LITERARY TRANSLATION AND SOVIET CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE 1930S: THE ROLE OF THE JOURNAL
INTERNACIONAL’NAJA LITERATURA

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Abstract
Until the late 1930s, the import, translation and dissemination of foreign literature in the Soviet Union was surprisingly free. Archival documents demonstrate that individual translators and successive editors of the journal Internatsional’naia literatura (International Literature) played a key role in selecting foreign literary works for translation and publication. Viewed in part as an instrument of foreign policy, Internatsional’naia literatura operated far more independently than any other literary periodical of its day. Through careful manoeuvring and extensive correspondence with foreign writers and the Party elite, the editors of Internatsional’naia literatura were able to hold off the pressures of centralisation and cultural isolationism for significantly longer than was possible in relation to domestic literature.
Keywords: Literary Translation; Soviet Cultural Politics; 1930s; ‘Internatsional’naia literatura’; Thick Journals

During the 1930s, a period characterised by marked shifts in Soviet attitudes toward the West and by the growing centralisation of cultural activity under the creative unions, translated literature offered eager Soviet readers surprisingly rich and diverse information about contemporary literary activity.
and cultural life in the West. Translations of contemporary Western literature were published occasionally in “thick journals” such as Znamja (The Banner), Novyj mir (The New World), Oktjabr’ (October) and Za rubežom (Abroad), and sometimes also in book form, usually after their publication in periodical editions. However, Soviet readers’ main source of information about literary and cultural life outside the Soviet Union was Internacional’naja literatura (International Literature), a monthly “thick journal” that began publication in 1928 under the title Vesti’ inostrannoj literatury (The Herald of Foreign Literature) and that was published for a decade and a half before being closed by order of the Politburo on 18 February 1943. As the only Soviet periodical of its era devoted entirely to contemporary translated literature, Internacional’naja literatura represents an invaluable source of information about the reception of foreign literature and the politics of literary translation in the Soviet Union during the Stalin period.

Despite its enormous cultural significance, however, Internacional’naja literatura has yet to receive concerted scholarly attention in Russia or in the West. After its closure, the journal fell into oblivion and was largely forgotten by Soviet scholars, in part because many of its leading editors and staff members were repressed during the purges of the late 1930s. In the post-Soviet period, a few general interest articles have provided some insight into the history and development of Internacional’naja literatura, but a comprehensive analysis of the journal’s important place in the cultural landscape and cultural politics of the 1930s has yet to be undertaken.

Drawing upon original archival materials, this article considers three interrelated issues: first, the position of foreign literature in the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1930s, as reflected in the process of importing and distributing foreign books and other printed materials; second, the history of Internacional’naja literatura and interactions between its editors and the Soviet authorities; and third, the journal’s communications with and publication of contemporary Western authors, including a number whose works were apolitical or even (from the Party’s standpoint) ideologically dubious. Careful analysis of these issues will help to shed light on the question of how a journal devoted to contemporary translated literature could exist in the Soviet Union during the Stalin period. Moreover, close examination of the activities of Internacional’naja literatura will demonstrate that the translation and publication of foreign literature complicate the familiar picture of Soviet cultural policies of the 1930s, with specific relation to notions of increasing cultural isolationism and centralised control over cultural activities.

Importing Foreign Literature to the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1930s

A journal devoted to contemporary foreign literature could not possibly have existed without regular access to books, journals and newspapers from
abroad. Before embarking on a discussion of the history and activities of Internacional’naja literatura, therefore, it is necessary to address the as yet under-researched question of how foreign literature reached the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1930s, and how it found its way into the hands of translators, scholars and publishers. Through careful examination of a range of sources, it is possible to discern two distinct phases in this process. The first phase begins in the immediate post-revolutionary period and extends through the years of the New Economic Policy (1922-1928), while the second begins with the introduction of the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932) and continues through the late 1930s.

During the earliest years of the Bolshevik regime, the import of foreign books – once familiar reading material for Russia’s cultural elite, Tsarist censorship notwithstanding – slowed to a trickle. Together, the nationalisation of printing houses, book warehouses and bookshops in 1918 and the military and cultural blockade of Soviet Russia during the civil war closed off many routes for importing foreign literature. Both economic devastation and cultural isolation led to a sharp decline in the translation of foreign literature as well: while some 134 foreign books were translated in 1918, in 1921 this number had dropped to a paltry 19.5

The unfavourable situation surrounding foreign book imports began to change as early as 1921, however, with the establishment of the Central Inter-agency Committee for the Purchase and Distribution of Foreign Literature (Центральная межведомственная комиссия по закупке и распределению иностранной литературы, or KOMINOLIT). As its name suggests, KOMINOLIT’s functions were:

[…] to receive from abroad all types of literature necessary for the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic in all fields of knowledge, […] to concentrate all foreign literature in corresponding scientific institutions and libraries and to organise the rational use of foreign literature by all institutions and individuals.6

During KOMINOLIT’s brief existence (it was abolished in 1922), in principle it was charged with obtaining “all types of [foreign] literature”. In practice, however, far greater emphasis was placed on up-to-date technical and scientific publications and periodical editions than on belles-lettres.7 At
much the same time, regular book exchanges between Soviet libraries and scientific institutions and their counterparts in various Western European countries and the United States began to be established. Again, though, greatest emphasis was placed on obtaining foreign scientific and technical, as well as political and anti-religious, publications through such exchanges.8

During the NEP years, however, this situation changed markedly. As the state returned temporarily to a market economy and cultural links with the West were revived, there was a sharp increase in the number of foreign books translated and published in Russian: more than 600 literary translators were active at the time, and around 800 translated books were published in Russian in 1927 alone. In obtaining foreign literature for translation and publication, as well as for individual readers who could read foreign literature in the original, private and co-operative book trading organisations played a crucial role. These organisations were permitted to conduct business with foreign firms, but they were obliged to obtain a special licence from the People’s Commissariat of External Trade (Narodnyj komissariat vnešnej torgovli, or NKVT) and also to negotiate with the NKVT about the sums of currency they could spend on foreign books.9 Organisations that were not provided with hard currency were dependent on other means of obtaining foreign books, including “dispatches from the Soviet book acquisitions commission operating […] in Germany” and assistance from private individuals (including “sympathetic foreign socialists”) who donated foreign books to them.10

Like its Soviet counterpart, foreign literature was subject to censorship, which was carried out under the auspices of the Main Directorate for Literary and Publishing Affairs (Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatel’stv, or Glavlit). Glavlit’s subsidiary Foreign Department (Inotdel) had specific responsibility “for reviewing material printed abroad for possible import to the Soviet Union” and imposed “rather strict limitations” on foreign publications.11 The actual ‘Položenie o Glavlit’ (‘Regulations of Glavlit’, 1922) contained only loose guidelines as to what should be censored, however, and made no specific reference to the handling of foreign literature:

Цензурай запрещается издание и распространение произведений, содержащих агитацию против Советской власти, разглашающих военные тайны Республики, возбуждающих национальный и религиозный фанатизм и носящих порнографический характер.12

The publication and dissemination of works containing agitation against Soviet power, revealing military secrets of the Republic, inciting ethnic and religious fanaticism, and having a pornographic nature, is prohibited by censorship.

Moreover, as Michael David-Fox observes, “the way Inotdel evaluated books for import did not seem to follow any strict system”, typically mixing “a
range of political, ideological and aesthetic considerations in a one- or two-sentence review”. Thus, until the late 1920s, there were no specific ideological obstacles to the import of foreign literature into the Soviet Union, and so the quantity and quality of foreign literature reaching Soviet readers depended largely on the financial resources of book-trading firms and on the initiative of individuals who travelled abroad.

In the late 1920s, however, the situation changed once again. As Robert Service observes, during this period “planning as a concept acquired a great vogue around the world”. In the Soviet Union, this concept was applied broadly to the Soviet economy and society as a whole. Formally, the principles of planning could be applied to the import of foreign literature, just as they were to other areas of economic and cultural activity. Indeed, the possibility of planning and regulating literary imports attracted the enthusiastic support of a range of writers, critics and translators, most of whom belonged to the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (Rossijskaja asociacija proletarskich pisatelej, or RAPP), which was the main organisation of writers in Soviet Russia until 1932. In various RAPP-controlled journals, a series of articles was published in which the lack of an orderly process of importing foreign literature was criticised sharply. For example, in a 1929 article Nadežda Rykova, a translator who would later become head of the Foreign Division of the State Literary Publishing House (Goslitizdat), railed that:

С того самого момента, как на почве нэп, т.е. приблизительно с 1922 года, расцвели наши частные издательства, мы знаем, что с переводной литературой у нас неблагополучно […] В самом деле, самый отсталый вид импорта у нас — импорт литературный: он регулируется, но принципом плановости почти не затронут.

From the very moment that our private publishing houses burst forth on the soil of NEP, that is, approximately since 1922, we have known that [the situation] with translated literature here is less than ideal. […] In actual fact, literary import is the most backward type of import we have: it is regulated, but it is practically untouched by the principle of planning.

Around the same time, a regular column began to appear in the specialist journal Krasnyj bibliotekar’ (Red Librarian), devoted to “list[ing] and annotat[ing] titles, including foreign ones, [that were] not recommended for public libraries”.

Despite insistent suggestions from cultural figures that the import of foreign literature required strict planning and control, however, the authorities took a rather moderate approach to this problem. The reason for this was largely economic: because the First Five Year Plan would have been impossible to fulfil without support from the West, the authorities were re-
luctant to impose measures that would result in the cultural and technological isolation of the Soviet Union. On one hand, new regulations adopted in 1931 gave Glavlit specific authority over “the prohibition and permission of the import and export of literature”, while the closure of private book-trading firms and, in 1932, the founding of the enterprise International Book (Meždunarodnaja kniga) centralised book trade with the West. On the other hand, though, the authorities still allowed individuals to bring books into the Soviet Union from abroad and to receive them from foreign acquaintances.

As in the 1920s, furthermore, censorship of foreign literature continued to be rather unsystematic. In all likelihood, most foreign literature obtained through private channels (that is, avoiding International Book and other official organisations) was not censored at all. In addition, the assessment and censorship of foreign literature that reached the Soviet Union via official channels was hampered by the fact that Glavlit suffered chronic shortages of staff members who knew foreign languages. It was only in 1933 that Glavlit head (and one-time militant RAPPist) Boris Volin reported to the Politburo:

Glavlit is finally censoring all the foreign press that reaches the Union. There is a sizeable group of workers who know several languages apiece and who work both in the Post Office and in the Glavlit apparatus.

Consequently, during the first decade of its existence, Glavlit was unable to censor all foreign literary imports, regardless of the channels by which these reached the Soviet Union. Even after Volin’s declaration, moreover, imports of Western literature into the Soviet Union faced no serious obstacles. This situation persisted through the end of 1937, when – as part of the sweeping wave of repressions often referred to as the Great Terror – Glavlit was thoroughly purged and its head, Sergej Ingulov, subheads and other staff members were arrested. At this time, the authorities expressed particular dissatisfaction with the work of the Department of Foreign Censorship. In a note dated 22 November 1937 and addressed to Stalin and other Politburo members, Lev Mechlis, the head of the Printing Department of the Central Committee, observed as follows:

Важнейшие участки Главлита – военная цензура, отдел иностранной литературы, Главная Инспекция находились в руках врагов народа. [...] Такие важнейшие участки Главлита, как отдел иностранной литературы (Садыков), сектор контроля за книготор-
The most important divisions of Glavlit — military censorship, the department of foreign literature, [and] the Chief Inspectorate — were in the hands of enemies of the people. [...] Crucial Glavlit divisions such as the department of foreign literature (Sadykov) [and] the section for control over the book-trading network and libraries (Čurin) are headed up by politically unreliable people.

Mechlis’s note became the basis for a Central Committee resolution ‘O političeskom položenii v GLAVLITE’ (‘On the Political Situation in the Main Department of Literature and Publishing’), which effectively brought an end to the relatively free import of foreign literature through official channels.

As this survey demonstrates, prior to 1937 the Soviet authorities did not have a clearly articulated programme for managing the import of foreign literature or for its systematic censorship. For these reasons, much of the contemporary foreign literature that reached the Soviet Union came through private channels. Writing in 1933, for example, the playwright Vsevolod Višnevskij noted that works such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* circulated freely among readers who had a knowledge of foreign languages, though only in small numbers of copies (in the case of *Ulysses*, “up to twenty”). In turn, the practice of sharing of foreign books from private libraries provided translators with the opportunity to obtain new works for translation.

Until the mid-1930s, personal initiative played a significant role in the processes of obtaining foreign literature, selecting works for translation, and promoting the resulting translations to publishing houses and other outlets. Many translators carried on active correspondence with Western authors and cultural figures, obtaining books by foreign authors who appealed to them, and offering their translation services to journal editors and the heads of publishing houses. As the poet Elizaveta Polonskaja observed in her memoirs, those who received books from abroad had the opportunity to translate them and offer their translations to publishers and theatres; and Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Romain Rolland’s *Above the Battle*, and various works by Bertolt Brecht and other German expressionists reached the Soviet Union in this way.

Archival documents provide further confirmation of the important role of individuals in obtaining, translating and disseminating foreign literature during this period. For example, a letter written by Ol’ga Cholmskaja (subsequently a well-known translator) to fellow translator Aleksandra Gavrilova reveals important details about this process:
In accordance with our arrangement I spoke with our people about Shaw and I can report the following: there are realistic proposals for *Major Barbara* [from] Daruzes [and] for *Dasan* [sic] *Bull’s Other Island* [from] Cholmskaja. What’s left is *How He Lied to Her Husband* (Voļžina, probably) and *The Dark Lady of the [Sonnets]*, which no one seems to have; in all likelihood, you will have to request it. I have not seen Lor’e and Kalašnikova and [so] I couldn’t arrange anything with them. No one has even heard about *The Millionaire*. Voļžina is offering the play *On the Rock* as well (which was translated in abridged form for Interlit [Internacional’naja literatura] under the title *On the Sandbank*; I don’t know whom to make arrangements with to include it). As for me, I have already managed to get *John Bull’s Other Island* and I am taking it with me and will translate it little by little.

This letter demonstrates that, as a rule, translators themselves had to request and obtain the originals of foreign authors’ works for translation purposes. Moreover, it suggests that an individual translator, even one who (like Cholmskaja) did not have a formal leadership role in a Soviet publishing house, could nonetheless act as an unofficial leader among his or her fellow translators and play an influential role in selecting and distributing foreign literature for translation and in negotiating the possible publication of the translations.

In a broader sense, though, the import of foreign literature to the Soviet Union during this period depended on the intensity of cultural collaboration with the West. Until 1937, this collaboration was quite active: various members of the Soviet intelligentsia (including writers, actors, film directors and scholars) travelled abroad and demonstrated an interest in Western literature and culture, while “several tens of thousands of European and American professionals, scholars, artists and intellectuals […] came to see the Soviet experiment”. Of particular relevance here is the fact that, in the course of these visits, some pro-Soviet foreign writers passed their manuscripts directly to Soviet publishers or their agents, with the result that such works were
available to Soviet readers even before they were published in their authors’ native countries. Generally speaking, the Soviet authorities not only permitted but even promoted contact between sympathetic foreign authors and their Soviet counterparts: when American novelist John Dos Passos visited the Soviet Union in 1928, for example, he was accompanied by Valentin Stenič, one of the most talented translators of the time.

Alongside cultural figures, various political figures also became involved in promoting the import, publication and dissemination of foreign literature in the Soviet Union. In March 1935, for example, Ivan Majskij, the Soviet ambassador (“полномочный представитель”) to Great Britain, sent the manuscript for a novel titled Blue Shale Top, by English proletarian writer Harold Heslop, directly from London to the editor of Internacional’naja literatura, Sergej Dinamov, with the recommendation that the work be translated and published in the journal.26 Similarly, in February 1936, Aleksandra Kolontaj, who was then the Soviet ambassador to Sweden, sent a manuscript by a young Norwegian writer to the State Literary Publishing House (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo chudožestvennoj literatury, or GIChL), suggesting that the novel be translated and published and recommending Michail D’jakonov as a suitable translator.27

In 1937-1938, however, the Great Terror not only brought about a thorough purge of Glavlit and a crackdown on foreign literary imports through official channels. Affecting the psychological state of the Soviet intelligentsia profoundly, frightening people and inculcating a powerful sense of self-censorship, the Terror also had a significant impact on individual efforts to obtain foreign literature. At this point, the majority of translators and others who could read foreign literature in the original terminated their foreign correspondence and stopped receiving books from foreign contacts. In her memoirs, Elizaveta Polonskaja describes the situation as follows:

В годы испанских событий Давид ни на день не прекращал переписки со своими зарубежными корреспондентами. […] Между тем у нас люди все осторожнее стали относиться к связям с заграницей, и мало-помalu у всех нас они оборвались вовсе. Только один Выгодский продолжал получать письма, газеты, журналы и книги из Латинской Америки.28

During the years of the Spanish events [i.e. the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939], David [Vygodskij] did not cease corresponding with his foreign contacts even for a single day. […] Meanwhile, people began to be more and more cautious about connections with [people] abroad, and little by little they broke off entirely for all of us. Only Vygodskij continued to receive letters, newspapers, journals and books from Latin America.
During this unsettled and perilous period, it nonetheless remained relatively safe for individuals to read and share foreign books from their private collections: though state libraries were purged of “anti-Soviet” literature beginning in the second half of the 1930s, private libraries were not at risk until the post-war period.\(^{29}\)

As the preceding analysis reveals, in the 1920s-1930s the situation regarding the import of foreign literature to the Soviet Union was far from simple: prior to 1937, there was little regulation of foreign literary imports and little consistency in their censorship. Moreover, because individuals were permitted to receive books and other printed materials from foreign correspondents, significant quantities of contemporary foreign literature entered the Soviet Union through private channels. While the early 1930s saw some attempts to centralise and monitor foreign literary imports, this process was nonetheless free enough that very contemporary Western literature remained accessible to a significant substratum of the Soviet intelligentsia, including numerous translators. As will be discussed below, the journal *Internacional’naia literatura* benefitted greatly from this state of affairs, thanks to which its content during the early 1930s was quite rich and diverse.

*‘Internacional’naia literatura’: a Brief History*

The origins of *Internacional’naia literatura* date back to 1928, when Anatolij Lunacharskij, the first People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, founded the journal under the title *Vestnik inostrannoj literatury* (*The Herald of Foreign Literature*) and became its first editor. As the main organ of the International Organisation of Revolutionary Writers (Meždunarodnaja asociacija revolucionných pisatelej, or MORP), *Vestnik* was subject to the mandates of this organisation.\(^{30}\) The explicit aims of the journal were to unite and support so-called “proletarian” and “progressive” Western writers, to publish their works in Russian translation, and to acquaint Soviet readers with the literary and cultural life of the West.

In accordance with these aims, the majority of literary works published in *Vestnik* were by foreign writers who were members of their national communist parties and who openly sympathised with the Soviet Union. These included both well-known figures such as Henri Barbusse, Johannes Becher, Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair, and also numerous proletarian and pro-socialist writers who have long since been forgotten.\(^{31}\) In addition, *Vestnik* provided a forum for the works of “honest writers”, as Lunacharskij called them, non-proletarian writers like John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, André Gide and John Dos Passos who “speak (sometimes with horror) about the abnormality created by” bourgeois life and whose “acute gaze and artistic skill” at depicting reality therefore “make their works useful”.\(^{32}\) In keeping with the
The journal’s aim of informing Soviet readers about literary life in the West, *Vestnik* also published various critical articles and informational materials, including Eugene Fogarty’s article ‘James Joyce’ (probably a response to Joyce’s *The Dubliners* [1927]), which was published in its October 1928 issue. Vestnik’s willingness to publish works by non-proletarian and apolitical writers, and the diverse informative material it provided, were highly advantageous for its readers: underneath a thick layer of proletarian literature and class phraseology, thoughtful and sufficiently educated readers could discover truly interesting literary works and learn much about the diversity of contemporary cultural life in the West.

In 1930, however, RAPP temporarily gained a monopoly on the Soviet literary world and was empowered to “scourge and chastise in the name of the party”. RAPP ideologues held that “[t]he most important task of Soviet literature […] was to aid the proletariat in the building of socialism”. In accordance with RAPP’s class-based approach to literature, writers’ social backgrounds and political positions (not talent, imagination or creativity) were the primary criteria for judging their works and “any writer with an individual voice was deemed politically suspicious”. Committed to intensifying the class struggle in the arts, RAPPists labelled writers and other cultural figures using binary oppositions like “ours” (“свої”) vs. “alien” (“чужой”) and “proletarian” vs. “bourgeois”; and they employed administrative methods to resolve artistic questions (for example, by dictating which authors or works should be published). By the end of 1930, these developments in the realm of Soviet literature began to have an impact on literary translation as well. In November of that year, at the second conference of MORP (held in Char’kov), *Vestnik inostrannoj literatury* was criticised for passively reflecting, rather than actively promoting, the achievements of international revolutionary literature; and the decision was made to implement “fundamental reconstruction” of the journal on several levels.

As a result of this decision, the journal was renamed *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii* (*Literature of the World Revolution*), clearly signalling that it was to play an active role in leading the world proletarian literary movement. In order to further this aim, moreover, foreign-language editions of the journal began to be published. The ideologically reliable Polish-born writer Bruno Jasenskij was elected to be the journal’s chief editor, while RAPP leader and chief ideologue Leopol’d Averbach became a member of its editorial board. With Jasenskij at the helm, *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii* published a steady stream of proletarian literature, but the utopian dream of creating a world proletarian literature failed to materialise. By the middle of 1932, *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii* had become an anachronism and Jasenskij’s brief tenure as editor had come to an end. The catalyst for Jasenskij’s resignation, and for further changes that would bring the journal into its final stage of development, was the Central Committee resolution ‘O reorganizacii lite-
raturnych i chudožestvennych ob’edinenij’ (‘On the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organisations’) that was adopted on 23 April 1932. With this resolution, RAPP was dissolved and “the oppressive censorship they had imposed had been eased”, and the resulting “conciliatory treatment of intellectuals by the VKP(b)” led to significant shifts in MORP’s own organisation and approach.  

The final issue of *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii* (No. 9-10, 1932) was published in early 1933, after a considerable delay, under the guidance of a new editorial board headed by Sergej Dinamov and Sergej Tret’jakov. This issue marked a radical change in the journal’s course, reflecting a profound shift from ignoring prominent Western authors to publishing translations of their works, and from tedious revolutionary monologues to lively discussions. The following editorial announcement, which appeared in this final issue, both proclaimed and explained these changes to the journal’s readers:

Ввиду реорганизации МОРП’а и перепланировки его работы, произошел также коренной пересмотр портфеля и планов журнала *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii*, что отразилось неблагоприятно на своевременном выходе номеров.

In light of the reorganisation of MORP and the reconfiguration of its activities, there has been an in-depth reexamination of the portfolio and plans of the journal *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii* as well, which had an unfortunate impact on the timely publication of issues.

Significantly, the content of this issue included translations of George Bernard Shaw’s recently completed play *Too True To Be Good* (1931-1932) and Dos Passos’s ‘One Man’s Initiation: 1917’ (1920); an essay by Lunačarskij on Gerhard Hauptmann (marking the first time in several years that Lunačarskij’s name had appeared in the journal); and a subscription announcement for the following year that promised publication of complete versions of or extracts from Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Remarque’s *The Road Back*.

The third stage in the journal’s history, when it was published under the title *Internacional’naja literatura*, lasted from 1933 to early 1943. Until late 1936, the journal operated under quite favourable conditions, thanks to a warming in relations with the West and the lack of direct Party control over the journal’s activities. On one hand, a significant degree of cultural cooperation with the West had become possible: the Soviet Union began to seek out allies among prominent Western intellectuals as well as among “proletarian” writers, while interest in and sympathy for the Soviet Union was growing among Western intellectuals who were favourably impressed by the economic and social progress of the Soviet state and who considered the Soviet Union to be a crucial bulwark against fascism. As the notion of cultural dialogue became more prominent, *Internacional’naja literatura* emerged as a
potential cultural bridge between the Soviet Union and the West. Moreover, the considerable financial resources then at the journal’s disposal allowed it to support proletarian writers abroad, to invite foreign writers to the USSR, and to recruit allies of socialism in the West. In addition, foreign-language editions of *Internacional’naja literatura*, the explicit aim of which was to “acquaint broad circles of the Western intelligentsia with the literature, art and culture of the USSR”, provided a showcase for the Stalin regime abroad as well as a forum for sympathetic foreign intellectuals.\(^{42}\)

On the other hand, for a number of reasons the journal was largely untouched by the welter of controls and restrictions that were developing in the literary sphere. First, the Union of Soviet Writers, which was founded in 1932 as part of the push to centralise the administration of all cultural activity, was still in the process of organisation. Second, for practical reasons the authorities could not make the same demands of foreign authors (or of correspondence and editorial work with them) that they could in relation to Soviet writers. Finally, virtually all Party decrees, decisions of the Union of Soviet Writers (including the promulgation of socialist realism as the “sole artistic method” of Soviet literature), censors’ standards, and other regulatory documents concerning literary activity targeted domestic literature specifically. The problem of how to apply these to translated foreign literature was left up to the discretion of the editorial board of *Internacional’naja literatura*, as will be discussed in greater depth below. As a result of these factors, the editorial board of *Internacional’naja literatura* enjoyed significantly more independence than the boards of other literary journals.

The brief period of independence for *Internacional’naja literatura* came to an end in 1936, however, as a result of the so-called “anti-formalism” campaign launched in January of that year.\(^{43}\) Among the targets of the campaign were what was deemed to be an “undue preoccupation with ‘mere’ form, experimentation […] bourgeois escapism” and, most crucially for the present discussion, “interest in Western literature and art”;\(^{44}\) and indeed, one of the aims of the campaign was to isolate Soviet literature from its contemporary Western counterpart. As a consequence of this campaign, during the final period of *Internacional’naja literatura*’s existence (which lasted from mid-1936 until early 1943), the quantity of modern foreign literature published in the journal was reduced greatly, while the quantity of political material (including decrees, speeches by Stalin, Molotov and other Party leaders, and other documents that emphasised the leading role of the Party in shaping Soviet culture) increased steadily.

In sections devoted specifically to literature, there was a noticeable return to the classics, both Russian and foreign.\(^{45}\) Considerable space was devoted to the section “Memorable Dates” (“Памятные дни”), which included special articles marking the birth- and death-dates of Russian writers such as Puškin, Tolstoj, Lermontov, Majakovskij and Gor’kij and foreign
writers such as Byron, Heinrich Heine, Voltaire and Walt Whitman. Similarly, the section “The Literary Past” (“Литературное прошлое”) was filled with extracts from and accompanying articles about Shakespeare, Cervantes, Byron, Dickens, Hugo, Balzac and others. Of the contemporary foreign authors published in *Internacional’naja literatura* between 1937-1942, most were minor figures who have since fallen into obscurity, though works by a few well-known pro-Soviet writers including Richard Aldington, Johannes Becher, Lion Feuchtwanger and Upton Sinclair continued to appear as well. Occasionally, the works of Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, H.G. Wells, Thomas Mann and others appeared, disrupting the Party-sponsored ideological line evident in the majority of material published during this period, though almost invariably these publications were accompanied by commentaries and articles providing approved interpretations of them.

As a result of these changes, *Internacional’naja literatura* all but ceased to fulfil its initial aim of acquainting Soviet readers with contemporary foreign literature, and instead provided its readers with an array of political material and ideologically unobjectionable literary classics. By 1937, the journal’s heyday had passed and it was entering a period of decline. In addition to the “anti-formalism” campaign, reasons for this decline included the Great Terror of 1937-1938, during which numerous editors and translators associated with the journal (including Jasenskij, Tret’jakov, Dinamov, Benedikt Lifšic and Herbert Zuckau) were repressed; a shift to simply banning publication of complicated and ambiguous works, rather than attempting to teach readers to understand such works “correctly”; and, as archival documents to be discussed below demonstrate, the journal’s increasing dependence on the favour of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

In the late 1930s-early 1940s, the journal’s troubles were further exacerbated by external political developments and the growing cultural isolation of the Soviet Union. By the end of 1939, the number of Soviet sympathisers in Western cultural and intellectual circles had declined considerably. On one hand, political repressions within the Soviet Union had raised concerns and even prompted protests against Soviet domestic policies. On the other hand, the brutality of the Spanish Civil War gave rise to disillusionment with Soviet foreign policy, as the Soviet Union actively supported the Republicans in their struggle against Franco’s Nationalist coalition. The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939) and the subsequent Soviet occupation of the Baltic states and parts of Poland and Romania further eroded support for the Soviet Union among Western intellectuals. Only a few major literary figures – such as Feuchtwanger, Rolland, Sinclair, Shaw and Heinrich Mann – openly maintained their pro-Soviet stance and continued to support the Stalin regime during this period.

Within the Soviet Union, moreover, the scope for cultural collaboration with the West was sharply curtailed: the “Foreign Languages to the Masses”
campaign had been terminated by the end of the First Five Year Plan; Gor’kij’s journal *Za rubežom*, which published a variety of materials about life in capitalist countries, was closed down in 1938; and cultural figures were required to obtain special permission from the Politburo in order to travel abroad. These changes were accompanied by active promotion of the myth of Soviet cultural superiority, according to which Moscow was the “capital of world literature” and Soviet literature was “the brain and the heart of world literature”. Finally, from June 1941, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the Soviet authorities banned any hard currency transactions abroad, which made it virtually impossible for the editorial board of *Internacional’naja literatura* to continue providing honoraria to foreign authors in the West. As a result of these internal and external pressures, it became increasingly difficult for the editorial board to fill *Internacional’naja literatura* with translations of contemporary foreign literature. By the time the journal was shut down in 1943, both the quantity and the quality of its content had become severely impoverished.

**Negotiating to Publish: ‘Internacional’naja literatura’ and its Foreign and Domestic Correspondents**

The period between the end of 1932 and the middle of 1936 – that is, between the dissolution of RAPP and the entrenchment of the “anti-formalism” campaign – was the most interesting and vibrant period in the history of *Internacional’naja literatura*. During these years, foreign literature could still be imported into the Soviet Union relatively freely and censorship of it was far from complete, and *Internacional’naja literatura* itself operated relatively unfettered by direct Party control or by the dictates and directives that pertained to domestic literature. During this period, the majority of material that appeared in *Internacional’naja literatura* did fall into familiar categories: works by proletarian and revolutionary authors and Soviet sympathisers; articles about “progressive” literature, the rise in revolutionary activity and the struggle against fascism; and other materials designed to shape the tastes and outlook of the journal’s readers in the communist spirit. However, during this same period, authors who had been disparaged on the pages of *Literatura mirovoj revolucii* (e.g. Galsworthy, Hemingway, Remarque and Shaw) reappeared in *Internacional’naja literatura*; and new foreign authors (including André Gide, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann and William Saroyan) appeared in the journal for the first time. Moreover, in 1935 a selection of James Joyce’s poetry appeared in the journal under the title *Jabloki po grošu* (*Apples for Pence*), while the first Russian translation of *Ulysses* was published in instalments between 1935-1936.

The question of how apolitical (or, as it was later called, “decadent” (“упадочная”)) literature managed to find a place in *Internacional’naja
literatura during this period deserves further scrutiny. As noted above, in the early 1930s the restrictions placed on foreign literature were considerably less stringent than those applied to domestic literature. Issues such as whether the Soviet reading public needed to read modernist literature or works by “lost generation” writers like Dos Passos, Fitzgerald and Hemingway, and whether Soviet writers could learn from such writers, were hotly debated in various fora, including at the First Congress of the Soviet Writers Union in 1934. However, no concrete decisions arose out of these debates. More specifically, the question of who and what should be translated was left virtually untouched. Many Party apparatchiks and cultural figures opposed the publication of foreign writers with “dubious” political views, and many of these figures harshly criticised and even threatened those editors, publishers and translators who rejected the use of crude ideological labels in the assessment of foreign writers. Nonetheless, no list of banned foreign authors was produced at the time. As a consequence of this situation, there were no formal obstacles to the publication of any foreign author, so long as he or she did not openly criticise the Soviet regime. This gave editors and translators the possibility to select works for translation in a fairly independent way. As editors of Internacional’naja literatura, therefore, Tret’jakov and Dinamov themselves could take some risks when selecting particular Western authors or literary works for publication.

While the choice of foreign authors for publication did not depend on direct Party mandates, however, the journal was nonetheless not entirely independent. Funded by and published on behalf of MORP, Internacional’naja literatura was subject to decisions made by this organisation: the majority of MORPists supported “pure” proletarian literature and opposed the publication of “bourgeois” writers, and these preferences were duly reflected in the content of Internacional’naja literatura. A further factor that constrained publication of Western authors in Internacional’naja literatura was so-called “public opinion”, promoted by certain literary critics, writers and other cultural figures, that was directed against the “bourgeois” West, against modernist literature and the literature of the “lost generation”. Under these conditions, the editors of Internacional’naja literatura were forced to manoeuvre carefully in order to see the best-known Western writers published in their journal. Taking advantage of the relative weakness and inefficiency of direct Party control, they were able to select for publication a variety of works by Western authors; at the same time, they could not afford to ignore opposition to publishing “bourgeois” writers that was voiced by MORP and reflected in publicly promoted “anti-Western” sentiments.

Until the middle of 1936, Tret’jakov and Dinamov were able to resolve this thorny problem by publishing works of their choosing (by authors including Hemingway, Huxley, Remarque, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Alfred Döblin and Hans Fallada) alongside negative assessments thereof – that is, by
providing an ideologically appropriate context for and interpretation of these works. For example, an extract from Céline’s 1932 novel _Journey to the End of Night_ (translated from the French by Elsa Triolet) was published in the journal’s April 1933 issue; and the view of the French Communist Party that “the entire left-wing press (including _Le Monde_ and _Humanité_) has given brilliant reviews of [this work]” was cited in justification of this choice.\(^5^4\) Appearing in the same issue, however, was the first part of a critical article by A. Anisimov, in which the author acknowledged that “Céline is an artist of great talent” but noted harshly that “only once he has taken up a revolutionary viewpoint can this wonderful artist go further [and] develop […] Céline must find a path to the working class”.\(^5^5\) In subsequent articles by Anisimov, A. Starcev and Eleonora Gal’perina (also known as Nora Gal’), negative attitudes toward Céline became even more pronounced.\(^5^6\)

Publications of works by other “bourgeois” writers and by writers who had not yet achieved “proletarian, revolutionary” status took place according to the same scenario. For example, extracts from various works by Hans Fallada were published over a two-year period,\(^5^7\) and invariably these were accompanied by critical commentaries. In an article that accompanied extracts from Fallada’s _Little Man, What Now?_ (1932), for example, German critic, poet and translator Hans Günther noted that the novel had achieved deserved “sensational success” in Germany because of its “formal and artistic merits”; but he dismissed Fallada’s narrative style as “pseudo-realism”, because the author “describes facts exclusively as facts [and] he completely refuses to show their causes, their social roots, their real motivating forces”.\(^5^8\) Similarly, in a critical response to Fallada’s _Once We Had a Child_, V.A. Antonova-Avseenko noted caustically that in this novel “Fallada, grovelling before fascism, perishes as an artist [and] is attracted to purely pathological and disgusting phenomena (love for a corpse, and so forth)”.\(^5^9\)

As noted above, Remarque was rehabilitated in _Internacional’naja literatura_ (after being banished from the pages of _Literatura mirovoj revoljucii_ because of his “bourgeois” views), but his works, too, were accompanied by markedly negative critical commentaries. Thus, Remarque’s novel _The Road Back_ appeared in the journal in 1933, accompanied by a short afterword (written by Tret’jakov) that offered a generally positive assessment of the writer; and also by a vehemently negative assessment of both the novel and its author (written by Karl Radek), in which Radek harshly criticised Remarque’s pacifism and his failure to demonstrate the necessity of revolutionary conflict for the development of mankind.\(^6^0\) Thanks to this careful balancing act, for several years _Internacional’naja literatura_ was able to publish major literary works that had already received recognition in the West. The publication of such works alongside predominantly negative assessments by Soviet critics produced a situation that was favourable for the journal’s
readers: as a rule, readers simply ignored the accompanying critical articles and passed their own judgement on the literary works after reading them.\textsuperscript{61}

As discussed above, however, the position of \textit{Internacional'na literatura} began to weaken in mid-1936, as the anti-formalism campaign gained strength. By the late 1930s, political developments within the Soviet Union and abroad sent the journal into an irreversible decline. Confronted with diminishing numbers of foreign authors who were eager to work with the journal, increasing restrictions imposed by the Party, and increasingly difficult financial circumstances, Timofej Rokotov – who had taken over as editor-in-chief in October 1938 – adopted a two-pronged strategy to shore up the journal’s position. First, he began to contact foreign authors himself, and second, he used the privileges accorded to him as the journal’s editor-in-chief to petition the Central Committee directly for guidance and support.

In the late 1930s, the Party did not have clear and constructive plans for working with foreign writers and other cultural figures. Figures such as Bucharin, Kamenev and Radek, who knew foreign languages and literature well and who could conceivably have helped to articulate such plans in an informed way, had been expelled from the Central Committee and subsequently repressed. Thus, though Rokotov is likely to have been wary of taking risks (he knew the journal’s former editors well and had witnessed their repressions), his position as the editor of a journal devoted to foreign literature and culture forced him to take the initiative. Ultimately, his own correspondence with foreign authors turned out to be the main means of communication with Western writers in conditions of increasing cultural isolation. Archival documents show that, in 1939, the number of the journal’s foreign correspondents increased by 40\% as compared to the previous year (from 60 people in 1938 to 101 people in 1939); and the number of letters received from these correspondents also increased (from 214 in 1938 to 292 in 1939).\textsuperscript{62} Most of these correspondents came from the United States and Latin America, with only a small number from Western Europe, but only a very small number were well-known figures.

While not all of Rokotov’s letters to foreign correspondents have survived in the archival repository of \textit{Internacional’na literatura}, what is available provides an indication of the typical content of this correspondence. In his letters, Rokotov attempted to persuade his addressees that Soviet domestic and foreign policies were correct and appropriate. By way of supporting evidence, Rokotov sent nearly all of his addressees foreign-language editions of \textit{Internacional’na literatura}, which contained diverse propaganda materials such as the protocols of the 1930s show trials, information about the Soviet electoral system, and information about Soviet achievements in various spheres of industry, science and the arts.

In certain cases, Rokotov also tried to woo Western cultural figures through more sophisticated means, such as appealing to their vanity.
Throughout 1938, for example, Rokotov maintained contact with Virginia Woolf. In February of that year, Rokotov sent her the Russian-language edition of *Internacional’naja literatura* (December 1937 issue), in which a section titled “Antifascist Writers of the World” contained literary portraits of Woolf herself and of her nephew, the young poet Julian Bell. In the accompanying letter, Rokotov asked Woolf to send a volume of Bell’s poetry and some of her own works for translation and subsequent publication in *Internacional’naja literatura*.

In March, Rokotov dispatched the corresponding English-language edition of the journal, as the following letter (reproduced in full) shows:

Mrs Virginia Woolf  
C/O the Hogarth Press  
52 Tavistock Square  
London W.C.1  
England

Dear Virginia Woolf,

Under separate cover we are sending you the twelfth (December) number of the English edition of “International Literature” for 1937, in which a prominent place is given to the comments on the great and happy event in the life of our country, and our peoples – the elections of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Also we draw your attention to other items in this number, in particular to ‘Three Soviet Folk-Tales’, an interesting poem by Stanislav Neumann ‘Gratitude to the Soviet Union’, a sketch by V. Ivanov on the recently opened Gorky Museum in Moscow.

With friendliest greetings

Yours,

T. Rokotov  
Editor of “International Literature”

Rokotov’s attempts to maintain Woolf’s interest in the journal were quite successful. She did send Rokotov some of Bell’s poetry, and the English-language edition of *Internacional’naja literatura* was interesting enough to her that she specifically requested further issues in future, as her surviving letter to Rokotov demonstrates:

Monks House Rodmell, Lewes, Sussex, England  
16th Aug 1938

Dear M. Rokotov,

In answer to your letter of July 31st, I am glad to hear that you safely received the poems of my nephew Julian Bell.
I am interested in what you have been so good as to send me, and if it is possible for you to continue sending me the English edition of your magazine in future, I shall be glad to have it. Many thanks for the copies that you have been so good as to send me already.

Yours very truly,

Virginia Woolf [signature]
(mrs. Woolf)

Despite these friendly overtures, however, Rokotov’s correspondence with Woolf did not yield real cooperation and ultimately the journal did not publish translations of her works or of her nephew’s poems.

In a similar fashion, Rokotov tried to interest Charlie Chaplin in the journal. In a letter dated 10 March 1938, Rokotov informed Chaplin that Internacional’naja literatura had published Chaplin’s “message to the XX Anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution [sic]”, which had been forwarded to the journal’s editorial board by Izvestija; and that an article about Chaplin’s own work, titled ‘Chaplins-que Motives [sic] and Themes in the Literature of the Twentieth Century’, was forthcoming. Additionally, Rokotov tried to pique Chaplin’s interest in the journal by noting that it regularly featured “articles about the outstanding Soviet films” and offering to send Chaplin copies; and he attempted to solicit a contribution to the journal from Chaplin himself, writing that “we should also like to inform our readers who follow your work with great interest, on what you are working now”.

From the sole reply that has been discovered in the archives, written by a press representative on Chaplin’s behalf, it seems that Rokotov’s efforts again failed to result in meaningful cooperation:

My dear Mr Rokotov:

Mr Chaplin has asked me to acknowledge and thank you for your kind letter of February 8. Much as he would like to comply with your request for an article for your magazine, he is at present entirely occupied with preparations for his forthcoming picture, soon to go into production, and does not feel that he has the time to give such a matter proper attention. He trusts you will understand the circumstances.

With his appreciation for your interest, and all good wishes,

Yours very truly,

Katherine [signature illegible]
Press Representative

While pursuing these independent attempts to establish links with well-known Western cultural figures, Rokotov simultaneously petitioned the Cen-
tral Committee to establish a specific programme of active cultural cooperation with the West. In particular, Rokotov addressed himself directly to the Central Committee’s Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Upravlenie agitacii i propagandy CK VKP[b]), which was headed by elite Party members including Andrej Ždanov and later Georgij Aleksandrov and which held ultimate control over Glavlit, the Union of Soviet Writers and other creative organisations; and even to members of Stalin’s inner circle, including his chef de cabinet Aleksandr Poskrebyšev. In his letters to the Central Committee, Rokotov suggested rejecting the ban on translating and publishing the works of authors who were critical of the Soviet Union; and he advocated developing a “dialogue” between Soviet authors and their Western counterparts, so that Soviet authors who were well-known abroad could present “the most thorough, convincing and comprehensively well-grounded responses” to vexing questions about and critical attitudes toward Soviet policy.

In a letter dated 15 April 1940, for example, Rokotov reminded Petr Pospelov, Ždanov’s deputy, about a meeting Pospelov had promised to arrange in order to discuss problems relating to Internacional’naja literatura; and he suggested the need to reconnect with eminent Western writers who had become disillusioned with Soviet foreign policy and to convince them that they were mistaken. For example, in relation to Thomas Mann, who (as Rokotov observed) had “spoke[n] out very sympathetically about the USSR” before the start of the war but later changed his views, Rokotov proposed the following course of action:

In the portfolio of the editorial staff there are works by the most influential writers in the world, which are of great cultural and historical interest, but the fates of which, naturally, the editorial staff does not feel
it possible to resolve independently. One example of such a work is Thomas Mann’s novel *Lotte in Weimar*, which is devoted to the life of Goethe. Before the start of the war the novel’s author spoke out very sympathetically about the USSR on more than one occasion […] After the start of the war T. Mann’s position changed. It is not out of the question that his inclinations might change again in a few months’ time. It seems to me that our task and our policy in relation to such influential authors cannot be narrowly opportunistic, but must proceed from the ambition to win them over to our cause. In particular T. Mann’s position is important in respect to his great influence on popular opinion in the USA. It is thought that publication of T. Mann’s historical novel (with the appropriate foreword) would be an expedient measure.

Though Rokotov’s request regarding Mann’s novel was approved (*Internacional’naja literatura* published it in instalments in 1941, Nos. 3-6), he was far less successful in convincing the Central Committee to articulate a broader plan of action.71

Another letter to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, dated 28 December 1940, demonstrates that Rokotov repeatedly asked for instructions on how he should proceed in conditions of increasing cultural isolation, but received little in the way of reply:

Ввиду изменения в настроениях ряда писателей – постоянных корреспондентов “Интернациональной литературы”, связанного с началом второй империалистической войны, редакция журнала поставила тогда же перед ЦК вопрос о том – как вести эту работу в дальнейшем (копию письма в Управление Агитации и пропаганды от 2 ноября 1939 г. прилагаю). Не получая ответа, редакция еще раз поставила этот вопрос в Управлении Агитации и Пропаганды (копию письма от 15 апреля 1940 г. прилагаю).72

In light of the changes in disposition of a series of authors [who are] long-time correspondents of *Internacional’naja literatura*, in connection with the start of the second imperialist war, the editorial staff of the journal put a question to the CC some time ago about how to conduct such work in future (I attach here a copy of the letter to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, dated 2 November 1939). Not receiving a reply, the editorial staff again put this question to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (I attach here a copy of the letter from 15 April 1940).

A similar silence greeted Rokotov’s criticisms of drawbacks in the activities of International Book; his proposal to reject the ban on translating and publishing the works of Western authors simply because they held critical
attitudes toward Soviet policy; and his suggestion that the activity of journals and newspapers that cooperated with foreign writers and cultural figures should be coordinated.

One area in which Rokotov’s appeals to the Central Committee did yield a result was his request that *Internacional’naja literatura* be exempted from general ban on foreign currency transactions abroad, which had been introduced in June 1941 in response to the German invasion of the Soviet Union. In a letter dated 19 August 1941, Rokotov turned to the Secretary of the Central Committee, Aleksandr Şčerbakov, for urgent help, listing pro-Soviet Western authors such as Dreiser, Feuchtwanger, Sinclair, Heinrich Mann and Arnold Zweig who (according to Rokotov) lived mainly on honoraria from the Soviet Union. In this case, the authorities did make an exception for *Internacional’naja literatura*: in May 1942, for example, a grateful Theodore Dreiser wrote to Rokotov, thanking him for royalties he had recently received and expressing surprise that “considering the strain on Russia, […] [Rokotov] should pay anything at this time”. However, the amount of currency made available for such disbursements was small, far from sufficient to cover the journal’s needs.

Despite initiating extensive correspondence with Western writers and cultural figures, and despite petitioning the Central Committee repeatedly for guidance and support, ultimately Rokotov was unable to prevent the slow but certain decline of *Internacional’naja literatura*. This decline came to an abrupt end in February 1943, when the journal was closed down completely as a result of an increasingly dominant policy of Soviet cultural isolationism. It was only in 1955, two years after Stalin’s death and twelve years after the closure of *Internacional’naja literatura*, that a journal devoted to the publication of translated foreign literature began to be published in the Soviet Union again, this time under the title *Inostrannaja literatura* (*Foreign Literature*).

**Conclusion**

Until the late 1930s, the import, translation and publication of foreign literature occupied a highly significant but also uniquely complicated position in the cultural landscape and cultural politics of the Soviet Union. For two decades after the Bolshevik revolution – despite the militancy of RAPP, the demands of MORP and the rise of the Union of Soviet Writers and of socialist realism – almost any contemporary Western literary work could be imported to and published in the Soviet Union, so long as it was not explicitly critical of the Soviet system. This included not just the expected realms of “proletarian” and pro-socialist literature, but also works representative of the full scope and diversity of Western literary activity at the time.

Until the late 1920s, Soviet readers’, translators’ and publishers’ access to foreign literature was determined largely by practical factors (that is, by
the financial resources of book-trading firms and the resourcefulness of individuals who corresponded with foreigners or travelled abroad). Between the end of NEP and the late 1930s, however, both practical and ideological considerations came to the fore, as the case of *Internacional’naja literatura* demonstrates. Despite strong pressure from numerous writers, translators and other cultural figures, the Soviet authorities did not articulate a clear programme for the import, censorship and publication of foreign literature. As a result, *Internacional’naja literatura* operated considerably more freely than other literary periodicals. Moreover, its successive editors-in-chief used this relative freedom to publish works by leading contemporary Western authors, including many (e.g. Joyce, Hemingway, Céline, Fallada, Huxley) whose works could be interpreted as antithetical to the themes, values and aesthetics promoted through contemporaneous Soviet literature.

On one hand, the lack of a clear, centralised programme for the handling of foreign literature was the result of practical factors such as a persistent shortage of personnel with sufficient foreign language expertise to articulate and implement such a programme effectively; the impossibility of placing the same demands and restrictions on foreign authors as could be placed on Soviet ones; and the utility (even necessity) of foreign knowledge and expertise to the Soviet Union’s economic and industrial progress. On the other hand, it was driven by a keen awareness that foreign authors and foreign literature could be used to influence public opinion not just in the Soviet Union, but also abroad. Under these conditions, *Internacional’naja literatura* was viewed not just as a literary publication but also as an important instrument of foreign policy, to be deployed through its editorial board without mediation through Glavlit or the Writers’ Union.

Because of the special status of *Internacional’naja literatura*, the role played by its editors-in-chief was particularly important. The period between 1932-1936 was the most vibrant and interesting in the journal’s brief history, in large part because Sergej Dinamov and Sergej Tret’jakov developed an effective strategy for publishing the works of leading Western authors, despite harsh criticism and even threats from MORP and other quarters and officially promoted anti-Western “public opinion”. During the difficult years of the late 1930s-early 1940s, as archival documents demonstrate, it was largely thanks to Timofej Rokotov’s active petitioning of the Central Committee and extensive personal correspondence with foreign authors that the journal was able to publish any contemporary Western literature at all. The journal’s closure in 1943 not only deprived Soviet readers of a key source of information about literary and cultural life in the West. It also marked the end of a remarkable period during which the journal’s editors were able to stave off the pressures of centralisation and cultural isolationism to a significant extent, at the very same time that these forces came to dominate in relation to domestic literature.
NOTES

1 So-called “thick journals” (“толстые журналы”), which have existed in Russia since the mid-19th century, are aimed at an educated audience and typically contain more than 250 pages of varied content, including literary works, literary and cultural criticism, and commentaries about significant cultural events. The place of the “thick journals” among Russian periodicals of the 19th and early 20th centuries is discussed in Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917*, Evanston, IL., 2003, p. 110-111.

2 Andrej Artizov and Oleg Naumov, Eds, *Vlast’ i chudojestvennaja inteligencija. Dokumenty CK RKP(b) – VKP(b), VChK – OGPU – NKVD o kul’turnoj politike, 1917-1953 gg.*, Moskva, 1999, p. 486. There is some discrepancy as to the final year of the journal’s existence: though it was closed down formally in February 1943, its last published issue is dated December 1942.

3 Denis Babičenko, ‘Kak v Kominterne i vedomstve Ždanova vypravljali “Internacional’nuju literaturu”’, *Voprosy literatury*, 1994, 2, pp. 145-156; Arlen Bljum, ‘Tri cenzurnych épizoda iz žizni “Internacionál’noj literatury”’, *Inostrannaja literatura*, 2005, 10, pp. 313-326; Aleksej Micheev, ‘Meždu dvumja ottepeljami’, *Inostrannaja literatura*, 2005, 10, pp. 297-312. Bljum’s and Micheev’s articles were published in connection with the 50th anniversary of *Inostrannaja literatura* (Foreign Literature), a monthly literary and cultural journal that proclaims itself to be the successor to *Internacional’naja literatura*.

4 RGALI, f. 613 (Gosudarstvenoe izdatel’stvo ‘Chudojestvennaja literatura’), f. 1397 (Redakcija žurnala ‘Internacional’naja literatura’). In the main, these archival materials relate to the period between 1938-1941. Unfortunately, archival material relating to earlier periods of the journal’s existence has survived only in very limited form.

5 Here and below, data on the publication of foreign literature in the 1920s are cited according to Lev Vajsenberg, ‘Perevodnaja literatura v Sovetskoj Rossii za 10 let’, *Zvezda*, 1928, 6, pp. 110-122.

6 ‘Dekret Soveta narodnych komissarov o porjadke priobretenija i raspredele-nija zagranicnoj literatury’ (14 June 1921). Original held in RGASPI, f. 19, op. 1, ed. chr. 426, l. 146. Available online from *Otkrytyj tekst: elektronnoe periodicheskoje izdanie*, http://www.opentextnn.ru/censorship/russia/sov/law/snkh/1917/?id=3634; last accessed 8 September 2011.

7 See Marianna Tax Choldin, ‘Access to Foreign Publications in Soviet Libra-ries’, *Libraries & Culture*, 26.1, 1991, pp. 137-138; V. K. Furaev, ‘Soviet-American Scientific and Cultural Relations (1924-1933)’, *Voprosy istorii*, 1974, 3, pp. 56-57; A.M. Gak, ‘V.I. Lenin i razvitie meždunarodnych kul’turnych i naučnych svjazej sovetskoj Rossii v 1920-1924 godach’, *Voprosy istorii*, 1963, 4, pp. 197-198; Pamela Spence Richards, ‘Soviet-
American Library Relations in the 1920s and 1930s: A Study in Mutual Fascination and Distrust’, *Library Quarterly*, 68.4, 1998, p. 393.

Furaev, ‘Soviet-American Scientific and Cultural Relations (1924-1933)’, pp. 55-56; Gak, ‘V.I. Lenin i razvitie’, pp. 197-198.

For details, see M.V. Muratov and N.N. Nikorjakov, Eds, *Kniznaja torgovlya*, Moskva-Leningrad, 1925, Chapter VII.

Pamela Spence Richards, ‘Scientific Communication in the Cold War: Margarita Rudomino and the Library of Foreign Literatures during the Last Years of Stalin’, *Libraries & Culture*, 31.1, 1996, p. 237.

Michael S. Fox (= Michael David-Fox), ‘Glavlit, Censorship and the Problem of Party Policy in Cultural Affairs, 1922-28’, *Soviet Studies*, 44.6, 1992, p. 1055. Within the Inotdel, there were two separate sections, “[o]ne control[ling] the importation of books and the other of periodicals” (Herman Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature*, New York, 1997, p. 4). David-Fox notes that “[t]he percentage of foreign books approved for import was quite low. In April 1923, for example, […] of 177 [books] in foreign languages 54 [or ca. 31%] were approved” for publication (p. 1055).

*Sobranie uzakonenij i raspornajaenij Rabocheogo i Krest'janskogo pravitel'stva*, Moskva, 1922, article 461. Similarly, a 1927 report on the activities of Glavlit contained no specific procedures relating to foreign literature, noting simply that “Glavlit must battle brutally in original literature and literature in translation against” the kinds of issues enumerated in the 1922 *Polozenie* (e.g. pornography, obscenity, “the depiction of OGPU as a torture chamber” and “blatant counterrevolution”) (Katerina Clark, E.A. Dobrenko, Oleg V. Naumov and Andrei Artizov, Eds, *Soviet Culture and Power: a History in Documents, 1917-1953*, New Haven, CT, 2007, p. 125).

Fox, ‘Glavlit, Censorship and the Problem of Party Policy in Cultural Affairs, 1922-28’, p. 1055.

Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia from Nicholas II to Putin*, London, 2003, p. 170.

Founded in 1920, RAPP came to dominate the Soviet literary scene a decade later. Leading members of RAPP included Leopold Averbach, Aleksandr Fadeev and Vladimir Ermilov.

Nadezhda Rykova, ‘O meščanskom importe’, *Na literaturnom postu*, 1929, 6, p. 59. Other articles typical of this trend include A. Barbjus (= Henri Barbusse), ‘K voprosu o perevode’, *Vestnik inostrannoj literatury*, 1928, 8, p. 131; and B. Pesis, ‘O perevodnoj literature’, *Revoljucija i kul'tura*, 1928, 10, p. 42. In fact, it was the French communist writer Barbusse who, with this 1928 article, initiated the campaign to increase the role of the Soviet political authorities in the field of translation.

Choldin, ‘Access to Foreign Publications’, p. 140.

‘Položenie o glavnom upravlenii po delam literatury i izdatel’stv RSFSR (Glavlit) i ego mestnych organizacijach’ (6 June 1931). Original held in GARF, f. 259, op. 24, d. 6, l. 43-47. Available online from *Otkrytyi tekst*: [Link](http://garf.ru/otkrytyi tekst/).
éléktronnoe periodičesko periodičesko izdanie, http://www.opentextn.ru/censorship/russia/sov/law/snk/1931/?id=208; last accessed 8 September 2011.

Artizov, Ed., Vlast’ i chudožestvennaja intelligencija, p. 145. Translation cited according to Clark et al., Eds, Soviet Culture and Power, p. 263.

Tat’jana Gorjaeva, Istoriija sovetskoi političeskoj cenzury, 1917-1991 gg., Moskva, 1997, p. 73.

Gorjaeva, Istoriija sovetskoi političeskoj cenzury, pp. 72-74.

Vsevolod Višnevskij, ‘Znat’ Zapad’, Literaturnyj kritik, 1933, 7, p. 83.

Elizaveta Polonskaja, Goroda i vstreći, Moskva, 2008, p. 440. The translator Nora Gal’ describes the process of “obtaining [dostat’] a book” in very similar terms (see Nora Gal’, Slovo živoe i mertvoe, Moskva, 2003, p. 245).

RGALI, f. 613, op. 1, ed. chr. 4460, l. 123. The letter is undated, but Cholmskaia’s reference to George Bernard Shaw’s comedic play The Millionaire (1936) indicates that it was written no earlier than 1936. Nina Daruzes, Natal’ja Volžina, Marija Lor’e and Evgenija Kalašnikova were all translators with particular expertise in Anglo-American literature.

Michael David-Fox, ‘Origins of the Stalinist Superiority Complex’, NCEER Working Papers, 2004, p. 1, <http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2004_819-05_David-Fox.pdf>; last accessed 14 May 2011. Liudmila Stern notes that “[t]he real peak of international pilgrimage to the ‘Soviet Mecca’ was reached in the mid-1930s” and that “[s]ympathetic accounts prevailed throughout most of the 1930s” (Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union: from Red Square to the Left Bank, London and New York, 2007, p. 17).

RGALI, f. 613, op. 1, ed. chr. 4454, l. 63. Neither the author’s name nor the title of the novel is mentioned in Kollontaj’s letter.

Polonskaja, Goroda i vstreći, p. 442. Vygodskij, a well-known translator with particular expertise in Spanish, was arrested in 1938. He died in a labour camp near Karaganda in 1943.

In a 28 January 1938 report summarising Glavlit’s activities in removing “harmful” literature from public libraries and other state organisations, it is noted that “[n]ever in its practice has Glavlit confiscated literature from private individuals” (Gorjaeva, Istoriija sovetskoi političeskoj cenzury, p. 489). Founded in 1925, MORP comprised pro-Soviet foreign writers who opposed fascism and were involved in the revolutionary movement. Based in Moscow,
it had foreign sections in Germany, England, the US, Japan, China and elsewhere. MORP was dissolved in 1935. On the activities of MORP, see Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*.

The long list of now-forgotten writers published in *Vestnik* includes Mariano Azuela, Joe Corrie, Emil Ginkel, Petros Pikros, Stijn Streuvels, and many others.

Anatolij Lunačarskij, *Vestnik inostrannoj literatury*, 1928, 1, p. 2.

‘Džejms Džojs’, *Vestnik inostrannoj literatury*, 1928, 10, pp. 119-120.

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, Ithaca, NY, 1992, p. 112.

Nina Kolesnikoff, *Bruno Jasienski: His Evolution from Futurism to Socialist Realism*, Waterloo, Ontario, 1982, p. 87.

Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*, London, 2003, p. 471.

As advertised in the 1931 No. 8-9 issue of *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii*, these issues showcased “the best samples of modern international proletarian and revolutionary literature” and were intended to serve both as “a valuable manual for those [in the Soviet Union] who study foreign languages” and as “the best literary journal in their native language[s] for foreign workers in the USSR”. Encouragement to study foreign languages with the help of proletarian literature came as part of the Party-sponsored campaign “Foreign Languages to the Masses”, which had been launched in 1929.

Jasenskij’s ideological credentials included active involvement in the French communist movement and his authorship of the novel *I Am Burning Paris* (1928), a polemical response to a collection of anti-communist works (including the short story ‘I Am Burning Moscow’) by the French writer Paul Morand.

Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, p. 183; Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, pp. 63-64.

Shaw finished the first draft of *Too True To Be Good* on 30 June 1931, only a few days before making an historic visit to the Soviet Union, and he subsequently completed the play upon his return home during the autumn and early winter of 1931-1932 (see Bernard Šou, *Polnoe sobranie p’es v šesti tomach*, Vol. 5, Leningrad, 1980, pp. 717-718).

By 1932, the USSR had been recognised by and had begun to establish diplomatic relations with most Western countries. Furthermore, the idea of compulsory confrontation with the West for the purpose of world revolution, which was so popular in the 1920s, had lost prominence.

*Internacional’naja literatura*, 1933, No. 1, p. 157. Unlike the foreign-language editions of *Literatura mirovoj revoljucii*, these were not carbon-copies of the Russian version but rather original editions with content tailored to particular countries. The fact that the French- and German-language editions were edited by Westerners (the French writer and political figure Paul Vaillant-Couturier and the German poet and translator Hans Günther, respectively) further supports the notion that these editions were intended as
showcases for the Stalin regime and designed to impress potential Soviet sympathisers in the West.

The campaign was initiated with a series of articles, published in *Pravda*, which “attacked the remnants of modernism in Soviet art” (Clark et al., *Soviet Culture and Power*, p. 229). The first of these, which was published on 20 January 1936, targeted Sostakovič’s opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* for its “atonal music […] and its lack of melody”; and as Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko summarise, “[i]n effect, the anti-Formalist campaign launched by this series of articles was conducted under the sign of an art that should be ‘simple,’ accessible to the broad masses” (p. 229).

Victor Erlich, ‘Russian Formalism’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 34.4, 1973, p. 635.

Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Front*, p. 197; Catriona Kelly, *Russian Literature: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2001, pp. 48-50. Nicholas Timasheff first noted the signs of a “great retreat” from revolutionary values to classical ones in the cultural policy of the 1930s (*The Great Retreat*, New York, 1946). Though regarded as a seminal study when it was first written, Timasheff’s work has since been critiqued from various angles; see, e.g., David L. Hoffmann, ‘Was There a “Great Retreat” from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 5.4, 2004, pp. 651-674; David R. Shearer, ‘Crime and Social Disorder in Stalin’s Russia. A Reassessment of the Great Retreat and the Origins of Mass Repression’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 39.1/2, 1998, pp. 119-148.

E.g. George Bernanos, Sterling Brown, Edward Everett Hale, Margaret Harkness, Julio Mangada, Hans Rodenberg, etc.

Examples include Hemingway’s novel *To Have and Have Not* (*Imet’ ili ne imet’*, 1938, No. 4) and his play *The Fifth Column* (*Pjataja kolonna*, 1939, No. 1), Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (*Grozd’ja gneva*, 1940, Nos. 1-4), Wells’s story ‘The Croquet Player’ (‘Igrok v kroket’, 1937, No. 2) and Mann’s novel *Lotte in Weimar* (*Lotta v Vejmare*, 1941, Nos. 3-6).

*Literaturnaja gazeta*, 1936, No. 25.

From August 1937 through September 1938, no single person was identified as the journal’s editor-in-chief; instead, the anonymous collective term Editorial Board (Redkollegija) appeared on the journal’s cover. This changed when the purges ended, however: from October 1938 to May 1942, the editorial board was headed by Timofej Rokotov, and from June 1942 until the journal’s closure, by Boris Sučkov.

This provides further confirmation of Evgeny Dobrenko’s assessment that, in the 1930s, control over literature was not only imposed by the Party “from above” but was also initiated “from below” by writers and critics themselves (see *The Making of the State Reader*, Stanford, 2001).

One notable foreign writer to fall foul of this restriction was André Gide. Having supported the Soviet outspokenly in the early 1930s, Gide became deeply disillusioned with the Soviet political system after a two-month visit in 1936; and upon his return to France published a highly critical account
entitled *Return from the USSR* (1936). For a detailed account of Gide’s
canonisation and subsequent de-canonisation in the Soviet Union, see Nailya
Safiullina, ‘The Canonization of Western Writers in the Soviet Union in the
1930s’, *Modern Language Review*, 107.2, 2012, pp. 559-584.
52 When MORP was dissolved in 1935, *Internacional’naja literatura* became an
organ of the Union of Soviet Writers, but the Union did not interfere directly
in the work of the journal’s editorial board.
53 On the creation of a “public xenophobic sensibility” in the early Soviet period
— and the gap between this and popularly held views — see Jeffrey Brooks,
‘Official Xenophobia and Popular Cosmopolitanism in Early Soviet Russia’,
*American Historical Review*, 97.5, 1992, pp. 1431-1448.
54 *Internacional’naja literatura*, 1933, No. 4, p. 17.
55 ‘Noč’ kapitalizma’, *Internacional’naja literatura*, 1933, No. 4, p. 40.
56 According to Gal’perina/Gal’, for example, Céline’s *Death on Credit* (1936),
along with surrealist poetry and dadaism, represented “dead-ends of art” (*Internacional’naja literatura*, 1936, No. 12, p. 173).
57 *Little Man, What Now?* (1933, No. 3), *Who Once Eats Out of A Tin Bowl*
(1934, No. 5) and *Once We Had A Child* (1935, No. 6).
58 *Internacional’naja literatura*, 1933, No. 3, pp. 103-104.
59 *Internacional’naja literatura*, 1935 No. 7, p. 115. Antonova-Ayseenko’s
article is not a critical analysis of Fallada’s work, but rather a denunciation
and even a threat, addressed as much to the editorial board of *Internacio-
nal’naja literatura* as to Fallada himself.
60 *Internacional’naja literatura*, 1933, No. 3, p. 100.
61 On the role of criticism in the literary process during the 1920s-1930s, see
Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader*. In Chapter 3, Dobrenko presents
evidence indicating that, in the early 1930s, readers for the most part did not
read critical articles. Further evidence to support this notion is provided by
readers’ letters to the editorial board of *Internacional’naja literatura*, a
number of which have been preserved in RGALI (see Nailya Safiullina,
‘Window to the West: From the Collection of Readers’ Letters to the Journal
*Internatsional’naia literatura*, *Slavonica*, 15.2, 2009, pp. 128-161).
62 RGALI, f. 1397, op. 1, ed. chr. 20.
5 RGALI, f. 1397, op. 1, ed. chr. 551, l. 4.
65 RGALI, f. 1397, op. 1, ed. chr. 551, l. 8. In the original, Rokotov’s name had
been mistyped as “Rotokov” and the misspelling corrected in pen.
66 RGALI, f. 1397, op. 1, ed. chr. 959.
67 RGALI, f. 1397, op. 1, ed. chr. 959, l. 2. Rokotov’s letter of 8 February has
not survived in the archives. The film to which Chaplin’s press representative
refers here is *The Great Dictator*, which was first shown on 15 October 1940
(see Žorž Sadul’, *Žizn’ Čarli*, Moskva, 1955, pp. 201-205).
In June 1941, for example, Rokotov sent Poskrebyšev translated chapters from English author Hewlett Johnson’s *The Soviet Empire*, with the recommendation that Poskrebyšev show the translations to Stalin himself.

RGALI, f. 1397, op. 5, ed. chr. 69, l. 12.

RGALI, f. 1397, op. 5, ed. chr. 69, l. 8.

In 1941, for example, the journal’s editorial board continued to collect material about Hemingway’s novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but they did not succeed in overturning a ban on the novel’s publication that had been introduced in 1940 (RGALI, f. 1397, op. 5, ed. chr. 69, l. 16). Interestingly, though, in a 1953 article Deming Brown noted that while “*For Whom the Bell Tolls* has never been published in the Soviet Union”, the novel “has been translated, and the manuscript – possibly even proofsheets – has been circulated widely in the Soviet literary world” (‘Hemingway in Russia’, *American Quarterly*, 5.2, 1953, p. 154).

RGALI, f. 1397, op. 5, ed. chr. 69, l. 11.

RGALI, f. 1397, op. 5, ed. chr. 61, l. 24.

*Letters of Theodore Dreiser: A Selection*, Ed. Robert H. Elias, Vol. 3, 3 Vols., Philadelphia, 1959, p. 959.

Vasilij Sojma indicates that the journal was closed specifically because it had become “a conductor of English and American bourgeois literature and had a harmful political influence on the USSR” (*Zapreščennyj Stalin*, Moskva, 2005, pp. 444-445).