

# The Committee for Contemporary Literature and Unpublished Formalist Books

VALERII OTIAKOVSKII  
University of Tartu

## Abstract

The article examines the corpus of archival documents related to the creation and functioning of the Committee for Contemporary Literature at the Institute of Art History. This academic unit was important for the Formalists because they considered this Committee a platform for uniting scholars with poets and writers. The Institute's documents contain vital information on the unrealized book projects of the Committee. Among these proposed plans were a collection of reviews by Tynjanov, several volumes of the well-known series *Masters of Contemporary Literature*, and a collection of papers on contemporary literature by the Junior Formalists.

**Keywords:** Institute of Art History; Tynjanov, Ėjchenbaum; Junior Formalists; Academia publishing house.

One of the distinctive features of the Formalists as an academic community was their willingness to interact with the field of contemporary literature. Šklovskij, Tynjanov, and Ėjchenbaum regularly acted not only as researchers, but also as literary critics and writers. This paper considers their curatorial activities in the second half of the 1920s, when most Formalists in Leningrad were affiliated with the Institute of Art History (Zubov Institute)<sup>1</sup>. The role of the Institute in the development of the Leningrad humanities is enormous; this importance is well explained in the literature (for example: Ulicka 2023). However, the inner layout of the Formalists Institution is described poorly, so my paper outlines the configuration of the Institute's divisions, particularly in the area of Formalists' interactions with contemporary literature field.

---

1 I am thankful to Assol Vlasova, Venja Gushchin and Benjamin Mussacio for their help in editing of this paper.

Even before the creation of the Literature Department (LITO)<sup>2</sup>, contemporary literature was linked to the Institute – for example, in 1919 Nikolaj Gumilëv gave a lecture on Aleksandr Blok, and in 1921 the Institute held an event commemorating the Symbolist poet’s recent passing. However, the real institutional frame for studying contemporary literature began to develop in 1923 when the Office of Research on Artistic Speech (Kabinet po izučeniju Chudožestvennoj Reči, KICHr) was created at the Institute. The mission of this new unit was “to discover the laws of verse through the empirical study of recitation, specifically to identify its inner melodic structures” (Zolotuchin 2015: 55). The research materials of KICHr consisted of recordings of poets reading their verses, so the existence of this academic unit was unimaginable without regular collaboration with the writers themselves. It is worth noting that the aim to create a unit for the study of recitation at the Institute was grounded in longstanding Formalist interests: from the early years of OPOYAZ, the future supervisor of KICHr Sergei Bernstein had published articles written under the influence of German Ohrenphilologie. This interest in recitation determines the background of several Formalist works, among which are Ėjchenbaum’s *The Melodics of Russian Lyric Verse* and Tynjanov’s *Ode as an Oratorical Genre*. KICHr also had a direct predecessor: in the 1920–1923, Bernstein led the phonetic laboratory at the Institute of the Living Word (Institut Živogo Slova, IŽS), where the initial corpus of poetic speech was recorded and KICHr was an heir to this laboratory.

A few months after the opening of KICHr, the Committee (or Commission) of Research on Artistic Speech at the Institute was also founded. It was led by Ėjchenbaum: “With its appearance at the Institute, the two-part structure of research that had developed in the IŽS was reproduced: empirical work in the laboratory, the role of which was taken on by KICHr, and theoretical work – at Committee meetings” (Zolotukhin, Schmidt 2018: 379)<sup>3</sup>. However, as Valery Zolotukhin notes, at the same time we could observe a noticeably declining interest in the problems of recitation in the circle of ex-members of OPOYAZ such as Ėjchenbaum, Tynjanov, Tomaševskij, Žirmunskij and Jakubinskij. This is explicitly stated in the Institute’s report for the third quarter of 1924: according to the author of the report, the material of the KICHr “can be

2 We use this term even in a relation to the early years of Department when it was called *Razryad Izučeniya Slovesnyh Iskusstv*.

3 Here and further translations are mine.

considered exhausted for contemporary scholarship” (Zolotuchin 2015: 56). In the mid-1920s, the Formalists moved from immanent analysis to the problems of constructing a historical narrative and the development of models for literary evolution, the study of “neighboring” series, etc. Bernstein and his studies started to drift towards other Departments of the Institute (Theatrical, Musical). In this context, it was unprofitable to maintain two institutional units related to Artistic Speech, and at the end of 1923, another reorganization took place at the Institute. The minutes for the History of Literature Department of the Russian Institute of Art History meeting at December 12, 1923 helps explain the details of the reconfiguration:

1) Report of the Chairman <Viktor Žirmunskij> on the reorganization of academic work in the Department. The project proposes to transfer the activities of the Society for the Study of Verbal Arts and the Committee of Research on Artistic Speech in two sections of the Department. In this regard, the Society and the Committee are not abolished, but the nature of their activities is changed. The Committee is renamed the Committee for the Study of Contemporary Literature, with the involvement of representatives from contemporary literature and criticism. The activities of the Committee may include the discussions on works of art, reports of writers about their own work, critical reports on the problems of contemporary literature, etc.<sup>4</sup>

On January 6, the declared reorganization began, which is described by Eĵchenbaum in his diary:

---

4 «Слушали: 1) Доклад Председателя <В. М. Жирмунского> о реорганизации научной работы Разряда. Проект предполагает перенести в Разряд деятельность Общества Изучения Художественной Словесности и Комитета Изучения Художественной Речи в качестве двух секций Разряда. В связи с этим Общество и Комитет не упраздняются, а изменяют характер своей деятельности. Комитет переименовывается в Комитет по изучению современной литературы, с привлечением в него представителей современной литературы и критики. Деятельность Комитета могла бы состоять в обсуждении художественных произведений, сообщениях авторов о собственном творчестве, критических докладах о современных явлениях литературы и т. д.» (Central State Archive of Art and Literature in Saint-Petersburg [further – CGALI SPb] 82/1/67/106).

Yesterday there was an interesting meeting at the Institute of Art History: an organization of the *Committee for the Study of Contemporary Literature*. From our Department – Žirmunskij, Tomaševskij, Tynjanov, Kazanskij, Žukov; from the writers – Zamjatin, Fedin, Kaverin, N. Tikhonov, Roždestvenskij, Gruzdev, Petrovskij. The discussion was very lively. We talked about scholarship (the formalists) and criticism. We argued with Zamjatin, who spoke about “dispassion” in science. Tynjanov and I explained to him that there is no longer a separation between theory and criticism, and there can be no such separation. The point is not in dispassion, but in the different nature of the assessment. Fedin spoke well on the “proper form”. Things seem to work out (Ėjchenbaum 1998: 208).

On January 9, 1924, the Committee (whose title will be later shortened to *Committee for Contemporary Literature*) was officially opened<sup>5</sup>, and Ėjchenbaum was named (more precisely, renamed)<sup>6</sup> its chairman (Ėjchenbaum 1998: 208). The new institutional configuration was more suitable for the formalists’ new research interests, so they took up the organization of the Committee with enthusiasm. At January 23 the invitations to the first meeting were sent out:

At the Literature Department of the Russian Institute of Art History, the idea of creating a special Committee for the study of contemporary literature came up. The Committee would include both the theoreticians and practitioners of the verbal arts, writers, and poets. The Department believes that this kind of communication between representatives from the literary community can give fruitful results both for the organization of new criticism and for the development of the verbal arts itself. The organizational group of the Committee (consisting of S. Baluhaty, I. Gruzdev, V. Žirmunskij, P. Žukov, E. Zamjatin, V. Kaverin, B. Kazanskij, A. Petrovskij, V. Roždestvenskij, N. Tikhonov, B. Tomaševskij, Y. Tynjanov, K. Fedin and B. Ėjchenbaum) asks you to participate in the first meeting of the Committee, which will be held

5 CGALI SPb 82/1/67/108.

6 On the meeting of Administration of the Institute Žirmunskij formulates this procedure as “with an Actual Member of Institute B. Ėjchenbaum remaining as chairman of this Committee” [«с оставлением Председателем этого Комитета Действительного Члена Б. М. Эйхенбаума»] (CGALI SPb 82/1/147/4).

on Sunday, February 3 at 6 p. m. in the building of the Institute (St. Isaac's Square 5) and the subject of which would be a discussion of the problems of modern prose. Initiative papers on these topics would be read by I. A. Gruzdev and V. A. Kaverin<sup>7</sup>.

The meeting took place on time, even though events surrounding the state funeral for Lenin, who died on January 21, could have presented an obstacle. But the meeting's outcome disappointed the chairman, who wrote in his diary: "On Sunday, the 3rd, there was the first meeting of the Committee of Contemporary Literature at the Institute of Art History. It went badly, sluggish and ceremonial. It was only good when Šklovskij and Venja [Kaverin] spoke. A terrible, completely senile speech was made by Žirmunskij – he said that literature began to degenerate since Balmont, becoming mechanized" (Ėjchenbaum 1998: 210). Nevertheless, the work of the new institution had begun. For the first year and a half, writers such as Evgenij Zamjatin, Aleksej N. Tolstoj, Il'ja Ėrenburg, Viktor Šklovskij, Nikolaj Tichonov, Maksimilian Vološin, Il'ja Gruzdev, Veniamin Kaverin, Jurij Tynjanov, Boris Ėjchenbaum, Konstantin Fedin, Ol'ga Forš and Vasilij Kamenskij had participated at the Committee events (Otchet 1926: 159). In the magazine *Russian Contemporary* (*Russkij Sovremennik*), which was close to the Formalists, transcripts of the debates that took place in the Committee were published. The preface to these transcripts states: "The new organization aims to unite theorists and critics with representatives from contemporary literature in meetings and to discuss the most interesting and topical questions after literary readings and

7 «При Разряде Истории Словесных Искусств Российского Института Истории Искусств возникла мысль о создании особого Комитета по изучению современной литературы, в состав которого входила бы как теоретика, так и практика словесного искусства, беллетристы и поэты. Разряд полагает, что такого рода общение представителей литературы может дать плодотворные результаты и для организации новой критики, и для развития самого словесного искусства. Организационная группа Комитета (в составе С. Балухатого, И. Груздева, В. Жирмунского, П. Жукова, Е. Замятина, В. Каверина, Б. Казанского, А. Пиотровского, В. Рождественского, Н. Тихонова, Б. Томашевского, Ю. Тынянова, К. Федина и Б. Эйхенбаума) просит Вас пожаловать на первое заседание Комитета, которое состоится в воскресенье 3 февраля в 6 час. вечера в здании Института (Исаакиевская пл. 5) и предметом которого будет обсуждение проблем современной прозы. Инициативные доклады на эти темы прочтут И. А. Груздев и В. А. Каверин» (СГАЛИ СПб 82/1/67/109).

academic presentations” (Diskussii 1924: 273)<sup>8</sup>. The atmosphere of these events is described in the memoirs of Kaverin:

“The meetings” usually took place in the Red Hall. Guests, speakers and professors sat at the long oval table, and everyone else fit in where they could. At least three students sat on each of the armchairs, and almost my entire seminar group settled on a long sofa covered with red cloth, decorated with pale red flowers.

I liked to sit on the windowsill: a long curtain, up to the floor, could have been pushed back a little – and the Saint Isaac’s Cathedral opened to view in the chalk-white twilight (Kaverin 1982: 458).

Since the opening of the Committee, contemporary literature had become an important research field along with the Puškin era for professors at the Institute. For several years, the reports of the Department began with an almost unchanging paragraph, which indicated an affinity of the Department’s two main projects:

The main task of the Department in the last year continued to be a systematic examination of Russian literary production, mainly of the 1st half of the 19th century, which for several years has been the main work of the Verbal Arts Section, and which unites all the actual members of the Department of the 1st and 2nd category. In the last year, this task was also supported by the Artistic Speech Section, which was busy with a study of the language of Russian literature from the same era. In a similar direction, but on the basis of more recent material, this problem was studied in the Committee of Contemporary Literature, which was supposed not only to provide a proper survey of current Russian literature, but also to give conceptual and methodological guidance to historical study<sup>9</sup>.

8 In the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art [further – RGALI] “Report on the work of the Committee for the Study of Contemporary Literature of the Russian Institute of Art History for 1924 (January-May)” is kept. This report includes a more extensive transcript of discussions than in the published version (RGALI 1527/1/36). I am thankful to Ksenia Kumpan for this note.

9 «Основной задачей Отдела в отчетном году продолжало быть систематическое обследование русской литературной продукции, преимущественно 1-й половины 19 века, составляющее уже в течение ряда лет главную работу Секции Художественной Словесности и объединяющее всех н. с. 1-го и 2-го разряда и большинство Действительных Членов Отдела. В отчетном году проведению этой задачи способствовала и Секция Художественной Речи, в которой выдвинуто

This very paragraph is taken from the report for the 1925/26 academic year, but in other years, the introduction to the reports remained almost identical. The last sentence of the report reminds us that the creation and development of the Committee was dictated not only by the scholarly interests of the Formalists, but also by the political context. Ksenia Kumpan notes that the inclusion of contemporary culture in the programs of the Institute was imposed from the outside. In 1923, a report written by the Commission from the Petrograd Administration of Scientific Institutions blamed the Institute for ignoring modern art. In response, the director of the Institute, Valentin Zubov, decided to create specialized units in each Department (Kumpan 2014: 15). As Kumpan writes, “The Literature Department was the first department at the Institute which began studying contemporary art, thereby responding to the demands of the revision commissions to ‘bring academic work closer to modern topics’ and turned out to be a pioneer in the development of ‘Leniniana’” (Kumpan 2009: 351). Ėjchenbaum wrote in his diary on February 1: “[Šklovskij] persuaded me to write a paper on Lenin’s style – it is necessary, he says, to accept the order, but you could include it in your own work. He said it so passionately that perhaps I will try” (Ėjchenbaum 1998: 210)<sup>10</sup>. The next entry describes the first meeting of the Committee – and this overlap is not accidental.

In the organization of the Committee, a political agenda was intertwined with the interests of the Formalists, and this combination determined the logic of the unit’s existence (the same could be said about the cluster of papers on Lenin in the LEF [Kalinin 2019]). In the plan for the 1925-26 academic year, the goals of the Committee are listed:

- 6) extending the study of issues in criticism through an analysis of contemporary literary works in cooperation with writers;
- 7) exploring the problems of literary production through questionnaires and joint discussions;

---

было на первый план соответственное обследование языка русской литературы той же эпохи. С некоторой стороны, но направляясь уже от современности, к выполнению той же задачи примыкала и работа Комитета Современной Литературы, долженствовавшая не только выполнить соответствующее обследование современной русской литературы, но и давать идейное и методологическое руководство историческому изучению» (CGALI SPb 82/3/21/64).

10 In the May of 1924 Ėjchenbaum was delegated to the Committee of Studying the style of Lenin in the Petrograd University (CGALI SPb 82/1/147/57).

8) tracking the image of Lenin in Russian literature (supervised by K. A. Šimkevič)<sup>11</sup>.

We can see how the main task of the Committee (the synthesis of theory and criticism) is combined with the goal of gathering relevant materials to create the foundation for further developments and with the ideological “superstructure”. This combination could provide the remarkable freedom of research that the Formalists and their colleagues in other Departments of the Institute could afford throughout the 1920s. They did not engage themselves in direct political action at all – although their field of research was gradually occupied by ideological rhetoric. Šklovskij’s long-sightedness in Eichenbaum’s entry was in this sense quite reasonable. The work on “Leniniana” did not, in general, disturb the way of the development of late Formalists thought.

When Eichenbaum begins to explore the problems of literary *byt*, this term appears in the Institute’s documentation. For example, in the work plan for the 1926-27 academic year, the list of the topics for the Verbal Arts Section headed by Eichenbaum, includes “problems of the literary environment and *byt*”<sup>12</sup>. However, the new term can also be found in the Committee for Contemporary Literature work plan: “the sketching out of the problems of literary production and technique, in connection with the study of literary *byt* and the conditions of recent literary work”<sup>13</sup>. However, this notion entails an ideological motivation: “The last topic, organized by Jurij Tynjanov and Boris Kazanskij, is new, both chronologically and substantially. Connected with the study of literary life during the war and

11 «6) продолжение разработки вопросов научной критики путем совместного с писателями анализа современных литературных произведений; 7) разработка проблем литературного творчества и производства путем систематических анкет и общего обсуждения; 8) прослеживание образа Ленина в русской художественной литературе (руковод. К. А. Шимкевич)» (CGALI SPb 82/3/8/38) The previous and the following paragraphs are related to other sections of the Department. Also noted that the collection of questionnaires is supervised by Tynjanov.

12 «проблемы литературной среды и быта» with note “the last topic organized by В. Eichenbaum is new” [«последняя тема, организуемая Б. М. Эйхенбаумом, является новой»](CGALI SPb 82/3/21/20).

13 «Разработка проблем литературного творчества и техники, в связи с изучением литературного быта и условиями литературного труда и современности» (CGALI SPb 82/3/21/20).



the Revolution, this work will be an attempt to contribute to the colossal mission that our era sets for modern Russian art criticism”<sup>14</sup>.

The appearance of Tynjanov’s name here is no accident. As Vladimir Novikov noted, “Tynjanov’s work as a reviewer of contemporary literature fits into the period of 1921–1924. After writing *Kjučlja*, Tynjanov did not return to writing reviews” (Kaverin, Novikov 1990: 105). And indeed, his reviews comprise a relatively small corpus of texts, which, however, is crowned by two works of 1924: *Interlude* and *The Literary Today*. Methodologically, they could be interpreted as the fulfillment of the plan for the synthesis of theoretical work and criticism, which the Formalists discussed with Zamjatin in the process of creating the Committee. It is quite natural that *The Literary Today* was presented at the Committee, and in 1925 Tynjanov became the next chairman of the unit. Although he stopped writing reviews, he remained in the field of contemporary literature not only as a writer, but also as a curator.

Apparently, the scholar conceptualized the corpus of his reviews from the post-revolutionary period as an integral whole. This is evidenced by the publishing plan of *Academia* for the 1925-26 academic year: in this plan, a small (six printer sheets)<sup>15</sup> book by Tynjanov, *Sketches on Literature after October*<sup>16</sup>, is mentioned. Perhaps it might have included his papers written between 1921–24, from his essay on Blok to *Interlude* and *The Literary Today*, potentially with the addition of essays published for the first time. This book is not mentioned in the following publishing plans, but the record of the Administration of the Institute meeting on January 30, 1925, states: “Send over the ŠKLOVSKIJ and TYNJANOV

14 «Последняя тема, организуемая Ю. Н. Тыняновым и Б. В. Казанским, является новой не только хронологически, но и по существу. Связанная с изучением литературной жизни за время войны и Революции, эта работа будет попыткой внести свою долю участия по огромному заданию, которое ставит современному русскому искусствоведению наша эпоха» (CGALI SPb 82/3/21/20). The Institute administration appreciated their motivation: “We should welcome those new tasks in the work plan for 1926/7, which for the most part tend to expand sociological research (the study of literary environment, *byt*, influences, etc.)” [«Следует приветствовать те новые задания производственного плана на 1926/7 г., которые большей частью клонятся также к расширению социологических исследований (изучение литературной среды, быта, влияний и т. п.)»] (CGALI SPb 82/3/23/108).

15 One printer sheet being forty thousand characters.

16 «Очерки литературы после Октября» (CGALI SPb 82/3/8/45).

manuscript titled *Contemporary Russian Literature* for review to Ja. A. NAZARENKO, member of the Administration of the Russian Institute of Art History<sup>17</sup> – we could suggest that Tynjanov, in order to provide a wider view of contemporary literature, could have expanded the collection with essays by his friend and colleague. At that moment, Šklovskij had returned from emigration and was trying to restore his reputation as the leader of the Formalists, so his interest in this project was obvious. Perhaps it is also connected with concept of book on Soviet prose by Šklovskij, which he was writing at the middle of 1920s (Šklovskij 1990: 508). The choice of a reviewer for manuscript is telling – Jakov Nazarenko was an ardent opponent of the Formalists, an important figure in the Sociological Committee (Kumpan 2009), and in the late 1920s, he played a key role in the dismantling of the Institute (Kumpan 2014). It is possible that because of his negative review, the manuscript was not published, although we cannot say that for sure due to the lack of additional sources. Apparently, this book meant to be Tynjanov's final statement on contemporary literature, after which he switched to the study of other problems; since then, he acted in the literature field exclusively as a writer and curator, not a critic.

In 1926, the first issue of the Department's periodical *Poetics*, with the attachment of *The Report on the Academic Work in the Department*, was published. Among other things, this report contains a program for the development of the Committee for Contemporary Literature. For literary readings, which were previously the main form of the Committee's work, a special Verbal Arts Society was being created (more precisely, re-established), while the work of the Committee itself was shifting towards academic discussions on recent literary trends: the author of the report lists eight topics for papers and debates (Otchet 1926: 159).

The plans also included the launch of a special Committee's periodical – *Papers (Zapiski)*. This plan wasn't completed, but in 1928 *Academia* published five issues of a new series *Masters of Contemporary Literature: I. E. Babel, Efim Zozulja, M. M. Zoščenko, Michail Kolcov and Bor. Pil'njak*; each of these volumes contained papers by “the greats” of Formalism and young scholars, as well as bibliographic materials prepared by the special

---

17 «Передать рукопись книги ШКЛОВСКОГО и ТЫНЯНОВА “Современная русская литература” на отзыв члену Правления Российского Института Истории Искусств Я. А. НАЗАРЕНКО» (CGALI SPb 82/3/8/77).

Bibliographic Office at the Institute. This series didn't have any editorial notes, but the connection with the Committee is clearly indicated, for example, by Zoščenko's preface in the first issue. The writer says: "This paper wasn't written for a book. The origin of the paper is completely accidental. At the Institute of Art History, a report on my literary work was presented. I was asked to speak after the presentation. I speak poorly, kind of confusingly, and for this reason, before the report, I sketched these lines for half an hour" (Zoščenko 1928: 7). A letter from Boris Kazanskij to Il'ja Ehrenburg, received by the writer in mid-March of 1927, contains curious information about this series. The text of the letter has not been published, but its content is described in the chronology of the writer's biography:

I. Erenburg receives a letter from Leningrad from the scholar B. Kazanskij with a request to write a paper about himself for the volume *Il'ja Ehrenburg* edited by V. Kaverin, which is being prepared by the publishing house *Academia* in the series *Masters of Contemporary Literature*.

It was planned to publish at least 12 books in this series: on Michail Zoščenko, Isaak Babel, Boris Pil'njak, Victor Šklovskij, Michail Kolcov, Vladimir Majakovskij, Vsevolod Ivanov, Boris Pasternak, Il'ja Ehrenburg, Nikolaj Aseev, Maksim Gor'kij, Leonid Leonov. The books were supposed to be published in this order (Popov, Frezinsky 2000: 199).

Additional details of these plans could be found in the documents of the Bibliographic Office, whose employees made a significant contribution to the planned books. In a report for 1926/27, they announced: "A bibliography of Gor'kij<sup>18</sup> has been prepared for publication, as well as short bibliographies (by the request of the Verbal Arts Society) of Pil'njak, Babel, Zoščenko, Šklovskij, Ehrenburg"<sup>19</sup>, which indicates that the work on the last two volumes was very active. Some addition to this list can be found in the *General description of the activities of the Literature Department in 1924–27*, where the Bibliographic Office enumerated the works completed

18 An ambitious project of the chairman of the Office was published only in 1934 (Baluhaty 1934).

19 «Подготовлена к печати библиография Горького, также краткие библиографии (по заказу Общества Изучения Художественной Словесности) Пильняка, Бабеля, Зощенко, Шкловского, Эренбурга» (CGALI SPb 82/3/27/15–16).

– for the 1925/26 academic year it mentioned “Special bibliographies of Achmatova, Gumilev, Kuzmin, Zamjatin, Vs. Ivanov, Pil’njak, Zoščenko, Gor’kij”, and for 1926/27: “Short bibliographies of Babel, Šklovskij, Ehrenburg are completed”<sup>20</sup>. The second list refers entirely to the *Masters of Contemporary Literature*, but also half of the authors listed in the first quote were planned to be included in the following volumes. Of course, the book on Gumilev could not appear at that time (Timenchik 2018), but the fact of the Institute’s work with his legacy is striking. It is also difficult to imagine special issues on Achmatova, who by that time had not published any new books for five years, and on Kuzmin, whose popularity, high in 1921–1922, had faded away (Pachomova 2021: 233–247). Most likely, the resolution at the meeting of the Administration of the Institute dated November 6, 1929, refers to the *Masters of Contemporary Literature*: “Include the following publications in the plan of the Literature Department: <...> Contemporary Literature, 15 issues on modern writers. 50 printer sheets”<sup>21</sup>.

The Verbal Arts Society, separated from the Committee, created another periodical – the series *Questions on Contemporary Literature (Voprosy sovremennoi literatury)*. The preface to the first issue – the collection *A Feuilleton* – states:

New tasks and problems led the Society out of its former, traditional position as a closed, academic circle with special interests, and demanded close contact with writers and communication with readers. The rapprochement of writers and scholars should be supported both by literary readings and by reports on the problems of contemporary literature. The main task of the Society was the preparation of publications, because only through print it is possible to set out the main issues of contemporary literature in a systematic way through the combined forces of writers and scholars (Tynjanov, Kazanskij 1927: 5-6).

There were no further publications in this series.

20 «Спец. библиографии Ахматовой, Гумилева, Кузьмина <sic>, Замятина, Вс. Иванова, Пильняка, Зощенки, Горького»; «Закончены краткие библиографии Бабеля, Шкловского, Эренбурга» (CGALI SPb 82/3/27/62).

21 «Включить в издательский план по Отделу ЛИТО следующие издания: <...> Современная литература, 15 выпусков о соврем. писателях. 50 п<печатных> л<листов>» (CGALI SPb 82/3/22/23).

In the Institute's documentation we could find a trace of another unpublished book. The plan for 1925/26, along with the book of essays by Tynjanov, mentioned "MODERN LITERATURE, a series of monographs. Literature Department"<sup>22</sup>. Most likely, it refers to one of the already mentioned series, but the plan for the next academic year also includes a collection *Contemporary Russian Literature*<sup>23</sup> (in another version of the plan – *Contemporary Literature*<sup>24</sup> with an indication of the capacity as 10–15 printer sheets). According to a report for the 1925/26 academic year, the collection was prepared for publication, and its composition is also known: "Collection on Contemporary Literature: papers by Zilber (about Ehrenburg), Stepanov (about Babel), Buchstab (about Pasternak), Gofman (about Bely and Mandel'stam) etc."<sup>25</sup>. At the meeting of the Administration of the Institute on June 10, 1927, the plan for publications in honor of the first decade of the Revolution was approved, among the planned books there was a "Collection *Contemporary Literature* (on modern literary byt)"<sup>26</sup> – the addition of Ėjchenbaum's term to the definition of the book is telling. The idea for the book appears one final time in the report of the Committee for the 1926/27 academic year, which states: "In addition to the regular tasks devoted to reading and discussing recent literary works, a systematic study of problems of contemporary literature was held, as a result, a special collection was prepared for publication, which covered the evolution from Symbolism, through Acmeism and Futurism, to the present"<sup>27</sup>. The collection has never been printed, but the prepared papers were distributed among the volumes of the *Masters of Contemporary Literature* – the paper by N. Stepanov *Babel's Novella* was published in the volume on Babel, the papers

22 «"СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРА" серия монографий». Лито ГИИИ» (CGALI SPb 82/3/8/45).

23 «Современная русская литература» (CGALI SPb 82/3/21/21).

24 «Современная литература» (CGALI SPb 82/3/23/70).

25 «Сборник Современная литература: статьи Зильбера (об Эренбурге), Степанова (о Бабеле), Бухштаба (о Пастернаке), Гофмана (о Белом и Мандельштаме) и др.» (CGALI SPb 82/3/21/67).

26 «Сборник "Современной литературы" (о современном литературном быте)» (CGALI SPb 82/3/29/79).

27 «Кроме очередных заданий, посвященных чтению и обсуждению современных литературных произведений, производилось планомерное изучение вопросов современной литературы, в результате которого готовится к печати специальный сборник, охватывающий эволюцию от символизма, через акмеизм и футуризм, до наших дней» (CGALI SPb 82/3/27/15).

of Buchstab<sup>28</sup> and Zilber (Kaverin) were intended for the volumes that did not appear. The reaction of Ehrenburg to Kaverin's paper about him was negative – on March 20, 1927, he wrote to E. Polonskaja: “Some Kazanskij wants me to write a paper for the Kaverin's book about me. Kaverin sent me the article. This is a grade school essay, without the shine of Šklovskij or Tynjanov. With an incomprehensible look, various obvious positions are proved. Boring! So what should I write?” (Popov, Frezinsky 2000: 199–200). Undoubtedly, the experience of participating in the Institute collections will later turn out to be relevant for the Junior Formalists when they will work on *The Bath of Archimedes* collection (Blumbaum, Morev 1991). Tynjanov's letter to Šklovskij, in which he assaults on his students, is well known: “This generation is thin, we have turned out to be a bad nutritious material, and they are bad eaters”. The following sentence is quoted less frequently: “I have long ago refused, for example, to edit collections of youngsters' writings on contemporary literature, because I don't agree with them” (Tynjanov 1983: 27–28). It is obvious that the Head of the Committee for Contemporary Literature is referring to the collections described above. In the context of the conflict between teachers and students, the Junior Formalists felt the need for their own group statements – but this moment came at that time of the disruption of the Institute and the full-scale invasion of Stalinism in the field of humanities, so the Junior Formalist projects were never realized.

Katerina Clark noticed that the activity of the Committee was important not only within the Formalist community, but for Leningrad literature in general (Clark 1998: 169). My paper shows how this academic unit was created and what sort of knowledge it produced. At the Committee's peak, unique projects were launched, which could have extended the borders of the Formal Method in application to contemporary literature. However, in 1928, a deep crisis within the Formalist Institute began, leading to its eventual collapse; this process has been described in detail (Kumpan 2014) – the fading activity of the Committee is included in this decline. The key employees of the Committee were replaced by bureaucrats, and its diverse activity drastically reduced. We can only look at these ruins with the hope of understanding the contours of the unfinished building.

---

28 The book on Pasternak was published only after the death of the scholar (Buchstab 2000: 281-347).

## References

- Baluhaty, Sergej Dmitrievič (1936), *Literaturnaja rabota M. Gor'kogo. Spisok pervopechatnyh tekstov i avtorizovannyh izdanij 1892–1934*, Leningrad: Academia.
- Blumbaum, Arkadij and S. Morev (1991), “«Vanna Arhimeda»: k istorii nesostojavshegosja izdanija”, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, Bd. 28, S, 263-269.
- Buchstab, Boris (2000), *Fet i drugie*. Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Clark, Katerina (1998), *Petersburg. Crucible of Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Diskussii, G.A. (1924), “Diskussii o sovremennoj literature”, *Russkij sovremennik*, 2, 273-278.
- Ėjchenbaum, Boris Michajlovič (1998), *Dnevnik. 1924*, in *Filologicheskie zapiski*, A. S. Krjukova (ed), Voronezh, 10, 207-223.
- Kalinin, Il'ja (2019), *How Lenin's Language Was Made: Russian Formalists on Material of History and Technique of Ideology*, in *Words, Bodies, Memory: A Festschrift in honor of Irina Sandomirskaja*, Lars Kleberg, Tora Lane, Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback (eds), 335-346, Stockholm: Elanders.
- Kaverin, Veniamin and Vladimir Novikov (1990), *Novoe zrenie: Kniga o Jurii Tynjanove*. Moskva: Kniga.
- Kaverin, Veniamin (1982), *V starom dome: vospominanija i portrety*, in *Sobranie sochinenij*, Veniamin Kaverin, 6, 403-558, Moskva: Hudozhestvennaja literatura.
- Kumpan, Ksenia (2009), “K istorii vzniknovenija Sockoma v Institute istorii iskusstv (Eshhe raz o Zhirmunskom i formalistah)”, in *Na rubezhe dvuh stoletij: Sbornik v chest' 60-letija*, A. V. Lavrova (ed), 345-360, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- (2014), “Institut istorii iskusstv na rubezhe 1920–1930-h godov”, in *Konec institucij kul'tury dvadcatykh godov v Leningrade*, in M. E. Malikova (ed), 8-128, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Otčet (1926), “Otčet o naučnoj dejatel'nosti Otdela Slovesnykh Iskusstv GIII”, *Poetika*, 1, L, 155-162.
- Pachomova (2021), *Pisatel'skaja strategija i literaturnaja reputacija M. A. Kuzmina v rannesovetskij period*, Tartu: University of Tartu Press.
- Popov, Frezinsky (2000), *Il'ja Jerenburg. Hronika zhizni i tvorčestva*, 2, 1924-1931, Sankt-Peterburg: BAN.

- Šklovskij, Viktor (1990), *Gamburgskii sčet: Stat'i – vospominania – esse (1914-1933)*, Aleksandr Galushkin and Aleksandr Chudakov (ed), Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel'.
- Timenčik, R.D. (2018), *Istorija kul'ta Gumileva*, Moskva: Mosty kul'tury.
- Tynjanov, Jurij Nikolaevič (1983), *Vospominaniya o Ju. Tynjanove*, Moskva: Sovetskij pisatel'.
- Tynjanov, Jurij Nikolaevič and Boris Kazanskij (1927), *Ot redakcii, Fel'eton, Sb. statej*, 5-9, Academia.
- Ulicka, Danuta (2023), *Institute of the History of the Arts, in Central and Eastern European Literary Theory and the West*, Michał Mrugalski, Schamma Schahadat and Irina Wutsdorff (eds.), 137-151, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Zoschenko, Michail (1928), *O sebe, o kritikah i o svoej rabote, stat'i i materialy*, 7-11, Leningrad: Academia.
- Zolotukhin, Valeri Sergeevich (2015), “Dejatel'nost' Kabineta Izuchenija Hudozhestvennoj Rechi (pri Gosudarstvennom Institute istorii iskusstv) v kontekste issledovanij teatral'noj deklamacii”, in *Zhivoe slovo: logos – golos – dvizhenie – zbest: Sbornik statej i materialov*, 53-65, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Zolotuchin, Valerij Sergeevič and Schmidt, V. (2018), “Kabinet izuchenija hudozhestvennoj rechi (1923–1930), Hronologija”, in *Zvuchashhaja rech': Raboty Kabineta izuchenija hudozhestvennoj rechi (1923–1930)*, Valeri Sergeevich Zolotuhin and V. Schmidt (eds), 378-407, Moskva: Tri kvadrata.