

Changing from "The Writer Newspaper" to "The Reader Newspaper" — Discussion on the Transition of *The Literary Gazette* in the Soviet Union

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ABSTRACT

The Literary Gazette is the most influential literary newspaper of the Soviet Union and is still active in the Russian newspaper world. It is a successful media practice widely recognized by readers as the official publication of the Soviet Union. *The Literary Gazette* was originally an official publication of the Council of the Soviet Writers Association aimed at guiding the creation of Soviet writers and its readers were the writer groups in the narrow sense. However, it took the Great Patriotic War as an opportunity with its editing strategy gradually tilting towards readers and actively innovated the form and enriched the content, so that the newspaper contained diversified content featuring social issues. This is the most prominent feature of *The Literary Gazette* of the Soviet Union, which is also the secret of its success in the newspaper industry.

Keywords: *The Literary Gazette*, *Writer*, *Reader*, *Editing strategy*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Literary Gazette is the most influential literary newspaper in the Soviet Union and the oldest literary newspaper in the world. It is a special cultural weekly. At the beginning of its establishment, it was an official publication of the Council of the Soviet Writers Association. After wars, cultural "thawing" and formal reforms, it gradually became a sociopolitical and cultural publication for intellectual readers who thought about society and even had doubts. Since then, its circulation increased substantially, which even exceeded 6 million copies in the 1980s and 1990s, making it one of the most cited Soviet and Russian newspapers in the world.

Due to the highly concentrated organizational form of political power in the Soviet Union, all literary periodicals in the Soviet Union were relatively dependent on the state administrative authority and had a strong affiliation. Under the constraints of politics and official ideology, all content in the newspaper must undergo strict examination and approval. The discourse expression of literary journals basically revolved around political discourse, and the discourse space

was tightly restricted within a range. Certain default conventions and rules were also formed in the discourse field of the entire literary periodical circle. Once this limit was exceeded, it would be punished by public criticism, the replacement of the editor-in-chief, rectification, and suspension. *The Literary Gazette* had political ideological functions other than its own responsibilities and played a complex multiple roles such as cultural discourse and political discourse. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, it consciously or unconsciously began to explore its own media identity, opening the process of transition from "the writer newspaper" to "the reader newspaper".

2. THE FOUNDING OF THE LITERARY GAZETTE IN THE SOVIET UNION

The Literary Gazette in the Soviet Union was issued in 1929 of "The Great Transformation". In this year, the New Economic Policy had been halted, and the country accelerated the development of agricultural collectivization and socialist industrialization. The cultural life of the Soviet Union showed a complex situation of two parallel

trends of pluralism and monism. In order to unite different literary schools in the cause of socialist construction, from the end of 1927 to 1928, the Alliance of Soviet Writers Union (ФОСП) decided to publish a weekly literary newspaper as an official newspaper. After many meetings and discussions, it was decided to appoint Comrade С.Канатчиков as the editor-in-chief, and to form a large-scale editorial board to be responsible for the organization of the newspaper. After many consultations and long-time negotiations, the editorial board of *The Literary Gazette* was finally composed of 12 representatives from different literary schools. However, it needs to be pointed out that *The Literary Gazette* here is not a re-run of *The Literary Gazette* of the liberal aristocratic school in Pushkin's era, but a brand new literary publication. It was the Modern Editorial Department of *The Literary Gazette* that extended the history of *The Literary Gazette* to the beginning of the 19th century and established historical links with Pushkin and Jerry Vigil. In the early days of the Soviet Union, people in the cultural circles didn't associate this newspaper with *The Literary Gazette* one hundred years ago, consciously or unconsciously.

The first issue of *The Literary Gazette* was published on April 22, 1929. It was published every Monday, with 4 pages per issue. The circulation of the first issue was 45,000 copies. The first page of the first issue is shown in the following "Figure 1":



Figure 1 The first page of the first issue of *The Literary Gazette*.

The Literary Gazette published the foreword titled "The Writer Newspaper" (Газета писателей) in its first issue, detailing the newspaper's mission and purpose: First of all, it must provide new

culture to the broad workers and peasants who lacked cultural education and create ideal figures close to and cherished by the working class to inspire the working people; secondly, it should help writers to form a world view that conforms to the working people of the Soviet Union, help writers understand the surrounding reality and determine their status and role, shorten the distance between writers and the working class in an organized way, and respond to the proposal of the Central Council of the All-Soviet Labor Union to send writers to the production area to understand the daily lives of workers; finally, it should correct the mistakes of literary groups, lead different literary organizations, implement the principle of free competition among different groups in the field of literature and art, and oppose the determination of a single creative method by order and coercion.

3. THE NEWSPAPER OF WRITERS

Many Soviet journalists have taken *The Literary Gazette* as a case study of a successful media transformation. In this article, it is believed that the success of *The Literary Gazette* is attributed to the change of its targeted audience — from the writers to the mass audience. Under the framework of the politicization and ideology of Soviet culture, *The Literary Gazette* was not only a regular literary publication and news publishing organization, but also an important cultural propaganda organization of the country. Writers are an important part of national cultural undertakings. They are in the same value coordinate system as literary newspapers, and the two naturally have the relatedness. Therefore, the original concept of *The Literary Gazette* was to serve writers. However, *The Literary Gazette's* influence on writers developed from helping and guiding to leading and controlling, and finally moved towards alienating.

3.1 Helping and Guiding Writers

The Literary Gazette provided a platform for writers to publish literary works, open letters and critical articles, making them one of the most active participants in the social and cultural process. From the beginning of the Stalin period, the state power gradually began to attach importance to the role of literature in ideological formation and polity. "He (Stalin) knew very well that Russian writers traditionally had public authority, therefore, literature had to be a guide to the state's ideology" [1]. *The Literary Gazette* was an important institution for the country to express its cultural

position. In its foreword to a periodical, *The Literary Gazette* stated that its core mission was to help writers understand the new social reality, strengthen the relationship between writers and the working class, form artistic creation methods suitable for the new era, and actively participate in the cause of socialist construction. Therefore, several articles were published in the newspaper, calling on writers to go to factories, construction sites, and collective farms to experience life in person.

3.2 Leading and Controlling Writers

The guiding function of *The Literary Gazette* gradually evolved into a forward-looking leadership posture. It established an image higher than the literary creation group for itself, and gave itself a certain special power. The literature historian Stuluwe called this period a period of "literature in uniform". At this time, the political power wanted to use discipline and reform to turn writers into Soviet intellectuals who met political standards and social requirements. [2] *The Literary Gazette* was the best way to publicize these reform rules.

There was often a telling or commanding tone in the newspaper, for example: "Soviet writers should remember their responsibilities to the working people" [3], "We have an obligation to remind writers to speed up the pace of creation" [4]. *The Literary Gazette* also often put forward certain rigid requirements for writers. For example, "It is necessary to write a close-up or a monograph about the protagonist of the labor... and describe the individual economic types (state farms, collective farms, communes), reflecting the most important issues in the period of agricultural transformation." [5] This tough tone and administrative imperative requirements made writers feel the pressure from the national cultural management department, and gradually eroded writers' creative independent space.

More importantly, for the "dissidents" in the writer groups, *The Literary Gazette* stood on the highest point of ideological consciousness and carried out a fierce criticism. The critical angle extended from the literary aesthetics to the writers' political beliefs, lifestyle and daily life and so on. Writers who were inconsistent with the will of the state were seen as counter-revolutionary enemies. The organized critical movements of Zamiatin and Pirinhak in 1929 used *The Literary Gazette* as the main battlefield.

3.3 Alienating Writers

The Literary Gazette transformed writers from mere creators into politicians. The newspaper was no longer just a platform for publishing literary works, but more like a national cultural news organization. The suggestions, regulations, and orders of the writers in *The Literary Gazette* actually pointed to erasing writers' personality and uniting them into a unified whole that was managed and directed together. This alienation of writers was relatively clearly reflected in literary criticism. The literary criticism in *The Literary Gazette* played an unprecedented function in the 1930s, and had unlimited power over writers. At this time, literary critics performed not so much aesthetic appreciation of literary works as they performed political review of the literary environment. In addition to literature itself, "Literary critics studied the behavior of the writer himself or herself in literary creation and daily life, the method of communication between the writer and the reader, and the method of communication." [6] An atmosphere of tension, fear, and caution spread among the writers, and the aesthetic standards of literary judgment gradually blurred.

4. THE NEWSPAPER OF READERS

In the early days of the Soviet Union, it was the writers who determined the taste of *The Literary Gazette*, and readers were ignored in this field. However, *The Literary Gazette* became the most popular literary newspaper with the largest circulation in the 1970s and 1980s, and even reached 6 million copies of circulation in the late 1990s. This was naturally because it greatly met the needs of readers. So when and how did *The Literary Gazette* transfer its discourse initiative from the author to the reader? In fact, in the 1940s, the gradual adjustment of the relationship between the authors and readers of *The Literary Gazette* already began. This was also the path of self-growth for *The Literary Gazette* to form its own characteristics and establish independent consciousness.

4.1 The Readerization of Editing Strategies

Under the constraints of personnel, paper, and printing capacity during the wartime, many publications were temporarily integrated or closed, and the same was true for *The Literary Gazette*. *The Literary Gazette* was temporarily suspended after October 15, 1941, and the Soviet Writers

Association and the Soviet People's Committee of Art and Film (Комитет при СНК СССР- по делам искусств и по делам кинематографии) co-hosted the release of "Literature and Art" (Литература и искусство), which was published until November 1, 1944. This newspaper could be seen as a continuation of *The Literary Gazette*.

In *The Literary Gazette* during the wartime, conventional literary content such as literary development and new book reviews inevitably had to be replaced by other war topics with more realistic meaning. *The Literary Gazette* chose a unique and characteristic perspective to report on the war — to report on the writers in the war. The newspaper introduced writers' works during the war, called on writers to focus on short stories, poems, playlets and other genres that could be used as literary weapons, introduced the organizational situation of the writer reserves, and published writers' exciting speeches and the list of writers who donated money to the war of resistance.

However, the content of *The Literary Gazette* during the wartime was more oriented towards readers who were concerned about the war situation, and the audience of the newspaper surpassed the narrow and professional group of writers. It reported and analyzed the latest war information to readers in a timely manner, helping readers understand the situation of the enemy and themselves. New columns such as "In Order to Defend the Motherland!" (В борьбе за Родину!) and "Complete the Duty to the Motherland!" (Выполним свой долг перед Родиной!), and some slogan-style and propagandistic article titles, such as "Hold on" (Выдюжим), "For the Motherland, for Stalin!" (За Родину, за Сталина!), and "We Shall Win!" (Мы победим!) continued to appear in the newspaper, intensively praising honor, sacrifice, loyalty, love and faith. The imperative and slogan-like titles aroused the people's enthusiasm for fighting, and the plural form of verbs and the first person form shortened the distance among authors, editors and readers.

The newspaper also adopted a report form that was closer to readers. In 1943, the newspaper opened two new columns — "Letters from the Frontline" (Письма с фронта) and "Letters to the Frontline" (Письма на фронт). The form of letter made the emotional communication between the front and the rear more smooth and free, and was greatly praised by many readers. On November 7, 1944, *The Literary Gazette* launched a questionnaire survey titled "What Did I Read in

Time of War". Famous writers and ordinary readers all wrote letters and actively participated. The correspondence between soldiers and cultural celebrities, readers and writers answering the same question, and other content greatly promoted the spiritual temperament of all people sharing a bitter hatred of the enemy and mutual encouragement in the face of foreign invasion, greatly enhancing the reader's position in *The Literary Gazette*.

4.2 The Diversification of Newspaper Content

The readerization of *The Literary Gazette* was inseparable from its rich and diverse content. Only when the content was more diversified and rich and the theme was more social and topical, could it attract readers other than professional writers and national cultural undertaking staff. *The Literary Gazette* also complemented the large-scale literary journals that dominated the Russian culture and journalism tradition. It had fresh news materials, flexible forms, and rapid response, being able to capture even small dynamic changes in the process of literary social life.

The enrichment of the content of *The Literary Gazette* went through such a development path: Since January 1934, when *The Literary Gazette* began to cover the 17th Congress of the Soviet Republic (Bolshevik), it gradually involved political news. A large amount of real-time war information was added to the newspaper during the war. In a meeting with Simonov in 1947, Stalin instructed that *The Literary Gazette* could be a widely distributed "big newspaper" discussing life in the Soviet Union and foreign countries. It should change from one issue a week to two issues, and readers should increase tenfold. [7] In 1947, the Soviet Writers Association made a resolution to turn *The Literary Gazette* into a literary-social and political newspaper. It should expose and criticize Western capitalist culture and act as a propaganda weapon for the ideological confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Simonov, who was the editor-in-chief of *New World* and later in 1950 as the editor-in-chief of *The Literary Gazette*, also proposed the idea of combining literary and art magazines with social and political magazines in 1947, hoping that there would be an all-encompassing publication to help intellectuals, especially those ordinary intellectuals in the locality who couldn't order multiple publications, expand their cultural horizons. [7] Since 1953, social issues closely related to people's work and life appeared in

the newspaper one after another, such as the scoring standards of school teachers, the problem of doctors' office visiting time being occupied by filling in the form, the vacation conditions of workers provided by labor unions, and the difficulties faced by women at work and at home and so on. The proportion of social themes in *The Literary Gazette* continued to increase, and the interactive communication model of "reader-newspaper-state agency" basically took shape.

5. CONCLUSION

Because of its close relationship with the government, *The Literary Gazette* gained high media effectiveness and hidden right of management. But at the same time, the official journal status of it also restricted its media freedom, making it easier to lose the trust and love of readers. However, the fact was on the contrary. As an evergreen tree in the Soviet newspaper industry, *The Literary Gazette* experienced ups and downs several times in the transformation of social life, and it was the most successful and influential cultural publication in Soviet society. This was due to the fact that *The Literary Gazette* penetrated the brushstrokes to ordinary readers, broke and used its identity as an official publication of the Soviet Writers Association, reached a perfect balance between the "permitted" and the "not permitted" of the examining authority, and changed from a professional "newspaper of writers" to a "newspaper of readers" closely connected with the people.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Jingyu Chang.

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