

“Critical Appropriation of Literary Heritage” and the Shaping of Soviet National Literatures: A Close Reading of the Debate in the Journal *Literaturnyi kritik* (The Literary Critic, 1933–36)

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Point of Departure

This article zooms in on what can be called the laboratory of the notion of Soviet literature: the debates of the journal *Literaturnyi kritik*, in which the programmatic debate at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (1934) was prepared, articulated, and further elaborated. Mikhail Lifshits, one of the most prominent art, literary, and cultural critics at the time, decades later described that period as a “zazor,” a crevice¹ in and from which great things evolved.² A vibrant moment when RAPP, the formerly most powerful party organization of “Proletarian writers” (Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei, 1925–32), was just dissolved and the Writers’ Union as the only remaining state organization just founded. Nothing was finalized yet, but the future course of action was set.³ Objectives and dogmas (“Soviet literature,” “socialist realism”) were worked out and implemented in institutions and organizations for the first time, yet these years also saw Soviet internationalism and the announced “socialism in one country,” that is, the (multi) national isolation of the Soviet Union, still keeping each other in balance.

From its foundation in 1933 until the end of the decade, the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* was the preeminent organ of the literary-critical debate and served as THE platform for questions of aesthetic theory. Translations of parts of G. W. F. Hegel’s *Aesthetics* as well as essays on Immanuel Kant and Henri Bergson formed a central part of the publication program, as did the critical reception of modernist tendencies in western literatures. In this context, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway figured

1. With this image, Lifshits takes up and modifies the metaphor of the interval (*promezhutok*) as coined by Iurii Tynianov for literary history in a broader theoretical and historical context.

2. Looking back, Lifshits spoke of a “great passage from the old class-determined world to the still unknown world of human society of the future,” Mikhail Lifshits, “Otritsanie otritsaniia,” *Sputnik* 12 (1976): 57. In another statement he wrote: “Between the crash of the old dogmata of abstract Marxism that still had survived from pre-October days and the confirmation of one single dogmatic model a wonderful period of time opened up.” Lifshits, *V mire estetiki: Stat’i 1969–1981gg.* (Moscow, 1985), 255.

3. Writing this lapidary sentence, I am not sure whether it must have a cynical undertone: Does not “finalized” connote also the fact that 90% of the voices/authors I am referring to would fall victim to the Stalinist repressions (most of them in 1937)?

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as major names, and translations of Georg Lukács's critique of expressionism (1933) and—from 1935 onward—his reflections on *Problems of the Novel*, which definitely contributed to theoretically consolidating anti-modernist (socialist) realism as the one and only literary norm. In essays on Vissarion Belinskii, Nikolai Chernyshevskii, and Nikolai Dobroliubov, a new “national” approach was elaborated and the foundations for the so-called “real criticism” were laid. At the same time, the journal published essays by authors like Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii and Andrei Platonov,⁴ as well as two short stories by Platonov that hardly could otherwise be placed with his works.⁵ In its later years, the journal played a major role in the discussion on “political poetry”⁶ and defended Mikhail Sholokhov's “Tikhii Don.”

Research has hitherto particularly focused on the journal as the arena of polemics between the so called “voprekisty” and “blagodaristy” and on George Lukács's role in the development of the journal's theoretical positions. Lukács's contributions on realism, which countered “irrational” National Socialism with a rational Marxist approach, were at the core of the journal's “world literature orientation” and supported its anti-fascist positioning as an international and internationalist literature platform.⁷

This article considers the publications in *Literaturnyi kritik* in their variety as a laboratory and the formation of a literary-theoretical program, focusing on one of its key concepts: “the critical appropriation of heritage.” Departing from Evgeny Dobrenko's diagnosis that the worldview of Stalinism in general was characterized by an “awareness of heritage and a synthesis that. . . includes everything conceiving of itself as ‘heir’ that removes all contradictions of previous epochs,”⁸ it will focus on a controversial debate on the pages of *Literaturnyi kritik*. This debate was based on a threefold agreement: to lay claim to the artistic and literary heritage of the world, in order to safeguard it from fascism; the demand to critically appropriate the heritage of realism in order to bring forward a high-quality socialist realism; and the effort to establish a new, Soviet literature as a multinational concept. The controversy to be analyzed arose around the questions of first, how to define the heritage, what should be part of it and what not, and second, how to “critically appropriate” the heritage.

4. For example, a unique satirical commentary on the All-Union Writers' Congress. Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, “Kommentarii Prutkova-vnuka k materialam pervogo vsesoiuznogo s'ezda pisatelei,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 11 (1934): 214–16; and his essay on “Falstaff” from the context of Krzhizhanovskii's research on Shakespeare in those years: “Shagi Falstaffa,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 12 (1934): 116–26.

5. Quite unexpectedly under the rubric “Kritika” in number 8 (1936), Platonov's short stories “Fro” and “Immortality” (Bessmertie) are framed by a short introduction “On Good Stories and Editorial Routine,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 8 (1936): 114–45.

6. E. Usievich, “K sporam o politicheskoi poezii,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 5 (1937): 62–102.

7. See Katerina Clark and Galin Tihanov, “Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov: V poiskakh granits sovremennosti,” in Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov, eds., *Istoriia russkoi literaturnoi kritiki: Sovetskaia i postsovetskaia epokhi*, (Moscow, 2011), 286. During his second exile in Moscow, from late 1933 until 1945, Lukács presented a modification of his theory of the novel that had been first published in 1916. The discussion of his view began immediately after the All-Union Congress in the fall of 1934.

8. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine. Evgeny Dobrenko, “Zanimatel'naia istoriia: Istoricheskii roman i sotsialisticheskii realism,” in Evgeny Dobrenko and Hans Günther, eds., *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon* (St. Petersburg, 2000).

“Critical Appropriation of Heritage”: The Way to Mastership

Founded in 1933, in the run-up to the First All-Union Congress, *Literaturnyi kritik* served as the arena where crucial concepts and norms that were established at the congress by the status of the Writers Union as a standard binding on all still could be negotiated. First of all, this was the definition of socialist realism as the aesthetic norm for every text and work of art to be composed in its relation to previous versions of realism. In contrast to earlier forms of realism, socialist realism was determined not solely to analyze or diagnose the reality depicted, but to create and shape a new reality. A “truthful depiction of the reality” (*pravdivost'*) should guarantee to “ideologically remake and educate the workers in the spirit of socialism.”⁹ Or, as Stalin said, writers had to be “engineers of the human soul.” The debate flared up over whether historical masterpieces of nineteenth-century realism should serve as models for socialist realism, even though their authors, from the perspective of Marxism-Leninism, had written them from a politically incorrect point of view. The debate that was fought out on its pages has come to be known as the controversy between the so-called *voprekisty* against the *blagodaristy*, between those who held the view that the aesthetic value of a work fundamentally depended on the political views of its author (“blagodarists” and “sociologists” like V. F. Pereverzev, who also took part in the journal’s debate) and those who argued that valuable realism may be produced in spite of the author’s (wrong) political position. After M.M. Rozental’s programmatic article “Worldview (political position) and method (poetics) in literary writing,” the majority of the journal’s authors—among them the editor-in-chief, Pavel Iudin, as well as some of its pre-eminent voices, Mikhail Lifshits,¹⁰ Elena Usievich and Georg Lukács, but also Il’ia Erenburg—tended to value the mastership of canonized authors of world literature as a resource for present and future ways of writing and to defend the works of those contemporary authors who were exposed to criticism. Accordingly, the debate in the journal focused on questions of style and aesthetics especially in relation to the literature of the prerevolutionary bourgeois past, but also to the development of literary modernism. It can be said that the agenda of the journal was generally directed against both, the ultra-pragmatic and maximal party loyal approach represented by the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) that, before it was shut down in 1932 and replaced by the Writers’ Union, had suggested what they called a “proletarian realism”—a simplified version of psychological realism—and also against the circle surrounding Pereverzev, who had been criticized by the RAPP, declared “men’shevist” and excluded from it in 1930.¹¹ In its early

9. Pavel Iudin, “Doklad P.F. Iudina ob ustave soiuza sovetskikh pisatelei,” in I. K. Luppel, M. M. Rozental’, and S. M. Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 1934: Stenograficheskiĭ otchet* (Moscow, 1934): 666.

10. Like Usievich, Lifshits had emerged from the circle around Lunacharskii at the Institute for Literature and Art of the Communist Academy and made a name for himself primarily as an editor of the writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin on (world) literature and as the closest discussion partner of Georg Lukács.

11. See Ivan Sergievskii, “Sociologiya i problemy istorii russkoi literatury,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 10 (1935): 34–51. For broader info about RAPP see Katerina Clark, “RAPP i institutsionalizatsiia sovetskogo kul’turnogo polia v 1920kh–nachale 1930kh godov” in

years Pereverzev himself and members of his circle also contributed to the journal, but the majority of its authors promoted an aesthetically sophisticated understanding of literature that started from the premise that aesthetic mastery and literature's effectiveness as an instrument of education condition each other.¹² However, looking at the details, their positions and also the strategies of their argumentation clearly diverged among themselves: there were different notions of heritage and realism and opinions particularly differed between the defenders of modernist/avant-garde tendencies—such as among others Sergei Tret'iakov—and their critics.

The editors of the journal, M.M. Rosental' and P.F. Iudin (also the director of the Philosophical Institute of the Academy of Sciences and the head of the organization of the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers), proclaimed the tasks of the journal in the programmatic editorial ("Nashi zadachi," Our Goals) of the first issue in Summer 1933. Among the main goals was the "creation of a socialist and the appropriation of classical aesthetics" (*sozdanie sotsialisticheskoi i osvoenie klassicheskoi estetiki*), and establishing an understanding of Soviet literature as a new world literature (*osmyslenie sovetskoi literatury kak novoi literatury mira*). The question of how to reach these goals was directly touched upon by these very formulations: through the "appropriation of classical aesthetics."¹³

The debate evolved around questions such as "who is the heir to world literature," "what should be valued as heritage," "how to legitimate learning from or even imitating classics, when they evolved from a political context that proletarian culture and socialism claims to have overcome," and "how to appropriate heritage." The only premise shared by everyone except the "sociologists" and a few representatives of older avant-garde positions was the importance of appropriating the literary heritage of world literature in order to further develop literature as the most powerful instrument to effectively educate the masses, because literature should not be just for pleasure, but the most powerful means to affect, influence, and educate millions of people.¹⁴ This premise—at least in its general idea—was completely in line with ideological statements by Lenin and Stalin.

Lenin had already addressed the problem of heritage long before the revolution, pleading for an active understanding of heritage as an act of conscious selection, and suggesting to understand "preservation" not in the "antiquarian" sense of the word (not in opposition to future-oriented innovation), but rather in harmony with it. In his essay from 1897, "*Ot kakogo nasledstva my otkazyvaemsia?*" (Which Heritage Do We Reject?), Lenin stated: "To preserve

Dobrenko and Günther, eds., *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon*, 209–24, especially: 217–21. To the theoretical context of the early 1930s in general, Clark and Tihanov observed in the early 1930s a dominant tendency against pragmatic, utilitarian, and materialistic approaches towards culture. See Clark and Tihanov, "Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov," 281.

12. For example, Pereverzev's article "Narodnyi iazyk u Gogol'ia," *Literaturnyi kritik* 9 (1934): 80–93.

13. "Besides the question of 'What to do?' there is the question of 'How to do it?'" M.M. Rosental' and P.F. Iudin, "Nashi zadachi," *Literaturnyi kritik* 1 (1933): 6.

14. Rosental' and Iudin, "Nashi zadachi," 4.

the heritage does not mean to content oneself with it” (*Khranit' nasledstvo—vovse ne znachit eshche ogranichivat'sia nasledstvom*).¹⁵ To inherit is already clearly understood as an act of taking up and of making use of past accomplishments for the present day. In the years after the revolution, when Maksim Gor'kii was already in the process of realizing his publication project “World Literature,” which was also based on a—still inexplicit—concept of heritage, Lenin stressed the urgency of appropriating “old society” achievements in the field of knowledge and expertise (including art) for communism in a speech at the Congress of the Komsomol.¹⁶ In the years before and after the October revolution, cultural heritage was continuously defined as an indispensable resource that can inspire and help to prevent dilettantism among the creative communist youth.¹⁷

It was not until the beginning of the 1930s that the notion of literature as heritage became the centerpiece of a comprehensive literary-political program. In an article “Lenin and Literary Studies,” A. V. Lunacharskii made this reference explicit when he wrote: “In the foreground is the very fact of the class struggle; the new class assimilates what is useful from the inheritance of the bourgeois world in order to direct it immediately as a weapon against capitalism itself. The hygiene of everyday life, certain data and certain methods of the sciences and arts can be assimilated, and yet everyday life itself must acquire a character far removed from the Western bourgeoisie.”¹⁸ This program was implemented by means of canonization through literary history writing as well as programs and norms for new Soviet literary writing, but also included editorial projects and research.

In this context, one of the flagship-projects was the famous archival edition series *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (Literary Inheritance) founded by RAPP and the Institute of Literature and Language (ILIA, Institut literatury i iazyka) of the “Communist Academy of Sciences” (1918–36) in 1931. The editors’ preface to the first volume also refers to the already quoted pre-revolution essay by Lenin, “Which Heritage Do We Reject?”¹⁹ Lenin wrote:

“Only exact insight into culture that is the creation of humankind, only its appropriation will enable us to build up proletarian culture.” Lenin’s thought is groundbreaking for the attitude towards the inheritance of the old world: the proletariat does not reject this inheritance, hence it is the only legitimate heir of classical culture. Lenin repeated this crucial idea time and again. . . especially when he addressed young communists, for they often

15. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *O kul'ture i iskusstve: Sbornik statei i otryvkov*, ed. Mikhail Lifshits (Moscow, 1938), 88. See also: Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, “L.N. Tolstoi,” (1910) in Lenin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1931), 14:400–3.

16. Lenin’s speech at the Third Komsomol Congress on February 10, 1920, in Lenin, *O molodezhi*, (Moscow, 1974), 406–9.

17. See Aleksandr Bogdanov, “O chudozhestvennom nasledstve,” in Aleksandr Bogdanov, *Iskusstvo i rabochii klass* (Moscow, 1918), 31–54; also Petr Kogan, *Nashi literaturnye spory. K istorii kritiki oktiabr'skoi epokhi*, (Moscow 1927), 109. See also: Clark and Tihanov, “Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov,” 70.

18. A. V. Lunacharskii, “Lenin i literaturovedenie,” in *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, 12 vols. (Moscow, 1932), 6:16. This was followed in 1938 by Lenin’s *O kul'ture i iskusstve*.

19. Vladimir I. Lenin, “Ot kakogo nasledstva my otkazyvaemsia?,” in V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 55 vols. (Moscow, 1967), 2:543–50 (1895–97).

display a nihilist attitude towards culture from the past, totally reject it and are not able to acknowledge its importance for communist education. . .²⁰

The following paragraph quotes Lenin's "Project on a Resolution on Proletarian Culture," which he had presented as the fourth point of this resolution at the First Congress of the Proletkul't. Here, Lenin refers to Marx himself as the precursor of the strategy "to appropriate all valuable inheritance of 2000 years of human thought and culture."²¹

Accordingly, the editorial board of *Literary Inheritance* formulated the goal of the series "to critically record the artistic heritage that the proletariat inherits from world literature" and thus "to take up the Bolshevik struggle for the reevaluation of classical literary heritage, first and foremost the literature of the peoples of the USSR."²² Symptomatic for the literary politics of those years, world literature and the literature of the peoples of the USSR are mentioned in one breath because the literatures of the peoples of the USSR are understood as integral parts of world literature.²³

It has to do with Marx and Engels's importance for this concept that the first and second volume of *Literary Inheritance* was dedicated to their correspondence.²⁴ Exactly in these years—the early 1930s—Mikhail Lifshits wrote his monograph *On the Question of Marx' Views on Art*, where he took up the same Lenin quote in order to underline the significance of Marx's emphasis on the importance of the classical heritage.²⁵ He co-edited the anthology *Marx and Engels on Art and Literature* and, a few years later, an anthology with Lenin's statements on questions of aesthetics.²⁶ Both anthologies ultimately served to authorize and normatively substantiate the understanding of world literature as the heritage of the proletariat and as the ultimate resource for all future creativity.

Finally, in those same years at the beginning of the 1930s, Stalin himself, referring to Lenin's concepts of heritage, resolved the seemingly contradictory claim by revealing its "dialectic":

"Il'ich taught us that without knowledge and without preserving the old cultural experience of mankind we will not be able to build up our new socialist culture. . . dialectic requires not only to reject the old, but to preserve

20. *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 1 (1931): 1.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. However, the further development of the series *Literary Inheritance* shows a clear shift of emphasis in the direction of world literature as it was perceived from a conventional European perspective: Among thirty-two volumes published by 1937, three were on Goethe (1932) and two on relations between Russian culture and France (1937).

24. See Clark and Tihanov, "Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov," 282.

25. Mikhail Lifshits, *K voprosu o vzgliadakh Marksa na iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1933).

26. Frants Petrovich Shiller and Mikhail Lifshits, eds., *Marks i Engel's ob iskusstve* (Moscow, 1933). Also: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Ueber Kunst und Literatur. Sammelband unter Redaktion von I. K. Luppel*, ed. Ivan Kapitanovich Luppel (Moscow, 1937); Lenin, *O kul'ture i iskusstve*. Again, Lenin's statement of 1897 (note 13) is referred to several times. See also Clark and Tihanov, "Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov," 283. The already mentioned essay on Tolstoi is also published in Lenin, *Lenin o kul'ture i iskusstve*, Lifshits, ed., 124.

it. . . The writer should know that in order to become a master of the poetic word he can also learn from the works of counterrevolutionary writers. . .”²⁷

In accordance with this, the motto of the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* was “to capture one’s craft,” but the question of which would be the right way to execute the appropriation was still at stake in the first half of the 1930s.²⁸

The “Only Heir” and the “World”

In complete agreement with the opening speech of Andrei A. Zhdanov, the secretary of the “Tsentral’nyi komitet of the VKP,” journal editor-in-chief Pavel Iudin emphasized a dialectic perspective on the role of the proletariat as the “sole heir” to all the creations of world culture and especially to those of bourgeois culture, which can be appropriated and transformed in line with the new, socialist society.²⁹ What is new in Zhdanov and Iudin is the emphasis on “critical appropriation” that comes from Lenin and is increasingly rhetorically refined. Opening the first meeting at the All-union Writers’ Congress, Andrei A. Zhdanov declared the “critical appropriation of the literary heritage of all periods” to be precondition for the “the writer as engineer of the human soul” in Stalin’s definition.³⁰ Iudin emphatically seconded Zhdanov in his editorial in three successive paragraphs.³¹ Various contributions to the journal echo these formulas or even carry them to the extreme, for instance V. Gerasimova, who described appropriation in terms of a “fight” against the “titans” and “conquest” in her article “For the Hegemony of the Literature of the Communist World.”³²

As far as the notions of “literature” and “author” are concerned, there is a significant shift from earlier definitions of the proletariat as the sole heir to world culture (like Bogdanov’s and Lenin’s) towards Stalin, Zhdanov, and Iudin. Their argumentation implicitly distinguishes between the writer and his audience in terms of the “engineer of the soul” vs. the addressee. In their case, the appropriation of heritage—literary mastership—serves the purpose of generating the strongest possible impact on the readership. As literature has become an instrument of cultural power, the appropriation of world literary heritage serves to increase this power—of the writer over the reader.

Another shift in the definition of the appropriation of heritage is still ongoing: the question of aesthetic modernism: as heritage and as a mode of

27. At a meeting of communist authors in Gor’kii’s apartment on October 20, 1932. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1116, l. 20–27. Published in *Voprosy literatury* 7–8 (2003): 224–34, at: <https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1014991>.

28. “Ovladet’ tekhniki svoego dela,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 1 (1933): 10.

29. Andrei Zhdanov, “Rech’ sekretaria CK VKP,” in I. K. Luppul, M. M. Rozental’, and S.M. Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 1934: Stenograficheskiy otchet* (Moscow, 1934): 2–5.

30. Zhdanov, “Rech’ sekretaria CK VKP,” 2–5.

31. Pavel Iudin, “Doklad P. F. Iudina ob ustave Soiuza sovetskikh pisatelei,” in Luppul, Rozental’, and Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 665.

32. This rhetoric might remind one of how the Russian formalist Iurii Tynianov wrote about “literary evolution” by means of a rhetorics of fight and conquest. See V. Gerasimova. “For the Hegemony of the Literature of the Communist World,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 9 (1934): 171–76.

appropriating the heritage. The debate went continued but in the end the discussion resulted in the restriction to realism.

Hereditary Disease “Modernism” vs. Heritage “Realism”

After socialist realism had been declared the aesthetic norm for all literary writing, the journal’s authors still continued discussing three prominent poetical directions of the past with respect to their usefulness as heritage for the present: realism, romanticism, and modernism. Under the auspice of Marx and Lenin, the notion of realism was broadened and extended to the whole range of premodern classics.³³ Gor’kii in his keynote lecture at the Allunion Writers Congress legitimated Soviet literature to inherit romanticism when he propagated “revolutionary romanticism” as complement to “critical realism” and as opposed to “bourgeois realism” as the most powerful instrument “to provoke a revolutionary attitude towards reality.”³⁴ Subsequently, the classical work of historical realism and romanticism could easily be re-canonized and adopted as a resource for socialist realist recycling. At the same time, the appropriation of modernist literature went on winding paths until it was finally inhibited.

As a consequence, it was safe for Iudin to state: “Socialist realism first of all accepts as an heir the best traditions in literature of realism as well as of revolutionary romanticism. The classical inheritance of the past—this is the historical resource of Soviet literature, the material on which Soviet literature started to exist, the ground from which it can delineate itself. Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Heine, Fonvizin, Griboedov, Pushkin, Gogol’, Chernyshevskii, Tolstoi—they constitute the school, from which in one way or another all authors of Soviet literature graduated.”³⁵ But critics elaborating on modernist authors from the west argued or had to argue differently. It is important to underline that even though most of them finally denied the “appropriability” of modernist authors for Soviet usage, what they wrote were not simple accusations but informative critical articles.³⁶

Rashel’ Miller-Budnitskaia is an interesting case, because as a scholarly expert and translator of English and American modernist literature, she was a mediator of the very texts that she also criticized.³⁷ In 1934, Miller-

33. See D. Gachev, “Problemy realizma Didro,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 9 (1934), 32ff.

34. A.M. Gor’kii, “Doklad A.M. Gor’kogo o Sovetskoi literature,” in Luppol, Rozental’, and Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 10ff.

35. P.F. Iudin, “Doklad P. F. Iudina ob ustave Soiuzna sovetskikh pisatelei,” in Luppol, Rozental’, and Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 665.

36. See Dmitrii Mirskii, “Dos Passos, Soviet Literature and the West,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 1 (1933): 111–26, especially 114, where Mirskii also comments on Joyce and Proust, but declares them as a heritage that is inappropriate for “critical appropriation.”

37. In addition to Russian modernist literature, Miller-Budnitskaia worked primarily on works from English and American modernist literature. She translated these as well as other modernist classics such as Pirandello, but also Yiddish literature, into Russian. Starting from the early 1930s, she worked at the Leningrad Academic Institute of Russian Literature, the so-called “Pushkinskii dom,” and was one of the very few there to survive not only the purges of the 1930s, but even the antisemitic cosmopolitanism campaign of the postwar period.

Budnitskaia commented directly in the journal *Zvezda* on the translation the chapter “Pokhorony Patrika Dignema” of James Joyce’s “Ulysses” by Valentin Stenich. In *Literaturnyi kritik*, Miller-Budnitskaia then went on to analyze Joyce’s poetics as polluted by “inherited” elements from “medieval feudal-ecclesiastical forms of consciousness”; from “biologizing” naturalism; decadence of authors such as Joris-Karl Huysmans and Octave Mirbeau, and from the bourgeois “neo-romanticism of symbolism and expressionism.”³⁸ What Miller-Budnitskaia demonstrates in practice is what Ivan Sergievskii recommends in his article “How to Comment on the Classics”: paratextual framing as a means of critically appropriating works of the past that ideologically do not conform to the political views of the present, of disarming them and steering toward their being read without risk of getting polluted.³⁹

While the voices of those who criticize but still discuss and those who finally discard modernist poetics grew stronger, the lively debate on the pages of *Literaturnyi kritik* went on. Critics remained who suggested experimental forms of contemporary modernist literature was a proper tool to critically appropriate the literary heritage of the bourgeois past.

Between Moscow and Germany: Parallel Controversy about the Right Way to Inherit

From the end of 1933, when his second Moscow exile began and his first article criticizing Expressionism had been published in *Literaturnyi kritik*, the voice of Georg Lukács became central to the conservative position.⁴⁰ During his exile, which lasted from 1933 to 1945, Lukács became an integral member of Soviet institutions.⁴¹ In the context of and just after the congress, Lukács’s reflections on the genre of the novel became the focus of attention when he prepared the keyword “novel” for the “Literary Encyclopedia” and discussed it with members of the *Literaturnyi kritik* circle.⁴² In clear agreement with

38. See R. Miller-Budnitskaia’s essay “Ulyss Dzhheimsa Dzhoisa,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 1 (1934): 167–180, 167, 171, 177.

39. I. Sergievskii, “Kak kommentirovat’ klassikov,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 1 (1933): 152–55, 153.

40. In 1939–40, this debate was also carried out in *Literaturnaia gazeta*. Lukács’s essays on the “History of Realism” appeared in Moscow in the later 1930s, both in Russian (often abridged) and in German.

41. As lecturers at the IFLI, founded in 1931, which later formed the foundation of the Humanities Department of the Academy of Science, they investigated idealist philosophical aesthetics, including those of Kant and Hegel, and the Renaissance epoch. See Clark and Tihanov, “Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov,” 286–87. Lifshits joined the party only in 1938, that is, after he had already written all his programmatic literary-theoretical articles on aesthetics. Nils Meier points out that in the literary-critical section of the journal, more than 400 reviews are devoted to heritage, among which Russian and west European classics figure prominently. See Nils Meier, *Die Zeitschrift Literaturnyi kritik im Zeichen sowjetischer Literaturpolitik* (Munich, 2014), 111–12.

42. It started with a publication in *Oktiabr’ 7* (1934), the journal that used to be the organ of VAPP and MAPP and had just that year been incorporated into the Writers’ guild. See M. Wegner: “Disput über den Roman: Georg Lukács und Michail Bachtin. Die 30er Jahre,” *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 33, no. 1 (1988): 20–26. In December 1934 and January 1935, the debate reached a climax when Lukács’s manuscript, which he had prepared on

many speakers at the First All-Union Congress, Lukács was at pains to formulate his concept of the novel genre with reference to the aesthetic, cultural, and literary-historical statements of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, which had just been published by Lifshits. Yet, Lukács's "genealogy of socialist-realist literature" is special: reaching back to ancient Greece and including as its apotheosis the new Soviet literature, it separates the 'good' literature of all epochs as "realist" from the politically unacceptable "decadent" one. Thus, Socialist Realism is given the task of saving and critically appropriating the great heritage of realism on the one hand, while on the other, to safeguard itself against "decay" and the influence of "bourgeois decadence" that—from Lukács' point of view—realism had experienced in naturalism and then in modernism and expressionism (keyword "formalism").⁴³

Little attention has been paid so far to the fact that, already from 1933 onwards there was debate in *Literaturnyi kritik* and at the All-Union Congress, which could be called the Soviet parallel to the "expressionism debate."⁴⁴ For both debates the term "heritage" had a key function in the dispute about the right way to deal with literature of the past. In both cases, all participants understood "heritage" both as a given and as a task to actively deal with; yet, opinions differed in "how" to go about this. Lukács insisted on preserving historical realism in the process of claiming its heritage—which he then, in the later contributions of 1937—pushed even further in the direction of party-political key slogans of "sincerity" (as "partisanship") and "popularity."⁴⁵

the keyword "novel" for the first Soviet *Literaturnaia enciklopediia* was controversially discussed at the Communist Academy. This was just one of the discussions that were subsequently published in the form of abbreviated stenographs in *Literaturnyi kritik*. See Lukács, "Problemy teorii romana," *Literaturnyi kritik* 2 (1935), 214–49, and 3 (1935): 231–54. On the cutting of the publication of the stenographs and omission of Viktor Shklovskii's contributions to this debate, see Galin Tihanov, "Viktor Shklovsky and Georg Lukács in the 1930s," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 1 (2000): 44–65.

43. See G. Lukács, "Roman kak burzhuaznaia epopeia," in *Literaturnaia entsyklopediia*, 9:795–832. The full version is the German one, Georg Lukács, "Der Roman (1934)," in *Disput über den Roman. Beiträge zur Romantheorie aus der Sowjetunion 1917–1941* (Berlin, 1988), 358–59. See Clark and Tihanov, "Sovetskii literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov," 288, and Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford, 2000), 113–28. Also see Lukács' polemical essay against naturalism, modernism, and the "degeneration" of the novel towards description or reportage: "Erzählen oder Beschreiben?," *Internationale Literatur* 11 (1936): 100–18, and 12 (1936): 108–23. Russian version: "Рассказ или описание?," trans. N. Vol'kenau, *Literaturnyi kritik* 8 (1936): 44–67. See also Lukács's earlier essay on this subject: "Reportage oder Design? Kritische Bemerkungen anlässlich des Romans von Ottwalt," *Die Linkskurve* 7 (1932): 23ff. and 8 (1932): 27f. Reprinted in Lukács, Georg Lukács zum 13. April 1970 (Neuwied, Germany, 1970). On the journal *Internationale Literatur* as an exile journal, see Angela Huß-Michel, *Literarische und politische Zeitschriften des Exils 1933–1945* (Stuttgart, 1987), 125–28. Huß-Michel also refers to Ernst Bloch as the source of ideas for the discussion on heritage (127).

44. Lukács essay "Velichie i padenie ekspressionizma" appeared first in 1933 in *Literaturnyi kritik* 2 (1933) and only 1934 in the German edition of *Internatsional'naia literatura* as "Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus," *Internationale Literatur* 1 (1934).

45. See Lukács article "Why do we need the classical heritage?" which was still unpublished at the time. See Meier, *Die Zeitschrift Literaturnyi kritik*, 180. G. Lukács, "Wozu brauchen wir das klassische Erbe?" in Anton Hiersche and Edward Kowalski, eds., *Literaturtheorie und Literaturkritik in der frühsowjetischen Diskussion: Standorte*,

Other prominent voices to the contrary linked “mastership” with the criterion of aesthetic-literary innovation and artistic experimentation. Exactly in this experiment they recognized the demand for a critical appropriation of the heritage. At the congress itself, S. Tret’iakov, the “father” of “literature fakta,” together with Nikolai Bukharin were advocates of this position, while in *Literaturnyi kritik* Il’ia Erenburg (who was practically the only representative of this position to survive the Stalin purges) was its strongest proponent. In his contribution “Knigi meniaut zhizn’,”⁴⁶ Erenburg referred also to his own work when he defended innovative documentary forms such as the “ocherk,” (interview), the stenograph, and protocol as experimental steps toward a new, contemporary mode of writing and a “new form of the novel” against the revival of the classical form of the realist novel, which he criticizes as “epigonal” and “a cult of reactionary aesthetic form.”⁴⁷

Looking at these opposing positions, an interesting parallel—indeed a parallel and not the result of reception—can be found in the debate between Lukács and Ernst Bloch, which took place during the following years in Germany (and Switzerland). Whereas Lukács condemned naturalism and dismissed Expressionism as “petty-bourgeois,”⁴⁸ Ernst Bloch, in the preface to his programmatic book *Die Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (The Inheritance of our Time, 1935), like Erenburg, criticized the conservative appropriation of realism as demanded by Lukács and others for being epigonal.⁴⁹ In 1937, in his debate with Lukács, Bloch explicitly addresses the “problem of cultural inheritance.”

Programme, Schulen, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1993), 422–27. There he wrote: “. . .the classics offer us a standard and a model of how a rich and profound humanity can be richly and deeply and poignantly shaped. Our contemporaries—caught up in the barbaric prejudices of the imperialist period—have lost almost all sense of standard needed for the actual design of humanity.” And: “It will perhaps sound paradoxical to some readers, but I dare to say that our entire contemporary literature—with the sole exception of Gor’kii—has not created a popular figure that could be compared with Goethe’s Klärchen or Dorothea, with Walter Scott’s Jenny Dean, with Cooper’s Leatherstocking, and with countless other figures of classical literature. This is what we have to learn from the classics. This is the most important part of their heritage”: Lukács, “Wozu brauchen wir das klassische Erbe?,” 426–27). Similar theses can also be found in some of Lukács’s essays published in *Literaturnyi kritik* such as the version of “The Historical Novel.” See: Meier, *Die Zeitschrift Literaturnyi kritik*, 183.

46. Il’ia Erenburg, “Knigi meniaut zhizn’,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 9 (1934): 155–64. The article almost verbatim corresponds to his speech at the 7th meeting of the Congress. See Luppol, Rozental’, and Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 182–86.

47. Erenburg, “Knigi meniaut zhizn’,” 161–62.

48. Symptomatically, Georg Lukács himself used the term “heritage” in his first contribution to *Literaturnyi kritik* to point out cases of “heritage” showing a wrong literary direction, that is, in relation to Heinrich Mann: “Heinrich Mann’s spiritual isolation in Weimar Germany is also expressed in the fact that the literary heritage he appropriated for himself in the course of his development was almost exclusively French (from Voltaire to Anatole France). Thus, Heinrich Mann politically and ideologically does not go beyond abstract democratism and pacifism, beyond the propaganda of the ‘Western’ orientation of Germany, and does not notice the imperialist, anti-Soviet nature of this policy.” See: Lukács, “Realizm v sovremennoi nemetskoj literature,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1934): 48.

49. See Ernst Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley 1991), 5ff.

Asking why it has “become a fresh problem, a thoroughly bold one?,” Bloch went in the direction Erenburg had actually chosen in 1934, but which had become impossible in the Soviet Union of 1937. Not “the epigone [who] finds in the past only a ‘wealth of forms,’ the Nazi though only the kitsch that he is himself,” Bloch states, “but the Expressionists dug out fresh water and fire, wells and wild light, at least the will towards light. Not through this alone, but in the wake of this renewal the view of the artistic past has also been refreshed, it shines in new, and thus currently burst-open, contemporaneous depth.”⁵⁰

In a very similar way, Erenburg had reported on the polemic between the British novelist E. M. Forster and the French author Jean Cassou on the importance of literary and artistic heritage in his “Letters from the International Writers’ Congress,” “Pour la défense de la culture,” in Paris in June 1935.⁵¹ Juxtaposing Forster, who made a strong case for the importance of “preservation,” and Cassou, who was in favor of a creative, revitalizing, and inventive approach to heritage, Erenburg, in his fifth and last letter, emphatically and without any further comments quotes the speech of André Malraux, who was his close friend at the time, at the same congress. Using a bold rhetoric of fight and conquest, Malraux uncompromisingly promulgated innovation instead of worshipping the classics and thus interprets the formula of “critical appropriation” in his own way:

“A work of art is dead, when people stop loving it. . . . Art, thoughts, poetry. . . need us, as we need them. We (re)create them as we create ourselves. Heritage is not passed on, it has to be conquered. Soviet comrades, your congress passed off under the sign of worshipping famous writers of the past. . . . We are expecting something different: you have to recreate the past, give it a new face, new life. Each of us should try in his own world by his own creative attempts to open the eyes of those blind statues and transform hope into freedom, revolt into revolution and thousand years of suffering into human consciousness.”⁵²

Looking at his later projects we can see what André Malraux owed to the Soviet discussion on literature and art as heritage. From the discussions in 1934–35, Malraux developed the idea of the “Musée imaginaire,” which he presented to Gor’kii at Yalta in 1936 and later elaborated as a minister in Gaullist France after World War II.⁵³

50. Ibid.

51. Erenburg, “Pis’ma s mezhdunarodnogo kongressa pisatelei,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 8 (1935): 3–21.

52. Ibid.

53. In one of her essays on Malraux in the Soviet Union in 1934 and 1935, Tatiana Balashova quotes a letter of Malraux from December 3, 1935 archived in RGALI, which shows that the idea of heritage was at the core of Malraux’s theoretical considerations: “I am actually writing a book on art or, more precisely, on the perception of cultural heritage. The theme is roughly the same as my last address to the Congress, namely that we do not possess a complete legacy of the works of the past, but rather a selective one. Whether we like it or not, this choice turns out to be our personal choice, determined by our creative aspirations. Every great work, in turn, shapes the past that has just produced

In the context of 1934, it is interesting to note how close to the diction of the abovementioned Soviet critic Gerasimova Malraux comes in his rhetoric of conquest. Yet in its essence, it could not be more different, for Malraux' speech is about the power of art (including literature) and not about the political domination of Soviet literature over the world.

Finally, Bloch's critique of Lukács makes the latter appear merely as a propagator of epigonism. Bloch asks: ". . . what if Lukács's reality—a coherent, infinitely mediated totality—is not so objective after all? What if his conception of reality has failed to liberate itself completely from classical systems? What if authentic reality is discontinuity?" And he argues:

"Since Lukács operates with a closed, objectivistic conception of reality, when he comes to examine Expressionism, he resolutely rejects any attempt on the part of the artists to shatter any image of the world, even that of capitalism. Any art which strives to exploit the real fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices, appears in his eyes merely as a willful act of destruction. He thereby equates experiment in demolition with a condition of decadence" (1938).⁵⁴

After the purges that eliminated the majority of its authors and subsequently also its original variety of directions, from the perspective of a harmonious continuity on a transregional scale, in the words of Mikhail Lifshits, socialist realism appears as a "world culture."⁵⁵ In this way, and by seamlessly fitting the epic as folklore into this heritage, Lukács and Lifshits complement Iudin's position and spell out Gor'kii's and, even more so, Zhdanov's theses at the All-Union Congress in a one-sided way and in line with Stalin's conservative literary policy.⁵⁶

it. Of course, my thought is more complicated than I am presenting it now, but in general you can judge the basic direction." Quoted in: Tatiana Balashova, "Between Tradition and Experiment: The Experience of André Malraux—Writer and Minister," *Voprosy literatury* 5 (2013): 267–85. On Malraux's project of the "Musée imaginaire" see also: Derek Allan, *André Malraux and Art: An Intellectual Revolution* (New York, 2021).

54. Quoted from Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. and trans. Ronald Taylor (London, 1980), 16–27, 22.

55. "What we have before us is the scenario of socialist realism becoming, in Lifshits's words, the embodiment of 'world culture.'" Lukács, "Problems of the theory of the novel," in *Literaturnyi kritik* 3 (1935): 240. In his account, Tihanov emphasizes the surprising nature of this harmonizing position in the context of neighboring and immediately preceding perspectives of militant detachment: "In Lukács's account, the novel had to wait for the natural (and much regretted) demise of the epic, before it could make its way up onto the stage of great literature. We are witnessing a case of peaceful lineal inheritance with no bloodshed or loss of energy. It is astonishing that Lukács should concentrate on the struggle of the Renaissance novel against the conventions of bourgeois society, without saying a single word about the fight of the novel with the received genre repertoire of the preceding epoch, in which the epic still occupies an honorable position. This harmonious picture of peaceful coexistence of the old and the new has its roots in a characteristic asymmetry in the Marxist attitude to the socio-economic formations predating capitalism." Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave*, 119–20.

56. See Clark and Tihanov, "Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov," 289. As well as Lukács in "Problems of the theory of the novel," in *Literaturnyi kritik* 3 (1935): 232, Lifshits identified the classic epic as *narodnoe tvorchestvo* (folk art).

***Literaturnyi kritik* as a Platform for Modelling Soviet Minor Literatures as National and as Part of One Soviet Multinational Literature**

Soviet national literatures were the third important topic of the journal. Between 1933 and 1936 alone, *Literaturnyi kritik* published contributions about Ukrainian, Belarusian, Yiddish, Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Turkmen, Tadjik, Uzbek, Dagestani, Chuvash, and Baltic literatures. The reason why this point of focus has hardly been looked at so far maybe that the journal did not dedicate an extra rubric to national literatures. It has to be asked whether this is a symptom of a lack of reflection or tacit agreement that all literatures should be viewed equally as part of overall historical development. In the journal's contents-structure, articles on non-Russian literatures were sometimes featured in the first division, "Theory and History of Literature," but mostly in "Review and Bibliography." A random glance at the contents of number 1/1936, first rubric "Theory and History" clearly indicates that, first, for this topic there was no special concept and, second, world literature and soviet national literatures were not separated but dealt with together in one rubric:

Sergei Potapov—Poetry of Soviet Iakutia	211
Vladimir Kemenov— Shakespeare in the 'Sociologist's' Embrace.....	223
Elena Usievich—Sergey Bulantsev's "Love of Life"	238
Ivan Sergievskii— Fiction and Life	240

Articles on non-Russian Soviet literatures appeared continuously in consecutive numbers of the journal and represented a steady element of the journals' content. The very titles show a historical differentiation between a focus either on current Soviet developments in national literatures or on national literatures in general, or, starting from 1935, on epic and folklore. Another series of articles is dedicated exclusively to single authors who were of central importance to their respective national canons (Mikheil Dzhavakhishvili, Galaktion Tabidze, Lahuti, or Ianka Kupala).

It is obvious that all articles follow the programmatic declarations of the Congress in some way in practice and elaborate on what can be called Soviet style literary nation-building. Even though the fact that the articles on national literature are written by authors with different ethnic origins may indicate that ethnic origin was not a criterion, the fact that in each single case there is at least one article written by a "native" author⁵⁷ may be interpreted

57. In the case of Armenian literature there are four Armenian authors, Egishe Charents, Arutiun Mkrтчian, Karen Mikaelian and Marietta Shaginian, of whom only two wrote exclusively about Armenian literature: Mkrтчian in his article about his compatriot "Stepan Zorian," in *Literaturnyi kritik* 7–8 (1934): 226–34, and Mikaelian on "Mikael Nalbandian," in *Literaturnyi kritik* 8 (1936): 189–91. Charents wrote about Armenian literature, but also referred to other minor literatures. In contrast, Shaginian, who was also very active in translating Armenian literature into Russian, has an article "On socialist realism," in *Literaturnyi kritik* 2 (1933): 26–34. We find a similar combination in the case of articles about Georgian literature: Shalva Radiani's article "The Path of the Poet" on Galaktion Tabidze in *Literaturnyi kritik* 7–8 (1934): 118–24, and Viktor Gol'tsev—the future editor of *Druzhba narodov*—"On the work of Mikhail Dzhavakhishvili," in

as an indicator of what has been understood as an anti-imperial strategy of nation-building and at the same time as the concept of author as representative of the nation, in the sense of incarnation and figure of identification: a principle that corresponds to an article on the “colonial history of Russian literature” that deals with orientalist projections in Russian literature on the Caucasus.⁵⁸ The main objective of the articles on non-Russian literatures is to establish a national canon: in other words, to define and critically appropriate a national literary heritage. The dedication, from 1935 onwards, of an extra rubric to epics and folklore can be interpreted as an attempt to adopt Gor’kii’s claim to delimitate the modern concept of literature and—based on his notion of the myth as a main source of cultural identity—to incorporate the epic and folklore as substantial parts of the national literary heritage. But what does this “appropriation” actually look like?

To give an example, Evgenii V. Dunaevskii (1898–1941), the most important translator of Persian poetry at the time, portrays the Persian poet Abolqasem Lāhūti as a founding father of modern Tadjik literature.⁵⁹ Dunaevskii emphasizes Lāhūti’s merits in conveying the heritage of ancient Oriental poetry’s mastership to young Soviet poets while consequently avoiding any kind of ingratiating mimicry, neither in the direction of ancient oriental poetry nor modern European poetry. From today’s perspective, the Soviet-style decolonizing attitude of Dunaevskii’s strategy seems obvious: it was his

Literaturnyi kritik 1 (1934): 97. On the literatures of Central Asia there is an article by the Lithuanian literary critic Sigizmund Valaitis on “The Literatures of the Five Republics” in *Literaturnyi kritik* 2 (1934): 169; B. Dunaevskii wrote on the Persian revolutionary poet Lahuti: “The work of Lakhuti” in *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1935): 242; P. Skosyrev has an article “On the oral literature of Turkmenia” in *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1935): 159; and I. Borozdin wrote an article on “Soviet Kirgizstan,” in *Literaturnyi kritik* 5 (1933): 134. Also Ali-Nazin wrote a portrait of the Azeri poet Dzhafar Dzhaharli, who combines the general question of a new Soviet mode of writing (“New Content Needs New Form” is the title) with a focus on national literatures that should be the moving force of the new aesthetic program’s implementation: “New Content Needs New Form,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 9 (1934): 112–20. The Turkmen party official Oraz Tash-Nazarov wrote an article on Turkmen Soviet literature: “Turkmenskaia sovetskaiia khudozhestvennaia literature,” in *Literaturnyi kritik* 3 (1934): 188; and Gabbas Togzhanov, a young Soviet literary critic, published “Critique of Kazakh Literature,” in *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1933): 116–22. Ch. Zarifov published on Soviet folklore in Uzbekistan: “Sovetskii fol’klor v Uzbekistane,” in *Literaturnyi kritik* 2 (1935): 151–64.

58. See N. Svirin, “Russkaia kolonial’naia literatura,” *Literaturnyi kritik* 9 (1934): 51–79.

59. It is remarkable that—as Katerina Clark shows in her book *Eurasia without Borders: The Dream of a Leftist Literary Commons, 1919–1943* (Cambridge, Mass., 2021)—Lāhūti developed a strategy to critically appropriate the heritage of classical Persian poetry and develop on its basis a national form for new Soviet Tajik poetry long before the program of “national form and socialist content” was proclaimed by Stalin. Clark gives the example of Lahūti’s 1923 ode “Quasidai Kremel” (in Russian: “Kreml’”) where Lahūti, in order to praise the new Soviet regime, used the meter of a famous elegy by the poet Khāqāni of the twelfth century. As Clark states, Lahūti “appropriated both the Persian national imaginary and the national poetic form, thereby making its propagandistic message more accessible to those brought up with the Persianate tradition,” Clark, *Eurasia without Borders*, 109. In the following years, Lahūti was canonized together with Saddridin Aini as two founding fathers of Soviet Tajik literature, Lahūti as national poet, Aini as national writer. See Sam Hodgkin, “Lahūti: Persian Poetry in the Making of the Literary International” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2018).

task to underline that Lāhūti's appropriation is a revivification that neither follows the footprints of European orientalism nor recklessly modernizes or Europeanizes old Persian traditions, but rather invents a new soviet Tadjik poetry out of them (as a resource, one might add).⁶⁰

In Petr Skosyrev's article "The Oral Literature of Turkmenistan," the author pursues his own strategy of literary nation-building through "appropriating national heritage."⁶¹ By interpreting the role of Turkmen poet-singers, "bakhshi," as keepers and mediators of the legacy of Turkmen poetry (especially the work of the eighteenth-century poet Machtum-Kuli) over a long period of illiteracy in large swaths of the population, Skosyrev constructs an intermediary narrative of national continuity from the perspective of which Soviet Turkmen literature can be seen as a new reincarnation of a long national tradition: "It is the "bakhshi" who are the guardians of the treasure of classical literature. . . . The "bakhshi" is singer and a musician, and often also a poet."⁶²

"The richness of classical Turkmen literature is handed over from one interpreter to another. They live among the people like fairytales and other creative genres that we are used to calling folklore. . . . But today for most of the oral texts we have a written template as their basis. Mostly the authors of those texts were professional poets whose development as poets can be traced easily. Therefore, the works of these poets and their creative fate meet all the criteria that a philologist might demand."⁶³

From his point of view, folklore functions as a mode of handing down literary heritage and securing a feeling of national-cultural belonging.⁶⁴ Skosyrev at no point even raises the question of the socialist significance of this literature, nor does he historically classify this literature in a Marxist sense,

60. Evgenii Dunaevskii, "Tvorchestvo Lakhuti," *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1935): 242.

61. Petr Skosyrev "The Oral Literature of Turkmenistan," *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1935): 159–80. Skosyrev's article is actually the second one about Turkmen literature in *Literaturnyi kritik*. The article "Turkmenskaia sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia literatura" by Oraz Tash-Nazarov had already appeared, which explicitly takes up the formula of "critical appropriation" or "utility" while also underlining the initially fundamental and urgent necessity of compiling the "heritage" of the old, pre-Soviet Turkmen literature: "The questions of the critical use of the literary inheritance of the past are now becoming particularly acute for the Soviet literature of the TSSR. So far, the works of Makhtum Kuli and other writers and poets of the past, as well as folk art, have not only not been studied from the Marxist-Leninist point of view, but there have not even been organized attempts to collect the entire heritage of the past. Meanwhile, the struggle for the development of the Turkmen language and its enrichment requires a particularly thorough study of the rich folk language greatly littered with alien influences in the past," Oraz Tash-Nazarov, "Turkmenskaia sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia literatura," *Literaturnyi kritik* 3 (1934): 182–201, here: 201.

62. Petr Skosyrev "The Oral Literature of Turkmenistan," 162.

63. Skosyrev "The Oral Literature of Turkmenistan," 163.

64. Interestingly, besides being a scholar-Orientalist, Skosyrev was a writer of popular essays (*ocherki*) on regions of Central Asia. In these essays, he tried to popularize his strategy to transform oral tradition "back" into written literature. See his folklore-based stories *Vash pokornyi sluga* (Yours truly) (Gor'kii, 1937) in which he brought into practice his own thesis. See Skosyrev "The Oral Literature of Turkmenistan," 166.

but simply treats the oral tradition as the heritage of a Turkmen classical period worth preserving.⁶⁵

As has been said, many contributions on national literatures are written by “native” authors or literary specialists. Let me elaborate on two prominent contributions: Iakov Bronshtein on Belarusian literature, and Egishe Charents on Armenian literature.⁶⁶ The example of Bronshtein will throw light also on the ongoing negotiations of Jewish/Yiddish literature as a Soviet national literature.⁶⁷

The Belarusian-Jewish literary scholar Iakov Bronshtein (1897–1937), who was an alumnus of the Communist Academy and a researcher at the Institute for World Literature (IMLI) since its foundation in 1932, wrote most of his research on Soviet-Jewish contemporary literature in Yiddish, which since the 1920s had been serving as *the* means of building a Soviet Jewish culture. But the fact that Yiddish was also one of the accepted languages of Ukrainian literature and also an official language of the Belarusian Soviet Republic at the time is a symptom of the somewhat special status of Yiddish as a Soviet national language in comparison to the other national languages.⁶⁸ Only territorial affiliation was accepted as the basis for national literatures, thus Yiddish literature was problematic because Jews lived in more than one republic. When Ivan Kulik (Jewish-Ukrainian Soviet poet and, from 1934, first chairman of the Ukrainian Writers’ Union) and Bronshtein spoke at the All-Union Writers’ Congress as representatives of Ukrainian and Belarusian literatures, respectively, they referred to Jewish authors writing in Yiddish in the first place as representatives of Ukrainian or Belarusian literatures.

From 1932 until his imprisonment and death in 1937, Bronshtein was secretary of the Belarusian Writers’ Union.⁶⁹ At the All-Union Writers’ Congress, his speech in the 9th section was the second from Belarus after the poet

65. In the years after the Second World War, Skosyrev was the editor of the journal *Druzhba narodov*.

66. Both of them were speakers at the All-Union Congress.

67. On the process of modelling Yiddish Soviet literature, see Mikhail Krutikov’s illuminating intellectual biography of Meir Wiener: *From Kabbalah to Class Struggle: Expressionism, Marxism, and Yiddish Literature in the Life and Work of Meir Wiener* (Stanford, 2011). Wiener (1893–1941) was an Austrian Jewish intellectual and a student of Jewish mysticism who emigrated to the Soviet Union in 1926 and reinvented himself as a Marxist scholar and Yiddish writer and took part himself in the debate on socialist realism and Soviet literary nation-building. See Meir Viner, “O nekotorykh vorprosakh sotsialisticheskogo realizma,” *Oktiabr’* 1 (1935): 237–57.

68. See David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930* (New York, 2004), 6ff. See also: “Atake” (1930), “Farfestikte pozitsies” (Fixed positions, 1934), “Sheferishe problemen fun der yiddisher sovetisher poezie” (Creative Problems of Soviet Jewish Poetry, 1936), *Elektronnaia evreiskaia entsyklopediia* at <https://eleven.co.il/jewish-literature/in-yiddish/10769/> (accessed September 18, 2021). See the memoirs of Bronshtein’s daughter Inna concerning the family history: “I wrote poems to Stalin, and I did not know that he was behind the murder of my father.” The story of the Bronshtein family, which went through the millstone of Stalinist repression. <https://belisrael.info/?p=13487> (accessed on January 28, 2023).

69. See Gennady Estrakh, *In Harness: Yiddish Writers’ Romance with Communism* (Syracuse, 2005), 138. In parallel to Bronshtein, Ivan Kulik chaired the Ukrainian Writers’ Union from 1934 until his arrest and execution in 1937.

Michaś Klimkovich, who spoke in the third section. Both of them dealt with Belarusian and Yiddish literature alike as essential literatures of Belarus. But only Bronshtein published two articles in parallel on Belarusian literature in *Literaturnyi kritik* and after two years another one only on Janka Kupala.⁷⁰ The fact that despite Bronshtein's focus in his articles and in his speech, the journal completely ignored Jewish/Yiddish literature may serve as a hint as to the journal's role as a laboratory of the concept of Soviet national literatures. In both his speech and articles, Bronshtein argues against what he calls national-democratic developments in literature for being "bourgeois," "formalistic," "aestheticized," "romanticist" and "nationalist." He applies the term "inheritance" to them in order to underline their uncritical borrowing from bourgeois literary traditions.⁷¹ Despite this obedient criticism of bourgeois modernism, however, Bronshtein defends and helps secure the canonical position of the most important representatives of modernism by describing their development as a procedure of transformation and productive turns (*povorot*), a process of "critical self-appropriation." Bronshtein defends two of the most important Belarusian modernist writers, Ianka Kupala and Iakub Kolas, who before had been severely criticized for their bourgeois symbolism, and the Jewish/Yiddish writer Dovid Bergelson alike.

It is striking how Bronshtein in his speech at the Writers' Congress dissolves the narrowly-defined national paradigm first through regionalization and then through a more trans- than multinational notion of Soviet literature. Bronshtein presents current tendencies in Belarusian and Yiddish literature as parallel developments represented by their own respective authors whose works feature regional characteristics, yet at the same time equally contribute to the Sovietization of those literatures and literature in general.⁷² Bronshtein, whom Gennadii Estraikh has called "a striking example of self-purification in Yiddish literature," distinguishes Jakub Kolas, Ianka Kupala, and Dovid Bergelson as real examples of self-criticism and of conscious artistic-formal changes that followed changes in political belief.⁷³ For example, when he praises Kupala and Kolas for their respective strategies of critical

70. Bronshtein's three articles were: "Sovetskaia literatura Belorussii," *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1934): 229–52; "Starye i novye obrazy (Zametki o belorusskoi proze)," *Literaturnyi kritik* 7–8 (1934): 125–35; and "Ianka Kupala," *Literaturnyi kritik* 1 (1936): 131–42.

71. When Bronshtein used *nasledstvo*, it had negative connotations. He used it twice in his article "Starye i novye obrazy (Zametki o belorusskoi proze)" on the glorification of politically wrong literary trends and works of the past. See for instance: "The bourgeois-restorative and interventionist policy of separating the BSSR from the USSR corresponds to the nationalist literary policy of opposing Belarusian culture to Russian Soviet culture, "orientation to the West" and idealization of the nationalist literary heritage." And: "In all this one senses a general offensive on the whole front of Socialist Realism against the violence of Impressionist Romanticism, often rooted in the National Democratic style legacy." In "Starye i novye obrazy (Zametki o belorusskoi proze)" in Luppul, Rozental', and Tret' iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 235, 250.

72. "I will illustrate this with examples from Belarusian and Jewish literature, from the areas in which I work. Before us are vivid works of the Belarusian folk poet Ianka Kupala and the Belarusian folk poet Yakub Kolas," Ia. Bronshtein's speech at the First All-Union Writers Congress (Zasedanie deviatoe) in Luppul, Rozental', and Tret' iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 220.

73. Estraikh, *In Harness*, 139.

appropriation of the inherited national imagery: resemantization and “translation” of nationalist/romanticist images into socialist ones.⁷⁴ Bronshtein refers to Dovid Bergelson in the same way, who according to Bronshtein pursues a comparable strategy of critical self-appropriation and self-transformation.⁷⁵

With sophistication, Bronshtein interprets parodic elements in Jewish Belarusian literature as a weapon in the fight against bourgeois nationalism. “In close relation to this we can see a genre phenomenon in Belarusian and Jewish literature. In the novel of Belarusian prose writer Biaduli—*Iazep Krushinskii*—and in the poem of the Jewish poet I. Kharik—*All the Weeks Round*—one may notice the sharp lancet of literary parody attacking bourgeois nationalism.”⁷⁶

While he points out the political and literary relevance of Soviet-Yiddish folklore, which according to Bronshtein had hitherto remained largely unnoticed, he criticizes the “Moscow” authors for “misjudging the folklore of the peoples of the USSR as something exotic, ossified and a non-class phenomenon” and thus exoticizing, among others, “the expressive poetic figure of the renowned Jewish poet Markish, some of whose works come very close to the pathetic lyrics of Maiakovskii.”⁷⁷

Resonating with Gor’kii’s keynote lecture on “Soviet literature,” Bronshtein deals with Soviet Yiddish literature as a Soviet national literature from the periphery. Sophisticatedly arguing and underlining the equivalence and, in fact, propinquity between great authors of the center (like Maiakovskii) and great representatives of small literatures (like Perets Markish), he fights

74. Bronshtein says: “Kupala translates, with great artistic tact, his favorite traditional romantic landscape and canonized folkloric-epic imagery and rhythmic grid to the rails of socialist pathetics. A similar technique is used very originally in Jakub Kolas’s novel—*Drygva*—where the old nationalistic image of the Belarusian patriarchal ‘grandfather’ is replaced by a display of the grandfather-partisan.” Ia. Bronshtein’s speech in Luppol, Rozental’, and Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi*, 220. Two years later in his article on “Ianka Kupala,” Bronshtein made the same suggestion by referring to details of folkloric poetic form and came to the conclusion that this way of critical appropriation, “translation,” contributed to the “real blossoming of national culture that is socialist in content and national in form.” Bronshtein, “Ianka Kupala,” 142.

75. Bronshtein suggested it is: “. . . important to find out the basic formula of alteration. *At the Dnieper*, the work of the famous Jewish prose writer Bergelson, sets a striking example of such a kind of autocritique. Formerly burdened by idealizing the bourgeois-nationalist Jewish community, the author now guillotines with a sharp pen and specific atopolemics his traditional image gallery, his polemics attacking the whole stylistic front. Sometimes it looks grotesque how Bergelson by means of realist adaption and modification in the direction of rationalism and enlightenment manages to cross out the reactionary images of his earlier writings.” Ia. Bronshtein’s speech in Luppol, Rozental’, and Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi*, 220. According to Harriet Murav, Bergelson’s novel *At the Dnieper* is programmatically modelled on Maxim Gor’kii’s *The Life of Klim Samgin* and Aleksandr Fadeev’s *The Last of the Udege*, two of the paradigmatic novels of socialist realism. See Harriet Murav, *David Bergelson’s Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2019), 252–57, and her *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post Revolution Russia* (Stanford, 2011), 86.

76. Ia. Bronshtein’s speech in Luppol, Rozental’, and Tret’iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi*, 220.

77. Bronshtein in *ibid.*, 220–21.

hegemonial exoticization and defends the acknowledgment of new Soviet folklore as a valuable poetic strategy.

Interestingly, there is not a single word on Jewish/Yiddish literature in the series of three articles on Belarusian literature Bronshtein published in 1934 and 1936 in *Literaturnyi kritik*. In the two articles that came out in the context of the Writers' Congress, Bronshtein praises the upswing of Belarusian literature in Soviet times as a "remarkable example of a national renaissance"⁷⁸, going into detail and giving a whole range of examples besides Kupala and Kolas (like Mikhas Zareckii, Zmitrok Biaduli, Kondrat Krapiva, Kuz'ma Chorny, and Platon Golovach), Bronshtein repeats and develops the same thesis and, finally, comes to the conclusion that in the works of all of them one can see the formation of a socialist realism front against "impressionist romanticism that mostly owes in style to national-democratic inheritance."⁷⁹ Keywords of Bronshtein's second and even more militant article in *Literaturnyi kritik* are *Literaturnyi front* and *perestroika* (restructuring). There he juxtaposes less successful examples of self-critical transformation—like, in his words, Jan Skryhan—and ideal examples like Kolas. As adequate "weapons" to fight "natsdemovskii romanticism" and achieve literary "truthfulness," Bronshtein mentions parody and pamphlet besides the direttissima of socialist realism.⁸⁰

But not a single word on Jewish/Yiddish Soviet literature from Bronshtein's side in *Literaturnyi kritik*. Instead, there are two articles on Yiddish Soviet literature by two other authors: a critical review by Aleksandr Leites on the just-published Russian edition of Perets Markish's collection of poems *Thresholds* (orig. *Shveln*, first published in 1919)⁸¹ and a portrait of Dovid Bergelson by Isaak Nusinov.⁸² Nusinov, who held the chair in "Jewish literature" at Moscow Pedagogical University and gave lectures at the "Academy of the Red Professorship," characterizes Bergelson on eighteen pages as an author who, while continuing to focus on the social situation on the eve of the revolutions, managed to transform from a Hamsun-like bourgeois pessimist and impressionist into a future-bound socialist realist who in his trilogy *Baym Dnieper*

78. Bronshtein, "Sovetskaia literatura Belorussii," 229.

79. *Ibid.*, 250.

80. "The basic and best masters of our fiction have rebuilt in earnest. We are not talking here about external restructuring. We are talking about the fact that the major masters of the word are organically rebuilding now, drawing on their past. The writer summons from the depths of the past a gallery of his favorite images, viewing them in a new class aspect, and debunking and discrediting them with new artistic means," Bronshtein, "Starye i novye obrazy (Zametki o belorusskoi proze)," 129. "The main thing in the creative restructuring of Belarusian Soviet prose, the main thing in the achievements of its communist writer's activities is the struggle against Natsdemean romanticism, for the truthfulness of reality, for the method of socialist realism," *ibid.*, 133. "The struggle for the restructuring of Belarusian Soviet prose is a struggle for an irrevocable break with the nationalist gallery of images, with populist poetics. Literary polemics, parody and pamphlet are a sharp weapon in this struggle," *ibid.*, 135.

81. Leites criticizes Perets Markish's poems for being "declarative" and "lifted." They fall short of what the readers may have expected from the Markish they know from his lively prose that is full of concreteness. Aleksandr Leites, "O *Rubezhe* Peretsa Markisha," *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1933): 131–32.

82. Isaak Nusinov, "D. Bergelson," *Literaturnyi kritik* 6 (1935): 91–108.

(1932) almost matches the standard of Gor'kii's "Artamonovs."⁸³ Elaborating on Bergelson, Nusinov takes the opportunity to resonate on Jewish Soviet literature. When Bergelson, Nusinov writes, realized that the Soviet Union is the only place in the world where Jewish culture has a chance to develop as a national culture, he returned from abroad⁸⁴ and became a Soviet writer.⁸⁵ Here again the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* turns out to be the arena where the concept of Soviet national literatures is modelled and negotiated in the course of the 1930s. It becomes clear that the direction of the ideological development was towards—or, if you wish, back to—the one language, (one nation) one territory concept that in case of Jewish culture/literature had become manifest in the "Autonomous Region" of Birobidzhan.

In comparison let me take a look at yet another Soviet national literature: Armenian. The great Armenian modernist poet Egishe Charents (1897–1937) follows in his congress speech,⁸⁶ which in his case has been printed more or less identically in *Literaturnyi kritik*, a line similar to Bronshtein's, but argues differently.⁸⁷ Charents's speech features the same two points of focus: the national literatures and the general (Soviet) aesthetic direction, adding different accents, however. Just like Bronshtein in his Congress speech, Charents opposes the exoticization and marginalization of national literatures, but unlike him, Charents's objective is a more general acknowledgement of all the national literatures of the Soviet Union. He argues for an awareness of even the smallest national literatures, because their individual significance lies in their unique characteristics. In this respect, Charents's view seems much closer to present-day UNESCO's concept of culture—which, actually in its turn goes back to Malraux's ideas—than to the Soviet concept of national literature of the 1930s. According to Charents, each national literature is interesting and worth preserving precisely because of its uniqueness:

Speaking of the past, we mostly have European literatures in mind. . . but how much richer we would become if we would read and acknowledge the literatures of all peoples of our multilingual Soviet Union, if we would learn from each other. However small, any literature has its own singular and unrepeatable character. . . It is our urgent task to critically appropriate the best part of the literary heritage of all literatures of the USSR. . . We. . . have to know each other not on the basis of two or three random translations, but—and this is most important—on the basis of a lively exchange of creative experiences by means of regular translations in both directions."⁸⁸

The Soviet state support for all of these literatures for the first time ever made it possible for their authors to get to know each other. Charents thus argues against the centralist and paternalist view that could also be heard at the Congress and that later was to become the blueprint for the Soviet Union's

83. *Ibid.*, 106.

84. Bergelson spent the 1920s in the west, first in Berlin, later in the US, where he wrote for the New York Yiddish-language newspaper *The Forward*.

85. Nusinov, "Bergelson," 100.

86. Luppol, Rozental', and Tret'iakov, eds., *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi*, 559–63.

87. Egishe Charents, "Za slozhnuiu prostotu v iskusstve," *Literaturnyi kritik* 9 (1934): 149–54.

88. Charents, "Za slozhnuiu prostotu v iskusstve," 149–50.

dominant stance on literature. He is rather in favor of a decentralized, multilateral dialogue between national literatures, in which the heritage of each single national literature is to be honored and critically appropriated.⁸⁹

Charents' thoughts on the aesthetic norm are different and fundamental as well. As a result, he is closer to some of the representatives of the center, in particular to Nikolai Bukharin and Erenburg, both of whom he mentions several times, albeit in a critical manner. In his contribution to *Literaturnyi kritik*, oxymoronically titled "For a Complicated Simplicity," he supports the idea of preserving or revitalizing aesthetic-poetic "mastership" in the new Soviet literature. Against the backdrop of history, this new literature should be modelled neither after old bourgeois realism, nor after the aestheticized complexity of modernism as illustrated by authors such as Boris Pasternak. It should in fact rather create a new "synthetic art," characterized by a "complicated simplicity" that could be at the same time aesthetically sophisticated and accessible to the masses.⁹⁰

With the criterion of accessibility, Charents seeks to substantiate and justify his plea for the "critical appropriation" of a heritage passed down by either aesthetically or politically "wrong" authors. The oxymoronic title of his contribution captures this thesis.

More than any other publication of the mid-1930s, the contributions to *Literaturnyi kritik* illustrate the most important focal points in the debate about the normative understanding of literature during those years— aesthetics, style, imitation, innovation, the social function of literature, world literature, multinational Soviet literature—as well as its complexity and still open dynamics. As has been demonstrated, the notion of heritage was a kind of common denominator of all positions of literary critique and served as a key instrument to define and legitimize the strategies of literary politics: as an instrument to legitimize the acknowledgement, revaluation, and cultivation of pre-Soviet literatures; as an instrument to legitimize the Soviet claim on world literature; as the claim on the prerogative to keep, preserve, analyze, translate and interpret it; as an instrument to distinguish between valuable works and works that should be excluded from the canon; as a means to strengthen the role of literature; as *a*—or rather *the* main—instrument to

89. A. Lavretskii's statement in "Sotsialisticheskii realizm v ponimanii Gor'kogo," also corresponds with Charents's position. See A. Lavretskii, "Sotsialisticheskii realizm v ponimanii Gor'kogo," *Literaturnyi kritik* 11 (1936): 36–48. He emphatically denounces the contradiction between internationalism and the appreciation of the nationally distinctive small literatures. He welcomes the fact that ignorance of national literatures—which corresponded to the ignorance of European literatures toward Russian ones—was now finally overcome thanks to the new Soviet perspective: "The idea of socialist, i.e. the only consistent humanism cannot accept any national restrictions of the people's art. . . the literature of the Soviet Union being the first internationalist literature of the world. . . In the past we looked at the literatures of the Russian empire—even those very old literatures of the Jews, Georgians, and Armenians—like the European writers looked at us, Russians: dumb and ignorant. Now, in the works of our young writers there cannot be found such a disgusting attitude towards people of "foreign blood". . ." *ibid.*, 40.

90. Charents, "Za slozhnuiu prostotu v iskusstve," 153.

educate the readership and to “forge the soul”; and, last but not least, as the main instrument of literary nation-building.

In the period that this article focuses on—the volumes from 1933 to 1936—the discussion in the journal was closely related to the debate at the First All-Union Soviet Writers’ Congress.⁹¹ The group of contributing critics was still very diverse, including *voprekisty* and *blagodaristy*, but also representatives of avant-garde positions like Sergei Tret’iakov. I hope it has become clear that, when it comes to heritage in these years, it was not only about (socialist) realism and not only in the context of aesthetic conservative neo-classicism in contrast to avant-garde, but that in fact heritage served as a concept of overall importance for all different positions.

Even though the question of “Whose heritage?” seems to be answered unanimously as well, the analysis shows that the slogan of “the proletariat as the only legitimate heir to world literature” is sometimes but a phrase, because heritage is meant as a means to exercise power over the readership and over all future production of literature.

Regarding the question “What heritage?” positions also partly correspond, partly diverge. With respect to the necessity to include epic and folklore into the respective national canon all considered positions agree, although they pursue different strategies to carry out this project. But when it comes to modernism there is crucial dissent between those who accept modernist aesthetics either as a way to adequately adopt the heritage of previous times or as a heritage of bourgeois literature on its own and those who want to renounce and exclude it from the canon.

As has become clear from the articles on national literatures, it was an increasingly difficult task to argumentatively circumnavigate the cliffs of the “bourgeois nationalism” accusation; one has to keep in mind that, just a few years later, most of the representatives of national literatures and of somehow individual positions fell victim to Stalin’s purges. Still, they all attempted to revalue and include the most important works into a national canon that in some cases had already started to take shape in the years and decades before the revolution and the birth of the Soviet Union, but from now on was supposed to become—and in fact mostly became—the centerpiece of the cultural identity of the new Soviet nation. At a time when the concept of multinational Soviet literature had just begun to emerge alongside (and as part of) the Soviet concept of world literature, and when there was not yet a journal specifically devoted to these (multi)national subjects—*Druzhba narodov* was initially founded as an almanac in *Literaturnyi kritik*’s last year of publication 1939—the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* functioned as a platform for the critical and theoretical negotiation of the concept of national literatures as Soviet units and as an integral part of multinational Soviet literature; in other words: for the discussion and implementation of Stalin’s dictum “national in form and socialist in content.”

91. For the analysis of the last years of the journal’s publication see Clark and Tihanov, “Sovetskie literaturnye teorii 1930-kh godov.”