nabokov, Mashenka.
Pilniak, The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon.
Shmelev, The Sun of the Dead.
Vesely, Russia Washed in Blood.
Chronology

1927
Fadeev, The Rout.
Leonov, The Thief.
Mayakovsky, Very Good!
Olesha, Envy.
OBERIU poets’ group founded

1928
The ‘Cultural Revolution’ begins.
First All-Union Party Conference on Cinema
Gorky returns to the Soviet Union.
Erdman, The Suicide.
Ilf and Petrov, Twelve Chairs.
Mayakovsky, The Bedbug.
Panferov, Bruski.
Vaginov, The Goat Song.
Propp, Morphology of the Folktale.

1929
Stalin’s fiftieth birthday; the beginning of the ‘Stalin Cult’.
Attacks on Bulgakov, Pilniak, and Zamiatin.
Kuzmin, The Trout Breaks the Ice.
Mayakovsky, The Bathhouse.
Platonov, Chevengur.
Zabolotsky, Scrolls.
Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics.
Tynianov, Archaiizers and Innovators.

1930
Journal The Banner is founded.
Mayakovsky, At the Top of My Voice. Suicide of Mayakovsky (b. 1893).
Nabokov, Luzhin’s Defence.
Platonov, The Foundation Pit.

1931
Afinogenov, Fear.
Shaginian, Hydrocentral.

1932
Dissolution of RAPP and other proletarian artists’ associations.
Socialist Realism proclaimed.
Pasternak, Second Birth.
Kataev, Time, Forward!
Sholokhov, Virgin Soil Upturned.

1933
Gorky Literary Institute is established.
Journal The Literary Critic is founded.
Bunin wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
Makarenko, Pedagogical Poem.
Shmelev, The Summer of the Lord.
Vishnevsky, Optimistic Tragedy.

1934
First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, which effectively established the Union.
Chronology

Ostrovsky, *How the Steel Was Tempered*.
Evgenii Shvarts, *The Naked King*.

1935
- Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*.
- Pogodin, *Aristocrats*.
- Zoshchenko, *The Blue Book*.

1936
- Anti-Formalist campaign.
- Gorky (b. 1868) dies.
- Tvardovsky, *The Land of Muravia*.

1937
- Height of the Great Terror.
- Execution of Kliuev by NKVD.
- Mandelshtam, *Lines on the Unknown Soldier*.
- Nabokov, *The Gift*.

1938
- Arbuzov, *Tania*.

1939
- Kharms, *The Accidents* and *The Old Woman*.

1940
- Akhmatova, *Poem without a Hero* and *Requiem*.
- Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*.
- Chukovskai, *Sofia Petrovna*.
- Sholokhov, *Quiet Flows the Don*.
- Aleksei Tolstoi, *Peter the First*.

1941–1945
- The Great Patriotic War.

1941
- Simonov, *Wait for Me*.
- Suicide of Tsvetaeva (b. 1892).
- *New Review* is founded in New York.
- Leonov, *Invasion*.

1942
- Antokolsky, *A Son*.
- Bunin, *Dark Alleys*.
- Gorbatov, *The Unvanquished*.

1943
- Kaverin, *Two Captains*.

1944
- Fadeev, *The Young Guard*.
- Panova, *Fellow Travellers*.

1945
- Tvardovsky, *Vasily Terkin*.

1946
- Attacks on Zoshchenko and Akhmatova; beginning of *zhdanovshchina*.
- Nekrasov, *In the Trenches of Stalingrad*.
- Polevoi, *Story of a Real Man*.

1949
- Anti-cosmopolitanism campaign.

1952
- Bunin, *The Life of Arseniev*.

1953
- Stalin dies and is succeeded by Malenkov.
- Leonov, *The Russian Forest*.
- Soloukhin, *Vladimir Country Roads*.
- Pomerantsev, *On Sincerity in Literature*.

1954
- Ehrenburg, *The Thaw*.
- Prishvin, *The Chain of Kashchei*. 
### Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1955 | Journal *Youth* is founded.  
Paustovsky, *The Golden Rose*. |
| 1956 | Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party. Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’.  
Suicide of Fadeev (b. 1901).  
Dudintsev, *Not by Bread Alone*.  
Iashin, *Levers*.  
Tendriakov, *Tight Knot*. |
| 1957 | Journal *Problems of Literature* is founded.  
Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*. |
| 1958 | Pasternak wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.  
Campaign against Pasternak. |
| 1959 | Arbuzov, *An Irkutsk Story*.  
Voznesensky, *The Masters*.  
Siniavsky (Abram Tertz), *Fantastic Tales*. |
| 1960 | Pasternak (b. 1890) dies.  
Grossman, *Life and Fate*.  
Tvardovsky, *Distance beyond Distance*. |
| 1961 | Height of de-Stalinization. Stalin’s body is removed from the Lenin Mausoleum.  
Miscellany *Pages from Tarusa*.  
Aksyonov, *Ticket to the Stars*.  
Evtushenko, *Babii iar*. |
Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.  
Voznesensky, *The Triangle Pear*. |
| 1963 | Shukshin, *Rural People*.  
Solzhenitsyn, *Matryona’s House*.  
Voinovich, *I Want to be Honest*. |
| 1964 | Khrushchev’s fall.  
Brodsky trial.  
Zalygin, *On the Irtysh*. |
| 1965 | Sholokhov wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.  
Ehrenburg, *People, Years, Life*.  
Evtushenko, *Bratsk Hydroelectric Plant*. |
| 1966 | Trial of Siniavsky and Daniel.  
Akhmatova (b. 1889) dies.  
Aitmatov, *Farewell, Gulsary*.  
Belov, *That’s How Things are Done*.  
Kataev, *The Holy Well*. |
| 1967 | Ehrenburg (b. 1891) dies.  
Vampilov, *Duck-Hunting*. |
Chronology

1968
Soviet suppression of the ‘Prague Spring’.
Astaev, *The Last Tribute*.
Belov, *The Carpenters’ Tales*.
Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward*.
Tvardovsky, *By the Right of Memory*.

1969
Bondarev, *The Hot Snow*.
Bykov, *Krugliansky Bridge*.
Venedikt Erofeev, *Moscow to the End of the Line*.
Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*.
Trifonov, *The Exchange*.

1970
Solzhenitsyn wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
Aitmatov, *The White Steamship*.
Bitov, *Pushkin House*.
Bykov, *Sotnikov*.
Rasputin, *The Final Stage*.

1971
Simonov, *The Living and the Dead*.
Vladimov, *Faithful Ruslan*.

1973
Iskander, *Sandro from Chegem*.
Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*.
Shukshin, *Characters*.
Sasha Sokolov, *School for Fools*.

1974
Journal *Kontinent* is founded.
Solzhenitsyn is arrested and expelled from the Soviet Union.
Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*.

1975
Aksyonov, *The Burn*.
Astaev, *Tsar-Fish*.
Siniavsky, *Strolls With Pushkin*.
Voinovich, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of the Soldier Ivan Chonkin*.

1976
Gelman, *Minutes of a Meeting*.
Rasputin, *Farewell to Matyora*.
Trifonov, *The House on the Embankment*.
Zinoviev, *Yawning Heights*.

1977
Brodsky, *The End of a Beautiful Epoch* and *A Part of Speech*.
Nabokov (b. 1899) dies.

1978
Andrei Bely Prize is established by underground writers.
Trifonov, *The Old Man*.

1979
Metropol affair.
Limontov, *This is Me, Eddie*.
Okudzhava, *Journey of Dilettantes*.

1980
Vysotsky (b. 1938) dies.
Dovlatov, *A Solo on an Underwood*.
CHRONOLOGY

Evgenii Kharitonov, *Under House Arrest.*
Petrushevskaia, *Three Girls in Blue.*
Prigov, *The Apotheosis of Militsaner and Tears of the Heraldic Soul.*
Sasha Sokolov, *Between a Dog and a Wolf.*

1981
Trifonov (b. 1925) dies.
Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years.*
Gorenstein, *The Psalm.*
Krivulin, *Poems.*

1982
Brezhnev dies and is succeeded by Andropov.
Shalamov (b. 1907) dies.
Yuz Aleshkovsky, *A Little Blue Kerchief.*
Dovlatov, *Zone.*
Sadur, *The Weird Peasant Woman* and *The Trapped Swallow.*

1983

1984
Andropov dies and is succeeded by Chernenko.
Brodsky, *Urania.*
Rubinshtein, *The Six-Winged Seraph.*
Sorokin, *The Thirtieth Love of Marina.*

1985–1991
Gorbachev's glasnost' and perestroika.

1985
Chernenko dies and is succeeded by Gorbachev.
Elena Shvarts, *Dancing David.*
Sasha Sokolov, *Palisandria.*

1986
Aitmatov, *The Execution Block.*

1987
Brodsky wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
Viktor Erofeev, *Russian Beauty.*
Granin, *Bison.*
Elena Shvarts, *The Works and Days of Lavinia.*

1988
Petrushevskaia, *Our Circle and Immortal Love.*

1989
Evgenii Popov, *The Soul of the Patriot, or Various Messages to Ferfichkin.*

1990
Dovlatov (b. 1941) dies.
Palei, *Cabiria from the Obvodnoi Canal.*

1991
Yeltsin elected President of Russian Federation (re-elected 1996).
Attempted coup against Gorbachev fails.
Gorbachev resigns as President of the Soviet Union. Soviet Union collapses.
Russian Booker Prize is established.
Petrushevskaia, *The Time: Night.*
Vasilenko, *Shamara.*
**Chronology**

1992  
Journal *New Literary Review* is founded.  
Narbikova, *In the Here and There*.  
Pelevin, *Omon Ra*.

1993  
Pelevin, *The Life of Insects*.  
Prigov, *Fifty Drops of Blood*.  
Rubinshtein, *The Problems of Literature*.

1994  
Limonov founds National-Bolshevik Party.  
Solzhenitsyn returns to Russia.  
Astaev, *The Cursed and the Slain*.  
Mark Kharitonov, *Lines of Fate*.  
Kibirov, *The Sentiments*.  
Prigov, *Stalinskoe*.  
Rubinshtein, *I Am Here*.  
Sadur, *Witch’s Tears*.  
Sorokin, *Roman and Hearts of the Four*.  
Vladimov, *The General and His Army*.

1995  
The Anti-Booker Prize established.  
Kibirov, *When Lenin Was a Little One*.  
Makanin, *The Prisoner from the Caucasus*.  
Parshchikov, *Cyrillic Light*.

1996  
Brodsky (b. 1940) dies.  
Gandlevsky, *The Trepanation of the Skull*.  
Pelevin, *Chapaev and Void*.

1997  
Apollon Grigoriev Prize established.  
Solzhenitsyn Prize established.  
Tolstaia, *Love Me – Love Me Not*.

1998  
Grishkovets, *How I Ate a Dog*.  
Makanin, *Underground, or The Hero of Our Time*.  
Sorokin, *Blue Lard*.

1999  
Pelevin, *Generation P*.  

2000  
Putin elected President (re-elected 2004).  
National Bestseller prize established.  
Tolstaia, *Slynx*.  
Ulitskaia, *Kukotsky’s Case*.  
Vasilenko, *A Little Fool*.

2001  
Prokhanov, *Mister Hexogen*.  
Solzhenitsyn, *Two Hundred Years Together*.  
Sorokin, *Feast*.

2002  
Attacks of the pro-Putin youth group ‘Moving Together’ against Sorokin and Pelevin.  
Sharov, *The Resurrection of Lazarus*.

2003  
Dmitrii Bykov, *Orthography*.

2005  
Literary Prize ‘The Poet’ is established.  
Shishkin, *Venus’ Hair*.
CHRONOLOGY

2006

Literary Prize ‘The Big Book’ established.
Bykov, ZhD (Jewhad).
Pelevin, Empire V.
Sorokin, The Day of the Oprichnik.
Ulitskaia, Daniel Stein, a Translator.
This volume is the first in the series of Cambridge companions to literature to be devoted to post-classical Russian literature. Individual twentieth-century Russian literary works enjoy great popularity with English-speaking audiences: readers have gained access to and familiarity with these works through comprehensive translations, literary and film adaptations, and a number of surveys and monographs. This familiarity with individual exemplars has increased the public’s awareness of lesser-known works, and has consequently led to a need for a more complete understanding of the cultural contexts of post-classical Russian literature.

In previous decades, scholars in the former Soviet Union were accustomed to compiling a quite different history of twentieth-century Russian literature from that produced by their counterparts in the West, since each group based its history on a different body of literary texts. In the Soviet Union, major literary works written at the turn of the century and in the 1920s were taken out of circulation, much like those produced at various times by dissident and émigré writers, which were forbidden and therefore never published. In the West, however, all literature created by Soviet literati was considered tantamount to co-opted officialdom. Both groups of scholars used an ideological standard – opposite though their standards were – as a basis for judgements concerning the value of these literary works. Moreover, both Soviet and Western scholars were stymied by the inaccessibility of Soviet archives, and were thus forced to work with a limited number of literary texts. The twofold situation of restricted access and ideological axe-grinding was improved only very recently, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the publication of previously unknown sources. Finally, readers and scholars in both Russia and the West were able to see twentieth-century Russian literature as a united body of works in all its fullness.

A new, revisionist post-Soviet spirit now suffuses approaches to this subject at all levels, from the production of new editions and new biographical studies to the construction of new interpretive readings. Both mature and
younger generations of scholars in Russia and in the West are seizing the opportunity to ‘modernize’ twentieth-century Russian literature studies. The past two decades have seen major developments in the way this literature is approached and understood.

The twentieth century was perhaps the most turbulent time in all of modern European history. In Russian history, this ‘age of extremes’ was a century of unprecedented, radical transformations – changes in social systems, political regimes, and economic structures – which occurred in unimaginable leaps and retreats. For Russia, whose political culture had long been based on authoritarianism and, consequently, on an acute lack of political freedoms, these changes were particularly dramatic. Contributing to this was the historically developed literary centrism of Russian culture: literature here had always been something more than simply literature in the Western sense, and had also played the role of political tribune, the repository of national self-awareness, and a sort of discussion club that provided an outlet for the need to appraise the country’s history in terms of ethics (or of what Russian classical tradition called a ‘moral verdict’) and to reflect philosophically upon its past, present, and future. Thus these changes profoundly altered the very processes by which culture – and, of course, literature – functioned: more than once in the twentieth century, the very content and style of literary production changed radically, as did the makeup of those producing and consuming literature and the scope and functions of literary institutions.

The development of Russian literature in the twentieth century presents an extraordinarily motley picture. It is not even a question of changing styles or trends, but rather of distinct cultural ecosystems. Although each of them did in fact have roots in the preceding sociocultural situations, they were practically autonomous. Russian Symbolism, for example, was the product of the search for new means of artistic expressiveness and of the rejection of the overburdened ideology and psychologism of Russian classical realism; Futurism can be viewed as an abrupt radicalization of the idea of the autonomy of art that lay at the heart of the Symbolist aesthetic; from this perspective, one could define Socialist Realism (as Boris Groys does) as ‘the avant-garde, Stalin-style’ and, simultaneously, as a return to a pre-avant-garde aesthetic; similarly, one could consider post-Stalinist literature to be a return to the traditions of revolutionary culture that had been abolished in Stalinism; finally, one might conceive of post-Soviet literature as a heterogeneous cultural model open to practically all of the preceding artistic practices (this aesthetic omnivorousness allows us to investigate this literature in the postmodernist paradigm). At the same time, each of these aesthetic schools that successively replaced each other possessed an autonomy that was by no means simply chronological. Each was shaped in a deeply engaged polemic
with the foregoing one, and could only consolidate itself on the ruined foundations of the preceding tradition: Symbolism destroyed psychological Realism; Futurism rejected both Symbolism and the Realism that had preceded it; likewise, Socialist Realism rejected both its predecessors (and, in fact, Realism as well); post-Soviet literature, begotten as a freakish hybrid of practically all of the preceding traditions, grounds itself upon a principled distance from all of them and often in ironic superiority over them.

Although all of these cultural ecosystems did in fact have certain features of resemblance to the styles and artistic trends that were developing in parallel in other European cultures, each differed in its profound uniqueness. The ties of the Russian Silver Age to French Symbolism, for example, are obvious, as are those between the Russian avant-garde and Italian Futurism and German Dadaism; Stalinist ‘Socialist Realist art’ has much in common with the art of fascist Italy or Nazi Germany; the parallels between the culture of the post-Stalinist ‘Thaw’ and the general tendencies of 1960s European culture are obvious, as are those between the tendencies of post-Soviet Russian literature and Western postmodernism. Nonetheless, the distinctiveness of each of these literatures cannot be doubted: Russian avant-garde literature was a deeply innovative phenomenon; the Stalinist model of the functioning of culture was, for better or worse, in many respects unprecedented; and, because of the very specifics of all the changes in artistic trends in Russian literature over the twentieth century, ‘Russian postmodernism’ is totally unique.

A final point to note about these cultural ecosystems is that, although each had a dimension that pervaded all of culture, each led to a break with previous literary conventions per se as it created new ones differing markedly from the preceding conventions – whether it was a system of literary genres or of narrative models, a new type of plot or hero, systems of expressive devices or indeed of literary institutions, or even a new type of reader sensitivity.

Revealing these peculiarities of twentieth-century Russian literature is exactly what the chapters comprising this book aim to do. We speak of a single twentieth-century Russian literature, including the literature of the Silver Age, the revolutionary avant-garde, the Stalinist era, the post-Stalinist and post-Soviet eras, and, finally, that of émigrés. Nonetheless, there are at times such distinctions where it probably would not be a mistake to say that we are talking about literatures, in the plural. These literatures are so different that it seems as if, apart from the Russian language, nothing unites them. But this, too, is probably not completely true: even the literary language was often completely incomprehensible to the reader of the preceding culture. The language of Symbolism and Acmeism, for example,
saturated with cultural allusions, or Khlebnikov’s ‘trans-rational’ language, was already completely incomprehensible to the new readers of the early 1930s – yesterday’s peasants, who found themselves in an urban culture so new to them, into which Stalin’s industrialization and collectivization had thrown them. But the language of Soviet officialese, too, or even the everyday Soviet language developed in the new culture – the language of Zoshchenko’s characters in the 1920s or of Galich’s in the 1970s – also remains opaque to the uninitiated. The story is told that, at one of Galich’s concerts in Paris, an old emigrant woman turned to the person sitting beside her and asked, ‘Excuse me, but do you know what language he’s singing in?’

In a word, the literary schools that replaced each other in turn were so different, the metamorphoses so profound and radical, and the social contexts of literary production and consumption each time so distinctive, that the book here presented to the reader might well be properly called The Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literatures.

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