Paper: Censoring the Narrative: A Social History of Two Dissident Novels

Abstract: This paper is a social history of the censorship faced by John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* and Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, using Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of *dialogics* and *centripetal/centrifugal forces* to explore the relation between realist novels, censorship, and marginalized voices in society.

Résumé:

1. Introduction

Creating a social history of a novel involves investigating the circumstances that surrounded its creation and placing both the author and the literary work within the context of their socio-historical circumstances. Realist novels, because they present fictionalized accounts of actual events, are narrative artefacts and can occupy a powerful place in society. The reception of certain realist novels indicates their power: controversial narratives are met with vitriol and attempts to silence their message because they are perceived as threats. Two such novels that sparked controversy in the twentieth century are John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* (1958), both strikingly political novels that received considerable critical and public attention. They depict, respectively, the two major ideologies of the twentieth century – liberal capitalism in the United States and communism in the Soviet Union – but they are not propagandist portrayals. Rather, these novels are polemical, subversive, and were highly provocative at the time of their publication. *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Doctor Zhivago* both portray changes to the social fabric of society: Steinbeck depicts the Dust Bowl and the mass migration of Okies during the Great Depression, while Pasternak presents the October Revolution and its aftermath through the eyes of the title character.

The inseparability of literature from its social and historical context features prominently in the thought of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). His insistence on situating literature within its context and viewing it as a microcosm of the society that produced it (through its author) makes Bakhtin’s theories particularly relevant to examining censorship as a product of social history. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of this thought provides a useful link between literary theory and criticism, cultural studies, and information studies. The particular theories that support an analysis of censorship through social history are *dialogics* and *centripetal/centrifugal forces*.

First, however, it is important to outline how Bakhtin constructs these theories based on language and human discourse. Language is a way to explore and express the meaning of the world, and it gives voice to the ideologies that dominate and attempt to subvert the culture in which the language is being produced. Human sciences, the broad discipline with which Bakhtin is largely concerned, are “about man and his specific nature, and not about a voiceless thing or natural phenomenon” and, furthermore, are linked intrinsically to text: “man in his specific human nature always expresses himself (speaks), that is, he creates a text (if only potential)” (Bakhtin, “Problem of the Text,” 1986, 107). Because language permeates all aspects of human activity, it is impossible to ignore the inherent interconnectivity of human endeavours, which manifest themselves through written and
spoken language. Language, however, is not synonymous with linguistics, nor is the study of language restricted to linguistic analysis. Beyond such technical aspects, Bakhtin sees uses for language that are linked to semiotics and contextual importance, proposing the \textit{utterance} as the fundamental unit with which to analyze language: “Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by the participants in various areas in human activity” (Bakhtin, “Problem of Speech Genres,” 1986, 61). An utterance is defined by a sense of completeness; it is not determined by length, but rather by the will of the author to utter a thought that, at the time of its expression, is finite, defined, and complete. Bakhtin posits that utterances are comprised of two parts: linguistic matter, which is the purely structural elements of language; and a nonverbal component or “implied part,” which corresponds to the context of the enunciation (Todorov, 1984, 41). The “nearest social situation” shapes every utterance and “discourse is oriented toward the person addressed,” whether the interlocutor is actually present or implied (Bakhtin, cited in Todorov, 1984, 43). The linguistic element of an utterance is reiterative; however, each context of enunciation is perpetually unique, thus changing its implied part and transforming the linguistic content into a new utterance.

The novel is one type of utterance and features “an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” 1981, 7). The novel, therefore, is part of its social context and engages with the \textit{openended present}, a concept that implies a connection with the future because the present is not closed off, but rather is part of a continuum, growing organically into the future. This conceptualization of the novel focuses on the socio-historical context of the novel as an utterance, as well as its continuing relevance as an active voice in society, where each iteration of the linguistic content creates a new utterance. Bakhtin’s novel is a microcosm of society, and as an utterance, it is in constant contact with other utterances, serving as both interlocutor and author (through human mediation).

The author of a novel finds himself in much the same situation as his utterance: a product of his social context, functioning both within the novel and externally by presenting himself to the audience. “We find the author outside the work as a human being, [...] observing from his own unresolved and still evolving contemporaneity [...] insofar as he himself is located as it were tangentially to the reality he describes” (Bakhtin, “Forms of Time,” 1981, 254-255). An author’s \textit{contemporaneity} is a cumulative concept that encompasses the past and all the influences of the present that exert themselves upon the author. He is a social being whose work functions within society: “every literary work \textit{faces away from itself}, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself” (Bakhtin, “Forms of Time,” 1981, 257). The author, through his utterance, is performing a dialogic function through the imperative to interact with other utterances, both by responding to and anticipating a response from them.

Dialogics are very important for Bakhtin, as the concept explains how language interacts as a social structure to change society. There are two forces in society: centripetal and centrifugal. Centripetal forces seek to establish hegemony, a dominant ideology, and unity in language. Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, seek to subvert the established hegemony by undermining stability and cultural unity. To imagine the interaction of these societal forces, it is useful to visualize of the concept of a Bakhtinian carnival, which features the uncrowning authority (the dominant ideology) by bringing the “high” down to the “low,” using laughter and disrespect for authority (sometimes to the level of
violence) to disrupt fossilized societal conventions. Because language is a reflection of society, it exhibits centripetal and centrifugal forces. Dialogics is the area where these forces exert themselves, and, for Bakhtin, literature (through the authorial voice) illuminates the struggle between the dominant ideology and that which seeks to undermine it.

2. Social History of The Grapes of Wrath

The 1930s were a time of turmoil and instability, due to the legacy of the First World War, which destroyed traditional autocracies without creating new, viable forms of government, and due to the economic destruction of the Great Depression. As a result of these tensions, radical ideologies like communism and fascism featured prominently during the interwar period. During the 1930s, the American and Canadian prairies were the site of one of the worst agricultural disasters in history, the Dust Bowl, a combination of severe drought and poor agricultural practices, which resulted in dust storms that destroyed crops. American families were forced to leave their farms due to foreclosure and migrated in large numbers, often westward to California (Worster, 1979).

John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath was published in 1939, and tells the story of the Joads, a family of Dust Bowl migrants, also referred to as “Okies,” making their way to California. The novel also includes non-narrative chapters that read like essays, describing the Dust Bowl and its victims in stark, provocative language. It was a best seller in 1939 and 1940 and was popular in libraries (Wiegand, 2011; Shockley, 1944), indicating that the book was reaching audiences across America. The Grapes of Wrath attracted considerable critical attention, too, receiving reviews in publications that covered several different audience mandates: intellectual, public, and professional. Generally, the critical reception of The Grapes of Wrath responded to the novel’s subject, noting its significance as a social document, and, in some cases, as outright propaganda. Several periodicals, specifically the New York Times Book Review and Herald Tribune Books, Commonweal, Christian Science Monitor, and Time, situated The Grapes of Wrath within a global context, comparing the situation in America with the cataclysms in Europe and Asia that were leading up to World War II. Reception of the novel as a literary work was mixed. Most reviewers did not appreciate its formal structure, particularly taking issue with its non-narrative chapters. Generally, in order to give credit to a work that was deemed important, reviewers tended to focus on the propagandist value of The Grapes of Wrath; this shift of focus to the novel’s social merits justified the attention given it, despite the literary flaws that most reviewers noted.

Reviews aimed toward a professional audience, such as those appearing in The Booklist (American Library Association’s publication) and The Wisconsin Library Bulletin, were wary of Steinbeck’s language, noting the apparent inevitability of offense and of demands for censorship; however, there is no allusion to the inflammatory nature of the content Steinbeck presents, only his language. The cautionary nature of the reviews aimed at professional librarians speaks to the nature of the profession at the time. Before the publication of The Grapes of Wrath, intellectual freedom was not an explicit or even a traditional goal of American libraries. Libraries supported a “neutral” position, but this neutrality was often translated into passivity when faced with censorship: the library was under the jurisdiction of a higher governing body, which issued orders for libraries to censor certain works. The American Library Association (ALA) did not have a unified position on censorship; its position vacillated and its attitude was ambivalent (Office for
Consistent with predictions, *The Grapes of Wrath* was met with opposition immediately after its publication, notably in public libraries. The East St. Louis Public Library, in Illinois, was directed by the board to burn three copies of the book on the steps of the courthouse; however, the National Council on Freedom from Censorship appealed this order. Instead, this novel was placed on the “Adults Only” shelf of the library (Dawson, 1997). Other notable instances of censorship occurred in Buffalo, New York, where a librarian refused to purchase the novel (Kappel, 1982), and in Kansas, where the Board of Education in Kansas City ordered *The Grapes of Wrath* removed from all library shelves, due to its “obscenity and portrayal of life” (Lingo, 2003, 358). Perhaps the most famous instance of censorship of *The Grapes of Wrath* occurred in Kern County, California, the same county where the fictional Joads arrived, a place that received a harsh portrayal in the novel. Bowing to pressure from the Associated Farmers of California, a notorious anti-union group, the Kern County Board of Supervisors requested “that the use, possession, and circulation of *The Grapes of Wrath* be banned from the county’s libraries and schools” (Kappel, 1982, 212). This “request” sparked heated debate: either the conditions presented in the novel were accurate and needed to be presented to the public, or Steinbeck was slandering Kern County and needed to have his voice suppressed (Wartzman, 2008).

The treatment *The Grapes of Wrath* was receiving, much like the reviews of its subject matter, drew comparisons to totalitarianism. R.W. Henderson, spokesperson for the American Civil Liberties Union, stated that the banning and censorship of books belonged to the “philosophy of fueherrs [sic], and dictators. That is the way they do [sic] over in Italy and Germany and Russia and Japan” (Lingo, 2003, 362). Gretchen Knief, the Kern County librarian, made the following statement regarding the ban: “But the thing that worries me is that ‘it could happen here.’ If that book is banned, what book will be banned tomorrow? … It’s such a vicious and dangerous thing to begin and may in the end lead to exactly the same thing we see in Europe today. Besides, banning books is so utterly hopeless and futile. Ideas don’t die because a book is forbidden reading” (Lingo, 2003, 366).

Book burning was highly controversial in the 1930s because the world was becoming aware of what was occurring in Nazi Germany. While burning books may have been strongly criticized before then, such an act was seen as a step toward totalitarianism in light of Nazi activities (Dawson, 1997). The quotations above illustrate that censoring books by banning them was also drawing comparison to totalitarian actions. The idea of destruction of intellectual material and inhibiting intellectual freedom through censorship was being related to the destruction of a free and just society; if totalitarian regimes partook in censorship, it followed that democratic regimes should be wary of similar tendencies in their own societies, as censorship may be a catalyst for totalitarianism. The belief that “freedom of mind is basic to the functioning and maintenance of democracy as practiced in the United States” began to take hold in the 1930s (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992, xiv). Reflective of this changing perspective, the American Library Association began to respond to the issues surrounding censorship and intellectual freedom. The ALA had recently adopted the “Code of Ethics for Librarians,” which
reinforced the idea that “the final jurisdiction over the administration of the library rests in the officially constituted governing authority” (Lingo, 2003, 367). In a shift away from this philosophy, the ALA adopted the Library’s Bill of Rights in 1939, but there was a lack of unity among librarians facing censorship, so the Bill was not enforced (Robbins, 1996). The controversy precipitated by The Grapes of Wrath, however, drew attention to the lack of intellectual freedom in American libraries, and pushed for stronger enforcement of the Library’s Bill of Rights, which later became the Library Bill of Rights. As well, the ALA formed an official committee for the promotion of intellectual freedom: the Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the Rights of Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry, now called the Intellectual Freedom Committee.

3. Social History of Doctor Zhivago

The 1950s, following on the heels of World War Two, was also a tumultuous time. The global map had shifted once more after this catastrophe, and the Potsdam and Yalta conferences highlighted the growing disagreement over the fate of countries affected by the Allied victory, dividing the occupation of conquered nations into Soviet and Western blocs. By the beginning of the 1950s, tension between the USSR and the United States had culminated in the Cold War, an ideological conflict between these two countries and their respective allies. Furthering the mounting geopolitical tension of this time were conflicts like the Korean War (1950-1953), the Suez Crisis (1956), the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959), and burgeoning independence struggles in colonialized nations. Cold War America was embroiled in a “Red Scare,” where alleged communist sympathizers were subjected to persecution and intimidation, and subversive, “un-American” materials were censored. The FBI kept files on dissident intellectuals and sought to remove them from influential positions, where they would have the opportunity to spread their subversive views (Robins, 1992). As a result of this increased threat to intellectual freedom, the American Library Association and the Intellectual Freedom Committee introduced changes to the Library Bill of Rights, in order to protect librarians and libraries from attempts to censor “un-American” materials. Librarians were vulnerable to the effects of Red hunting and experienced pressure from authorities and community members label books “communist” and remove them from collections. However, these endeavours were contrary to the ALA’s goals of intellectual freedom, and the Association sought to protect its members and institutions from the consequences of perceived dissent (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992; Robbins, 1996).

The concept of intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union – particularly during Stalin’s time – was virtually inexistent, as the Communist Party saw the arts, including literature, as a vehicle to further its ideological agenda and indoctrinate the people. Socialist realism³ was introduced as official Soviet policy toward art in 1932 and the state censored all output. Criticizing the regime was unthinkable; the destruction of the intelligentsia and purging of dissidents (perceived and real) dominated much of Stalin’s time as leader of the Soviet Union. In a regime where the official ideology is responsible for the state of the arts and intellectual freedom, a change of leadership can change everything. Nikita Khrushchev, when he became leader of the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death in 1953, had the potential to represent such a change. Indeed, at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev famously denounced Stalin and renounced parts of the Stalinist legacy. This destruction of the myth of Stalin drew questions from arts organizations wondering how this would affect the state of the arts, and whether there
Doctor Zhivago is a love story saturated with the major historical events that occurred in Russia during the first half of the twentieth century. Boris Pasternak first attempted to publish it in 1956, when he submitted the manuscript to the literary journal Novy Mir, where it would have been published in serialization, and requested the novel’s publication as a monograph of Gosizdat, a state publishing firm (Weiss, 2011). However, the content of the novel was too critical, even for Khrushchev’s Thaw, and Pasternak was refused publication unless he removed the dissident views toward the Revolution. Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, an Italian communist publisher, received the Doctor Zhivago manuscript and published both a Russian version and an Italian translation of the novel in November 1957, despite attempts by Alexey Surkov, First Secretary of the Soviet Writers’ Association, to have the manuscript returned to the Soviet Union (Dyck, 1972). On September 5, 1958, an English translation of Doctor Zhivago was published.4

The English translation was a best seller in 1958 and 1959,5 and received considerable critical attention in the West; the novel’s popularity was greatly aided by its emergence from behind the Iron Curtain. Nearly all reviews focused on the circumstances of Doctor Zhivago’s publication, and, aside from complaints about the poor translation and the contrived, highly coincidental nature of the plot, reviews were generally positive and promoted Doctor Zhivago as an important novel.6 Curiously, American reviewers were careful to downplay the ideological and political aspects of the novel, despite their prevalence in Pasternak’s writing and the political atmosphere of the 1950s.

It would seem natural that a novel critical of the Soviets would be appropriated and used as propaganda on the American side of the Cold War; however, the phenomenon of New Criticism explains this lack of explicit appropriation. Essentially, New Criticism aimed to examine a literary work in a formalist way; the text was paramount and subjected to close reading, while the social, historical, and political context of the work was ignored: Rescuing the text from author and reader went hand in hand with disentangling it from social or historical context. [...] Literature was a solution from social problems, not a part of them; the [literary work] must be plucked free of the wreckage of history and hoisted into the sublime space above it. (Eagleton, 1983, 48)

This approach, well established in literary criticism by World War II, continued to gain popularity in mainstream literary analysis and critical reception in the post-war decades. It was particularly popular among “bourgeois intellectuals” because it circumnavigated left-wing radical thought, which was tantamount to support of the Soviet Union and therefore considered un-American (Jancovich, 1993). Moreover, due partly to their intellectual roots, New Criticism and formalist readings are “invariably linked with a conservative social, moral, religious, and political assessment” (Leitch, 1988, 28). At its roots, New Criticism was linked to conservative, right-wing politics, and so it was an ideal approach to Cold War literature: critics could align themselves with the “correct” (anti-Soviet) ideology without having to directly address the political context of a given work. By analyzing Doctor Zhivago with New Criticism, critics were treating the novel as significant in the Western tradition for its literary merit. Pasternak’s novel was not didactic; it did not conform to Soviet socialist realism, but, rather, was aligned with Western aesthetic values, therefore marking it as a superior literary work.
Behind the Iron Curtain, Pasternak did not face consequences for his dissidence in subverting Soviet censors by publishing abroad until the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to him on October 23, 1958. Initially, the writer responded to the Swedish Academy with “immensely thankful, touched, proud, astonished, abashed,” but a week later rescinded the Prize: “Considering the meaning this award has been given in the society to which I belong, I must reject this undeserved prize which has been presented to me. Please do not receive my voluntary rejection with displeasure” (Nobel Prize, 2013). After his award had been announced, Pasternak was the target of a vicious press campaign initiated by his fellow writers. The letter Pasternak had received from Novy Mir in 1956 rejecting Doctor Zhivago was published in Literaturnaya Gazeta in October 1958, referring to the novel as “a libel on the October Revolution, the people who made the Revolution, and the building of socialism in the Soviet Union” (Garrard and Garrard, 1990, 139). The accompanying editorial called Pasternak a “Judas” and “an ally of those who hate our country” (201). Pravda also contributed to the backlash, damning Pasternak as a perpetually dissident writer who had “always been basically hostile toward the revolution and to socialism” (201). Pasternak was urged to refuse the award; he was also removed from the Soviet Writers’ Union and it was suggested that he be deprived of his citizenship (Garrard and Garrard, 1990). In order to defuse the situation and allow him to stay in the Soviet Union, Pasternak declined the Nobel Prize. He also wrote to Khrushchev announcing this refusal and published an apology in Pravda, the standard practice of atonement for offending the state.

4. Bakhtinian Analysis

From the Bakhtinian perspective of centripetal and centrifugal forces, both The Grapes of Wrath and Doctor Zhivago qualify as centrifugal forces within their respective contexts. Steinbeck, who had first-hand experience with the lives of migrant workers in America, responded to this social phenomenon by creating a fictionalized account of those affected by the Dust Bowl and its economic repercussions. Although his novel is a work of fiction, the Joads represent millions of Americans who were displaced and forced to live a marginalized, exploited existence as a ‘part-of-no-part,’ an allegory that is compounded by the non-narrative chapters. Steinbeck gave a literary voice to this situation, thereby drawing attention to it, and conceivably hoping to elicit a reaction; he is the author of an utterance anticipating a response, engaging in a dialogic interaction. Critics predicted that Steinbeck would be censored, largely because of his inflammatory language rather than the novel’s subject matter. The dialect chosen by Steinbeck was a vehicle to transmit his message, a reflection of the people whose situation he was depicting: he was using the very language of the marginalized to tell their story.

The Grapes of Wrath’s content also includes a Marxist, socialist message. The United States was (and is) a staunchly capitalist nation; therefore, leftist ideologies were subversive to the dominant ideology. The novel was treated as an angry polemic with the goal of inciting reaction and, hopefully, social change on behalf of exploited groups who were without a social safety-net and deprived of their voice in society. The Grapes of Wrath was functioning as a centrifugal force because it gave these marginalized people a voice. By criticizing the government’s treatment of Okies, Steinbeck was subverting the dominant ideology. The centripetal forces of the time reacted by attempting to silence The Grapes of Wrath through censorship; in order to preserve hegemony, these centripetal forces exerted pressure to keep the voice of the Okies marginalized.
Critics also engaged in dialogics, drawing parallels between Steinbeck’s message and events occurring at that time in Europe and Asia. Further connections to dictatorships abroad were made when the novel was censored, which related the inhibition of freedom of speech to the rise of totalitarianism, and warned against the effects that censorship could have in America. *The Grapes of Wrath* was engaging with the global socio-political atmosphere of the 1930s. The importance of the treatment of *The Grapes of Wrath* in light of worldly events exerted pressure on institutions to engage the concept of intellectual freedom. The library profession, as a result, was forced into a dialogic relationship with Steinbeck’s novel; librarians chose to address the concept of intellectual freedom as a reaction to efforts by those in power to cripple the dissemination of information. The American Library Association initiated a more unified approach to preserving and supporting centrifugal voices by beginning to champion intellectual freedom, which assigns merit to the inclusion of marginalized voices.

While *The Grapes of Wrath* presented the immediate events of its time, *Doctor Zhivago* dealt with a more historical issue: the Bolshevik revolution and ensuing civil war happened several decades before the book was published. This brief temporal distance was insufficient to place Pasternak’s narrative in the closed past. For Bakhtin, the closed past (epic time), is inaccessible, as it is irreconcilably distant from the present. Pasternak’s utterance belongs to the openended present because it was highly accessible to its interlocutors. Evidence of the emotional proximity of *Doctor Zhivago* can be seen in the reaction it elicited from Soviet officials. The regime was unwilling to permit criticism of events and socio-political circumstances, which remained relevant and profoundly affected the people of the Soviet Union. Emboldened by Khrushchev’s Thaw and the denunciation of Stalin’s myth, Pasternak must have felt that perhaps society was ready for his centrifugal voice. The socialist realism of the preceding decades, which prohibited criticism of the hegemonic regime, created a marginalized perspective within Soviet society. Critical analysis, even an accurate presentation, of the ideologues and ideologies that perpetrated the radical social change – and destructive effects on humanity – in Russia was forbidden under Stalin’s regime. Even under the Thaw, Pasternak’s novel was silenced within the Soviet Union, illustrating the totalitarian nature of both the regime and its censorship, and marginalizing Pasternak’s perspective.

While the Soviet Union’s centripetal forces had the overpowering strength to forbid the publication of subversive texts, Bakhtin’s tenet that there exist, within every society, both centripetal and centrifugal forces remains valid in the case of *Doctor Zhivago*. The novel exerted itself as a centrifugal force on the Soviet Union’s hegemony from abroad, by voicing its message in the West. When the novel is viewed only in terms of the respective sides of the Cold War, Bakhtin’s centripetal forces triumph. *Doctor Zhivago* was lauded in the West, where its message was not centrifugal in nature, as it conformed to the anti-communist, anti-Soviet hegemony of the Western bloc. However, from the broader perspective of the Cold War epoch, *Doctor Zhivago* was performing a centrifugal function: it was subverting the hegemony of the Soviet Union through its dissemination in the West and opening up an imaginary space for dissidence and the destruction of the homogeneity within society. 7

5. Conclusion

Including marginalized voices from other regimes or epochs is a way of opening dialogic spaces. An utterance may be centrifugal in one context, yet it may become a
centripetal force in another. This reversal is explained through Bakhtin’s concept of an utterance as comprising of both a structural, linguist aspect and a contextual, semantic aspect that is unique to its circumstances. While *The Grapes of Wrath* was a centrifugal utterance in America, subject to censorship, it was performing a centripetal role within the Soviet Union. In the USSR, Steinbeck was held up as an exemplary proletariat author who exposed the injustices of the capitalist system (Brown, 1962). The same reversal is true for *Doctor Zhivago*: while it was centrifugal where it originated in the Soviet Union, it was centripetal in the West. Pasternak was held in esteem by the Western literary tradition because he eschewed socialist realism and his message was critical of the Soviet system.

A dissenting voice that is inserted into a new context, where it is transformed into a centripetal force, also retains the ability to act as a centrifugal force on its original socio-political context. In other words, the subversive voice is given more power when it is placed in a context that supports its views, like *Doctor Zhivago* in the West and *The Grapes of Wrath* in a Marxist regime. From this empowered position, the subversive voice continues its dialogic interaction with its original context (the regime that attempted to suppress it). For Bakhtin, centripetal and centrifugal forces are inherent in society, and have to be examined in ever widening contexts in order to understand how they exert themselves. Centripetal forces will always work to silence centrifugal utterances, regardless of the political regime: censorship in the communist, totalitarian Soviet Union was reflective of the regime – it was complete, violent, and arbitrary. Censorship in the capitalist, democratic United States may exist on a case-by-case basis, supplemented by discussion, but it is still an attempt to eliminate subversion of the dominant ideology. Instances of censorship are attempts to marginalize voices and perspectives by removing them from the dialogics of the epoch.

Libraries act as disseminators of information and, as a result, when the information is perceived as subversive, dangerous, or threatening, libraries face (often considerable) pressure to censor. The concepts of intellectual freedom and its partner, freedom of speech, are contemporary notions used to promote the protection and vitality of centrifugal forces. Intellectual freedom and freedom of speech are intended to allow dissenting voices the same opportunity as hegemonic voices to present utterances to the dialogic world. As a result, libraries that seek to preserve intellectual freedom by working to eliminate censorship are also assuming the role of a centrifugal force within society. Libraries can choose to encourage heterogeneity within society and seek to include voices that might otherwise be marginalized. For Bakhtin, censorship occupies a natural place in human existence: centripetal and centrifugal forces are inherent, locked in a dialogic struggle that will last throughout the cumulative epoch of humanity. Understanding the forms these forces take within society and participating in dialogic interactions – both centripetal and centrifugal – will create a more open approach to controversial utterances. Understanding the events and context that precipitate censorship will not eradicate the urge to silence inflammatory ideas, but it will enable a dialogue to exist between opposing sides, encouraging the inclusion of marginalized voices.
Notes:


3. Socialist realism is “the truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development [where] the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of ideologically remolding and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism.” (Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 576.)

4. *Doctor Zhivago* was not published in the Soviet Union until 1988. The Italian and Russian versions published by Feltrinelli, as well as the English edition from Pantheon Books, were only available in the West.

5. For listings of *Doctor Zhivago* as a best seller at the time of its publication, see *Publishers’ Weekly*, vols. 174-177, “National Best Sellers.”


7. Pasternak and his work to voice marginalized perspectives from the Soviet Union can be held up as influences on other famous dissidents, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a writer who was eventually exiled from the USSR as a result of his criticism of the regime.

8. An *epoch*, for Bakhtin, refers to a socio-political period, not a unit of time *per se*. The concept is used in a cultural sense, so several (infinitely many) epochs can occur simultaneously, within different cultural spheres. The concept also has a concentric sense: epochs can become clear and absorb myriad elements when viewed retroactively through increased historical perspective.
References


