

The Books Were Re[a]d: A Dialogic Approach to the Censorship and Social History of
The Grapes of Wrath and *Doctor Zhivago*

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Library and Information Studies

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
March 2012

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
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Dated: March 20, 2012

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DATE: March 20, 2012

AUTHOR: Lora Hamilton

TITLE: The Books Were Re[a]d: A Dialogic Approach to the Censorship and Social History of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago*

DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL: School of Information Management

DEGREE: MLIS CONVOCATION: May YEAR: 2012

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Abstract

Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical thought is largely focused on the interconnectivity of human discourse, privileging literary genres (i.e. the novel). Language comprises of both the structural components of linguistics and a non-verbal component that corresponds to the context of the enunciation. Therefore, the social situation that creates an utterance cannot be diminished. This thesis examines the social history of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1958), both realist novels that have faced censorship, using Bakhtin's theories of dialogics and centripetal and centrifugal forces. *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago* came out in different epochs and were products of the two conflicting ideologies of the 20th century – liberal capitalism and communism. These distinctions provide an interesting forum for comparing the legitimacy of Bakhtin's theories with regard to censorship across societies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Vivian Howard, for her patience, support, and guidance, as well to Dr. Keith Lawson and Dr. David Howard, for their insightful comments. Thanks also to Dr. Ann Curry for her generous and timely feedback. Having such a dedicated committee has made this experience a positive one.

I would also like to acknowledge the incredible support I've received from my folks – throughout all of my endeavours, of course, including not bearing down on “practicality” but instead encouraging me to explore my interests. It means the world to me. Melinda Robb, your copy-editing skills, titling prowess, and patience with convoluted discussions are invaluable and very much appreciated. EMT, props for easing the navigation of intellectual pursuits, for encouraging me to explore what interests me, and for teaching me to ask for help.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one's contemporaries (an event that is therefore based on personal experience and thought) is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of the epic into the world of the novel.¹

We are presented with a text occupying a certain specific place in space; that is, it is localized; our creation of it, our acquaintance with it occurs through time. The text as such never appears as a dead thing; beginning with any text [...] we always arrive, in the final analysis, at the human voice, which is to say we come up against the human being.²

Background

The social history of a novel is a fascinating subject, because it forces one to examine the situation surrounding the creation of the literary work, its precipitating context. When contextualizing a novel or literary work, one assumes that the political and social atmosphere in which the author is writing has a direct influence on the product. Furthermore, when examining the social context of a literary work, one must also consider the reaction of the audience – the readers, the consumers – to the message being presented in the novel. Social history defies the novel's ability to stand separately and autonomously from its circumstances; its place within human society is privileged and its interaction with its surroundings paramount.

The study of a novel's social history becomes more interesting when the novel in question is received as controversial, when the life of the novel is wrought with strife. Perhaps the best evidence that the novel, as a literary form, is an important means of communication within society is its ability to incite forceful – sometimes violent – reactions. As often happens when controversial, contradictory messages are presented, the groups that feel threatened attempt to silence the dissenting voice. In other words, it

¹ M.M. Bakhtin, "Epic and novel: Toward a methodology for the study of the novel", p. 14.

² M.M. Bakhtin, "Forms of time and chronotope in the novel", pp. 252-253.

is a case of censorship. A problematic work threatens elements of society, resulting in cries to censor the offending work. The strength of the cry and the outcome of it – its success or failure in censoring a work – are related to the strength of the group within society that has been offended.

The inseparability of literature from its social and historical context features prominently in the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher. The interdisciplinary nature of his thought is evident in its wide-ranging impact: Bakhtin's philosophy has influenced the disciplines of literary theory and criticism, linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies. Because Bakhtin situates literature in its context, rejecting both Russian Formalism and vulgar forms of Marxism, and sees it as a microcosm of the society that produced it (through the author), his theories are particularly relevant when examining the idea of censorship, especially through the lens of social history.

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* are strikingly political novels. They depict, respectively, the two major ideologies of the twentieth century – liberal capitalism and communism, respectively represented in the United States and the Soviet Union – but are not propagandistic portrayals. In fact, they strike one as polemical, subversive, and dissenting. These novels both appeared at times when their respective ideas, their portrayals of society, were provocative and opposed to official ideologies. Steinbeck and Pasternak were attempting to disseminate dissenting perspectives, narratives that criticized the current state of their worlds, and they faced censorship in response to controversial messages. *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago* both portray changes in the social fabric of society: the American author

Steinbeck depicts the Dust Bowl and the mass migration of Okies during the Great Depression; the Russian writer Pasternak presents the October Revolution and its aftermath through the eyes of the title character.

The social and historical context in which *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago*, respectively, were created also constructed the circumstances of their respective censorship. Examining the social and historical contexts of which these novels were products, and analyzing their reception within these contexts, can provide an understanding of why these novels were deemed controversial and provocative enough to be censored. The application of certain aspects of Bakhtin's thought adds a further dimension – a more theoretical one – to the concept of censorship.

Research Questions and Significance

Broadly, the question I wish to explore is whether Bakhtin's theories are still relevant for understanding today's literature. More specifically, I would like to know: How do Bakhtin's theories inform the censorship of literature? The specific theories that relate to censorship of literature are those of dialogics (the existence of centripetal and centrifugal forces within society) and philosophical anthropology (the interrelation of disciplines and the intrinsic importance of the social history of utterances). When applied to the social history of a novel, especially a novel that has been censored or viewed as dangerous/subversive/controversial, how do these theories inform a society's reaction to literature? Does the censorship of literature occupy a natural place in society, and how does Bakhtin's philosophy account for this? *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago* are situated within two of the great ideological alternatives of the twentieth century: liberal capitalism and communism, the United States and the Soviet Union. To what

extent does an analysis of the censorship of these novels reveal similarities and differences between these two ideologies? Because Bakhtin places such a strong emphasis on the interconnection of disciplines, both within the “human” sciences and throughout ever-expanding human existence, his theories are particularly logical for explaining the interconnection between society and literature.

This research – and these research questions – are important in helping to explain the prevalence of censorship in society. Censorship is an on-going issue in contemporary society; by examining these two novels and their respective social histories, and then applying aspects of Bakhtin’s thought, I present two case studies of censorship. This analysis will create a foundation for future understanding of censorship – how it works within society, as it seems to be an inherent aspect of contemporary, as well as past, societies. Examining instances of censorship from the past (albeit the recent past) permits the benefit of historical distance and increased objectivity, which makes the inclusion of a theoretical perspective easier and more natural. Furthermore, by establishing this theoretical perspective within the historical past, the study of contemporary censorship will, *ipso facto*, also be able to benefit from the conclusions found by this research.

Bakhtin

Context

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Soviet (Russian) intellectual, who was raised and educated in the tradition of the Tsarist intelligentsia. He lived most of his life in obscurity under the Soviet regime: Bakhtin was not overly successfully in terms of academic employment; his most notable position was in Mordovia, far from the active intellectual community of Russia. He was a political exile – in Kazakhstan – during the

1930s, and spent the worst of the Stalinist purges in a small town outside of Moscow. Prior to this, however, Bakhtin was arrested, in 1929, in a purge of Leningrad intellectuals (Clark & Holquist, 1984).

Bakhtin's obscurity throughout most of his life was compounded by the fact that his work was scarcely published during his lifetime. However, there is some controversy as to whether his works were published under the names of other authors, the so-called "disputed texts".³ In the 1960s, when Soviet literary scholars became interested in Bakhtin's work, the theory of a "Bakhtin circle" developed (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 146). This circle included two obscure intellectuals, contemporaries of Bakhtin, both of whom were dead by 1938 – long before their involvement with Bakhtin was suspected. Valentin Voloshinov, a "linguist and sometime musicologist", and Pavel Medvedev, a "literary journalist and cultural bureaucrat", published several texts in the 1920s and '30s that now constitute the disputed texts of Bakhtin's authorship (p. 146).⁴ While it is unclear why exactly Bakhtin would have participated in this "reverse plagiarism" (p. 150), it might have been easier for Voloshinov/Medvedev to publish than Bakhtin, owing to the latter's lack of strong academic affiliation (Clark & Holquist, 1984).⁵

³ The following titles are attributed to Voloshinov/Bakhtin: "Critique of Saussurian Linguistics"; "Critique of Freudianism"; "Language as Dialogic Interaction"; "Reported Speech as Index of Social Change"; "Constructing a Sociological Poetics". Attributed to Medvedev/Bakhtin are: "Literature as Ideological Form"; "Critique of Formalism"; "Genres as Ideological Forms". See Morris, P. (Ed.). (1994). *The Bakhtin reader: Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*. London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd.

⁴ These texts are referred to as "disputed" because of the active nature of the debate: scholars have not reached a consensus on the definitive authorship – either the role of the alleged authors nor to whom the publication should be properly attributed – of the texts in question. For instance, see Morson, G.S. & Emerson, C. (Eds.). (1989). *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and challenges*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

⁵ One is also tempted to think that perhaps the political atmosphere contributed to Bakhtin's reverse plagiarism. His circumstances and political status could have made it risky or difficult to publish under his own name. It is interesting to note that both Voloshinov and Medvedev perished during the time of the Stalinist Terror, while Bakhtin remained in obscurity (and safety) throughout this dangerous time. However, as scholars of Soviet history are aware, it can be exceedingly difficult to patch together the actions and lives of individuals of this epoch.

Mikhail Bakhtin was scarcely published (under his own name) during Stalin's time, and only came into prominence in the mid-1960s when Soviet literary scholars became interested in his work. English translations of his works, including *The Dialogic Imagination*, were published in 1975, just before he died, and his works continued to be disseminated posthumously, appearing in translation around the world. With the increased dissemination of Bakhtin's works outside the Soviet Union, his thought was appropriated by myriad disciplines. As a philosopher and intellectual active – albeit unpublished – during a political epoch where terror and censorship were standard operating procedure, Bakhtin seems particularly applicable to the discussion of censorship.

His Theory

Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical thought is largely focused on supporting the interconnectivity of academic disciplines, which he divides into the natural and human sciences, through their common element of language. Language is a way to explore and express the meaning of the world; it is intrinsically connected to culture, expressive of the ideologies that dominate – and attempt to subvert – the culture in which the language is being spoken. Bakhtin also privileges the written aspects of language, specifically literary genres of human discourse (i.e., the novel), as concrete manifestations of a specific cultural lexicon. The human sciences, the broad discipline with which Bakhtin is largely concerned, are “about man and his specific nature, and not about a voiceless thing or natural phenomenon” and, furthermore, are linked intricately to text: “man in his specific human nature always expresses himself (speaks), that is, he creates a text (if only potential)” (Bakhtin, “The problem of the text”, p. 107). Because language permeates all

of human activity, it is impossible to ignore the inherent interconnectivity of human endeavours, which manifest themselves through written, as well as spoken, language.

For Bakhtin, language is not synonymous with linguistics, and the study of language is not necessarily restricted to linguistic analysis, which is more of an objective, hard science than a human science. Language can also be examined in terms of meaning, which is contingent on context. There is a clear distinction between the purely technical aspects of linguistics – grammar, syntax, etc. – and the uses Bakhtin sees for language, which are more closely related to those of semantics and contextual importance. The fundamental unit with which Bakhtin proposes to analyze language is the *utterance*: “Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by the participants in the various areas of human activity” (“The problem of speech genres”, p. 61). There is a sense of completeness to an utterance; it is not determined by length, as might apply to a purely linguistic term, but, rather, by the will of the author to express – to utter – a finite (at the time of its expression), defined thought, something complete that can function independently.

In his early thought, Bakhtin posits that an utterance comprises of two parts: linguistic matter, the purely structural elements of language; and a nonverbal component, “an implied part”, which corresponds to the context of the enunciation (Todorov, 1984, p. 41). The importance of the social situation that creates the utterance cannot be dismissed or diminished; it is integral to Bakhtin’s concept of utterance:

Whatever the moment of the utterance-expression we may consider, it will always be determined by the real conditions of its uttering, and foremost by the *nearest social situation*. [...] The utterance is constructed between

two socially organized persons, and, should there not be present an actual interlocutor, one is presupposed in the person of a normal representative, so to speak, of the social group to which the speaker belongs. *Discourse is oriented toward the person addressed*, oriented toward what that person is.⁶ (Bakhtin, cited in Todorov, 1984, p. 43).

Not only does an utterance necessarily include its social context, this aspect of context also intimates the necessity of an audience, of at least one interlocutor, who reacts to – and therefore interacts with – the utterance.

The linguistic element of an utterance is reiterative; however, the context of enunciation that belongs to an utterance is perpetually unique. With every articulation of an utterance, every time the linguistic aspect of the utterance is reiterated, its context changes, thereby changing the second aspect of the utterance – its implied part, the part that interacts with its audience/interlocutors. In other words, an utterance occurring in a different time and space than its original appearance would acquire a new nonverbal, implied part. Continuing along this path, the utterance itself, because such a fundamental aspect has been changed, is now a new, unique utterance. In Bakhtin's words:

Two poles of the text. Each text presupposes a generally understood (that is, conventional within a given collective) system of signs, a language (if only the language of art). [...] Everything in the text that is repeated and reproduced, everything repeatable and reproducible, everything that can be given outside a given text (the given) conforms to this language system.

But at the same time each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique, and

⁶ The work by Bakhtin cited here is “Marxism and the Philosophy of Language”, a text of disputed authorship – it is signed by Voloshinov, one of the authors (the other was Medvedev) who supposedly collaborated with Bakhtin in his early writings. (Cf. Bakhtin's Context, in the section above.)

unrepeatable, and herein lies its entire significance (its plan, the purpose for which it was created). This is the aspect of it that pertains to honesty, truth, goodness, beauty, history. With respect to this aspect, everything repeatable and reproducible proves to be material, a means to an end. [...]

The second aspect (pole) inheres in the text itself, but is revealed only in a particular situation and in a chain of texts (in the speech communication of a given area). This pole is linked not with elements (repeatable) in the system of the language (signs), but with other texts (unrepeatable) by special dialogic (and dialectical, when detached from the author) relations.

(“The problem of the text”, p. 105)

The second aspect of an utterance is privileged over the system of signs (the language) with which it is presented. Instead, the utterance derives its purpose from its social context – a situation that changes each time it is repeated.

Bakhtin’s utterance serves as a unit in his overall construction of a philosophy that proposes the interconnectivity of all human discourse (the human sciences). By moving language beyond linguistics, into *translinguistics*,⁷ Bakhtin is incorporating the social, contextual aspects of discourse – the broader conception of communication beyond signs and symbols – and delving into the realm of *meaning*. Having established the utterance as a translinguistic unit, Bakhtin articulates its function: “Two verbal works, two utterances, in juxtaposition, enter into a particular kind of semantic relation, which we call dialogical. [...] Dialogical relations are (semantic) relations between all the utterances within verbal communication” (cited in Todorov, 1984, pp. 60-61). The units of Bakhtin’s theory, utterances, interact with each other much like humans interact

⁷ Todorov’s term; sometimes this concept is translated as *metalinguistics*.

through dialogue, though not in an identical manner: “These relations [between the discourse of the other and the discourse of the I] are analogous to (but certainly not identical with) the relations between the exchanges of a dialogue” (Bakhtin, cited in Todorov, 1984, p. 60). Therefore, the products of the human sciences are all capable of interacting with one another and of constantly producing new meaning as their social context alters and is reinvented and transformed.

Texts (utterances) cannot interact with each other of their own accord, though. Just as a text requires an author, its (dialogic) interaction with other texts requires an interlocutor, an audience, to facilitate. Because the text is dependent on humans, the link to its context is further reinforced. The text is a product of its author, who is, in turn, the product of a social situation. The text is, therefore, the product of a social situation. Bakhtin’s philosophy requires one to consider the impact of social context on each utterance, both in the utterance’s original state – from an historical perspective – and in each new reiteration. The interlocutor’s interaction with a text is inseparable from her own socio-historical context, much as the utterances involved in the interaction are also inseparable from their cumulative socio-historical context.

The structure of an utterance is also contingent on social factors; ideologies and conventions present in society determine the structure and types of utterances produced:

Utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area [of human activity] not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects – thematic content, style, and

compositional structure – are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. (Bakhtin, “The problem of speech genres”, p. 61)

Not only is the language content of an utterance – the verbal component combined with the implied element discussed above – a product of its societal origins, but so, too, is the compositional structure. Spheres of communication dictate the stylistics of an utterance; this reinforces Bakhtin’s concept that utterances are intrinsically linked, they are a product of their social circumstances. This philosophy gives way to the formulation of distinct types of utterances.

One type of utterance is the novel. While it is logical that a literary theorist would privilege the novel as a vehicle for criticism, Bakhtin describes his preference of the novel in terms that closely relate to cultural studies as well as literary theory. The novel is inherently linked with the *openended present*: the novel is not contained safely in the finite, distant past, like an epic, but, rather, is a product of its immediate surroundings. The novel features “an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)” (Bakhtin, “Epic and novel”, p. 7). This concept of the openended present, furthermore, implies a connection with the future because the present is not closed off, a concrete and specific moment in time, but is part of a continuum, growing organically into the future. The organic, evolutionary nature of the novel supports both Bakhtin’s categorization of the genre as an utterance and, as such, its participation in dialogics, with a strong focus on socio-historical context.

Throughout his discussion of the novel, Bakhtin relies on the linguistic root of the word: *new*, often in an interesting or unusual way. Thus, when he discusses the *novelization* of moribund genres of creative discourse, he is assigning the novel the role of renewing – contemporizing – these modes of communication. The novel transforms fossilized genres into relevant ones precisely because the novel is contemporary and reflects society as it is:

The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making. (Bakhtin, 1981, “Epic and novel”, p. 7)

Again, one detects the link that Bakhtin stresses between the present and the future – these two concepts of time are inseparable. The present (“reality”) is developing (“unfolding”) into the future (“a new world”).

Bakhtin’s novel functions as a microcosm of society; it is a product of the culture in which it originated, but also connects the present with the future. As an utterance, the novel is in constant contact with other utterances, constantly serving both as interlocutor and author, through human mediation. The role of a Bakhtinian novel, therefore, becomes intrinsically that of a tract or a polemic, born out of its socio-historical circumstances. Because of the social function of the novel, analyzing controversial novels that functioned overtly as social tracts/polemics – and faced violent reactions as a result – belongs naturally in the realm of Bakhtin’s philosophy.

Dialogics and author voice. Using the novel as a fundamental unit (an utterance) in applying Bakhtinian philosophy to analyze society brings one to the concept of author voice and how it relates to the concept of dialogics (or *intertextuality*⁸). The author voice is, obviously, the message of the individual who composed the utterance in question. However, it is also important to consider the authority⁹ of the utterance within the novel itself. The author acts in relation to his characters, to the message he is creating within the utterance. The heroes of the novel are, from their perspective, autonomous individuals interacting with their world within the novel. The author exerts, however, his own force upon these heroes; the author has an external, complete view of the heroes' circumstances. In this way, the author occupies the position of "other" in relation to the heroes.

The author also functions externally, by presenting himself to the audience – the readers, the interlocutors – through his utterance. The author is a socio-political being, inseparable, much like the utterance, from his context in society:

We find the author *outside* the work as a human being, [...] observing from his own unresolved and still evolving contemporaneity, in all its complexity and fullness, insofar as he himself is located as it were tangentially to the reality he describes. (Bakhtin, "Forms of time and chronotope", pp. 254-255)

⁸ Todorov's term. While Todorov chooses to use *intertextuality* to describe this concept because of the inherent – and perhaps misleading – multiplicity of meaning associated with the etymology of *dialogics*, dialogics is a more common translation of Bakhtin's concept; therefore, I will use the latter, as opposed to *intertextuality*.

⁹ Bakhtin frequently brings to mind the relationship, etymologically, of the words *author* and *authority*. With Bakhtin, one thinks of the root of authority as belonging very closely to the role of an author, a combination of the producer of a (literary, fictional) text, in addition to an expert (the more colloquial interpretation of authority). Therefore, writing fiction (potentially a pejorative classification when considered in the context of informational function) becomes an authoritative act: the author is an expert based on the fact that he is exercising his authority.

Again, the unresolved nature of the present is apparent, a nature that leads to the future: the author functions externally to the literary work he is creating and is dramatically influenced by his own reality. He is related to the reality within the novel, but tangentially; he cannot present it autonomously from himself because of his relation to it. This relation is coloured by his own *contemporaneity*, a cumulative concept that encompasses the past and all the influences of the present that exert themselves upon the author. Because the author is a social being, his work also functions within society: “every literary work *faces outward away from itself*, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself” (Bakhtin, “Forms of time and chronotope”, p. 257). This hearkens back to the initial idea of the utterance, with its inherent dialogic function: it must interact with other utterances, both by responding to and anticipating a response from them.

Dialogics are very important for Bakhtin, as the concept explains how language interacts as a social structure to change society. There are two currents in society: centripetal and centrifugal. Centripetal forces seek to establish hegemony, a dominant ideology, unity in language. Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, seek to subvert the established hegemony, to undermine stability and cultural unity. One thinks of the concept of a Bakhtinian carnival – uncrowning authority (the dominant ideology) by bringing the “high” down to the “low”, using laughter and disrespect for authority (sometimes to the level of violence) to disrupt fossilized societal conventions. Because language is a reflection of society, it exhibits centripetal and centrifugal forces. Dialogics is the area where these forces exert themselves, and, for Bakhtin, literature (through the

authorial voice) illuminates the struggle between the dominant ideology and that which seeks to undermine it.

Significance

The crux of Bakhtin's thought can be found in his view of human discourse as dialogic, as based in apperceptive interaction between utterances via readers and authors, and based in socio-cultural context. Culture is integral to creating meaning, to understanding *self* in terms of *other*, and to understanding the language used for expression (Roberts, 1989). The relation between literature and culture is further strengthened by Bakhtin's need for the novel to exist in contemporaneity, not the self-contained, closed past of the epic. Realism, therefore, becomes an integral part of the novel. The author "carries within himself the image of his liberation" (p. 107); he is seeking change and striving toward heteroglossia¹⁰ (de Man, 1989). This liberation, this change, harkens back to Bakhtin's concept of the novel as revolutionary.¹¹ The novel, for Bakhtin, is "ideologically prosaic, anti-romance, anti-epical, and anti-mythical; its multivoicedness or heteroglossia postulates distinct and antagonistic class structures as well as the celebratory crossing of social barriers" (de Man, 1989, p. 108).

Bakhtin's philosophy, particularly the ideas of dialogics, centripetal and centrifugal forces in society, and author voice, is significant in the discussion of censorship. Because his thinking has been appropriated by so many disciplines, Bakhtin has proven (posthumously) the interdisciplinary nature of his thought. The following

¹⁰ *Heteroglossia* is a translation of *raznorečie* (literally, *different-speech-ness*). Reflective of its Greek roots, *hetero* (*different*) and *glossia* (*tongue, language*), this term refers to the diversity of meaning, based on social factors, that is present within language. (Cf. M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the novel", p. 263)

¹¹ Cf. the epigraph of this chapter: "To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one's contemporaries (an event that is therefore based on personal experience and thought) is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of the epic into the world of the novel." (Bakhtin, "Epic and novel", p. 14)

study is founded, broadly, in the areas of literary criticism and theory, cultural studies, and information studies; Bakhtin's theories have strong ties to the former disciplines, and, because of his philosophy's interdisciplinary nature, can also be applied to the field of information studies. The connection, for the purposes of this study, between these disciplines is censorship, specifically the censorship of literature. Bakhtin views novels as microcosms of society; therefore, realist novels, with their focus on portraying contemporary society and life as it is, are exemplary for Bakhtinian analysis. The novels chosen here as case studies depict times of social upheaval, dramatic shifts in the social fabric of their respective times; furthermore, the novels discuss – at the time of their publication – contemporary reality. *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago* were created in different epochs, yet both novels were censored and elicited violent reactions: realist literature functions as information in society, and analyzing the reaction to literature across different epochs will bring to light the similarities in the function, and reception, of literature-as-information.

Limitations

For this study, I chose to focus on several of Bakhtin's central tenets, privileging these in my analysis of the reaction to the novels in question. While Bakhtin's theories are interrelated and continue to develop (rather linearly) throughout the course of his writing,¹² I selected only a few of his major concepts to directly inform my analysis. The basis for my choice of concepts was founded in the focus of my study on censorship, which places the emphasis on the cultural context in which the works were created and received. This context includes the political and social factors that, presumably, directly

¹² Or, "a distinctive feature of Bakhtin's career as a thinker is that he never ceased pursuing different answers to the same set of questions" (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 63).

affected the lens through which the novels were initially viewed; the study exhibits a strong connection with cultural studies. Therefore, I selected Bakhtin's ideas of dialogics, the author voice, and of centripetal and centrifugal forces working within society through literature, specifically novels in the tradition of realism. For the purposes of space, I chose to privilege these concepts over others, as they connect closely to cultural studies. I chose to exclude (formally) Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque and the chronotope; while they are integral to his oeuvre, these concepts apply more directly to literary theory. Moreover, my discussion of Bakhtin was based on English language translations of his work; works that I consulted were only those available in translation.

The other limitation present in my study concerns the critical reviews I collected. I examined critical reviews as a primary source of data regarding the general societal reaction to the novels in question. I used *Book Review Digest* as a source listing all reviews issued on each of the novels at the time of their initial publication (in the case of *Doctor Zhivago*, at the time of its publication in English translation). This is an American publication, and, as such, had a bias toward American periodicals. While several international publications were listed in *Book Review Digest*, they were exclusively English-language (Canadian and British); my collection of reviews exhibits a strong Anglo-American bias. However, because I focused my study on the American reception of both the novels, the prevalence of American reviews is reasonable. The other limitation I faced with regard to the critical reviews applied specifically to *The Grapes of Wrath* case study: 10 of the reviews listed in *Book Review Digest* were unavailable to me, as they were published some 70 years ago and several of the periodicals that published reviews are no longer in existence and archives of their

publications are limited. However, I was able to retrieve all the reviews listed in *Book Review Digest* for *Doctor Zhivago*; these reviews were published a mere 50 years ago.

As with the sources I consulted about Bakhtin, the reviews I consulted were also restricted to English-language publications. Because I was focusing on the American reception of both books, this limitation was, in fact, appropriate to the scope of the study. Concerning *The Grapes of Wrath*, because it was first published in America in English, the language limitation is largely inconsequential. However, concerning *Doctor Zhivago*, a novel that was originally written and published in Russian and then in Italian before appearing in English, the limitation of only English language reviews has a greater impact. I chose to focus on the American reception of both the novels because it provided stronger grounds for comparison between *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago* by placing them on the same geographical plane, and diminished the possible detriment of not having access to Russian (language) sources. The other impediment in discovering and retrieving Soviet sources from the time of *Doctor Zhivago*'s initial appearance is the state of official Soviet records and their opacity, particularly in the West.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters, including the introduction. Within these six chapters, there are two main sections: the first, dedicated to *The Grapes of Wrath* (chapters two and three), and the second, dedicated to *Doctor Zhivago* (chapters four and five). The structure of these two main sections is similar, as they both present the case studies of my research. Chapter two, "The Context of *The Grapes of Wrath*" discusses the historical context of John Steinbeck's novel. Chapter three, "Analysis of the

Reception of *The Grapes of Wrath*”, continues the discussion of this novel by examining its reception and applying Bakhtin’s theories. Chapter four, “The Context of *Doctor Zhivago*”, presents the historical context of the novel. Chapter five, “Analysis of the Reception of *Doctor Zhivago*”, examines this novel’s reception and applies Bakhtin’s philosophy to its case. The final chapter is dedicated to concluding the study, through a discussion of Bakhtin’s continued relevance and by revisiting the research questions outlined in the introduction.

Chapter 2 – The Context of *The Grapes of Wrath*

“I’m pretty mad about it [the situation of migrant workers].” John Steinbeck, writing to Elizabeth Otis, his literary agent¹³

Introduction

This chapter contextualizes John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* within the time of its initial publication. In order to better understand the reception of the novel, it is important to illustrate, in broad strokes, the general social and historical state of the world in the 1930s, beginning with the political and economic forces at play at that time, and then focusing more closely on the United States (and Canada). An overview of the state of intellectual freedom before the publication of this controversial novel also helps to situate the reaction to and aftermath of its publication. A profile of Steinbeck as an author concludes the section dedicated to social and historical context.

A plot summary of *The Grapes of Wrath* is given, in order to facilitate understanding of why the novel was controversial; its provocative themes are highlighted. Lastly, the publication history of this novel is illustrated, focusing, again, on the time period of its first introduction to the public.

Social and Historical Context

Political and Economic Context

The 1930s were a time of turmoil and instability. The First World War was a recent memory and this devastation was followed by the Great Depression. Communist and fascist powers rose and established themselves across the globe. The First World War created several lingering tensions, specifically by destroying the autocracies of the

¹³ Cited in DeMott, R. (1992). Introduction. In Steinbeck, J., *The Grapes of Wrath* (ix-xi). London: Penguin Books.

nineteenth-century without providing viable new forms of government. This led to the rise of totalitarian ideologies, spurred by ongoing economic instability and the reorganization of the European map, resulting in a sense of nationalist entitlement, often combined with resentment over the outcomes of the First World War. The masses were frustrated, unsatisfied, and suffering from catastrophic inflation and a global economic depression. Traditional political structures – autocracies – had crumbled; they were no longer suitable for the configuration of the world, and the masses mobilized support for extreme ideologies. As a result, the period between the World Wars became a time of radical ideologies: communism on the left, fascism on the right. In the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected in 1932; he implemented the New Deal, a social welfare strategy designed to combat the devastation of the Great Depression – a dramatic departure from the laissez-faire economics that preceded it.

The American and Canadian prairies were the site of one of the worst agricultural disasters of all time, the Dust Bowl; severe drought combined with poor agricultural practices resulted in dust storms that destroyed crops. The 1920s created a high-producing, high-consuming lifestyle for Americans, owing to a post-war boom. This lifestyle had its effects on the agricultural sector, particularly the ecologically sensitive American plains, where demand for crops was high. Aggressive, unsustainable agricultural practices exhausted the fragile earth and were coupled with drought, intense heat, and wind. This combination created the Dust Bowl: the soil was essentially dust; it swirled through the air in dust storms; crops could not grow and were destroyed before mature. Millions of people were affected by the Dust Bowl throughout the 1930s. Because crops could not grow and profits could not be made, banks foreclosed on farms,

forcing families to leave their lands, creating an enormous migration – often westward to California. The Dust Bowl disaster stretched across New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas.¹⁴ The Canadian prairies and the farmers who sought their livelihood on them also faced devastating drought and erratic weather during this decade.

Both Americans and Canadians suffered greatly during the Great Depression, and the scene was ripe for explosive, controversial ideologies to take root. As with the rise of fascism and communism, many Americans were also disenchanted with economic conditions and the government's inability to solve these problems and alleviate suffering. Because of this discontent, extreme ideologies, promising action and solutions to problems, became more appealing. People were talking about communism, socialism, fascism; it was a time of experimental thinking in an attempt to stabilize society and heal wounds left by the economic and social disasters of the First World War and subsequent Depression.

Intellectual Freedom Context

Such a charged ideological atmosphere lends itself, often, to a desire to censor and silence the voices that offer dissenting views. In an era of widespread instability and uncertainty, where totalitarianism becomes more prevalent, people are prone to feeling threatened by 'dissenting' voices, voices expressing an opinion that is not shared by a certain group. The United States Constitution's First Amendment supports freedom of speech and freedom of the press, but this document did not serve as a significant deterrent to censorship because of the tumultuous nature of the 1930s.

¹⁴ See Worster, D. (1979). *Dust bowl: The southern plains in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press for an analysis of the American Dust Bowl, particularly in relation to economic factors preceding and complementing the disaster.

At this time, intellectual freedom was not an explicit or even traditional goal of American libraries. Libraries supported a “neutral position”, but this neutrality was often translated into passivity when faced with censorship: The library was under the jurisdiction of a higher governing body and therefore complied with orders for censorship as received from these bodies. The American Library Association did not have a unified position on censorship; its position vacillated and its attitude was ambivalent (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992).

In the 1920s, censorship of literature was a ubiquitous feature of public libraries: controversial works were often either banned outright, or placed on a restricted shelf; works were deemed worthy of censorship based on moral grounds, if their content was offensive or unsuitable for public consumption. These decisions were arbitrary and subjective; those involved in censoring works were, essentially, dictating what was morally acceptable. Famous authors who were censored in American libraries during this time include Upton Sinclair, Gustave Flaubert, D.H. Lawrence, John Dos Passos, Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and H.G. Wells.¹⁵ During the 1930s, Erskine Caldwell’s *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God’s Little Acre* (1933) faced censorship; *God’s Little Acre* was sued (and later acquitted) for obscenity (Geller, 1984).

However, during the latter part of the 1930s, the American Library Association began to push back against the censorship of published materials in response to news of book burnings and destructive crusades against intellectual material elsewhere, including Nazi Germany. The idea of destruction of intellectual material, of inhibiting intellectual freedom through censorship, was closely related to the destruction of a free and just

¹⁵ For a discussion of censorship in libraries, including controversial books, see Geller, E. (1984). *Forbidden books in American public libraries, 1876-1939: A study in cultural change*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

society; if totalitarian regimes partook in censorship, it followed that democratic regimes should be wary of similar tendencies in their own societies, as censorship may be a catalyst for totalitarianism. Relating the push back against censorship to the American Constitution, many believed, especially in the face of totalitarian regimes, that “freedom of the mind is basic to the functioning and maintenance of democracy as practiced in the United States” (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992, p. xiv).

Steinbeck’s Profile

The American author John Steinbeck, having achieved his first critical success with *Tortilla Flat* in 1935, was continuing to write and be watched by the literary world. His subsequent novels, *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), like *Tortilla Flat*, dealt with contemporary subject matter. Steinbeck was making a name for himself as a writer, but also as a proletarian writer – one to watch, for both literary and ideological reasons. Much of Steinbeck’s writing focused on migrant workers and their plight, especially workers in California during the Depression. His fascination with this theme continued, and he wrote a series of seven articles, later published as *The Harvest Gypsies*, on this topic for the *San Francisco News*. This exercise led Steinbeck to write his next novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, addressing the same theme as *The Harvest Gypsies*. *The Grapes of Wrath* would win Steinbeck the Pulitzer Prize in 1940 and would play a crucial role in his winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962.

Plot Summary

John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* opens with a description of the Dust Bowl, a despairing image of corn fields wrecked by dust, where families are facing the disappearance of their livelihood and courting emotional ruin. Throughout the novel,

general, non-narrative chapters, telling the broad outline of the migration of thousands of farming families expelled from the Dust Bowl and moving west to the promised land of California, are dispersed amongst chapters telling the particular story of the Joads.

Originally from Oklahoma, the Joads are the central family of the story: Ma and Pa; their adult children, Tom, Al, Noah, pregnant Rose of Sharon; their younger children, Ruthie and Winfield; Uncle John; and Granma and Grampa. Rose of Sharon's husband, Connie, also joins the family on their journey, as does Jim Casy, a former preacher. The Joads' farm land was repossessed by the bank; as with many of the farmers affected by the Dust Bowl, small family farms could not grow enough produce to remain profitable, which meant banks repossessed farms and evicted the families living on them. Tractors and mass farming were the only way to salvage the land and turn a profit. First, Tom's parents' farm is repossessed by the bank and the family moves to Uncle John's property. John, however, also meets the same fate as so many other Dust Bowl families: eviction. With no land and nowhere left to live, the Joad family, encouraged by handbills promising work picking fruit in California, sets off in a broken down "jalopy", joining the thousands of "Okies"¹⁶ travelling along Route 66, with dreams of saving up to buy a house and farm of their own. Along the way, both Grampa and Granma die, Connie deserts the family, and Noah decides to make his own way.

Having finally made it to California, the Joads are greeted with a vision worthy of the description "promised land". However, the lush land belies the fact that there is no work, or property, to be had: California is owned by farmers who are using the vast numbers of migrant workers to drive down labour prices. Because the demand for work

¹⁶ The term "Okie" is a derogatory one assigned to all Dust Bowl migrants, not just the ones originally from Oklahoma.

is so great, far greater than the actual work to be done, desperate Okies accept very little compensation for their labour. The Joads experience the cut-throat search for work, the treacherous life of migrant camps, and watch children starve while unprofitable food is wasted. There is a brief respite for the Joads when they find a spot in a government camp. However, this does not last; difficulty in finding work and tensions caused by California police, who attempt to incite riots so as to gain jurisdiction to close the camp, force the Joads to leave Weedpatch Camp.

Organizing labour is another theme in this novel: Any attempts at unionizing, or at instituting fair labour practices for migrant workers, are seen as “red” activities. After being released from jail for assault – brought on by an argument over unionizing labourers – Preacher Casy continues his unionizing attempts, activities that culminate in his murder. Tom witnesses this murder and retaliates by murdering a police officer; as a result, he must leave his family and go into hiding. Eventually, he heads off on his own to continue Casy’s work of organizing labourers. The desperate situation worsens when flooding occurs across California. At the end of the novel, Rose of Sharon gives birth to her stillborn baby. In an unforgettable scene, driven by the flooding to take shelter in an abandoned barn, the Joads come across a man starving to death. Rose of Sharon, in response to a pleading look from Ma, nurses the dying man with her breast milk.

The story of the Joads is interspersed with non-narrative chapters that read like essays, polemics telling the overarching story of the Okie migration of the 1930s. The Joads put a human face on the struggles faced by the masses described in Steinbeck’s angry polemics. *The Grapes of Wrath* features the patois of the migrants; Steinbeck depicts both their speech and their culture in this way. The author was deliberate in his

presentation and did not shy away from what might be deemed offensive, stating: “those readers who are insulted by normal events or language mean nothing to me” (Steinbeck, cited in DeMott, 1992, p. xxxvi). The language is stark, as is the content of the novel; Steinbeck presents an account of a highly politically and emotionally charged event in American history. However, the inflammatory nature of the writing is heightened by the timing of the presentation: *The Grapes of Wrath*'s subject matter reflected *contemporary* reality. Steinbeck was writing about the Joads when the people like the Joads were very much real – not historical figures.

Publication History

Viking Press announced the upcoming publication of *The Grapes of Wrath* in *Publishers' Weekly* on December 31, 1938, as part of its spread of upcoming publications: “The most exciting literary news of the year – John Steinbeck’s most mature and important work, a novel of over 200,000 words. It is a dramatic story of Americans today carrying out their pioneer tradition” (Viking Press, 1938, p. 2191). When the novel appeared three and a half months after this announcement, on April 14, 1939, there had already been three advance printings. The first printing consisted of 19 804 copies, and the demand for *The Grapes of Wrath* was so great that 60 000 copies were on order before it was published (“Candidates for the best seller list”, 1939, April 22). Because the demand was so high, initial orders from bookstores had to be halved in order to supply dealers with copies before publication (French, 1963, p. 105). After the book was released, demand for it was so great that booksellers who had not received their full orders requested they be filled as soon as possible (“Viking increases ad appropriation”, 1939, April 29).

The official publication announcement appeared in *The Weekly Record of Publishers' Weekly's* April 15th issue, which described *The Grapes of Wrath* as a “novel of the ‘poor whites’ in California, in present-day America” and indicated it was a collector’s item (p. 1452). A mere month after its initial publication, Viking Press had printed 120 000 copies of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was twice the number of copies in demand before the novel was published (“Best sellers of the week”, 1939, May 20). By the end of 1939, Viking Press had shipped approximately 430 000 hardcover copies of Steinbeck’s latest work, priced at \$2.75 each (French, 1963, p. 106; Steinbeck, 1989, p.97). *The Grapes of Wrath* experienced huge demand before it was even published, despite the short time between the official announcement and the actual publication, and the lack of support from book club selections. The continued success of the novel was perhaps aided by an extensive advertisement campaign by Viking Press, as reported in *Publishers' Weekly*, a campaign that emphasized the following key points:

(1) that *The Grapes of Wrath* has become immediately the fastest selling book in America; (2) that the reviews are almost unprecedented in their enthusiasm and that they have stressed three points: (a) Steinbeck’s greatest book; (b) the “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” of our day; (c) Here, at last, perhaps is the great American novel. (“Viking increases ad appropriation”, 1939, April 29, p. 1609)

The campaign included advertisements in many major periodicals of the time. The novel was announced mere months before its publication, but was hugely popular – widely reviewed and purchased in tremendous amounts – despite this short notice. Presumably,

this was due, in part, to Steinbeck's rising celebrity as a writer concerned with contemporary America and its social issues.

Early in 1940, the Literary Guild issued a special printing of *The Grapes of Wrath*; however, this was discontinued in May when a "price-protected" edition of the novel appeared (French, 1963, p. 106). Two illustrated editions also appeared, both based on the work of artist Thomas Hart Benton: One edition consisted of two volumes and was distributed through the Limited Editions Club; the other edition, comprised of a single volume, was issued by the Heritage Club (French, 1963, p. 107). Another illustrated edition, with line drawings by John Garth, was included in the Living Library. *The Grapes of Wrath* was also reprinted by the Modern Library and as a Compass Book by Viking Press; the novel was also "one of the most popular titles in the Bantam paperback line" (French, 1963, p. 107).

Internationally, a British edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* appeared several months after the American publication. In *The Grapes of Wrath*'s entry in the Best Sellers of the Week section, *Publishers' Weekly* announced that the novel has been "sold to British, Dutch, French, Italian, Polish, Rumanian and Scandinavian publishers"; however, Steinbeck "refused to sell the rights for publication in Germany" ("Best sellers of the week", 1939, June 17, p. 2176). This refusal is reflective of the politics of the time; tensions were mounting in Europe, largely due to aggressive tactics by Hitler's Germany. The novel appeared, in translation, in a Russian periodical in 1940; by 1941, three-hundred thousand copies of the work had been published in the Soviet Union (French, 1963, p. 149). Despite the war and the resulting upheaval in Europe, *The Grapes of Wrath* was published and distributed throughout Europe, albeit with disruptions due to

supply shortages. After World War II ended, Steinbeck's novel became popular in most European countries, in addition to in Asia and Africa (French, 1963, p. 149).

Clearly, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* experienced immediate demand and enduring popularity, both in its native United States and internationally. Initial publication runs were significant in size, and the enduring popularity of the novel translated into on-going editions and publications. The popularity of the novel seems to have resulted from the social and political atmosphere of the time. The reception of the novel, both critical and popular, points toward the complex situation of the work within the social currents of the American 1930s; Steinbeck was reflecting a controversial reality, one that attracted the attention of both critics and wider audiences. Huge publication runs were a result of the demand to read about the problematic situation of migrant workers in America's "backyard".

Conclusion

The social and political atmosphere of the 1930s played a very important role in the conception of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Political tensions caused by the First World War and the ensuing economic collapse created an atmosphere that was ripe for experimental – and controversial – ideas to take root, and for different sides of the ideological spectrum to feel threatened. The social upheaval of the 1930s was also an important factor of the time; desperate poverty was spreading throughout America (among other places), following the incredible prosperity of the post-war boom, which contributed to the epoch's tense atmosphere. Steinbeck responded to this situation with a series of literary works, most notably *The Grapes of Wrath*, depicting the plight of American migrant workers at the mercy of the economy, the environment, and the politics of the time. *The*

Grapes of Wrath was published in huge amounts and created such demand and popularity, in part, due to the contemporary nature of the subject matter and its relevance to the tumultuous times in America during the 1930s.

Chapter 3 – Analysis of the Reception of *The Grapes of Wrath*

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord/He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored/He hath loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword/His truth is marching on.¹⁷

Introduction

This chapter discusses how *The Grapes of Wrath* was received upon its initial publication, starting with the critical reception. This section presents official reviews of the novel in several categories: American press, subdivided into an intellectual audience, a general public audience, and professional reviews; Canadian press; and British press. To complement the critical reception of Steinbeck's novel, the next section illustrates its public popularity by examining its status as a best-seller in the United States. Next, the censorship and controversy surrounding the novel is explored, specifically the reaction of the library profession. Aspects of Bakhtin's philosophy are then applied to the reception of the novel, with respect to its censorship and social history.

Critical Reception

The high level of publicity that *The Grapes of Wrath* received included literary reviews in many prominent periodicals of the time. Critics recognized the force behind the novel, which led it to be in such high demand before it was even published. Steinbeck's reputation as an author of note, and as one who tackled contemporary, social issues, was solidifying; therefore, *The Grapes of Wrath* was widely reviewed. According to Viking Press ("Viking increases ad appropriation", 1939, April 29), *The Grapes of Wrath* was lauded far and wide as the next great American novel and received exclusively positive reviews; however, this was not the case. The majority of critics

¹⁷ Battle Hymn of the Republic, first verse.

admitted that Steinbeck's latest offering was important, the subject matter pertinent and critical, but many of the reviews were not laudatory or even positive. Although many critics admitted that Steinbeck was providing a needed exposition of contemporary social and political issues, many reviewers severely criticized his literary style.

Methods and Limitations

In order to determine the critical reception *The Grapes of Wrath* received upon its initial publication, I consulted *The Book Review Digest* for 1939,¹⁸ which indexes reviews in periodicals by publication (James & Brown, 1940). John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* had nearly thirty reviews indexed for the year it was first published. However, I was not able to retrieve all the reviews listed, owing largely to temporal distance. Many of the reviews from 1939 are not digitally available; moreover, at this time, the landscape of the American press was constantly changing – myriad small presses were cropping up, only to subsequently disappear. This dynamic situation resulted in some difficulties in retrieving original reviews of *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, I was able to access many American reviews from periodicals of several different mandates (i.e., popular, intellectual, and professional), in addition to one Canadian and several British reviews.

American Press

Intellectual audience/mandate. One of the first reviews of the novel to appear was in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, a liberal scholarly publication under the leadership of Yale English professor, Henry Seidel Canby.¹⁹ Reviewer George Stevens

¹⁸ *The Book Review Digest* entry for *The Grapes of Wrath* featured 26 publications: 21 were American and five were international (one Canadian and four British). I was able to include 16 of the 26 reviews indexed in this study. In 1939, *The Book Review Digest* referenced over 80 publications (including six international – Canadian and British – sources) in total in order to collect its reviews for the year.

¹⁹ See James Playsted Wood. (1971). *Magazines in the United States*. (3rd ed.). New York: The Ronald Press Company.

sets the tone for the majority of *The Grapes of Wrath*'s critical reception by emphasizing the social consciousness of its author, thereby firmly establishing the novel as a social document:

Steinbeck has looked at the Oklahoma farmers – the “Okies” in Salinas County, California, driven from camp to camp, finding no work, not allowed to settle. What he has written about them is a narrative: colorful, dramatic, subtle, coarse, comic, and tragic. For “The Grapes of Wrath” is not a social novel like most social novels. It is instead what a social novel ought to be. When you read it, you are in contact not with arguments, but with people. (Stevens, 1939, p. 4)

In his review, Stevens depicts Steinbeck as an author bridging the gap between novels and pure social propaganda. For Stevens, Steinbeck applies literary rhetoric to the contemporary social issue being addressed; he uses stories and people to transmit arguments. Focusing his praise on the social issues addressed, Stevens criticizes the formal structure of the novel, particularly the ending, which he deems to be “bathos”. The formal criticism is added, almost as an afterthought, to the end of the review; the majority of Stevens’ thoughts centre on the propagandist value of the novel. Stevens also employs social language of his own when describing the plight of migrant workers: California police are “California Gestapo” seeking out “dangerous reds” (p. 4). World politics have found their way into the book reviewer’s vocabulary, and the woes of the world at large are echoed under the same labels at home.

According to Stevens, the characters of *The Grapes of Wrath* are its most valuable asset; they allow the truth of American migrant workers to speak to the reader, as the

story unfolds. “In its affirmation of man’s courage in desperation lie the human significance and value [of the novel]” (p. 4). The humanity must be transferred through the characters, as humans can empathize better with an individual than with a general and broad group, such as the hordes of migrant workers. Through his treatment of characters, Steinbeck is able to bring home the social message of his narrative. An important part of this characterization occurs through the dialogue, which is “necessary and right” in presenting “uninhibited coarseness”, although, cautions Stevens, it will offend some readers (p. 4). Stevens directly references the “sociological value” of *The Grapes of Wrath*, and attributes this motivation to Steinbeck: “Unquestionably, also, Steinbeck sees his material both as a narrative and as a condition calling for action” (p.4). This double role, of narrative and imperative, echoes the idea of a “social novel” mentioned above.

The importance of the characters is further emphasized when Stevens condemns the “general chapters” – the essay-like chapters that are dispersed amongst those telling the Joads’ story – as “at best superfluous, occasionally sententious, and in one instance downright bad” (p. 4). However, Stevens reminds us that the purpose of this book is to “interpret what is going on in this country among the kind of people of whom book readers in general know little – people like the Joads” (p. 4); *The Grapes of Wrath* is serving an educational and propagandist purpose, and its structural failings can be forgiven on these grounds.

Like George Stevens, Louis Kronenberger, in his “Hungry Caravan” (*The Nation*, 1939) views *The Grapes of Wrath* as a social novel, a “social protest”, even a “tract”, full of “great indignation and great compassion”:

Its theme is large and tragic and, on the whole, is largely and tragically felt.

No novel of our day has been written out of a more genuine humanity, and none [...] is better calculated to awaken the humanity of others. (p. 440)

Again, Steinbeck is calculating the effect of his work; Kronenberger views the purpose of this novel as a call to action, awakening people to their circumstances and invoking their humanity. The review is very much focussed on the propagandist nature of the novel, pausing for brief condemnations of Steinbeck's "sentimentalism", of the uneven nature of the formal structure, and of the "chapters in which Steinbeck halts to editorialize about American life" (p. 441). Kronenberger names Steinbeck as a propagandist outright: The Joads are "the stuff of rich folk-comedy", but "their fate is the theme of an angry and aroused propagandist" (p. 440). Moreover, it is a "proletarian novel", or, more accurately, a proletarian "tract", successful because of its characters, a "fiery document of protest and compassion" (p. 441). *The Nation*, the periodical in which this review appears, is a left-leaning publication²⁰; this political bias is apparent in Kronenberger's characterization of *The Grapes of Wrath* as a proletarian tract, meant to rouse readers into action.

Charles Angoff of *The North American Review*²¹ approaches *The Grapes of Wrath* from a unique, distinctly religious perspective (1939). Before placing Steinbeck among such authors as "Hawthorne, Melville, Crane, and Norris" (p. 387), Angoff situates the "souls of great American imaginative writers" in "Hell" (p. 387). It is a laudatory review; even the sensuousness of the novel would have been forgiven by "the

²⁰ See James Playsted Wood. (1971). *Magazines in the United States*. (3rd ed.). New York: The Ronald Press Company.

²¹ *The North American Review* "was largely a literary, historical, and critical review"; see Wood, J.P. (1971). *Magazines in the United States*. (3rd ed.). New York: The Ronald Press Company; p. 43.

Fathers of the Church”, and “moral anger” is that which is only possessed by “the highest art” (p. 387). Religious language permeates the review: Migrant workers, the dispossessed, have the “patience of Christ” (p. 388); the “literary Episcopalians” do not understand the “eternal heartbreak” in the controversial passages of the novel, such as its ending; Steinbeck has written a book that “offers more praise to God than a dozen Cathedrals of Saint John the Divine” (p. 389). The subject matter, in itself, and the fact that these events are occurring in contemporary America seems, for Angoff, a greater sin than what has led the “literary Episcopalians” to condemn Steinbeck.

Angoff also mentions the New Deal and deems it an attempt to rectify the “dreadful, almost incredible poverty of contemporary American life” (p. 388). This link to contemporary politics seems strange, mixed as it is amongst the strong religious rhetoric of the review; however, it is indicative of a theme in the overall range of reviews – that of trying to understand how this novel relates to the lives of Americans in the 1930s. During this decade, Steinbeck published several of his short stories in *The North American Review*.²² The periodical had a literary bias in favour of Steinbeck even before *The Grapes of Wrath* appeared.

Malcolm Cowley, writing for the leftist *The New Republic*,²³ relates the tragedy at home to the “cataclysms of Europe and Asia”. There is tragedy in America’s backyard and little is being done to draw attention to it:

A hundred thousand rural households have been uprooted from the soil,
robbed of their possessions – though by strictly legal methods – and turned

²² “The White Quail”, March 1935; “The Raid”, October 1934; “The Murder”, April 1934; “The Red Pony, I: The Gift”, November 1933; “The Red Pony, II: The Great Mountains”, December 1933. [See Peter Lisca. (1958). *The wide world of John Steinbeck*. Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.]

²³ *The New Republic* sits on the political left; see J.P. Wood. (1971).

out on the highways. Friendless, homeless and therefore voteless, with fewer rights than medieval serfs, they have wandered in search of a few days' work at miserable wages – not in Spain or the Yangtze Valley, but among the vineyards and orchards of California, in a setting too commonplace for a color story in the Sunday papers. (Cowley, 1939, p. 382)

Cowley chastises the American press for not better acknowledging the problems of its own citizens, albeit those without a legal voice – the “homeless and therefore voteless”, those with barely any rights at all. These people have been dispossessed in staggering numbers; the picture Cowley paints is dramatic.

In this review, *The Grapes of Wrath*, though not referred to as a “social novel”, is again compared to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; they are both “great angry books” that have “roused a people to fight against intolerable wrongs” (p. 383). Like other reviewers, Cowley takes issue with the non-narrative chapters; unlike other reviewers, he separates them into two groups: those written on the way to California, and those written upon arrival in this “promised land”. In the first set, writes Cowley, the interludes are “effective in themselves, sorrowful, bitter, intensely moving” (p. 382), but the second set is problematic. They are “spoken in a shriller voice. The author now has a thesis – that the migrants will unite and overthrow their oppressors – and he wants to argue, as if he weren't quite sure of it himself” (p. 382). Steinbeck is, in Cowley's eyes, trying too hard; he (Steinbeck) is struggling to assert his view that a migrant revolution is inevitable.

However, despite his criticisms of the tone of the interludes, Cowley praises Steinbeck's sympathetic treatment of the migrants, his understanding of them as 'part of no-part':

What one remembers most of all is Steinbeck's sympathy for the migrants – not pity, for that would mean he was putting himself above them; not love, for that would blind him to their faults, but rather, a deep fellow feeling. It makes him notice everything that sets them apart from the rest of the world and sets one migrant apart from all the others. (p. 382)

This sympathetic understanding of the migrants is the lasting impression of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Although Cowley does not specifically mention Steinbeck's first-hand experiences as a migrant worker, journeying west from Oklahoma, Cowley does, inadvertently, praise the authenticity of Steinbeck's portrayal.

Survey Graphic takes a unique approach to *The Grapes of Wrath*. Reviewer Leon Whipple presents an analysis based on the "value of the modern novel on a social theme" (p. 401), thereby locating *The Grapes of Wrath* squarely within the realm of the social novel. Though considering Steinbeck's novel as a social one is not, in itself, unique, Whipple differentiates his review by presenting criteria for judging the impact of such socially conscious literature:

The author must present a true case story to carry his characters and drama; he must have the principal gifts of the novelist for story telling; he must reveal that his case is not singular but general, not unique but typical; and he must have the appeals that will get his book widely read, for without a popular audience his influence will be narrow and indirect. (p. 401)

These criteria are aimed at judging the effectiveness of the social novel. Whipple also stipulates the importance of defining the social novel in an age when such works are particularly relevant, thereby contextualizing *The Grapes of Wrath* within the broader politics of the time.

Whipple refers to Steinbeck as a prophet and lauds the characters he has created. Whipple stands out in his praise of the non-narrative chapters, stating that Steinbeck reveals the background to his social tale by asserting “his right to stand aside and become the Greek chorus, commenting in rhythmic prose on his theme”, a mark of “the wisdom of a true novelist” (p. 401). The literary flaws mentioned are subsumed by the social momentum of the novel.

Another unique feature of Whipple’s review is the evidence he presents to prove the authenticity of Steinbeck’s account. Whipple references a senate report on the state of migrant workers to California that supports the authenticity of *The Grapes of Wrath*; the plight of migrant workers is documented officially, meaning Steinbeck is describing a real situation, not simply dramatizing socialist propaganda. Furthermore, Whipple urges that the report be disseminated with the novel because “knowledge must supplement anger” (p. 402). *The Grapes of Wrath* was already being widely read at the time this review appeared, a fact that Whipple uses to support his claim that this is a successful social novel. *Survey Graphic*’s review indicates a left-leaning tendency by emphasizing the importance of literature in implementing social awareness and action.

Public audience/mandate. Peter Munro Jack, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, writes about *The Grapes of Wrath* from a political perspective that directly evokes the parallel between this novel and world events, particularly the rumblings of

forthcoming war in Europe (Jack, 1939). Steinbeck, for Jack, belongs in the company of Faulkner, Hemingway, Caldwell, and Dos Passos – a group of writers looking at America with “revolutionary eyes”: “Stirred like every other man in the street with news of foreign persecution, they turn to their own land to find the seeds of the same destructive hatred” (p. 2). “Foreign persecution” refers, of course, to the aggressions of Nazi Germany, a comparison that continues when the reviewer describes the reaction of Californians to the migrant workers, or “Okies”:

The beauty and fertility of California conceal human fear, hatred and violence. “Scart” is a Western farmer’s word for the inhabitants, frightened of the influx of workers eager for jobs, and when they are frightened they become vicious and cruel. *This part of the story reads like news from Nazi Germany.* Families from Oklahoma are known as “Okies.” While they work they live in what might as well be called *concentration camps*. [...] If any one objects he is a Red, an agitator, a trouble-maker who had better get out of the country. Deputy sheriffs are around with guns, legally shooting or clubbing any one from the rest of the Union who questions the law of California. (Jack, 1939, p. 2) [Italics my own]

This comparison with Nazi Germany and its concentration camps is striking: the reviewer recognizes the inflammatory nature of both his comparison and of the novel that incited it, a fact that he acknowledges with “Californians are not going to like this angry novel” (p. 2). The novel, Jack argues, does not present a flattering portrait of America; the reviewer highlights the fact that hatred is not isolated in countries on the other side of the world.

Jack does not dismiss the non-narrative chapters as literary flaws that disrupt the social message of the novel, but refers to these sections as “essays”:

There is, in fact, a series of essays [...] running through the book, angry and abstract – like the characters, “perplexed and figuring.” The essayist in Steinbeck alternates with the novelist [...] The moralist is as important as the story-teller, may possibly outlast him; but the story at the moment is the important thing. (p. 2)

Jack observes that Steinbeck is creating a polemic, using non-narrative chapters to express his outrage at the situation of migrant workers in America. These “essays” perform a function in the overall scheme of the novel, according to Jack; however, he acknowledges that the story is, in 1939, the most important aspect of *The Grapes of Wrath*. This echoes the other reviewers, particularly George Stevens of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, in that the force of the novel is transmitted by the characters, by Steinbeck’s having put a human face on the tragedy of the Dust Bowl and the Okies. However, Jack diminishes the effect of his powerful review by added a caveat in closing: Steinbeck may have been exaggerating the situation of the migrant workers; the reviewer cannot verify the truthfulness of the account.

Joseph Henry Jackson, of the *New York Herald Tribune*, writes an unapologetically laudatory review, calling the novel “The finest book John Steinbeck has written” (1939). The review itself is written in the style of Steinbeck’s non-narrative chapters, telling the general story of this migration of “the thousands of the dispossessed”, and declaring Steinbeck a prophet. This classification of Steinbeck as a prophet echoes the review in *Survey Graphic*. Steinbeck’s “declaration of faith” is that

“the terrible meek will inherit” (Jackson, p. IX 3). Furthermore, Jackson authenticates *The Grapes of Wrath* by referencing Steinbeck’s research on migrant workers:

For the story itself, it is completely authentic. Steinbeck knows. He went back to Oklahoma and then came West with the migrants, lived in their camps, saw their pitiful brave highway communities, the life of the itinerant beside the road. He learned what was behind the handbills. And he came back with an enormous respect for the tenacity of these dispossessed, and with the knowledge that this migration is no less a forerunner of those earlier Americans who took California from another group of landholders who had grown too soft to hold it. (p. IX 3)

There is no question of Steinbeck’s authority on the subject of the migrant workers; he has experienced it first-hand. For Jackson, this prophetic work is the culmination of Steinbeck’s style; there is no doubt of the authenticity or literary genius behind *The Grapes of Wrath*.

It is important to note the contrast between the *Herald Tribune*’s assessment of the novel and that of the *New York Times Book Review*. The *New York Times Book Review* reviewer has significant doubt on the authenticity of Steinbeck’s facts. The *New York Herald Tribune*, however, accepts Steinbeck’s first-hand experience as sufficient proof of the situation. The *Herald Tribune* does not correlate the events in America with the politics of Europe, whereas the *New York Times Book Review* does; evidently the *Times* was not afraid of controversy, and yet the reviewer shied away from declaring the authenticity of *The Grapes of Wrath* with regard to the migrant worker situation in California. John Steinbeck’s first-hand experience on the subject was well known;

Jackson mentions it in his review, and Steinbeck had published a series of essays on the topic called “The Harvest Gypsies” in *San Francisco News* in 1938, although neither the *Herald Tribune* nor the *New York Times* makes reference to “The Harvest Gypsies”.

Time magazine’s review, by an anonymous writer, describes the migrant workers as “hated, terrorized, necessary”; one of their “diseases” is “sullen hatred exploding periodically into bloody strikes” (“Oakies”, 1939, p. 87). The review does not romanticize the theme of Steinbeck’s novel. Instead, the migrant workers are depicted in the review as a plague on America, dehumanized, as a ‘part of no-part’. *The Grapes of Wrath* is again compared to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: “great” because it “is inspired propaganda, half tract, half human-interest story, emotionalizing a great theme” (p. 87). The key is “emotionalizing”: *Time* does not agree that, in terms of literature, this book is “great”; yet it is inflammatory, destined to elicit a reaction, and to draw out readers’ emotions. Furthering Steinbeck’s agenda, for this reviewer, are the “panoramic essays on the social significance of the Oakies’ [sic] story”, “burning tracts”, but a failed fiction experiment (p. 87). *Time* recognizes the social pull of *The Grapes of Wrath*, its polemic value, its passion, but does not acknowledge any literary strength, aside from crediting Steinbeck with his best work yet.

The Commonweal’s²⁴ review does not deal with the literary aspect of *The Grapes of Wrath*; rather, the reviewer, Vaughan, responds to the social message of what he deems to be

a monograph on rural sociology, a manual of practical wisdom in times of enormous stress, an assault on individualism, an essay in behalf of a rather

²⁴ *The Commonweal* is a publication aimed at a Catholic audience, specifically progressive Catholics. I have classed it with the “Public Audience/Mandate” reviews because it does not specifically occupy a literary/intellectual mandate, but a public, religious one.

vague form of pantheism and a bitter, ironical attack on that emotional evangelistic religion which seems to thrive in the more impoverished rural districts of this vast country. (1939, July 28, pp. 341-342)

This language follows the theme of “social novel” by emphasizing the polemic value of the work. Vaughan summarizes Steinbeck’s thesis as one of an impending revolution precipitated by the despicable conditions under which the migrants are living. Although the language is indirect, Steinbeck is accused of proposing collectivism, socialism, and Marxism. In a unique move for a literary review, Vaughan then refutes this message by engaging in dialectics: a violent revolution is unnecessary and *The Grapes of Wrath* is attacking the “American way of life” (p. 342). However, *The Grapes of Wrath* is necessary in order to educate the country and to prevent further situations like those experienced by the migrant workers of the novel.

The Christian Science Monitor begins by mentioning Steinbeck’s increasing fame, starting with *Tortilla Flat*, culminating with *The Grapes of Wrath* (L.A.S., 1939). As with other reviews (*Saturday Review of Literature*, *New York Times*), the main strength of this novel, according to the reviewer known only by the initials L.A.S., is in the characters, particularly Ma Joad. This reviewer considers the language problematic; while possibly authentic and presented “without apology”, “its blasphemousness and indecency may obscure the real value of the novel for some readers” (p. 13). The language is expected to generate controversy; several other reviewers (*The Saturday Review of Literature*, *The Booklist*, and *Wilson Library Bulletin*) mention the problematic issue of Steinbeck’s characters’ dialogue. A unique feature of this review is its insistence on referring to the novel as a “story”. There is no mention of its being a “social novel”, a

term that was so popular among other reviews. This constant reference to the “story” gives one the impression that the novel is not based in reality; this feeling is compounded by the trite, summarily cheerful ending to the review, which describes the novel as a “saga of high courage and of human brotherhood” (p. 13), leaving the impression that the purely fictitious characters sprang from Steinbeck’s mind and were not based in painful, contemporary reality.

Professional Reviews. In addition to receiving reviews in many of the major literary and news publication of the time, *The Grapes of Wrath* was addressed by two American library bulletins. The American Library Association’s publication, *The Booklist* (“Steinbeck, John”, 1939, April 15), ran a brief, unsigned review of *The Grapes of Wrath* immediately following its publication. This review concludes: “The natural language is bald and will offend many, but a serious economic evil is here realistically presented. Read the book before buying” (p. 271). The review acknowledges the importance of the subject matter but predicts Steinbeck’s use of dialogue, rather than his themes, will offend. “Read the book before buying” indicates that the reviewer is reticent to recommend outright the purchase of this novel; rather, the review defers to the judgement of individual libraries, perhaps because of the suspected offensive nature of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The Wisconsin Library Bulletin also reviewed *The Grapes of Wrath*, and, like *The Booklist*, made reference to offensive language. However, this review predicts censorship, suggesting that the language of the novel will “bar it from many, perhaps most, libraries” (p. 104). This reviewer also makes the perceptive observation that the migration depicted by Steinbeck is not “safely enshrined in history”, but, rather, “is going

on right now” (p. 104). Troublesome, contemporary issues – especially ones close to home – are more controversial than historical facts, events “safely enshrined in history”.

Canadian Press

The Grapes of Wrath was also reviewed in Canada by the left-wing *Canadian Forum* (Birney, 1939, June). The language of this review stands in sharp contrast to the largely diplomatic reviews of the United States: the reviewer, Birney, employs the graphic rhetoric of communism with gusto; he condemns the actions that caused the “gradual murder of a half-million southwest farmers by the human instruments of an inhuman and outworn economy” (p. 94). Steinbeck is not a “pseudo-Marxist” (p. 95); his novel is not a literary play at warning the rich, but rather a call to the poor to help themselves, to revolt. Furthermore, Birney sees the echoes of the plight of the United States in the Canadian prairies, which reinforces his statement that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a “MUST book”. The Canadian leftist publication is much more vocal and politically assertive in its review than the American publications, leftist or otherwise. This partisan position suggests distance – geographic and political – from the situation in America, which allows for a removal from the direct consequences of the novel’s message; however, Birney’s relation of the novel’s subject to the Dust Bowl’s Canadian prairie counterparts indicates that there existed a great willingness to embrace the full political challenge of Steinbeck’s novel, if, in fact, it qualifies as a social novel, which was the label given to it by many American reviews.

British Press

Following its publication in the United Kingdom, a few months after it appeared in America, several British periodicals issued reviews of *The Grapes of Wrath*. *The*

Times Literary Supplement, a publication from London with a traditionally centre-right bias, lists *The Grapes of Wrath* as the first choice in fiction on the recommended reading list (“Novels of the week”, 1939, September 9). Interestingly, the anonymously-written review is entitled “Victims of Mammon”; Mammon is the personification of material wealth and greed from the Christian Bible. The Joads and the other thousands of migrants are the victims referred to by the title. *The Times Literary Supplement* separates Steinbeck from “lesser American writers”, because his novel is “a campaign” and because Steinbeck is “anxiously in touch with [his country’s] present” (p. 525). Steinbeck is viewed as an important writer because he is tackling the contemporary situation in his country, a situation that is described in the review as “the tyranny over all classes of economic laws”. The American system has produced these victims of greed, “victims of a system for which no man will take responsibility”, victims who cannot rebel against the despot of money. “Victims of Mammon” recognizes the importance of the social aspects found in *The Grapes of Wrath* and privileges these over slight formal faults of the novel; the review, however, celebrates Steinbeck as a writer as well as a social commentator.

Unlike *The Times Literary Supplement*, Kate O’Brien of *The Spectator* does not feel that Steinbeck has proven himself a great writer with *The Grapes of Wrath*; rather, he remains a good one. She states that “surely we have heard of John Steinbeck, even in darkest England” (p. 386), which acknowledges his popularity, based on such works as *Tortilla Flat*, *The Cup of Gold*, and a theatre-version of *Of Mice and Men*. Her criticism of Steinbeck’s style is harsh, but she remarks that the book’s “wide popularity would be a beneficial thing” for it is a “terrible, moving story of universal and immediate

significance” (p. 386). Similar to *The Times Literary Supplement*, this review focuses on the American system that has created the dire situation depicted by *The Grapes of Wrath*, describing the system as based on greed and exploitation: “big business, industrialisation, is destroying the United States” (p. 386). The review recognizes value in disseminating this story and sharing the outcomes of such a system.

The New Statesman & Nation published a review of *The Grapes of Wrath* written by Anthony West (1939, September 16). Refreshingly, West gives a brief outline of the farming history in the Middle West, which describes the impetus responsible for the collapse of small farms into the Dust Bowl. West states that the novel’s function is pure propaganda: it is the Dust Bowl’s version of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, a polemic about the Chicago stockyards; once suitable legal reforms have been instituted to solve the migrant’s problems, *The Grapes of Wrath* – the book itself, as an embodiment of social anger – will disappear:

The Grapes of Wrath will take its place in the social history of the United States, but it is its literary fate to lie in that honourable vault which houses the books that have died when their purpose as propaganda has been served. (p. 405)

This dismissal of the literary value of *The Grapes of Wrath* aligns with West’s harsh criticism of Steinbeck’s formula, specifically the non-narrative chapters of the book. West does not give much credit to the characters, either, unlike most other reviewers. However, like other reviews from the United Kingdom, *The New Statesman & Nation*’s review makes note of the propagandist value and social importance of this novel; it is a criticism of the United States’ economic and social systems, and the reviewer argues that

“wide popularity” of the portrayal of victims of this flawed system “would be a beneficial thing” (O’Brien, 1939).

Conclusions

Generally, the critical reception of *The Grapes of Wrath* responded to the novel’s subject, noting its significance as a social document, and, in some cases, outright propaganda. The American periodicals that catered to a more intellectual, literary audience stressed, in particular, the propagandist nature of the novel, giving Steinbeck more credit for his social commentary than his literary merit. The language used in *The Grapes of Wrath* was not an issue for this set of reviews; literary periodicals did not emphasize the potentially offensive nature of the work – either in content or language. However, reviews aimed at a broader audience, were more cautionary concerning the language of the novel, as well as its social content. The *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Commonweal*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Time* were more interested in situating *The Grapes of Wrath* within a worldly context, more related to the news and current events of the time, which suits their classification as periodicals informing a broader public, in contrast to the literary periodicals with more esoteric mandates. This latter group of reviews were more interested in comparing the situation at home with the cataclysms in Europe and Asia. There were also differing views on the authenticity of Steinbeck’s portrayal, notably between the *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune*. *Commonweal* and *Christian Science Monitor* were both quite politically conservative in their discussion of the novel, diminishing the importance of the social message that the literary periodicals so keenly emphasized.

The reviews issued by periodicals aimed at a professional audience were the most wary of Steinbeck's language; the apparent inevitability of offense and of demands for censorship is striking. The social importance of the novel is secondary to the language concerns, and, surprisingly, there is no allusion to the inflammatory nature of the content Steinbeck presents – only to the words he uses to present it. The cautionary nature of the reviews aimed at professional librarians speaks to the nature of the profession at the time; censorship of materials, when *The Grapes of Wrath* was published, was something that plagued libraries,²⁵ institutions that did not have a unified mandate to support intellectual freedom.

Canadian and British reviews tended to be more critical of the circumstances causing this migration – blaming the American economic and political system for the terrible plight of the thousands of families moving westward – and viewing Steinbeck's novel as important social criticism. These reviews were not concerned with the inflammatory, potentially controversial nature of *The Grapes of Wrath*; this concern was only expressed in American reviews. The international reviews, especially British ones, were quite concerned with the literary merit of Steinbeck's latest offering. Of all the reviews examined in this study, *Canadian Forum*, featuring the poet Earle Birney as a reviewer, was the most explicit in appropriating *The Grapes of Wrath* as a social, even Marxist, tract, one meant to rouse the proletariat into revolt.

Reception of the novel as a literary work, both in America and internationally, was significantly more mixed. Most reviewers did not appreciate the formal structure, particularly taking issue with the non-narrative chapters. Several publications lauded

²⁵ For a discussion of the censorship in libraries and the rise of action against censorship in light of the ideological upheaval of the 1930s, see Geller, E. (1984). *Forbidden books in American public libraries, 1876-1939: A study in cultural change*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Steinbeck, placing him among great American authors, while others merely admitted to his being “good”. Generally, in order to give credit to a work that was deemed important, reviews tended to focus on the propagandist value of *The Grapes of Wrath*; this shift of focus to the novel’s *social* merits justified the attention given it, despite the literary flaws that most reviewers noted.

Public Reception

Methods and Limitations

To complement the critical reception of Steinbeck’s novel, an analysis of the public reception is essential: was the book being read, and was it reaching audiences? In order to measure public reception of *The Grapes of Wrath*, I relied heavily on the *Publishers’ Weekly* publications from 1938-1940, particularly its weekly and monthly best sellers lists. I used this source as an indication of whether the book was being purchased; *Publishers’ Weekly* accumulated its statistics based on reports from representative bookstores across the United States. Because *The Grapes of Wrath* was being purchased in large quantities, I made the assumption that the “public” was reading this novel. A list of the bookstores from which *Publishers’ Weekly* received sales reports was not available, so I was unable to analyze the geographic factors that may have been an influence on the popularity of *The Grapes of Wrath*, or to determine any biases from the lists in *Publishers’ Weekly*.

Public Popularity – *The Grapes of Wrath* as a Best Seller

On April 22, 1939, a week after its official publication, *The Grapes of Wrath* was listed as the first selection for “Candidates for the best seller list”, accompanied by the following announcement: “Just out, this [novel] has been received with enormous

enthusiasm, both in bookstores and by reviewers” (“Candidates for the best seller list”, 1939, April 22, p. 1522). Because of the high demand for the novel before it was published, and the large volume of the first printing, *Publishers’ Weekly* predicted that this book would sell enough copies to make the best seller list. Bookstores, presumably, were buying and ordering the novel because of the high demand; people clearly wanted to read it.

The following week, *The Grapes of Wrath* was indeed on the *Publishers’ Weekly* Best Sellers of the Week list, debuting in the third spot (“Best sellers of the week”, 1939, April 29). The novel was “topping all fiction at the Columbia University Bookstore, the University of Chicago Bookstore, Sessler’s, Stokes & Stockell’s, among others” (p. 1615). This indicates that the novel was popular in New York (Columbia University), Illinois (University of Chicago), Pennsylvania (Sessler’s in Philadelphia), and Tennessee (Stokes and Stockell in Nashville), broadly speaking. There is an eastern bias in the locations of the bookstores mentioned; none of the cities listed are in the western United States. Perhaps the same phenomenon that occurred in the critical reception is echoed in the public reception of the novel: places further removed from the site of the narrative were more interested in exploring the “other”, and were given to being more critical of it. Therefore, there was great interest in *The Grapes of Wrath* in the eastern United States, as it provided insight into what was happening on the other side of the country.

The Grapes of Wrath continued to appear on *Publishers’ Weekly*’s Best Sellers of the Week list, quickly moving up to the first spot on the list by May 6, 1939. By June 3, 1939, less than two months after its publication, *The Grapes of Wrath* was “sweeping the country! Of the seventy-odd stores whose May best seller reports we have received up to

now, 51 tell us this is outselling all other novels” (“Best sellers of the week”, 1939, June 3). No specific regions or bookstores are mentioned, but this statement indicates that the novel’s popularity was wide-spread, indicating strong public interest.

The novel was also prominent on the monthly Best Seller’s Lists, also compiled in *Publishers’ Weekly*.²⁶ *The Grapes of Wrath* quickly reached the top of the ten-novel-long list; by May 1939, a month after its publication, the novel was a best seller in 90 percent of the bookstores that reported their sales to *Publishers’ Weekly*. This percentage stayed quite high throughout the year and the book remained in the highest position until November, 1939 and remained on the National Best Seller List for fourteen consecutive months.²⁷ Furthermore, Steinbeck’s novel was declared a “Best Seller of 1939” under the fiction category, where it appeared first on the list of ten novels. The novel also appeared, in the eighth position, on the “Best Sellers of 1940” list.²⁸

Libraries were also buying *The Grapes of Wrath*. In his study of four Midwestern public libraries, Wiegand notes that all four (Bryant Library of Sauk Centre, Minnesota; Sage Public Library of Osage, Iowa; Charles H. Moore Library of Lexington, Michigan; and the Rhinelander Public Library in Wisconsin) purchased the novel within a year of its publication. Furthermore, when copies of the novel were worn out or disappeared, these libraries regularly replaced them. The Rhinelander Public Library listed *The Grapes of Wrath* as one of the novels most widely circulated in 1940; it held two copies of the title, which circulated 81 times that year (Wiegand, 2011). The fact that copies had to be replaced further supports the fact that people were reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the

²⁶ *Publishers’ Weekly* created lists indicating monthly percentages of books sold based on its weekly indications from book sellers. These monthly percentages were then used to create the yearly best seller lists, and Book of the Year.

²⁷ See *Publishers’ Weekly*, vols. 135-137, “National Best Sellers”.

²⁸ See *Publishers’ Weekly*, vol. 137, pp. 209-217; *Publishers’ Weekly*, vol. 138, pp. 226-228.

location of these four libraries indicates that demand was not only based in the eastern United States. Libraries close to the site of the Dust Bowl were providing patrons with access to this controversial book, and the patrons were interested in reading it.

In Oklahoma, the state at the centre of the Dust Bowl, the book was very much in demand, and very much discussed. Shockley (1944) reported that many libraries within the state owned multiple copies of *The Grapes of Wrath*, that it circulated widely, and that bookstores experienced high demand for the novel as well. Moreover, people were talking about the novel, mostly in the context of the truthfulness of the events depicted, not its literary merit. According to Shockley's analysis, people became incensed by the subject matter of the novel, not the language. This differs from the expectations of critical reviewers, who expected a stronger reaction to language.

The American public, in addition to critics, was taking notice of *The Grapes of Wrath*. This speaks to Americans' interest in reading about contemporary issues. In such a highly-charged era as the 1930s, this is not especially surprising; the novel was receiving a fair amount of critical attention and Viking Press undertook a serious advertisement campaign. Moreover, Steinbeck was a known author, so his latest work would, doubtless, be anticipated. This anticipation, coupled with the advertising push and the contemporary and (expected) inflammatory nature of the novel, seems to have created a high popular demand for *The Grapes of Wrath*, as supported by the novel's repeated appearance on best seller lists.

Censorship / Controversy

From the initial reviews of *The Grapes of Wrath*, it is possible to see that the novel was garnering attention due to its timely, contemporary subject matter. The label

“social novel” was liberally applied, and the events depicted were linked to the broader context of world events – Europe on the brink of war, the aggressions in Asia – as well as to political tensions at home in America. There was an emphasis on the propagandist nature of the novel, the polemic interpretation of the migrant workers’ plight presented. Steinbeck was a well-known writer; one that critics felt was worth watching, perhaps more for his contemporary subject matter and his embodiment of a political persuasion than for his literary promise – he was frequently labelled “good”, as opposed to “great”, and qualified as an important and necessary voice because of his chosen subject matter: contemporary America.

Many of the critics predicted the novel would be controversial and offensive because of Steinbeck’s presentation of “Okie” dialogue. The frank presentation of sexual themes and offensive words struck critics as potential cause for strife. Library reviews were also eager to point out the “bald” nature of the language, sure to “offend many” (*The Booklist*, 1939); this language would, it was predicted, “bar it from many, if not most” libraries (*Wisconsin Library Bulletin*, 1939). Such frank statements are intriguing: not only was it expected that the novel would offend people, attempts to prevent its dissemination were anticipated. Censorship not based on content per se, but the delivery of this content through the language itself, was both predicted and accepted. Many critics felt that the banning of *The Grapes of Wrath* was inevitable.

Adding further to the storm surrounding *The Grapes of Wrath* was the fact that the novel experienced great public popularity. Viking Press experienced huge demand before the book was published, and shipped massive quantities to bookstores to fill bookstores’ orders – people wanted to read Steinbeck’s latest. Such a flurry of activity

around a novel, at a time when America was experiencing the end of a crippling Depression and when the world was teetering on the brink of a second, global, devastating war indicates the controversial nature of the work. The subject matter was contemporary; the presentation was unforgiving. People wanted to read about what was occurring in their backyard, perhaps to understand, or perhaps to support their own view on the situation. Regardless, the reactions of critics and the public were quite dichotomized within each of these groups.

Consistent with predictions, *The Grapes of Wrath* was met with opposition immediately after its publication, notably in public libraries. The East St. Louis Public Library, in Illinois, was directed by the board to burn three copies of the book on the steps of the courthouse; however, the National Council on Freedom from Censorship appealed this order. Instead, the novel was placed on the “Adults Only” shelf of the library (Dawson, 1997).²⁹ Book burning was highly controversial at the time because the world was slowly becoming aware of what was occurring in Nazi Germany. While burning books had been strongly criticized prior to the 1930s, such an act was seen as a step toward totalitarianism in light of Nazi activities (Dawson, 1997). This sentiment further connected *The Grapes of Wrath* to the political atmosphere of the world. Other notable instances of censorship of the novel occurred in Buffalo, New York, where a librarian refused to purchase it (Kappel, 1982), and in Kansas, where the Board of Education in Kansas City ordered *The Grapes of Wrath* removed from all library shelves, due to its “obscenity and portrayal of life” (Lingo, 2003, p. 358).

²⁹ Most sources indicate that the book burning in East St. Louis actually occurred; however, *Censorship* indicates otherwise.

Perhaps the most famous instance of censorship of *The Grapes of Wrath* occurred in Kern County, California, the same county where the fictional Joads arrived. In the novel, the portrayal of the “promised land”, as mentioned earlier, is stark, unflattering, and harsh. Steinbeck condemns California’s treatment of the thousands of Joads who showed up, ready to work, only to be exploited and dehumanized. During the 1930s, California experienced several violent, dramatic confrontations between workers and landowners. The Associated Farmers of California was an organization well-known for its anti-union stance and for inciting violence against migrant workers. As subsequently became clear, the Associated Farmers were responsible for initiating the ban of *The Grapes of Wrath* in Kern County.

A motion was passed on August 21, 1939, by the Kern County Board of Supervisors requesting “that the use, possession, and circulation of *The Grapes of Wrath* be banned from the county’s libraries and schools”, despite the fact that the library had received no complaints about the novel (Kappel, 1982, p. 212).³⁰ The “request” that the book be banned sparked a very heated debate: Either the conditions presented in the novel were accurate and needed to be presented to the public, or Steinbeck was slandering Kern County and needed to have his voice suppressed. It also became evident that the members of the Board of Supervisors were largely ambivalent about the novel; several individuals closely involved in the censorship debacle admitted to not having read any or all of it. Gradually, the nefarious influence of the Associated Farmers came to light – members of the Associated Farmers were highly involved with the Kern County

³⁰ For a transcription of the motion, see Lingo, M. (2003). Forbidden fruit: The banning of *The Grapes of Wrath* in the Kern County Free Library. *Libraries & Culture*, 38(4), 351-377. For discussion on the motion and subsequent case, also see Wartzman, R. (2009). *Obscene in the extreme: The burning and banning of John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Public Affairs.

Board of Governors, and exerted pressure to have the book officially banned.³¹ The ban was lifted, rather quietly, in January 1941. At this time, requests for *The Grapes of Wrath* from the Kern County Free Library immediately appeared; it seems controversy did not diminish but may, in fact, have *increased* the demand for the novel.

During the protracted attempt to have the ban rescinded, several noteworthy incidents occurred. For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), via its spokesperson, R.W. Henderson, stated that the banning and censorship of books belonged to the “philosophy of fueherrs [sic], and dictators. That is the way they do [sic] over in Italy and Germany and Russia and Japan” (Lingo, 2003, p. 362). Along similar lines, Gretchen Knief, the Kern County librarian, made the following statement regarding the ban:

But the thing that worries me is that “it could happen here.” If that book is banned, what book will be banned tomorrow? ... It’s such a vicious and dangerous thing to begin and may in the end lead to exactly the same thing we see in Europe today. Besides, banning books is so utterly hopeless and futile. Ideas don’t die because a book is forbidden reading. (cited in Lingo, 2003, p. 366)

Both Gretchen Knief and R.W. Henderson saw the parallels between inhibiting intellectual freedom and the rise of totalitarianism, as was happening in Europe and Asia. The idea that society in America, Europe, and Asia, was reaching a breaking point informed critical reactions to Steinbeck’s novel and inspired the outcry surrounding the novel’s censorship.

³¹ See Wartzman, R. (2008). *Obscene in the extreme: The burning and banning of John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Library Response

American libraries at this time were concerned with remaining neutral, so frequently kept silent in controversial situations (Lingo, 2003). The American Library Association had recently adopted the “Code of Ethics for Librarians”, which reinforced the idea that “the final jurisdiction over the administration of the library rests in the officially constituted governing authority”, and did not mention intellectual freedom or censorship (cited in Lingo, 2003, p. 367). As a result, the decision to inhibit the dissemination of a work – to introduce censorship – was deferred (ultimately) to the library’s governing body; libraries were not responsible for championing intellectual freedom but, rather, were meant to remain neutral. However, by choosing to implement the censorship demands of the governing bodies, the library’s neutrality was compromised; doing nothing to support a book’s dissemination resulted in passive support for censorship. This position perhaps explains the reviews of *The Grapes of Wrath* in *The Booklist* and *Wisconsin Library Bulletin*; despite the importance of the novel, if offense was taken, if censorship was demanded, libraries would not serve as crusaders for intellectual freedom.

As predicted by critical reviews, *The Grapes of Wrath* was controversial, and public popularity served to heighten the reaction to its subject matter and content. The language – the explicit nature of Steinbeck’s Okie dialogue – presented cause for offense, as did the content and subject matter of the novel. Steinbeck presented the American public with a polemic detailing the flaws of the system; it was “at once populist *and* revolutionary” (DeMott, 1989, p. xxii). The public dialogue surrounding the novel is a striking feature in this case: people were talking about the novel; discussing its merit; agreeing or disagreeing with its message, its literary magnitude; celebrating or

condemning it as propaganda; disputing its authenticity. The novel was censored on a case-by-case basis, depending on reception by authorities involved in specific instances. It was, first and foremost, a social document, a mirror of the times, and it resonated deeply with the American people, echoing a contemporary reality both at home and in the larger world. Condemning social problems internationally became much more problematic when those at home were being violently exposed.

The Grapes of Wrath presented an interesting challenge to the profession of librarianship. As mentioned earlier, championing intellectual freedom and preventing censorship were not traditional parts of this profession. Instead, prior to the adoption of the Library Bill of Rights by the American Library Association in 1939, libraries were largely at the mercy of governing bodies in cases of censorship.³² Moreover, libraries were traditionally responsible for choosing works that were “best” for collections – a kind of selective censorship. The mandate of libraries was not necessarily to present a balanced, diverse collection, nor to cater explicitly to popular demand. However, the politically and ideologically tense 1930s raised important issues for libraries and the profession of librarianship, issues that garnered significant attention because of the outcry surrounding *The Grapes of Wrath*. The rise of totalitarianism across the globe, specifically Hitler’s Third Reich, called into question the role of the First Amendment of the American Constitution: Does the inhibition of freedom of speech and of expression give rise to totalitarian regimes? Does the preservation of democracy, an important value in the American system, depend on the preservation of freedom of speech?

³² Libraries and librarians were also at the mercy of their governing bodies after 1939; however, *The Grapes of Wrath* drew increased attention to the importance of intellectual freedom. This increased attention was part of a spasmodic development in the American library profession toward protecting works against censorship.

The Library's Bill of Rights³³ was adopted in 1939, but did not stop attempts to censor *The Grapes of Wrath*. As Robbins points out, there was a lack of unity of librarians faced with censorship; the Bill of Rights was not necessarily enforced. The idea of libraries protecting intellectual freedom was not embraced; a comprehensive identity of librarianship was, seemingly, lacking (Robbins, 1996). Of major concern was the warped neutrality often present in libraries, as well as the fact that library collections could be – and were – so often determined by bodies outside of the library, such as government organs. All of these concerns – the political atmosphere of the 1930s, rampant censorship, profession disorganization and disunity – led not only to the adoption of the Library's Bill of Rights, but also to the formation of a committee on intellectual freedom. Initially called the Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the Rights of Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry,³⁴ this body was the beginning of the intellectual freedom movement by the American Library Association in the United States.

Thus, *The Grapes of Wrath* precipitated a dramatic shift in the library profession. The novel was born out of Steinbeck's need to address the plight of the migrant worker, to bring attention to the terrible economic and social conditions in America's backyard. It was a proletarian novel, social propaganda, born in an epoch of extreme ideologies and cataclysmic events; it was hugely popular and generated extreme reactions. These reactions drew attention to the situation of libraries in America, and sparked a dramatic change in the way libraries approached censorship, intellectual freedom, and the profession itself.

³³ A pre-cursor to the Library Bill of Rights, which states the profession's basic policy on intellectual freedom concerning library materials (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992).

³⁴ This committee went through several appellations: Committee on Intellectual Freedom (1947), and eventually Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC), as it is currently known.

Applying Bakhtin

Steinbeck was inspired to write *The Grapes of Wrath* by the circumstances within his country; the impetus was his first-hand experience with the lives of migrant workers. Steinbeck wrote several pieces on migrant workers in California, and his literary output on the topic culminated with *The Grapes of Wrath*. He presented readers with a fictionalized account of a real, on-going situation. Although the Joads' story is fictional, they are real in that they represent millions of Americans who had been displaced by the Dust Bowl and forced to live a marginalized, exploited existence as a 'part-of-no-part'. Steinbeck gave a literary voice to this situation, thereby drawing attention to it, conceivably hoping to elicit a reaction; he is the author of an utterance anticipating a response, a dialogic interaction.

Because of its polemical nature, it is easy to uncover Steinbeck's voice, in the Bakhtinian sense, within *The Grapes of Wrath*. He presents himself quite openly in the non-narrative chapters, which read like essays – opinion pieces – on the plight of the Joads. By presenting broad descriptions, complete with political and philosophical messages, of the situation in contemporary America in tandem with the story of the (fictional) Joads, Steinbeck is reasserting his message: the novel may be fiction, but it is also a realistic presentation of actual events. Several critics reviewing the novel noted the essay-like quality of these chapters, meaning that the author voice was apparent to readers (interlocutors).

For Bakhtin, writing about contemporary circumstances – the openended present – creates the atmosphere for dialogical interaction between utterances. The author is a product of his time, enmeshed in his specific socio-political context, and is therefore dramatically affected by it. Steinbeck's novel demonstrates the direct influence of his

socio-political surroundings on his literary output. The reception of the novel by critics amounts to their dialogic exchange with Steinbeck's utterance; critics were also products of their socio-political surroundings. As such, they did not hesitate to draw parallels between *The Grapes of Wrath* and the events occurring in Europe and Asia, events that led to World War II. This reflection on world events in relationship with *The Grapes of Wrath* continued with the censorship controversy: those who cried out against censorship frequently cited the rise of totalitarianism around the globe as an evil sustaining itself through the silencing of voices. Not only did *The Grapes of Wrath* draw attention to its context within America, but also to the *global* socio-political atmosphere of the 1930s.

At a time when the world is in a state of upheaval, writing about contemporary circumstances is provocative. While critics did predict its censorship in many cases, they did not perceive *The Grapes of Wrath's* subject to be inflammatory so much as its language. The dialect chosen by Steinbeck was a vehicle to transmit his message, a reflection of the people whose situation he was depicting: he was using the very language of the marginalized to tell their story. Steinbeck supplements the tale of an exploited people with a leftist message; there are (as was noted by critics) Marxist and socialist elements to be found in the novel. While ideologies abounded during the 1930s, the United States was (and is) a staunchly capitalist nation; leftist ideologies were, *ipso facto*, subversive in the eyes of the dominant ideology. The reception of *The Grapes of Wrath* indicates that both the means of transmitting the message (the language) and the message itself (the subject matter) were inflammatory. Many groups reacted violently to the unflattering, political nature of the novel, resulting in attempts to silence Steinbeck's literary utterance.

The novel was treated as a great angry novel, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; it was a social polemic with the goal of inciting reaction and, hopefully, social change. In the context of 1930s America, Steinbeck's utterance was understood as an exposition of the situation faced by Dust Bowl migrants. But for some, it was more than an exposition. *The Grapes of Wrath*, in a time when people were turning to more extreme ideologies to solve unaddressed social struggles, could only be a manifesto, a centrifugal force. Because of *The Grapes of Wrath*'s centrifugal nature, social groups subscribing to the dominant ideology of the time censored the novel in an attempt to preserve their own hegemony. Steinbeck was critical of the way the government treated the Okies, forcing them off their land and into a life as a 'part-of-no-part'; these were people with no social safety-net and no voice, at the whim of those in charge (the centripetal, hegemonic forces). *The Grapes of Wrath*, then, was a criticism of the hegemonic powers in the United States, and those powers reacted with censorship.

The library profession, too, was forced into a dialogic relationship with Steinbeck's novel; librarians chose to address the concept of intellectual freedom as a reaction to efforts by those in power to cripple the dissemination of literature. This seemed particularly pressing in light of the political turmoil abroad and its alarming echoes in America. Over time, censorship began to be viewed in a negative light. The American Library Association, therefore, initiated a more unified approach to preserving and supporting dissenting (centrifugal) voices by beginning to champion intellectual freedom.

From a contemporary perspective, *The Grapes of Wrath* could perhaps strike one as firmly rooted in the world of the 1930s. However, its canonical status is indicative of

the novel's lasting message. The United States remains, to this day, a staunchly capitalist nation, yet it still suffers from social and financial troubles and socially excluded groups – modern day Okies – whose presence contributes to *The Grapes of Wrath*'s lasting resonance. The story of the Joads is absorbing; the polemical element that Steinbeck includes in the non-narrative chapters supplements the allegory, propelling his message of social change into our contemporary epoch.³⁵

Conclusion

Censorship was predicted for *The Grapes of Wrath* from its initial critical reception, and the novel was perceived as inherently propagandist. It was reviewed by periodicals of several mandates in the United States, in addition to being reviewed in Canada and Britain. The novel was immensely popular in Steinbeck's country, achieving best-seller status. *The Grapes of Wrath* was also met with many isolated cases of controversy and censorship. The controversy the novel elicited also provoked a change in the way the library profession viewed its responsibility with regard to intellectual freedom: the warped neutrality of the past gave way to a stronger stance in favour of intellectual freedom and freedom of speech, largely in reaction to the rise of fascism and communism. *The Grapes of Wrath* was a polemic that forced American to engage in a dialogic interaction: Steinbeck's utterance, a centrifugal force, subverted the hegemony perpetuated by centripetal forces of the time; it provoked a violent reaction, and brought to light alarming truths of its epoch and resonates, unsettlingly, in our own.

³⁵ An epoch, for Bakhtin, refers to a socio-political period, not a unit of time, per se. The concept is used in a cultural sense, so several (infinitely many) epochs can occur simultaneously, within different cultural spheres. The concept also has a concentric sense: epochs can become clear and absorb myriad elements when viewed retroactively through increased historical perspective.

Chapter 4 – The Context of *Doctor Zhivago*

“Blok says somewhere: ‘We, the children of Russia’s terrible years.’ Blok meant this in a metaphorical, figurative sense. The children were not children, but the sons, the intelligentsia, and the terrors were not terrible but sent from above, apocalyptic; that’s quite different. Now the metaphorical has become literal, children are children and the terrors are terrible, there you have the difference.”³⁶

Introduction

Chapter four focuses on situating Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* within its social and historical context. The first section describes the major undercurrents in the world during the 1950s, focusing on the burgeoning Cold War. As in chapter two, the intellectual freedom context of the time – *Doctor Zhivago*’s time – is outlined, and Pasternak’s profile as a writer in the Soviet Union is given. Following the “Social and Historical Context” section, there is a plot summary of the novel, which allows the reader to better understand why the novel was provocative for its time. To supplement this understanding, the publication history of the novel is traced from its origin in the Soviet Union, to an Italian publisher, to its dissemination in the West in English translation. Throughout this chapter, the focus remains on the time immediately surrounding the dissemination of the novel – the circumstances that precipitated its publication and followed immediately after its attempted (and successful, though only in the West, initially) dissemination.

Social and Historical Context

Political Context

The 1950s, much like the 1930s, were a time of turmoil. Following World War II, the global map shifted once more. The Potsdam and Yalta conferences highlighted growing disagreement over the fate of countries affected by the Allied victory; the

³⁶ Misha Gordon, in Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, p. 518. (Pasternak, B. (1958). *Doctor Zhivago*. (M. Hayward & M. Harari, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

nations conquered at the end of World War II were divided into those under Soviet occupation and those under Western occupation. By the beginning of the 1950s, tension between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union) and the United States had culminated into the Cold War. This “war” was an ideological conflict between the East and West Blocs: the USSR and its allies, the communist, anti-democratic nations; and the United States and its allies, nations supporting free-market economies (capitalism), and democracy. Winston Churchill, in 1945, famously used the term “Iron Curtain” to refer to the ideological barrier that existed between the Soviets and the West. In lieu of direct, armed conflict, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in political posturing and backed third-party conflicts, supplying arms and resources to assist with struggles occurring in different parts of the world. The situation was made considerably more dire by the atomic bomb: With the development of such a powerful weapon, the threat of complete annihilation was very real.

The Korean War (1950-1953), the Suez Crisis (1956), and the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959), as well as burgeoning independence struggles in colonialized nations, contributed to mounting tensions in geopolitics during the 1950s. The United States was preoccupied with the “Red Scare” – fear of communist infiltration of the United States, fuelled by propaganda; government committees for the discovery, interrogation, and sentencing of ideological dissidents (those accused of “un-American” actions, beliefs, etc.) had existed since World War II. The House Un-American Activities Committee and Senator Joseph McCarthy, with his Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, are perhaps the most famous examples of “Red-hunting”. Ergo, the ideological atmosphere in the United States, because of the Cold War, was quite stilted: fear of “the Reds” was

ubiquitous and highly encouraged, and identifying with “Red” ideology (communism) was taboo.

Intellectual Freedom Context

The concept of intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union – particularly during Stalin’s time as General Secretary of the Communist Party – was virtually nonexistent. The Party saw the arts, including literature, cinema, music, etc., as a way to further its ideological agenda, to “instruct” (or indoctrinate) the people on communism and the endeavours of the Soviet Union. Socialist realism was introduced as official Soviet policy toward art in 1932; existing artistic and literary groups were abolished, and artistic works had to comply with the dictates of socialist realism.³⁷ All art had to correspond to its specifications, and the state acted as an approving body; the state, in effect, was the censor. Criticizing the regime was unthinkable; the destruction of the intelligentsia and purging of dissidents (perceived and real) dominated much of Stalin’s time as leader of the Soviet Union.

After Stalin’s death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev became the leader of the Soviet Union. In a country where the official ideology was responsible for the state of the arts and of intellectual freedom, a change in state leadership could change everything. Indeed, at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev famously denigrated Stalin and renounced parts of the Stalinist legacy. This destruction of the myth of Stalin caused a flurry of questions from the arts organizations within the Soviet Union regarding

³⁷ Socialist realism is “the truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development [where] the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of ideologically remolding and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism” (Riasanovsky & Steinberg, 2005, p. 576).

official policy: what would become of the state of the arts? Would there be, perhaps, increasing freedom and decreasing censorship?³⁸

In Cold War America, intellectual freedom was also under attack, albeit on the other side of the ideological spectrum: subversive materials, thus labelled for their “un-American” (i.e., communist or pro-Soviet) nature, were subject to censorship and persecution. McCarthyism and “Red” hunting – the identification, persecution, and intimidation of alleged communist sympathizers – were prominent elements of American life in the 1950s, and intellectual freedom was compromised as a result. Promulgating communist opinions was tantamount to the betrayal of one’s country, the alignment of oneself with the enemy – the Soviet Union. The FBI kept files on dissident intellectuals, interrogated them, and sought to remove them from positions of influence, where they might have had the opportunity to spread their subversive views.³⁹ Fear of communism, of the Reds infiltrating America, was very prominent during this time; writers and intellectuals were affected by this atmosphere.

As a result of increased threat to intellectual freedom, brought on by the Cold War and McCarthyism, the American Library Association and the Intellectual Freedom Committee introduced changes to the Library Bill of Rights. These changes were made in an attempt to protect libraries and librarians from attempts to censor “un-American” or “subversive” materials. Librarians, as professionals responsible for the dissemination of intellectual material, were also included in Red hunting, and were under considerable

³⁸ For a detailed discussion of the role of the state on literary control in the USSR, see Swayze, H. (1962). *Political control of literature in the USSR, 1946-1959*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

³⁹ For a discussion of the FBI’s role in the monitoring of and reaction to “subversive” writers in the US, see Robins, N.S. (1992). *Alien Ink: The FBI’s War on Freedom of Expression*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

pressure to toe the pro-American line in their collections. There was pressure for libraries to label books as “communist”, and attempts were made by authorities and community members to remove subversive materials; however, these endeavours were contrary to the American Library Association’s goals of intellectual freedom, and the ALA sought to protect its institutions and members from the consequences of perceived dissent (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992; Robbins, 1996).

Pasternak’s Profile

Boris Leonidovich Pasternak was educated in the tradition of the Tsarist Russian intelligentsia; he studied law and philosophy at Moscow University, spent time studying philosophy in Germany, and was involved in musical, literary, and intellectual circles. He made his mark on Russian and Soviet society, as a poet, publishing *Sestra Moya – Zhizn (My Sister, Life)* in 1922. Throughout the 1920s, Pasternak published several volumes of poetry and short stories; when the Communist Party began to exert its control over the arts, and socialist realism was adopted as an official doctrine by the Union of Soviet Writers, Pasternak turned his efforts to translation of works by Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, and others (Dyck, 1972). Throughout the time of the Stalinist purges and the suffocating control that the Party imposed, Pasternak eschewed politics. He was the target of official criticism several times, but did not suffer any serious consequences. For example, in 1946 Pasternak was the focus of a vicious attack by Zhdanov, who was in charge of the committee responsible for ideology; however, Pasternak was not removed from the Soviet Writers’ Union, nor was he physically harmed (Garrard & Garrard, 1990). Boris Pasternak’s ability to evade serious consequences for his dissidence, during Stalin’s time and after, is somewhat enigmatic. Seemingly, his success

at avoiding the purges of the intelligentsia and of those critical of the regime was aided by his low profile and his aloofness from the political games of the time.⁴⁰

Stalin died in 1953 and Pasternak completed *Doctor Zhivago* in 1956; at the time, Pasternak was 66 years old and well-known in the Soviet Union for his translations and poetry. *Doctor Zhivago* was not Pasternak's first novel, nor was it his first prose publication. However, this novel did attract attention from around the world, partly – perhaps largely – due to the controversy surrounding its publication and Pasternak's Nobel Prize. *Doctor Zhivago* was not published in the Soviet Union until 1988, over thirty years after it appeared in the West. Pasternak, despite the history of political persecution in the USSR that often resulted in death or exile, did not suffer physical consequences for his dissidence,⁴¹ and continued to live in Russia until his death from lung cancer in 1960.

Plot Summary

Doctor Zhivago begins in Tsarist Russia, where we are introduced to the title character as a boy, known as Yura. His father, Andre Zhivago, has deserted the family and squandered all their money. After his mother dies, Yura is raised by his Uncle Nicholai, a defrocked priest who is fond of extolling his views on humanity. Yura becomes the classic figure of the Tsarist intelligentsia: He attends university in Moscow and becomes a doctor, now called Yuri Andreievich Zhivago. He also marries his

⁴⁰ There has also been speculation that Pasternak was protected from the purges by Stalin himself because the leader viewed the poet as prophetic. George Gibian includes an interesting note on this idea in *Interval of Freedom: Soviet Literature during the Thaw, 1954-1957*; p. 146. [Gibian, G. (1960). *Interval of Freedom: Soviet Literature during the Thaw, 1954-1957*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.]

⁴¹ The term *dissident* came to mean “disagreeing in political matters; voicing political dissent, usually in a totalitarian state” during the Cold War (cf. Oxford English Dictionary). There is a connotation of heroism when someone is labelled a dissident, like Pasternak was labelled by the West. Pasternak's *dissidence* contrasts with Steinbeck's label as a *proletarian* author, which lacks heroic connotations.

childhood friend, Tonia (Antonina Alexandrovna), with whom he eventually has a son, Alexander (Sasha). Misha Gordon, a fellow medical student, is also an important character in this novel.

Early in the novel, we are also introduced to Lara (Larissa Feodorovna Guishar), the daughter of a French émigré; Lara is seduced by Komarovsky, a lawyer. She eventually breaks free of Komarovsky's spell, earning her independence and attending university, where she studies to become a teacher. She marries Pavel (Pasha) Antipov, who has adored her since they were children. The two move to the Urals, where they both work as teachers and have a daughter, Katya. Antipov, spurred by a desire to prove himself worthy of Lara, joins the army and goes to fight in the First World War; he is declared missing in action and presumed dead, but, in reality, is a prisoner of war. Lara enlists as a nurse in an attempt to find her husband; Zhivago has also joined the war effort, as a doctor. Around the time of the February Revolution,⁴² Lara and Yuri meet at a field hospital, although Yuri has seen Lara twice already in the novel. Throughout *Doctor Zhivago*, characters find themselves in close proximity – Pasternak creates a highly structured plot where coincidences become meaningful meetings.

Zhivago returns to his family in Moscow, where society continues to crumble. We are introduced to Yuri's half-brother, Evgraf, a man with strong government connections who shows up periodically throughout the novel to save Zhivago. After the October Revolution and the commencement of the Civil War that followed it, the

⁴² The February Revolution of 1917 resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholai II, effectively ending the Imperial Russian Empire. Following the fall of Tsarist Russia, the Russian Provisional Government was established. The February Revolution also effectively ended Russia's participation in the First World War, as troops began deserting en masse. The October Revolution occurred later that year when the Bolsheviks (under Lenin) seized power from the provisional government. The ensuing Russian Civil War was a violent and bloody conflict between the Red Army (loyal to the Bolsheviks) and the White Army (the "Old Guard").

Zhivagos flee Moscow by train for the Ural Mountains, where the family has an estate at Varykino. Along the journey, Zhivago meets Strelnikov – actually Lara’s husband, Antipov, who has become a General in the Red Army and assumed the name Strelnikov. Lara and Zhivago meet again while they are both in the Urals, where Lara has returned to raise her daughter. The two become lovers. On his way home from a meeting with Lara, Zhivago is abducted by Liberius, the commander of a Bolshevik guerrilla band.

Zhivago eventually escapes from Liberius’s captivity and re-joins Lara. His wife, Tonia, and their children have had to flee Russia; they are now exiles in Paris. Komarovsky reappears and shares the news that both the doctor’s and Lara’s lives are in danger. Komarovsky, however, has secured himself a political position in Siberia and offers to smuggle both Lara and Zhivago out of the country. Zhivago convinces Lara to go by promising to follow; he, however, does not follow them. After Lara leaves with Komarovsky, Strelnikov arrives at Zhivago’s doorstep looking for Lara, despite having been pronounced dead by Komarovsky. After a lengthy conversation with Yuri, Strelnikov shoots himself.

Once again, Yuri Zhivago returns to Moscow, this time during the New Economic Policy.⁴³ He lives with a woman named Marina and they have two children together. The doctor spends time writing, but his health is deteriorating. Eventually he dies of a stroke just after exiting a public tram. Lara returns for his funeral and speaks with Yuri’s half-brother, Evgraf. Lara is arrested and dies in the Gulag. In the epilogue, Zhivago’s old friends, Misha Gordon and Dudorov, meet over the doctor’s papers; they realize that

⁴³ NEP (1921-1928) was a period of compromise, a strategic retreat, in the Soviet Union; capitalist measures were permitted in conjunction with communism in order to encourage economic growth; the Soviet Union had been ravaged by the Russian Civil War and NEP was Lenin’s way of recovering from this destruction.

Yuri and Lara had a daughter together, and trust that Evgraf will look after her. The novel ends with several poems attributed to Yuri Zhivago.

Doctor Zhivago is a love story; it is also saturated with the major historical events that occurred in Russia during the first half of the twentieth century. The story spans from Tsarist Russia, to the 1905 Revolution, to the Revolutions of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. The novel includes philosophical passages discussing the effects of these tumultuous events; Zhivago frequently ruminates on the state of mankind, particularly in reference to Bolshevism, Marxism, and other prominent political ideologies of the time. Pasternak's portrayal of the history he himself lived through does not align itself with socialist realism. He does not subscribe to a polished version of history, nor does he present a view of life in the USSR as a happy, collective experience – socialist realism was overtly propagandist and became synonymous with life as the regime wanted it, not as it actually was. As well, Pasternak's dissenting voice, his less-than-flattering perspective on the official ideology, is a prominent aspect of *Doctor Zhivago*.

Publication History

Pasternak first attempted to publish *Doctor Zhivago* in 1956, when he submitted the manuscript to the liberal literary journal *Novy Mir*, where it would have been published in serialization, and requested the novel's publication (as a monograph) of Gosizdat, a state publishing firm (Weiss, 2011). The content of Pasternak's novel within the Soviet Union was known, and the author was encouraged to edit his manuscript to exorcise the offensive elements; seemingly, the regime could see literary value in his work, as long as the dissident attitude toward the Revolution was removed. However, without revisions, the novel's content was too controversial, even for Khrushchev's

Thaw, and Pasternak's requests for publication were denied,⁴⁴ despite the fact that ten of the poems at the end of the novel had already appeared in print.⁴⁵ Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, an Italian communist⁴⁶ publisher, received the *Doctor Zhivago* manuscript and published both a Russian version and an Italian translation of the novel in November, 1957, despite attempts by Alexey Surkov, the First Secretary of the Soviet Writers' Association at the time, to have the manuscript returned to the Soviet Union (Dyck, 1972).

On September 5, 1958, almost a year after *Doctor Zhivago* appeared in the West, an English translation by Max Hayward and Manya Harari, with the translation of "The Poems of Yurii Zhivago" by Bernard Guilbert Guerney, was published by Pantheon Books. By Friday, September 19, *Publishers' Weekly* recorded that Pantheon had reported a total sales of 32 800 copies of the novel ("Best sellers of the week", 1958, Sept. 29). Approximately one month later, nearly 45 000 copies of the book had been sold by the publisher, and an advertising campaign by Pantheon was underway in several prominent newspapers. *The New York Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Chicago Tribune*, all of which published reviews of the novel, ran ads for *Doctor Zhivago* through the end of November ("Best sellers of the week", 1958, Oct. 27).

⁴⁴ A translation of the rejection letter from *Novy Mir* is published in Robert Conquest's *Courage of Genius*, pp. 136-163. [Conquest, R. (1961). *Courage of genius: The Pasternak affair: A documentary report on its literary and political significance*. London: Collins and Harvill Press.]

⁴⁵ In 1954, *Znamya*, a Soviet monthly magazine, printed 10 poems from *Doctor Zhivago*. These poems were identified as belonging to part of an upcoming novel, and received harsh criticism: They were deemed "unpolitical, devoid of ideas and alien to the people" (Dyck, 1972, p. 18).

⁴⁶ After Stalin died, Communist parties in Western Europe became much more autonomous. However, the Italian Communist Party, led by Palmiro Togliatti, who found nothing wrong with Soviet Marxism, had always been exceptionally loyal to Stalin and the Soviet Union. The increased autonomy of the Western communists could very well account for Feltrinelli's insistence on publishing *Doctor Zhivago*, despite protests from Moscow. (For a discussion of the Soviet Union's influence on communism around the world, see Service, R. (2007). *Comrades! A History of World Communism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.)

The Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Pasternak on October 23, 1958. However, after initially accepting the award, Pasternak declined the Nobel Prize as a result of pressure from Soviet officials.⁴⁷ The announcement of the Nobel Prize for Literature served to increase demand for the novel, to which Pantheon responded with new printings. The cover of *Publishers' Weekly* for November 24, 1958 was dedicated to Pasternak's Nobel Prize win, and the verso of the cover featured Pantheon's explanation of their stock and advertising plan in response to huge demand for the novel. Proposed advertising by Pantheon, in response to this increased demand, included "a budget of \$25 000 through December, January and part of February, to include all the important book media (daily, Sunday, weekly and monthly) in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and other metropolitan areas" ("Best sellers of the week", 1958, Nov. 24, cover verso).

By the beginning of December, 1958, 225 000 copies were in print in the United States ("Best sellers of the week", 1958, Dec. 1); by the end of February, 1959, 650 000 copies had been printed ("Best sellers of the week", 1959, March 9). Demand for *Doctor Zhivago* was very high starting in the autumn of 1958 and continued until the one year anniversary of its publication; this demand resulted in a high volume of print runs by Pantheon. The last figure quoted for copies in print was 650 000, per *Publishers' Weekly* ("Best sellers of the week", 1959, April 13).

⁴⁷ A more complete discussion of the Nobel Prize controversy surrounding Pasternak occurs at the end of chapter five, "Analysis of the Reception of *Doctor Zhivago*".

Conclusion

In the 1950s, there were two major political powers in the world: the Soviet Union and the United States; they were engaged in what came to be known as the Cold War, an ideological struggle between communism and capitalism. Intellectual freedom was compromised in both the Soviet Union and the United States as a result of the tense ideological atmosphere of the Cold War. Pasternak, a Russian author living in the Soviet Union, was an enigmatic figure, largely due to his aloofness from the political games of his nation, whose controversial novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, escaped the confines of the USSR and was published with great success in the West and, particularly, in the United States.

Chapter 5 – Analysis of the Reception of *Doctor Zhivago*

“What an enviable blindness!” thought the doctor. “To be able to talk of bread when it has long since vanished from the face of the earth! Of propertied classes and speculators when they have long since been abolished by earlier decrees! Of peasants and villages that no longer exist! Don’t they remember their own plans and measures which long since turned life upside down? What kind of people are they, to go on raving with this never-cooling, feverish ardor, year in, year out, on nonexistent, long-vanished subjects, and to know nothing, to see nothing around them?”⁴⁸

Introduction

Chapter five presents the reception of *Doctor Zhivago* at the time of the novel’s initial publication in the West, as it was not disseminated in the Soviet Union until some thirty years later. This chapter begins with a discussion of the critical reviews that the novel’s English-language translation received. The reviews are grouped as follows: American periodicals, divided into those aimed at an intellectual audience, a general public audience, a religious audience, and a professional audience; Canadian press; British press. In order to further analyze the critical reception of Pasternak’s novel, the impact of New Criticism on literary analysis is explored. Next, the public reception of *Doctor Zhivago* is presented. In contrast to the laudatory reception it received in the Western world, *Doctor Zhivago* faced harsh censorship in the Soviet Union, and this censorship is examined in this chapter, including the Nobel Prize controversy that unfolded in 1958. Lastly, Bakhtin’s theoretical lens is applied to the reception and social history of *Doctor Zhivago*.

Critical Reception

Doctor Zhivago appeared in an English translation by Max Hayward and Manya Harari in August, 1958. Shortly thereafter, critical reviews of the novel started appearing in American and international periodicals. Pasternak, a Soviet writer who had committed

⁴⁸ Yuri Zhivago, in Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, pp. 381-382.

an act of obvious dissidence by publishing his banned work in the West, was intriguing. Critics and periodicals were eager to read *Doctor Zhivago* and advise their readership. The phenomenon was a conflation of literary and political fascination: something controversial had “escaped” from the Soviet Union, the Cold War adversary and this added to the intrigue of Pasternak’s first prose publication.

Methods and Limitations

In order to determine the critical reception *Doctor Zhivago* received upon its initial publication in English, I consulted *The Book Review Digest* for 1958⁴⁹ (Davidson, 1959). This publication indexes reviews in periodicals by title. I was able to retrieve all 24 of the indexed reviews of *Doctor Zhivago* for this year; because this novel was published and reviewed more recently than *The Grapes of Wrath*, it was easier to obtain copies of these reviews. The following discussion of the critical reception includes all of the reviews presented in *The Book Review Digest*. *The Book Review Digest* mainly indexed American periodicals, but these included several different mandates (i.e., popular, religious, intellectual, and professional); it also listed one Canadian and several British periodicals.

American Press

Intellectual mandate. Ernest J. Simmons, a specialist in Russian literature, reviewed *Doctor Zhivago* for *The Atlantic Monthly*. The review opens by contextualizing Pasternak: Simmons describes the political situation within the USSR as it affected Pasternak, and explains how this political atmosphere created a dearth of quality writing,

⁴⁹ *The Book Review Digest* entry for *Doctor Zhivago* featured 25 publications; 21 were American and 4 were international (one Canadian and three British). In 1958, *The Book Review Digest* referenced 70 publications (including 6 international – two Canadian and four British – sources) in total in order to collect its reviews for the year.

compared to that of America and Western Europe. Pasternak is “neither a Communist in his political philosophy nor a socialist realist in his art” (Simmons, p. 67). Moreover, “*Doctor Zhivago* is not a political novel, nor is it an attempt to expose the iniquities of the Soviet regime” (p. 68). Instead, Simmons aligns Pasternak with the pre-Soviet Russian literary giants: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Pushkin. Simmons stresses that Pasternak is an historian as much as (or perhaps even more than) a novelist; Pasternak is telling an expansive history of the Russian people who lived through the upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century. For Simmons, the literary flaws of *Doctor Zhivago*, such as the author’s refusal to develop characters to the point where the reader can identify with them, are accounted for by the novel’s panoramic description of the epoch.

Despite Simmons’ assertion that this novel is not political, an ideological theme runs throughout the review. Simmons notes that Pasternak has revived “the noble tradition of the Russian past that literature is the conscience of the nation” (p. 68). This statement aligns Pasternak with pre-Soviet ideals of literature – removing the socialist realism imperative – and reasserts the novelist’s connection with Western European and American sensibilities. There is no doubt of the veracity of Pasternak’s portrayal of history; the reviewer praises Pasternak’s ability to distance himself from the events he is describing, to objectively examine them. But there is a political element, in Simmons’ view, in *Doctor Zhivago*; Simmons writes the “anguished cry of the human spirit for freedom in all its manifestations runs through the pages of this remarkable Soviet novel”, a “cry for freedom that alone can restore the human dignity of man [that] needs to be heard in the Soviet Union” (p. 72). Simmons praises the dissenting views that were

banned in Pasternak's native country. The review closes with a reminder that the novel is likely never to appear in its original form in the Soviet Union.

Like *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Saturday Review* turned to a specialist on Russia to write a review of *Doctor Zhivago*: Harrison Salisbury, a former *New York Times* correspondent in Moscow (1958, September 6). Salisbury is very enthusiastic; *Doctor Zhivago* is "a great novel of our times", and Pasternak is comparable to the other Russian masters (those invoked by Simmons of *The Atlantic Monthly*), yet also standing alone. Again, there is a careful distinction made between "Russian" and "Soviet"; the "Russian-ness" of the novel is admirable and an important feature, a feature that is carefully contrasted with "wooden Soviet 'novel[s]'" and "propagandist essay[s]" (p. 20). Salisbury also stresses the Christian element of Pasternak's novel, even stating that Pasternak survived Bolshevism because of his faith and "the honesty with which he looks upon the world" (p. 21). Pasternak's condemnation of society, according to Salisbury, does not just refer to the Soviet regime. Pasternak also "indicts Europe and America with the same pen which convicts Soviet society" (p. 21). Salisbury, it seems, is intimating the apolitical nature of *Doctor Zhivago* by including both the Soviets and the West as the audience intended for Pasternak's message – the broad, humanist, faith-based message of the book is, for Salisbury, a condemnation of both the Soviet and Western political regimes.

The biography of Pasternak that accompanies Salisbury's review is also interesting. It describes Pasternak's role as a poet and intellectual in the USSR, first rooting him in the Western tradition that preceded the Soviet era. The biography then segues into the publication history of *Doctor Zhivago*, outlining how the novel was

initially considered for publication in the Soviet Union but was ultimately censored and published illicitly in Italy. While Salisbury disdains the fact that the novel's reputation as a work that escaped Soviet censors is bound to taint its reception, he is careful to provide readers with an awareness of the role that official censorship played in the Soviet Union at the time. Salisbury also incorporates an autobiographical element into his reading of *Doctor Zhivago*, informed by events surrounding the novel's publication and social history. He refers to the novel as a "literary cameo" (p. 20) in which "Pasternak speaks for himself" (p. 21) through the characters. Salisbury, who claims the novel is apolitical, cannot review it without reference to Pasternak's context.

Irving Howe's⁵⁰ review for *The New Republic* ties Pasternak's novel to its time and circumstances, as well:

[It is] a major work of fiction, but it is also – and for the moment perhaps more important [sic] – a historic utterance. It is an act of testimony as crucial to our moral and intellectual life as the Hungarian revolution⁵¹ to our political life. (1958, September 8, p. 16)

Pasternak is not removed from his political circumstances – he did not write an apolitical novel, and the effects of the regime in which he lived and wrote are important to include in analysis of *Doctor Zhivago*, which is, according to Howe, a testimonial.

Furthermore, Howe, unlike the reviewers for *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Saturday Review*, does not classify Pasternak's work as Western literature. Instead, Howe makes a distinction between Pasternak's style and that of his contemporary Western writers: the

⁵⁰ At the same time of this review, Irving Howe – an active literary critic and leftist intellectual – was also writing about the end of modernism.

⁵¹ The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was a popular uprising against the government of People's Republic of Hungary – a Soviet puppet government; the revolt began in late October and was violently terminated by the Soviets, who reinstated their government, in early November, 1956.

trauma of the twentieth century's events has wrought a change in the way Western writers approach their craft, resulting in a "split between historical event and personal existence" (p. 16). However, Pasternak was able, by recalling Tolstoy's aesthetics, to reject this split, and to present an "utterance" that unifies history and personal experience:

Pasternak refuses to accept any claim for the primacy of ideological systems. Avoiding any quest for the "essence" of modern terror, he prefers to observe its impact upon the lives of modest and decent people. (p. 16)

This quotation further solidifies Howe's view that Pasternak was writing an historical document, as people are not separated from their ideological and historical surroundings. *The New Republic* also praises the objectivity of Pasternak's writing – again, the veracity of *Doctor Zhivago* is undoubted, and the reviewer praises Pasternak's dedication to writing in a society that is "wholly unfree" (p. 17).

In the vein of *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Saturday Review*, David Magarshack, reviewing for *The Nation*, is knowledgeable about Russian letters (1958, September 13). However, Magarshack's approach to the novel is unique from the earlier reviews discussed; he focuses on *Doctor Zhivago* as an explicitly social document:

[*Doctor Zhivago*] excels ... as a *social document*, as a work of observation of the highest order, as a fearless and intellectually honest commentary on the political situation in Russia before and after the October revolution. (p. 134)

Pasternak uses his characters chiefly as a vehicle for conveying his own thoughts and ideas on the contemporary scene in Russia. His novel is

therefore in the main a *social commentary* and if, in spite of that, it succeeds in engaging the sympathy of the reader for its chief characters, it is because of its many autobiographical elements, the undercurrent of genuine feelings that runs through it... (p. 134) [Italics my own]

According to Magarshack, Pasternak was not only writing a polemic, he was also writing an autobiography. The reviewer sees definite parallels between the author and the title character of the novel. The focus of the review is to illustrate Pasternak's views on the situation in Russia through *Doctor Zhivago*; however, Magarshack nowhere mentions the censorship of the novel in its home country, nor does he indicate any effects that the novel may have as a "social commentary".

The New Yorker issued a highly detailed review of *Doctor Zhivago* written by Edmund Wilson: "Doctor Life and His Guardian Angel" (1958, November 15). This review was published significantly later than those mentioned above, after the Nobel Prize announcement. Wilson takes a detailed look at the translation of the novel, and identifies its main themes as "death and resurrection", which are closely tied with the religious aspects of the story, namely individuality and immortality. He also draws attention to the fact that "Zhivago" is from the root "*zhivoy*", or "life". Wilson focuses on the literary merits of the novel, and does not consider it an autobiography; however, he does, at times, point to the social, historical, and political significance of *Doctor Zhivago*. For instance, Strelnikov, in his last conversation with Zhivago, "has poured out the whole apologia for his generation" (p. 212). Furthermore, Wilson has this to say about the censorship of the novel and the reaction of the Soviet officials regarding the Nobel Prize debacle:

... the anti-creative bureaucrats who are allowed in the Soviet Union to interfere in matters of literature – sounding much like those Mississippi newspapers which raised a howl against Faulkner in the same situation – have compelled him [Pasternak] to refuse this award. I do not, however, in paying my respects to the official mediocrities of Moscow, want to adopt the self-righteous attitude toward Russia which has become official in the United States. (p. 225)

Wilson acknowledges that censorship and state pressures forced Pasternak to refuse this literary prize, but he (Wilson) also wants to distance himself from Cold War politics and focus instead on the literary merits of *Doctor Zhivago*.

The American press reviews of *Doctor Zhivago* from periodicals with an intellectual audience relied on “experts”, inasmuch as their reviewers were largely billed as knowledgeable on Russian culture and literature. Pasternak was compared frequently to the pre-Soviet greats: his intellectual and “westernized” background was highlighted, as was the fact that he was a dissident, who survived the terror of Stalin, and a sort of ally in the anti-Soviet cause. *Doctor Zhivago* was, more or less explicitly, described as a social document, an autobiography, and, less explicitly, as a condemnation of the Soviet regime.

Public audience/mandate. *Doctor Zhivago* was also widely reviewed in periodicals with a broader public audience. *The New York Times Book Review* published “But man’s free spirit still abides: Out of Russia comes a new novel that defies the totalitarian’s ways”, by Marc Slonin (1958, September 7). Slonin is described as “a Russian-born American scholar who keeps tabs on writing and publishing in the Soviet

Union” (p. 1). The review begins by contextualizing *Doctor Zhivago* and Pasternak within their politically-charged social and historical realm; this presents the novel as controversial. However, the characters, especially Zhivago, are not “political animals” – a reference to socialist realism – but are people: “man is shown in his individual essence, and his life is interpreted not as illustrations of historical events” (p. 42). As well, the theme of autobiography returns:

Of course it would be wrong to attribute to Pasternak all the statements made by his protagonists and to identify the author completely with Doctor Zhivago. But there is no doubt that the basic attitudes of Pasternak’s chief hero do reflect the poet’s intimate convictions. (p. 42)

Slonin described the novel as anti-political – “the book, despite all its topical hints and political statements, [is] a basically anti-political work” (p. 42); yet the reviewer’s rhetoric is contradictory. Pasternak’s life is very much affected by his political surroundings; this is made clear by historical background the reviewer himself provides. By reading *Doctor Zhivago* as an autobiography, Slonin is conflating the personal and the literary; the novel becomes a polemic.

Slonin’s view of *Doctor Zhivago* as a social document becomes more explicit as the review proceeds, emphasized by the reviewer’s ambiguous use of “him” to refer to both Zhivago and Pasternak. Zhivago/Pasternak’s “quarrel with the epoch is not political but philosophical and moral” (p. 42); however, this statement is followed closely by a condemnation of Marxism, suggesting that it is not possible to distinguish so clearly between politics, philosophy, and morals. The subtle categorization of the novel as anti-Soviet propaganda culminates at the end of the review:

Despite all the trials and horrors and death it [Pasternak's writing] depicts, despite the defeat of its heroes, his novel leaves the impression of strength and faith. It is a book of hope and vitality. And it is a book of great revelation. Even if we admit that communism represents a part of Russian life, mentality and history, it does not encompass all the Russian people and the country's traditions and aspirations. A whole world of passion, yearning, ideals and creativity exists next to or underneath the Communist mechanism. It lives, it stirs, it grows. Pasternak's novel is the genuine voice of this other Russia. (p. 42)

This conclusion strongly supports the American side of the Cold War: Pasternak's dissidence gives hope, strength, and faith to the struggle against the Communist mechanism, by providing the "genuine voice" of Russia, as opposed to the inauthentic one of the Soviet Union.

The other New York newspaper that reviewed *Doctor Zhivago* was the *New York Herald Tribune*. As in the *New York Times Book Review*, reviewer Bertram D. Wolfe details the exceptional political circumstances surrounding this novel's publication, adding the interesting fact that *Doctor Zhivago* was described in April 1954 by a Soviet literary journal as "a forthcoming event of the first magnitude" (p. 1). Wolfe, like Slonin, seems to negate the effect of political circumstances on the popularity of the novel (i.e., he argues that its foreign translation and success had nothing to do with its anti-Soviet content); however, the characters of the novel are victims of history, of the revolution, and of the Soviet system. This political slant is, again, emphasized with reference to the

autobiographical elements of the novel and by an ambiguity in the review between Zhivago and Pasternak:

The theme of the novel, too, might seem to be a paradigm of the author's own life. It is the struggle of a noble individual to continue to remain true to himself in the face of overwhelming forces, too great for him to alter or resist. (p.1)

Above all he [Zhivago/Pasternak] is a man of intellectual and moral integrity, unable to lose himself in a frightened and conforming herd or to utter as if they were his own thoughts the untruths that others prescribe to him, whether these are the untruths of Tsarism at war for its existence in the earlier part of the book, or the untruths of totalitarianism at war to remake its subjects according to its infallible blueprint and to conquer the world. (p. 1)

Again, this reviewer sees the novel as autobiographical, and its characters as victims of the whims of history, attempting to retain integrity despite the "untruths" surrounding them. The continuation of the article, on page 8, sees *Doctor Zhivago* as a harbinger of intellectual freedom and the end of censorship in Russia (no mention is made of the Soviet Union), perhaps in the distant future. Wolfe, furthermore, predicts a Nobel Prize for Pasternak. He does not, however, predict what might happen should Pasternak, in fact, be nominated for this award.

Fanny Butcher's review of *Doctor Zhivago* in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* appears as half of an article entitled "Two novels portray life under communism"; the other half is dedicated to *The Eighth Day of the Week*, by Marek Hlasko, a Polish writer

(1958, September 7). Butcher's brief review focuses on the fact that Pasternak's novel has reached the world from behind the Iron Curtain and that it was not yet (and, though this was not known at the time, never would be, in its original form) available in its native Russia. She acknowledges the fact that "the book will be hard going for most Americans", owing to its multitude of characters and "slow and sometimes baffling episodic quality"; however, it is unforgettable and "a must for anyone who really wants to understand Russia and the Russians" (p. 3). Butcher does not consider the novel a polemic, explaining that Pasternak's portrayal of "life under communism" is too vivid and detailed to be propaganda.

Along similar lines, William Hogan's review for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Behind the Iron Curtain with 'Doctor Zhivago'" (1958, October 8), depicts the novel as a remarkable literary work incidentally "enmeshed in an urgent and extreme socio-political atmosphere" because some of its sentiments do not correspond with official ideology. The anti-Marxist passages of the novel are not the main focus of the review; Hogan observes that the novel tells an important story of a "difficult period of history" (p. 33). It is important to observe that critics who dismiss the polemical nature of the novel seem to ignore the fact that the suffering of the people depicted in *Doctor Zhivago* was not safely in the annals of history: It was very much still a reality.

Time, in an anonymous review published on September 15, 1958, opens with a novel explanation of why *Doctor Zhivago* will never be read in Russia: Pasternak "seems to summon his readers to stand – not before the official Communist deity, which is a thing called history – but before the divinity of Jesus" ("Innocence in Russia", p. 94). *Time* is more explicit in its propaganda, and its review is written very much for the

American public during the Cold War: The Soviets are “Reds” and *Doctor Zhivago* is a “biography of Pasternak’s own generation, described by poet Alexander Blok as ‘the children of Russia’s terrible years’”, where the title character is Pasternak’s alter-ego (p. 94). Similar to Butcher’s review in *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, *Time* insists that the novel is too good (although, according to Butcher, too detailed) to be merely propaganda: “*Doctor Zhivago* is far too good to be read primarily as an anti-Marxist polemic, although it does contain some breath-taking anti-Marxist passages” (p. 94). *Time* also plays to the politics of the time by stating that the end of the Soviet regime is coming, and that this novel is a hint of the inevitable:

The talk may be mostly silenced today, but there is in *Doctor Zhivago* an unyielding suggestion that the silence will one day be broken, that the Communist regime is an interim affair, an affliction to be endured in hope, until the caravan of time evoked in Zhivago’s poem comes out of the dark for judgment.⁵² (p. 94)

Typically, for the political atmosphere of the Cold War, *Time* is emphasizing the inevitable collapse of the enemy ideology: the escape of *Doctor Zhivago* from the censors is a symptom of the coming capitulation of the Soviets and subsequent end to Communism.

Richard McLaughlin, wrote a review of *Doctor Zhivago* for *The Springfield Republican* after Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize (1958, November 2). The reviewer states that the major highlight of the novel is its “exceptional prose”.

⁵² A reference to the last poem in *Doctor Zhivago*, “Garden of Gethsemane”; the last stanza is: “I shall descend into my grave. And on the third day rise again./And, even as rafts float down a river,/So shall the centuries drift, trailing like a caravan,/Coming for judgment, out of the dark, to me.” This fragment is quoted at the beginning of *Time*’s review.

McLaughlin does not spend much time discussing the Nobel controversy. He does, however, like earlier reviewers, see Pasternak as responsible for further pulling open the Iron Curtain.

Public, religious mandate/audience. *Doctor Zhivago* was also reviewed in periodicals with religious focus. *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Catholic World*, *Christian Century*, and *Commonweal* all published reviews of the novel. *The Christian Science Monitor* – more of a mainstream periodical than the other three – published its review, like many other periodicals, shortly after *Doctor Zhivago* initially appeared in English translation. This review, written by Ernest S. Pisko, is quite frank about the reasons the novel was problematic (for the Soviet censors). Pisko describes Pasternak as a threat to official ideology and *Doctor Zhivago* as a much more dangerous leak out of the Soviet Union than Vladimir Dudinstev's *Not by Bread Alone*. Dudinstev's novel was published as a serialization in *Novy Mir* in 1956, during Khrushchev's Thaw, and contained several inflammatory themes, which resulted in its post-publication condemnation by Khrushchev's regime. *Doctor Zhivago* was a more dangerous leak than *Not by Bread Alone* because Pasternak dug much deeper with his criticism of the regime. Pisko coins the phrase "un-hero" to describe Zhivago's (and Pasternak's) aloofness from politics; he sees the characters, too, as victims of history, not purely political beings.

Catholic World, publishing a review by Riley Hughes in early 1959, focuses on the religious aspects of *Doctor Zhivago*, calling it "one of the great religious novels of our time" (p. 335) because of its focus on human values. Hughes also mentions Pasternak's fixation on the changing language of the Soviets, which was influenced by, and reflective of, their ideology. This mention of Soviet language also corresponds to the

religious focus of the periodical, because organized religion was another victim of the Revolution, both in terms of language and in the practice of religion. However, Hughes feels the novel is hopeful at its close because it foreshadows a “freedom of the soul” that is coming to Moscow.

Edith Lovejoy Pierce, writing for *Christian Century* (1959, January 14), does not focus on the controversy surrounding the novel, nor the censorship, nor the Nobel Prize; rather, she seeks the religious symbolism that permeates *Doctor Zhivago*, calling it an epic poem, an “allegory on the condition of man in the 20th century” (p. 50).

The last reviews from a religious periodical are from *Commonweal*. There are two reviews of the novel in the February 27, 1959 issue of the periodical. The first one, by an unknown author, describes the novel as telling the story of the “intellectual and political upheavals of twentieth century Russia” (p. 576), though it is, overall, a testament to the rights of each man as an individual. Again, as with *Catholic World*, the end of the review is hopeful: “[*Doctor Zhivago*] is a serious and tragic book which leaves the reader with strengthened hope for confused and suffering mankind” (p. 577). This publication stresses the more ecumenical role of *Doctor Zhivago*, a position that is also expressed in J.N. Moody’s review in the same issue: This review describes the novel as “an important testimony of the survival of the spiritual under materialist totalitarianism” (p. 578).

Not surprisingly, the periodicals with religious mandates that reviewed *Doctor Zhivago* tended to avoid the political controversy and politically-motivated ideological discussions of the book’s messages, and instead tended to focus on the book’s humanist, religious element. Reviews from religious periodicals comprise 16% of the total reviews – four out of 24. The prevalence of religiously minded periodicals that presented reviews

is indicative of the broad reach of Pasternak's novel. Evidently, it was being widely read in America, and had messages for myriad audiences.

Professional reviews. As is fitting for a novel that would go on to win its author a Nobel Prize, *Doctor Zhivago* was highly recommended by professional review publications. *Kirkus Reviews* ("Problematical books", 1958, August 15) classifies the novel under "Problematical Books – Fiction", presumably because of the controversy surrounding it. The controversial nature of the novel is succinctly summed up by the anonymous reviewer who says a "critical picture of Soviet society – the price of revolution – is framed by philosophical considerations of the problems of good and evil, historical necessity vs. individual freedom, spiritual values as imminent rather than transcendent [sic]" (p. 616). The reviewer sees the novel as targeted at a specific audience: "a must for the litterati [sic]" (p. 616). This recommendation is interesting, as the book was reviewed among publications with such wide mandates. *Kirkus Reviews* published this review before *Doctor Zhivago* appeared in print in English; presumably the periodical had access to a prepublication copy. Perhaps the reviewers did not expect that Pasternak's novel would establish such a wide following or become an important document in the Cold War.

Library Journal also highly recommends *Doctor Zhivago* "for most libraries" (1958, September 15, p. 2443). The review in this publication is written by an academic, Paul C. Wermuth, who claims that "Pasternak appears to be unreconstructed". This statement could either mean that the author's work has been faithfully preserved through its escape from the Soviet Union, or that Pasternak's philosophy has avoided corruption by the ideologues of the Soviet Union.

The Booklist, the review publication of the American Library Association, surprisingly makes no mention of *Doctor Zhivago*'s controversial history or censorship by the Soviet regime. In fact, the review claims that Pasternak has won a reputation in Russia as a "literary leader". Perhaps *The Booklist* was referring to Pasternak's status as a poet before he fell from grace and published his dissenting novel outside the Soviet Union. The review does, however, state that Zhivago's "critical views of the new regime are the most significant aspect of the novel" ("Pasternak, Boris", 1958, October 15, p. 100). *The Bookmark*, by contrast, issues a very neutral review, stating that the book is "not yet published in the U.S.S.R.", and describing its subject succinctly (1958, October 15, p. 14).

The last professional publication to review *Doctor Zhivago* was the *Wisconsin Library Bulletin*; this review appeared in November, 1958, after Pasternak's Nobel Prize win, and mentions that "Pasternak has been international news since he was awarded and refused the 1958 Nobel Prize for literature" (p. 521). Furthermore, the reviewer notes that this book "should be in every Wisconsin public library" (p. 521), presumably because it is written by a Nobel laureate, but also perhaps because of its political message, albeit one unmentioned by the reviewer.

Canadian Press

The Canadian Forum, a left-leaning publication with an intellectual mandate focusing on literary, political, and cultural topics, issued a review of *Doctor Zhivago*, written by Northrop Frye (1958, December). Frye gives a detailed review of the overarching themes of the novel, and diminishes the Soviet reaction, stating: "In this country [Canada], where it is assumed that it is part of the job of a serious novelist to

make serious criticisms of his society, [*Doctor Zhivago*] would hardly have raised a ripple of controversy” (p. 206). Furthermore, Frye makes the following comment regarding the social reception of the novel:

A novel derives its *social* significance only from the resistance it happens to meet, and the fact that this book is banned in Russia, and vociferously denounced by officials who have presumably not read it, has given it an extraneous and topical importance. Its fate is typical, not exceptional, for the Soviet record in literature is a miserable one, with so many of their really first-rate writers having disappeared in purges or been driven to suicide or exile. The functionaries of the Soviet Union could get the sputniks into the air, but cannot endure to be told that they are not meeting the ethical standards of the New Testament. It is possible that their failure in the latter area may turn out to be more important, even historically, than their success in the former one. (p. 207) [italics in original]

The fact that *Doctor Zhivago* was banned in its native country and had to be smuggled out and published abroad is a sign of the state of literature, art, and intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union. By dismissing the purely social function of the novel, Frye is refusing to acknowledge the reverse: that *Doctor Zhivago* could be used as propaganda by the other side in the Cold War. Frye makes no mention of the Nobel Prize incident, despite the fact that this review appeared after Pasternak declined the award, apparently choosing to abstain from discussing political ramifications of the novel as a social document.

British Press

Three British periodicals also reviewed *Doctor Zhivago* at the time of its initial publication in English. The *Times Literary Supplement* issued an anonymous review on September 5, 1958 (“Praise or blame?”). This review begins with a portrait of Pasternak quite different from those provided in American periodicals; it presents Pasternak as somewhat enigmatic:

Without making a fuss about it, he has simply rejected the whole concept of utilitarian writing and refused to compromise with the Communist Party’s theoretical or practical aesthetics [...] He is at once a source of consolation to foreign Communists, who are happy to feel that individual writing of this quality can still go on in the U.S.S.R., and an object of slightly malicious interest to the cultural freedom experts, who see their case proved whenever official barriers seem to be put in Pasternak’s way.
(p. 496)

This quotation illustrates clearly the significant interest by American periodicals in Pasternak and his novel: in many cases, these could be the “cultural freedom experts” mentioned above, attempting to prove their superiority in terms of intellectual freedom when compared to the rival ideology – Communism.

The reviewer for *Times Literary Supplement* states that Pasternak’s novel vacillates between condemning the effects of the revolution, and exhibiting Marxism tendencies in the way he finds meaning or coincidence in every event in the lives of his characters. Yevgraf, Zhivago’s half-brother, is a metaphor for the official state machine – not malicious, but, rather, offering “an apparent redemption at the end of [Zhivago’s]

life” (p. 496). But the reviewer feels that Pasternak’s refusal to take sides in the political struggle of the time is not a flaw:

Nobody who sees so much ever finds it easy to make up his mind. And there is no reason why he should, so long as he is seeing straight, for life is crammed with inconsistencies, and such enormous moral issues cannot be decided one way or another by a neat propagandist stroke. The whole book is an unresolved tussle for its author, quite as much for his hero, for he believes at once in personal freedom and in his own curious form of cosmic predestination, in individualism and in the unimportance of the self. [...] All the tension in the novel comes from the conflict of overwhelming arguments, waged within a personality still close to the issues involved. No clear solution could be so impressive as Pasternak’s conviction that this battle must be fought in public and that sooner or later it will. What matters is not the outcome but the testing and modification of great ideas.

(p. 496)

Pasternak does not fit neatly on one side of the Cold War; he is neither anti- nor pro-Soviet. *Times Literary Supplement* acknowledges the effect that living through such social and political upheaval can have on human beings, and also acknowledges that this upheaval is very much a living memory.

Spectator, publishing a review by Frank Kermode on the same day as *Times Literary Supplement* (Kermode, 1958, September 5), focuses mainly on the extreme coincidences and symbolism of the characters in *Doctor Zhivago*. “Certainly it includes politics”, but the novel’s broader theme is life; however, this theme includes the great

upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century: “*Doctor Zhivago* is an historical novel” (p. 315). With a slightly more political focus than *The Times Literary Supplement*, Kermodé’s review closes with a prophecy:

Its rejection in Russia is melancholy proof not only of his courage but of the correctness of his diagnosis; far more surprising than the rejection, and in an obscure way encouraging too, is the fact that at one moment the book came so near to publication. There is no dawn without the possibility of a true one. (p. 315)

Kermodé is predicting the fall of the Soviet Union’s ideological structure as well as its grasp over intellectual freedom. He takes a more obviously anti-Soviet position than the reviewer in *Times Literary Supplement*.

The final British review listed in *The Book Review Digest* is from *New Statesman* and was written by V.S. Pritchett (1958, September 13). This review moves closer still to American reviews that denied the anti-Marxist element of *Doctor Zhivago*, focusing on its apolitical nature; however, Pritchett still includes anti-Soviet rhetoric in his review. Pasternak is reflecting the people, innocent victims pushed by history, and the novel is autobiographical. Pritchett finds the coincidences of the novel contrived, but he recognizes the importance of the minutiae in Pasternak’s writing: “That is how revolution comes. Everywhere people are carrying around their core of private life about with them” (p. 354).

Conclusions

Doctor Zhivago was widely reviewed when it was published in English translation in 1958. Aside from some complaints about the quality of the translation, the

contrived and highly coincidental nature of the plot, reviews were generally positive and promoted *Doctor Zhivago* as an important novel. The general audience periodicals used rhetoric that called to mind the ongoing Cold War; despite claims that *Doctor Zhivago* was not anti-Marxist, that it was apolitical, the reviews still focused heavily on the circumstances of its publication: that it had slipped from behind the Iron Curtain, had escaped Soviet censors, and issued a damning view of the October Revolution and ensuing establishment of the Soviet regime.

The religious-focused periodicals also issued positive reviews of *Doctor Zhivago*. There is a prominent element of faith in the novel, and, unsurprisingly, these publications focused on this feature. Pasternak's overarching view of humanity, his hopeful message, and his religious symbolism made this novel appropriate subject matter for these publications. The anti-Soviet rhetoric, the Cold War presence, was less noticeable in the religious periodicals, but the censorship of *Doctor Zhivago* in Pasternak's home country was frequently mentioned. Pasternak's humanity, however, seems to have been subtly used to condemn the lack of intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union, and the book's message provided hope for the future of mankind, an end to suffering in the Soviet Union.

The international reviews of *Doctor Zhivago* were, in some instances, more frank about the nature of the novel and the social history that was being developed around it. Northrop Frye (*The Canadian Forum*) and *Times Literary Supplement* issued reviews that were careful not to fall into anti-Soviet rhetoric: *Times Literary Supplement* explored the leftist, communist, ideologically ambiguous elements of the novel, while Frye condemned those who sought to use *Doctor Zhivago* as a polemic, because, after all, in

countries where intellectual freedom is protected, it is the responsibility of serious novelists to criticize the politics of the world around them. The international reviews did, in some instances, use Cold War rhetoric: the other two British press reviews – *Spectator* and *New Statesman* – were more akin to the United States periodicals in their emphasis of the anti-Soviet nature of the novel and the ideological implications of its publication history.

Noticeably, no reviews took a pro-Soviet stance; none doubted Pasternak's veracity. However, the majority of the reviews this study examined were American, where the political atmosphere of the time was strongly anti-Soviet.

New Criticism and American Reception

The critical reception of *Doctor Zhivago* in America is perplexing in that reviewers were careful to downplay the ideological, political aspects of the novel, despite their prevalence in Pasternak's writing and despite the political atmosphere of the time in which the reviewers were writing. It strikes one as counter-intuitive that, when presented with a literary work that condemns the society whence it originated – especially when that society is on the opposite side of an ideological war – critics would avoid and downplay a discussion of the political context and content of the literary work. However, the state of literary criticism in America during the Cold War provides an explanation for this confusion. The school of "New Criticism" began to develop out of the Southern Agrarian movement in the 1920s and 1930s, and by World War II the New Criticism approach had been defined (Jancovich, 1993). Essentially, New Criticism sought to examine a literary work – often poetry – in a formalist way; the text was paramount and

subjected to close reading, while the social, historical, and political context of a literary work was ignored:

Rescuing the text from author and reader went hand in hand with disentangling it from social or historical context. [...] Literature was a solution to social problems, not a part of them; the poem must be plucked free of the wreckage of history and hoisted into the sublime space above it.

(Eagleton, 1983, p. 48)

Therefore, in New Criticism, not only was a literary work removed from its social and historical context, it was also understood without recourse to author and readers; literature was autonomous, extracted from society.

While New Criticism may have been well-developed by its pioneers by the beginning of World War II, it continued to gain popularity in mainstream literary analysis and critical reception during the 1940s and 1950s. This philosophy was particularly popular among “bourgeois intellectuals” because it circumvented left-wing radical thought, which was tantamount to support of the Soviet Union and therefore considered un-American (Jancovich, 1993). Moreover, due partly to their intellectual roots, New Criticism and formalist readings are “invariably linked with a conservative social, moral, religious, and political assessment of the past, present, and possible future” (Leitch, 1988, p. 28). This description of the movement illustrates the appeal for a regime (the United States) trying to triumph ideologically over the extreme left philosophies of its enemy (the Soviet Union). Because, at its roots, New Criticism was linked to conservative, right-wing politics and philosophy, it was particularly useful as an approach to the literature of the Cold War. Critics were able to align themselves with the “correct”

ideology (anti-communist, anti-Soviet), and did not have to directly address the political context of a given work.

Therefore, when critics reviewed Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, they did not discuss the overt political messages in the novel, but rather focused on its purely literary merit; *Doctor Zhivago*'s importance as a social document, as a damning polemic, was largely diminished or ignored. This approach to the novel illustrates a more subtle alignment with the American side of the Cold War: by treating *Doctor Zhivago* as a novel significant for its literary merit in the Western tradition – by analyzing it with New Criticism, a Western approach – critics were demonstrating the novel's superiority. Pasternak's novel was not didactic; it did not conform to Soviet Socialist Realism, but, rather, was aligned with Western aesthetic values, therefore making it a superior literary work.

Public Reception

Methods and Limitations

In order to measure the public reception of *Doctor Zhivago*, I relied heavily on the *Publishers' Weekly* publications from 1958-1960, particularly its weekly and monthly best sellers lists. I used these to indicate that the book was being purchased and, therefore, read. *Publishers' Weekly* accumulated its statistics based on reports from booksellers across the United States. The number of booksellers reporting and the number of communities represented varied on a monthly basis, and *Publishers' Weekly* did not provide further details describing the sources it used to obtain its percentages. However, *Doctor Zhivago* was purchased in enormous quantities; this overwhelming popularity led me to assume that it was being widely read by the public.

Public Popularity – *Doctor Zhivago* as a Best Seller

Pasternak's novel, despite the large amount of critical attention it received upon its publication in English, did not appear on the "Candidates for the best seller list" in *Publishers' Weekly*. Instead, the novel made a direct appearance on the "Best sellers of the week" list. *Doctor Zhivago* first appeared on the *Publishers' Weekly* best sellers list on the September 29, 1958, ranking seventh out of ten titles: "a new best seller" (p. 106). Over the next two weeks, the novel moved up the list to fifth, then second place⁵³ ("Best sellers of the week", 1958, Oct. 6; "Best sellers of the week", 1958, Oct. 13). After a few weeks near the top of the list, *Doctor Zhivago* achieved the number one spot on the "Best sellers of the week list" ("Best sellers of the week", 1958, Nov. 24). This increase in popularity was no doubt aided by the announcement of Pasternak's Nobel Prize for Literature on October 23, 1958 and Pasternak's subsequent refusal of the award at the behest of the Soviet machine.⁵⁴ *Doctor Zhivago* remained at the top of *Publishers' Weekly*'s best sellers list for 25 weeks, only losing its number one ranking at the end of May, 1959. At the peak of its popularity, *Doctor Zhivago* was reported to be the top selling book by all⁵⁵ the booksellers reporting to *Publishers' Weekly* ("The best sellers of 1958", 1959, Jan. 19). The final week that the novel appeared on this list was September 28, 1959 – approximately one year after its first appearance as a best seller, although the novel was listed on the monthly best sellers list for 14 months ("Best sellers of the week").

⁵³ On October 13, *Doctor Zhivago* appeared directly underneath *Lolita*, a novel that also attracted much controversy due to its subject matter, by ex-patriot Russian, Vladimir Nabokov.

⁵⁴ See the end of this chapter for a discussion of the Nobel Prize controversy surrounding Pasternak and the Soviet officials.

⁵⁵ i.e., 100% of the 54 booksellers that reported, collectively representing 41 communities.

Doctor Zhivago was selling in enormous quantities across the United States. The average sale reports accounted for 10 000 copies a day, and orders were being placed “from all over the country, including some very small book outlets” (“Best sellers of the week”, 1958, Dec. 29). As a culmination of its tremendous sales, indicating an intense public interest in reading the novel, *Doctor Zhivago* was the number one fiction book of 1958,⁵⁶ and the number two book of 1959 (“The best sellers of 1958”, 1959, Jan. 19; “The best sellers of 1959”, 1960, Jan. 18).

Censorship/Controversy

Khrushchev’s Thaw marked an important time in Russia’s literary history. Citizens were no longer encouraged to denounce those who deviated from official Party positions. It was a chance for writers to explore further the realms of creativity and reclaim a position in the international realm. Boris Pasternak, having finished writing *Doctor Zhivago*, was perhaps heartened by this thaw; Dudintsev’s *Not by Bread Alone* was published in the liberal Soviet journal *Novy Mir* in 1956, despite its dissident message and denouncement by Khrushchev. Pasternak did attempt to have his novel published by the same journal, but was rejected. Evidently, *Doctor Zhivago* contained subject matter that was too controversial; the Soviet Union would still not allow intellectual freedom of the kind Pasternak was asserting.

⁵⁶ In 1958, its sales indicated greater popularity over these other best sellers: *Anatomy of a Murderer* (Robert Traver), *Lolita* (Vladimir Nabokov), *Around the World with Auntie Mame* (Patrick Dennis), *From the Terrace* (John O’Hara), *Eloise at Christmastime* (Kay Thompson), *Ice Palace* (Edna Ferber), *The Winthrop Woman* (Anya Seton), *The Enemy Camp* (Jerome Weidman), and *Victorine* (Frances Parkinson Keyes). In 1959, *Doctor Zhivago* sold fewer copies than *Exodus* (Leon Uris), but outsold the following: *Hawaii* (James Michener), *Advise and Consent* (Allen Drury), *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (D.H. Lawrence), *The Ugly American* (William J. Lederer and Eugene L. Burdick), *Dear and Glorious Physician* (Taylor Caldwell), *Lolita* (Vladimir Nabokov), *Mrs. Arris Goes to Paris* (Paul Gallico), and *Poor No More* (Robert Ruark).

However, the stringent controls on writing and on dissidence in general were significantly looser than they had been under Stalin. Pasternak's manuscript was smuggled out of the Soviet Union to an Italian communist publisher, Feltrinelli. Pasternak had given the manuscript to an Italian communist who was working in the "Italian Section of the Soviet radio and at the same time acted as an agent for the communist Milanese publisher Feltrinelli" (Berlin, 1981, p. 185). Censorship in his home country was still plaguing Pasternak, but was not total, and dissident writing did reach the world outside the East Bloc. While it is difficult to say whether this could have happened under Stalin, it seems that the Thaw emboldened Pasternak to attempt to have his work disseminated.

The theory that *Doctor Zhivago's* appearance abroad was a lapse in security and censorship is supported by the attempts by Surkov, First Secretary of the Soviet Writers' Association, to have the manuscript returned to the USSR; Pasternak was extolled to revise his novel with the promise that, with correct revisions (i.e., if he altered controversial passages to support official ideology), it could be published at home. *Novy Mir* was aware of the content of *Doctor Zhivago*, and the literary magazine was known by the Soviet officials; therefore, the content of the novel was not a secret in the USSR. Moreover, *Novy Mir* had suggested publication of the novel would be possible if "revisions" were made – revisions to replace the dissident attitudes of the novel toward the Revolution, etc. Despite political pressures, the Italian publisher Feltrinelli proceeded with the publication of an unrevised version of *Doctor Zhivago*, and the novel went on to be published in myriad translations.

Another telling feature of the Thaw, and the growing level of intellectual freedom accepted in the Soviet Union, was the fact that Pasternak did not face any retribution for his dissident actions. The laudatory reception that *Doctor Zhivago* received in the West, was perhaps largely influenced by the political atmosphere of the time. The United States was deeply entrenched in a “Red Scare”, and Pasternak’s literary tenacity included both his novel’s content and the fact that he evaded the censorship of his homeland allowed his voice to be heard outside of the confines of the Iron Curtain.

The claims made by many reviewers that *Doctor Zhivago* is not a political novel, that it is not anti-Marxist or anti-Soviet, seem incredible: The very fact that its publication was impeded in the USSR indicates its political nature. It was deemed offensive to the official Soviet sensibilities and, therefore, denied dissemination; this type of censorship is political to its core. The further fact that, in a time of severe propaganda against anything remotely “socialist” or “communist” or “Red”, this novel was so widely and positively reviewed and was so extraordinarily popular in the West indicates that the social circumstances surrounding the novel’s appearance were key to its reception. The Cold War had not yet reached the stages of Mutually Assured Destruction – the Invasion of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis had yet to happen – and neither side was eager to cede any ground; escalation of the ideological conflict was imminent.

The Nobel Prize Controversy

The rent in the Iron Curtain, indicating that the Soviets were losing control of their intellectuals, became too painful for the East when the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Pasternak on October 23, 1958. Initially, Pasternak responded to the Swedish Academy via telegram with the following statement: “Immensely thankful,

touched, proud, astonished, abashed” (cited in Nobel Prize in Literature, 2011). A mere week later, the following telegram reached the Swedish Academy, again from Pasternak: “Considering the meaning this award has been given in the society to which I belong, I must reject this undeserved prize which has been presented to me. Please do not receive my voluntary rejection with displeasure” (cited in Nobel Prize in Literature, 2011).

What happened in the week between Pasternak’s acceptance of this prestigious award and his rejection of it? What caused him to change his mind? There had not been significant backlash in the USSR upon *Doctor Zhivago*’s initial publication, but the awarding of the Nobel Prize to a dissident writer was an insult not to be tolerated. The letter *Novy Mir* sent to Pasternak in 1956 rejecting *Doctor Zhivago* formed the basis of a press campaign against the writer, which was initiated by Pasternak’s fellow writers – not Party leaders.⁵⁷ This letter was published in October 1958 in *Literaturnaya gazeta*; it referred to *Doctor Zhivago* as “a libel on the October Revolution, the people who made the Revolution, and the building of socialism in the Soviet Union” (cited in Garrard & Garrard, 1990, p. 139). A long editorial accompanied the letter from *Novy Mir*, which took an even stronger tone against Pasternak, calling him a “Judas” and “an ally of those who hate our country” (cited in Swayze, 1962, p. 201). *Pravda* also chimed in, damning Pasternak as a perpetually dissident writer who had “always been basically hostile toward

⁵⁷ Surkov, the head of the Soviet Writers’ Union, was invited to the Kremlin to advise Khrushchev on Pasternak. Arkady Belinkov describes the following scenario: “Surkov said that Pasternak was a scoundrel and God knows what else, that his poems were always terribly anti-Soviet and his influence on Russian literature baleful. On the basis of this report the vicious Soviet campaign against Pasternak was launched, and of course it incensed the world. When the whole scandal erupted Khrushchev summoned Surkov, grabbed him by the collar and gave him a terrible dressing-down for failing to mention that Pasternak was a world-famous author” (cited in Garrard & Garrard, 1990, p. 140).

the revolution and to socialism” (cited in Swayze, 1962, p. 201).⁵⁸ The abuse continued, and it was suggested that the author must refuse the award. Moreover, he was removed from the Soviet Writers’ Union and it was suggested that he should be deprived of his citizenship (Swayze, 1962). Pasternak was facing the consequences of eluding Soviet censorship and of causing the Soviet Union to lose ideological ground in the Cold War: He was being defamed and ostracized for his dissidence.

Pasternak’s subsequent refusal of the Nobel Prize was an attempt to defuse the situation and to allow him to stay in the Soviet Union. The author wrote several letters to accomplish this; in the Soviet Union, upon being accused of anti-Soviet sentiments, the offending party must admit to his mistakes and request forgiveness – this was standard practice. Pasternak wrote to Khrushchev, announcing his refusal of the Nobel Prize, and published a letter in *Pravda*, apologizing for what had happened. This was sufficient to calm the storm inside the Soviet Union and to prevent Pasternak’s exile.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The history of *Doctor Zhivago* illustrates a case of intellectual freedom in a regime where terror and persecution were the usual fate awaiting dissidents. Those accused of dissidence or actions against the state, whether their purported crimes were real or imagined, often faced terrible, violent consequences. Khrushchev’s Thaw, while it did not permit the publication of such a dissident novel in the Soviet Union, enabled the

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the press backlash in the USSR, and translations of several letters, see Conquest, R. (1961). *Courage of genius: The Pasternak affair: A documentary report on its literary significance*. London: Collins and Harvill Press.

⁵⁹ Alexander Solzhenitsyn might provide an alternate path for ‘dissident’ writers in the Soviet Union; he won the Nobel Prize (and accepted it) in 1970, which acceptance resulted in his exile. Solzhenitsyn circulated much of his writing via the samizdat, and sent ‘safety’ copies of his writing outside of the USSR so they could still be published in case of his death. Solzhenitsyn’s *The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of a literary life in the Soviet Union* illustrates the publishing situation in the Soviet Union; Solzhenitsyn also discusses the events surrounding Pasternak’s Nobel Prize win.

leak of a novel to be disseminated abroad. The West was more than willing to give attention to this breach of the Iron Curtain; *Doctor Zhivago* became a best seller in its English translation and the uproar surrounding the “Pasternak affair” in relation to the Nobel Prize also indicated the West’s support of the intellectual freedom of Soviet writers. Taking into consideration the social context of a novel that alters the fabric of society is critical, and *Doctor Zhivago* was a catalyst for intellectual dissidence in the Soviet Union.⁶⁰ Pasternak managed to have a manuscript, which had been condemned by the Soviet authorities, published abroad, had drawn attention to the plight of writers within the Soviet Union, and had opened up an imaginary space for further, overt dissidence by Soviet intellectuals. In addition, despite having to issue public apologies for his actions, Pasternak did not suffer seriously at the hands of Soviet officials, who had previously been hugely repressive and violent.

By paving the way for changes in the relationship between state censors and artists, by drawing attention to the draconian measures imposed upon those who sought to express intellectual freedom, Pasternak wrought considerable change to the role of censorship in the Soviet Union. Granted, following Khrushchev and his Thaw, the Soviet Union was plunged back into a rigid and retrogressive state under Brezhnev, and it was to be another thirty years before *Doctor Zhivago* would be published in the land in which it was written.

Applying Bakhtin

Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, like *The Grapes of Wrath*, presented a fictionalized account of real, tumultuous events that changed the fabric of society.

⁶⁰ Again, one thinks of Solzhenitsyn, who also pushed hard against the restrictions of intellectual freedom, despite excruciating punishment, and exhibited an almost incomprehensible determination to remain in his native country (although he was eventually exiled).

However, *Doctor Zhivago* dealt with a more historical issue: the Bolshevik revolution and ensuing civil war had happened several decades before the book was published. This brief temporal distance, though, was insufficient to place Pasternak's narrative in the Bakhtinian past (that of the epic, closed to the present). *Doctor Zhivago* treated topics very much within living memory (Pasternak's own), and the people of the Soviet Union were, at the time, still profoundly affected by the events discussed in the novel.

Evidence of the emotional proximity of *Doctor Zhivago* can be seen in the reaction it elicited from Soviet officials; the regime was unwilling to concede to criticism of events and socio-political circumstances. Essentially, the Revolution and its aftermath were (at the time of *Doctor Zhivago*'s completion and publication abroad) still in the openended present because these events, and their discussion, were still controversial. The closed past (epic time), for Bakhtin, is inaccessible, irreconcilably distant, from the present; if the events presented in Pasternak's novel belonged safely to this type of past, the novel would not have elicited such a dramatic, violent reaction by Soviet officials.

Pasternak's own proximity to the story in his novel presents itself through the authorial voice; Pasternak is asserting his *authority* on the subject by communicating, through fiction, historical events he experienced first-hand and supplementing these events with ideological musings. Critics noted this in their frequent elision of Pasternak and the eponymous hero of the novel: *Doctor Zhivago* was frequently described as an autobiography masquerading as a novel. There are obvious parallels between the two – mostly their origins in the Tsarist intelligentsia and their affinity for art and philosophy. *Doctor Zhivago* contains strong, polemical elements: criticism of the Soviet regime, of Marxism, of the ideologues and ideologies that perpetrated the radical social change –

and destructive results for humanity – in Russia during the first half of the twentieth century. Another societal influence affecting Pasternak would have been the denunciation of Stalin's myth and the commencement of Khrushchev's Thaw: the dissemination of *Doctor Zhivago* is inconceivable under the oppressive terror of Stalin's regime. Perhaps Pasternak felt society was ready for his centripetal voice. However, the reaction within the Soviet Union to *Doctor Zhivago* indicates that the centripetal forces – the state, the reigning dictators of hegemony – were unwilling to cede territory to dissenting voices. As part of his censorship, Pasternak was forced to take responsibility for his writing in the form of a public apology; the content of the novel was polemical, in the eyes of the Soviet regime, and expressed inappropriate views, and Pasternak, as the author (an authority), had to claim responsibility for his error.

In the United States, *Doctor Zhivago* was well-received and popular. The novel had a strong appeal for Western audiences, which was based – at least partly – on the anti-Soviet message, its condemnation of communism. The socio-political context of the Cold War coloured the reception of *Doctor Zhivago*, creating the conditions for a dialogic interaction between the utterance (the novel) and its interlocutors (readers, including critics). Americans were influenced by their own social surroundings to fear and be suspicious of communist infiltration; the reds were perceived as a serious threat. Persecution of dissidents in America (sympathizers of the communist cause) impacted the political atmosphere and presented an inversion of Soviet tyranny that was, largely, condemned in the West. *Doctor Zhivago* presented a depiction of events that happened in an alien (and, at the time, enemy) society; the polar opposite of capitalist America was the communist Soviet Union. Western readers were presented with a literary utterance,

which was unique in its depiction of a socio-political situation; Soviet writing was, almost entirely, entrenched in the socialist realism doctrine, but *Doctor Zhivago* shook that tradition, along with its fantastical, surreal optimism.

Although critics were careful to avoid discussing the polemical nature of *Doctor Zhivago*, the popularity of New Criticism accounts for this initially puzzling reception. New Critics ignored social factors and influences on literature, and focused instead on the literary work as a separate, free-floating item. This type of formalism is fundamentally contrary to Bakhtin's philosophy, where literature is intrinsically connected to and reflective of its cultural surroundings. With this perspective, it is impossible to exorcise *Doctor Zhivago* from the society in which Pasternak lived, where the culture inundated his thoughts, his language, his very existence. Moreover, the critics, in glossing over the novel's political content, were exhibiting their own political bias: they were elevating Pasternak to the level of Western (capitalist, non-enemy) writers and silently condemning the Soviets by appropriating a Soviet dissident.

Pasternak's utterance, *Doctor Zhivago*, was censored completely within the Soviet Union, indicating the overpowering strength of the centripetal forces in that epoch. However, Bakhtin's tenet that there exist, within every society, both centripetal and centrifugal forces remains valid in this case: *Doctor Zhivago*, a centrifugal utterance, exerted itself on the Soviet Union's hegemony from without, by voicing its message in the West. Interestingly, when the novel is viewed only in terms of the opposing sides of the Cold War, Bakhtin's centripetal forces triumph. Complete censorship silenced *Doctor Zhivago* in the USSR, while the novel was lauded in the US, where its message was not centrifugal in nature (it conformed to the anti-communist, anti-Soviet hegemony

of the States). However, viewed within the wider epoch of the Cold War, *Doctor Zhivago* was performing the function of a centrifugal force: it was subverting the hegemony of the Soviet Union through its dissemination in the West; it was opening up an imaginary space for dissidence and destruction of homogeneity within society.

From a contemporary perspective, experiencing *Doctor Zhivago* after the fall of the Soviet Union, the criticism of the regime in the novel is perhaps not so inflammatory. The Eastern Bloc, the communist “threat”, is no longer a strong presence in the minds of readers. Furthermore, with the fall of the Soviet Union, the truth of the regime’s history – the violence, the suppression, the destruction – has become clear. The victory of capitalism as the dominant ideology has mitigated the provocative effect of Pasternak’s criticism of Soviet history. However, the novel remains in the literary canon; its message that an artist, an author, has the responsibility (see Northrop Frye’s review of *Doctor Zhivago*) to critique the political regime under which he lives. While communism may have taken the fall in the Cold War, Pasternak’s novel is a reminder of the importance of exposing history and its impact on individual lives through literature.

Conclusion

Initial critical reception of *Doctor Zhivago* in the West at its initial dissemination was generally laudatory and welcoming of dissident writing that had escaped from the Soviet Union. The school of New Criticism enabled critics to evade discussion of the inherently political nature of the novel, creating a striking omission when viewed from historical distance. Largely because of the controversy Pasternak’s dissidence created in the Soviet Union, the novel experienced incredible popularity in the West. Emboldened by Khrushchev’s Thaw, Pasternak sought to publish his work, but after being censored at

home, Pasternak succeeded in smuggling his work out of the Soviet Union. The awarding of the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature brought further trouble to the author, yet he managed to evade serious consequences, thereby affecting the struggle for intellectual freedom that continued in the Soviet Union up until the regime's collapse.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

If we don't show anyone, we're free to write anything.⁶¹

And we change people through conversation, not through censorship.⁶²

Research Questions Revisited

At the beginning of this study, I outlined several research questions I wished to explore: Are Bakhtin's theories still relevant for understanding today's literature? How do Bakhtin's theories (specifically, dialogics and philosophical anthropology) inform the censorship of literature? *Dialogics* stems from the existence of centripetal and centrifugal forces in society, where the former attempts to perpetuate a dominant ideology or hegemony through homogeneity and the latter attempts to subvert hegemony through the manifestation of heterogeneity. *Philosophical anthropology* refers to the Bakhtinian idea that all disciplines are interrelated, and that the social history of utterances is intrinsically important: people and their utterances are products of their apperceptive circumstances, their social, political, cultural context. In order to examine the relevance and application of Bakhtin's theories, the study focused on two specific novels and their respective social histories, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1958).

Examination of the context of the critical reception of these novels, relating the novels – the author's message, the censorship and controversy that resulted – to the circumstances that precipitated their creation demonstrated the link between Bakhtin's theories and censorship. The realism of the novels grew out of a need to examine the socio-political context Steinbeck and Pasternak, respectively, experienced: the migrant

⁶¹ Allen Ginsberg. (2006). "Cosmopolitan Greetings", *Collected Poems: 1947-1997*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics. p. 954

⁶² Jay-Z. (2010). *Decoded*. New York: Spiegel & Grau. p. 307

workers of the Dust Bowl in 1930s America; the Russian Revolution and its aftermath in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the reaction to the novels – the censorship they faced, as well as their public popularity – was also a product of the socio-political context in which the novels appeared. The critical reception, in particular, is an interesting aspect of the novels' histories and provides a strong connection between the literature and the atmosphere of its initial dissemination.

The construction of each novel's social history involved a presentation of political context, intellectual freedom context, the author's profile, a plot summary, publication history, an examination of both critical and popular reception, and a discussion of the censorship and controversy surrounding the novel. Bakhtin's theories of dialogics – specifically centripetal/centrifugal forces and the role of utterances/author voice – provided an important lens through which to view the social history of each of these provocative novels. By accounting for the socio-political context surrounding each novel's publication, it is possible to understand the censoring impulse that greeted these utterances. Moreover, by choosing as case studies two novels that came from different epochs (in the Bakhtinian sense), it is possible to show the similarities in censorial impulses throughout time. Criticism of a dominant ideology is a threat, and forces that perpetuate hegemony react to silence these threats, regardless of the regime – be it the capitalist, democratic United States, or the communist, totalitarian Soviet Union. Bakhtin's theory provides a framework for examining and labelling the forces at play in censorship cases.

Libraries, Censorship, and Heterogeneity

The Bakhtinian concept of a centrifugal force is closely related to the classification of an utterance as provocative or controversial. A centrifugal force seeks to undermine hegemony within a society, to destroy homogeneity, and, by so doing, to create heterogeneity – a constant subversion of “the norm” and a diversification of society and its ideologies. Both Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* and Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* were the targets of controversy and censorship in their home countries. They were contemporary, provocative, subversive novels: Bakhtinian utterances that undertook the role of a centrifugal force within society by presenting views that went against the dominant ideologies of the time. The urge to censor these novels falls into the domain of a centripetal force. A centrifugal utterance is a threat to hegemony and in the cases of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago*, the reaction to these threats was censorship, an attempt to silence the authorial voice.⁶³

Libraries act as disseminators of information and, as a result, when the information being disseminated is perceived as subversive, dangerous, or threatening, libraries face (often considerable) pressure to censor. The concepts of intellectual freedom and its partner, freedom of speech, are contemporary notions used to promote the protection and vitality of centrifugal forces. Intellectual freedom and freedom of speech are intended to allow dissenting voices the same opportunity as hegemonic voices to present utterances to the dialogic world. As a result, libraries that seek to preserve intellectual freedom by working to eliminate censorship are also assuming the role of a

⁶³ Modernist literature in the eras of the Great Depression and the Cold War was also subject to censorship. One thinks, for instance, of the controversy surrounding James Joyce (*Ulysses*) and Henry Miller (*Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn*) at the time of the Great Depression, and of the Beat generation during the Cold War – Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*), Kerouac (*On the Road*), and Ginsberg (*Howl*). The subject matter of literary works was problematic, and the exploratory and innovative nature of their form was also controversial.

centrifugal force within society. In times (for Bakhtin, *epochs*) of great ideological tension, like those in which *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago* initially appeared, the pressure to silence centrifugal forces is particularly strong because the subversive utterances take on an especially sinister nature; the risk of their becoming centripetal forces – of usurping the current hegemony and establishing a new order – is (perceived as) great. Libraries that champion intellectual freedom and freedom of information maintain heterogeneity within society. By reacting to pressure to censor by introducing policies to protect against this, libraries are forcing change on the dominant ideology: it must coexist with the utterances that seek to subvert it; it must engage in dialogics.

Censorship and Contemporaneity

While this study explores the social history and censorship of novels that have become established fixtures in the Western literary canon and whose censorship has more or less ceased, the issue of censorship remains a concern. *Doctor Zhivago*, notably, was only published in the Soviet Union in 1988 – thirty years after its publication in the West. The protection of intellectual freedom has become a goal of the American library profession (in part as a result of the controversy over *The Grapes of Wrath*), but there have been numerous instances of censorship of literature around the world since then, indicating that censorship remains an active part of society. For instance, one thinks of the violent – and deadly – reaction to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), when Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for Rushdie's death. Censorship of literature on moral grounds, which are arbitrarily determined and sentenced, has been prevalent where religious beliefs are involved – Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991) was banned in Portugal. Censorship of literary authors was prevalent in South

Africa under apartheid, which only ended in 1994; one thinks of the works of J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer, among others.

There are myriad cases of censored literature throughout history, and as the previous examples indicate, censorship has not been eradicated. For Bakhtin, censorship occupies a natural place in human existence: centripetal and centrifugal forces are inherent, locked in a dialogic struggle that will last throughout the cumulative epoch of humanity, much like Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha were locked in an embrace as they plummeted to earth.⁶⁴ Understanding the forms these forces take within society, and participating in dialogic interactions – both centripetal and centrifugal – will create a more open approach to controversial utterances. Understanding the events and context that precipitates censorship will not eradicate the urge to silence inflammatory ideas, but it will enable a dialogue to exist between opposing sides, and to encourage human creativity. For how does one understand one's surroundings, if not through art and exploration?

⁶⁴ C.f. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. This scene takes place in the opening of the novel.

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