

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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RUSSIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY - 19th Century

One of the 19th century Russian writers, Denis Davydov, wrote an *Essay towards a Theory of Guerrilla Warfare* (1821), included an autobiography prefixed to the 1832 edition of his poems, and authored a series of recollections of military life. His autobiography is peppered with puns and jokes, many unsuitable in polite company, and his highly readable military writings are regarded as some of the best in Russian.

Alexandr Pushkin, in his autobiographical work *Journey to Arzrum* (1836) and based on his travel to the Caucasus, depicted the places and people he encountered in the Caucasus.

Another writer who experimented with autobiographical fiction was Ivan Turgenev. His collection of short stories *Notes of a Hunter* (1852), based on his observations of peasant life and nature, and his novella *First Love* (1860) were famous for their autobiographical overtones.

Apollon Grigoriev's autobiographical work, *My Literary and Moral Wanderings* (1862-64) was about his experience of the cultural life that created him and the Russian nation during his early years.

Alexander Herzen's autobiography *My Past and Thoughts* (1852) covers the period from Herzen's birth in 1812 to 1868 and depicts his early privileged childhood among the Russian aristocracy, his interaction of people and events, his correspondence with friends and his ideological debates. He began writing his *My Past and Thoughts* in London, printed many of its chapters in *Polyarnaya zvezda* and *Kolokol*, and published the first and second volumes as a separate edition in London in 1861. The fourth and last volume came out in Geneva in 1867.

Sergey Aksakov's trilogy *The Family Chronicle* (1856), *Childhood Years of Bagrov Grandson* (1858) and *A Russian Schoolboy* (1856) influenced autobiographical works of the mid-century with its focus on the history of the childhood and the family of the protagonist.

Lev Tolstoy published his autobiographical work entitled *Childhood* (1852) under the initials L.N. Although initially it was planned as the first part of a tetralogy, only *Childhood*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* were completed. The trilogy describes the transition from adolescence to adulthood and examines the emotional world of a young gentry boy. He published another autobiographical work *My Life or First Memories* (1878) based on his personal recollections.

Émigré Writers: Émigré writer Prince Peter Kropotkin wrote his autobiography *The Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1899) in exile. His *Memoirs* covers his early life, cadet corps schooling, life in the royal court, his military service in Siberia, his political activities, his imprisonment, his escape from jail, his exile and activities in Western Europe.

Women Writers: Among women writers of autobiographical accounts, Nadezhda Durova's autobiographical texts written from 1836 to 1841 recounted her childhood experiences in *Autobiography*. In her *The Cavalry Maiden* she described her service in the military dressed as a man, and her participation in the defense of her country.

Another women writer, Varvara Bakunina's *The Persian Campaign of 1796* (1887) was another account of military operations and her experiences during her husband's expedition against the Persian invasion of the Caucasus in 1795.

Mariya Kamenskaya's *Reminiscences*, written in the late 19th century, was a family chronicle including the history of her father's family, the Tolstoy family and her own happy life as a daughter of the regiment of artists.

Reading

- 1- *Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, Edited by Jane Gary Harris, Princeton University Press, 1990
- 2- Cooper, N.L., "A Chapter in the History of Russian Autobiography: Childhood, Youth, and Maturity in Fonvizin's *A Sincere Avowal of My Deeds and Thoughts*", *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Winter, 1996, pp. 609-622.
- 3- *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, Edited by Neil Cornwell, Routledge, 2013.
- 4- Terras, V., *A History of Russian Literature*, Yale University Press, 1991.
- 5- *A History of Women's Writing in Russia*, edited by Adele Marie Baker, Cambridge University Press, 2002, Ch. 5.
- 6- Greenleaf, M., "Performing Autobiography: The Multiple Memoirs of Catherine the Great (1756-96)", *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Jul., 2004), pp. 407-426