

The Soviet Union As an Empire by Fiction

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For citation: Auclert R. The Soviet Union As an Empire by Fiction. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2019, vol. 64, issue 1, pp. 92–106. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu02.2019.105>

Since the First All-Union Congress of Soviet writers held in 1934, Socialist Realism had been officially considered the basis for Soviet literature and literary criticism. After the World War II its mission extended to the periphery of the Eastern bloc. Analyzing the aims of official propaganda through novels, one can consider the Soviet Union an “Empire by fiction”, to paraphrase Geir Lundestad’s fortunate title (who calls the United States an “Empire by Invitation”). To enhance unity inside the communist camp, writers often resorted to the perception of the enemy. Fearful and phantasmagorical, he is surrounded by an inspiring universe that unleashes the imagination of people. Then Yugoslav President Josip Tito became the case in question. “The Yugoslav Tragedy” (1951) came out three years after the Stalin-Tito split. Due to the acerbic condemnation of the “traitor” in the novel, together with a number of articles published in newspapers, Orest Maltsev, a stalwart of Socialist Realism, was awarded the Stalin Prize. Following Michel Foucault’s bi-functional nature of power, I argue that in Maltsev’s description of the Yugoslav enemy, not only does the Soviet regime punish guilty behavior, but it also legitimizes itself by enhancing Soviet prestige at war (the indisputable winner vs. the shameful resistance fighters) and so reinforces Soviet values. This paper offers a new perspective on those founding principles in the early Cold War era and explains how fiction was used as the main tool of imperial soft power.

Keywords: Socialist Realism, Stalinism, Enemy, Cold War, Soft power, Imperial consciousness.

Советский Союз как империя, созданная словом

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Для цитирования: Auclert R. The Soviet Union As an Empire by Fiction // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. История. 2019. Т. 64. Вып. 1. С. 92–106. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu02.2019.105>

Первый Всесоюзный Съезд советских писателей в 1934 г. определил соцреализм как единственный допустимый метод советской художественной литературы и литературной критики. После Великой Отечественной войны влияние соцреализма распространилось до периферии коммунистического блока. В статье исследуется, как именно официальная пропаганда использует литературу для достижения своих целей, а также выдвигается новая гипотеза о том, что Советский Союз был империей, созданной словом. Проводится параллель с тезисом Гейра Лундстада, назвавшего США «империей по приглашению». Советские писатели часто прибегали к идеологеме врага для

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того, чтобы подкрепить единство внутри коммунистического лагеря. Югославский президент Иосип Тито оказался отличным примером врага. «Югославская Трагедия» Ореста Мальцева (1951) была опубликована через три года после разрыва отношений между Сталиным и Тито. Жесткое осуждение Тито как «предателя» наряду с серией положительных отзывов, опубликованных в газетах, обеспечили автору романа, одному из столпов соцреализма, Сталинскую премию. Роман предлагает необычный пример того, как литература может быть применена к геополитике. Отрицая роль югославы в освобождении своей страны, Орест Мальцев по существу пытается узаконить советскую гегемонию над Югославией. В данной статье, используя идею Мишеля Фуко о бифункциональной природе власти, я доказываю, что своим описанием югославы автор не только наказывает «виновного», но также возвышает престиж Красной армии — бесспорного победителя в войне. Сталинские ценности у Мальцева носят неоспоримый характер. Изучение врага в романе Мальцева дает нам представление об имперской политике позднего сталинистского Советского Союза, указывая на конкретный способ использования литературной дипломатии. Приемы сталинской прозы показывают, что Советский Союз был не менее «мягкой», чем «твердой» силой. Кроме того, в статье освещаются главные идеологические вехи начала холодной войны и показывается, как литература служила основным орудием имперской «мягкой силы».

Ключевые слова: соцреализм, сталинизм, враг, холодная война, «мягкая сила», имперское сознание.

As the most significant outcome of the Bolshevik revolution, communist ideology in the Soviet Union occupied an indisputable place in its policy. For this reason, if one wants to understand the roots of the Soviet decision making, one cannot bypass the study of the communist gospels in which the aims and means of Marxism-Leninism are explained to the masses. These gospels are Socialist Realist novels. Indeed, since the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers held in 1934 Socialist Realism had become the basis for Soviet literature and literary criticism. It set up for the artist such a standard as the truthful, historically precise representation of reality in its revolutionary development. This true-to-life representation of reality was also aimed at the ideological transformation and education of the workers in the “spirit of socialism”, as they said at the time. After the Second World War its mission extended to the periphery of the Eastern bloc in order to “roll back” Western influence as well as to strengthen the socialist camp.

“The Yugoslav Tragedy” (1951), the Stalin Prize novel at the outset of the Cold War, offers an extraordinary example of how literature can be applied to geopolitics. Denying the role of the Yugoslavs in the liberation of their own country, the book’s main goal is to legitimize Soviet hegemony over Yugoslavia as well as to comminate its integration into the West. This paper aims to show the Soviet regime’s literary diplomacy at the time when “the ‘operational weapon’ was culture”¹. Analyzing the use of novels by official propaganda, one can consider the Soviet Union an “Empire by fiction”, to paraphrase Geir Lundestad’s fortunate title².

Unlike Lundestad’s expression “Empire by invitation,” limpid, seductive and paradoxical at once, my title “Empire by fiction” admits some ambiguity: on the one hand, “Empire by fiction” points to fiction, i.e. to literature, as to the vehicle transmitting So-

¹ Saunders F.S. Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War. London, 2000. P. 17.

² Lundestad G. Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952 // Journal of Peace Research. 1986. Vol. 23, iss. 3. P. 263–277.

cialist values. As Hannibal used elephants to lead his conquests, the Soviet system resorted to the narrative as an “Empire-builder”, as cement to maintain symbolically what was gained by economic or military means. On the other hand, one can consider this concept not from the perspective of the ruler (Hannibal, Cesar or Stalin), but “from below”, i.e. through the lens of the new empire’s subjects. If Lundestad says that the American empire is built upon democratic choice and consent, my expression suggests that to hold sway over the satellites, especially after the occupation of Eastern Europe by the Red Army at the end of the war, was, to a certain degree, possible owing to the communist narrative, i.e. to the political fiction that ended in 1991. This paper attempts to explore both meanings of such “empire by fiction” and to track down the fragments of the Soviet “imperial consciousness” up to the present day.

The Enemy Escapes from the Book

In this section I will show that fiction has a direct impact on the political consciousness of the reader and how, in the mind of the latter, imaginary enemies in the book become real.

Soon after the end of World War II the former allies encountered crises where “traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity”³ met Western fears of the Red invasion of Europe articulated by Winston Churchill in his famous Fulton speech. In the atomic age, when any direct conflict could have led to mutual destruction, ideology became the main battlefield for the two superpowers. These techniques included psychological warfare and cultural infiltration. In the Eastern bloc, the Zhdanov doctrine was implemented in 1946, and Stalin created the *Cominform* in October 1947. It was a new structure of psychological warfare against both Truman’s idea of containment and the Marshall Plan. Indeed, “both Soviet and American policymakers realized that to “win the minds of men” in Europe, they needed to appeal more to their cultural than to their political identity”⁴. More precisely, “culture in the study of international relations may be defined as the sharing and transmitting of consciousness within and across national boundaries”⁵. I see two reasons for privileging this approach: firstly, all the post-war political identities were diluted in the common struggle against fascism; secondly, culture appeals to one’s sincere beliefs often situated outside the sphere of politics. Thus, cultural campaigns, infiltrating into the self of “cultural subjects”, covering its innermost political goals, “looking interesting”, are by far the most efficient.

In the world of literature, the convention of fiction invites myth as a guest of reality; thus, “the novel rode escort to contemporary history”⁶, providing “Soviet and Western fictional responses to the Cold War”⁷ and shaping the consciousnesses of the readers. No later than April 1949, the *Cominform* organized the World Congress of Advocates of Peace in Paris, including key official Soviet writers (Aleksander Fadeev and Ilya Ehren-

³ Kennan George to George Marshall (Long Telegram) // Truman Library. Harry S. Truman Administration File. Elsey Papers. 1946. February 22. P. 5.

⁴ *Gienow-Hecht J. C. E. Culture and the Cold War in Europe // The Cambridge History of the Cold War. In 3 vols / eds M. P. Leffler, O. A. Westad. Cambridge, 2010. Vol. 1. P. 401.*

⁵ *Iriye A. Culture and International History // Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations / eds M. J. Hogan, T. G. Paterson. Cambridge, 2004. P. 242.*

⁶ *Caute D. Politics and the Novel during the Cold War. New Brunswick & London, 2009. P. 351.*

⁷ *Ibid. P. 1.*

burg). As for the US, they just began to organize their “Deminform”⁸, which resulted in the Congress of Cultural Freedom whose opening ceremony took place in June 1950 in Berlin. The Congress was an instrument to rally the European elites, and, first of all, writers, against the communist camp. Thus the “book war” started, but the Soviet Union was certainly a well-trained fighter.

At the beginning of the Cold War, the Soviet Union had already had some twenty years experience in literary propaganda. During the 1930s the Red Army viewed fiction as “one of the most powerful tools for the organization and education of the masses”⁹. The First Congress of the Soviet Writers held in 1934 coined the definition of “Socialist Realism”. As Yuri Olesha put it, the writer is “the engineer of human souls” whose task is to make people support the Party and its struggle for the victory of Communism. This doctrine was still maintained after his death. At the Second Congress in 1954, Aleksei Surkov, First Secretary of the Directorate of the Writers’ Union, proclaimed that, “Literature is the sharp-edged weapon of socialist-political action. It is tightly connected to politics and is subordinate to the latter”¹⁰.

More importantly, Socialist Realism was — or, at least, ought to have been — a mass phenomenon. “By saying “readers”, one implies “people”. In our country almost every literate person is a reader, because to the illiterate, they are rare; it is an anomaly. The “people-reader” believes us, the Soviet writers”¹¹, said one Socialist Realist classic. Such “people-reader” (or “worker-readers”¹²) was a great asset in the cultural war. Hence, Soviet literature had the strongest social dimension. As Vera Dunham argues, “literature [stands] between the regime and the people and [constitutes] the conversation between the two”¹³. It is an *agora* made of words where members of society can meet and deal with political issues. Besides, many fiction writers used to take over a political function, producing texts with totally political content. That is, for example, the case of Nikolai Shpanov (“The Diplomats with a Cloak and Dagger”, 1952 or “Writer and Vigilance”, 1953), and Orest Maltsev (“Tito’s Chronicler”, 1949). Because of this social interaction, “literature [is] not only a receiver of signal but a sender of them <...> [and] the most dominant existential clichés of Stalinism derive from literary models”¹⁴.

In this mass production, enemy is the true hero of fiction. Along with the cult of the positive hero, the figure of the enemy is also central in novels and films of late Stalinism. Often being the trigger of the plot, the enemy is also the point at which all the actions of the protagonists converge, and once he is unmasked and disappears from the scene, the story ends. Indeed, the enemy is also the main character in Cold War mythology.

⁸ Saunders F.S. *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*. London, 2000. P. 57.

⁹ Boevoi otriad na fronte literatury // *Literaturnaia Gazeta*. 1930. August 5, quoted in: *Hooker M. T. The Military Uses of Literature. Fiction and the Armed Forces in Soviet Literature*. Westport, 1996. P. 2.

¹⁰ Surkov A. A. O sostoianii i zadachakh sovetskoi literatury // *Vtoroi sèzd sovetskikh pisatelei. Stenograficheskii otchet*. Moscow, 1956. P. 31.

¹¹ Kochetov V. A. *Writer and Reader* // *Neva*. 1955. No. 1. P. 175, quoted in: *Dobrenko E. The Making of the Soviet Reader. Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*. St. Petersburg, 1997. P. 11.

¹² Geldern J. von. *Epic Revisionism and the Crafting of a Soviet Public* // *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* / eds K. M. F. Platt, D. Brandenberger. Madison (WI), 2006. P. 333.

¹³ Dunham V. S. *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*. Cambridge, 1976. P. 25.

¹⁴ Clark K. *The Soviet Novel: History as a Ritual*. Chicago, 1981. P. 253.

Generally, there can be two approaches to the figure of enemy: subjective and objective. On the one hand, the very concept of enmity is often put into doubt by a number of the authors who studied the topic — that is the subjective approach¹⁵. On the other hand, in my research, I consider that the enemy has an objective dimension by the simple material rivalry of interests. This is true for the contest between two empires when the very existence of one empire questions the universal value of the other. By and large, in geopolitics and, in particular, in the case of the Cold War, it seems difficult to define the enemy as a sort of delusion we have to struggle with and, eventually, deny it as such. That is why I support the objective definition of the enemy, in the wake of Schmitt's theory¹⁶.

Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) is the main thinker of enmity. A German jurist and a political theorist, he remains controversial due to his allegiance to the Nazi regime. However, his academic works influenced many philosophers and political authors, including Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida, and Slavoj Žižek. Schmitt defines the enemy as the genesis of any political and cultural struggle, “the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy”¹⁷. In other words, according to Schmitt, the distinction between friend and enemy represents the extreme degree of unity or disunity, so the essence of the political. In the next sentence, he postulates that “this provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition”. Such a criterion is particularly appropriate in the Soviet case. Hence, official literature, with its wide collections of characters, friends and foes, mirrors the ideology of the party. By studying the enemy in various Socialist Realist novels, my goal is to identify the political discourse at the time.

Besides, Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov does not question Schmitt's hypothesis, pointing to the archaic instinct to share the world between “we-them”¹⁸. He even extends it by saying that it creates a culture of fear and hope, and political consciousness capable of mobilizing the masses; he defines the paradox of enmity as a “necessary lethal threat”. Yet, by mobilizing itself *against* the enemy and the threat it stands for, the Soviet Union expresses itself as a vital organism making its ideological choices. In other words, to rep-

¹⁵ Some authors, like *Sam Keen* (*Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. San Francisco, 1986), and *James A. Aho* (*This Thing of Darkness: A Sociology of the Enemy*. Seattle & London, 1994) consider the concept of enemy as a somewhat artificial construction. To them, the other would be a projection of a part of ourselves that we cannot stand, of our “dark side”. Keen cherishes the hopes of *Homo amicus* to whom he devotes the last chapter of his book; Aho tries psychoanalytically to deconstruct the enemy revealing his nature as a shadow of our own fears, and thus being totally unoriginal. *Droit*, whose work is focused on the term “barbarian” (for him it is an equivalent to enemy) eventually concludes that it would be “wiser” to get rid of the very concept of “barbarian”. Hence, according to *Droit*, any enunciation of a norm or cultural standard is denounced as totalitarian, see: *Généalogie des barbares*. Paris, 2007. As for Robert Robins and Jerrold Post, they consider the perception of an enemy as a “political paranoia” that must be fought against; paranoia is a mental illness developed to avoid “the humiliation of helplessness”, see *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred*. New Heaven; London, 1997. P.301. — Aleksander Fateev is more pragmatic: to him the concept of the enemy is nothing else than the gimmick of power to “make the Soviet people fool and control them”, see: *The image of the Enemy in Soviet Propaganda, 1945–1954*. Moscow, 1999.

¹⁶ Among other reinterpretations of the concept of enemy, one can find *Borkenau F.* *The Totalitarian Enemy*. London, 1940; *Volkan V.* *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies. From Clinical Practice to International Relationships*. Lanham, 1997, and *Seniavskaia E. S.* *The Perception of the Enemy by the World Wars Soldiers // Voprosy Istorii*. 1997. No. 3. P. 140–156.

¹⁷ *Schmitt C.* *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago, 2007. P. 26.

¹⁸ *Gudkov L.* *Ideologema “vruga”: “vragi” kak massovyi sindrom i mekhanizm sotsiokul’turnoi integratsii // The Concept of the Enemy / ed. by L. Gudkov. Moscow, 2005. P. 15.*

resent the enemy in artistic works is to construct its own identity. During the early Cold War period, the Soviet writers often resorted to the perception of the enemy in order to create the image of a common communist camp. After the Stalin-Tito split in 1948, Yugoslav President Joseph Tito turned out to be a perfect option for conveying the role of such an enemy.

Orest Maltsev's *Yugoslav Tragedy*: The Case of a Tarpeian Book

After the war, the Red Army took Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Empire acquired new borders and a new critical mass. The foundation of the *Cominform*, and the economic and ideological tightening up was welcomed by the majority of the communists in Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia, however, with Tito as a “national communist”, who led the resistance movement during the war, was a black sheep¹⁹. When the latter started, the Soviet Union was still bound by the Ribbentrop — Molotov pact. So when the Yugoslav peasants joined the Communist Party, they were more urged by the defence of their motherland than by Marxist-Leninist ideology. During the war, there were frequent conflicts between Tito, who was asking for help in the struggle not only with Germans, but also with his domestic rivals, and Stalin who did not consider the Yugoslav front the major one. After the war, Yugoslavia refused to obey Stalin since the Red army was called to other fronts. Thus, the role of the Yugoslav communists in their own national liberation deprived Moscow of the legitimacy to impose its unshared authority on them after the war. The conflict took a dramatic turn, especially after three particular incidents.

Firstly, despite the fact that Yugoslavia followed the Soviet economic model, Tito's regime was not willing to implement reforms on behalf of the Soviet Union and rejected Stalin's attempts to transform the country into a Soviet satellite as well as refused The Marshall Plan aid. Secondly, Tito began to lay claim to the leadership of the Communist countries in Eastern Europe. During the liberation of Trieste by his army, he affirmed his regional leadership by demanding that Istria, Zara and Fiume be “given back” to Yugoslavia. Stalin, fearing to hurt the Italian communists, did not back Tito. Later, Tito went as far as to propose a Balkan federation. Thirdly, Tito's active support of the Greek rebels against the British influence had irritated Stalin who wanted to avoid a conflict with his Western allies at any cost. In February 1948, Stalin called Tito in Moscow, but the latter declined the invitation, alleging illness. Consequently, Stalin enforced economic sanctions against Yugoslavia and the leaders started exchanging letters in which Stalin was blaming Tito for violation of the communist dogma, for being a Trotskyite and for his lack of democracy. As for Tito, he defended his vision of a “national communism”.

From the summer of 1948 until Stalin's death, a pitiless anti-Yugoslav campaign was launched by Soviet political authorities and media. To understand all its intensity, one has to keep in mind that, like Berlin, Yugoslavia was a frontline of the cultural war. For the Soviet leaders, moving backwards would have meant a “bandwagon” effect and could eventually have led to the collapse of the Soviet bloc as a whole. In June 1948, Stalin expelled Yugoslavia from the *Cominform* and urged the “loyal Yugoslav” to get rid of the “Tito clique”, but these measures only strengthened the Yugoslav unity against its adver-

¹⁹ On the relationship between Stalin and Tito, see: *Gurchenko Y.S. Stalin — Tito*. Moscow, 1991. P. 342, et passim, and *West R. Tito and the Rise and the Fall of Yugoslavia*. London, 1994. P. 269–302.

sary. During the year of the economic blockade (1949–1952), Tito turned to America for help and introduced decentralization and principles of market economy (demand, supply, profit) in his country. Tito's separate road to socialism dramatically challenged the communist dogma and Stalin's project to integrate Eastern Europe in one monolithic bloc. Under the accusations of "rootless cosmopolitanism" and "national nihilism", Titoism was declared treason. From the autumn of 1949, a large purge was launched in communist parties throughout Eastern Europe and even in Soviet society itself: certain politicians and writers were accused of subversive actions and of collaboration with Marshal Tito and the Western intelligence services. In November 1949, the *Cominform* enforced the resolution "The Yugoslav Communist Party in the hands of murderers and spies". Even sport became part of the game: at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, the Soviet football team was defeated by the Yugoslavs. What follows was that the inglorious team was broken up, the coach and some players had to return their previous awards for having "undermined the prestige of Soviet sport and Soviet state". Records of the Ministry of State Security are testimony to Stalin's plan to murder Tito (spraying bacteria of pneumonic plague!)²⁰, but his death in 1953 left this plan unrealized.

The author of our case study, Orest Maltsev (1906–1972), was born in the region of Kursk. In 1920, he was a volunteer in the Red Army. After he earned a diploma in literature, Maltsev worked for the newspapers "Krasnaya Zvezda" and "Na strazhe". As a war correspondent, he accompanied the Soviet troops moving from the North Caucasus to Belgrade, Budapest and Vienna, and took part in the liberation of Western Ukraine.

With an opportunistic mind, as early as 1948, Maltsev seized the Stalin-Tito split to begin a new novel following the Party line tenets. Three years later "The Yugoslav Tragedy" came out. The plot of the novel is simplistic in the Socialist Realistic sense of the term: "The Yugoslav Tragedy" (1951) describes the struggle of the Yugoslav resistance fighters against Hitler's army. Due to the confrontation between Stalin and Tito, Moscow urgently needed to denigrate the importance in their own liberation of the Yugoslav communists in order to establish the Soviet authority. In this context, it is no surprise that the description of the fighters is unkind and even grotesque.

The Yugoslavs — and among them Tito in particular — are reproached for their nationalism, which indirectly follows "the old plan of Hitler and Mussolini for the Balkans: to gather them as a colonial possession and turn into a huge military bastion to launch attacks on the European countries. The Balkan Slavs, as well as the Greeks, the Romanians and Hungarians would be employed as cannon fodder at the disposal of the "Aryan race". Being under the Fascist boot, precisely, under these conditions of tension and humiliation, local — and even tribal — chauvinism was blooming as never before"²¹ (280). Thus, in spite of their positive struggle against Hitler, the Yugoslavs appear to be his strategic accomplices. Moreover, they are described as primitive: "— Moscow! Moscow! Do you hear us? <...> We inform you, fere (*druzhe*) Stalin, we're defeating heavily the fascists. Thank you for your help and for the machine guns. Send us anything else, and in a mass. But

²⁰ *Dubinianskii M.* Iosif vs. Iosip. 60 let nazad v SSSR startovala the anti-Yugoslav Campania // *Gazeta ZN, UA.* 2008. September 5. Available: http://zn.ua/SOCIETY/iosif_vs_iosip_60 лет_nazad_v_sssr_startovala_antiyugoslavskaya_kampaniya.html (accessed 05.09.2018).

²¹ *Maltsev O.* The Yugoslav Tragedy. Moscow, 1952. — Pages of the quotations are mentioned between brackets.

more importantly, let your soldiers come quicker; we alone are in a very hard situation. Hello! Hello! <...> Hey, cretin, open your eyes, the transmitter doesn't work!" (323) and they are also materialist, hypocritical and opportunistic: "Tito is a secret friend of the members of the Labor Party, but shouts from the rooftops his loyalty to the Soviet Union" (222). Naturally, the book is full of American and British spies, who aimed to make profits from the war.

Due to his acerbic condemnation of the "traitor" in the novel, along with several articles, which appeared in newspapers, the stalwart of Socialist Realism, Orest Maltsev was awarded the Stalin Prize (second grade) in 1952. Half a million copies were sold, the book underwent more than ten re-editions, and the author signed a contract for a film adaptation²². He became rich and enjoyed a luxurious dacha in Peredelkino.

A general reception of the book by the critics was positive. The playwright Georgi Mdivani (1905–1981), in his article "History of treason"²³, praised the veracity of the novel: "Using historically faithful and documentary means, the book explains that during World War II Tito was an agent of the Gestapo <...> his action contributed to the removal of a big part of the Nazi army from the Balkans and to its direction towards the Soviet Union <...> also the author gives an account on the true love of the Yugoslav resistance fighters for Comrade Stalin. He shows that the former were trapped in a network of treason. The tragedy of the Yugoslav people relies on the fact that at that time they kept believing in Tito's clique, whereas he had destroyed national heroes and wanted to transform Yugoslavia into a bridgehead of American imperialism". Regardless of his ideological approval, Mdivani points to some negligence in the style, and regrets that the number of pages devoted to the enemy camp prevails over the national theme. Ironically, five years before this criticism, Mdivani had been the scriptwriter of a film by Abram Room entitled "In the Yugoslav Mountains" (1946). The plot deals with... the common struggle of the Red Army with Yugoslav peasants, and Tito's fighters against the Nazi invader. Needless to say, the film was forbidden in the Soviet Union after the Stalin-Tito split. In an interesting manner, it was also prohibited in Yugoslavia for several decades, even after Khrushchev's settlement of the conflict. The writer Yurii Libedinskii (1898–1959) shared Mdivani's endorsement, stressing that the novel "answered to the readers' demand on international events <...> and presented the Trotskyite-spy Tito crew and their machinations to seize power". To put it briefly, the book brought to light "truth, so to speak, from the inside" (*pravda, tak skazat, iznutri*)²⁴.

But critics were not unanimous. In their "Remarks on the Manuscript of the Yugoslav Tragedy"²⁵, two members of the "Znamia" editorial board I. Medvedev and N. Bondar' reproached Maltsev for repeating Tito's arguments when he overestimated the extent of the liberation struggle in Yugoslavia (with a ratio of power of 6 against 1 in favour of the foe). The author failed to properly mention Stalingrad heroes, whose role was presented as diversion to draw the Nazis to themselves. The critics underlined that unlike the British policy in Yugoslavia, Maltsev characterized the American one as "unclear", whereas

²² Script of the Film Double Face Written in 1954–1955 // Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva (future — RGALI). F. 2453. Op. 3. L. 2074–2076

²³ Mdivani G. Literaturnaia Gazeta. 1951 // RGALI. F. 631. Op. 3. Edinitsa Khranenia 266. L. 306–315.

²⁴ Libedinskii Y. // RGALI. F. 1099. Op. 2. Edinitsa Khranenia 116. L. 77–85.

²⁵ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (future — RGASPI). F. 17. Op. 137. Edinitsa Khranenia 629 L. 96–100.

“it was totally clear”. They also deplored many factual mistakes in the role of the Soviet mission; in translations of Serbian words, names of some villages and dates when certain regions were liberated; in the duties, actions or travels of personalities of the time. Andrich Ratomir added many other geographical and tactical mistakes to the list of inaccuracies²⁶. At the time of his criticism, he was the editor of the newspaper “For a socialist Yugoslavia!” In 1943, he was Major-General Commandant of a regiment of resistance fighters in South Serbia, and recommended the Writers’ Union to organize a meeting between himself and Maltsev to correct certain mistakes that diminished the significance and sharpness of the novel to the Yugoslav reader. In his view, it would be wiser for the author to remove the whole first part since it takes place in Eastern Serbia, although resistance fighters’ movements were active in the South of the country. By the way, it is noticeable that Ratomir’s paper dates from July 18, 1952, i.e. four months after the book had been awarded the Stalin Prize. Such drastic criticism of a work that had just been declared as the benchmark of the Party line testifies that relative amplitude existed in the postwar literary debates. At least there *was* a debate.

But in spite of the prestige of the award, the book was harshly criticized by Maltsev’s peers and many of them even “stopped greeting him when they met in the street”²⁷. Logically, some people suspected that with this book, Maltsev was a Kremlin representative, and the rumor even spread that he resorted to a ghostwriter. The latter might have been the war veteran Vladimir Gurvich, the son of Nicholas I. Hourwich (Americanized version), one of the founders of the American Communist Party. On the pretext of parasitism, MVD organized for Gurvich’s removal from his job and from his Moscow flat. Then he may have written “The Yugoslav Tragedy” to earn his living²⁸. In 1955, when Khrushchev restored diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, the book was withdrawn from all the libraries, the project of the film was dropped, and the courtier Maltsev fell into disfavor and poverty. He became a casualty of the versatile Party line.

After this presentation of the “Yugoslav Tragedy”, I want to put forward my main thesis and argue that Maltsev’s work is a ‘Tarpeian book’, that is to say, a case of empire building through fiction in a way that brings to mind an edifying punishment. Firstly, I repeat that I am not dealing here with high calibre literature, but with a pure political text. It can be compared to the article by the same author on Vladimir Dedier entitled “Tito’s Chronicler” (1949)²⁹, where the latter is accused of presenting himself as a fervent Serbian nationalist and at the same time, of despising the Serbian people. Maltsev considers him an agent of the United States and adds that when he was a student, he looked like an American gangster. Furthermore, he points out several inaccuracies in Tito’s war diaries written by Dedier, challenging — just like in the novel — his prestige as a resistance fighter. The same *cliché* on the American influence in Eastern Europe and on “the Tito’s clique” can be found in the novel “Plotters” (1951) by Nikolai Shpanov. Half a million copies had

²⁶ Ratomir A. 1952. June 18 // RGALI. F. 631. Op. 20. Edinitsa Khranenia 110. L. 33–36.

²⁷ Interview of Evgenii Evtushenko // Komsomol’skaia Pravda. 1999. April 28.

²⁸ Svirskii G. Na Lobnom Meste. Literatura npravstvennogo soprotivleniia. 1946–1986. M., 1998.

²⁹ Maltsev O. Titovskii letopisets. Vlado Dedier i ego razoblacheniia // Literaturnaia Gazeta. 1949. April 25 // RGALI. F. 634. Op. 3. Edinitsa Khranenia 168. L. 54–59.

been sold when the book was forbidden in 1956 for the same reason as Maltsev's book. One can quote many other examples³⁰.

This political fiction fulfils the function of storytelling, as defined by Brian Boyd, "In order to assess novel or problematic situations human minds can draw not only on our individual present and species' past, as all minds can do, but also on their individual pasts, even on particular episodes, and can consider projected futures, as they turn ideas around through a possibility space enlarged by the dimensions of the hypothetical and the counterfactual"³¹. Hence, the fictional narrative transforms the perception of political reality.

Following Michel Foucault's bi-functional nature of power³², one can argue that in Maltsev's description of the Yugoslav enemy, not only does the Soviet regime punish guilty behavior, but it also legitimizes itself by enhancing the Soviet prestige at war (the indisputable winner vs. the shameful resistance fighters) and so reinforcing the Soviet values. One can find an example in the exchange between the Russian hero and Katnych, a resistance leader (340–341). Katnych reads one of his texts exposing his political views and boasting about the situation of Yugoslavia, "at the heart of the heart of the world" (Europe) and pretending to be the best of the Balkan nations, which realizes the combination between Western culture and communism. Then the narrator "sets the record straight" and mentions the Yugoslav debt to the Russian army in the 19th and 20th centuries to gain its independence, mocks his cultural pretensions ("this half-feudal culture here, where people still write with a wooden plough and maintain with each other relations of arbitrary rule and slavery"). This symbolic punishment is a reminder of the "Tarpeian rock" in ancient Rome³³. Initially, the legend says that while Rome was besieged by the Sabine king Titus Tatius, Tarpeia, daughter of the commander of the citadel, promised Tatius that she would give him entry to the city, if she received "what the Sabine bore on their left arms" as payment, i.e. their bracelets. But instead they crushed her to death with their shields and hurled her body from the Capitoline Hill³⁴. From then on, the traitors were executed by

³⁰ *Gribanov B.* Banda Tito — Orudie Amerikano-Angliiskih Podzhigatelei Voiny. M., 1951.

³¹ *Boyd B.* The Origin of Stories. Evolution, Cognition and Fiction. Cambridge (MA), 2009. P. 49.

³² *Foucault M.* Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison. Paris, 1975.

³³ *Dumézil G.* Tarpeia. Essais de philologie comparative indo-européenne // Mythes et dieux de la Scandinavie ancienne. 1st ed. Paris, 2000, 1947. P. 7–43. — Dumézil's analysis of Tarpeia, based on both mythological and anthropological considerations, suggests an interesting interpretation of the Soviet-Yugoslav relations and fits surprisingly well into Cold War confrontation. So, from this perspective, the Soviet Union was standing for the Romans, the people of warriors opposing to the US and its capitalist allies, a modern avatar of the Sabines, the people of wealth. The role of Tarpeia was given to Yugoslavia, subject to moral corruption (Tito disowned the communist dogma) and to greed for gold (Maltsev and the Soviet press have often used the expression "Tito's clique" to design them as gangsters). As Dumézil points out: "Tarpeia <...> has been viewed as the experimental demonstration of a power which, taken in itself, deserves nothing but the blames of moralists, a modern form of Tatius' shields (p.34)". At the dawn of the 1950s, Tarpeia, think Yugoslavia, was symbolically crushed not by shields, but by the Soviet official writers' novels. As a historical and political consequence, the story of Tarpeia founded a new world order: "To be sure, the myth narrates about a war, however its center of gravity is in the long concluding exposition that settled the actual world order <...> like in the myths of creation, the chaos is firstly mentioned to make the order appear out of it", see p.11. Hence, the punishment of Tarpeia for her treason and eventually her reintegration into the Roman imperial memory through her cult (Dumézil mentions libations in honor of Tarpeia's Manes, see p. 42) was mirrored in Maltsev's novel, which justifies the Soviet hegemony over Yugoslavia by Tito's betrayal. However, the Soviet split with Yugoslavia was followed by Khrushchev's restoration of his relations with Tito in 1955. Finally, the Tarpeian narrative implies that the Soviet Union would finally triumph over and absorb the West, like Romulus the Sabines.

³⁴ *Livy.* The Rise of Rome / transl. by T. J. Luce. Book I. Oxford; New York, 1998. P. 11, 5–9.

being thrown from the cliff, and this carried a stigma of shame. This situation is similar to the Yugoslav case, justifying the qualification of Maltsev's text as a "Tarpeian book".

It is interesting to note that the aim of such an empire by fiction is to have a specific impact on perception of the reader at the centre as well as at the periphery of the bloc. On the one hand, the strong effect on the people's republics can be measured through criticism and readers' letters. For example, the novel spurred an intense reaction in the Bulgarian press, and there was even an exchange of letters between the author himself and a group of Bulgarian frontier guards³⁵. The same effect can be observed in the RSFSR, at the centre of the empire, where the perception of a periphery arose in the Soviet readers' shaping of an imperial consciousness. This process was carefully sustained by discussion groups at the local level. Thus, in the municipal library of Kokchetavo (Kokshetau since 1993), a city in the province of Northern Kazakhstan, conferences and evening readings were regularly organized and dedicated to Stalin Prize winners, including Orest Maltsev's "Yugoslav Tragedy"³⁶.

Abroad, the propaganda machine was resorting to its wide international networks; such was the case with "Parallèle 50"³⁷, a Franco-Czech journal conveying Moscow's message about Maltsev's novel, "the novelist didn't produce a fiction but a documentary... on Tito's conspiracy to seize power... after reading this book, we hope that the Yugoslav people will be free from its today oppressors"³⁸. In doing so, the Soviet power led the literary offensive, targeting readers of the Western bloc. The Soviet empire by fiction extended beyond the ideological borders to challenge the European narrative on its own territory.

The study of Maltsev's novel gives us some insight into the imperial policy of the late Stalinist Soviet Union emphasizing the specific way to avoid any "ideological dissonance"³⁹. We call it "Tarpeian book" for it is a reminder of the punishment of the traitors in ancient Rome playing the role of the ostracised in the communist bloc. In this sense, the Soviet "Empire by fiction" demonstrates an undeniable symbolic component within its materialistic dimension. Indeed, the Party line was more decisive than any military goal *per se*. In the evolution of Soviet doctrinal debates, Tito's official return to favour in 1955 was the prologue to the inversion of values that took place at the XX Party Congress.

As for the consequences of American policy, the Yugoslav crisis fed the diplomat George Kennan's hope that other communist leaders "might already be infected by the

³⁵ Reactions in the press to Maltsev novel in 1953 // RGALI. F.631. Op. 26. Edinitsa Khranenia 538. L. 34–35 and 62–63; Maltsev replies to a group of frontier guards concerning his book. 1953. March 26 // RGALI. F.631. Op. 21. Edinitsa Khranenia 539. L. 2.

³⁶ *Tchernova V.* Stalinskoie Znamia. 1952. December 16 // RGALI. F.2175. Op. 2. Edinitsa Khranenia 361.

³⁷ *Parallèle 50* was a communist journal financed by Prague. It came out in Paris from 1947 to 1952. The title reflected its European as well as geopolitical ambitions: the 50th Parallel joined Paris to Moscow through Prague. For more details, see: *Noirant F.* *Parallèle 50: un périodique tchécoslovaque, communiste et parisien contre la division de l'Europe // Une Europe malgré tout. 1945–1990. Cultural, Intellectual and Scientific Contacts and Networks among Europeans during the Cold War / eds A. Fleury, L. Jílek.* Bruxelles; Berne; Berlin, 2009. P. 383–398.

³⁸ *Parallèle 50.* 1952. May 29 // RGALI. F.631. Op. 26. Edinitsa Khranenia 2625. L. 10.

³⁹ *Krushinskii S.* The Danger of Yugoslav Vanguardism. Report to Shepilov. 1955. July 8 // *Tsentr Khranenia Sovremennoi Dokumentatsii (future — TsKhSD).* F.5. Op. 30. Edinitsa Khranenia 121. L. 50–60, quoted in: *Hopf T.* *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Politics.* M., 1955–1999. Ithaca; London, 2002. P. 112.

Tito virus”. Hitherto, he recommended “fostering a heretical process” in Eastern Europe⁴⁰. Thus, perhaps because he was reassured by the first cracks in the Eastern bloc, the inflexible author of containment showed unusual appeasement and favoured negotiations with Moscow. Unfortunately, at the turn of the 1950s he lost his influence within the Department of State and was not able to stop the McCarthyist purges. The cultural war would gather steam within the next decade.

From Imperial Consciousness to Imperial Fiction

After having gone through the case-study and demonstrated the existence of “Empire by fiction”, let us focus on the concepts of empire and imperial consciousness in the Cold war context and today. Besides, what is their impact on Soviet and Russian identities? During the Cold War, the very concept of empire had moved to the ideological field too and, consequently, had to be defined anew. The domination within the two blocs implied the acceptance of an economic system (liberalism vs. state control) and of a set of values (individual liberties vs. cult of the worker). The Cold War empires relied on the principle of “Soft Power” formulated by Joseph Nye⁴¹ and struggled to “win the hearts and minds”, “Traditionally the test of a great power was its strength. Today, however, the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force <...> The factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power <...> new power resources, such as the capacity for effective communication and for <...> using international institutions, may prove more relevant”⁴². There is a “more attractive way of exercising power than traditional means <...> This second aspect of power — which occurs when one country gets other countries *want* what it wants — may be called co-optive or soft power”⁴³. Geir Lundestad considers that soft power was the monopoly of the West, “unlike the Soviet Union, which frequently had to rely on force, the United States was generally encouraged to take a more active interest in the outside world”⁴⁴. As Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis writes, by “empire” he means “a situation in which a single state shapes the behaviour of others, whether directly or indirectly, partially or completely, by means that can range from the outright use of force through intimidation, dependency, inducements, and even inspiration”⁴⁵. In the Eastern bloc, this inspirational role was devoted to official literary production.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the very idea of imperialism applied to this place of the world seems to have lost its accuracy. However, even now the Russian Federation remains the biggest territory reviving its imperial past often associated with President Putin’s policies. Let us glance at the evolution of this imperial narrative in the discourse of some remarkable contemporary Russian politicians and intellectuals. The writer and political dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008) considered that the Bolshevik revolution was a tragedy in Russian history, and that the genuine cultural and political

⁴⁰ Hixson W. L. George F. Kennan. Cold War Iconoclast. New York, 1989. P. 85.

⁴¹ Nye J. Soft Power // Foreign Policy. 1990. Vol. 80. P. 153–171.

⁴² Ibid. P. 154, 164.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 166.

⁴⁴ Lundestad G. Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952. P. 263.

⁴⁵ Gaddis J. L. We Now Know: Rethinking the Cold War. Oxford, 1997. P. 27.

roots of Russia are to be found in tsarism and orthodoxy, and he wanted to get rid of the “imperial doping”⁴⁶.

The geopolitician Aleksandr Dugin (born in 1962), the leader of neo- Eurasianism, was inspired by Sir MacKinder’s theory and identifies Russia with the Eurasian “heart-land”. Following the Slavophil tradition⁴⁷, he considers that Russia is the leader of the Eurasian space called to face the “Atlantic imperialism”. He praises Russian messianism and wants to restore the empire, supporting strategic alliances with Germany, Japan, and Iran.

For the Director General of Roscosmos — and former Russia’s ambassador to NATO — Dmitri Rogozin (born in 1963), “the Russian land has grown not by a process of colonization, but by the appropriation of big spaces without any violence. The Russian national consciousness was thus shaped jointly with the other ethnic groups living near by. Because of the wealth and natural resources, Russian people used to always be in a defensive position. This perception of one’s own territory is peculiar to an imperialistic view. It is an innate imperialism of large spaces that allows the territorial unity between Kaliningrad to the Kouriles Islands to be maintained. “Empire” is supposed to perceive this land as common, on a scale of “humanity” in the Dostoevskian sense”⁴⁸.

As a result, even at the turn of the twenty-first century, there is a persistence of the imperial paradigm in Russian political discourse, but some questions remain: is it really a remnant of the tsarist — or the Soviet — empire, a host from the past hovering over the collective memory? Or, does it make any sense in today’s reality? And how does it appear in fiction that, being no longer directed by the State, mirrors the cultural and political climate of its time?

Looking back at Russian imperial consciousness, let us switch from the concept of “Empire by fiction” to the phenomenon of *imperial fiction*. As noted above, there is a mutual interdependence between the geopolitical architecture (empire) and the official literary production. Both reinforce each other: in the case of a growing empire, politics tends to support the imperial literature to legitimize their strategic aspirations. This literature has the effect of the empire-builder, creating symbolical political alliance and a feeling of historic necessity. Hence, the empire grows and strengthens thanks to its imperial narrative. Today one is surprised by the lack of imperial fiction. Russian contemporary prose is rather introspective, self-centred, if not minimalist. This is true even for authors of military prose like Andrei Guelassimov, who describes the war in Chechnya in *Thirst* (2002) through the prism of shame, vodka and despair — far from the epic times of Socialist Realism. I think this vacuum of imperial fiction is proof that, arguably, Putin’s Russia is not a new imperial state, but rather a construction built up from memory blocks mostly extending into its own past. Russian imperial consciousness is passive, bequeathed by tsarist times and the Soviet Union, and echoes the geographical scale of the country.

The study of the enemy in Maltsev’s novel gives us insight into the imperial policy of the late Stalinist Soviet Union, pointing out a specific way of using literary diplomacy in

⁴⁶ Solzhenitsyn A. Kak Nam Obustroit’ Rossiю // Literaturnaia gazeta. 1990. No. 38. September.

⁴⁷ Trubetskoi N. Nasledie Chinguizkhana. M., 2017.

⁴⁸ Auclert R. Interview of Dmitrii Rogozin. Geopolitics of Russia: European culture with Russian values // Revue de Défense Nationale. 2012. Vol. 749. P. 137–139.

order to avoid any “ideological dissonance”⁴⁹. The creative impetus displayed by Stalinist prose is noteworthy, consisting in assigning their roles to political enemies inside the Soviet narrative. I call it “Tarpeian book” because it is a reminder of the punishment of the traitors in ancient Rome. In this sense, the Soviet ‘Empire by fiction’ demonstrates a high symbolic component in spite of its materialistic dimension. To put it differently and resort to Nye’s terminology, the Soviet Union was no less a soft power than a hard one.

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⁴⁹ Krushinskii S. The Danger of Yugoslav Vanguardism. Report to Shepilov. 1955. July 8 // TsKhSD. F. 5. Op. 30. Edinitsa Khranenia 121. L. 50–60, quoted in: *Hopf T. Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Politics*. M., 1955–1999. P. 112.

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Received: July 17, 2018

Accepted: November 30, 2018

Статья поступила в редакцию 17 июля 2018 г.

Рекомендована в печать 30 ноября 2018 г.