

Literature as a political weapon during the cold war

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



Literature has always shaped who we are and has defined us to this day. It dates back centuries and records our history, the good and the bad. Books and articles have always reflected society and the values held.

In the 1960s, there was political unrest and upheaval, affecting literature in United States as it was used as a political weapon and power tool to extract doubts about the conflicting sides. The Cold War changed how literature was used and had affected it to this day. Literature leading up to the sixties allowed more creativity yet also disagreement. It was as if there was a rebellion in literature in the 1950s as publications deemed life as empty. The people's spirits seemed to be nonexistent although understandable as life in America was fearful due to the advances in technology. An example being in The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, a clock was shown, the time three minutes before midnight. It was the symbol of a coming bomb. Several publications in newspapers voiced America's fears throughout the Cold War, although articles and more also voiced doubts and the undermining of different cultures. The Cold War created a stressed environment for writers and the created literature as it soon became a weapon to undermine the enemy. Literature, before the Cold War, was used to teach children how to read, to inform society about the government and more. During the race to be a better nation, the creation of books became a way to change people's attitudes and actions. Agencies of different types were created to spread opinions and rule against the Soviet Union.

The Central Intelligence Agency was established in September of 1947 and still exists today. The mission of the CIA had four tasks, one regarding

intelligence activities and providing dissemination. The CIA became greatly involved in literary culture as it was used and distributed as novels created doubts within the minds of people. Pamphlets and lore were used to direct people's opinions. It reduced radicalism and redefined modernism. Modernism soon became "an affirmation of bourgeois liberal value". Meaning that is neither an apologia in a theological sense nor directed toward contradiction. It "organized official and unofficial apartheid". Normally, it is the segregation of race, but can be considered segregation of beliefs or culture as well. This new form of modernism may have helped win the war of culture as it defined culture and people's opinions. Articles and such had always been used to sway people's opinions but not to the extent in the 1940s to the 1960s and after. An agency, Bedford Publishing Company, "successfully purchased, printed, distributed, and even commissioned a number of books" to the people within the Soviet Union. The majority of books had a "spiritual understanding of Western Values". These books were smuggled within ordinary products and Bedford delivered about one million books within fifteen years. There was a diverse range of authors such as Albert Camus and James Joyce, whose books were delivered. As the CIA's program for dissemination, that being the act of spreading information, was in order, they were delighted by the media spotlight on the anti-communist passages and saw the value of propaganda. Literature does have its limitations but this did not divert the use of it as a political weapon. It became a dangerous tool to gain more power. Stalin, more than the most, used publications as strategic propaganda. Communism had and still does, have a strict limit to what was written and published. An example being, if

publications within the Soviet Union did not praise their leader, Stalin would execute those supposedly writing against the Union. At the time, the chief of covert action at the CIA stated that "...books can significantly change the reader's attitude and action to an extent unmatched by the impact of any other single medium". This was considered a shared rhetoric, however, the CIA refused to use similar tactics that Stalin was using at that time, since they were interested in promoting their ideologies and value and undermine communism.

In 1957, there was a novel publication that openly doubted the justification for bloodshed as the revolution for power took place. Boris Pasternak, the author of the novel Doctor Zhivago, helped shape literary culture as his novel came across indifferent to politics and more. The context to him writing the novel is quite interesting and gives to the purpose behind the novel, as he had inherited the paper from a friend who was tortured and killed by the Soviet Regime. The book quickly became a best-seller after Pasternak declined the Nobel Prize for Literature. The epic tale was not published until 1987 in the Soviet Union as it was rejected but Soviet authorities.

Over the span of forty five years, the United States raced against other nations to be the best in all aspects, technology, culture, and more. Literature, an example among many, may have been possibly the greatest tool during the Cold War as a political weapon and an aid to doubting minds. From the beginning of the arms race, literature was changed as ideas were published and distributed. From authors against the Soviet Union to the

Central Intelligence Agency, the people of America used their knowledge and fears to sway and defeat communism. Although, it may not have been enough, it did however, create disarray within other cultures as it worked in advantage to the United States. During the political upheaval, literature became a dangerous mean to determine the outcome of the war.