PART II

MANUFACTURING COLD WAR BOOKS

“This people loves books so much, that it is impossible ever to see them disappear.”
- A Catholic missionary in the Counter-Reformation in Bohemia in the early 18th century

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CHAPTER THREE

THE AMBIGUITIES OF CENSORSHIP AND RESISTANCE

Recent studies of centrally controlled societies, and of their literary history in particular, have shown that much of the Cold War-era scholarship on culture in Eastern Europe, both inside and outside the region (i.e. Western studies of Eastern Europe or so-called Sovietology), was ‘colonial’ in the sense that the bodies of knowledge produced on either side of the divide were largely trapped in an extra-historical space dominated by pro- or anti-Soviet ideology.¹ In this context, a certain thematic dichotomy tended to dominate much of what was produced in the West as ‘knowledge’ about cultural issues in Eastern Europe, a dichotomy in which the issue of the ‘censorship’ practised by the communist regimes was positioned on one side and issues of textual production and reception in resistance to the totalitarian authorities, usually grouped under the conceptual umbrella of ‘samizdat’, were positioned on the other side. This thematic opposition, in which there is no apparent consensus on how even to define these basic terms, must not be viewed as a feature peculiar exclusively to the way in which themes relating to culture and print were constructed. In reality, this opposition was an integral part of the overall Cold War intellectual dynamics and discourse attached to the East–West division of the world and the associated explanatory frameworks that were touched on in the introduction to this book. The question of how narratives about centrally controlled books were produced, which is the subject of the discussion below, cannot be separated from the more general characteristics of discourse in a period when – with some exceptions - isolationist and myth-constructing tendencies dominated the political and intellectual contexts on both sides of the Cold War divide.

¹ E. Dobrenko, (1997), x. Michael Holquist refers to ‘kremlinology’ as a specific form of discourse in Western Sovietology, which tends to focus on the very peak of the Soviet political hierarchy, or possibly its opposition, while largely ignoring the actual socio-cultural dynamics of the wider population. See Michael Holquist, “Ten Theses on the Relevance of Cultural Criticism for Russian Studies (History, Myth, Biography),” in New Formations. A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics. Postcommunism: Rethinking the Second World 22 (Spring 1994).