

## RUSSIAN LITERATURE – 20th Century

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### POETRY

**Silver Age:** The early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Russia was a tumultuous period of political crises and calls for profound change, and this atmosphere was reflected in the literature of this period. Dissatisfaction with the realism of 19<sup>th</sup> century writing combined with exposure to new ways of expression and artistic forms resulted in new literary movements that attempted to express poets' innovative ideas. The first of these literary movements was Symbolism, which continued until 1910, and is regarded as the first phase of the Silver Age. The second phase, known as 'post-Symbolism' or 'avant-garde', saw the emergence of two major, rival movements, the 'Acmeists' and the 'Futurists' which took the tenets of Symbolism and developed them in their own distinctive ways.

**Symbolism:** According to the theory of symbolism, the use of symbolic images can assist an artist in creating new art that expresses his/her emotions, thoughts and experiences more accurately and more subtly. Symbolist art is distinctive for its urbane, cosmopolitan character that encourages the artist to strive to reach the most distant places and beyond. In addition, Symbolism encourages artists to challenge frontiers, even cultural and linguistic frontiers.

Symbolism in Russia originated as a reaction to the predominant "civic poetry", and despite being a foreign artistic movement, it soon developed a distinctive Russian form. The European origins of this artistic movement lie in France and this outside influence is reflected in the stylistic similarities between Russian Symbolist poetry and Western European poetry written between 1890 and 1910.

The pioneers of poetic Symbolism in Russia were Merezhkovsky, Bryusov and Balmont, who all defended Symbolism and its tenet of 'art for art's sake' in the face of its populist critics, the doctrine of utilitarianism, and even conventional morality. Russian Symbolist poetry displayed great thematic diversity; while Bryusov produced poems in the manner of European Decadence, the poetry of Zinaida Gippius was dominated by religious themes. Other Symbolist poets, Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely and Vyacheslav Ivanov in particular, attempted to go beyond the physical world in their mystical poetry. Taking the philosophy and mystical poetry of Vladimir Soloviev as their starting point, Blok, Bely and Ivanov merged myth and religion with their aesthetics to produce poetry that would provide knowledge of a mysterious dimension beyond this mundane life.

**Acmeism:** The Symbolist lasted until 1910 when two new schools appeared: Acmeism and Futurism. A direct development from Symbolism, Acmeism emerged in 1912 and continued until 1917. It was a neo-classical form of modernism which replaced the vagueness, shadowiness, and uncertainty of Symbolism, with clarity and the visible world. Returning to the classical tradition, Acmeists argued that poetry should deal with culture, human existence and the world rather than mystical themes.

In the history of Russian poetry Acmeism was known more through three prominent poets - Nikolay Gumilev, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelshtam – rather than as a coherent, organized artistic movement. For these poets Acmeism was a movement with an independent voice, and its advocates would

soon pay a heavy price for daring to criticize the Soviet regime headed by Stalin who had no tolerance for any art form that did not serve to further his political aims. Akhmatova was charged with treason, deported, and her works were banned. Her husband, fellow poet and the founder of Acmeism, Gumiliev, was executed. Her second husband was sentenced to the Gulag where he would die of exhaustion. Mandelstam, after writing a poem critical of Stalin in 1934 was denounced, arrested and sentenced to three years' exile in the Urals. However, he was later deported to Kolyma and in late 1938 died in a field there.

After Stalin's death, Evgeny Evtushenko was influential in the development of a more unofficial style of poetry. Beginning in the 1970s numerous avant-garde poets emerged, with Joseph Brodsky being the most familiar to readers in the west.

**Futurism:** The second offshoot from the Symbolism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a Russian avant-garde movement known as Futurism. Futurism not only rejected Symbolism's lyricism, but also strongly rejected conventional society, culture and accepted ways of life. Such strong anti-establishment attitudes generated strong opposition to Futurism who referred to Futurist tenets as 'animalistic Nietzscheanism' and its followers as 'savages'.

Futurists claimed that their movement was a radical break with the past, and turned their energies to bringing innovations to art, technology, and politics, often in the form of primitivism. The visual arts were a favorite media with Futurists to challenge and provoke conventional society.

**Zaum:** Russian Futurists even applied their artistic philosophy to language. Taking their cue from abstraction in the visual arts, they attempted to develop a new form of verbal expression they called *zaum*, a language that transcended reason by directly evoking an emotional response despite not referring to anything clear and specific.

**Cubo-Futurism and Ego-Futurism:** Just as Symbolism had earlier split into two main branches, Russian Futurism also fractured into two sub-schools, namely Cubo-Futurism and Ego-Futurism. Cubo-Futurists attempted to enrich the Russian language through a new vocabulary of derived and arbitrarily created words. Among the more important Cubo-Futurist poets were Aleksey Krucenyx, Viktor Khlebnikov, David Burlyuk, and Vladimir Mayakovsky. Ego-Futurism, founded by Igor Severyanin were, opposed to what it regarded as the excessively objective attitude in the poetry of the Cubo-Futurists and argued for a more subjective attitude in poetry.

Futurism rapidly declined as a coherent artistic movement after 1917, but its influence continued to be felt in Soviet poetry until around 1930.

**Imaginism:** The Imaginists were active between 1919 and 1924 and were indirectly influenced by the works of Ezra Pound. For Imaginists the image was almost the sole basis for poetic composition, and Imaginist poems were created by linking a series of striking, unexpected images, sometimes without the use of verbs. Sergey Esenin, Vadim Shershenevich, and Anatoly Marienhof are among the better known Imaginist poets.

**Constructivism:** Constructivism was another short-lived artistic movement from the early years of the Soviet Union, 1924-1930. While supportive of Soviet ideology, Constructivists also labored to form a new theory or aesthetics of artistic creation. They argued that the subject matter of a poem should determine its form, included scientific and technical terms in their works, and attempted to employ some of the methods of prose writing in their poetry. The two leading figures of Constructivism were Eduard Bagritsky and Ilya Selvinsky.

**Letter-poems:** Folklore, folklore studies, and old literary genres began to fall out favor with the regime following the implementation of Stalin's first five-year plan in 1928. Regarded as reactionary and expressing support for both the tsar and capitalism, epic poetry was no longer considered an appropriate format for praising the Soviet leadership or its actions. Instead, in the mid-1930s letter poems addressed to Stalin began to make their appearance. Folk performers and professional poets would create an initial draft that was then re-worked in numerous later meetings until agreement was reached on a final text. Thousands

would then sign this final version before it was sent to Stalin. Important events for workers and other professional groups across the Soviet Union could also be commemorated with a letter poem.

**Russian Heritage-Going Back to its Roots:** Some poets attempted to combine the old and the new in their work by combining elements of Symbolism with other elements taken from Russia's earlier literary heritage as well as its classical literary tradition. Two of the more prominent poets of this movement were Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetayeva.

**After Stalin:** For a brief period under Khrushchev, Russian poets were allowed a degree of freedom unheard of under Stalin. Some who had been imprisoned were released, and the poetry of this period explored themes, public and private, that had previously been off limits.

However, these freedoms came to an abrupt end with Leonid Brezhnev's assumption of power in 1964. Literature was once again brought under strict state control, with some poets being forcibly exiled and others choosing to emigrate to the West. Despite the restrictions imposed on poets and their work under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the poetry of Robert Rozhdestvensky, Andrey Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko that was deemed politically acceptable was able to reach the public. In contrast, some poets of the post-Stalin period towed the standard Party line, among them Nikolay Rubtsov, and Yuri Kuznetsov.

However, those poets whose works put them in clear opposition to the Soviet regime could take one of two paths. They could decide to write "for the desk drawer", to keep their work private to avoid trouble with the state. If they chose to try and make their voice heard and disseminate their poetry, they faced exile or even death. Two poets who took the latter path were Joseph Brodsky and Yuri Galanskov.

Russian poetry flourished with the end of most official censorship after 1985, part of Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* introduced after his ascension to power in that year. With permission more easily granted for gatherings and the publication of new anthologies, poets sought larger audiences for their work, and young poets were also able to have their works made public. In addition, numerous works that had been suppressed in previous years began to see the light of day. Some of the most prominent poets from this era were Viktor Sosnora, Ivan Zhdanov, Gennady Aygi, and Aleksandr Kushner.

## DRAMA

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a blossoming of theatrical performances as official control of the arts relaxed. A number of private theaters appeared. One of them was Alexander Tairov's Chamber (Kamerny) Theater that opened its doors in 1914 after the end of the government's theater monopoly in 1882. In Tairov's theater the repertoire was largely composed of foreign plays, but some Soviet propaganda plays were also staged.

Shortly after the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917 they issued a decree of the Soviet of People's Commissars on 9 November 1917 that placed all the theaters under the authority of the arts section of the State Commission for Education, and all served as *agitprop* (agitation and propaganda) theater. So the Soviet theatre became a *director's theatre*, but not a *writer's theatre*. It was utilized to do what has been ordered rather than provide only entertainment, and used as propaganda and communication agent.

During the era of Stalin Russian theater continued to be primarily a propaganda tool, and failed to keep up with the development seen in other literary genres. The majority of works performed in Soviet theaters continued to be foreign or pre-revolutionary dramas.

During the 1930s and 1940s Socialist Realism was the predominant style for drama. Mayakovsky's plays during this period *The Bedbug* and *The Bathhouse* were anti-utopian satires written for Meyerhold's theater. Both works move from portrayals of a subversive, chaotic present during the NEP era, to a future that is at times ideally perfect, and at other times regulated and controlled.

Another classic example of this genre is *Fear* by Alexander Afinogenov with a happy ending for the Communist hero. While the play incorporates the good-to-better development typical of Socialist Realist works, it is clear that complex situations from real life are ignored in the plot in favor of ideology. Other examples of this type of drama are *Aristocrats* and *Kremlin Chimes* by Nikolay Pogodin.

When the Soviets began preparing for WWII, the state turned its attention to the previously condemned Russian past, and to increase patriotism, they used the Russian tsars, princes, military leaders and religion. Soviet playwrights contributed their share to the Soviet war effort. Afinogenov's *On the Eve*, Leonov's *Invasion* and *Lyonushka*, and Simonov's *Russian People* all extolled the courage of ordinary Russians, but their plots were all predictable and melodramatic.

After the war, both Soviet literature and drama failed to produce any works worthy of notice. Most dramas from the period between the end of the war and Stalin's death were very cautious efforts to dramatize the party line of the day.

Khrushchev's Thaw period (1956-1964) saw a dramatic change in the official attitude to the theater. Playwrights were suddenly free to portray both Russian history and life in the Soviet Union in a more realistic way. Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Days of the Turbins* adapted from his novel *The White Guard*. *The Days of the Turbins*, took the struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Whites as its subject matter, and portrays the upheaval of the Civil War through its impact on a Kievan family. Other notable dramatists from this period are Leonid Zorin, Alexander Shtein, Viktor Rozov and Alexey Arbuzov. Abuse of power and corrupt party officials were the focus of both Zorin's *The Guests* and Shtein's *A Personal Matter*. Unsurprisingly, neither play was received warmly by the authorities.

The period of the Thaw saw a revival of experimental theater, and innovations in theater of the absurd from Europe were enthusiastically incorporated into the works of Russian playwrights. The plays *Christmas at Ivanov's* by Alexander Vvedensky and *Elizaveta Bam* by Daniil Kharmis are perhaps the most representative of this brief trend. Another important playwright of the period was Viktor Slavkin with his famous play *A Young Man's Grown-Up Daughter*.

Much like the period of Khrushchev's Thaw, the Glasnost era witnessed a return to the avant-garde in Russian theater and dramas that explored periods of Russian history that had previously been off limits. Mikhail Shatrov's plays *The Sixth of July* and *The Bolsheviks* were centered on Lenin, while the Third Youth League Congress was the subject of *Blue Horses on the Red Grass*. For the first time in Russian drama Trotsky and Bukharin, both officially eliminated in Soviet history books, appeared in Shatrov's *The Dictatorship of Conscience*. Its performance in 1985 marked a clear break with previous state policy towards the theater.

During the 1990s Nikolay Kolyada and Roman Vyktyuk through both their plays and their support for new playwrights made significant contributions to the development of Russian drama. They were able not only to revive the traditions of avant garde theater, but to then move beyond them. However, one of the major challenges facing the Russian theater in this period was the adaptation to commercialization, a process which took a number of years. New trends and developments in Russian drama could only emerge after this transition had been completed.

## FICTION

In the decade following the revolution prose fiction displayed two prominent characteristics – tremendous diversity in its subject matter and stylistic experimentation.

In this period, the realist writer Ivan Bunin was interested in his country life during the revolution of 1905 and portrayed his disappointment over the destruction of the idealistic picture of his traditional village life in his short fiction *The Village*.

**Criminal Fiction:** Short story writer Leonid Andreev took the material for his stories mostly from common criminal cases and from his experiences as a court reporter as in his *In the Fog*, *The Life of Vasily Fiveisky* and *The Tale of the Seven Who Were Hanged*. He also used biblical themes, imbuing them with modern symbolism and psychological insights, as in *Eleazar and Judas Iscariot*.

The writer Aleksey Remizov's prose fiction stories were marked by details of everyday life, such as violence, illness, death and suicide. In his satirical novel *The Indefatigable Cymbal* Remizov portrayed sectarians from the countryside as superstitious and odd. Another work of this period was his Gothic horror story *The Sacrifice*.

**Symbolist Fiction:** The symbolist writer of historical prose fiction, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, became famous with his trilogy, *Christ and Antichrist*, *Julian the Apostate* and *Antichrist: Peter and Alexis*.

Another Russian symbolist writer Fyodor Sologub published sixteen volumes of short stories titled *The Sting of Death* and *A Book of Enchantments*. He also wrote several novels: *Heavy Dreams* and *The Petty Demon*.

Andrey Bely is considered the most important innovator of 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian prose fiction. His symbolist novel *Petersburg* is widely regarded as his finest work, and is characterized by the stylistic device of colors being evoked by sounds. The events of the novel take place in St. Petersburg before the Russian Revolution of 1905. His Moscow trilogy *A Moscow Eccentric*, *Moscow under Siege* and *Masks* are considered as other masterpieces of his narrative style.

**Anti-Utopian Fiction:** One such writer was Evgeny Zamyatin who created a new genre, the anti-utopian novel (dystopia). He published his short novels as satires of provincial life in *A Provincial Tale* and military life in *At the World's End*. It was *We* which earned high-praise when it appeared abroad in the 1920s, first in English and then in Czech; it was published in Russia only in 1988. Zamyatin's dystopic novel *We* depicts a unified totalitarian state which has produced a society of almost complete conformity and harmony.

Mikhail Sholokhov wrote his realist novel *The Quiet Don* to show the living conditions and struggles of the Don Cossacks to survive during World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Civil War. His second novel, *Virgin Soil Uplifted*, depicts life during the collectivization period and the liquidation of the kulaks in a Don Cossack village.

**Science Fiction:** One of the early science fiction writers, Aleksey Tolstoy gained popularity with the novels *Aelita* and *The Hyperboloid of Engineer Garin*. He also wrote *Nikita's Childhood*, *The Sisters* and a historical novel *Peter the First*. *A Tour of Hell* was Tolstoy's effort to depict the hell that the tumultuous upheavals of the revolution had been for Russian intellectuals.

**Realist Fiction:** During the NEP period, Yury Olesha in his fictional novel *Envy*, depicted a new man created as a result of the NEP and placed him in contrast with the older society. Olesha also wrote several short stories such as *Liompa*, *The Cherry Stone*, and *Natasha*.

Andrey Platonov earned his reputation as a writer with his collection of stories *The Sluices of Epiphany*. Most of his works were published in the West because of his criticism of Stalinist policies such as the liquidation of Kulaks as a class, the Five-Year Plan and Collectivization. Among these works were his novels *Chevengur* which describes a fictional city undergoing a rapid transition to communism, and *The Foundation Pit* which presents the building of socialism in one country under Stalin from the perspective of the common citizen.

Odessa's Jewish gangsters and the Red Cavalry Cossacks were favorite subjects of Isaac Babel's short fiction. Set in the Polish-Soviet War, the stories in *Red Cavalry* are taken from entries in a diary that Babel kept.

*Twelve Chairs*, a collection of short works satirizing the NEP in the Russian countryside, made Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov popular figures.

In the 30s, some writers, such as Mikhail Bulgakov and Boris Pasternak continued to write in the classical tradition. Bulgakov was unable to publish his novel *The Master and Margarita* under Stalin in the Soviet Union. The work first appeared, heavily censored, after his during the Khrushchev Thaw. Describing the devil's visit to the Soviet Union, *The Master and Margarita* defies simple classification with its mix of Christian thought, the supernatural and satire. Bulgakov also published the satirical science fiction novel *Heart of a Dog*, an allegory of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Boris Pasternak's novel *Doktor Zhivago* portrayed the Bolshevik Revolution as a political coup rather than a mass uprising, and because of the negative reaction of Soviet officials, the novel had to be published in the West, and did not appear in publication till the Thaw.

Some writers, opposed Soviet ideology, chose to deal with rural settings in their works. Among them were Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Sergey Antonov, Vladimir Soloukhin, Aleksandr Yashin, all of whom attempted to portray the misery and backwardness of the Russian countryside.

**Prison-Camp Fiction:** It was during the Thaw, with the personal approval of Khrushchev, that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, master of prison-camp genre, published his short prose fiction *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* which was about the Gulag camps. The novel was only published in the 60s, and long remained the sole example of a work published in the Soviet Union and critical of Stalin's legacy. Nevertheless, Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers in 1969 and five years later from the country.

The Khrushchev years, regarded as a period of literary stagnation, took their toll on Vladimir Tendryakov and Yury Trifonov, both of whom would clearly have been more productive in a more liberal atmosphere. However, despite the restrictions on literary expression, both found their own means to cope with the circumstances they found themselves in and to make significant contributions to Russian literature.

**Urban Fiction:** In the 60s and the early 70s, Trifonov started a new genre *Urban Prose*. His keen eye for detail, both physical and psychological, awareness of the rhythms of city and suburban life, and understanding of the inner turmoil of urban dwellers all made Trifonov the best-known writer of the Soviet middle class. He published his historical novel *The House on the Embankment* that portrayed the period of Stalin, his purges, the late Stalinist era, and the stagnation interpreting fundamental strains of development over the decades. In 1973, he published his historical novel, *The Impatient Ones*, depicting the assassination of Alexander II by the revolutionary anarchist group called *People's Will* which was active in the 1870s and 1880s. His *Another Life* dealt with the relationships and conflicts between the generations during the Soviet period.

**Village Fiction:** In the decades from the 1950s through the 1970s numerous works treating the life of the peasantry in Russia and Siberia were written in a movement known as Village Prose. Despite official censorship that often prevented authors from telling the full truth of the difficulties and injustices that confronted Russian farmers – the loss of autonomy that came with having to work on state farms or agricultural collectives, the unrealistic demands made on the rural sector by central planners as well as its exploitation and neglect by distant urban powers – village prose writers were able to depict this sector of Soviet society with more realism than almost any other. Because these writers themselves were frequently from rural backgrounds, they were able to examine all aspects of rural Russian society in great detail, celebrating its positive aspects and unflinchingly delving into its darker areas.

One example of such writers was Valentin Rasputin from Siberia, whose fame as a writer was based on a number of short stories and four novels. Rasputin used Siberia as the setting for all of his works, and his first novel, *Money for Maria*, concerns how a village responds when one family is confronted with an emergency. *Live and Remember* is tragedy about a soldier who deserts the front lines, while *Farewell to Matyora* is a protest against the disruption of traditional rural lifestyles and environmental degradation all in the name of progress.

In the early 1960s, Vladimir Tendryakov earned his reputation with his prose fiction of rural and urban settings and characters with various occupations and stations in life. Tendryakov displayed a deep

suspicion of Marxist-Leninist utopianism and the mindset that was the bedrock of standard Soviet optimism in his novel *Attack on Mirages*.

**Historical Fiction:** Tendryakov also began writing stories based on his two-year experience as a field-telephone specialist in several battles in World War II. *A Day that Ousted a Life* gives a detailed depiction of battlefield atmosphere and the psychological transformation it brings about.

An historical novelist Yury Davydov in his novels focused on the revolutionary movement the *Populism* (Narodnichestvo) of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His novel *March* was about the revolutionary Populist (Narodnik) organization *People's Will* that advocated violence. His work *The Slack Period of Autumn* was another work in which he portrayed *People's Will*. In *The Fate of Usol'tsev* Davydov depicts an unsuccessful expedition by peasants and intellectuals to found a socialist colony in Ethiopia.

The Soviet writer Sergey Zalygin, who wrote his prose fiction *The South American Variant* late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, portrayed the psychological problems of a woman in her middle years during the Soviet system. In his novel *On the Irtysh*, Zalygin portrayed the forced collectivization in Siberia under Stalin, and the sufferings of Siberian peasants. He was also the editor of an anthology called *The New Soviet Fiction: Sixteen Short Stories*.

Moral questions, whether the result of complex ethical choices that faced an individual or those that resulted from scientific and industrial activities, were the subject matter of Daniil Granin's works in the 1960s and early 1970s. He wrote his fiction about World War II together with Ales Adamovich *Leningrad Under Siege* (The Book of Blockade) which gave detailed accounts of the 900-day siege of Leningrad. Granin's other book *The Bison: A Novel About the Scientists Who Defied Stalin* was a fictional portrait of genetician Nikolay Timofeyev-Resovsky.

In the 1960s the political liberal Elena Ventsel' (also known as I. Grekova) rose to prominence as an author. Her writing was distinctive for its ironic sense of humor, sharp understanding of people's strengths and weaknesses, strong sense of justice, and mix of compassion and understanding for people's sufferings and frustrations. *The Faculty*, a novel that centers around the lives of the researchers, teachers and students from the same academic department of a research institute, was one of Grekova's most popular works. Despite being unable to publish some of her writing before 1985, her critical, skeptical views on life in the Soviet Union remained unchanged, as shown in her critical story *Without Smiles*, written in 1970 but published in 1986.

For Georgy Semyonov, human interactions, thoughts, emotions, and behavior in both the natural and human worlds constitute the subject matter for his writing, as evidenced in *The Smell of Burnt Powder*. Semyonov's stories were frequently melancholy, depicting the loss and sense of inadequacy felt by many. However, his short story *The Collection* takes a darker turn, conveying a sense of horror.

Andrey Bitov published several volumes of short fiction in the Soviet Union under the title *Life in Windy Weather*. His work *Pushkin House* examines the mental and emotional life of an intelligent young to middle-aged man with an education. It was banned in the Soviet Union. The complete text was first published in the United States and it was allowed in the Soviet Union in 1989. His fiction *The Symmetry Teacher* is called by him as an "novel-echo" of an untraceable English novel written by a writer called A. Tired-Boffin. It was never quite finished, and a compiled version was released in 2008, and republished in 2014.

### **Discussion/Questions**

1. How would we characterize 20<sup>th</sup> century fictional work?
2. Compare the fiction writers from Stalin's period with the writers from Khrushchev's period. What conclusions can you draw from such a comparison?

## ESSAY

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new group of writers appeared expressing their criticism of rationalism, political conservatism and apolitical individualism as in Dmitry Merezhkovsky's essay *On the Reasons for the Decline and the New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature* (1893).

Like Merezhkovsky, Valery Bryusov also wrote essays like *The keys of mysteries* (1893) and *Contemporary Thoughts* (1905) criticising those intellectual movements hostile to symbolism. Bryusov expressed his criticism of the poetry of Aleksandr Pushkin in his essay *Pushkin's Verse Techniques* (1915).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the 1905 Revolution became a major event for writers like Nikolay Berdyaev, Sergey Bulgakov, Mikhail Gershenzon, Semyon Frank, Petr Struve, and Alexander Izgoev to express their concerns and expectations from the radical intellectuals and the Revolution in their *Landmarks: A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia* (1909).

During the "Silver Age", there were essayists such as Vasily Rozanov and Lev Shestov who devoted their time only to religious issues. In his essays, collected in his books, *Solitaria* (1912) and *Two Baskets of Fall Leaves* (1913–1915), Rozanov talked about the issues of Christianity, the Christian Church, Jews, and Russian society.

Under the influence of Nietzsche, the Russian existentialist Lev Shestov devoted his criticism to Hegelian rationalism, and the concepts of reason and scientism in his works *Beginnings and Endings* (1908) and *The Great Vigils* (1911).

The symbolist writer Aleksandr Blok was interested in social and political problems in his essays such as *The People and Intelligentsia* (1909); *The Intelligentsia and Revolution* (1918), and *The Collapse of Humanism* (1921). In these essays, Blok discussed the problems of intellectuals and art, and he claimed that the intellectuals followed an individualistic path, wasted their energies in literary and philosophical speculations, and political activities which did not answer the needs and desires of the Russian people, bringing Russia to the brink of catastrophe.

Maksim Gorky in his early years in Capri (1906–1913) published essays of literary and social criticism, rejecting the individualism of the Russian writers and supporting collective creativity. In his essay *The Destruction of the Individual* (1909) he praised the ideals of socialism and the purity of the working class and in *About Karamazovism* (1913) he criticized Dostoyevky's views and his bitter style of presenting the Russian character. During the Revolution, Gorky published a series of articles such as *Revolution and culture* (1918) and *Untimely Thoughts* (1917–1918), in which he expressed his reaction to the October Revolution and advocated the preservation of cultural values.

Osip Mandelshtam, together with Nikolay Gumilyov, Anna Akhmatova, and Sergey Gorodetsky founded the Acmeist school of poetry, and wrote some essays on the idea of acmeist aesthetic such as *François Villon* (1913) and *On the Nature of the Word* (1922) and *The Morning of Acmeism* (1919).

The author Yevgeny Zamyatin penned essays which included his observations and thoughts on the problem of literature in a totalitarian state. He criticized censorship and ideological dogmatism in his essays *Tomorrow* (1920) and *On Today and the Contemporary* (1924). In 1923, Zamyatin wrote an essay titled *On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters* and talked about the effects on Russian Modernism of Nietzsche's Dionysianism, Einstein's relativity, and the campaigns against the illusion of realism. And in his essay *I Am Afraid*, he examined the state of postrevolutionary literature.

Literary critic and one of the main theorists of Left Art, and one of the active practitioners of factography (linking writers to contemporary life directly and encouraging them to turn reporter, historian, memoirist etc.) Viktor Shklovsky expressed his personal views and observations on the theory of literature, theater and film that were gathered in his *Hamburg account* (1928). In his essay *Monument to a Scholarly Error* (1930),

under the pressure of the Soviet authorities, Shklovsky tried to embrace the theory of Socialist Realism. Vladimir Mayakovsky's *How to Make Verse* (1926) and his *My Discovery of Amerika* (1925-1926) were also remarkable contributions to this genre.

Theorist of Symbolism, Andrey Bely published his three volumes of essays which included his essay *Symbolism, Green Meadow* (1910) in which he discussed the state of contemporary literature and its development, and *Arabesques* (1913) in which he depicted the modern literary era. His essay *Rhythm as Dialectic* (1929) was about a new method of studying poetic rhythm. Bely also wrote essays such as *Revolution and Culture* and *The Mastery of Gogol* in 1934.

In the late 1960s, Andrey Sinyavsky was one of the Soviet writers who was published outside the Soviet Union. He was arrested and put on trial for publishing his works in the West. In his essays *On Socialist Realism* (1959), *Thought Unaware* (1965), *For Freedom of Imagination* (1971), *The Literary Process in Russia* (1976), and *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History* (1989) he discussed the classical tradition of Socialist Realism and Soviet literature.

As being one of the supporters of a neo-Slavophile trend during the Soviet Union, Vladimir Soloukhin in his essays, *A Walk in Rural Russia* (1958), *From Lyrical Points of View* (1965) and *Searching for Icons in Russia* (1972) looked back with longing, remembering Russia's native culture, religious art and literature and criticizes the Soviet regime.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The writer Aleksey Remizov's autobiographical novel *The Pond* (1908) was a reflection of his early childhood. It includes the depiction of the life of two merchant families: one rich and the other-poor.

Life writing began to adopt more experimental forms of expression in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An early example of avant-garde autobiographical writing can be found in Vasily Rozanov's *Solitaria, Fallen Leaves* (1913-15).

One of the active revolutionaries, Maksim Gorky wrote his autobiographical stories in three novels: *Childhood* (1913), *My Apprenticeship* (1916) and *My University Years* (1923). His *Childhood* contains his experiences with the people, pain, sorrow, social injustice and incidents that he encountered in his younger days. In his second volume *My Apprenticeship*, he gives information about his adolescence in the years after the death of his mother, how he survived and how earned his own living. The third volume of his autobiography *My University Years* covers the years he spent in Kazan between 1884 and 1888 in which the only university he attended was the university of life. During this period, struggling to make ends meet, Gorky moved from one job to another.

Andrey Bely's autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* (1922) portrayed the author's experiences through his hero Kotik from his own early childhood and through his psychological and social developments. His *The Baptized Chinaman* explores the evolution of consciousness into self-consciousness in the mind of a child.

The nostalgia for childhood was the theme of several works such as Aleksey Tolstoy's *Nikita's Childhood*. *Nikita's Childhood* (1922) was a life story containing autobiographical sketches and realistic depictions of the life of a small boy living in a village.

Mikhail Bulgakov was a doctor, and in his autobiographical stories *Extraordinary Adventures of a Doctor* (1922) and *Notes of a Young Country Doctor* (1926) he covered his personal experiences while attempting to portray the circumstances of his current life.

Osip Mandelstam's collection of autobiographical sketches *The Noise of Time* (1923) includes "The Egyptian Stamp," a novella; "Fourth Prose;" and the famous travel memoirs "Theodosia" and "Journey to Armenia". These works are an evocative portrayal of the intellectual milieu of early 20<sup>th</sup> century St. Petersburg as well as the author's own affairs of the heart.

Boris Pasternak's autobiography *Safe Conduct* (1930) portrayed his daily life, ideals, philosophical views, and negative statements about the Stalinist period.

Nikolay Ostrovsky's autobiography *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1936) was an account of his actions in the Civil War on the side of the Bolsheviks and his difficult process of recovery after the war from his serious injuries.

Mikhail Zoshchenko's autobiographical novella *Before Sunrise* (1943), about how the author tried to overcome his chronic depression, negative emotions and fear of life, was banned and three years later the writer was expelled from the Soviet Writers' Union. After Stalin's death, attempts were made to clear his name, and he was eventually re-accepted into the union.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Vladimir Tendryakov established his reputation with a more profound and memorable story, *Donna Anna*, which combines the same detailed depiction of the battlefield atmosphere with a portrayal of the disastrous effects of a Stalinist mentality on military behavior. *Donna Anna* is actually one of a series of eyewitness stories, autobiographical in nature.

Stalin's death in 1953 marked a new era in the development of Soviet literature usually referred to as the Thaw. Life writing of this period is represented by the autobiographical memoir.

Evgeny Evtushenko in his *A Precocious Autobiography* (1963) introduced snatches of his life experiences with his family, his grandfather, his schools years, his labor work on two geological expeditions, and his sorrow upon the news of Stalin's death.

Yury Olesha's *No Day Without a Line* (1965) is a collection of miscellaneous writings whose only common thread is that they all relate to the author's life and thoughts. They range from recollections of Olesha's childhood before the revolution, his ideas about literature in general and 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature in particular, and his impressions of famous cultural figures.

Ilya Erenburg's multi-volume *Memoirs: 1921-1941* (1961-65) recounts his memories of the historical events he had witnessed, and of his acquaintance with leading figures such as Sergey Yesenin, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Andrey Bely, Andrey Remizov, and Vsevolod Meyerhold. The *Memoirs* also included his recollections about Boris Pasternak Alexander Tairov, Marina Tsvetayeva, Osip Mandelstam and Isaak Babel.

Yury Trifonov wrote his autobiography *The House on the Embankment* (1976) which embodied the everyday lives of his family and the residents living in a house on Embankment complex in Moscow. The novel covered the period of the Stalinist purges, the post-war late Stalinist time, and the stagnation.

Sergey Dovlatov's *The Preserve's* (1983) plot was autobiographical, narrating a summer that was spent as a tour guide at the Pushkin Museum near Pskov, and reflected his views on provincial life. *Ours: A Russian Family Album* (1989) was another of Dovlatov's autobiographical works consisting of a collection of character sketches of four generations in the Soviet Union.

**Émigré Writers:** Kuprin's *The Junkers* (1932), written while an émigré, conveyed nostalgia for the Russia of his early childhood and his emotions during the long separation from his country.

Realist writer Ivan Bunin's autobiographical novel *The Life of Arseniev* (1952) was also from his émigré period. It was published in parts in France; later the complete version of the book appeared in New York. *The Life of Arseniev* depicted the narrator's childhood, his education, his ignorance, his struggles, and his emotions in the social and cultural atmosphere before and after the Revolution.

Émigré writer Ivan Shmelev's *Pilgrimage* was an autobiographical work of his own first pilgrimage to Trinity-Sergius in the 1930s.

Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation of a Memory* was an autobiographical memoir containing twelve short stories about his childhood days in an aristocratic family in pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg from 1903 until his emigration to America in 1940; and three stories about his émigré life at Cambridge, in Berlin and in Paris.

Andrey Sinyavsky's autobiography *Goodnight!* was published after his emigration to France in 1984. In his novel he attempted to find the meaning of his life in the Soviet Union, his role as a writer and his thoughts on literature and ethical questions.

**Women Writers:** Anastasiya Verbitskaya's autobiography *To My Reader* echoes her childhood and youth and traces her development into confirmed individualist in conflict with the revolutionaries and their ethos of selfless service to the state.

Valentina Dmitrieva wrote her autobiography, *The Way it Was* in the 1920s to document her difficult transition from a peasant daughter to a physician and a writer, and her acquaintances with the literary thinkers and intellectuals.

Anastasiya Tsvetaeva in her *Reminiscences* echoes the psychological shifts she went through in her first twenty years, and examines her youth from the perspective of tolerant old age.

Nina Berberova wrote her autobiography, *The Italics Are Mine* to portray her acquaintances with many influential Russian writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Osip Mandeshtam's wife Nadezhda Mandelshtam's autobiographical story *Hope Against Hope* reflected her life with Osip, and the daily struggle to survive in most desperate circumstances during Stalin's Soviet Union.

The autobiographical trilogy *The Little Caftan*, *The Polack*, and *The Break* (1930-31) written by Vera Gedroits was originally published under the masculine name Sergey, indicating possibly that conventional sex roles were merely arbitrary.

Journey into the Whirlwind was Evgeniya Ginzburg's account of her time in prisons and labor camps that included a two-year stint in solitary confinement.

Lidiya Chukovskaya's *Going Under* (1949) was an attempt to portray the Stalinist epoch, a period that destroyed people physically, mentally, and morally with its cruelty.

Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem* (1963-64) was a cycle of poems about the Great Terror, the suffering of people, and her personal life during the time of terror and her son's arrest.