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**THE ROOTS OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE**

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**ABOUT ARTICLE**

**Key words:** Russian, literature, middle, compose. **Abstract:** This article deals with the stages of Russian literature. Russian literature refers to the literature of Russia and its émigrés and to Russian-language literature.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The roots of Russian literature can be traced to the Middle Ages, when epics and chronicles in Old East Slavic were composed. By the Age of Enlightenment, literature had grown in importance, and from the early 1830s, Russian literature underwent an astounding golden age in poetry, prose and drama. Romanticism permitted a flowering of poetic talent: Vasily Zhukovsky and later his protégé Alexander Pushkin came to the fore. Prose was flourishing as well. The first great Russian novelist was Nikolai Gogol. Then came Ivan Turgenev, who mastered both short stories and novels. Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy soon became internationally renowned. In the second half of the century Anton Chekhov excelled in short stories and became a leading dramatist. The beginning of the 20th century ranks as the Silver Age of Russian poetry. The poets most often associated with the "Silver Age" are Konstantin Balmont, Valery Bryusov, Alexander Blok, Anna Akhmatova, Nikolay Gumilyov, Osip Mandelstam, Sergei Yesenin, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Marina Tsvetaeva and Boris Pasternak. This era produced some first-rate novelists and short-story writers, such as Aleksandr Kuprin, Nobel Prize winner Ivan Bunin, Leonid Andreyev, Fyodor Sologub, Aleksey Remizov, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Andrei Bely.

After the Revolution of 1917, Russian literature split into Soviet and white émigré parts. While the Soviet Union assured universal literacy and a highly developed book printing industry, it also enforced ideological censorship. In the 1930s Socialist realism became the predominant trend in Russia. Its leading figure was Maxim Gorky, who laid the foundations of this style. Nikolay Ostrovsky's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* has been among the most successful works of Russian literature. Alexander Fadeyev achieved success in Russia. Various émigré writers, such as poets Vladislav Khodasevich, Georgy Ivanov and Vyacheslav Ivanov; novelists such as Mark Aldanov, Gaito Gazdanov and Vladimir Nabokov; and short story Nobel Prize-winning writer Ivan Bunin, continued to write in exile. Some writers dared to oppose Soviet ideology, like Nobel Prize-winning novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who wrote about life in the gulag camps. The Khrushchev Thaw brought some fresh wind to literature and poetry became a mass cultural phenomenon. This "thaw" did not last long; in the 1970s, some of the most prominent authors were banned from publishing and prosecuted for their anti-Soviet sentiments.

The end of the 20th century was a difficult period for Russian literature, with few distinct voices. Among the most discussed authors of this period were Victor Pelevin, who gained popularity with short stories and novels, novelist and playwright Vladimir Sorokin, and the poet Dmitri Prigov. In the 21st century, a new generation of Russian authors appeared, differing greatly from the postmodernist Russian prose of the late 20th century, which lead critics to speak about "new realism".

Russian authors have significantly contributed to numerous literary genres. Russia has five Nobel Prize in literature laureates. As of 2011, Russia was the fourth largest book producer in the world in terms of published titles.[1] A popular folk saying claims Russians are "the world's most reading nation" Old Russian literature consists of several masterpieces written in the Old East Slavic (i.e. the language of Kievan Rus', not to be confused with the contemporaneous Church Slavonic nor with modern Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian). The main type of Old Russian historical literature were chronicles, most of them anonymous.[4] Anonymous works also include *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* and *Praying of Daniel the Immured*. Hagiographies (Russian: *жития святых*, *zhitiya svyatykh*, "lives of the saints") formed a popular genre of the Old Russian literature. *Life of Alexander Nevsky* offers a well-known example. Other Russian literary monuments include *Zadonschina*, *Physiologist*, *Synopsis* and *A Journey Beyond the Three Seas*. *Bylinas* – oral folk epics – fused Christian and pagan traditions. Medieval Russian literature had an overwhelmingly religious character and used an adapted form of the Church Slavonic language with many South Slavic elements. The first work in colloquial Russian, the autobiography of the archpriest Avvakum, emerged only in the mid-17th century. After taking the throne at the end of the 17th century, Peter the Great's influence on the Russian culture would extend far into the 18th

century. Peter's reign during the beginning of the 18th century initiated a series of modernizing changes in Russian literature. The reforms he implemented encouraged Russian artists and scientists to make innovations in their crafts and fields with the intention of creating an economy and culture comparable. Peter's example set a precedent for the remainder of the 18th century as Russian writers began to form clear ideas about the proper use and progression of the Russian language. Through their debates regarding versification of the Russian language and tone of Russian literature, the writers in the first half of the 18th century were able to lay foundation for the more poignant, topical work of the late 18th century.

Satirist Antiokh Dmitrievich Kantemir, 1708–1744, was one of the earliest Russian writers not only to praise the ideals of Peter I's reforms but the ideals of the growing Enlightenment movement in Europe. Kantemir's works regularly expressed his admiration for Peter, most notably in his epic dedicated to the emperor entitled *Petrida*. More often, however, Kantemir indirectly praised Peter's influence through his satiric criticism of Russia's "superficiality and obscurantism," which he saw as manifestations of the backwardness Peter attempted to correct through his reforms.[5] Kantemir honored this tradition of reform not only through his support for Peter, but by initiating a decade-long debate on the proper syllabic versification using the Russian language.

Vasily Kirillovich Trediakovsky, a poet, playwright, essayist, translator and contemporary to Antiokh Kantemir, also found himself deeply entrenched in Enlightenment conventions in his work with the Russian Academy of Sciences and his groundbreaking translations of French and classical works to the Russian language. A turning point in the course of Russian literature, his translation of Paul Tallemant's work *Voyage to the Isle of Love*, was the first to use the Russian vernacular as opposed the formal and outdated Church-Slavonic.[6] This introduction set a precedent for secular works to be composed in the vernacular, while sacred texts would remain in Church-Slavonic. However, his work was often incredibly theoretical and scholarly, focused on promoting the versification of the language with which he spoke.

While Trediakovsky's approach to writing is often described as highly erudite, the young writer and scholarly rival to Trediakovsky, Alexander Petrovich Sumarokov, 1717–1777, was dedicated to the styles of French classicism. Sumarokov's interest in the form of French literature mirrored his devotion to the westernizing spirit of Peter the Great's age. Although he often disagreed with Trediakovsky, Sumarokov also advocated the use of simple, natural language in order to diversify the audience and make more efficient use of the Russian language. Like his colleagues and counterparts, Sumarokov extolled the legacy of Peter I, writing in his manifesto *Epistle on Poetry*, "The great Peter hurls his

thunder from the Baltic shores, the Russian sword glitters in all corners of the universe”. [7] Peter the Great's policies of westernization and displays of military prowess naturally attracted Sumarokov and his contemporaries.

Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov, in particular, expressed his gratitude for and dedication to Peter's legacy in his unfinished *Peter the Great*, Lomonosov's works often focused on themes of the awe-inspiring, grandeur nature, and was therefore drawn to Peter because of the magnitude of his military, architectural and cultural feats. In contrast to Sumarokov's devotion to simplicity, Lomonosov favored a belief in a hierarchy of literary styles divided into high, middle and low. This style facilitated Lomonosov's grandiose, high minded writing and use of both vernacular and Church-Slavonic. [8]

The influence of Peter I and debates over the function and form of literature as it related to the Russian language in the first half of the 18th century set a stylistic precedent for the writers during the reign of Catherine the Great in the second half of the century. However, the themes and scopes of the works these writers produced were often more poignant, political and controversial. Alexander Nikolayevich Radishchev, for example, shocked the Russian public with his depictions of the socio-economic condition of the serfs. Empress Catherine II condemned this portrayal, forcing Radishchev into exile in Siberia. [9]

Others, however, picked topics less offensive to the autocrat. Nikolay Karamzin, 1766–1826, for example, is known for his advocacy of Russian writers adopting traits in the poetry and prose like a heightened sense of emotion and physical vanity, considered to be feminine at the time as well as supporting the cause of female Russian writers. Karamzin's call for male writers to write with femininity was not in accordance with the Enlightenment ideals of reason and theory, considered masculine attributes. His works were thus not universally well received; however, they did reflect in some areas of society a growing respect for, or at least ambivalence toward, a female ruler in Catherine the Great. This concept heralded an era of regarding female characteristics in writing as an abstract concept linked with attributes of frivolity, vanity and pathos.

Some writers, on the other hand, were more direct in their praise for Catherine II. Gavrila Romanovich Derzhavin, famous for his odes, often dedicated his poems to Empress Catherine II. In contrast to most of his contemporaries, Derzhavin was highly devoted to his state; he served in the military, before rising to various roles in Catherine II's government, including secretary to the Empress and Minister of Justice. Unlike those who took after the grand style of Mikhail Lomonosov and Alexander Sumarokov, Derzhavin was concerned with the minute details of his subjects.

Denis Fonvizin, an author primarily of comedy, approached the subject of the Russian nobility with an angle of critique. Fonvizin felt the nobility should be held to the standards they were under the reign of Peter the Great, during which the quality of devotion to the state was rewarded. His works criticized the current system for rewarding the nobility without holding them responsible for the duties they once performed. Using satire and comedy, Fonvizin supported a system of nobility in which the elite were rewarded based upon personal merit rather than the hierarchal favoritism that was rampant during Catherine the Great's reign.

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