

BETWEEN PROFESSIONALISM AND CENSORSHIP: INTERNAL REVIEWS  
AND THE HIDDEN POLITICS OF SOVIET LITERARY CULTURE

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The Soviet Editorial-Publishing System and Its Institutional  
Framework

The Soviet literary and editorial process of the late 1950s through the late 1980s can be described as a combination of diverse activities: the creation, evaluation, editing, publication, and distribution of fiction, literary criticism, children's literature, educational materials, and professional publications. What distinguished the Soviet publishing system from those of other countries and political regimes outside the socialist block was its exceptionally high degree of centralization and control,<sup>1</sup> and the great importance of ideological – that is, fundamentally non-market – criteria for selecting and promoting books, journals, almanacs, and so forth.

This vast social institution included a complex ensemble of smaller institutions: publishing houses, structures within the Writers' Union (from admissions boards to creative retreat houses where authors could work on books), censorship bodies, specialized institutions of higher education such as the Literary Institute and the University of Printing Arts. It also comprised networks of experts and everyday human relationships among publishers, authors, representatives of the party bureaucracy, literary critics, and others. The operation of this large social institution was based on complicated intersections of publicly acceptable and behind-the-scenes norms and rules.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: A.V. Bljum, *Za kulisami "Ministerstva pravdy": Tainaia istoriia sovetskoi cenzury. 1917-1929*, Sankt-Peterburg, Gumanit. agentstvo "Akademich. proekt," 1994; Id., *Evreiskii vopros pod sovetskoi tsenzuroi, 1917-1991*, [vstup. st. D. El'iashevicha], Sankt-Peterburg, Peterburgskii evreiskii universitet, 1996; Id., *Sovetskaia tsenzura v epokhu total'nogo terrora. 1929-1953*, Sankt-Peterburg, Akademicheskii proekt, 2000; Id., *Zapreshchennye knigi russkikh pisatelei i literaturovedov. 1917-1991: Indeks sovetskoi tsenzury s kommentarijami*, Sankt-Peterburg, Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvenny universitet kul'tury, 2003; T.M. Goriaeva, *Politicheskaia cenzura v SSSR. 1917-1991 gg.*, Moskva, ROSSPEN, Fond Pervogo Prezidenta Rossii B.N. Eltsina, 2010.

This system of norms and rules nearly always required expert reports on manuscripts submitted to publishing houses or editorial boards of literary journals. Paradoxically, this process was called “internal” because reviewing. In fact, it was actually both internal and external: “internal,” in that review texts were not intended for publication or wider circulation, and “external,” because reviews were sometimes commissioned from individuals who did not work for the editorial board of a magazine or as editors at a publishing house.

In this article, the Soviet “internal review” (*vnutrenniaia retsenziia*) is understood as a stabilized speech genre (in Bakhtin’s interpretive tradition)<sup>2</sup> substantially different from published reviews of already-published texts. Internal reviews served as a definitive stage in editorial and publishing work on authors’ manuscripts while establishing specific types of communication between authors, editors, and external experts. In this article, I seek to prove that these reviews were commissioned evaluations that combined literary assessment with ideological screening, operated within a non-anonymous system where reviewer and author identities were known, and functioned as tools of cultural policy implementation through seemingly objective professional standards.

Internal reviews served multiple functions. Some reviewers protected controversial publications from censorship, while others sought to block or delay problematic works. Reviewers also pushed authors to make changes, sometimes to core concepts or key episodes and plotlines. In all cases, reviewers leveraged their superior status in the literary hierarchy – sometimes gained simply through the review assignment – to influence authors.

Despite limited scholarly research on Soviet internal reviews, vast archival materials suggest an unexplored realm of Soviet literary history. Systematic analysis of these sources, combined with participant testimonies, reveals new aspects of Soviet cultural politics, including publishing strategies, reviewer authority, and the complex interplay of power and personal relationships within literary institutions.

### Theoretical Frameworks: Censorship versus Professionalization

The first major scholarly tradition views internal reviews primarily as censorship – prohibiting texts with taboo subjects, risky statements, or problematic authors. This approach dominates studies of the USSR, Eastern European, and

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<sup>2</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *The Problem of Speech Genres*. In M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Transl. from Russian by Vern W. McGee, ed. by C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 60-102.

Latin American dictatorships, with research covering Estonia, Poland, East Germany, and Hungary.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars following this “censorial” perspective agree that internal reviews functioned as a fundamental state filter in the publishing process, similar to gatekeeping functions in democratic societies but with ideological assessment as the primary concern. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming coined the term “Rezensur” to describe the fusion of censorship and review, noting that while aesthetic quality was addressed, it remained secondary to political considerations.<sup>4</sup>

Sergey Soloviev’s analysis of Varlam Shalamov’s publication history exemplifies this approach, viewing internal reviews as an additional censorship layer. Soloviev argues these texts reveal the ideological atmosphere more accurately than official documents because reviewers responded sensitively to political currents while their aesthetic preferences were shaped by Soviet mainstream culture.<sup>5</sup>

A second tradition treats internal reviews through the Soviet “enlightened” editing approach, where editors serve as coaches, consultants, and intermediaries who enhance works through dialogical processes. This perspective, exemplified by authorities like Lidia Chukovskaya, Nora Gal, and Arkadij Milchin, appears in editor memoir-guides describing collaborative work with authors. This interpretive line is mostly represented in a special subgenre of editor memoir-guides (or editor’s craft memoirs) that primarily comprise episodes of their work with certain authors and particular publications.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> E. Lauk, *Practice of Soviet Censorship in the Press: The Case of Estonia*, “Nordicom Information,” 21 (1999), pp. 19-31; A. Wiśniewska-Grabarczyk, *Recenzja cenzorska Polski Ludowej*, “Polish Review,” 64 (1) (2019), pp. 31-49; S. Fritzsche, *Science Fiction Literature in East Germany*, Oxford, Bern, Berlin et al., Peter Lang, 2006; Z. Cziganyk, *Readers’ responsibility: literature and censorship in the Kádár era in Hungary*, in: *Confrontations and Interactions: Essays on Cultural Memory*, ed. by B. Gárdos, Á. Péter, N. Pikli, and M. Vince, Budapest, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2011. Structurally similar mechanisms of ideological control over publishing existed in non-socialist authoritarian regimes as well, as evidenced by Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola: A. Herrero-Olaizola, *The Censorship Files: Latin American Writers and Franco’s Spain*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> C.A. Costabile-Heming, “Rezensur”: A Case Study of Censorship and Programmatic Reception in the GDR, “Monatshefte,” 92 (1) (2000), pp. 53-67.

<sup>5</sup> S. Soloviev, *Vnutrennie recenzii kak instrument cenzury: sluchai Varlama Shalamova*, In: *Kul’tura i vlast’ v SSSR. 1920-1950-e gody: Materialy IX mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, Sankt-Peterburg, 24-26 oktjabrja 2016 goda*, Moskva, Politicheskaja enciklopediia, Prezidentskij tsentr B.N. Eltsina, 2017, pp. 59-70.

<sup>6</sup> L. Chukovskaya, *V laboratorii redaktora*, Moskva, Iskusstvo, 1960; N. Gal, *Slovo zhivoe i mertvoe: Iz zapisok perevodchika i redaktora*, Moskva, Kniga, 1972; A.E. Milchin, *Chelovek knigi. Zapiski glavnogo redaktora*, Moskva, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2016.

Igor Kuzmichev and Elena Gushanskaya's *Editing of Fiction: Historical Aspect*,<sup>7</sup> structured as a college handbook, exemplifies this tradition. Their monograph covers the editor's profession genealogy, systematic overview of the "editorial-publishing process" from their experience at Leningrad's "Soviet Writer" publishing house, and genre examples including internal reviews. They present internal reviewing as an essential stage following initial proposal discussion, culminating in editor's conclusion and manuscript negotiations before printing – emphasizing impartial evaluation and quality enhancement rather than censorship.

Kuzmichev and Gushanskaya describe internal review as benevolent professional dialogue where reviewers act as allies, noting that reviewer selection sometimes provided authors reliable backing against censorial authorities.<sup>8</sup> Though such support often failed (as with Brodsky's collection despite Vadim Shefner's favorable review),<sup>9</sup> they don't explore decision mechanisms. Tellingly, their appendix examples reveal ideological and aesthetic censorship disguised as professional standards, highlighting the entangled relationship between professionalism and censorship in Soviet editorial policy.

### Soviet "Literary Professionalism" and Editorial Normalization

Soviet "literary professionalism," developed by A. M. Gorky in works like *On Young Writers* (1928)<sup>10</sup> and his collection *On Literature* (first published 1935), envisioned mass literary socialization of authors from underprivileged groups through ideological-political support and institutional frameworks. This built on spontaneous developments between 1917-1920 when soldiers, workers, and others began writing to express their revolutionary experiences. Writers were expected to "study" in three ways: achieve high literary craft, "learn from classics," and learn from "contemporary masters."<sup>11</sup> Soviet writers had to master plot construction, create accessible metaphors, and develop lifelike characters while simultaneously producing ideologically convincing representations. Consequently, internal reviewers typically demanded both aesthetic and political 'improvement' in their critical comments.

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<sup>7</sup> I.S. Kuz'michev, E.M. Gushanskaja, *Redaktirovanie hudozhestvennoj literatury*, Saint-Petersburg, Peterburgski institut pechati, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, pp. 224-225.

<sup>10</sup> A.M. Gorky, *O literature: Stat'i i rechi 1928-1935 gg.*, Moskva, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo "Khudozhestvennaja literatura," 1935, pp. 27-32.

<sup>11</sup> E. Dobrenko, *Formovka sovetskogo pisatelja. Social'nye i esteticheskie istoki sovetskoi literaturnoi kul'tury*, Sankt-Peterburg, Akademicheskij proekt, 1999, pp. 350-355.

Soviet literary professionalism operated within the broader framework of Soviet institutional structure: Soviet professionals were unable to form autonomous associations and were required to align their work with political imperatives. Consequently, internal reviews of critical works or humanities scholarship routinely merged academic standards with political criteria.<sup>12</sup>

To follow these requirements, in the mid-1920s, publishing houses and literary journals incorporated literary consultations – departments for working with young authors who were numerous but uneducated and/or insufficiently ideologically informed, and editing and internal reviewing simultaneously meant helping writers achieve “professionalization” (learning to construct sentences, composition, and plot; abandoning dialectisms and vulgarisms; rejecting modernist literary fashions like the rhythmization of prose writing; combating complex imagery and ambiguous expressions) and their ideological “formatting.” Evgeny Dobrenko describes this as achieving stylistic “smoothness” and “normalization,” the alienation of the author from his text, making it non-transparent.<sup>13</sup> In later periods, this also involved eliminating potentially dangerous themes and plot devices.

There is no doubt that internal review was embedded in this process of editorial “normalization” represented as an attempt to raise the professional level of a given work or of a writer in general.

It is important to add to Dobrenko’s keen observations that if in the 1930s through early 1950s editing and peer-reviewing implied direct ideological criticism, from the mid-to-late 1950s onward these practices were transformed into masking ideological requirements as aesthetic ones.

As a result, the famous Soviet critic and writer Arkadiy Belinkov would characterize contemporary Soviet literary production in 1970 as completely dependent on and determined by censorship implemented mostly at the level of editing performed by authors themselves, or by editors and internal reviewers:

The overwhelming majority of books or parts of books that people were unable to read were not destroyed by censorship, but were ruined either in conception, or in manuscript, or in the process of internal editing, or during the editorial process at publishing houses.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A. Simirenko, *Professionalization of Soviet Society*, London, New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1982; O. Leibovich, N. Shushkova, *Professional’nye soobshchestva za granitsami publichnosti*, “Otechestvennye zapiski,” 1 (46) (2012), pp. 94-103.

<sup>13</sup> E. Dobrenko, *Formovka sovetskogo pisatel’ia. Social’nye i esteticheskie istoki sovetskoi literaturnoi kul’tury*, pp. 406-410.

<sup>14</sup> A. Belinkov, *My poluchim druguiu literaturu (Po stenogramme vystuplenii na Mezhd-*

Internal reviewers within the Soviet writers' establishment, or those aspiring to join it, were often self-deceptive and would never admit to censoring works they reviewed. However, all these reviewers understood that internal reviews functioned as significant tools of power relations and that writing them meant directly participating in literary politics, regardless of whether they sought to promote or suppress the work.

Soviet "literary professionalism" had a distinctive contradiction established in Gorky's programmatic articles. Writers had to comply with normative requirements regarding language, style, composition, and ideology, while simultaneously being "perceptive," "sincere," and "original" in conveying life events. Gorky implied that genuine "observation of life" and "sincerity" would inevitably lead writers to recognize Bolshevik power's rightness, as stated in his article *On Socialist Realism* (1933).<sup>15</sup>

These requirements of normativity and "sincerity" or "originality" implicitly contradicted each other. Though this contradiction couldn't be openly discussed, Soviet editors, writers, and critics knew or intuitively sensed it. From the 1930s, the same work elements – episodes, metaphors, plot lines – could receive diametrically opposite evaluations: one reviewer might condemn them as norm violations requiring correction or manuscript rejection, while another might praise them as manifestations of "sincerity" or "originality" deserving support.

Consequently, participation in literary politics took different forms: strong support for young, non-established, or politically dubious authors with minimal criticism; detailed analysis addressing problematic elements while assuming publication remained possible with proposed changes; or harsh criticism that, given the reviewer's status, rendered works unpublishable or delayed publication for years.

In the following sections, I will analyze internal reviews as a distinctive element of Soviet literature as a cultural-political institution. I will examine how reviewers evaluated books, who could author such reviews, what social and cultural objectives they accomplished, and how they combined ideological criticism with textual analysis. I will also explore how internal reviews functioned as communication between literary elites and non-privileged writers, influencing publication histories. This analysis will demonstrate internal reviews' significant role in both implementing cultural policy from Soviet leadership and producing grassroots-level cultural policy.

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*narodnoi konferentsii po tsenzure. London, 1970*), in: A. Belinkov, N. Belinkova, *Raspria s vekom (V dva golosa)*, Moskva, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008, pp. 548-570, here pp. 550-551.

<sup>15</sup> A.M. Gorky, *O literature: Stat'i i rechi 1928-1935* gg., pp. 325-331.

## Time Period Under Study

This article examines internal reviews from the 1950s and 1960s because, starting in the mid-1950s, Soviet literature acquired new “rules of the game” that remained relevant throughout the late Soviet decades until the regime’s collapse. Vladimir Pomerantsev’s December 1953 article *On Sincerity in Literature* in “Novy Mir” became an early “Thaw” sign, sharply criticizing late Stalinist literature as “insincere,” lacking individuality, and insufficiently analytical. The 1950s and 1960s clearly displayed the ambiguity and contradiction between demands for normativity and originality mentioned previously. I focus primarily on materials from 1955-1970, as archival reading shows the system described here remained largely unchanged from 1970 until “Pere-stroika.”

## The Non-Anonymous System and Its Consequences

The first crucial point about the Soviet internal review is that both the review itself and the reviewed manuscripts were not actually anonymous. Internal reviews from the Stalin era, both published and preserved in archives, generally confirm this pattern. Such de-anonymization led to several important consequences. First, serious criticism intended to destroy or block publication of some text could only be possible in the situation of a consciously conducted “literary war” against an author being reviewed, or against a group to which they belonged. This could be a war of high-status figures against those whom they viewed as marginals, as well as a war between two or more high-status lobbying groups. Nevertheless, conceptual arguments relating to shortcomings of the text and its specific fragments were not themselves considered actions that could block future publishing. Everything depended on the quality of these arguments, the specific terms used to point to these shortcomings, and mainly on the final conclusion of an editor or editorial board made after internal reviews on a certain manuscript had been received and summarized.

In some cases, internal reviews were commissioned even when editors had no doubts that the manuscript should not be published because of its low literary quality, unoriginality, or irrelevance to the publishing house’s (or journal’s) specialization. If the author of a given manuscript was a famous poet or writer, or if their social, professional, or ideological background had high symbolic meaning, it would be inappropriate to disregard such a manuscript by writing just a polite rejection letter. The rejection should be well motivated. In this case, an extended internal review had to be commissioned.

For example, in 1956 the editorial staff of the newly established “Yunost” magazine received the manuscript of Volga-region writer Vassily Alferov (1898-1988), an author of dozens of poetry and prose books, and famous

songs performed by Volga region and Moscow choirs. In this case the editors had to commission an internal review. Its author, poet Evgeny Vinokurov, insisted that Alferov's stories were not age-appropriate for the magazine:

You see, the case is that the whole composition of Alferov's novella, its mood, its plotline – everything about it is addressed to middle-school children (and that is a major advantage of the manuscript). For the readers of "Yunost'," for people whose literary and life demands are quite high, Alferov's novella cannot be of great interest, as they are used to reading similar narratives elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

In this case, a purely formal pretext was used to reject the manuscript of an influential writer who could have caused a scandal if the review had stated, for example, that the novella was boring and based on clichéd situations and characters.

The practice of keeping the author's name on a reviewed manuscript could, in turn, lead to the reviewer basing their judgment on the already known reputation of the author and their previous publications. Of course, the status and position in different ideological games and wars were also taken into account.

On the level of content, a reviewer could allow themselves to be harsher and more open than in published reviews, on the level of formal organization, apart from general conceptual arguments, a reviewer could devote a significant part of a review to comments and notes on very specific text fragments.

Late Soviet reviewing differed from contemporary practices of peer-reviewing for one additional reason: the text that the reviewer received from a publishing house was not "clean" – it already contained traces of editing, editors' remarks proposing changes that needed to be made, etc. Thus, it would not be possible for a reviewer to remain impartial when making their judgment. Reviewers often mentioned in their evaluations that they supported the corrections proposed by the editors, even though they did not know who personally made these remarks. Sometimes they even suggested making the corrections more radical.

The writer Nikolay Nikitin who had a fairly high status in the Soviet hierarchy (in 1951 he received the Stalin Prize, for many years he was a deputy of the Leningrad City Council), noted in one of his 1960 internal reviews, after reading the manuscript:

Someone before me had read this story and left their notes in the margins. I completely agree with them. And even more than that, the entire manuscript could have been covered with corrections of this sort, from beginning to end, but evidently the reviewer who read it before me lacked both the strength and the patience. And I understand him.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> E. Vinokurov, *O rukopisi V. Alferova "Druzhba"*, RGALI, F. 2924, Op. 1, D. 59, L. 6.

<sup>17</sup> N. Nikitin, *Vnutrennie retsenzii*, RGALI, F. 2575, Op. 1, D. 92, L. 301.

## Literary Gatekeepers: The Professional Authority of Internal Reviewers

Who could be chosen as an internal reviewer? As far as we can gather from preserved materials, editorial offices had their own lists of external experts that they collected over years. These experts were offered this job primarily because they had previously fulfilled their tasks thoroughly without pushing deadlines too far. Sometimes this job was offered to people who could neither publish their works nor get permanent positions in any Soviet literary institution (nonconformist writers, dissidents, etc.). In magazines, this job was often taken on by editorial board members.

For example, a famous critic and literary scholar Alexander L'vovich Dymshits (1910-1975) wrote internal reviews on a regular basis for the magazines "Znamya" ("The Banner") and "Voprosy literatury" ("Problems of Literature") where he was a member of the editorial board since 1963 and 1964 respectively. At the same time, he composed reviews fulfilling orders from Goslitizdat, Moscow and Leningrad branches of the "Soviet Writer" publishing house, as well as "Sovremennik" ("The Contemporary"), "Khudozhestvennaya literatura" ("Fiction"), and others. Being a literary scholar, critic, and translator from German, Dymshits wrote reviews on fiction, new books of literary criticism, and academic monographs on literary theory and foreign literature. This wide range of topics was characteristic of literary scholars who participated in the internal reviewing process.

Reviews written by writers (even high-status and experienced ones) were often far less detailed and more impressionistic than reviews by literary scholars, critics, and editors. Sometimes it was hard to derive any straightforward recommendations for further rework from writers' reviews. Here is a typical fragment from an internal review by conservative and high-ranking Maria Prilezhaeva (1903-1989) on a novella by Nina Artiukhova *Svetlana*:

There are a lot of characters... You cannot even remember all of them. Svetlana's entire background, except for a few school-life inconveniences, is too smooth, and one can start doubting whether some things are ascribed to the character because of the author's kindness. Life in some turn of events is far harsher and more complicated than it is depicted in this kind and sweet book which fears and tries to avoid any problematic topics. It is appealing as it is. And if it had been written in another way, it would be different.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> RGALI, F. 2924, Op. 1, D. 59, L. 156. Despite this rather ambiguous assessment, Artiukhova's novella was published in 1961 and then republished many times (the newest edition known to me is from 2016).

Sometimes editors who worked for another publishing house or journal could become internal reviewers. In their recommendations for text rework, they not only mentioned things that needed to be corrected, eliminated, or added, but also gave recommendations on the ways in which the future editor should work with the author. One such review, on a novella by prose writer and translator Natalia Aroseva, was written in 1955 by Asya Berzer for “Yunost” (“The Youth”) magazine. At that time, Asya Berzer was the editor of “Znamya” journal, and before that she worked for “Literaturnaia Gazeta” (The Literary Newspaper) and the “Soviet Writer” publishing house. In the future, she would become the editor of “Oktiabr” (“October”) journal, and most importantly, for more than a decade served as Alexander Tvardovsky’s right hand at “Novy Mir” (“The New World”) – the most liberal literary journal of the “Thaw” period. Pointing out fragments and even entire plotlines which should be scaled down, Berzer finishes her review with the following passage: “Of course, the work on this novella should be soft and tender...”<sup>19</sup>

The work of internal reviewers was well paid. Sometimes people who worked as staff literary consultants were primarily occupied with writing reviews and answers to authors’ letters. But more often, a publishing house or magazine editorial commissioned and paid for each review separately. The rates differed depending on the volume of the manuscript read. Writing internal reviews was a profitable literary side-job opportunity.

### Internal Reviews as Communication Tools

Internal reviews could be addressed not only to the editorial staff but sometimes to the authors of the reviewed texts. The author of the review could separately ask the editorial to make the text of his review known to the reviewed author and even add a few lines personally addressing him or her. For example, Nikolay Atarov, while reviewing the prose book by a talented and underestimated writer Alexander Sharov, ended his text with a recommendation to eliminate the third part of the book that was made up of autobiographical essays. He concluded his recommendation with a personal appeal to the author:

The essays drag the book down. With the gloomy mood, in some places even with forced and blown out of proportion arguments, with ill-timed topics they become a threat to a perfectly composed collection – they draw our attention in the wrong direction. I can even argue that they confuse the reader. And knowing the sensitivity of the author I can say that these few lines would outweigh for him everything I said before about

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<sup>19</sup> A. Berzer, *Vnutrenniaia retsenziia na povest’ N. Arosevoi “Svetlye gody” (1955)*, RGALI, F. 2924, Op. 1, D. 59, L. 90.

the future book. I would appreciate it if he read the entire review. I have thought it over three times, and I wrote with the kindest intentions in mind.<sup>20</sup>

Other experts, by contrast, could reference in their internal reviews the fact that they had already discussed seemingly harsh and burdensome requirements with the author. For example, Mikhail Slonimsky wrote in his internal review of Viktor Konetsky's book: "I discussed all of this in detail with the author, and he agreed with me and consented to remove the chapters mentioned above."<sup>21</sup>

Reviews written for the "thick journals" were addressed to the editors themselves and also to the editorial board. That is why in these texts we can see how the reviewer appeals to his colleagues with proposals and arguments about changes needed in the regime of editorial work, about the composition of a certain issue, and about maintaining contacts and good relationships with some reviewed authors as they were important for the magazine.

Sometimes even editorial policies and general principles of publication were discussed. The above-mentioned Nikolay Nikitin wrote in his internal review to the editors of "Druzhba narodov" ("Friendship of Nations") journal—focused on translations of fiction and poetry from the non-Russian languages of the USSR into Russian addressed more than a single specific story. He moved to general methodological questions on which a coordinated decision by the editorial board is needed – not only on this specific occasion, but at the level of changing editorial policy:

By the way, this is a fundamental question. We take translations. But do we check them against the original? Doesn't it turn out that the translator gives us the "content" of a phrase without its aesthetics... Do they convey the style of the work to us, or do they limit themselves to conveying meaning – that is, do they give only a "protocol translation"... So, if we're taking a story, we need to think about this not as a secondary concern, but as a primary one. Otherwise, i.e., with a formal attitude toward language, we deprive the work of that aroma which is inherent to it. Conclusion: I am for this story. But the thought about translation troubles me.<sup>22</sup>

Sometimes manuscripts reached internal reviewers without being received or registered in the publishing house first, and probably without the author contacting any publishing house. In such cases the author wanted to secure support

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<sup>20</sup> N. Atarov, *Retsenziia na knigu A. Sharova "Povesti vospominanii" (1969)*, RGALI, F. 3208, Op. 1, D. 294, L. 16.

<sup>21</sup> I.S. Kuz'michev, E.M. Gushanskaja, *Redaktirovanie hudozhestvennoj literatury: Istoricheskij aspekt*, p. 228.

<sup>22</sup> N. Nikitin, *Vnutrennie retsenzii*, RGALI, F. 2575, Op. 1, D. 92, L. 97.

before submitting their manuscript to the publishing house and make sure of the quality of their work. Sometimes the manuscript was transferred for review straight from the publishing house or a department of the Writers Union secretly, to get a convincing conclusion and, in some cases, to talk the author out of submitting their manuscript to the publishing house. That is what probably happened with the prose collection *City-Dwellers (Gorozhane)* written by four Leningrad writers: Igor Efimov, Vladimir Maramzin, Boris Vakhtin, and Vladimir Gubin. Actually, all of them made up a literary group with the same name and often performed in Leningrad in the early 1960s with public readings of their works. Later all of them became famous writers, and two of them, Efimov and Maramzin, emigrated. All four authors belonged to unofficial literature that rejected the demands of Soviet ideology and Socialist Realism.

This group prepared the typewritten collection of short stories and novellas. It was sent for review to Vera Ketlinskaya, and her review included an analysis of each work, as well as characteristics of each of the authors. This review was almost 20 pages long and was introduced with the following clarification:

This is not a review for a publishing house, nor is it a public statement, but my comments and thoughts addressed to the four authors only. They do not oblige the authors to anything except for reading them carefully and thinking through them without impetuosity but being self-critical and demanding to a degree that is crucial for every person of letters who wishes to dedicate himself to the complicated profession of a writer. And that leaves me full power to speak without thinking about my evaluations harming the authors in any way or influencing the fate of the manuscript.<sup>23</sup>

This demonstration of confidence was essential for Ketlinskaya to solve a complex task that was both social and psychological: she found the collection's authors appealing and interesting as people and considered them talented writers – especially Vladimir Maramzin – but simultaneously she was shocked by the bleak, existentialist, sometimes even absurdist picture of Soviet life that the contributors consistently presented in their works. Ketlinskaya clearly did not want her review to be perceived as a denunciation; therefore, she simultaneously criticized the authors for their overly “physiological” perception of human life and admonished them to write differently. The reviewer sought to demonstrate that she positioned herself not as a censor or controller, but rather as someone who sympathized with and supported the young writers. However, her message was clear: the collection could not be submitted for publication in its current condition. The second internal review, written by Leningrad writer Alexander Rozen, was positive, but the collection *City-Dwellers* was never published.

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<sup>23</sup> V.K. Ketlinskaya, *Vnutrennie recenzii*, RGALI, F. 2816, Op. 1, D. 73, L. 32.

The triangle between author, editor, and internal reviewer could be complex and tense. Sometimes internal reviewers addressed young and unknown authors directly, demanding changes to their work or literary manner and warning that otherwise they would not be accepted into the professional literary world. Sometimes the internal review was addressed primarily to the editor, who was expected to urge the author to be more flexible and attentive to the reviewer's remarks.

In 1963, Leningrad writer Leonid Rakhmanov reviewed a collection by Reed Grachev. Rakhmanov was well-known but not highly privileged – notably, he wasn't a Communist Party member. Reed Grachev (real name Reed Vite) was one of Leningrad's most promising young prose writers in the 1960s but stopped writing in the early 1970s due to mental illness. Grachev's prose puzzled Rakhmanov: it lacked the striking modernist style and vivid metaphors characteristic of 1960s "youth prose," yet contained noticeable descriptions of strange mental states and altered consciousness. Rakhmanov's review addressed both the editors and the author, intimidating Grachev by suggesting that failure to minimize psychedelic elements would prevent publication:<sup>24</sup>

I hope that the author will carefully consider my comments and listen to my friendly advice, otherwise I think his encounter with readers will be marred by various surprises, or may not even happen in the near future.<sup>25</sup>

Simultaneously, Rakhmanov demanded that editors help Grachev get published – probably suspecting that otherwise the writer would gain prominence in uncensored literature and become uncontrollable:

If we want to lead this gifted young writer out of the thicket of psychology, sometimes even psychopathology... we must not dismiss [the novella] "Business Trip," but rather interest the author in its creative revision.<sup>26</sup>

## Literary Education and Management of Mass Submissions

Within the Soviet system of publishing houses and literary journals (and sometimes within particular sections of newspapers and journals), there were some that had been created with the task of searching for, developing, and making visible new generations of writers. In this case internal reviews became means of communication with and literary education of young authors, and corre-

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<sup>24</sup> I.S. Kuz'michev, E.M. Gushanskaja, *Redaktirovanie hudozhestvennoj literatury: Istoricheskij aspekt*, p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 231.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 234.

sponding journals and publishing houses invited many experts to work intensively on reading manuscripts and producing needed expertise. This interest from elites in youth became substantially more noticeable in the 1950s-60s, when the social-psychological mobilization of younger generations became a crucial direction of Soviet domestic policy. At this time, the concept of “literary education,” implemented under Gorky’s leadership in the first half of the 1930s, was revived at a new level.

This was the case with the magazine “Yunost” launched in 1956. The editors and reviewers who were invited to perform this role were supposed to establish distinct levels of literary professionalism that implied possession of precise skills in building plot, conflict, character systems, and elaborating appropriate stylistic manner. This was especially needed when dealing with amateur or non-professional writers who submitted their manuscripts unsolicited through the mail. In this case reviewers focused considerable attention on originality – seeking new voices, fresh ideas, and innovative elements that should ideally be present in the manuscripts under review. When they failed to find such qualities, reviewers often stated this directly, expecting their assessment to be communicated to the author, and often were not afraid to seem too tough and rude.

For instance, Boris Kamir, deputy editor-in-chief of Detgiz publishing house, wrote about young writer A. Anishchenko’s novel *The Tragedy of Igor Samokhin*:

The trouble is not that these motifs, already used more than once in literature, were taken. The fundamental flaw lies in the fact that in solving these problems, the author failed to introduce a single living touch, not a single fresh detail that would distinguish this story from dozens like it in any way. <...> The entire narrative bears the imprint of leveling, of mediocre indifference. Commonplace figures move through familiar circumstances, stripped of distinctive features or personal characteristics. One feels that there is no deep penetration into the characters and into those phenomena in which they manifest themselves in this literary work.<sup>27</sup>

The task of sorting out and responding to a mass flow of submissions led to a series of practices that presumed that not all texts received by editorials or publishing houses were subject to internal reviewing. People working as assistant editors, employees of letter departments, or literary consultants had to sort through all incoming manuscripts. In case the text looked hopelessly commonplace, the assistant editor could address the author directly with a short letter, not sending the manuscript to a reviewer. This unrewarding work took a lot of time and effort. For example, Lev Shubin (mentioned above), who worked as an assistant editor at the “Soviet Writer” publishing house in

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<sup>27</sup> RGALI, F. 2924, Op. 1, D. 59, L. 9-12, here p. 9-10.

the 1960s and 1970s, during some periods of his work, had to read through all incoming correspondence. He told his friends that he was required to read at least 300 pages daily. As a result of this enormous load, he got so exhausted that he had to temporarily leave his work.<sup>28</sup>

### The Interrelation of Aesthetics and Politics

Internal reviews, unless aimed at unconditional support, were typically written from the position of someone more experienced, better educated, and – most importantly – more politically astute. In this context, the three levels of competence might not be distinguished separately, and remarks about style could easily flow into comments about implausibility, excessive “naturalism,” or insufficient “psychologism.” Comments about character development or authorial position could be read as political claims: a reviewer might accuse a young author of taking “too passive” a position, meaning failing to provide clear ideological evaluations of characters’ actions. Criticism of “naturalism” and “psychologism” also carried ideological meaning: beginning in the 1930s, these labels stigmatized Western modernist influence or excessively realistic descriptions of Soviet everyday life.

Thus, criticisms of aesthetic shortcomings would seamlessly transition into identifying politically problematic aspects. For example, playwright Mikhail Musienko, reviewing writer G. Abakumov’s play in early 1956, first criticized how the author’s desire to generalize freed him “from the necessity of deeply studying a specific country, its customs, morals, life, and people.”<sup>29</sup> This approach placed significant obligations on Abakumov – “to choose phenomena for portrayal that would be equally characteristic of any capitalist country.”<sup>30</sup> As a result, the country becomes recognizable as the United States, and the entire plot (American “reactionaries” kidnap a Soviet citizen; a Soviet embassy employee and American communist organize a protest demonstration) begins to sound politically questionable.

Unfortunately, Abakumov’s drama is based on the author’s invention, which, from the standpoint of the possibility of such a situation, raises no objections, but does cause serious concerns that our enemies will find weak points in this invention and turn Abakumov’s drama against Abakumov himself.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> From oral memoirs of Shubin’s friend Ella Kukulina, 2025.

<sup>29</sup> RGALI, F. 2924, Op. 1, D. 59, L. 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> RGALI, F. 2924, Op. 1, D. 59, L. 43.

Apparently, Abakumov's play continued the anti-American stylistics abundant during the 1948-1953 "struggle against servility before the West," but by 1956, after Soviet leadership's transition to less aggressive foreign policy rhetoric, such ideological messaging was inappropriate. Since discussing this political shift was impossible, Musienko transferred responsibility to "our enemies."<sup>32</sup>

### Managing Literary Politics Through Editorial Communication

For some participants in the late Soviet literary process, internal reviews became highly effective tools for influencing literary politics. Since these reviews remained unpublished and their contents rarely circulated, this form of literary-political participation operated in a "backroom" fashion, if not entirely in secret.

Vasily Abgarovich Katanyan (1902-1980) – writer, critic, and leading Soviet scholar of Vladimir Mayakovsky – exemplifies this phenomenon. In 1958, Katanyan received a commission to review a book by Alexey Metchenko, the notorious Soviet literary scholar who headed the Department of Contemporary Literature at Moscow State University. "Metchenko was the main official specialist on Mayakovsky's work. Through his efforts, Mayakovsky's path in literature was turned into a story of the poet 'overcoming' the [allegedly] fruitless futurism with which he had been 'afflicted' in his youth."<sup>33</sup> The book under review was titled *Vladimir Mayakovsky: An Essay on His Creative Work*. The reviewer and reviewed clearly belonged to opposing literary camps and embodied diametrically different professional ethics regarding literary scholarship and preferred writing models.

Recognizing the impossibility of preventing Metchenko's publication, Katanyan crafted an extensive twenty-page review with detailed analysis. He opened by declaring:

A schematic understanding of the literary process, primitive literary analysis of Mayakovsky's works, an extremely weak grasp of poetic technique, inexpressive language abounding in bureaucratic clichés almost completely deprive the book of significance as a work of literary scholarship. Basically, this is a compendium of all the prevailing

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<sup>32</sup> On this wave of anti-American plays, see in detail: V. Gudkova, "Mnogikh etim vozdukhom i proskvozilo...": *antiamerikanskii motivy v sovetskoi dramaturgii (1946-1954)*, "Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie," 95 (2009), pp. 187-216.

<sup>33</sup> E. Dobrenko, *Kraeugol'nyj kamen' sovetskoi literatury: RAPP i literaturny process 1920-30-kh godov kak predmet izucheniia (istoriograficheskoe vvedenie)*, "Slavic Literatures," 146-148 (2024), p. 10.

notions in our criticism about Mayakovsky's work, interpreted in the spirit of maximum favorability toward the great poet.<sup>34</sup>

After providing an extensive list of required edits, factual corrections, and interpretive problems, he concluded with a recommendation to the editors: "...all the cuts that can be made in this book will serve to improve it."<sup>35</sup> Katanyan's efforts succeeded partially – Metchenko's book appeared only in 1964, six years later than originally planned.

Particularly intriguing are cases of systematic internal reviewers who preserved copies and drafts of nearly all their reviews. For experts like Alexander Dymshits, internal reviews far outnumbered published ones. High-ranking writers such as Vera Ketlinskaya worked on internal reviews with remarkable intensity. Archival evidence suggests that figures like Dymshits found this mode of literary-political participation far more effective than publishing critical reviews systematically. Ketlinskaya's archive demonstrates that she viewed her constant evaluation of fiction – primarily for Leningrad publishing houses and magazines – as a means of influencing literary politics. Her internal reviews significantly alter our understanding of her role in Leningrad literary life and individual writers' careers during the 1960s and 1970s, revealing what might be termed "professional authors of internal reviews."

Sometimes editorial staff with particularly close relationships would consult authors about potential reviewers before commissioning internal reviews. This practice aimed to secure successful manuscript processing through expert institutions, especially for authors of uncertain status. Editors might seek competent, sympathetic critics who could suggest the most convincing revision strategies when reworking seemed essential. In 1962, editor Arkadiy Milchin wrote to Oleg Riss:

Could it be that in these circumstances we should consult a smart and knowing person? If this person was to live in Leningrad, it would be perfect. We would send him the manuscript, and you could personally meet him and talk through everything. Who would you see as fittest for this role? Could B[oris] Ya[kovlevich] Bukhshtab be any good?<sup>36</sup>

Boris Bukhshtab (1904-1985) was an established literary scholar specializing in critical editions of nineteenth-century Russian writers.

When ideologically or aesthetically questionable works reached publishing houses, outcomes often depended on the responsible editor or editorial

<sup>34</sup> V. Katanyan, *Vnutrennie retsenzii*, RGALI, F. 2577, Op. 1, D. 671, L. 24.

<sup>35</sup> V. Katanyan, *Vnutrennie retsenzii*, RGALI, F. 2577, Op. 1, D. 671, L. 47.

<sup>36</sup> A.E. Milchin, *Chelovek knigi. Zapiski glavnogo redaktora*, p. 289.

group, or even the publishing house head for famous authors. “Liberal” editors or those sympathetic to particular authors sometimes found reviewers who would write favorable internal reviews, providing grounds for publication recommendations. Conversely, editors-in-chief occasionally sought reviewers certain to disapprove proposed books or recommend radical revisions.

The most notorious episode occurred in 1963 when Nikolay Lesiuchevsky, former editor-in-chief and then board head of “Soviet Writer” publishing house, commissioned a harsh internal review of Anna Akhmatova’s poetry collection from conservative critic Evgeniya Knipovich. Akhmatova’s collaborator Lidia Chukovskaya, upon receiving a copy, was horrified that this was an unpublished, “internal” review – essentially “a stab in the back”<sup>37</sup> – rather than a published piece that could be countered by authoritative writers like Korney Chukovsky or Konstantin Paustovsky. This threatened not only the current collection but Akhmatova’s future publishing prospects. Understanding that both Lesiuchevsky and Knipovich were responding to the party leadership’s new demands articulated during Nikita Khrushchev’s March 7-8, 1963 meeting with Soviet intelligentsia (marking a neoconservative cultural policy shift), Chukovskaya consulted fellow writer Konstantin Fedin. After reading Knipovich’s review, Fedin rendered his verdict:

Well, they don’t need any proof,” answered Konstantin Alexandrovich. They understand each other without words. This isn’t about the degree of persuasiveness, but about the power of names: Lesiuchevsky ordered it, Knipovich carried out the order. Korney Ivanovich’s opinion is just empty noise to them. Even though he’s an expert on Akhmatova and Russian poetry in general, Lesiuchevsky needs Knipovich’s signature specifically, no one else’s.<sup>38</sup>

Fedin proved unable to help Akhmatova. The original collection was never published; instead, *The Flight of Time* appeared in 1965 as Akhmatova’s final lifetime edition, excluding the most politically provocative and aesthetically experimental works from the “killed” collection.

Internal reviews demonstrate how permanent staff reviewers sometimes fought for years to publish stylistically and intellectually original books. Editor and critic Lev Shubin’s posthumously published papers contain internal reviews of works he sought to bring to publication – books published many years after they were written, including Miron Petrovsky’s methodologically

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<sup>37</sup> L. Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, in 3 vols, vol. 3: 1963-1966, Moskva, Soglasie, 1997, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 66.

innovative *Poetic Thought of Samuil Marshak* (1971; never published)<sup>39</sup> and Georgy Gachev's *National Images of the World*, a comparative essay on mythological images in different Eurasian literatures, published in 1988 during perestroika after Shubin's death.<sup>40</sup>

These reviews demonstrate how difficult it was for Shubin to defend "dubious" authors under Soviet conditions. Petrovsky's methodology—analyzing children's poet Samuil Marshak's poetics through structuralism and child psychology—was ideologically suspect in 1971. Shubin appealed to Soviet collectivist ideals, arguing that Petrovsky's analysis showed Marshak's poetry creating a "collective image of the people" where the "folk" hero "always wins a moral victory"<sup>41</sup>—a strategy for presenting the nonconformist Petrovsky as ideologically acceptable. Shubin insisted that Petrovsky's work contributed to scientific knowledge: "The world as seen by Marshak is a new knowledge about the world. This is what M. Petrovsky's work is about." Unfortunately, this rhetoric failed to help either Shubin or Petrovsky in 1971.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Shubin resorted to circuitous arguments when advocating in 1983 for Gachev's book, written on a controversial topic in a provocative, essayistic, non-academic style. Shubin first argued the book suited "Soviet Writer" publishing house: "The study of the national character of our literatures is one of the most important topics... for our publishing house."<sup>43</sup> He then listed well-known Soviet scholars (Evgeny Feinberg, Samarii Velikovskiy, Dmitry Likhachev) who had defended Gachev's right to write on his chosen topics in their internal reviews. Finally, Shubin appealed to editors' conscience, transparently hinting that delayed publication would allow other authors to appropriate Grachev's ideas from the manuscript, since the author was modest and couldn't defend his priority.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Part of this book was included in Petrovsky's heavily censored work *Books of Our Childhood*—the first non-based on the Soviet ideology cultural-historical study of Soviet children's literature. This work was first published in 1986, and the uncensored version was released only in 2006. It is approximately one and a half times larger than the first edition.

<sup>40</sup> Lev Shubin died in 1983.

<sup>41</sup> L.A. Shubin, *Poiski smysla otdel'nogo i obshhego sushchestvovaniia*, Moskva, Sovetskij Pisatel', 1987, p. 335.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 336.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 357.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 362-363.

### The Role of Internal Reviews in the Editorial Process

If the manuscript was accepted for publishing on the condition of reworking the text according to notes given by reviewers and editors, further processing depended on regulations of certain publishing houses or editorials. In some cases, the reworked text was once more sent to at least one of the reviewers to get confirmation that it was actually reworked according to the comments made, and now it could be accepted for publication. Sometimes an editor took this task upon themselves, and in this second case the editor's initiative, as well as their new editorial report, was an attempt to neutralize or block out reviewers whose unfavorable attitudes towards the author or their texts could cause damage to future publishing. The elimination of the second round of reviewing could stem from the idea to save time both for the reviewers who would have to do a lot of work once again and for the author who would have to wait a couple more months until their manuscript would be included in the publishing plan.

Internal reviewing as a stage of processing the manuscript was finished in journals with the decision made by the editorial board, and in publishing houses with making an editorial report based on the main points of the internal reviews. This report was usually written by an editor who was responsible for working with a certain author. The editor could give an expanded evaluation of precise arguments of the reviewers and point out which of them they considered the most useful for reworking and the most important for decision-making about future publication. Moreover, at this stage as well the editor could try to neutralize some of the negative statements of the reviewers.

This is how the editor of the publishing house "The Soviet Writer" Z. Odintsova does in her final editorial report to the manuscript of Alexander Sharov's *Novellas of Memories*:

Both reviewers pointed out how talented the writing is. At the same time, they express serious concerns. The harshest arguments are expressed by L[eonid] Kudrevatykh. The critic writes: "A. Sharov, in his new book, when acting out as a humanist who is fighting against violence and cold-heartedness, but whether he wishes it or not, he rather looks resentful, and even cruel." There is some truth to this observation by L. Kudrevatykh. Precisely 'some,' because, in my opinion, it would be better to talk not about resentment, but about tragic worldview of the writer. There is a real ground for this: gangster attacks, casting a shadow on his childhood, ghetto, Auschwitz, Treblinka... And even in his memories, not connected to these tragic events, you can see a sad mood...<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Z. Odintsova, *Redaktorskoe zaklyuchenie na knigu A. Sharova "Povesti vospominanii"* (1969), RGALI, F. 3208, Op. 1, D. 294, L. 38.

This is how the “cruelty” and “resentfulness” ascribed to Sharov by the reviewer – a conservative and high-status Soviet writer and journalist hostile to Sharov as a westernizer and critically minded author inclined to question the principles of Soviet common sense – is turned by the editor into just a “tragic worldview” justified by the circumstances of his past.

### Conclusion: Literary Normalization and Cultural Conservation

The great unstudied archipelago of Soviet internal reviews itself shows what immense, ideologically protective and conservative cultural work was conducted in Soviet editorials and publishing houses on a daily basis. This is especially true about the beginning and middle of the 1960s when numerous initiatives of writers belonging to different groups and generations were shut down at the stage of internal reviewing. This was done in the sphere of constructing historical memory of Stalin’s repressions, in the works where the subject of the narrative was being addressed, and directly in relation to individual writing styles. This suppression is clearly evident in the story of Knipovich’s review of Akhmatova’s collection, as described above.

Internal reviews demonstrate how some authors became in their published books far more loyal and conventional than they initially intended to be, and how some others were pushed out of the field of official literature, into unofficial or uncensored literature.

This large corpus of texts shows how many aesthetically trivial, intellectually invalid, and even ideologically primitive works of fiction, literary criticism, and literary scholarship successfully passed the stage of internal reviewing.

Internal reviews constituted both a highly stable and internally flexible speech genre. What remained stable in internal reviews was the relationship between addressee and recipient, which can be described through unity of purpose: an internal review is always an emotionally and ideologically evaluative statement, presupposing cooperation between the writer (reviewer) and reader (editor) regarding the author, who occupied a position in this system that was, if not subordinate, then alienated (see main features of the speech genre in: Bakhtin). Internal review of late Soviet time was not a peer-review and never pretended to be it. Reviewers and editors wielded the power of the “final word” (Bakhtin’s term) in relation to the author.

Internal reviews constituted, moreover, a paradoxical genre. They combined professional reading and textual commentary, to the extent that each reviewer could manage – with the consolidation and reinforcement of Soviet literature’s hierarchical structure as a social institution. Even such reviewers

as Lev Shubin, who supported nonconformist authors, were compelled to accept this hierarchical structure as an inevitable condition of Soviet editorial work.

### Abstract

#### Between Professionalism and Censorship: Internal Reviews and the Hidden Politics of Soviet Literary Culture

The Soviet literary and editorial system from the late 1950s through the 1980s operated through a complex network of institutions that integrated literary creation with ideological control. At the center of this framework was the practice of internal reviews (*vnutrennie retsenzii*), which were expert evaluations of manuscripts commissioned by publishing houses and literary journals as a mandatory stage in the editorial process. Unlike Western peer review, these internal reviews functioned simultaneously as professional literary assessment, ideological screening, and a confidential channel of communication between authors, editors, and political authorities. Drawing on extensive archival materials from publishing houses and journals, this article analyzes internal reviews as a flexible speech genre that reveals the intersection of aesthetic judgment and political control in Soviet literary culture. The study examines how internal reviewers, including established writers, literary scholars, and cultural bureaucrats, wielded significant influence over publication decisions through supposedly objective professional evaluation. By analyzing the genre conventions, institutional functions, and communication patterns of internal reviews, this article demonstrates how Soviet cultural policy was implemented not only through official censorship but also through the everyday practices of literary communication. The analysis reveals the complex power dynamics within Soviet literary institutions and shows how ideological requirements were often masked as aesthetic and professional standards.

**Keywords:** Soviet cultural institutions; internal reviews; editorial practices; speech genres; literary censorship; Socialist Realism; publishing history; archival analysis