

Zalambani, Maria. *Censura, istituzioni e politica letteraria in URSS (1964–1985)*. Biblioteca di Studi Slavistici, 10. Firenze University Press, Florence, 2009. 286 pp. Notes. Biographical notes. Appendix. Bibliography. €29.90 (paperback).

THIS very readable monograph is an excellent supplement to the last volume, subtitled *Tsenzura v gody ottepeli, zastoia i perestroiki 1953–1991*, of Arlen Blium's remarkable trilogy about the Soviet censorship system (*Kak eto delalos' v Leningrade*, St Petersburg, 2005). Blium concentrates on developments in Leningrad, whereas Zalambani is more concerned with instructions issued from on high in Moscow and their impact on writers living and working in the capital. She is well aware of the collections of official documents on Soviet censorship and realizes that documents alone never tell the full story of what actually happened in 'real life'.

Outlining in chapter one the two decades of stagnation, the author rightly distinguishes between political stagnation and social stagnation (the word *obshchestvennyi* is sometimes better translated as *political*, rather than *social*) and points out (p. 15) that Soviet society in 1985 was different in many ways from the situation twenty years earlier. Brezhnev's *nomenklatura* (it is painful to refer to it as an elite), and indeed most of the Soviet Establishment, wanted to preserve the status quo, apparently without realizing that *ustoiчивost'* (sometimes used in preference to the rather alien word *stabil'nost'*) can also mean sustainability, which is almost impossible in a large country without a certain degree of instability. Of course, some 'modernization' did take place during this period, but as Zalambani perceptively points out (p. 32), it was particularly the KGB under Andropov that was 'modernized', in order to control dissent and the desire for political change more effectively. Although they differed on so many things, Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, both of whom were trained as scientists, realized that the Soviet censorship system was counterproductive for the regime itself. It could be added that they, like most other dissidents, were not 'anti-Soviet' in the strict sense of the word. It was the system itself that, even before Kronstadt, was anti-Soviet, since it did not allow the councils, including even the Supreme Soviet, to exercise as much power as all manner of councils have in capitalist societies.

Chapter two (pp. 49–143) quite rightly stresses that the official censorship organ, *Glavlit*, was only one, and not necessarily the most important, of the organizations that controlled literature — and, indeed, all intellectual life — in the USSR. (The author does not mention that the 1931 Statutes of *Glavlit*, a rewrite of the original 1922 version, everywhere replaced the word *tsenzura* with the vaguer term *kontrol'*, which enabled Soviet officials and badly informed foreigners to claim henceforth that there was no censorship in the Soviet Union, merely control — and who could complain about that?) Thus, after discussing the role of *Glavlit* (but not *Glavrepertkom*), Zalambani provides lucid pages about the secret services, the Writers' Union (*narodnost'* and *partiinost'* are touched on, but not *ideinost'*), literary critics, bowdlerizing translators (a very good example of how to make Sartre safe for Soviet readers and theatre-goers is presented on pp. 120–24), 'editorial censorship' and the often anonymous role of 'internal reviewers'. Perhaps more could have been said about the political role of the CPSU's cultural and ideological departments and commissions. There is also a section on *samizdat* and the persecution of

many of those who wrote, copied, circulated or merely read subversive texts, but very little is said about the role of jamming and the activities of certain foreign radio stations. The author is well aware of the importance of self-censorship, or 'internal censorship', present of course in even the most liberal and tolerant societies, perhaps more in the form of self-control.

The next chapter provides some details on the taboo subjects in the USSR during (and also before — Zalambani always tries to place the Brezhnev period in historical perspective) the two decades of stagnation, with examples taken from Sholokhov and Bitov. Chapter four discusses the ways in which Iskander's *Sandro iz Chegema* was rendered acceptable for his Soviet (and, inevitably, his foreign) admirers before it (or rather, parts of it — several chapters, presumably submitted by Iskander, were completely omitted) came out in *Novyi mir* in 1973. Zalambani compares this text with the 1979 'Ardis' version and makes the important point (footnote 14, p. 163) that it is impossible to say whether the censoring was carried out entirely by the staff of the periodical or whether they were advised and assisted by employees of certain other organizations. It is only too obvious that most of the cuts were made for political and ideological reasons, but religious, physiological, sexual and ecological details and references were also cut out, as were some non-standard usages of the Russian language. The penultimate chapter, on the *Metropol'* scandal of 1979–80, demonstrates clearly how the manic desire of the Soviet authorities for stability (i.e., stagnation) led to the unsustainability of the seemingly entrenched political system just a few years later. The author concludes her monograph by discussing the decline of all the Soviet control mechanisms, the increasing role of the market and therefore of mass culture, and the end of the central position that serious literature has traditionally occupied in Russian life.

There are a number of factual mistakes in this valuable volume — for instance, Lidiia Chukovskaia was *not* forced into emigration (pp. 83 and 96), and the *Chronicle of Current Events* did not cease (*cessa*), but suspended, publication in the early 1970s (p. 82). But apart from the rather unsatisfactory sketch of the development of *Glavlit* (pp. 245–46 — the *upravlenie* was *not* renamed the *upolnomochennyi* in 1933), these slips are of minor importance. However, for those who read Russian and are interested in this subject, attention should be drawn to part two, chapters eight and nine, of an amazing work, existing at present only online, by Pavel Reifman, *Iz istorii russkoi, sovetskoi i postsovetskoi tsenzury*, freely available at <<http://reifman.ru/soviet-postsoviet-tsenzura/biblio-soviet-tsenzura/>>.

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