The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat

Ann Komaromi

The Russian neologism *samizdat,* coined to describe the system of underground publishing in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, has entered many languages as a way to describe any clandestine production and circulation of texts. The original Soviet samizdat seems at once both a known and an unknown phenomenon. Previous international audiences most often thought of samizdat in terms of political opposition and heroic dissidence: samizdat was a free channel for communicating the truth that would bring down the Soviet empire. This idealized characterization made a compelling Cold War political narrative, but it has little current relevance. In fact, samizdat was a more complex cultural phenomenon binding a varied Soviet dissident public. Idealized conceptions of samizdat have lost their resonance, but the samizdat form continues to influence post-Soviet thought and praxis. By turning to the material existence of the samizdat text, can we evaluate anew what samizdat was?

This focus on the material form of samizdat has a couple of hermeneutical advantages. In the first place, it implies a distance from the texts of samizdat as historical artifacts, allowing us to contemplate them as indices of their historical time. The retrospective view of samizdat as a historical phenomenon has led in the nearly twenty years since the end of the samizdat era to a growing abundance of anthologies, memoirs, and scholarly treatments of the era. Traditional political mythologization in surveys of samizdat has given way to more detailed and varied treatments of samizdat culture in its localized manifestations.[1] The historical remove

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1. The predominance of specifically political opposition in descriptions of samizdat and "unofficial" Soviet literature has been noted by, for example, Stanislav Savitskii, in his book *Andegraund: Istoriia i mify leningradskoi neofitsial'noi literatury* (Moscow, 2002). See, for example, the 1976 account by dissident Iurii Mal'tsev of the history of "free" Russian literature, *Vol'naia russkaia literatura, 1955–1975* (Frankfurt/Main, 1976). The most authoritative and comprehensive account of the era framed samizdat in terms of oppositional political activity: Liudmila Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomysliia v SSSR: Noveishii period* (Vilnius, 1992). For the English translation, see Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights,* trans. Carol Pearce and John Glad (Middletown, Conn., 1985). More recent materials reflecting the diversity of Soviet underground culture include Savitskii, *Andegraund,* the proceedings of conferences held in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1993 (Viacheslav Dolinin and Boris Ivanov, *Samizdat: Po materialam v konferentsii "30 let nezavisimoi pechati, 1950–80 gody"* [St. Petersburg, 1993] and E. V. Shukshina and Tamara Vladimirovna Gromova, eds., *Gosbezopasnost' i literatura: Na opyte Rossii i Germanii (SSSR i GDR)* [Moscow, 1994]), and the series of articles appearing in the Moscow journal *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie,* 1995, no. 14. The massive tome edited by Anatolii Strelianyi et al., *Samizdat veka* (Moscow, 1999), provides a broad overview of Russian samizdat materials, with interesting accompanying articles and photographs. See also the catalogue of a German exhibition on samizdat held at the University of Bremen in 2000: Wolfgang Eichwede and Ivo Bock, eds., *Samizdat: Alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa: Die 60er bis 80er Jahre* (Leipzig, n.d.). An idiosyncratic early source is the massive volume: Konstantin K. Kuz'minskii and Grigorii L. Kovalev, eds., *Antologiia noveishei russkoi poezii u Goluboi Laguny/The Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry,* vols. 1–5 (Newtonville, Mass., 1980–1986).

can help us achieve critical distance as well. New critical approaches that gained currency in the post-Soviet era have introduced "apolitical" or alternatively political readings informed by western theory to the contemplation of Soviet alternative culture.[2] Such a perspective resonates with the orientation to western praxis and theory within Soviet samizdat culture. It corresponds especially well to the more ironic and self-reflexive trends of samizdat. My choice of poststructural theory (including concepts from Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Jean Baudrillard) to help frame discussion in this article assumes a measure of appropriateness based on the temporal parallel of the development of this theory to the evolution of Soviet alternative culture. Specifically, the poststructuralist emphasis on writing and texts as a locus for challenging dominant ideologies and idealist assumptions seems useful for illuminating the subversive essence of samizdat. At the same time, the view from/toward the west brings into focus what is particularly Soviet about samizdat.

Samizdat and the Disappearance of Samizdat

Samizdat existed as a system of underground publication in the Soviet Union from the 1950s to the mid-1980s.[3] Poet Nikolai Glazkov reportedly first used the term *samsebiaizdat* (roughly, "I-self-pub") on his own unpublished manuscripts beginning in 1952. Amateur publishing and circulation of uncensored typescripts became common in the 1960s. Anna Akhmatova described the era as "pre-Gutenberg" because of the limited technical possibilities for producing and distributing uncensored written

2. Viktor Erofeev, in the article, "Pominki po sovetskoi literature," *Literaturnaia gazeta,* 4 July 1991), 8, described an "alternative" new Russian literature from the Soviet underground that was supposedly not politically engaged. In the 1990s, "postmodernism" became a leading critical discourse among Russian critics. See Mikhail Epshtein, Aleksandr Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture,* ed. and trans. Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (New York, 1999). See also Mark Lipovetskii, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos,* ed. Eliot Borenstein (Armonk, N.Y., 1999). Other examples include discussion by Oleg Dark, "Mif o proze," *Druzhba narodov,* 1992, nos. 5–6: 219–32, and Viacheslav Kuritsyn, *Russkii literaturnyi postmodernizm* (Moscow, 2000).

This "postmodern" critical discourse reflected a drive to reintegrate Russian culture into a larger international playing field, but it was open to charges of tendentiousness and lack of historicization. Vladislav Kulakov, for example, questioned the fashionable label "postmodern." Why did some merit the privileged designation and not others, and on what authority did critics confer the label? See Kulakov's discussion of Boris Groys's article "O pol'ze teorii dlia praktiki," *Literaturnaia gazeta,* 31 October 1990, 5, in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fakt* (Moscow, 1999), 35–41.

3. The period from the late 1960s to 1987 is the period of "classic" samizdat, according to the catalog in the publication *Materialy samizdata,* from the Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe Archives, no. 8 (1991): iii. This period stands out from the larger tradition of unofficial publishing in Russia from Aleksandr Radishchev to the internet. Samizdat underground publishing, appearing after Iosif Stalin, existed under particular conditions, within a definite political environment and specific technology and media. The explosion of independent publishing in the period of glasnost and perestroika reflected a different political climate, much freer access to the means for publishing, and significantly less threat of repression.

material. Strictly controlled access to copy machines made privately owned typewriters the most practical means for publication, and typescripts became the characteristic samizdat form.[4] Most frequently, typists produced multiple copies of a text using carbon paper and tissue paper. This system accommodated the scarcity of paper and produced texts that could be easily concealed. These samizdat typescripts were then passed from reader to reader within a trusted network of acquaintances. Particularly in the early years of its existence, possessing samizdat could be grounds for arrest.

Traditional political readings of samizdat tended to view the material existence of the samizdat typescripts as simply a circumstantial artifact. Emphasis rested on the content, the truthful and authoritative message. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose 1973 *GULag Archipelago* is the most prominent example of political samizdat, claimed in his Nobel lecture: *"One word of truth will change the course of the entire world."*[5] A mythologizing belief in the power of the ideal free word was linked to a heroic conception of the authors of samizdat. See, for example, Iurii Mal'tsev's history of a "martyred" underground literature.[6] Similarly, we have Lev Kopelev's reminiscences of the free word, and Grigorii Svirskii's description of Frida Vigdorova's feat.[7] From a retrospective position in 1993, Aleksandr Daniel' (son of dissident author Iulii Daniel' [Nikolai Arzhak]), outlined the "myths" of samizdat obvious in such discourse, including the view of samizdat as the forum of "heroic and uncompromising" truth wielded by dissident-warriors struggling valiantly against the totalitarian regime to bring about its eventual demise.[8]

4. Some texts, particularly foreign editions smuggled into the USSR, could be photographed and then reproduced in theoretically limitless numbers of copies, although this process required a camera and paper for development and produced bulky texts.

5. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Nobel Lecture*, trans. F. D. Reeve (New York, 1972), 34, 69 (emphasis in the original, in all capital letters).

6. In his history of unofficial literature, Mal'tsev said, "Underground literature fixes itself with difficulty. It is forced to accomplish heroic feats (literally heroic, because the authors, like the distributors, pay with years in the camps, or with their lives) in order to survive, and often it does not survive (how many manuscripts are buried in the ovens of the Lubianka or in the secret archives of the KGB!)." Mal'tsev, *Vol'naia russkaia literatura*, 5–6.

7. Dissident Kopelev was the prototype for Rubin in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel *First Circle.* He said, "Those accomplishing great feats for the free word offer sacrifices. Iurii Galanskov died in the camp. Il'ia Gabai committed suicide, having just returned to freedom. Grigorii Pod"iapol'skii died of a heart attack." He maintained, however, "Whatever may happen to those who help to free the word, it lives. You cannot kill it, nor lock it up." From Kopelev's introduction to a collection of his speeches and letters circulated in samizdat, *Vera v slovo: Vystupleniia i pis'ma 1962–1976 gg.* (Ann Arbor, 1977), 10.

Svirskii emphasized the moral significance of Frida Vigdorova's service, notably the transcription of Joseph Brodsky's trial, in light of her subsequent death: "The significance of writers such as Frida Vigdorova is enormous. It is not just a matter of what they wrote, but of their fate, the ordeals they suffered. They hurled themselves unarmed at the State. As a rule children follow their parent's deeds rather than their words, particularly if their parents have paid for nobility of spirit with death." Grigorii Svirskii, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: The Literature of Moral Opposition,* trans. and ed. Robert Dessaix and Michael Ulman (Ann Arbor, 1981), 237–38. This mythologizing quote does not, curiously, appear in the Russian versions of the text published in London (1979) and Moscow (1998).

8. See A. Daniel''s "Istoriia samizdata," in Shukshina and Gromova, eds., *Gosbezopasnost',* 93. Another example of the heroic discourse is to be found in Viacheslav Dolinin's

According to this idealistic "heroic" discourse, the goal of samizdat was to transmit the "truth" suppressed in the official world of state-censored publications. Samizdat provided a channel for freely transmitting content. A remarkably successful example of this aspiration can be found in the long-running samizdat dissident bulletin *Khronika tekushchikh sobytii* (Chronicle of current events, begun in April 1968). This samizdat newsletter documented human rights abuses on the basis of information collected through underground channels. Thanks to the publishers' tireless efforts, the bulletin achieved remarkable consistency and accuracy.[9] Clearly, for publishers and readers of the *Chronicle,* the typescript was simply the medium available for communication. In the west, however, this amateurish typescript page acquired significance as a symbol of the Soviet dissident struggle. The title page of the Russian-English counterpart to the *Chronicle* published in New York beginning in March 1973, the *Chronicle of the Defense of Rights in the USSR,* deliberately imitated the typewritten style of its prototype. The geographical distance made the typewritten form strange and significant. With time, Soviet dissidents, too, began to value, or fetishize, the samizdat text, a phenomenon later profiled by younger generations of samizdat users, who directed critical attention toward the form of the characteristic samizdat page.

Early on, however, the typescript functioned simply as the inevitable medium. Attention to the physical form was considered a luxury and generally expressed itself through a transformation of the samizdat form into something that looked less like samizdat. The early samizdat journal published by Aleksandr Ginzburg, *Sintaksis* (1960–61), resembled an artist's edition and featured especially creative covers. Such elaborate designs quickly proved impractical given the growing underground demand for texts, severely limited publishing resources, and the diffusion of copying activity throughout the system. Later samizdat typescripts show occasional modest attempts at design (see figures 1 and 2).[10] Individual attempts to beautify particular copies of samizdat for gifts or keepsakes reflected the effort to make them more like "professional" editions. Masters of such hand publishing, like Sergei Lar'kov in Moscow, were sought for their polished

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view of samizdat as a powerful political movement: "Samizdat, by widening spiritual horizons and awakening civil society and healthy, constructive forces, played a huge, still not fully appreciated role in destroying the totalitarian regime, in constructing a foundation for the future democratic Russia." "Leningradskii periodicheskii samizdat serediny 1950–80-kh godov," in Dolinin and Ivanov, *Samizdat,* 21.

9. The KGB waged a campaign of searches, seizures, and arrests centered on the *Chronicle* in 1973, Case No. 24, known as the *"Chronicle* Case." In twenty-seven issues they could find only one incorrect fact. See Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomysliia v SSSR,* 231–32, 244, 246–47.

10. See also the playful watercolors and thread binding of early Muscovite "publications" of SMOG poetry, including Aleksandr Urusov's "Krik dalekikh murav'ev" (1965) and "CHU" (1965), in the Hoover Archives, NTS Collection, Box 1, Items 9/65, 10/65. While some examples of hand-drawn covers can be found later, like that of the *Moskovskii sbornik* (1975) (Moscow Memorial Society, f. 156), others used typewritten graphics or placement

Figure 1. The projected cover of Aleksandr Ginzburg's early samizdat journal *Sintaksis,* **no. 4, 1960. This issue was never realized. The design, originally in yellow and black, might be Stanislav Krasovitskii's. Photograph courtesy of the Archive at the "Memorial" Society, Moscow, f. 118.**

on the page to contribute to design. Most publications forwent such luxury, however, in order to fit as much writing onto as little paper as possible.

For this article, I consulted the sizable collection of samizdat texts at the Moscow Memorial Society, the small collection at the Sakharov Museum in Moscow, and the extensive NTS archive at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Other major collections can be found at the Radio Liberty Archives, housed in Budapest, and at the University of Bremen.

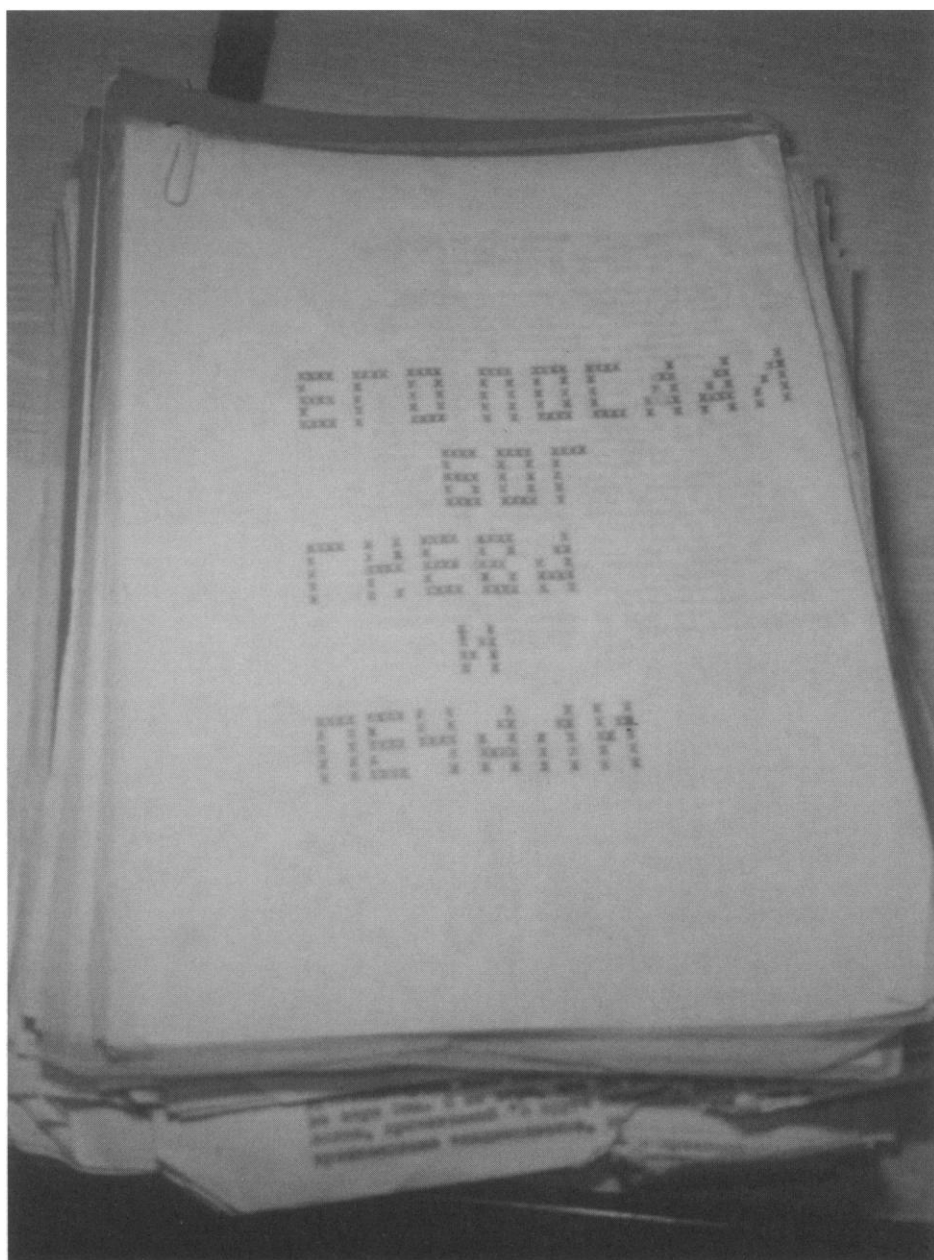**Figure 2.** A later typewritten cover for the 1970 samizdat collection of materials on Solzhenitsyn, "Ego poslal Bog gneva i pechali" (He was sent by the God of anger and grief). Photograph courtesy of the Archive at the "Memorial" Society, Moscow, f. 155.

technique and creative use of materials.[11] These special editions of samizdat testified to a special regard for the author or the recipient.

The publication of works like Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago,* Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago,* or Akhmatova's *Requiem* in foreign editions and later glasnost-era and post-Soviet editions rendered samizdat meaningless. As merely a (somewhat embarrassing and wretched) carrier of information, samizdat disappears.

Resurrecting Samizdat: The Material Existence of the Text

The long existence of samizdat and the burgeoning tensions within the underground system led to other, more self-conscious conceptualizations of the significance of samizdat on the basis of the material existence of the texts. Looking back at the era, the samizdat text began to seem symbolic of the era, an integral part of the special experience of reading samizdat. One western reviewer commented, "To some Russians, the memory of a first encounter with Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* is as much a physical memory—the blurry mimeographed text, the dog-eared paper, the dim glow of the lamp switched on late at night—as it is one of reading the revelatory text itself."[12] The medium of samizdat had a significance, too.

This samizdat medium was particular. The typical samizdat typescript was characteristically wretched and frequently featured mistakes and corrections as well as blurred or pale type. Occasionally copies had lines running off the page. Highly circulated typescripts became brittle and worn from handling, like the heavily used Odessa copy of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Sobach'e serdtse* (Heart of a dog). The physical page seemed as embattled and fragile as the Soviet author himself (figures 3 and 4).

For the *Chronicle* and all other samizdat publications that focused on transmitting the "pure" message, the typos and other deformations in the typescript constituted "noise" in the channel of communication. For those considering retrospectively the development of samizdat, precisely these material aspects reflected the unique tensions of samizdat culture. Writing about samizdat, Konstantin Kuz'minskii extolled the virtues of underground typists and typewriters: "How many of them were there, those selfless typists worrying over the texts of [Joseph] Brodskii, [Mikhail] Eremin, [Dmitrii] Bobyshev, and [Viktor] Sosnora!" And, "the typewriter itself, 'Konsul,' 'Erika,' 'Kolibri,' my 'Underwood' from 1903—how can one not remember them?" Lyrics from bard Aleksandr Galich showed the extent to which the samizdat typewriter symbolized the era: "The 'Erika'

11. Sergei Lar'kov in Moscow, for example, specialized in hand-binding gift editions of samizdat texts, including an edition of the *Sakharovskii sbornik* that was presented to Andrei Sakharov himself in 1981. Having no materials on hand and being in a rush, he was forced to bind the text using the suede from his wife's skirt. Lar'kov, interview, Moscow Memorial Society, May 2000.

12. Anne Applebaum, "Inside the Gulag," *New York Review of Books* 47 (15 June 2000): 10. Although, as noted above, samizdat texts were rarely mimeographed. Mimeograph technology, like photocopying machines, was strictly controlled in pre-glasnost Soviet society.
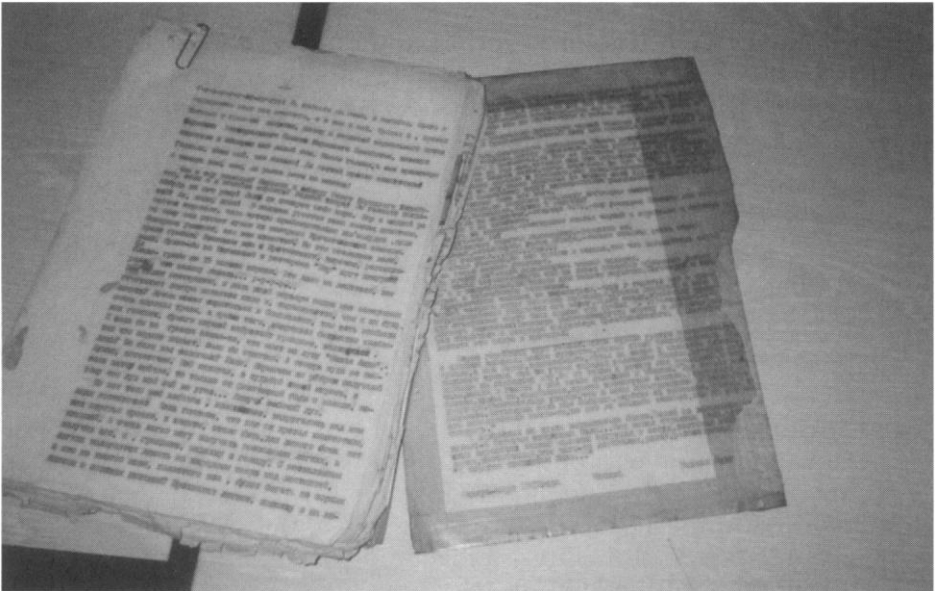
Figure 3. Mikhail Bulgakov's *Sobach'e serdtse* (Heart of a dog), a samizdat copy from Odessa from the 1970s. Photograph courtesy of the Archive at the "Memorial" Society, Moscow, f. 129.

makes four copies."[13] The diffusion of the message through multiple samizdat typists tended to multiply mistakes. Kuz'minskii recalled with gentle irony that Boris Taigin would faithfully copy crude orthographic or lexical errors in samizdat texts, particularly if they were marked "checked by the author."

The nature of the samizdat system complicated the notion of a "true" message and an individual author. Dissident Petro Grigorenko and other originators of samizdat texts testified to the loss of control over a text, once it was released into samizdat circulation. Copyists introduced degrees of remove from the original author (figure 5). The technological exigencies, as well as the idiosyncratic editorial license, altered the message transmitted, sometimes significantly. Natal'ia Trauberg, who translated texts from English for samizdat, later recalled excising the "redundant" passages from G. K. Chesterton's texts, for example.[14]

In this way, the written "trace," to borrow Jacques Derrida's terminology, in samizdat implied a certain amount of ambiguity or "play" between the physical form and the ideal content, between the signifier and the signified.[15] The spirit of "play" in all senses strongly infused samizdat from

13. See Kuz'minskii and Kovalev, eds., *Antologiia*, 1:28. The lyrics come from Galich's song "How are we worse than Horace?"

14. See Petr Grigorenko's memoirs, *V podpol'e mozhno vstretit' tol'ko krys* . . . (Moscow, 1997); Kuz'minskii and Kovalev, eds., *Antologiia*, 1:31; and Natal'ia Trauberg, "Vsegda li pobezhdaet pobezhdennyi? Natal'ia Trauberg o khristianskom samizdate," *Literaturnaia gazeta* (26 April–2 May 2000) 17/5787: 11.

15. In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida treated the genealogy of the theologically motivated logos and the play between signifier and signified implied by "writing." Samizdat
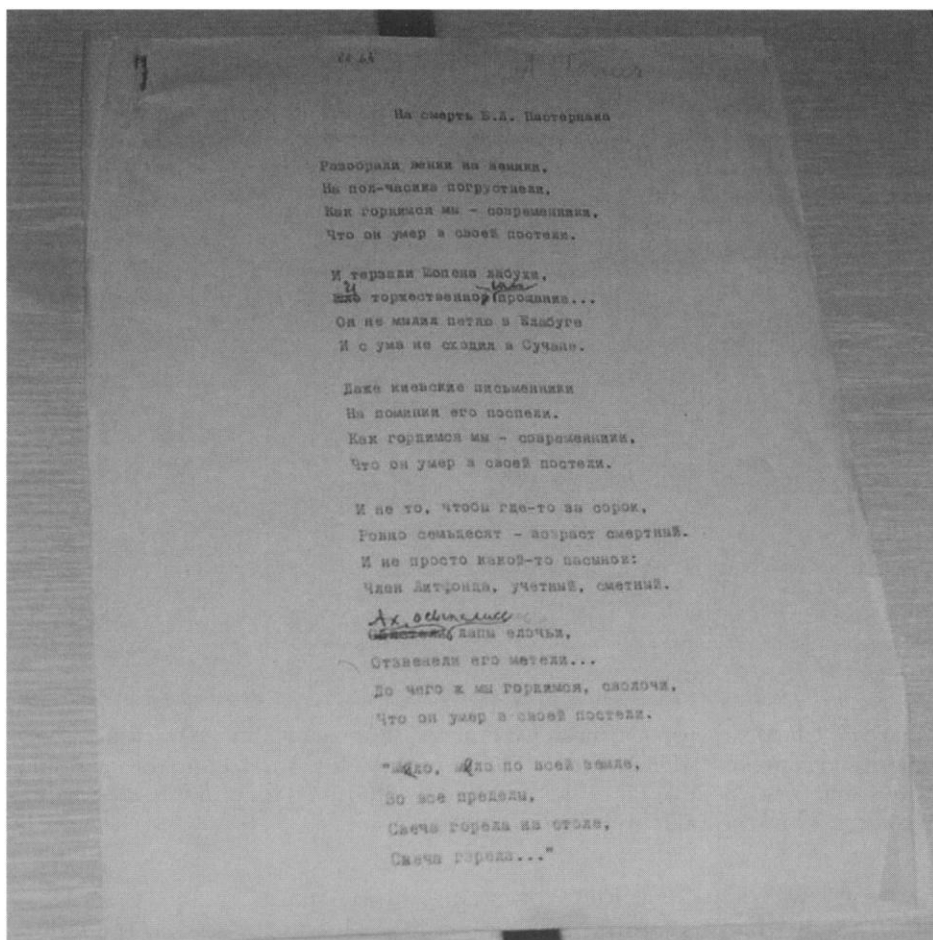
Figure 4. Aleksandr Galich's "Na smert' B. L. Pasternaka" (On the death of B. L. Pasternak). Photograph courtesy of the Archive at the "Memorial" Society, Moscow, f. 157.

its inception. In using the term *samizdat,* Glazkov was parodying the acronyms of official Soviet publishing houses like "Gosizdat," "Voenizdat," and so on. Lev Losev suggested that Glazkov's playful term also evoked associations with a brand of Georgian wine popular in the Soviet Union, "Samtrest." The carnivalesque spirit Losev describes in samizdat captures the atmosphere of a Soviet decade characterized by youthful enthusiasm and the publication, in 1965, of Mikhail Bakhtin's book on François Rabelais and the carnival. Losev submits that, more often than heroic struggle, samizdat represented for Soviet citizens the opportunity for carnivalesque consumption, something on which to get high. The boredom of Soviet life gave rise to "binge drinking, and, as its variants, binge sexual activity and binge reading," he claimed in the essay *Samizdat i samogon* (Samizdat and

presents a special historical case of the written "trace" he examines. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967), trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1998).
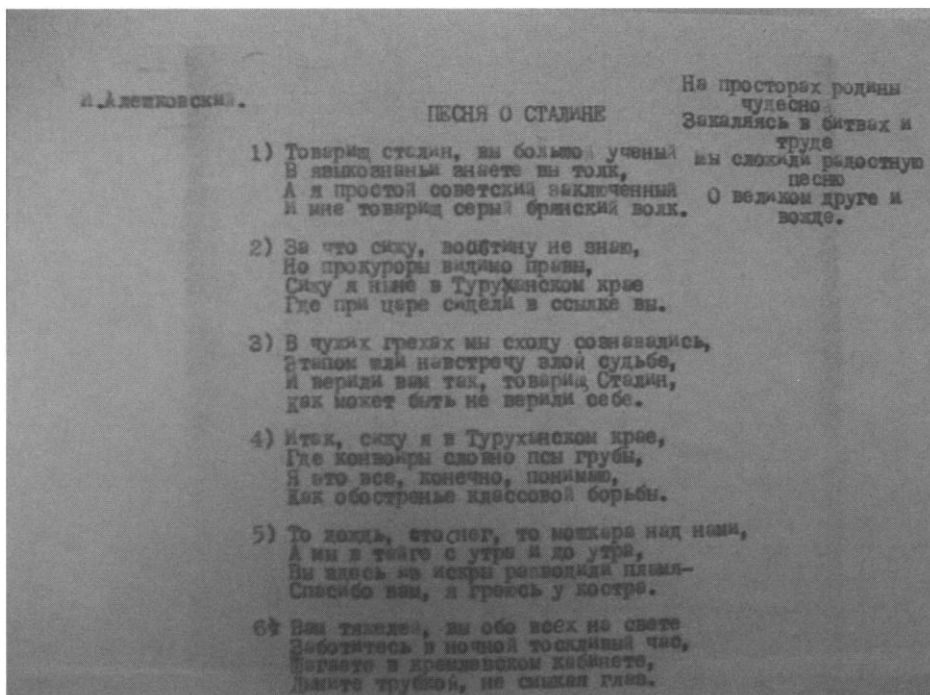
Figure 5. Iuz Aleshkovskii's "Pesnia o Staline" (Song of Stalin). Here the author's first initial is presented incorrectly. This humorous text was so popular and ubiquitous that many believed it to be "folklore," without an identifiable author. Image courtesy of the Sakharov Center Museum.

home brew; the title underscores the "home-made" [*sam-*] nature of both). Samizdat was an intoxicating product. It was forbidden fruit. This forbidden fruit included serious political and literary works, but also literature of much more dubious quality, including pornography.[16]

From the beginning, samizdat derived its identity via its parodic difference from official publishing. Samizdat self-consciously aped "serious" censored publications, challenging the Soviet publishing industry's self-proclaimed monopoly on truth (as in the official newspaper *Pravda* [Truth]). Traditional political dissidents offered an alternative, "real" truth in samizdat. Others challenged the worth and possibility of one integral "truth," a project waged on the level of content and of form. Critic and writer Andrei Siniavskii (Abram Terts) was one of the first in the samizdat era to articulate clearly a dissident challenge to monolithic political truth, and to uphold literature's independence from it. The 1966 trial of Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' for "anti-Soviet propaganda" in literary works published abroad presents a defining moment in the history of Soviet dissidence. At the trial, Siniavskii argued for the autonomy and ambiguity of

16. See Lev Losev, "Samizdat i samogon," *Zakrytyi raspredelitel' (Tsikl ocherkov)* (Ann Arbor, 1984), 178. Losev identified six categories of samizdat literature: literary, political, religious-philosophical, mystical and occult, erotica, and instructions. Ibid., 170–74.

literary discourse, a mode of discourse that could not be reduced to political messages and should not be judged by political criteria.[17]

One of Siniavskii's works published abroad, his article "Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm" (On socialist realism, 1959), challenged the very foundations of official Soviet literature. Questioning the attachment to "realism," Siniavskii examined the assumed equivalency between art and reality and art and a political message. At the end of the essay he proposed instead a phantasmagoric mode of writing, with hypotheses rather than goals and grotesquery in place of a reflection of everyday life. By challenging realist premises, Siniavskii found himself at odds with other dissidents. The neorealist literature of internationally recognized dissident authors like Solzhenitsyn and Vladimir Maksimov offered a response to Soviet truth by dissident truth, expressed through the same type of supposedly transparent realist prose. Siniavskii and his coeditor of the émigré journal *Sintaksis* (Paris), Mariia Rozanova (also his wife), accused these dissidents of the same dangerous ideological dogmatism as the Soviet system they attempted to oppose. Some western critics agreed: "Some Western critics have called realist dissidents such as Solzhenitsyn and Maksimov 'inverted socialist realists' who arrive at different conclusions from orthodox Soviet writers but 'have taken over in all essentials the Socialist Realist aesthetic,'" wrote Stephen Lovell and Rosalind Marsh.[18]

Russian critics retrospectively interpreted Siniavskii's innovative challenge to Soviet-style dogmatism of all stripes in terms of poststructural or postmodern challenges to a traditional logocentrism. Aleksandr Genis dubbed Siniavskii the father of Russian postmodernism, hailing his transcendence of a binary opposition: in Siniavskii's article on socialist realism, said Genis, "The question of choice—of whether to accept it or to reject it, whether to fight against it or to defend it, whether to develop it or to reject it—became obsolete. Instead of the former perspective, which characterized the 1960s, Sinyavsky pointed to a new context: that of aesthetization."[19] Siniavskii was also deconstructing the traditional Russian author, in part through his alter ego, Abram Terts, the pseudonym under

17. The so-called *White Book,* compiled by Aleksandr Ginzburg et al., documented the trial of Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' and protests against the trial in Russia and abroad. The *White Book* was circulated in samizdat. It provoked further conflicts between the Soviet authorities and a burgeoning human-rights movement. Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomysliia v SSSR,* 206. See Siniavskii's comments on the nonpolitical character of artistic literature in his "final word." Siniavskii, *Belaia kniga o dele Siniavskogo i Danielia* (Moscow, 1966, and Frankfurt am Main, 1967), 301–6.

18. From the discussion of Nina Katerli's speech "Sovok—moi geroi i moi chitatel'" in Stephen Lovell and Rosalind Marsh's article "Culture and Crisis: The Intelligentsia and Literature after 1953," in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds., *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (New York, 1998), 60. Lovell and Marsh cite G. Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism* (London, 1980), and A. Besançon "Solzhenitsyn at Harvard," *Survey* 24 (1979): 134. In numerous articles in *Sintaksis,* Siniavskii and Mariia Rozanova criticized Solzhenitsyn and Maksimov for their intolerant, Soviet-style dogmatism.

19. Aleksandr Genis, "Pravda duraka: Andrei Siniavskii," in *Ivan Petrovich umer: Stat'i i rassledovaniia* (Moscow, 1999), 34. This English version can be found in Genis, "Archaic Postmodernism: The Aesthetics of Andrei Sinyavsky," in Epshtein, Genis, and Vladiv-Glover, *Russian Postmodernism,* 186.

which he published in the west. Literary scholar Catharine Nepomnya-
shchy linked Siniavskii's literary praxis to the challenge to realism, noting
that Siniavskii, writing as Terts, sought to "subvert the Russian tradition of
the writer as political, social, or moral critic by impugning the concept of
realism itself, counterposing to it the inherent difference between reality
and its representation."[20] This project included, too, a challenge to the
canonical images of classic Russian authors, a move that upset both offi-
cial Soviet ideologues and their opponents. Siniavskii / Terts provoked a
furor among conservative Russian readers at home and in emigration with
his mention of Aleksandr Pushkin's "thin erotic legs."[21] Nepomnyashchy
drew attention to the way Siniavskii / Terts's exposure of the writer's "na-
ked body" violated language taboos "covering" the body in traditional Rus-
sian discourse. Influential émigré editor Roman Gul' likened Terts's act to
Ham's laughter over the nakedness of his father, Noah.[22] This issue cuts to
the heart of cultural myths and ideology: the myth of Noah's other sons
respectfully covering their father's body provides a prototype for the dis-
creetly covered body of Truth.[23]

Siniavskii's playful dissident spirit found expression in the work of
younger generations who drew attention to the form and function of the
physical page of samizdat, the embarrassingly wretched "body" of the text,
in order to expose the operation of both official ideology and its dissident
counterpart. In 1979, conceptualist poet and artist Dmitrii Prigov explic-
itly explored the significance of samizdat as a physical medium. He iden-
tified a new self-consciousness within samizdat culture. This culture had
initially viewed typewritten copies as an interim stage on the way to the
professional textual product: "The rather long and intensive existence of
Samizdat literature has, however, already given rise to a corresponding
culture of its apprehension, a viewer's reaction to the typewritten text it-

20. See Catharine Nepomnyashchy, *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime* (New Haven,
1995), 198. See also Nepomnyashchy's article "Andrei Donatovich Sinyavsky," *Slavic and
East European Journal* 42, no. 3 (1998): 367–71. Genis called Terts Siniavskii's "main liter-
ary work." Genis, "Pravda duraka," 35. Vadim Linetskii asserted that Siniavskii's Terts rep-
resented the first use of "foolishness" in Russian culture for the construction of the author:
Linetskii, "Nuzhen li mat russkoi proze?" *Vestnik novoi literatury,* 1992, no. 4: 224–31.

21. Compare samizdat writer Venedikt Erofeev's lampooning of Maksim Gor'kii
on Capri with his "hairy legs" sticking out from under white trousers. Erofeev, "Friazevo–
61st kilometer," *Moskva-Petushki* (1969) (Moscow, 2000), and Venedikt Erofeev, *Moscow
Stations,* trans. Stephen Mulrine (London, 1997).

22. Roman Gul''s telling reference to the biblical prohibition described in Genesis
9:22–23 was part of his attack on Siniavskii in the émigré publication *Novyi zhurnal.* Gul',
"Progulki Khama s Pushkinym," *Novyi zhurnal,* 1976, no. 124:117–29. Nepomnyashchy il-
lustrated the way the language of outraged Soviet and émigré authorities demonstrated
Siniavskii's violation of essential language taboos. See Nepomnyashchy, *Abram Tertz,* 23.
Siniavskii's inappropriate attention to the body scandalized sensibilities accustomed to the
discreetly covered authorial body.

23. Roland Barthes talked about the centrality of the story of Noah's nakedness for
narrative in general, "if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a stag-
ing of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father—which would explain the solidarity of
narrative forms, of family structures, and of prohibitions of nudity, all collected in our cul-
ture in the myth of Noah's sons covering his nakedness." Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,*
trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1975), 10.

self."[24] An unexamined response to the physical text formed a key part of dissident ideology, Prigov suggested.

The mythologizing relationship to the samizdat text depended on unambiguously linking the signifying typescript to idealized "truth," "heroism," and "genius." A curious feature of this attitude involves decoupling the signifier from the "actual" message it bears. Dissident ideology reduced the text to a text-object or "object-sign" within a hierarchical system of cultural exchange in the Soviet underground. Like the "object-signs" described by Baudrillard in a consumer economy, these textual "object-signs" acquired value in this specific context of cultural exchange on the basis of difference coded as physical form.[25] Thus, the amateur typescript, the deformity of the text, the characteristic mistakes, corrections, fragile paper, and degraded print quality had value because they marked the *difference* between samizdat and official publications (figure 6). The message carried on the samizdat page ceased to matter. Scholar and cultural commentator Marietta Chudakova suggested that there was a rigid hierarchy characteristic of Soviet intelligentsia who subscribed to dissident dogma: even interesting literature like Iurii Trifonov's would be dismissed out of hand by liberals repeating the truism, "if it appeared in the official press, it's nothing *special.*" They exaggerated the impossibility of publishing anything "worthwhile" in the official press in the 1970s.[26]

Relation to the samizdat text *as sign* meant reducing the text from a carrier of significant content to a samizdat object-sign as such, one valued within a nonconformist ideology as a positive cultural product, in contrast to worthless official texts. A familiar joke highlights the function of the text-object as sign: a Soviet grandmother is having trouble interesting her granddaughter in Lev Tolstoi's beloved classic *War and Peace.* The problem is not that the novel is too long. It just looks too official. To entice the girl to read it, the poor woman stays up nights retyping the work as "samizdat." The physical form of samizdat, that is, the signifier functioning as coded difference, has value for the granddaughter. The samizdat text object is fetishized.[27]

24. From "Dimitry Prigov," *A-Ia* (Paris, 1979) 1:52.

25. See Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris, 1972), 63–64. He distinguishes the value of objects of consumption based on a logic of difference and semiotic signification rather than on usefulness, economic value, or symbolic exchange. Baudrillard's theory does not perfectly fit the Soviet situation. He treats objects of consumption in the context of neo-Marxist economic principles. Part of nonconformist ideology in the late Soviet Union was a belief in the "pure" status of the cultural object, particularly in the "unsold" samizdat text. Eduard Limonov lampooned this aspect by selling his samizdat texts and then writing about doing so. Olga Matich wrote of Limonov, "he was ignored by political dissidents, who expect writers to be socially responsible and politically anti-Soviet. In contrast to other samizdat authors, Limonov rejected all noble literary and political gestures, selling typescript volumes of his poetry, which he manufactured himself, at five rubles apiece." Matich, "The Moral Immoralist: Edward Limonov's *Eto ja– Edichka,*" *Slavic and East European Journal* 30, no. 4 (1986): 527.

26. See Marietta Chudakova, "Pora mezh ottepel'iu i zastoem (Rannie semidesiatye)," in *Rossiia/Russia* (Moscow, 1998), 1(9):101, 109.

27. Baudrillard describes fetishization of objects as the passion for the sign as such, for coded difference. He links that mechanism to ideology. Baudrillard, *Pour une critique,* 100.
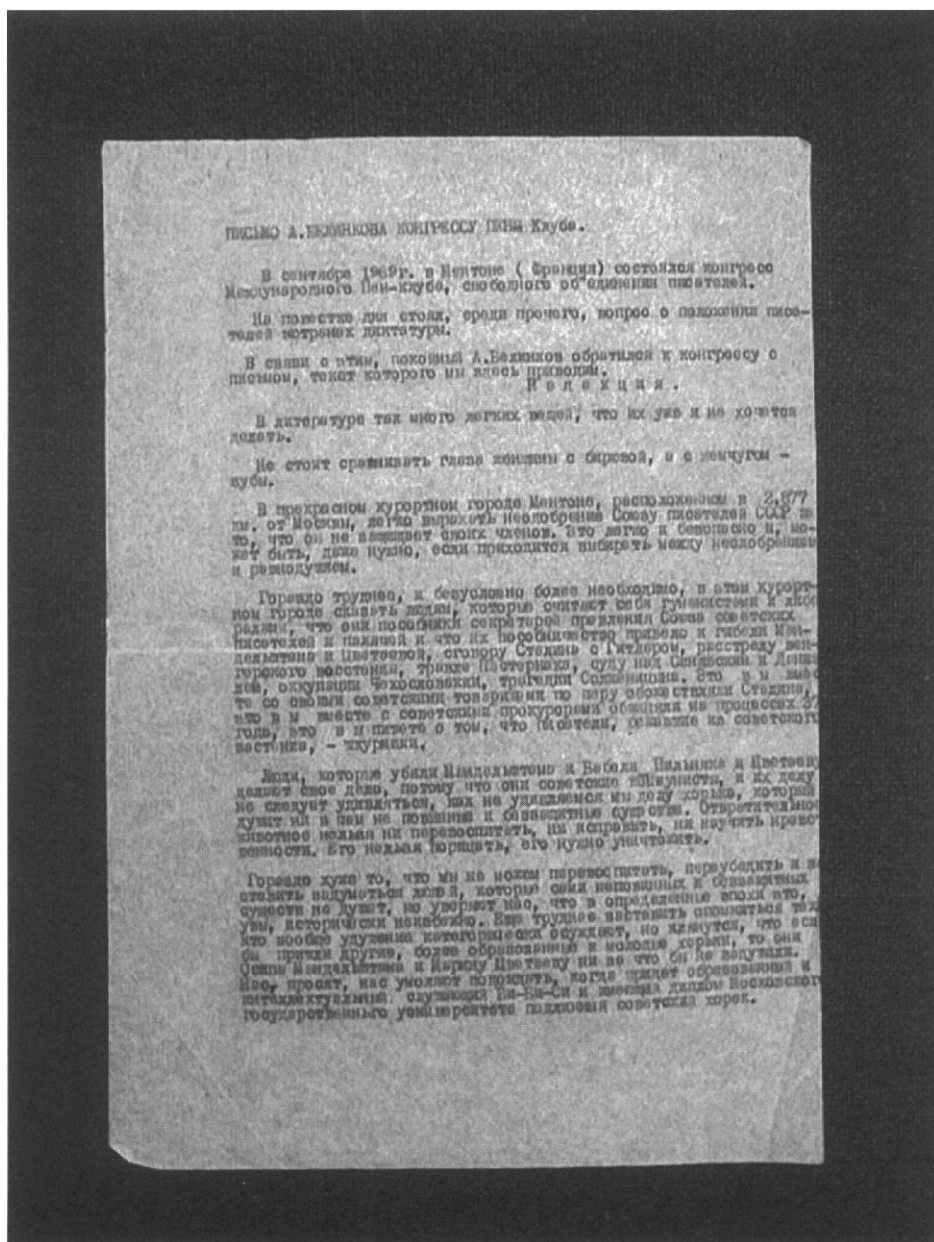
Figure 6. Arkadii Belinkov's 1969 letter to the PEN Club Congress. The open letter represented one of the most common genres of samizdat. Image courtesy of the Sakharov Center Museum.

Prigov exploited this premise for a deconstructive project aimed at dissident ideology in his *Pushkin's Eugene Onegin*. Prigov's version of Pushkin's classic novel illustrates what physical attributes were associated with the samizdat text as text-object. He simulated typed pages and translucent, dog-eared tissue paper with abundant mistakes and typeovers. He takes idiosyncratic editorial license with the work, rendering all modifiers

as a form of "mad" (*bezumnyi*).[28] When the pages are flipped quickly, they animate a drawing of Pushkin tipping his hat in the lower right corner (figure 7). In his foreword to the book, Prigov aimed a ludic poke at myths of authorship while exposing the elitism of the samizdat milieu. The self-less nobility ascribed to samizdat copyists finds ironic reflection in the image of the monk-chronicler Pimen of Pushkin's *Boris Godunov:* "Associations with samizdat literature . . . are natural, inasmuch as this was one of the goals—to introduce exalted, officialized literature into the context of the once stormy and selfless underground and the intimate relationship to the text. But that is as may be . . . of course, the main thing was the monastic-humble copying of a sacred text (sacred text of Russian culture)."[29] Prigov's exposure of the operation of the samizdat text as object-sign challenges the fetishization of the text and the implication within it of traditional mythologies of "sacred texts" and authorship. His playful deconstruction shows how the circulation and exchange of samizdat object-signs defined a community of dissidents and became implicated in mythologizing discourse about it.

Another aspect of dissident "dogma" targeted for exposure was the myth of the noble activist or unappreciated genius author behind the samizdat text. This specific mythology drew on a traditional logocentrism in Russian culture that many felt to be at the heart of the society's problems.[30] The excessive authority of the written word spawned an embarrassing twin in the form of excessive writing, or "graphomania." Svetlana Boym describes "graphomania" as writing perceived to be "unhealthy," "excessively banal, ideologically incorrect, or culturally improper."[31] The term implies ironic reflection on the phenomena, and, in the Russian literary tradition, it has long been the basis of playful literary posing by characters including jocular Koz'ma Prutkov in the nineteenth century and playful OBERIuTs Daniil Kharms and Nikolai Oleinikov in the 1920s and 1930s. The samizdat era witnessed a plethora of un-self-conscious and self-conscious "graphomaniacs." With its lack of authorial control and the prestige attached to its object-sign, samizdat encouraged abundant

28. Dmitrii Prigov and Aleksandr Florenskii, *Evgenii Onegin Pushkina* (St. Petersburg, 1998).

29. Ibid.

30. On the historical development of this logocentrism in Russian culture, see Iurii Lotman's analysis of the formerly religious authority transferred to modern secular authors in Russian culture: Lotman, "Literaturnaia biografiia v istoriko-kul'turnom kontekste (K tipologicheskomu sootnosheniiu teksta i lichnosti avtora)," Iu. M. Lotman, *Izbrannye stat'i v trekh tomakh* (Tallinn, 1992), 1:365–80; and "Russkaia literatura poslepetrovskoi epokhi i khristianskaia traditsiia," *Iu. M. Lotman i tartusko-moskovskaia semioticheskaia shkola* (Moscow, 1994), 364–79. Varlam Shalamov's letter vehemently denounces such authority, linking Russian high-realist novels to twentieth-century bloodshed. Iurii Shreider, ed., "Pis'mo Shalamova," *Voprosy literatury,* 1989, no. 5:226–44. Indictment of a pretension to comment on life via art was widespread among the younger generation of the Soviet underground. Influential theorist Boris Groys posited a direct line from the programmatic pathos of the Soviet avant-garde to Stalin's program in Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond,* trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, 1992).

31. See the chapter in Svetlana Boym's book, "Writing Common Places: Graphomania," *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 168–214.
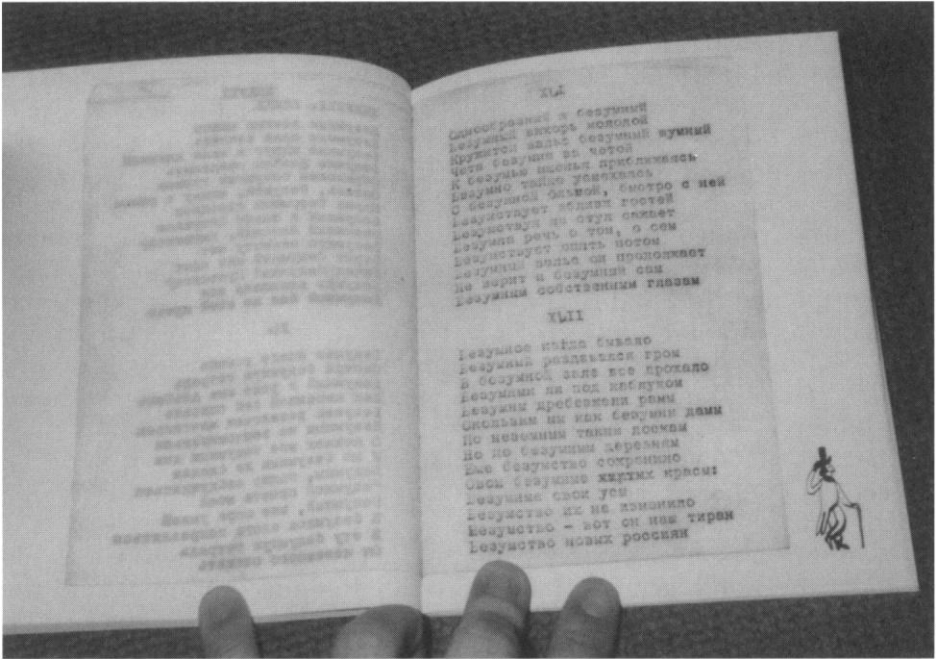
Figure 7. *Dmitrii Prigov's Eugene Onegin,* **a 1998 publication featuring tongue-in-cheek evocation of the samizdat typescript page.**

writing. No one in the history of Russian oppositional movements wrote as much as dissidents of the samizdat period, opined A. Daniel'.[32] Memoirists described poets and artists blithely creating, fueled by a sense of smug complacency and a "collective delusion of grandeur" due to their underground status.[33]

If samizdat writers did succumb to a facile belief in their own genius and heroism, it was not because they lacked warning. In Siniavskii's 1960 story "Graphomaniacs," the writer Galkin ironically attributes the widespread (and misguided) sense of a poetic vocation among Soviet citizens to strict censorship: "I am born for poetry," insists a young man who looks like he should be a boxer. Galkin laughs, "We are all born for it. A general national penchant for refined letters. And do you know what we have to thank? Censorship! . . . The government itself, damn it, gives you the right—the inalienable right!—to consider yourself an unacknowledged genius."[34] In the 1970s, Prigov appropriated the role of graphomaniac, producing thousands of poems. His collected works (projected to appear

32. See A. Daniel', "Dissidentstvo: Kul'tura, uskol'zaiushchaia ot opredeleniia," in *Rossiia/Russia* (Moscow, 1998), 1(9):114–15.

33. See discussion by members of the Leningrad underground on this pitfall of unofficial existence: V. Antonov, "Neofitsial'noe iskusstvo: Razvitie, sostoianie, perspektivy," and V. Krivulin, "Dvadtsat' let noveishei russkoi poezii," both in *Tserkov', kul'tura, ideologiia* (Leningrad Samizdat, 1980), Hoover-NTS, Box 21, 1305/81, pp. 9 and 12, 15–16.

34. From Abram Terts (Andrei Siniavskii), *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1992), 1:157. Lev Losev considered the productive effects of censorship on Russian literature generally in his study, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature* (Munich, 1984).

in ten volumes) visually mimic the amateur typescript, deliberately evoking the traditional style of samizdat.[35]

Poet Igor' Irten'ev has also exploited the physical appearance of the samizdat text for ironic self-presentation. The slick cover of his book *Riad dopushchenii* (A series of suppositions, 2000), evokes the sticking typewriter keys (figure 8). The stylistic allusion to crude typewritten lines functions as a graphical adjunct to Irten'ev's deliberately inadequate, banal rhymes and inexpertly handled allusions. Irten'ev parodies Pasternak's "Zimniaia noch'" (Winter night) in this poem:

> Кончался век, двадцатый век,
> Мело, мело во все пределы,
> Что характерно, падал снег,
> Причем, что интересно, белый.

> (The century's done, the twentieth century / The storm swept, swept over all in sight / Typically, it was snow that fell, / Moreover, interestingly, it was white.)

Irten'ev's pose as a "parodic hack" deflates expectations of finely crafted poetic art and suggests the OBERIuTs' influence.[36] At the same time, the samizdat visual aesthetic signals the distinctive historical period of his work. The poetic stylization provides a bridge between recent Russian writing and its historical predecessors, but its visual aesthetic marks it as a specifically late Soviet product.

Samizdat as Subversion

There might seem to be a divide between those who adhere to the "heroic" political discourse of samizdat and those carrying out its subversive deconstruction. A vociferous younger generation of samizdat writers promoted such a division, differentiating their savvy western-oriented "postmodernism" from the Soviet-style authoritarian ideology they identified among the older generation of dissidents. In part this was a natural evolutionary push toward a new self-definition within samizdat culture. The mythologizing force of a "postmodern" ideology has itself been recognized, however. More unites the various aspects of samizdat culture, and more distinguishes it from its western counterparts, than that reading acknowledges.

Siniavskii, a figure bridging the older and younger generations in samizdat culture, had his own attachment to the True and the Good. He

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35. See D. A. Prigov, *Sobranie stikhov* (Vienna, 1996–). Advertisements for the edition draw attention to its "samizdat" aesthetics. See Prigov's numerous other études of samizdat aesthetics: for example, his *13 Mini-books (13 Mini-bucher)* (New York, 1996).

36. Anna Gerasimova linked Igor' Irten'ev's practice to that of OBERIuT Oleinikov. She cited A. Eremenko as another late Soviet writer employing Oleinikov's device of inserting the deliberately inadequate, "parodic hack" word into serious rhetoric. Gerasimov, "OBERIu [Problema smeshnogo]," *Voprosy literatury*, 1988, no. 4:56. Krivulin described the OBERIuTs' defining influence on underground culture, particularly in the period from 1966 to 1970. See Krivulin, "Dvadtsat' let noveishei russkoi poezii," 7.
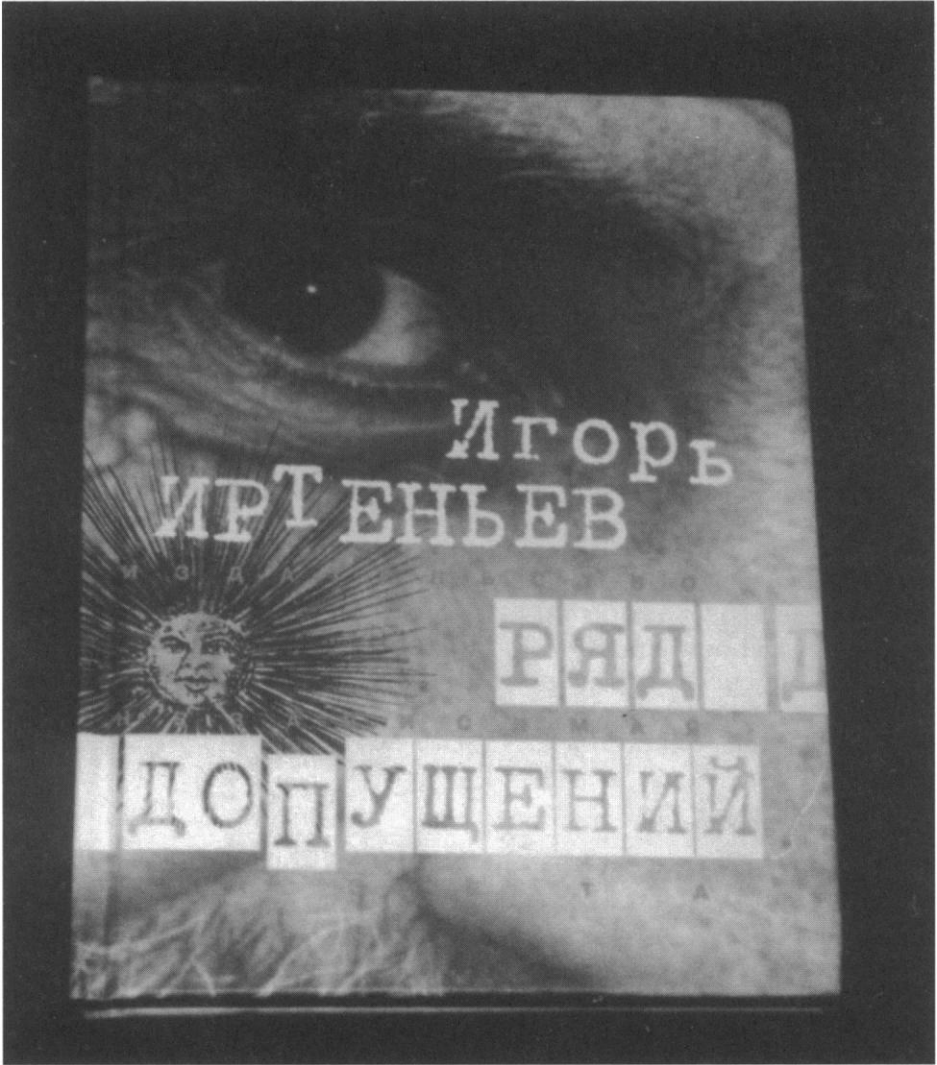
Figure 8. Poet Igor' Irten'ev's 2000 collection, *Riad dopushchenii* (A series of suppositions), with a stylized samizdat title.

acknowledged his personal spiritual belief, thus resembling most samizdat practitioners, who looked beyond the boundaries of a materialist, Marxist-based official Soviet ideology. Their perspective differed from that of the neo-Marxist theorists opposing the reigning order in the west. Unlike many of them, Siniavskii, and the "aesthetic" dissidents who came after him, aimed not to dethrone the individual author (this had, after all, been done long before by the Soviet avant-garde) but to restore vigor to literary discourse and save classic Russian authors from reductive canonicity.[37]

37. Siniavskii, in his books on the founding fathers of Russian literature, "casts the two authors as opposite models for the writer—Pushkin as the pure artist and [Nikolai] Gogol as the artist who strives for authority. Ultimately, however, he aims to rescue both from canonicity, not so much by offering an alternative reading of their lives and works as

Through their playful subversive projects, they showed as much interest in preserving culture and defending the author as those serious political dissidents who protested the trial of dissident authors with demonstrations and letters.

The playful ambiguity represented by the samizdat typescript may be described as the sharp ambivalence of culture poised on the edge of its destruction. The deformed samizdat page evokes a "baroque" aesthetics of sharp dualities: the more wretched the material manifestation, the more sublime the impulse behind it.[38] The samizdat typescript compels because of the contradiction it presents, said Prigov: the fragile and compromised material carries precious content, a metaphor for human life. Viktor Krivulin spoke in such terms about his contemporary, Lev Vasil'ev, before Vasil'ev's tragic early death: "[Vasil'ev's] physical being had thinned to transparency—the parchment transparency of a typewriter sheet with an unreadable copy of a poetic text."[39] A sense of the value of individual human life and the pursuit of culture under the threat of imminent disappearance imbue samizdat with a characteristic poignancy.

The ambivalence of the samizdat "home brew" (to borrow Losev's phrase) appeared in powerfully distilled form in Venedikt Erofeev's popular samizdat novel *Moskva-Petushki* (1969). The drunken hero Venichka perpetrates his carnivalesque parody over the course of his narrative journey until a wrong turn takes him into the realm of epic tragedy. Venichka's dense intertextual ramblings subvert ideologically fixed meaning in texts from socialist realism to the Gospels. The novel produces a sense of pleasure very like the "pleasure of the text" described by Barthes as that pleasure produced at the fault line between culture and its destruction, the location of the "eros of the text."[40] The satisfaction of Erofeev's novel is a textual *"jouissance"* beyond pleasure, where the erotic borders on death. Venichka's drinks represent his stigmata, and at the end of the text he is pierced by an awl through the throat in an infernal version of St. Theresa's "transverberation," as depicted by Gian Bernini in "The Ecstasy of St. Theresa."[41] It matters who performs the piercing: Erofeev's thugs resemble the pantheon of Soviet ideologues (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir

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by subverting the equation of the body of the writer with the body of the text on which canonicity rests." Nepomnyashchy, *Abram Tertz*, 198.

38. For use of the term *baroque* to describe late Soviet culture, see Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *Sovremennaia russkaia proza* (Ann Arbor, 1982), 154–55, Kuz'minskii and Kovalev, eds., *Antologiia*, 1:269, Lipovetskii, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction*, 22, among others.

39. Dmitrii Prigov, interview, Moscow, 2000. See Krivulin, *Okhota na mamonta* (St. Petersburg, 1998), 41.

40. "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. The pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely novelistic instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss." Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, 7.

41. The image was used as the frontispiece of Lacan's twentieth volume of "Seminars," of which chapter 1 was, "De la jouissance." He wrote, "vous n'avez qu'à aller regarder à Rome la statue du Bernini pour comprendre tout de suite qu'elle jouit, ça ne fait pas de doute." See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan* (Paris, 1973), 70. Georges Bataille used the image at the front of the first edition of his *L'Érotisme* (Paris, 1957).

Lenin, Iosif Stalin), who, from Erofeev's perspective, have taken over God's authorship and murdered the individual author. The implication of a real destruction of culture perpetuated in the name of Soviet ideology makes this a much sharper instantiation of the erotic edges of the text described by Barthes. The prospect of the "death of the author," which Barthes envisions as a cause for celebration, seems a horror through the eyes of the Soviet writer.[42]

The wretched material character of the samizdat text evokes the deep abyss between the material and the ideal and between the desire for culture and the fear of its destruction. A sense of the width of this great gulf marks samizdat culture: it is different from contemporaneous culture in the west. Russian readers found a satisfying badge of their difference from the west in the wretched physical aspect of the samizdat text. Vladimir Berezin described with relish the "non-ideal" experience of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* in samizdat copies of Ardis editions: "the stolen air was preserved even in the hard-to-read xerox—on thin paper, but with the traces of mysterious copy rollers like the tracks of insane Humbert's automobile tires."[43] Likewise, poet Aleksandr Velichanskii enthused over Ven. Erofeev's "national classic" in its defective typescript (see figure 9): "Let the poem be published later somewhere in France . . . but we, compatriots and devotees of Erofeev, to this day read his immortal poem in hard-to-read typewritten copies, with an unfailingly sticking letter «x» or, in the best case, «ю»."[44] Velichanskii singled out the two most symbolically loaded letters in *Moskva-Petushki*. We might picture samizdat authors like Erofeev's Tikhonov, scratching their "two distinct and lapidary words" (that is, profanity) on the fence of world culture.[45] Samizdat culture tended to view itself vis-à-vis the west as being outside the fence, excluded and marginalized with respect to the European mainstream (as before) by the Russian historical situation. By the same token, their position gave them a sharper sense of the perils and pleasures of human endeavors, embodied in texts.

In the west in the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet émigré writers and artists appealed self-consciously to the wretched samizdat form to underscore their unique identity with respect to imposing modernist forebears and western

42. Barthes refers to the "edges" of the text as those coming together at the fault line of pleasure. Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, 6–7. Barthes proposed a "death of the author" in his article of that name. See Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1968), *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), 142–48. Foucault treated that possibility in his article "What Is an Author?" (1969), in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York, 1984), 101–20.

43. Copying technology was not commonly available for samizdat, but the metaphor is nicely evocative nonetheless. See Vladimir Berezin's review of the Russian translation of Carl Proffer's *Kliuchi k 'Lolite,'* "Ideal'nyi chitatel' 'Lolity,'" *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 6 April 2000, 7.

44. From the afterword to Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki i pr.* (Moscow, 1990), 124–27.

45. "So, where did all this start? Well, it all started when Tikhonov nailed his fourteen propositions to the door of the Yeliseiko village soviet. Or rather, he didn't nail them to the door, he chalked them up on the fence, and they were words, really, not propositions, very clear and succinct, and there weren't fourteen of them, just two." Erofeev, *Moscow Stations*, 92.
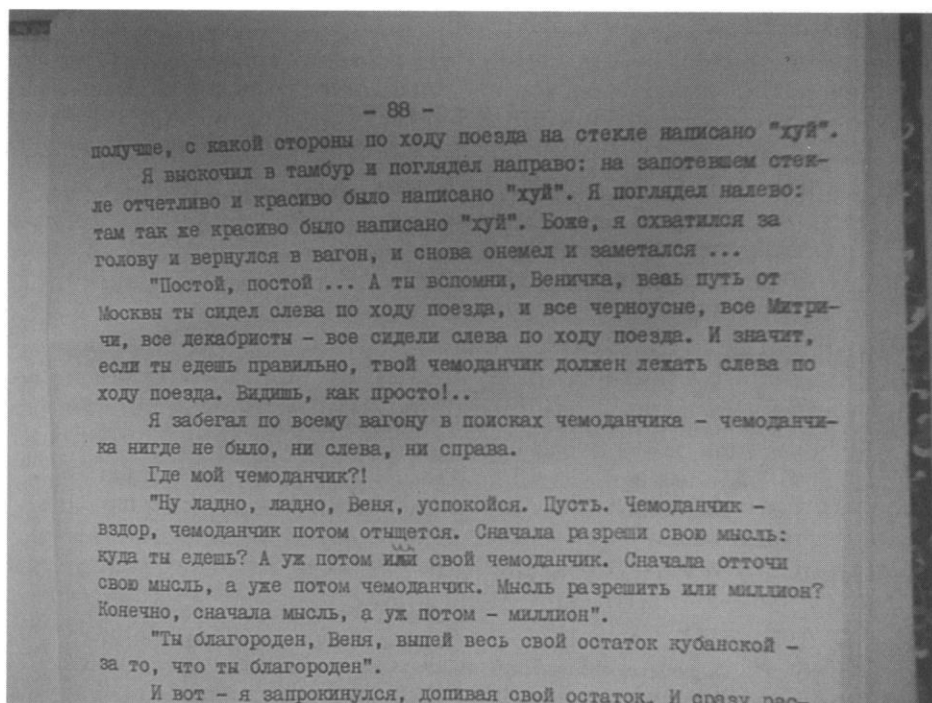
Figure 9. Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* in samizdat from the early 1970s. The profane word beginning with «x» shows clearly why this could not be an official publication.

contemporaries. Eduard Limonov, in a 1975 letter to the Parisian newspaper *Russkaia mysl'*, talked of a plan by recent Russian émigré writers in New York to type "samizdat" collections on the typewriters they brought with them from the USSR.[46] Lev Nussberg continued to use traditional samizdat methods following his emigration in 1976. Vilen Barskii's "Message on Toilet Paper" (1977–81), written on a role of toilet paper, highlights the ludic character of nonconformist "samizdat" art for a western audience. Samizdat-era book projects differ pointedly from the futurist art books preceding them.[47] Other Soviet émigré writers and artists, like the editors and contributors to the almanac *Apollon-77*, used the aesthetics of the samizdat text to signal their particular provenance. The fore-

46. Limonov addressed his article "Nuzhny li Rossii Zhany Kokto?" to editor Zinaida Shakhovskaia, *Russkaia mysl'*, 12 August 1975. Near the end he wrote, "I wrote this article at the request of my friends, the writers–avant-gardists who left the USSR and settled in New York. Recently we banded together into a New York group of Russian literati. We propose to publish general samizdat collections here in America. As before we will type them on typewriters (on those brought from the USSR) and distribute them by hand." Amherst Russian Center, Zinaida Shakhovskaia Collection, Box 3, File 23, p. 7. The article was cut significantly and appeared as a letter "From a Group of Literati in New York," *Russkaia mysl'*, 4 September 1975, 14. Members of this supposed group later disputed Limonov's status as their spokesman.

47. See the essay by Rimma and Valerii Gerlovin in Charles Doria, ed., *Russian Samizdat Art: Essays* (New York, 1986), 126. John Bowlt's essay in this same collection treats futurist art books as the starting point for late Soviet samizdat art.

words to this glossy professional edition appear in deliberately crude type-written fonts. Kuz'minskii published his anthology in the United States. He retained the typescript format of samizdat and drew attention to mistakes in the texts as part of unofficial Soviet poetry.[48] One can see the creative use of samizdat "deformations" in Genrikh Elinson's contribution, which exploits deliberate obfuscation of the text with typeovers, cross-outs, and corrections, as well as superimposing image over text.

The poor materials of samizdat acquire semantic potential and aesthetic significance with distance, in the context of post-Soviet and international consumption. In an essay in *Samizdat veka,* G. Zagianskaia and N. Ordynskii described the use of characteristic features of samizdat in post-Soviet Russian art. This represented, in their opinion, a "typical Russian characteristic: the aesthetic assimilation of formerly unavoidable Samizdat signs of the period of persecution—bad paper invoking the letter of a *zek,* or Soviet prisoner, a school notebook or yellow packing carton."[49] Cultural critic Kulakov described the presentation in Germany of the Soviet underground Lianozovo school. The book-catalogue accompanying readings of this poetry constituted an art object in itself. Kulakov described it as an "unattractive, gray (the color of barracks) cardboard box without inscription. . . . In a word, the barracks, a barrack-box, out of which came, as we know, all of Lianozovo art. Now, of course, it is nice to hold in one's hands this western stylization, but after all people lived in such boxes."[50] Like that box, the samizdat text provides a visual symbol of the material and cultural poverty out of which Soviet dissidents struggled and grew.

Like the stylized catalogue covers, the physical samizdat typescript testifies to the specific historico-cultural conditions of Soviet dissident culture. The understanding of dissidence varied widely among various practitioners in the Soviet underground, from politically engaged activity to principally apolitical art. The lifeblood of all Soviet dissident culture of the late period was, however, samizdat. And the material existence of the samizdat text, with its play between signifier and signified, between the real and the ideal, demonstrates the essential subversive force of this culture. Reacting against the constraints of a repressive system on the author and culture, samizdat developed an acutely critical faculty that many practitioners turned on themselves and their own origins. Although subversion of the Soviet regime is no longer a relevant struggle, the resistance to mythologizing ideology in general persists as the quixotic spirit of samizdat. Late- and post-Soviet practitioners continue to construct their identities and to examine their roots in samizdat. In that sense, the pages of samizdat have much yet to tell us about the dissident world that shapes the present.

48. See Kuz'minskii and Kovalev, eds., *Antologiia,* 1:27–28 and 20–21.

49. See G. Zagianskaia and N. Ordynskii, "Samizdat i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo: Kak smotret' etu knigu," in Strelianyi et al., *Samizdat veka,* 11–16.

50. Kulakov and others see Lianozovo poetry as a Soviet version of western "concrete" poetry. Initiated by Georg Witte and Sabina Hansgen, the presentation of Lianozovo school in Germany included Evgenii Kropivnitskii, Igor' Kholin, Genrikh Sapgir, Ian Satunovskii, and Vsevolod Nekrasov. See Kulakov's "Lianozovo v Germanii" (1993), in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fakt,* 161–63.