



Soviet Literary Culture in the 1970s: The Politics of Irony

Anatoly Vishevsky

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Hope and faith were in short supply among Soviet liberals by the late 1960s. Writing about the popular culture of the Soviet intellectual during the years of post-Stalinist thaw, Anatoly Vishevsky cites the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia as a formal landmark that inaugurated the period in which irony was propelled to the forefront of the literary and cultural scene. Irony was the direct product of disillusion and despair over the apparent abandonment of the promising post-thaw ideals and values. This period that ended with the beginning of perestroika and glasnost, Vishevsky believes, also was the incubator of many processes now prevalent in the country's literature and culture. Although censorship kept this ironic worldview off the main stage of Soviet literature, it surfaced in peripheral forms - stand-up comedy, songs of the "bards," short stories in periodicals and newspapers, radio and TV shows, local cinematography, regional literature - works that friends discussed over kitchen tables, "where most heated debates usually took place in the Soviet Union." A major part of the book is devoted to a corpus of writing never before treated critically: the ironic stories that appeared in the late 1960s and the 1970s in Soviet humor periodicals and in the humor pages of newspapers and magazines. These stories, each three to ten typed pages, were presumably tolerated by the Soviet authorities because of their brevity and their often unassuming placement in the back pages of magazines. The stories collected here, translated for the first time in English and including several by Aksyonov and Bitov, constitute a new subgenre in the history of Russian literature - the ironic short story.



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