

Foreword

How does literature react to major changes in society and how can literature cause social change? Think of novels such as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Radishchev's *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. The first one became the best-selling novel of the 19th century, the second one was banned and earned its author exile to Siberia under Catherine the Great for describing autocracy as a system of governance "most contrary to human nature."

It is generally recognized that the Stowe's anti-slavery novel played an important role in the abolition of slavery and "helped lay the groundwork for the Civil War." Despite Radishchev's novel became widely read throughout Russia only after the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, it also had a significant influence. Later on, moreover, Soviet authorities managed to paint the author as "an active fighter against autocratic tyranny, and a veritable forefather of Bolshevism" despite the discrepancies between the author's ideal and reality.

There are many other famous examples which show the relationship of literature and society's interaction, influence, and attempts at social control. Themes such as these show that studying literature also entails studying major social developments: the language question in Romanticism, the problems of language policy in the East European multinational states at the end of the 20th century, the fall of empires like Austria-Hungary or Soviet Union, or the role of literature in the rise of nationalism at the end of the 19th and the 20th centuries.

Since the history of literature belongs to the main field of research in Slavic studies, studying the history of Slavistics also entails researching a reflection of major social developments in Eastern Europe. The present volume contains papers discussing various aspects of this reflection in Slavic studies from its earliest days to the present. The traditional approach to the history of Slavic studies usually leads the researcher to focus on internal issues of the history of this scientific discipline, nevertheless, the editor of this volume believes that when considering the social context, the picture of the history of Slavic studies becomes more colorful.

Editor