Russian Literature from 1900 to present: a brief summary

The 1917 revolution instigated social and political repercussion throughout the world, attempted a total reshaping of the human being in relation to the environment.

Since 1900 the literature of Russia has passed through three distinct stages:

1. **a brilliant period of creativity**, with highly educated and talented poets, thinkers, critics, and prose writers, who similarly to many Western writers, searched for new symbols, myths, and language to redefine philosophy and the arts.

--during the 17 year span between the Tsarist and Soviet regimes, an interim period when literary censorship was abolished, there was a real cultural explosion. Blok, Yesenin, a futurist Mayakovskiy, Tsvetayeva, and forty years later a poetical novel of Boris Pasternak.

2. Literary development immediately after the civil War in the 1920s—**the epoch of Revolutionary Romanticism**, following the chaos and devastation of seven years of war. Malevich and Kandinsky in art; in contrast to erudite critics, proletarian circles advocated a worker’s and peasant’s literature that would directly reflect the life of the masses. Trotsky characterized the twenties as an age of transition, and wrote unprophetically in

   “Literature & Revolution”(1923): “…the fantastic revolutionary reality would make its own way and by its own means … the domain of art is not one in which the Party is called upon to command.”

Within ten years, Stalin has successfully launched the “second revolution” by imposing a socio-political aesthetic on all literature that eventually sealed off the writer’s creative initiative. The writer was mobilized into the country’s labor force to serve in the construction of the socialist state.

He was to be guided by the principles of the Socialist Realism:

   - Optimistic & enthusiastic concept of the new life under socialism
   - Glorifying real-life heroes in their military and labor feats
   - Express dedication to the Party, Worship the Leader, exhibit anti-Westernism, and fulfill some specific propaganda aims
   - Lenin and Stalin sincerely believed in the printed word as an instrument of Power.

3. **The Thaw**—the Party’s temporary indecisiveness in cultural matters after Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin (Solzhenitsyn, Yevtushenko, Panova, Kazakov.