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RUSSIAN AND EURASIAN STUDIES

MASTER THESIS

The Catcher in the Rye

Reception after its First Publication in Soviet Russia

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Figure 1: Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow - January 2017

Translations and Transliteration

All translations are done by myself, unless indicated otherwise. See the appendix for the original Russian texts from documents of RGALI. For the transliteration of the Cyrillic alphabet I used the following system:

Cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin
а	a	р	r
б	b	с	s
в	v	т	t
г	g	у	u
д	d	ф	f
е	e	х	kh
ж	zh	ц	ts
з	z	ч	ch
и	i	ш	sh
й	i	щ	shch
к	k	ъ	-
л	l	ы	y
м	m	ь	-
н	n	э	e
о	o	ю	yu
п	p	я	ya

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1

Introduction

From the nineteenth century up until the present literature has played a significant role in Russian society. Literature has been the medium through which people expressed their emotions, values and political opinions, as it was a field in which they felt relatively free. Thick literary journals have been an important part of society, which besides literature contained journalistic and political articles. Each journal had its own style, political worldview and approach to literature. It was common practice that a literary work first was published in a journal and later in book form. During the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, the period under Khrushchev, the Soviet society significantly changed due to reforms and rethinking of the Stalinist past. Because of their political and cultural significance, journals did well during such moments of political liberalization.¹

Coupled to the existence of literary journals there has been a long tradition of letter writing from readers. Through letters people responded, individually or as a group, to literary works and shared their political beliefs, critical opinions, praise, and sometimes even whole life stories. Many readers searched for truth and guidance in literature, and considered writers, who regularly wrote back, as a moral authority. Due to the growing autonomy of journals and political turbulence during de-Stalinization, literature was an important medium to discuss and evaluate the past and helped people to adapt to changes in society. Editorial boards of journals always responded and had special departments to analyse and discuss the received letters.²

As the tensions of the Cold War eased, Western influences increased and contributed amongst other things to the return of publications of contemporary Western literature. In November 1960 the journal *Inostrannaya Literatura* (Foreign Literature) published the first Russian translated version of the American novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, written by Jerome David Salinger. Although this time was characterized by a relatively liberal literary climate in comparison to former years, the fact that this American youth novel, by many considered controversial and even frequently banned

¹ D. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 4 - 5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 15 - 17.

in some of the United States, could be published in the Soviet Union is interesting. Apparently the book has been quite popular since its first publication in Soviet Russia. In 1971 American writer Kurt Vonnegut declared after meeting the book's translator Rita Rait-Kovaleva that 'her *Catcher in the Rye* is one of the sensational best sellers over there.'³ After Salinger's death in 2010 a significant amount of attention was paid to him and his work in the Russian media. In an interview with *Radio Svoboda* Salinger expert Astvatsaturov described the deep impression the novel made on Soviet readers, especially on those of the younger generation. Astvatsaturov explained how American readers saw themselves in the novel's protagonist Holden Caulfield, an outsider who protested to his surrounding world. Astvatsaturov presumed that this made the book also popular in Soviet Russia, since it was published in the years of de-Stalinization, a quite liberal time in which people too started questioning their surrounding world.⁴ I contacted Astvatsaturov to ask if he could tell me more about the reception of *The Catcher in the Rye* in Russia. Unfortunately he could not provide me with more information on this topic besides the above mentioned speculations, as he never researched Salinger in Russia.

I found that many studies have been done on *The Catcher in the Rye* in Russia. But almost all of them focus on the transformation of the English text to Russian, and state that the translation of Rait was part of the novel's success. When speaking about the novel's content, according to Astvatsaturov, it might have been the novel's character that appealed to the Soviet reader. Since little to nothing is written yet about concrete reasons for the novel's popularity, I chose to focus on the reception of *The Catcher in the Rye* in the Soviet Union for this thesis. Although it seems that Rait's translation played a significant part in the novel's success, it would not be possible to properly discuss the complete transformation of the text in this thesis as well. Therefore the translation will be discussed briefly, but the focus in reception will be on the novel's content. I furthermore chose to limit my research to the years around the first publication in order to prevent the investigation from becoming too large for one thesis.

For this research I visited the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), where many documents and letters from readers to journals have been preserved. The primary sources I found at RGALI discussing the reception of *The Catcher in the Rye* form the core of this research. In order to get an extensive view into this matter, I chose to use sources discussing the reception from the perspective of editors, but from ordinary readers as well. Unfortunately I have not been able to find any reviews dating from the years after the first publication of Salinger's novel in the Soviet Union, besides the first article published together with the novel written by Vera Panova. This means that the perspective from other literary critics will not be discussed.

³ K. Vonnegut, "Invite Rita Rait to America!" *The New York Times*, January 28, 1973, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1973/01/28/archives/invite-rita-rai-to-america-the-guest-word.html?mcubz=0>.

⁴ "Памяти Дж. Д. Сэлинджера. Беседа с литературоведом Андреем Аствацатуровым (In memory of J.D. Salinger. Interview with literary critic Andre Astvatsaturov)," website: Радио Свобода (Radio Svoboda), accessed July 2, 2017, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/1944442.html>.

Although I found many useful sources related to the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura*, the search for letters from readers was somewhat disappointing. In general the amount of preserved letters was smaller than expected. Also, I found that most letter writers asked for the contact information of a specific writer or journalist. In the case of letters about *The Catcher in the Rye*, letter writers preferred to contact translator Rait or journalist Vera Panova directly.⁵ Someone even asked if a personal letter she wrote could be forwarded directly to Salinger.⁶ Unfortunately the attached letter was not preserved.

When I discovered the readers' desire to talk directly to Rait and Panova, I tried to get access to both of their personal archives. Unfortunately, these are either not accessible without personal permission of (unknown) relatives, or they were not preserved at RGALI but at homes of relatives. When I found out that it was unclear with which relatives such files would be located if even preserved at all, I concluded that tracking down these people would probably lead to a dead end. I also did not succeed in finding any direct correspondence with Salinger. So, in the end I had not as many letters as expected and most of the ones I did find were quite superficial. Fortunately, two of the preserved letters I found are written like short essays and express an outspoken opinion about *The Catcher in the Rye*. They are both very different and therefore a useful contribution to this research.

This thesis has the following structure. First of all I will discuss the book's content and, briefly, its fate in America. Secondly, a general introduction to the period in which this book was published in the Soviet Union is given. Thirdly, the process towards publication and discussion at the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* is examined. After that we will look at the reception of the book amongst its readers. With this research I hope to not only provide more insight into the changing literary climate of the late 1950s and early 1960s, but also into the way Western literary influences were treated by editors and ordinary citizens during the turbulent years of de-Stalinization.

For insight in the consulted archives one can contact me personally.

⁵ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 134, p. 60.

⁶ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 235, p. 42.

2

The Catcher in the Rye

In order to properly understand the discussion about *The Catcher in the Rye* and its reception in the Soviet Union, it is necessary to know some background information about the novel. This chapter discusses the novel's publication in the United States, its content, and fate up until the present.

2.1 Publication in the United States

In 1951 Jerome David Salinger published his novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger quickly became one of the most well-known and popular American writers. Only two weeks after its publication, *The Catcher in the Rye* reached the *New York Times* best-seller list and the novel attracted more readers over the years. By the year 1961 the book had been sold over half a million times in the United States. In 1954 it had already been published in nine different countries. In that same year in the United States the *New American Library* published the book in its first paperback edition, which were at the time very popular under high school and college students and the book attracted more young readers. While receiving many reviews praising the novel for being written in such a lively way and speaking to the imagination of the reader, other critics were less enthusiastic about Salinger's work. From the start many considered the book to be unsuitable for youngsters to read, and they condemned the immoral behaviour and foul language that the story features.¹ *The Catcher in the Rye* was considered a dangerous novel and its protagonist Holden Caulfield a bad role model for the readers.² At the time Salinger changed much about the definition of what a hero should be like: Holden is an underachiever and a liar, who talks with slang. At the same time the reader sympathizes with Holden, since his intentions are good. From the first sentence in which Holden refuses to talk about 'all that David Copperfield kind of crap' it is obvious that Salinger wants to present a different kind of hero. Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) is

¹ J. Salzman, "Introduction," in *New Essays on the Catcher in the Rye* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 1 - 7.

² S. Pinsker, *The Catcher in the Rye: Innocence Under Pressure* (Twayne Publishers, 1993), p. 11.

seen as the example of a traditional American bildungsroman, and with Holden's comment about *David Copperfield* Salinger broke with this existing traditional example.³

2.2 Themes & Plot

The Catcher in the Rye is written from the perspective of Holden, who looks back on his adventures of the previous three days. After being kicked out of his prep school Pencey, Holden decides to leave the place, just a few days before the start of the Christmas break. Throughout the entire book no complicated plots unfold, nothing really happens besides Holden expressing his thoughts and reminiscing about what happened to him. More important than the actual story is the way Holden tells it. The reader is given a hint at how much Holden values the written word over image right at the first page of the book when Holden calls his brother a prostitute for working in the film industry in Hollywood, and states: 'if there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me.'⁴ Holden uses many swearwords, has little to no respect for any adults because they are 'phony', and describes the things that have happened to him vaguely with phrases such as 'sort of' ('(Ackley) was also sort of a nasty guy'⁵) and many passive constructions. This way he creates distance from, we later conclude, painful memories. Holden is depressed: he is an outcast, kicked out of school again and the loser who left the fencing equipment on the subway, thereby making his team lose before even having started the game. Moreover, to the reader it slowly becomes clear that Holden is severely traumatized by the death of his younger brother Ally and of his former classmate James Castle. Furthermore, after his hasty departure from his old teacher Mister Antolini's apartment, a small comment even suggests that sexual abuse in his childhood took place.

Because he does not want to tell his parents he failed all his classes and needs to change schools again, Holden does not return home directly but goes wandering through New York City for three days. During his journey, he starts conversations with many different people, such as a taxi-driver, a prostitute, an old friend and a former teacher. While desperately looking for someone to talk to, mainly about his fears of becoming an adult, he does not succeed in getting anyone to listen to him. Holden is obsessed with the desire to protect innocence. In the end Holden finally succeeds in finding someone to talk to: his sister Phoebe. He explains to her that he wishes to become a catcher in the rye, someone who watches over children playing in a field of rye near a cliff, making sure they do not fall off of it.

In addition to mentioning the death of his brother and the suicide of his former classmate, Holden's speech is full of signals pointing to severe illness and death: he jokes about having a brain tumor, he talks about an imaginary bullet in his gut and sometimes feels like jumping out of a

³ J. Rowe, "Holden Caulfield and American Protest," in *New Essays on the Catcher in the Rye* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 87 - 88.

⁴ J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Penguin Books, 1994), p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

window. He furthermore uses the expression that something ‘killed him’ many times, as well as the words ‘crazy’ and ‘madman’ to describe himself or other people.⁶ Although the ending leaves many things unclear, this could hint at Holden’s future and the place from which Holden tells us his story: a mental institution.

2.3 The Novel’s Fate

Publications of critical reviews and articles about *The Catcher in the Rye* have not ceased over the years.⁷ Up until the present *The Catcher in the Rye* has been regularly removed from high school reading lists and banned from libraries in the United States. *The Catcher in the Rye* came sixth on the 2009 list of *Top Ten Most Challenged Books* published by the *American Library Association*.⁸ However, this did not stop Salinger’s book from becoming one of the most read books of the past sixty years. Despite the book’s continuous popularity (or maybe because of it) Salinger has always been shy and led a very secluded life. He stopped publishing in 1966, never made public statements about his private life, let alone responded to any criticism or praise of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The writer’s silence could be one of the reasons the book has attracted so many of readers: in an attempt to find more information about the writer in his work, critics and readers speculated often about Salinger in relation to Holden’s character.⁹ There is another, in my opinion more plausible, explanation for the book’s popularity over the years. While Holden’s adventures take place in New York a few years after the end of the Second World War, most of the things he struggles with are relevant up until nowadays: rebellion towards the older generation, criticism of phony values, the struggle with adulthood, becoming sexually active and the transiency of life. Therefore Holden’s story can speak just as well to its current readers, as it could in the 1950s.¹⁰

Astvatsaturov explained that after the Second World War many Americans recognized themselves in Holden’s character as an outsider of society, which contributed to the initial success of the novel. In the next chapter we will see that due to rethinking of the Stalinist past, many people questioned their surrounding world too. Besides that, problems with the post-war generation, which *The Catcher in the Rye* vividly reflects, were apparent in the Soviet Union as well, although authorities may have been unwilling to admit this. Both these aspects seem indeed logical explanations for the novel’s popularity. The next chapter gives an introduction to the period in which *Inostrannaya Literatura* published Salinger’s novel. More insight in the changing tendencies in Soviet society will contribute to the understanding of the reception of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

⁶ Pinsker, *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 29, 71.

⁷ Salzman, “Introduction,” p. 7 - 14.

⁸ “Top Ten Most Challenged Books Lists,” website: American Library Association, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>.

⁹ Salzman, “Introduction,” p. 2.

¹⁰ Pinsker, *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 7.

3

Changing Society during the Thaw

When Joseph Stalin died on the fifth of March in 1953, the Soviet Union was left in shock, for their great leader during the war and the builder of socialism had passed away. The grieving period for the deceased leader was soon followed by unexpected events. The charges against the ‘Doctors’ Plot’, a group of Jewish doctors accused by Stalin of planning the murder of the Kremlin top, were dropped and the first political prisoners from the *Gulag* were released later that same year.¹ In February 1956 Khrushchev gave his famous speech to the party top in which he raised the topic of the crimes of the Stalin era. He condemned Stalin’s ‘cult of personality’, which had polluted the Soviet Union and smartly blamed the crimes on mistakes made by the leader himself. Although Khrushchev’s speech was held secretly before the members of the Twentieth Party congress, soon rumors about its content circulated through society.²

As a result of criticism of decisions and events under Stalin’s rule, Soviet society was shaken to its core. With change in the air, once forbidden topics were widely discussed. Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization was set in motion. In 1957 more prisoners from the *Gulag* were released.³ Throughout the country statues and pictures of Stalin were removed, and Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd. Probably the biggest and most symbolic act of de-Stalinization was the removal of Stalin’s embalmed body from the mausoleum on the Red Square in 1961. It was the beginning of a new era in Soviet history, known nowadays as ‘the thaw’, named after Ilya Ehrenburg’s novel *The Thaw*, published in 1954. This novel broke with the Socialist Realist tradition by portraying a not so ‘positive hero’ who cared more about his own career than contributing to socialist society. In this novel the first signs of spring prepare to thaw a long and cold winter. It was due to this metaphor that the book became symbolic for the new period, as the long cold winter of Stalinism was about

¹ J.M. Thompson, *A Vision Unfulfilled, Russia and the Soviet Union in the Twentieth Century* (D.C. Heath / Company, 1996), p. 381.

² S.V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat* (Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 1.

³ Thompson, *A Vision Unfulfilled*, p. 383.

to defrost.⁴

Despite the fact that change caused excitement about new possibilities, the thaw was simultaneously very controversial. Change was needed in order to get back on track on the way towards communism; the Soviet Union needed to return to the pure Marxist-Leninist ideology. But how much change and to what extent it was desirable, was up for discussion. Khrushchev and his government were constantly struggling in the course of their reforms and policy. Repeatedly Khrushchev had to deal with resistance within the party top towards his leadership and reforms.⁵ The struggle between liberation from and the urge to hold on to the conservative past is reflected in the government's policies. It is noteworthy to mention that this struggle took place at all levels of society, not only within the party top. It would be naïve to assume that all citizens immediately approved of de-Stalinization and changes in society.⁶ We will illustrate this further in the next chapters when discussing the motivation for the publication and reception of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Since all reforms coexisted with contradiction and ambiguity it was often unclear for civilians where changes were heading. For example in 1956 Khrushchev held his speech at the Twentieth Party Congress criticizing Stalin and later that year violently stopped the Hungarian uprising. He encouraged discussions about malpractice and corruption but also did not tolerate any criticism or attacks on current policies.⁷ The occurrence of controversial actions did not decrease over time and therefore it is impossible to speak of one 'thaw'. Scholar Stephen Bittner argues therefore that it is better to see this time as a period with many thaws and freezes.⁸ This chapter gives a general introduction about the changing tendencies of the period in which *The Catcher in the Rye* was published in Soviet Russia. As it is most relevant for this research, the emphasis will be on changes in the literary climate, the growing fascination towards America and the emergence of a proper youth culture in the Soviet Union.

3.1 Changing Tendencies in Literature and Society

During the thaw, the changing climate in society was a reason for excitement and hope under artists and writers.⁹ In 1932 Socialist Realism was officially adapted as the only correct artistic and literary style.¹⁰ Artists and writers were to give only a positive depiction of socialist society 'in its revolutionary development'.¹¹ Although in the Stalin period artists and writers faced heavy

⁴ Thompson, *A Vision Unfulfilled*, p. 389.

⁵ Ibid., p. 412 - 417.

⁶ Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, p. 12.

⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰ O. Johnson, S. Scheijen, and E. Petrovna, *De Sovjet Mythe: Socialistisch Realisme 1932-1960* (WBooks / Drents Museum, 2012), p. 10 - 11.

¹¹ A.A. Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature - The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature; speech from the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934," website, accessed April 20, 2017, https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongres

censorship, it is important to realize that they still had some leeway for personal interpretation and expression within Socialist Realism. In this way diversity kept existing to some scale. Still, Socialist Realism was without a doubt a limiting factor for artists and writers. Therefore the death of Stalin made relatively big changes possible in cultural life. Even before Khrushchev's speech in 1956 artists and writers started to let go of the strict guidelines of Socialist Realism and portrayed flaws of the Soviet society. For example the journal *Novyi Mir* (New World) printed the article *On Sincerity in Literature*. This article, written by Vladimir Pomerantsev in 1953, emphasized the importance of sincerity in literature and criticized the too rozy representation of reality that Socialist Realism has created.¹² In 1954 *Novyi Mir* published Ilya Ehrenburg's earlier mentioned novel *The Thaw* and it was the same journal that a few years later published the novel *Not by Bread Alone* written by Vladimir Dudintsev.¹³ This story about corruption, technological stagnation and inefficiency in Soviet science caused a sensation among its readers and encouraged political discussions about corruption and malpractice in the Soviet Union.¹⁴ Probably the most internationally well-known novella printed by *Novyi Mir* is *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, written by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This story described the grim reality Ivan Denisovich faced while living as a *Gulag* prisoner and gave a voice to those who had been suppressed during Stalinist times. It made a deep impression on its readers and led to rethinking of the past. It is probably one of the most important stories published during de-Stalinization.¹⁵

Just as in all fields of society it was often unclear where things were heading during the thaw in cultural life. For instance, while in the beginning of 1954 Ehrenburg's novel *The Thaw* was greeted with enthusiasm and excitement about new possibilities, a few months later at the Second Congress of Writers 'bourgeois nationalism' and 'cosmopolitanism' were brought up as serious problems in literature, both characteristic themes of the last xenophobic and anti-Semitic years of Stalinism.¹⁶ In 1956 Dudintsev's novel *Not by Bread Alone* was printed, but in 1957 Grigori Pasternak's novel *Doktor Zhivago* was rejected for publishing. A year later, after his novel had become an international success, Pasternak was forced to refuse the Nobel Prize for literature. Of course Khrushchev's whole administration was responsible for their controversial policies and Khrushchev himself was often torn between his own wishes for a reformed society and conservative minds within the party.¹⁷ Still, Khrushchev's hot-spirited character was probably a major factor. Bittner described very accurately how unpredictable and fickle Khrushchev could be:

In November 1962, Khrushchev personally approved the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's landmark novella about the gulag, in December, he curbed much of the good cheer by vulgarly

s/zdhanov.htm.

¹² Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, p. 44 - 50.

¹³ Thompson, *A Vision Unfulfilled*, p. 388.

¹⁴ Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, p. 88 - 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231 - 237.

¹⁶ Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Thompson, *A Vision Unfulfilled*, p. 391.

*denouncing a group of abstract artists who had gathered to narrate their work at the Manege Exhibit hall, just beyond the western wall of the Kremlin: "Are you pederasts or normal people? (...) What is hung here is simply anti-Soviet. It's amoral."*¹⁸

The fact remains that de-Stalinization transformed Soviet society. As discussed in the introduction, in Russia, traditionally literature has played an important part in intellectual, political and emotional life and has been a medium in which changes and new values were often well reflected. This was also the case during the thaw. For example, the realistic depiction of Soviet reality in Solzhenitsyn's book showed that the 'what ought to be' of the Socialist Realism, which was very important during the Stalin period, was gradually replaced by 'what is'. In addition to that, while in the 1930s and 1940s in literature the typical hero was an extraordinary individual, overcoming obstacles by showing leadership, symbolizing the greater task of society as a whole to reach communism¹⁹, the thaw featured more ordinary heroes.²⁰ The shift in focus from the future to the present and the featuring of the common man as a protagonist in literature indicated that attention for the ordinary and everyday life grew.

Aside from this, people tended to differentiate themselves from the regime as a reaction to the violence of the Stalin era. This made citizens first of all think more about their individual lives than the collective. Secondly, as misdeeds and lies of the past reached the surface, the period under Stalin became strongly associated with falsehood and dishonesty. Disillusioned and filled with doubts, people started to search for new values. As a result, truth and sincerity became highly valued during de-Stalinization.²¹ Thirdly, the differentiation from the Stalinist past led to the search for a new language, one that was not associated with malpractice and violence of the past. During the thaw, many authors started to experiment with language through the introduction of neologisms and slang. Because Solzhenitsyn's *One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* contained many swearwords, it was not always greeted with much enthusiasm by more conservative readers.²²

Changing tendencies led moreover to the further development of a youth culture. Since the younger generation could not be held responsible for the Stalinist past and was not influenced by malpractice and corruption, it was believed youngsters could play an essential role in the reformation of the Soviet Union and the return to pure Marxism-Leninism, which was necessary to achieve communism. Due to the belief in and optimism about the younger generation, juveniles received more attention and appreciation than before. Besides this a gap between the older and post-war generation became evident. This, together with the increased attention, played a major part in the development of a personal identity for youngsters and the growth of a youth culture.

Several actions showed that youth were taken seriously by the government of Khrushchev. For

¹⁸ Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, p. 4.

¹⁹ K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 201.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

²² Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, p. 213 - 214.

example, in 1957 a world youth festival was held in Moscow²³, and in 1955 the journal *Yunost* (Youth) was founded, printing articles and literature specially written for youth.²⁴ The latter contributed to the development of the so-called ‘youth novel’. As the youth novel showed a considerable number of similarities with the ‘classical’ Socialist Realistic novel, with the only exception being that it portrays a young hero, it would be exaggerated to call it a new genre.²⁵

The youth novel’s hero is often a troubled teenager, discovering his way in the adult world. Different about the youth novel is the hero’s rebellion and moral conflicts with his surrounding world. The fact that the hero possessed a separate inner identity was also new. Disillusioned by the Stalinist past, the possibility that not everything was as it seemed on the surface was reflected in literature in the inner identity of literary characters. It indicated a tendency that truth could be more complex and was apparent not only in youth novels, but in other literary genres too.²⁶ One of the most famous youth novels is probably *A Ticket to the Stars* written by Vasily Aksenov and printed by *Yunost* in 1961. This novel portrays a group of juveniles, who are quite sceptical towards their future and decide to run off to Tallinn. Interesting about *A Ticket to the Stars* are the many different ‘unofficial’ forms of culture it features, like slang, foreign pop songs and jazz. They help the heroes to escape from the obligations of their former life and immerse themselves in questionable spheres.²⁷ The story is drenched in English expressions and their fascination for the American way of life. This contributed to the fact that Aksenov was sometimes viewed as a Russian Salinger.²⁸ Although there has been much speculation about the influence of *The Catcher in the Rye* on Aksenov’s novel, the writer himself claimed not to have read Salinger’s youth novel yet when he published *A Ticket to the Stars*.²⁹

3.2 Fascination for America

Another phenomenon, which started after the Second World War and developed further during the thaw, was the fascination for the West, and out of all Western countries, mainly for the United States. Scholar Alexei Yurchak argues that, while the actual West was still out of ordinary

²³ S. Greenwold, *The Fate of Socialist Realism in an Indeterminate World: The Aesthetic of Thaw Fiction and Film* (Northwestern University, 2001), p. 127.

²⁴ “Yunost,” official website, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://unost.org/>.

²⁵ O.F. Boele, “The Soviet Abroad (That We Lost),” in *Border Crossing: Russian Literature into Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 341.

²⁶ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 228 - 231.

²⁷ G.N. Slobin, “Aksenov beyond “Youth Prose”: Subversion through Popular Culture,” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1987, p. 51.

²⁸ W.G. Weststeijn and A. Langeveld, *Moderne Russische Literatuur; van Poesjkin tot Heden* (Pegasus, 2005), p. 330.

²⁹ A. Romanova, “Романы В.П. Аксенова «Звездный билет» и Д. Сэлинджера «Над пропастью во ржи» в контексте культурно-исторической и духовной ситуации 50-х начала 60-х годов (The novels *A Ticket to the Stars* by V.P. Aksenov and *The Catcher in the Rye* by D. Salinger in the cultural-historical and spiritual situation of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s,” in *Россия и США: формы литературного диалога (Russia and the USA: forms of literary dialog)* (Moscow, 2000), p. 149.

people's reach, Western influences contributed to the admiration and resulted in the idea of an internal 'elsewhere', that he calls the imaginary West.³⁰ With this concept he tries to make sense of all of the different expressions and products linked to the West, describing this as a larger trend:

*'A diverse array of discourses, statements, products, objects, visual images, musical expressions, and linguistic constructions that were linked to the West by theme or by virtue of their origin or reference, and that circulated widely in late socialism (and) gradually shaped a coherent and shared object of imagination – the imaginary West.'*³¹

Western influences for example defined the character of Soviet youth culture. This started even before de-Stalinization. After the war, dance became a very popular form of recreation in the Soviet Union, especially amongst youth. With not much other entertainment and a country still ruined by the war, people often danced outside on the street, on squares or in parks, sometimes with nothing more than a single harmonica playing. Although the popularity of dancing had been previously seen during the thirties, after the war soldiers brought 'trophy records' from the front with the Americans. In this way American jazz and blues music and Western ballroom dances like the foxtrot, rumba boogie-woogie and the twist made their entrance into Soviet society. The new light-hearted music and dances were great entertainment to help forget about the trauma of the past, and dances provided the opportunity for youth to go on a date. Besides music and jazz, going to the cinema was popular entertainment and provided the opportunity to go and listen to jazz orchestras, which often played in the foyer of the theatre. A regular night out with cinema and dancing was very popular.³² Later on during the fifties, through radio channels like *The Voice of America*, rock and roll music made its entrance into society.³³

Although relatively small, the best-known subculture amongst youth in the Soviet Union was that of the stilyagi: teenagers that were fascinated by mostly American culture. In an attempt to shake off the dominating and depressing topic of the war they looked across the borders for inspiration. Colourful Western movies they watched in the cinema inspired them in how to behave and to dress. Stilyagi bought Western clothing on the black market or tried to make their own clothes, often remodelled after the ones they bought.³⁴ It is noteworthy to mention that the generation gap and America craze were apparent in many different countries after the end of World War II. According to scholar Juliane Fürst this contributed to the emergence of youth cultures all around Europe and the fascination for America was seen in many of these cultures at that time.³⁵

³⁰ A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 159.

³¹ Ibid., p. 161.

³² J. Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 201 - 206.

³³ Greenwold, *The Fate of Socialist Realism in an Indeterminate World*, p. 127.

³⁴ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, p. 170 - 171.

³⁵ Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, p. 246.

The fact that under Khrushchev the relationship with the West, i.e. Western Europe and the United States, slightly improved, was a major contributing factor for increasing influences from the West. Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev aimed for a less aggressive attitude in the Soviet Union's foreign policy.³⁶ In contrast to his predecessors he was of the opinion that a conflict between the socialist and capitalist camp was not inevitable and nations should be able to coexist peacefully. Khrushchev wanted to employ soft power in order to improve contacts with Western countries. He hoped that this would help the Soviet Union to be taken more seriously as a powerful global nation.³⁷ Throughout the years Khrushchev's approaches were not always successful in maintaining peace, for example during the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the Berlin crisis in 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Still, his attitude helped to transform the way of thinking about the West and brought to some extent the nuance that led to mutual understanding. To Soviet citizens, the peaceful relationship with the United States could have been an unexpected transition after the last years of Stalinism that saw the start of the Cold War. However, considering the fact that the country was a former ally during World War II, they are likely to have quickly accepted the transition.³⁸

In World War II, the United States played a determining factor and afterwards had a dominant role in the recovery of Western Europe and the Soviet Union.³⁹ In order to transform the Soviet Union properly, Khrushchev wanted to improve the Soviet standard of living, amongst other things, with the increase of the production of consumer goods. Besides being reflected in literature and film, the wager on consumer goods also indicated a shift from the collective to the individual. While the emphasis was previously on a spiritual reward for hard work, the increase of consumer goods provided more private possessions as reward.⁴⁰ Throughout the years, industrial, agricultural and other foreign exhibitions were held in the Soviet Union. After such exhibitions ended, all items were often bought by the state and used to model new or modernize existing Soviet products.⁴¹ Probably the most famous exhibition was the American exhibition of consumer goods held in Moscow in 1959:

*The American National Exhibition was the first Soviet mass encounter with America – as America wanted itself to be seen – on Soviet turf. ‘A transplanted slice of the American way of live,’ emphasizing leisure, consumption, and domesticity, the experience it offered Soviet viewers was a kind of virtual day trip to America in the heart of Moscow, in the absence of any realistic prospect of their being able to travel to see the real thing.*⁴²

³⁶ Thompson, *A Vision Unfulfilled*, p. 385.

³⁷ R. Magnúsdóttir, “Be Careful in America, Premier Khrushchev! Soviet perceptions of peaceful coexistence with the United States in 1959,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 2006, p. 4 - 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁹ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, p. 166.

⁴⁰ V.S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 48.

⁴¹ R.A. Medvedev and Z.A. Medvedev, *Khrushchev; the Years in Power* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 43 - 44.

In order to influence interpretation, all exhibitions were presented with a proper introduction. For instance, the American exhibition of 1959 was opened with a personal speech from Khrushchev in which he pointed out the didactic and inspirational value of the exhibition: ‘we can learn something. We look at the American exhibition as an exhibition of our own achievements in the near future.’⁴³ With the Soviet Union’s goal in mind to ‘catch up and overtake America’ Khrushchev thus looked to the United States for inspiration and opened the Soviet Union to foreign exchange.⁴⁴

The increased exchange with the West had its influence on cultural life. Artists and athletes were allowed to travel abroad. For example in 1956 the Soviet Union participated in the Olympic games in Australia, and famous Soviet musicians like violinist David Oistrach or Ballet companies like the Bolshoi Ballet gained international glory performing abroad. The Soviet Union’s international participation improved its image worldwide, and contributed to the Soviet citizens’ conviction that a peaceful coexistence with the West was possible.⁴⁵ A greater amount of Western movies was shown in the cinemas, and for the first time people could watch live performances by major Western European theatre companies, like the Comédie Française, which visited the Soviet Union.⁴⁶

For literature, one of the most important effects of warmer relations between the Soviet Union and the West was the publication of contemporary foreign literature. During Stalin’s rule, the publication choices of for example American literature contributed to a tendentious image of the country. The chosen books were often written long ago and presented the United States as an underdeveloped country from decades ago. During the thaw, an important attributor to the publication of foreign literature was the journal *Inostrannaya Literatura*. In 1928 the journal was founded as *Vestnik Inostrannoi Literatury* (Messenger of Foreign Literature), changed its name to *Internatsionalnaya Literatura* (International Literature) in 1931, but was shut down due to World War II in 1943. In 1955, they continued under the name *Inostrannaya Literatura*.⁴⁷ The journal published mainly contemporary foreign literature, reviews about the published material and sometimes articles about art. Besides works from all Soviet countries and Eastern Europe it printed works from Western, African or Asian countries. With an issue published every month, each edition had a theme, devoted to a group of society, a country or genre.⁴⁸

In the years after Stalin’s death the incorrect image of America was gradually corrected as works that portrayed the current American standard of living. At the same time, authorities favoured literature that discussed themes like social inequality and the unfulfilling character of a bourgeois

⁴² S.E. Reid, “Who Will Beat Whom?: Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,” *Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2008, p. 856.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 863.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 862 - 863.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *A Vision Unfulfilled*, p. 390.

⁴⁶ M. Friedberg, *A Decade of Euphoria: Western Literature in Post-Stalin Russia, 1954-64* (Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 7.

⁴⁷ A. Semenenko, “Smuggling the Other; Rita Rait-Kovaleva’s Translation of J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*,” *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2016, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Friedberg, *A Decade of Euphoria*, p. 7 - 8.

life. Much American literature of this time was critical towards American values and institutions. The fact that authors of such literature were very loyal Americans, and at the same time often critics of communism, was often not mentioned.⁴⁹ Furthermore, foreign literature was frequently censored or even changed, often without their authors knowing about it.⁵⁰ Still, during the thaw changes led to the publication of contemporary foreign literature, and although such works were often published for the above-mentioned reasons, the fact remained that the works of writers like Hemmingway, Faulkner and Salinger were very popular.⁵¹ Interestingly, the publication of American literature increased considerably at the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, which was the same period as the American exhibition and the visit of then Vice President Nixon to the Soviet Union. In 1972, the period before his visit saw the same rise in publication of American literature.⁵² Apparently culture was frequently used as a public relations device, and as a help in emphasizing soft power and a public diplomacy with the West.⁵³

The relationship with the United States was sometimes difficult to understand. On the one hand, the capitalist centre of the world was the example for the standard of living, but on the other hand it was not desirable for citizens to have too many private possessions, as this was an indication of the despised bourgeois character of capitalism.⁵⁴ The United States embodied everything that stood in contradiction to socialist values: extremely rich people lived alongside extremely poor ones, exploitation of workers, and a lack of job security. On the other hand, the country was associated with prosperity, efficiency, a high standard of living and technological progress. The United States were the example of a successful wealthy efficient society and simultaneously the capitalist bourgeois enemy. It resulted in an alternation between resentment and admiration in their relationship and this was reflected in various fields of society.⁵⁵

The contradiction in Western influences in cultural life existed already before the thaw. For example, in music: after World War II the trophy records soldiers brought with them from the Second Front made American Jazz highly associated with defeating the Nazi's. A few years later the genre was condemned during the campaign against cosmopolitanism. While during the thaw Western influences were to some extent tolerated, the conflicting view on America intensified. Jazz music was still constantly either praised due to its origins related to slaves and the working class, or disapproved of as music the bourgeoisie listened to.⁵⁶ It was also apparent in the treatment of the stilyagi. Since none of their acts or items were forbidden in particular, it was hard to get a grip on them. In an attempt to attack them they were condemned in the press for their bourgeois

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 187 - 188.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 20 - 21.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 194 - 201.

⁵² C.R. Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties; an Anthology* (Ardis Publishers, 1972), p. xxvii - xxviii.

⁵³ Friedberg, *A Decade of Euphoria*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Dunham, *In Stalin's Time*, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Friedberg, *A Decade of Euphoria*, p. 186.

⁵⁶ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, p. 164 - 165.

character, presented as uneducated youth and ridiculed for their extravagant looks. By presenting them as a small group of rebellious youth, many youngsters did not want to be associated with them, although they were fans of jazz music and Western cinema themselves.⁵⁷

Cultural forms could thus be interpreted as socialist as well as bourgeois; as good internationalism or as bad cosmopolitanism. The fact that the view on Western culture depended on interpretation caused a trend of perceiving Western cultural influences as bourgeois as a matter of principle, but accepting influences that were very common.⁵⁸ It made the stilyagi a perfect target for emphasizing the fact that in the Soviet Union bourgeois culture was still despised. On the plus side, Soviet citizens could be dedicated socialists and at the same time appreciate American culture.

3.3 Conclusions

This chapter discussed how Soviet society changed during the thaw. Under Khrushchev a platform was created to discuss formerly taboo topics like corruptions and mismanagement in the governmental system. De-Stalinization and rethinking of the past triggered the search for new truth and led to sincerity as an important value in Soviet society. Also, in reaction to the Stalinist past, the emphasis on the collective shifted towards the individual and mainly the common man received more attention. More freedom gave way to the expression of personal experience. In combination with the belief in and enthusiasm about the younger generation, this led to the development of a proper youth culture. Furthermore, eased tensions in the Cold War increased Western influences. They fed the fascination for the West and mainly America, and moreover influenced the characterization of youth culture.

Ambiguity of domestic politics often made it unclear where reforms were heading, and the controversial attitude towards America had a huge impact on many different fields of society. The coexistence of good internationalism and bad cosmopolitanism created an atmosphere in which Soviet citizens could be loyal socialists and at the same time enjoy American culture. It created a climate in which contemporary American literature could be published and enjoyed, but simultaneously its readers were cautioned to be aware of the dangers of capitalism.

Due to the changing literary climate *Inostrannaya Literatura* could publish *The Catcher in the Rye*. In the next chapter, however, we will see that, despite the changing attitude towards America, the editors of *Inostrannaya Literatura* still struggled with the possible influences this bourgeois work could have on the Soviet reader. Although the Soviet interpretation of Salinger's novel was not extremely politicized, we will see that the possibility to present Holden Caulfield as victim of the evil bourgeois life in the United States was of major importance for the publication of Salinger's novel.

⁵⁷ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, p. 171 - 175.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162 - 168.

4

The Process towards Publication

*Despite the fame this book has, a lot of its content is vulgar; it discusses paedophiles and even lesbian love (...). The scepticism of this young man, almost adolescent, concerning studying and morals can harmfully influence our young readers and therefore in my opinion printing this, especially in the edition dedicated to youth, but in general too, will not be possible.*¹

*In my opinion, this novel is very well written and actively represents the aversion towards the American way of living. To print this novel in our journal is necessary.*²

These are the first two statements about *The Catcher in the Rye* I found when doing my research at RGALI. They resemble the most important positions in the internal debate evolving around the publication of Salinger's novel in the journal *Inostrannaya Literatura*. The main question in this discussion was: would it be worth exposing the Soviet readers, and especially youth, to this novel, filled with potentially bad influences, in order to show them the life of youth living in America? In this chapter I will discuss the first part of the documents I found in RGALI. The emphasis lies on the documents that illustrate reasons for and against the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye* at the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura*. First, I will shortly discuss the translation and introduce Soviet critic Vera Panova, who wrote the first review of Salinger's novel. After that I will go into different topics that emerged during the discussion around Salinger's novel and Panova's article, which were supposed to be published together in *Inostrannaya Literatura*. By reconstructing the process that led towards the first publication and analysing the discussion, I hope to provide more insight into the way Western literature, and here in particular American literature, was treated and thought about by editors during the thaw.

¹ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 021, p. 22.

² Ibid., p. 23.

4.1 About the Translation & Panova's Article

When exactly the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* became interested in *The Catcher in the Rye* is hard to determine, as all direct correspondence between the journal, Salinger and the translator Rait is either lost or in closed archives. In 1972, scholar Carl Proffer published his research *Soviet criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*. This work gives a short introduction, written by Proffer, about the publication process and reviewing of foreign literature in the Soviet Union, and contains translations of articles critical of American Literature written by Soviet critics between 1960 and 1972. According to Proffer it was not unusual for translators to take the initiative in suggesting foreign books for publication in the Soviet Union. He states that translators often started a translation anyway, and afterwards persuaded editors to print their work.³ In this case we can indeed assume that Rait herself was probably amongst the people that requested this translation, because of a statement made by S. A. Dangulov, the *zamglavy* (general deputy) of the editorial board at *Inostrannaya Literatura*. During a board meeting he mentioned that ‘this work did not show up by accident (...). It was a request from several translators. Moreover, this (book) has been mentioned often at reader conferences: we certainly have to pay attention to this (work).’⁴

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any documents from the reader conferences Dangulov is referring to, because the RGALI archive has not preserved them over the years. Since *The Catcher in the Rye* quickly became an international bestseller and was published almost a decade before it was first printed in the Soviet Union, it is maybe not so surprising that the journal considered its translation. This novel, which features a young protagonist, seemed to fit *Inostrannaya Literatura*'s November issue of 1960, which was about the life of foreign youth and devoted to the Soviet Union's younger generation. Aside from *The Catcher in the Rye*, the issue contained amongst other things the second half of the German novel *Die Brücke* by Manfred Gregor, two short stories by Mongolian writers, poetry by the Hungarian writer Antal Hidas, and some articles on Russian literature abroad. *The Catcher in the Rye* was as central piece of this edition positioned as one of the first items.

The translation of Salinger's novel was done by Rita Rait-Kovaleva. She was a respected translator, mostly known for her translations of American writer Kurt Vonnegut, which some claimed to be even better than the original works.⁵ It is unclear who exactly gave the green light to Rait for the translation, or whether she had already started by herself. In general, Dangulov was quite involved in the whole process. As the communist ideology was evident in all aspects of society, translated Western books were seen by critics and publishers not just as interesting stories but also

³ Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*, p. xvi.

⁴ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 5, ed. khr. 307, p. 5.

⁵ R. Johnson, “If Holden Caulfield spoke Russian,” *The New Yorker*, September 11, 2013, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/if-holden-caulfield-spoke-russian>.

as carriers of bourgeois values.⁶ During the 1940s the tendency emerged for foreign literature to be more than translated: they should be transformed into substantive Russian literary works, so good that they could replace the original. Therefore, translations of foreign literature were treated not only with caution, but were transformed and had to meet certain language requirements to receive approval for publication.⁷

Rait translated *The Catcher in the Rye* as *Over the Abyss in the Rye* (Над Пропастью во Ржи). She made her translation understandable for Soviet readers by finding Russian equivalents for untranslatable or unknown aspects of American life. For example, since hamburgers did not yet exist, Holden goes for *kotlety* (meatballs) instead. But she did more than finding equivalents. Most of Holden's foul language is censored,⁸ and all references to homosexuality are changed:

Original	Rait's translation	English translation of Rait
I mean I started thinking that even if he was a flit he certainly'd been very nice to me. ⁹	Понимаете, я стал думать, что даже если бы он был со странностями , так ко мне-то он отнесся замечательно. ¹⁰	You know, I started thinking that even if he was a bit weird , he had treated me wonderful.
The other end of the bar was full of flits . They weren't too fitty-looking —I mean they didn't have their hair too long or anything—but you could tell they were flits anyway. ¹¹	А в другом конце бара собрались психи . Вид у них, правда, был не слишком психоватый — ни длинных волос, ничего такого, но сразу можно было сказать, кто они такие . ¹²	At the other end of the bar some lunatics gathered. They honestly did not look that crazy — not with long hair or something like that, but you could tell immediately, they were that sort of people .
Somebody'd written ' Fuck you ' on the wall. It drove me damn near crazy. ¹³	Кто-то написал на стене похабщину . Я просто взбесился от злости. ¹⁴	Someone had written foul language on the wall. I just started raging with anger.

By letting the protagonist speak in correct Russian without slang, Holden sounds much better

⁶ Friedberg, *A Decade of Euphoria*, p. 1.

⁷ A. Borisenko, "Сэлинджер начинает и выигрывает (Salinger starts and wins)," *Inostrannaya Literatura*, No. 7, 2009, accessed May 18, 2017.

⁸ Johnson, "If Holden Caulfield spoke Russian."

⁹ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 175.

¹⁰ J.D. Salinger, *Над Пропастью во Ржи (Over the Abyss in the Rye)*, trans. R. Rait-Kovaleva (Радуга (Raduga), 1983), p. 81.

¹¹ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 129.

¹² Salinger, *Over the Abyss in the Rye*, p. 59.

¹³ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 180 - 181.

¹⁴ Salinger, *Over the Abyss in the Rye*, p. 83.

behaved.¹⁵ Also Rait made Holden's speech more varied by choosing different translations for 'goddamn', 'phony' and 'bastard', words that Holden uses many times:

Original	Rait's translation	English translation of Rait
Goddamn money	Чертовы деньги	Cursed money
The goddamn picture	Этот треклятый фильм	That bloody film
That bastard	Ах, этот подонок	Oh, that bastard
He didn't hesitate to horn in on my date, the bastard	И не постеснялся мерзавец отбивать у меня девушку	And that scoundrel was not ashamed to steal my girlfriend
I was surrounded by phonies	Там была сплошная липа	There it was totally fake
It's so phony	Ужасная пошлятина	It is terribly vulgar ¹⁶

One might expect censorship and modification of the original text would not benefit the quality of the novel. Still, enough of Holden's thoughts and behaviour remained shocking the Soviet reader.¹⁷ Furthermore, many Russians seem to favour Rait's translation over new ones, although that is according to scholar Aleksandra Borisenko probably motivated by the fact they are simply used to Rait's version.¹⁸ In any case, by putting much effort into creating a translation that would be suitable for Soviet readers, Rait played a major part in getting this work approved by the Head Department for Literature and Publishing (Glavit), the organ of censorship supervising writers and translators.

The whole process up until printing of foreign literature always took quite some time. Since a story had to be read and approved by the editorial board and Glavit, it happened from time to time that a translation was finished and paid for but would not end up being published. Before a translation was sent to Glavit, editors tended to proofread works and were so cautious about the content that they often censored quite a lot themselves and not much was left to censor by Glavit. Editors mainly censored passages that contained too much detail about sex or violence, disrespectful references to Russians or the Soviet Union, unrealistic or fantastic events, and pacifist statements. For example in *Catch 22* of American writer Joseph Heller, the statement that World

¹⁵ D.I. Petrenko, "К Вопросу о Переводах на Русский Язык Романа ДЖ.Д. Сэлинджера «The Catcher in the Rye» (The Issue about the Russian Translations of J.D. Salinger's novel "The Catcher in the Rye")," *Вестник Ставропольского государственного университета (Vestnik of the State University of Stavropol)*, No. 48, 2007, p. 75.

¹⁶ Examples found in: L.S. Kustova, "Роман Сэлинджера «Над Пропастью во Ржи» и Его Перевод на Русский Язык (Salinger's Novel "The Catcher in the Rye" and its translation to Russian)," *Вестник Московского Университета (Vestnik of the Moscow University)*, No. 1, 1964, p. 75 - 78.

¹⁷ Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Borisenko, "Salinger starts and wins."

War II was not worth fighting was censored.¹⁹ Although under Khrushchev, due to the relaxation in censorship, the role of editors in choosing what was published increased,²⁰ Glavit still played an important role in the final approval of translations. Reasons for rejection by Glavit were the featuring of anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet, religious, or foreign ideological content.²¹ From the choice of American works translated into Russian we can see that in general realistic critical literature was preferred,²² such as the works of Hemmingway, Vonnegut and Faulkner. Although it may seem that *The Catcher in the Rye* with Holden's negative portrayal of American society fits this preference well, we will see that its printing was almost cancelled as a result of internal disagreement.

I presume that not all members of the editorial board took the time to read the whole translation of *The Catcher in the Rye*, since it was given to them with an in-house review. Although on the one hand this document, written by a *vneshatnyi* (external reviewer), praises the novel for being written so well, on the other hand the author was not convinced that it was suitable for printing:

Although this unusual book seems appealing, the decision of publication raises some doubts. (...) The problems discussed (in the story) are of a narrow-minded and inconvenient nature. It is confusing that the book is written in jargon, which is from time to time very immoral, and even in the most tactical translation the jargon will be still apparent. (...) All these positive and negative considerations need to be taken into account when deciding whether or not Salinger's story is desirable for publication in the journal Inostrannaya Literatura. ²³

Even though the author of the in-house review was not that enthusiastic about *The Catcher in the Rye*, preparations for its publication in the November issue continued. To make sure the novel would be presented to the reader in the right way, Dangulov asked Vera Panova to write an article about *The Catcher in the Rye*, which would be published alongside the novel. She was a well-known Soviet writer, who specialized in writing about children's and family problems.²⁴ In his letter he mentioned to Panova that the novel was of a free-spirited character and motivated the choice for this novel. Here is a fragment of the letter:

Dear Vera Fedorovna!

Thank you for your kind agreement to publish in our journal a writer's response (I do not wish to use the standard word 'article' at any given moment) regarding the novel 'The Catcher in the Rye' by the American writer Salinger.

We turn to you, of course, not out of nowhere, but quite deliberately, convinced that you will

¹⁹ Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*, p. xxiv.

²⁰ H. Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature: 1917-1991* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 146.

²¹ Petrenko, "The Issue about the Russian Translations of J.D. Salinger's novel 'The Catcher in the Rye'," p. 74.

²² Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*, p. xvii.

²³ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 5, ed. khr. 329, p. 12.

²⁴ Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*, p. 3.

fully understand the theme of this work, as well as the thoughts and style of its writer. Salinger is one of the most well-known contemporary American writers and an idol for today's youth (mainly those who enjoyed higher education). In my opinion, this novel (one of his best books) gives us not only an accurate portrait of American youth from halfway through our century, but is furthermore in no lesser extent an indictment of all who are to blame for the mental disorder of today's Western youth. Therefore, we chose to make Salinger's work one of the main pieces of the special issue we are currently preparing about the situation of youth abroad.

What do we expect of you? Of course, not a critical analysis of the novel, but specific comments from a writer, in which you, a person who writes and thinks about today's youth, express your thoughts on this work. And these thoughts will appear, out of agreement, but of course too because of disagreement with Salinger. We are certain that this book leaves nobody indifferent.²⁵

In his research Proffer found that it is much harder to determine the degree of editorial change in critical reviews, than in literature.²⁶ However, the world changed since in 1972, the year in which Proffer published his research. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 it has been much easier to visit Russia and get access to Russian archives. Proffer probably had no access to RGALI, where I discovered different versions of Panova's article. The editors of *Inostrannaya Literatura* did two rounds of corrections on Panova's article, which tell us much about the degree of editorial change.

In her article *On Salinger's Novel*²⁷ Panova discusses the story of *The Catcher in the Rye* and Holden's behaviour. She explains why Holden is an unusual protagonist and *The Catcher in the Rye* a great piece of literature. The emphasis lies on Holden's sincerity and pureness of soul. Interestingly, in earlier versions of her article Panova paid almost no attention to the despicable aspects of Holden's world and she shows much sympathy for the protagonist. The changes were made after the board meeting concerning the final content of the November issue later that year on September 9, 1960. Together with the content of the novel, Panova's article is discussed during this meeting. The main bottlenecks in this discussion were the novel's possible temptations of capitalism, Holden's sincere character, and the homosexual passage about Mister Antolini. The next parts of this chapter discuss each of these topics separately.

4.2 Allurement of Capitalism & the American Way of Life

Apparently the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* had been working on an edition about foreign youth for quite some time. Salinger's novel was supposed to be one of its most important items. *The Catcher in the Rye* was chosen to illustrate to youngsters in the Soviet Union how

²⁵ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 031, p. 183.

²⁶ Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*, p. xxv.

²⁷ For a full version of the article see: V.F. Panova, "On J.D. Salinger's Novel," in *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties; an Anthology*, trans. C.R. Proffer (Ardis Publishers, 1972).

youth lives in the United States.²⁸ However not all editors considered this novel to serve the right purpose, and feared its dangerous influences did not outweigh the didactic purpose. During the board meeting editor I. I. Anisimov came forward as one of the fiercest critics, and blamed Panova for insufficiently addressing the dangers of this novel:

*I agree that this novel of Salinger is a delicately written work (...). However, it simultaneously contains so much inner vulgarity, so much cynicism that I am surprised such a good writer as Panova did not expose these elements in her article. She idealizes this work and its author in the same manner. To me it is unclear how she could fail to evaluate this work properly. If we print this book, we must make clear to the reader what kind of work they are dealing with. This is by no means progressive literature; it is from its core a poisonous work, very cynical and it can trick even compassionate people like Panova.*²⁹

Supporters of the novel, however, saw Holden as a proper example of an American youngster, and blamed his immoral behaviour on his surroundings. Dangulov and editor in chief A. B. Chakovski were the novel's biggest supporters and of the opinion that publishing this work would be a valuable contribution to the November issue. Chakovski stated that he was from the very beginning deeply convinced that this work should be absolutely published and that he would always be an advocate of this work.³⁰ Dangulov explained to the editorial board that Holden was a great example of a youngster getting lost in the capitalist system:

*I think that in its own style this work is far from poisonous and in this regard Panova's testimony shows a lot of character. Panova does not write such an article about every novel. These are the confessions of a sincere boy, lost in the wilderness of a capitalist city. Moreover, the confessions have a symbolic worth. Through the pencil of the author the whole manner of that world looks unattractive and unpleasant. This whole thing is full of social anger and this anger is clearly felt by the reader. This work is of great use in answering the main question: to show how youth lives (in the United States).*³¹

Thus, it should be clear to the reader that Holden is the victim of the despicable capitalist system. The supporters of publication saw through Holden's cynicism that in essence he was pure of heart. However, while understanding Holden's psychological problems, the editors totally disregarded the fact that this probably had a distorting impact on his perspective on things in general. By repeatedly emphasizing that Holden is a victim of capitalism, his depressed and cynical judgement of America is presented as a truthful depiction of reality. As mentioned in the former chapter,

²⁸ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 5, ed. khr. 307, p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

³¹ Ibid., p. 5 - 6.

in general Western authors with a critical view on their government and society were favoured, but the fact that they simultaneously were also critical about communism was ignored by the Soviet Union.³² The interpretation of Salinger's work as criticism towards the American system is probably the main reason Salinger caught the attention of *Inostrannaya Literatura* in the first place. They seem to consider Holden's worldview as interchangeable with that of the author. Since the novel's publication there has been much speculation about whether *The Catcher in the Rye* is an autobiographical novel.³³ The problem with this theory is that Salinger has always avoided the press and never made any public statements. No evidence or statements can be found to sufficiently support such an interpretation, and we can only speculate about both Salinger's personal relation towards his famous protagonist as well as his thoughts on capitalism versus communism.

During the meeting, opponents suggested that Panova's article should be replaced. Supporters, on the other hand, were of the opinion that replacing the article would not do justice to Holden, since Panova managed to describe Holden's essence well. Eventually they agreed on adding some paragraphs to the article, emphasizing the negative aspects of Holden's world.³⁴ Surprisingly, after the meeting only some small details were edited and one paragraph about the world in which Holden lives was added to Panova's article:

*However, with his scepticism, and unconscious cynicism Holden is an intrinsic part of this world (America). He would probably be indignant if he were told this. But it is unquestionably so. Whether Holden likes it or not he is a prisoner of this world, its tastes, its customs; and basically his 'revolt' leads to nothing.*³⁵

Although still nothing is said about the story being told from Holden's perspective, the changes to Panova's article concerning this topic were relatively small. After reading the discussion one might expect much more emphasis on the dangerous allurements of Holden's world for youngsters. I would argue that this shows the liberal cultural climate of this time contributed not only to the publication of more diverse foreign literature, but also to the easing of censorship and growing space for individual interpretation.

4.3 Holden Caulfield: a Sincere Cynic

It is true that this novel could not portray a hero more contrasting to the ones starring in Soviet novels of the past two decades. Holden is pessimistic, scared of adulthood and during the whole

³² Friedberg, *A Decade of Euphoria*, p. 187.

³³ R. Rosenbaum, "He's Not Holden!: The one big mistake people make about Salinger and *Catcher in the Rye*," website: The Spectator, September 12, 2013, accessed May 19, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_spectator/2013/09/interpreting_catcher_in_the_rye_the_one_big_mistake_people_make.html.

³⁴ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 5, ed. khr. 307, p. 12.

³⁵ Adaptation found in: RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 472, p. 5; Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*.

story he does not accomplish anything. Holden's depressed, unsuccessful and indecisive character does not seem to match the positive heroes of Socialist Realistic stories, who with enthusiasm and optimism accomplish great things by fighting social evil or taming wild elements of nature and contribute to the improvement of society.³⁶ Although, as discussed in the former chapter, the strict guidelines of Socialist Realism somewhat eased after 1953, it is clear that for earlier mentioned editor Anisimov this novel was one step too far in breaking with the Socialist Realist tradition. He considers Holden as being a spoiled brat and condemns his immoral behaviour. He furthermore is concerned that Soviet youth could be infected with Holden's behaviour.

*I am seriously concerned about our youth, and to me it seems that this work can infect them. This is a rich boy with plenty of pocket money, who does god knows what, and everybody can start to desire doing similar things here. We should think about what is important to us. Of course we should publish bourgeois literature, nonetheless we should perfectly know what we are contributing (to our society) from this bourgeois literature.*³⁷

However, he was willing to consider publication if the novel was better introduced to the reader. Editor E. F. Trushchenko was less open-minded. He stated that the novel's dominating cynicism was the result of the absence of any ideology (read: evil capitalism) and therefore he was totally against publishing in general.³⁸

An attentive reader understands, and to some extent part of the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* understood too, that Holden Caulfield is not just a random high school dropout, but is severely traumatized by his events of his past: the death of his younger brother, the suicide of his former classmate and maybe even sexual abuse. By recognizing Holden's state of depression, the reader can see his pure heart through his cynical façade. Supporters of this novel understood that it does not matter that Holden accomplishes nothing: his inner identity is more important. They recognized the difference between Holden's inner desires and his actions, and attached more value to the former than to the latter. Although Holden is mentally troubled, Holden's intentions are good: he wants to protect the innocence of children. The boy is pure of heart and because of that he will be alright.

For opponents, it was hard to understand why people would praise Holden for his pure and innocent nature as they only saw his bad behaviour and cynicism. Their misconception of Holden's character was intensified by the fact that the ending left too many things unclear. Anisimov expressed his concerns about Holden's future:

Anisimov: 'Where did you see the purity of this boy? (...) (And) in what way do you get what will

³⁶ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 11.

³⁷ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 5, ed. khr. 307, p. 10.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

come of this boy in the future? The novel's material does not provide any information about this. We do not know, where this boy will end up in the future.'

Litvinova: 'This is symbolically expressed in the part when he confesses, that he would like to save children in the rye; it is also visible when he repels all sort of bad things. Of course the author does not literally say the boy turns out to be a fighter, but it is clear to the reader that the boy will not turn into scum, that he will become a good person.'

*Anisimov: 'Who he becomes is still a question that remains unanswered. (...) I do not believe there are enough arguments for this matter in the novel.'*³⁹

This contradiction illustrates that during the thaw the more progressive editors appreciated complex literary characters and accepted that truth could be more complicated than it seemed at first sight, while the conservative ones still considered that a hero's behaviour was what counted the most.

In reaction to the doubts about Holden's character, Dangulov explained the importance of acknowledging Holden's sincerity. Holden is disgusted by his world, and, as he is in essence sincere, protests to it in his own way. It was good that Panova emphasized this as major theme in her article. Were Holden insincere, his judgement would be worthless. They considered his sincerity of major importance for the correct portrayal of the American way of life.⁴⁰ Besides that, Chakovski was convinced that Soviet youth would find little similarities between Holden's reality and their own. Therefore, he argued that Holden as a dangerous influence on youth's behaviour could be neglected, since his wrongdoings were caused by his terrible surroundings.⁴¹ Depressed juveniles like Holden would not occur in the Soviet Union, where there was no evil capitalism.

However, they agreed that at least some perspective on Holden's future should be given in Panova's article. Initially the article ended with a small biography of Salinger but Anisimov stated that the writer would never agree upon this ending.⁴² The paragraph was deleted from the article and replaced by the following sentence:

*When Holden's heart matures and the chaos of confusion abates in him, may he find that elevated goal, the one in the name of which one wants to live and for the sake of which it is not frightening to die.*⁴³

³⁹ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 5, ed. khr. 307, p. 13 - 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴² Ibid., p. 18.

⁴³ Adaptation found in: RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 472, p. 11; Translation: Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*.

4.4 Discussion about Mister Antolini

The last major issue that is discussed during this meeting is about whether the passage about Holden's old teacher Mister Antolini should be censored or not. The scene in which Holden visits his old teacher, whom he respects and is the only adult he does not think of as 'phony', ends quite obscurely. After talking to Mister Antolini about his future, Holden agrees to spend the night on his couch. He wakes up in the middle of the night when his teacher is stroking Holden's hair out of his face, and Holden interprets this as Mister Antolini making a pass at him.

It is not entirely clear whether Holden's assumption is right and his teacher was making a homosexual advance towards him.⁴⁴ Panova too was uncertain about the interpretation of this scene. In earlier versions of her article she expressed some compassion for Mister Antolini and raised doubts about Holden's interpretation of events:

*Personally I find in (the novel) one major miscalculation. Why Mister Antolini is discredited I do not understand. This is the single vulgar dark brush stroke on a perfectly painted picture. Mister Antolini is depicted as a well thinking and kind person and that is why you hardly believe this accusation. It makes you involuntarily think: maybe this poor Holden, who only knows the sad things about life, simply is too suspicious?*⁴⁵

Interestingly Anisimov stated that the scene with Mister Antolini should absolutely not be censored from the novel and Panova should discuss this matter better in her article. He was convinced that by maintaining the scene in the novel the true nature of this Western bourgeois novel would be revealed.⁴⁶ But deleting the passage expressing sympathy for Mister Antolini from Panova's article was for some members of the editorial board not enough. Editor M. I. Rudomino, declared that she was an advocate of this work, for it showed the life of American youth and universal themes relevant for youngster. But she despised the incident with Mister Antolini. She argued for the complete removal of the visit to this to the teacher, so 'nothing bad will come of this'⁴⁷, and that she would not feel comfortable if her children would read something like this.⁴⁸ The enthusiasm of *Inostrannaya Literatura's* general deputy and editor in chief has been of major importance for the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, but furthermore for limiting the degree of censoring. They were of the opinion this passage should definitely remain and that as little as possible should be deleted from Salinger's novel. Dangulov declared that certain elements are just inherent to bourgeois literature, and that the most important aspect of this novel was its social content and artistic quality.⁴⁹ In the end a compromise was made. The episode was not removed from the novel,

⁴⁴ Y. Takeuchi, "Salinger's the Catcher in the Rye," *The Explicator*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2002, p. 165.

⁴⁵ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 472, p. 12.

⁴⁶ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 5, ed. khr. 307, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

but Panova's article was edited. Throughout the article comments that hint toward too much compassion were deleted. The earlier quoted passage indicating sympathy for Mister Antolini was removed from the article and replaced by this one:

*Antolini doesn't know what will happen to his pupil. And Holden does not know what is ahead of him. But even the author does not see anything good for his hero in the future. The novel is tragically hopeless; everything is as if enclosed in a small space which is suffocating, gloomy, and without exit.*⁵⁰

4.5 Conclusions

When Panova's article was edited, the editorial board agreed upon publishing. They concluded that, if properly presented, this novel was indeed a good work to show how youth lived in America. It would be clear to the reader that Holden was a victim of his unpleasant surroundings. Holden was an unusual hero, who saw the evils of his world through his sincere and pure nature and protested it in his own way.

The discussion and following adaptations on Panova's article show that Holden as part of the capitalist world was acknowledged, but other elements of the novel were valued higher. Although for some editors Holden's complex character stood too far from the traditional Socialist Realist heroes, others appreciated his inner sincere character in spite of his actions.

Proffer explained in his research that Soviet critics always were bothered in the interpretation of American literature by their lack of first-hand experience in the United States, and therefore had no correct image of American reality and everyday life.⁵¹ For Panova this was of course true, as she never visited the United States herself. However, her article about Holden's world 'in which it is bad to live'⁵² initially did not overemphasize his hostile environment. And even after some adaptations the themes that make this novel up until nowadays relevant, are presented as most important in the article. While *The Catcher in the Rye* takes place at a certain place in a specific time, Holden's struggle with a traumatic past and the transiency of life are eternal.

The discussion at *Inostrannaya Literatura* demonstrates how the editors were still figuring out how to treat and present American literature, since it featured capitalist temptations. Panova's article was edited and censored. However, in the end the emphasis in treatment of *The Catcher in the Rye* lay much more on the work as a didactic youth novel than a carrier of bourgeois values.

⁵⁰ Adaptation found in: RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 472, p. 11; Translation: Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*.

⁵¹ Proffer, *Soviet Criticism of American Literature in the Sixties*, p. xxxii.

⁵² Panova, "On J.D. Salinger's Novel," p. 8.

5

Publication and Reception

The last chapter focussed on the reception of *The Catcher in the Rye* from the point of view of the editors of *Inostrannaya Literatura*. In this chapter I would like to focus on the reception of Salinger's novel from a different angle by examining letters from readers after the first publication. First of all I will discuss the details of the publication of the November issue and the letter archiving policy of *Inostrannaya Literatura*. After that, I will analyse two letters. By adding the readers' perspectives on this matter I intend to provide more insight into the way American literature was thought of and experienced by the Soviet society.

5.1 The Readership of *Inostrannaya Literatura*

In November 1960 *Inostrannaya Literatura* published its youth edition. In that year a total of about 600 thousand copies were printed, which were mainly distributed in the big cities such as Moscow and Leningrad. It was not possible to purchase a magazine in a regular bookstore: to get hold of a copy one had to be a subscriber of the magazine. Another possibility was reading a copy in a library. According to the current editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* Salinger's novel was very popular amongst youngsters in Moscow and Leningrad, but was not that well known in the provincial areas.¹ Unfortunately there are no records containing the number of subscribers or details about which cities subscribers of *Inostrannaya Literatura* lived in, nor the exact amount of copies of this particular edition. I could not find any statistics on this topic in RGALI either, so it is hard to determine the exact readership of *Inostrannaya Literatura*, let alone that of a specific edition.

Considering the fact that 600 thousand copies were printed for a population of roughly more than 200 million people², it is not so surprising that *The Catcher in the Rye* was better known in the

¹ It was difficult to find information of the first publication, so I consulted the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura* directly.

They provided me with the given details. They responded to my request at May 15 2017

² B.A. Anderson and B.D. Silver, "Growth and Diversity of the Population of the Soviet Union," *Annals of the American*

big cities. Still, the circulation of *Inostrannaya Literatura* was not that small in comparison with other journals. Although the paper shortages were slowly decreasing in the post-war years, due to the increasing popularity of journal subscriptions in general, throughout the fifties and sixties journals struggled to meet readers' demand. Shortages were not unusual and often publishers complained about the limited circulation possibilities, as the state regulated the number of copies that were printed. As a comparison to *Inostrannaya Literatura*, the journal *Novyi Mir*, which, as mentioned before, printed much famous Russian literature, had a circulation of 100 thousand copies in 1960.³ In *The Readers of Novyi Mir* scholar Denis Kozlov describes the reading habits that existed amongst its readers. Apparently, it was not unusual to share journals and lend them to relatives, neighbours, friends and acquaintances. Besides that, one could read a copy in the library. This way one copy could have been read by many people and this was true for all literary journals that existed around that time, including *Inostrannaya Literatura*.⁴ Thus, a relatively large number of the November edition of *Inostrannaya Literatura* was printed, and it probably reached a bigger number of people than the number of printed copies. However, this still tells us nothing specific about the number of readers of the first publication of Salinger's novel.

I had hoped to find more details by looking at the amount of letters sent to *Inostrannaya Literatura* about its November edition. Unfortunately the results were disappointing. Between 1960 and 1963, which means a total of 36 issues, only about 180 letters from readers have been preserved, from which only ten discussed *The Catcher in the Rye*. In total only 23 different files containing about 900 letters are preserved from 1955 until 1963. After the year 1963 the journal completely abolished the preservation of letters. In comparison: *Novyi Mir* preserved about 600 files containing 12 thousand letters dating from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. Apparently this was very unusual and mainly due to the attitude of its then editor in chief Aleksandr Tvardovsky, who abolished the policy of letter disposal that many other journals had.⁵ Considering the bigger circulation of *Inostrannaya Literatura*, it seems logical that the journal maintained a policy of letter disposal, keeping only the most important letters. It is quite unfortunate that we have no data on the exact readership, as it could have provide more details about the novel's popularity and an estimation of the amount of sent letters.

5.2 Letters from Readers: Contradiction in Perception

After reading six of the files containing letters from readers (I started reading in the ones with letters from after the publication of 1960's November edition) I found that a vast majority of the letters contained requests. These requests already indicated the variety of impressions the novel made amongst its readers: while one letter writer is lyrical about Salinger's work, another worries

Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 510 1990, p. 165.

³ Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, p. 33 - 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11 - 12.

about the content. However, this is still quite superficial. Luckily two of the preserved letters are worth mentioning. Even though it is not clear what the guidelines for letter disposal were, it could be possible that these two survived up until now because they were both written like a short essay and give an unreserved opinion. In comparison to the request letters, which all have been answered, sadly no response to either of these letters has been preserved. In any case, I believe it is safe to say that from the whole collection of letters that presumably have been sent, these two letters can be considered representative for the most outspoken point of views amongst them, as they represent either the most progressive and conservative mind-sets that were apparent during the thaw.

The first letter I want to discuss portrays the reader's positive review of the novel and a progressive attitude. The letter is sent just after the November edition was published:

Dear members of the editorial board!

I read the novel "The Catcher in the Rye." I certainly presume that you will receive a lot of letters from readers. It's been long since a novel made such a strong impression on me. Maybe when I read "What is to be Done" by Chernyshevsky in school. But I do not wish to compare these two works of course. In this book it is all about a feeling of major sincere sympathy towards the hero, who himself wishes to become a better and more honest person. Holden is in essence a very honest boy. Because of this the work probably made such a strong impression. His relationship towards other teenagers, young lads and stilyagi is shown very strongly in the novel. Unwittingly you get used to the fact that the quite unusual lifestyle is part of America, especially when it comes to the education and development of youngsters. After remembering the novel "The Fourth Vertebra" you are once again sure of it.

And although their way of life strongly differs from ours, there are of course many similarities in psychology and behaviour of youth in any country. Especially in the intimate sphere. The relationships between boys and girls are often not as clear as it is officially believed. In particular in thought and word. And especially for teenagers and stilyagi.

In our literature nobody writes about such relationships in their true light, it is totally taboo. In Western literature and films this topic appears quite often, but in such a form, where one wishes to behave in a way that is not accepted. When our authors, especially the females, write all sorts of pathetic moralizing stories, they are not convincing. On the contrary, they are annoying.

In that perspective the given book is extraordinarily interesting. The story has an enormous convincing power. This is a masterpiece of world literature. It is a unique work. It is good that it is written in a certain language, with slang. It gives the book a particular vitality, credibility and clarity. It is absolutely necessary to print this book and sell the largest number of copies possible.

By the way I do not agree that this novel is tragic and without any perspective. It is not without

reason that it is titled "The Catcher in the Rye". In the end, the title is explained. The first impression of this novel is quite cheerful. It is quite certain that Holden is becoming aware of the purpose of his life. That purpose is helping the weaker and fighting for justice.

*Vladimir Tuturyi, engineer, 01-12-1960*⁶

This letter illustrates well how *The Catcher in the Rye* corresponds with the characteristic tendencies of the thaw as discussed in chapter one. First of all, there is the high value of sincerity and honesty. It is the first and most important reason Tuturyi mentions for his appreciation of the book: Holden's sincere character and desire to become a better and more honest person make him a hero in the eyes of the reader. Secondly, Tuturyi understands and accepts that truth can be more complex, by seeing Holden's inner identity and his actions separately, attaching more value to the former than to the latter. Despite Holden's behaviour he recognizes the protagonist's inner desire to become a catcher in the rye, a protector of innocence. Thirdly, Tuturyi does not seem to think it is necessary for a story to portray a positive hero in order to be an inspiration for its readers. Despite Holden's pessimistic attitude and questionable behaviour, Tuturyi considers *The Catcher in the Rye* to be an inspirational and positive book, since Holden's intentions are good. This illustrates the transition from extraordinary 'positive heroes', which were so important in Socialist Realistic literature under Stalin, to a more ordinary protagonist, provided that his intentions were good. Also, the honest discussion of themes like sex, are unique according to Tuturyi. His conviction about the importance of youngsters reading truthfully about these topics without any cover up indicate Tuturyi's progressive mind-set and appreciation for the younger generation. Lastly, there is his enthusiasm for the language of this book. The fact that he considers the neologisms and slang of *The Catcher in the Rye* a contribution to the liveliness and credibility of the story is another reason his progressive attitude is reflected.

From this letter, we can determine what kind of person Tutury must have been. He signed his letter mentioning he is an engineer and furthermore refers to two famous literary works. I presume that he did this to let the journal know he is not just some nobody, but a well-educated man and respected Soviet citizen, in order to ensure that his message is taken more seriously. Firstly, he mentions Chernyshevsky's utopian work *What is to be Done*, written in 1863. At the time this optimistic and radical work inspired many revolutionists, amongst whom Vladimir Lenin himself.⁷ It furthermore influenced the development of symbolic story patterns in Socialist Realistic literature, which made it a classic in the Soviet literary canon and part of the required reading list in schools.⁸ The reference to this novel could be interpreted as Tuturyi's desire to present himself as

⁶ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 071, p. 122-123.

⁷ S.A. Werner, "The Reality Effect and the Real Effects of Chernyshevsky's What Is to Be Done?," *Novel: a Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2014, p. 422.

⁸ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 49.

a well-educated person, and moreover as a loyal communist, who knew his classics. The other book he mentions is *The Fourth Vertebra, or a Scamp Despite Himself* from the Finnish writer Martti Johannes Larni, written in 1958. This book was translated to Russian and published in 1959. The satirical novel describes the 'American way of life' and made Larni one of the best-known Finnish writers in the Soviet Union.⁹ The mention of this novel indicates that Tuturyi was familiar with the latest publications of foreign literature, and moreover that he was politically aware and interested in the United States. However, he has a dual attitude towards American culture. He figures that in the United States the unusual lifestyle of teenagers must be as described in this novel, since he read about the American way of life in the satirical novel *The Fourth Vertebra* too. The way he confesses to accepting the capitalist reality Holden lives in, gives the impression that he thinks that, as a Soviet citizen, he should feel guilty for accepting it unconsciously. He also admits that Western literature and films often evoke immoral behaviour. In this way Tuturyi expresses his awareness for the potentially bad influence that *The Catcher in the Rye* can have on readers. At the same time, Tuturyi underlines the fact that similarities should exist between youngsters in America and the Soviet Union, and that we could learn from the liberating way Salinger describes their relations.

In conclusion, this letter not only illustrates the changing tendencies of thaw, but moreover the double attitude towards American culture. The letter shows that Tuturyi could be a dedicated socialist, aware of the dangers of capitalism and immoral behaviour, and simultaneously be a good internationalist, for appreciating certain aspects of Salinger's novel by seeing the truthful way these themes are portrayed as an example.

Someone less enthusiastic was a certain Aleksei Petrovich. He was disappointed in Panova, Rait and the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* and therefore decided to send them a seven page long essay. Even though I did not succeed in translating everything because of the undecipherable handwriting, the essence of this letter is clear:

Dear members of the editorial board!

Of course I do not think for a minute that you would come up with a similar article against Kovaleva, Panova and others from your editorial board. But I am convinced that you will tell them with respect my wishes.

28-01-1961

Aleksei Vasilev Petrovich,

Member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since 1928

Leningrad, (address)

⁹ "Martti Larni," website: Goodreads, accessed May 31, 2017, http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/719452.Martti_Larni.

To write only about the necessary and useful

To me as a reader, it always seemed, (indeed in the last years in literature this has been the case most of the time), that journals should do the best they can in bringing us new literature. (...) Experience shows that new stories should be devoted to the important and basic things of life, in short, they should be typical. They should be about good and bad, but preferably good characters and situations, which today are the main, decisive, (...) and most often needed things for our people. This unquestionable rule is (...) sacredly complied with magazines like Zvezda, Neva and Novyi Mir etc. In case the rule of the need to be typical is not complied with these named journals, it is not that terrible. (...) Sometimes a writer or editor makes a mistake, and the reader himself is able to correct them.

But it is a different case with the journal *Inostrannaya Literatura*. Even if someone has been abroad for a long time, he does not have the right to consider himself an expert on life, (...) Someone else who has stayed at home, voluntarily or not, is forced to take what is printed for the truth. And so the rule of publishing about the typical should be complied with the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura* even more strictly than other journals. *Inostrannaya Literatura* is one of the media through which the Soviet reader can learn about foreign life. (...)

In the 11th edition of 1960 the journal printed the novel of J.D. Salinger "The Catcher in the Rye." About what kind of a reality is this? What is useful about it? (...) What could the Soviet reader have learned about American life or, as the Americans themselves say, about the way of life.

If the magazine will print more similar novels, since they obviously seem to gather more than enough of them, what will we learn from it. Especially young people will get the impression that there is no life there (...) and only some lazy good-for-nothing boys like Holden Caulfield. And even if this is the truth, why should we care? (...) These American rulers develop all sorts of aggressive plans, without any vision. They are based on nothing, on dollars. But it is not about money, people are more important. With all respect for the editorial board of this journal, I cannot agree with the decision that it was necessary to print this work.

Good-for-nothings and cynics, especially at a certain age, are as similar and not needed in America as here with us. It would be different if from this cynic would come something useful. A useless type is an unwanted type. Who, especially of our youngsters, will understand that Holden switches schools that often because he is not liked (...). But easy to understand is that he is offered a girl and what happened in the taxi, etc.

Obviously, V. Panova wrote the afterword for this novel with good intentions, but if you would ask me, she considers it to be necessary and (...) for our sixteen year olds to read this novel. But not only sixteen year olds, also twenty year olds (...). No, this is not rebellion against reality, against working for a Cadillac, but immorality.

The story above is obvious and all the confusion happening with Holden is explained by the system in his country and the disorders of his school, but there is no need to apply any special

considerations to him. And we absolutely do not need to print this work and admire it, just because the boy has a good character. The writer has talent, he writes well and beautifully, and he does not cover up the truth, does not keep silent about evils, and shows everything in its true nature. But to me it always seemed that only those who evoke something, guides and (...), can be called talented. We have good reasons to argue for this and therefore I wonder what this novel evokes, according to V. Panova and the editorial board. Worst case scenario it could evoke pity for Holden, sympathy. But that should not be the case. What kind of sympathy could a normal person have for such a lazy fellow, who does not even care for his parents.

Last, something should be said about the language, but that depends maybe on preference. (...) *Stilyaginess, cynicism, (...) 'David Copperfield kind of crap', [the rest of the paragraph gives examples of slang]. This is not even a tenth of the amount of verbal nonsense that appears in this novel. But it is obvious that with his words Holden makes the reader sick. But neither the editors nor the translator were bothered. (...) I am inclined to think that (...) you will only meet such expressions in old Russian texts. And it is obvious, that this jargon is of (...) the people from Odessa, who we can only consider to be scum.*

*In short, I want to say that people with insufficient vocabulary should not be given the right to work with literature. Literature is a sacred thing and something for the masses. To bring the masses such nonsense, only because the work is good or even profoundly outspoken, should not be the case. In the world in general, and even more in our Soviet world only the sensible, good, eternal should be spread, not weeds. They should be weeded. That is what I wish for *Inostrannaya Literatura* in the future.¹⁰*

As before, the way this letter is written says much about its writer. Petrovich wants to make sure people take his opinion seriously. Although he does not mention any specific literary works like Tuturyi did, he gives the impression that he is a literature fanatic and emphasizes the important role literature must fulfil in society. Furthermore, he not only signed his letter mentioning he is a member of the Socialist Party, but he also writes that he has been this since 1928. Thus, Petrovich was probably a well-read person, loyal communist and somewhere about the age of sixty when he read *The Catcher in the Rye*.

From the way he writes we can clearly tell Petrovich had a more conservative attitude towards literature. For him this novel broke too much with the Socialist Realist tradition. His biggest issue with *Inostrannaya Literatura* is their choice to publish a story about an atypical and cynical hero. Holden is indeed very cynical and it is far from possible to describe him as positive or optimistic. Besides the portrayal of a 'positive hero', one of the most important characteristic features of a Socialist Realist novel, was the need for typical personas and events, described as *typichnost* (being typical). It was important to make novels understandable to educate the mass.¹¹ Literature should

¹⁰ RGALI, f. 1573, op. 3, ed. khr. 133, p. 67-70.

¹¹ Weststeijn and Langeveld, *Moderne Russische Literatuur*, p. 280 - 281.

above all teach citizens about good socialist behaviour by giving them proper examples. Obviously Holden's immoral behaviour does not comply with this desire. Petrovich emphasizes more than once the importance of *typichnost* and questions if anything could be learned from this work. It indicates that he still highly values the features of the Socialist Realist stories as published in the 1930s and 1940s.

His conservative attitude is furthermore shown in the fact that Petrovich could not see Holden's behaviour separately from his inner identity. He cannot agree with the changing tendencies of thaw that gave more inner complexity to literary characters, and thinks that a character's actions are as important as his intentions and thoughts. Holden's behaviour was not rebellious but simply immoral. Therefore, he disapproves of the fact that excuses are made for Holden, which could lead to compassion for the protagonist. In short, this work could do more harm than good. Nobody could learn from this, especially not youngsters, in whose case it may be too difficult to understand Holden.

Besides that, Petrovich seems to have a problem with the language. Rait did her best to transform the American text so that it would be understandable for the Soviet reader. In order to find Russian equivalents that would be not as vulgar as the swear words and slang Holden uses, she apparently looked to old Russian texts for inspiration. This helped her in keeping the essence of the text without having to drastically change the overall structure.¹² But it gave Petrovich the impression that Rait was unsuitable for making proper translations. His resistance to the unusual language Rait used in her translation is more proof of Petrovich's conservative attitude.

Lastly, Petrovich's attitude towards America differs a lot from that of Tuturyi. Again the lack of didactic elements in this novel seems to bother Petrovich, as he sees nothing good can be learned from a system without any ideology and motivated by money. And while Tuturyi seems mostly to be saddened by the fact that the peculiar lifestyle of American youth must be truth, Petrovich is outspokenly hostile, and only sees danger in anything from the United States.

5.3 Conclusions

Although *The Catcher in the Rye* was apparently quite popular, concrete reasons for the novel's popularity were initially hard to find. In this chapter I tried to discover how the novel was received by looking at letters from readers to *Inostrannaya Literatura*. The number of preserved letters from readers is small, but presumably a bigger amount had been sent. Some of the letters that still exist are written quite extensively and are presumably representative of the most outspoken opinions amongst readers.

On the one hand Salinger's novel was greeted with enthusiasm, and praised for Holden's sincere character, the vivid language, and showing the American way of life. On the other hand the

¹² Vonnegut, "Invite Rita Rait to America!"

novel was condemned for spreading despicable capitalist influences from America. The contradiction between the letter writers' opinions illustrate that increased American influences in Soviet society were not greeted with enthusiasm by everyone during the thaw. While one applauds the American way of life, another strongly condemns the spreading of capitalism through this novel. Interestingly, just as members of the editorial board, the enthusiastic letter writer also struggled to which extent he could enjoy the American influences. Learning about the American way of life was important, but the novel could simultaneously evoke immoral behaviour. This shows that, besides editors, ordinary citizens too were still searching how to deal with increasing Western influences and capitalist temptations.

Of course if more letters would have been preserved, or correspondence with Panova or Rait about this matter would be open for investigation, more research could be done into the reader's perception of Salinger's novel.

6

Conclusion

The Catcher in the Rye made quite an impression and has been popular ever since its first publication in Soviet Russia. A significant amount of research has been done on the translation to Russian, but nothing has been written about concrete reasons for the book's popularity yet. For this thesis I therefore examined the reception of *The Catcher in the Rye's* first publication in the Soviet Union.

I examined the reception of this novel from different angles: editors and ordinary readers. The primary sources used, letters from readers and records of meetings of the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura*, form the core of this research. Through the reception of this novel we can not only understand changes in the literary climate, but furthermore see how people struggled with their attitude towards Western influences.

Salinger's youth novel was published during the thaw, a period in which the Soviet society changed a lot due to Khrushchev's reforms and de-Stalinization. Adjustments were necessary to return to the pure Leninist ideology and get back on track on the way towards communism. In reaction to the emerging knowledge about corruption and malpractice of the past, sincerity and truth were highly valued in society. In order to process the traumatic past, room for personal experience grew and people tended to differentiate themselves from the regime. The thaw was a hopeful time, which saw a lot of enthusiasm about the Soviet Union's younger generation, as they were untouched by the Stalinist past. The growing attention for youngsters and the increasing room for individuality contributed to the development of a youth culture in these years. Due to easing tensions in the Cold War, Western influences increased and the America fascination had amongst other things a determining influence on the characterization of youth culture. Changing tendencies of thaw were reflected in Russian literature, which saw the return of contemporary Western literature and the emergence of the youth novel, such as *A ticket to the Stars* by Aksenov.

However, controversial politics often made it unclear where things were heading. This was seen amongst other things in the ambiguous attitude towards America and American cultural influences.

On the one hand foreign culture could be enjoyed while being a good communist, on the other hand it was despised for being bourgeois. Good internationalism existed next to bad cosmopolitanism. Knowing more about the period in which Salinger's novel was published helps understand the discussion around *The Catcher in the Rye*. The discussion shows that not only the government was still looking for a way to deal with Western influences.

The editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* acknowledged that this novel had possible dangerous influences, such as Holden's cynicism, bad behavior and foul language. They concluded, however, that these characteristics were a product of the protagonist's evil capitalist world, of which he was undoubtedly a part. The possibility of capitalist influences on the reader were acknowledged, but Holden's sincerity and search for truth were prioritized. Besides this, the story's illustration of the American way of life played a decisive part in compelling towards agreement on the approval for publication. In the end adaptations in the novel and article by Panova were relatively small. In Panova's article the emphasis stayed on Holden's pure character. It illustrates that the dangerous allurements of capitalism became subordinate to the desire to show youngsters sincerity and the American way of life. The discussion shows how the editorial board struggled with the treatment of literature from capitalist countries, but found a way to deal with this novel.

We have seen that *The Catcher in the Rye* has been transformed to make it suitable for the Soviet reader, but enough of Holden's behavior and language was left to shock the Soviet reader. According to a more conservative reader, the new language was unnecessary and nothing could be learned from this novel. Holden could only stimulate youngsters to become unnecessary good for nothings. Moreover, evil American influences were unwanted in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, an enthusiastic reader thought that Rait's adaptations and language choices made the story lively and believable. Just as for the editorial board of *Inostrannaya Literatura*, the most important reason for the book's success was Holden's sincere character and the way this book shows the American way of life. Interestingly, even the enthusiastic reader, just as the supporters of the editorial board, clearly was struggling with his appreciation for Western literature, as he acknowledged the novel's capitalist features could as well evoke immoral behaviour.

The discussion of the board of *Inostrannaya Literatura* and the interpretations of readers show how Western influences were treated differently by citizens. On the one hand, we see that not everyone was enthusiastic about Western literature. Some were of the opinion that in literature a hero should not be a cynic, but an inspirational example, in order to educate the reader. They furthermore condemned American culture and saw capitalism still as their biggest threat. On the other hand, we can conclude that others enjoyed Western literature, while still considering themselves to be loyal communists. Their values altered due to the changes of thaw, and in their eyes a good communist was amongst other things sincere and internationally orientated. One could appreciate American culture and be inspired by it. However, to which extent they could appreciate all aspects of bourgeois literature, remained a difficult question.

The thaw was a turbulent but optimistic time that saw the development of youth culture and the growing availability of Western literature, films and music. It made the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye* possible. Although the climate under Khrushchev gave more nuance to the thinking about the United States in general, people were still figuring out how to deal with the increasing Western influences and allurements of capitalism. If other primary sources from that time were found, such as letters to Panova, Rait and Salinger, or reviews, a more detailed view on the reception of the book could be formed. However, the discussed letters and records give to an extent an impression of the book's reception, changes in the literary climate and the way Soviet society treated Western literature.

Consulted Archives

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