

Present, yet invisible: Avdotya Panaeva as an exemplary case of the realist women writers being shifted to the corner of the Russophone literary canon.

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Capstone Project

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May 2, 2022

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement

Hélène Cixous¹

One can hardly study Russophone literature without diving into its classics, which is mostly represented by the realist writers and poets². Lermontov, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Tolstoy, all of these prominent authors belong to the realist movement and constitute an integral part of the Russophone literary canon. Notably, the overwhelming majority of the canonized literary works from the realist period is written by the men writers. Yet there were women writers of the same period, who produced influential writing pieces, as much as were actively involved in the literary circles, their publications seem to receive considerably less attention compared to the men writers.

The reason for such a tendency lies within the condition of entering the canon and the patriarchal tradition associated with it. This way, the Russophone literary canon was not an exception from the trend of diminishing women writers' contribution to the literary sphere. This capstone project aims to interpret women

¹ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1975), 875.
doi:10.1007/978-1-349-14428-0_21.

² Renato Poggioli, "Realism in Russia," *Comparative Literature* 3, no. 3 (1951), 253, doi:10.2307/1768280.

writers' actual position in the Russophone literary canon based on the example of Advotyа Panaeva, an exemplary representative of the realist movement within Russian literature, while also drawing conclusions on the canon formation logics and its attitude towards women writers. Namely, I hope to investigate the reasons behind women's visible underrepresentation in the first rows of the realist canon, while studying Panaeva's experience and later perception of her works. I also hope to understand what social, personal and professional aspects affected women writers' perception and influenced both their contemporary and later placement within the canon.

The visible absence of women in the Russophone literary canon raises the question of what has happened to the female authors, where have they disappeared or even were there any Russophone realist women writers in the first place? The usual assumption of a person, who is familiar enough with the Russophone classics, varies from complete uncertainty regarding the women writers' literary legacy to doubting the existence of any Russophone women writers at all, since "almost everything that was done in literature by women of the 19th century remains reliably forgotten"³.

What is important about studying the reasons behind women writers being shifted to the margins of the Russophone literary canon⁴ is the rediscovery of the realist women writers' literary production and reassessment of its novelty. Once diving into the topic and observing the main principles of the women writers'

³ Mariya Nesterenko, "Everyone Get Out of the Shadows: How to Return the Women Writers of the XIX Century in the History of Literature," *Gorky Media*. Last modified December 12, 2019, n.p. <https://gorky.media/reviews/vsem-vyjti-iz-teni-kak-vernut-pisatel'nits-xix-veka-v-istoriyu-literatury/>.

⁴ Nesterenko, "Everyone Get Out of the Shadows: How to Return the Women Writers of the XIX Century in the History of Literature," n.p.

exclusion, one can realize that the reasons behind women writers' underrepresentation may have more of a sociocultural background rather than are based on the artistic value of the women writers' writings. The reconstruction of the more full-fledged picture of the writers' circles composition would help to enrich the literary tradition by adding some names it previously omitted.

The case study of this project, Avdotya Panayeva, was a Russian writer and a prominent representative of the Russophone literary world, who was known for her realist novels *The Talnikov Family*, *A Woman's Lot*, *The Steppe Lady*, as much as other stories and a memoir of her own⁵. ““Otechestvennye Zapiski”, “Moskvityanin”, “Biblioteka Dlya Chteniya” devoted many pages to criticism of her works. “She was published in the best magazines next to the so-called luminaries of Russian literature. Poets such as Nekrasov and Fet dedicated their poems to her”⁶. Panayeva got her works published in the major literary journals of the 19th century Saint-Petersburg and was an active participant in the writing community. She was also a holder of a literary salon and worked in the publishing of *Sovremennik* literary journal for many years.

Avdotya Panaeva was born in 1820 in Saint-Petersburg to a middle-class family of artistic circles. Because of her family, Avdotya was exposed to art from a very young age, as her parents, Yakov and Anna Bryansky were theatrical performers. Being submerged into the society of actors, Avdotya was surrounded by creative people from her childhood, which heavily influenced the future writer and gave her an opportunity to observe the artistic expression and everything

⁵ Petr Nikolaev, *Russian Writers 1800-1917: Biographical Dictionary*. (Moscow: Big Russian Encyclopedia, 1999), 520.

⁶ Korney Chukovsky, “Panaeva,” n.p., <http://nekrasov-lit.ru/nekrasov/bio/panaeva/oчерk-chukovskogo.htm>

connected to it⁷. At the same time, in spite of the positive side of being exposed to the theater due to her parents, Panaeva used to criticize them for their indifferent attitude and strict upbringing. This way, she stated that “no one caressed me, and therefore I was very sensitive to the kindness”⁸ in the pages of her memoirs.

Perhaps, this is why the writer raised the topic of inadequate children’s upbringing, as much as depicted problematic aspects of parenting in the 19th-century Russian empire in her novel *The Talnikov Family*. The novel is written from the perspective of a young girl, who goes through her maturity, while also reflecting on the complicated and tense relationships between the members of her family that inevitably affected the child and her perception of the world. Interestingly, in the very last lines of the novel, Panaeva steps off from the perspective of the implied narrator and switches to her personal voice (represented by N. Stanitsky, her pseudonym). After completing the fictional narration and making a transition to reality, Panaeva gives a summary of her intention to cover the events of *The Talnikov Family*.

This way, she explains the essence of the “notes” of the main heroine by underlining that “in any case, if by their sharp depiction of everything rude and immoral that can be found in home upbringing with the carelessness and bad morals of parents, they [notes] make them [readers] look back at themselves and shame those who are in any way guilty in this respect before their children and before

⁷ Edward Carr, "Avdotya Panayeva: Vospominania by K. Chukovsky." (*The Slavonic and East European Review* 8, no. 23, 1929), 458, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4202425>.

⁸ Avdotya Panaeva, *Memories*. (Leningrad: Kubuch, 1927), 9, http://az.lib.ru/p/panaewa_a_j/text_0010.shtml.

society, then this, I think, may be a sufficient reason why I print them [notes]”⁹. As it might be observed, Panaeva seems to be heavily invested in the problem of family psychology and children’s uninterrupted growth. Moreover, her decision of depicting the events of the novel through the young girl’s eyes amplifies the female voice that is rather scarce within the classical literature, as “women have generally been represented either by men or within the context of the dominant male code”¹⁰. Therefore, Panaeva’s writings focusing on family relationships and child psychology might be considered a rare phenomenon in the Russophone realist literature. Not only the writer presented a variety of female heroines, but also incorporated her personal experience in fiction that makes her novels a unique source of the female perspective on the realities of womanhood in the 19th-century Russian empire.

After being homeschooled, Avdotya Panaeva attended the Russian State Institute of Performing Arts, namely, the ballet class, which she did not find particularly inspiring¹¹. In 1839 Avdotya married Ivan Panaev, who was a writer and a literary critic. Their marriage could not be considered an exemplary happy one, as Ivan soon turned to be unfaithful in marriage¹², which was followed by the couple’s inability to conceive and the consequent multiple infant losses. A romance with the poet and writer Nikolai Nekrasov, that followed Panaevs’ unhappy marriage, was also an intense and stressful experience full of conflicts and fights that might be equally traced through Nekrasov’s poetry and the couple’s personal

⁹ Avdotya Panaeva, *The Talnikov Family* (Moscow: State Publishing House of Fiction, 1852), n.p., http://az.lib.ru/p/panaewa_a_j/text_0030.shtml.

¹⁰ Joe Andrew, *Women In Russian Literature 1780-1863* (Basingstoke: Springer, 1988), 5.

¹¹ Nikolaev, *Russian Writers 1800-1917: Biographical Dictionary*, 527.

¹² Nikolaev, *Russian Writers 1800-1917: Biographical Dictionary*, 521.

letters. In spite of the conflicts, Panaeva and Nekrasov formed a creative duet and wrote two novels together, namely, *The Dead Lake* and *Three Parts of The World*. It is important to mention that the novels often got attributed to Nekrasov alone, as Panaeva's contemporary critics did not perceive her as a separate and skilled writer. For example, in her memoirs, Panaeva describes the situation when an influential critic Vissarion Belinsky confessed that firstly he did not believe that she, indeed, wrote the novel *The Talnikov Family*¹³.

As Avdotya later wrote in one of her letters to Ivan Panaev, "Sometimes I think that I am not to blame for what I have become. What a barbaric childhood, what a humiliating youth, what an anxious and lonely youth!"¹⁴. Ultimately, Panaeva's tragic experiences with childbearing and complicated romantic relationships have influenced the topics that the writer covered in her literary production. She gravitated toward describing personal life of the characters and focusing on their private values fulfillment.

For instance, the tale *The Steppe Lady* conveys the story of social expectations of marriage. Here Panaeva illustrates a wide range of characters that do not fit into the traditional fate of the young people of the era and in some way diverge from the normal way of life. This way, the premise of the tale consists of the idea that all of the main characters fail to find a spouse on time, though, for different reasons. While the main hero simply could not find a soulmate, his close friend Ivan is convinced that marriage only complicates a person's life and sucks the resources both financially and spiritually. Answering the question if he got

¹³ Avdotya Panaeva, *Memories* (Leningrad: Kubuch, 1927), n.p., http://az.lib.ru/p/panaewa_a_j/text_0010.shtml.

¹⁴ Nikolaev, *Russian Writers 1800-1917: Biographical Dictionary*, 521.

married or had any children, Ivan indignantly responds to the main hero, “Are you out of your mind? Who said these lies to you? I haven't gone crazy yet!”¹⁵. The author perpetually questions the institution of marriage and the young generation’s attitude to it. Similarly, Feklusha, the main heroine, reveals that she cannot answer an offer of marriage because she “swore to never be anyone's bride”¹⁶ because of the personal trauma related to her sister’s death that presumably happened as a result of her marriage. Here one may truly see how Panaeva, as an author interested in the person’s deep childhood traumas, introduces this theme in her writings. On top of that, Panaeva’s writing might be distinguished by the simultaneous combination of the female and male types of narration, as they were believed to be seen during her time. While the male type of narration presupposes a certain degree of authority and omniscience, the female type of narration is expressed through abundant emotional reaction to the happening events, as much as trying to derive the possible consequences of them ¹⁷.

Speaking about the female images created by Panaeva, the image of Feklusha might be taken as an particularly strong and independent heroine. Notably, she even outranks the main male hero of the story in many skills and emotional maturity. Moreover, the very title of the novel is given after Feklusha, who is that free-minded steppe lady. For her portrayal of the strong and versatile female characters Panaeva might be, indeed, considered a proto-feminist. In fact, Panaeva’s specific attention to the problems of female representation and strive for equality

¹⁵ Avdotya Panaeva, "The Steppe Lady," In *Dacha on the Peterhof Road: Prose of Russian Women Writers of the First Half of the 19th Century* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1986), n.p., http://az.lib.ru/p/panaewa_a_j/text_0040.shtml.

¹⁶ Avdotya Panaeva, "The Steppe Lady," n.p.

¹⁷ Zubkov, "Self-Critical Realism: Three New Books on Russian Prose in the Middle of the 19th Century," 5.

often got expressed in her personal contemplations, as much as in her novels and stories. “If it is precisely moral progress in humanity that comes, then a woman, without any explanations and disputes, will take an equal position with a man”, writes the author in her novel *A Woman's Lot*¹⁸.

The novelty of Panaeva's ideas within the context of the 19th century Russophone literature might be traced through Vissarion Belinsky's feedback on her novel *The Talnikov Family*. According to Panaeva's memoirs, the critic confessed that “within the literary field no one has yet touched upon such an important issue as the attitude of children to their parents and all the outrages that are done to poor children”¹⁹. The case of Belinsky's acknowledgment of the novel's originality was also mentioned in Korney Chukovsky's essay dedicated to this novel. This way, Chukovsky wrote that “Belinsky could not help but be captivated by the social protest lurking here”²⁰. It was the specific attention to the family question on top of the protest against the norms of the 19th-century society that distinguished the novel. Notably, the first edition of *The Talnikov Family* was banned by the chairman of the imperial censorship committee, Buturlin, who believed that the ideas the novel conveyed might have intensified the revolutionary moods in the Russian society. As it was officially proclaimed by Buturlin, the novel must not be spread “for immorality and undermining parental authority”²¹. Hence, one could derive the originality of Panaeva's ideas that questioned the traditional

¹⁸ Olga Kafanova, "Avdotya Panaeva between public and private space," *ILCEA* 29 (2017): 12, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ilcea.4296>.

¹⁹ Panaeva, *Memories*, n.p.

²⁰ Korney Chukovsky, "On 'The Talnikov Family'," (*Chukfamily*, 1927), n.p., <https://www.chukfamily.ru/kornei/prosa/articles/o-semejstve-talnikovyx>.

²¹ Panaeva, *Memories*, n.p.

tsarist regime and, perhaps, even possessed a danger to it. Overall, the novel contributed to the enrichment of the Russophone realist canon in general and induced the development of the traditional family dynamics in particular.

Moreover, Panaeva's elaboration on the "woman question" might also be considered revolutionary, as she touched upon the state of the women's position in society when the writers only started to probe this topic. Taking into consideration that Panaeva's debut novel, *The Talnikov Family*, was published in 1848, only one year after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, a novel by Charlotte Bronte, that is considered one of the first major feminist novels²², one may evaluate the extent of the novelty of *The Talnikov Family*, especially in the Russophone context. In fact, Panaeva's decision to portray the realities of the average family through the young girl's eyes is "one of the first depictions of a girl's childhood in Russian literature"²³.

On top of the original fiction pieces, Advotya Panaeva's memoirs possess an impressive collection of details about the Russophone literary intelligentsia. Panaeva's contribution to the immortalization of the *Sovremennik* literary journal circles presents a unique perspective of one of the most important within the Russian context publishing agent's functioning. Not only do her descriptions of the historical events and authorities bring more factors to consider when understanding the context of the 19th century Russophone literature, but also

²² PJ Steyer, "Jane Eyre, Proto-Feminist vs. 'The Third Person Man'," (*Brown University*, 1996), n.p.,

<https://victorianweb.org/authors/bronte/cbronte/steyer7.html>.

²³ Polka, "The Female Canon," (Polka.academy, 2022), n.p., <https://polka.academy/materials/671>.

transfer a specifically female point of view. Yet Panaeva's memoirs are sometimes attributed as not the most trustworthy piece of the historical evidence, some scholars notice that it might be her professional deformation that led to the distortion of some particular moments illustrated in memoirs for the purpose of creating a plot. Likewise, Panaeva's extensive critique of some historical figures, like Ivan Turgenev and Pauline Viardot, adds the antagonist-like figures to the text that makes it resemble a fictional piece, thus, might be more attractive to readers²⁴. For example, Chaikovskaya considers the fact that "she writes her memoirs not with the aim of telling the story of her life, but with the desire to earn a living"²⁵, as the writer has left without a major source of income after the death of her second husband, a critic Golovachev, and needed to financially support a small daughter.

Panayeva's case of being a partner of another influential Russian writer, Nikolay Nekrasov, makes her a demonstrative example of the trend consisting of women writers' artistic production being dissolved in the couple's production or being perceived as a part of man writer's oeuvre. An excerpt from the preface to Panayeva's memoir written by Russian poet, critic and translator Korney Chukovsky, quoted in the next sentence might be a striking example of the typical assessment of a woman writer's professionalism based on the male figures that she was surrounded with. Chukovsky writes: «Avdotya Yakovlevna Panaeva, who wrote this book, was Nekrasov's common-law wife for fifteen years. She actively

²⁴ I. Chaikovskaya, "Ivan Turgenev as an Anti-hero of Avdoya Panaeva's Memoirs (Behind the Pages of Panaeva's Memories)," *Scientific Notes of the Oryol State University* 1 (2008), 187.

<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/ivan-turgenev-kak-antigeroy-memuarov-avdoti-panaevoy-za-stranitsami-panaevskih-vozpominaniy>.

²⁵ Chaikovskaya, "Ivan Turgenev as an Anti-hero of Avdoya Panaeva's Memoirs (Behind the Pages of Panaeva's Memories)," 188.

helped the poet in his editorial and literary work, wrote with him two novels "Three countries of the world" and "Dead Lake". She was introduced into the literary environment by her first husband, the well-known journalist I. Panaev. Both Nekrasov and Panaev were editors of *Sovremennik*; Thus, Avdotya Yakovlevna had the precious opportunity to meet almost daily with remarkable Russian writers, employees of this magazine»²⁶. While attributing Panayeva's writing talent to the male writers she was in contact with, it looks like Chukovsky does not perceive Panayeva's personality and writings independently.

Ultimately, Chukovsky's seemingly positive feedback on the memoir descends into an evident diminishing of the woman writer's merit. In fact, not perceiving women as real writers seems to be a usual practice of that time. As noted by Olga Kafanova, an author of the article "Avdotya Panayeva between public and personal space", Panayeva, as much as the majority of other women writers of the 19th century, was considered a second-class writer²⁷. Yet Chukovsky was one of the first biographers of Panaeva and has produced a considerable number of articles and essays about her persona, some of the later scholars suggest that the image of Panaeva he presented was more imaginary rather than matching the reality²⁸.

Despite her notable contribution to the literary world, Avdotya Panaeva got abruptly forgotten closer to the end of her life. This way, in the personal letter to Chernyshevsky she stated that "if it wasn't for the fear that the little orphans, my grandchildren, would die of hunger, then I would never show my nose to any

²⁶ Korney Chukovsky, "Preface," In *Memories* (Leningrad: Kubuch, 1927), n.p., http://az.lib.ru/p/panaewa_a_j/text_0010.shtml.

²⁷ Kafanova, "Avdotya Panaeva between public and private space," 10.

²⁸ All-Russian Museum of A. S. Pushkin, "'Impossible Woman' Avdotya Panaeva.," *All-Russian Museum of A. S. Pushkin*, 2020, n.p. <https://www.museumpushkin.ru/panaeva/>.

editorial office with my work, as it's so hard to endure the unceremonious attitude towards me, as a forgotten author of a past literary era"²⁹. Not only the writer herself did admit the fact that her literary legacy gradually got forgotten, the trend of Panaeva being marginalized within the Russophone canon might be traced with the help of considering the frequency of her literary pieces reprinting.

If to consider the circulation of Panaeva's debut novel *The Talnikov Family*, one may notice its extremely rare reprint. This way, the only issue of the novel belongs to the publishing house Academia and dates back to 1928. Notably, the Academia publishing issued only 5000 copies of the novel. Since then, the novel was not reissued. Similarly, it can hardly be considered adequately incorporated into the canon, as the novel does not appear in the collections of the Russian classics issued during the Soviet period. For example, the prominent Soviet anthology *Classics and Contemporaries* did not issue any of Panaeva's literary pieces under their collection. Yet there were many realist writers, who were contemporaries of Panaeva and even published in the same *Sovremennik* journal. For example, Alexander Herzen's novel *Who Is to Blame*, which is considered one of the first works of the Russian realist literature³⁰, was printed as a part of the series *Classics and Contemporaries* in the number of 600 000 copies³¹. Yet *Who Is to Blame* was also originally distributed by *Sovremennik*³², as much as most of Panaeva's works,

²⁹ Chukovsky, Korney. "Preface," In *Memories*, 10.

³⁰ Polka, "The rise of realism," *Polka.academy*, 2022, n.p.
<https://polka.academy/lists/97>.

³¹ "'Who Is to Blame' Book," LiveLib. Last modified December 25, 2021, n.p.,
<https://www.livelib.ru/book/1000446232-kto-vinovat-povesti-rasskazy-sbornik-a-i-gertsen>.

³² Culture.ru, "'Who Is to Blame?'," Culture.ru. Accessed May 1, 2022, n.p.,
<https://www.culture.ru/books/226/kto-vinovat>.

Herzen's novel was revisited and republished considerably more compared to Panaeva. Similarly, Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* got printed in the number of 2 500 000 copies within the same series³³, which, from one side, underlines the admiration of the Russian realist writers and their works, but, from the other side, shows the neglectable attitude to the Russian realist women writers.

A similar trend followed Panaeva's novel *The Steppe Lady*, which was first published in "Sovremennik" as well. This way, during the Soviet period the novel was only published as a part of the women writers collection *Dacha on the Peterhof Road*. The mentioned collection was composed of purely female authors, including Volkonskaya, Durova, Hahn, Zhukova, Kologrivova, Zhadovskaya, Sohanskaya, and Panaeva. The book was issued in 1987 in the number of 100 000 copies³⁴ and was not reprinted since then.

Accordingly, Panaeva's novels rarely get studied, especially in the context of realist literature³⁵. Yet they were considered original and provocative back in the time of publication, later the attitude towards Panaeva's work exemplifies how the works of the women writers get forgotten. At the same time, *A Woman's Lot* might be considered an illustrative example of a literary text built according to the principles of the realist canon. This way, it builds up an imaginary

³³ FantLab.ru, "Fathers and Sons," FantLab.ru. Accessed May 1, 2022, n.p., <https://fantlab.ru/edition38326>.

³⁴ LiveLib, "Dacha on the Peterhof road: Prose of Russian writers of the first half of the 19th century," LiveLib. Last modified February 7, 2022, n.p. <https://www.livelib.ru/book/1000533275-dacha-na-petergofskoj-doroge-proza-russkih-pisatel'nits-pervoj-poloviny-xix-veka-sbornik-nadezhda-durova>.

³⁵ Kirill Zubkov, "Self-Critical Realism: Three New Books on Russian Prose in the Middle of the 19th Century," *Russian Literature*, 2022, 3. doi:10.1016/j.ruslit.2022.03.001.

world that the author presents in her book as a social commentary on the 19th-century Russian reality³⁶.

Importantly, in order to study women writers' position in the literary canon, one needs to define the canon. Typically, the literary canon is a collection of literary works that are considered "worth preserving and passing on from one generation to the next"³⁷. In other words, canon is represented by the best pieces of literature that possess a unique cultural and artistic value. Notably, in the context of the Russophone literary world, one mostly uses the synonymous term "classics" instead of the term "canon" when in need to define a collection of well recognized and respected literary works³⁸.

Similarly, the notion of canon implies the existence of a certain hierarchy in which the chosen authors and their works were placed on top. Such hierarchy, in its turn, raises the question of the filtering system by that it operates. Namely, which characteristics did the literary product need to have to be assessed of excellent quality. Yet the common viewpoint is that literary value is the basic principle by which the works are selected³⁹, the role of the authors and the background of their works' publication should not be overseen. This way, the initial conditions for the realist women writers' inclusion into the widely accepted canon were different compared to men writers⁴⁰. This way, because of the heavy gender differentiation existing in the field of 19th-century Russian literature, the women

³⁶ Zubkov, "Self-Critical Realism: Three New Books on Russian Prose in the Middle of the 19th Century," 15.

³⁷ Ann Thompson, "The literary canon and the classic text," *King Lear*, 1988, 60, doi:10.1007/978-1-349-19250-2_7.

³⁸ Renato Poggioli, "Realism in Russia," 255.

³⁹ Thompson, "The literary canon and the classic text," 63.

⁴⁰ Nesterenko, "Everyone Get Out of the Shadows: How to Return the Women Writers of the XIX Century in the History of Literature," n.p.

writers' contribution was evaluated to have a lower value⁴¹. Thus, in order to reassess the actual value of their literary contribution, one may turn to a more radical approach to assessing the canonical works of literature based on the social realities under which the literary work was published and continuously spread. Such an approach, as Thompson argues, "puts less weight on the works themselves and more on the social circumstances of their production, dissemination and preservation"⁴². Adapting this strategy to the context of realist women writers, one could notice how their experience of being accepted as writers considerably differed from the men writers' context. Namely, since men writers were already more represented in the canon, their writing was considered more conventional and the audience was already taught to admire men writers⁴³.

Another important aspect voiced in Thompson's article is the role of educational institutions in canon acceptance. This way, if people are taught to admire canon, how can society truly evaluate the value of certain literary pieces. Thus, it might be argued that educational institutions play a huge role in the perpetual acceptance of canon. When students are pushed to admire classics, they would hardly oppose its importance in the world of literature. Taking into consideration that the succession of classics seems to be one of the core qualities of the Russophone literary canon, one could trace how the predominantly male canon was reiterated during the last century. For example, the revolutionary-romantic elements of the 19th-century classical realism were adopted by the Soviet literary canon and later evolved into "the whole trend of socialist realism"⁴⁴. Thereby, the

⁴¹ Thompson, "The literary canon and the classic text," 63.

⁴² Thompson, "The literary canon and the classic text," 60.

⁴³ Thompson, "The literary canon and the classic text," 60.

⁴⁴ Alexei Tolstói, "Trends in Soviet Literature," *Science & Society* 7, no. 3 (1943), 234, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40399537.pdf>.

men writers-centered canon with its long-established history has asserted itself over and over again in the context of Russophone literature.

In order to rediscover the “lost content of the female tradition of Russian literature”⁴⁵, as it was attempted by Rosalind Marsh in her book *Gender and Russian Literature*, it is essential to analyze the construction of the political, social and cultural experiences of Russian women along with their literary careers. Generally, it might be claimed that the Russian literary canon was shaped by the patriarchal cultural tradition⁴⁶. This way, Marsh emphasizes that the suppression and distortion of the Russophone women writers were fueled by the patriarchy of the Russian and Soviet society both of which tend to concentrate power in men’s hands. According to Marsh, the Russian literary sphere, including publishing houses and critics, was mainly represented by men, which lead to women writers’ topics of interest being neglected as uninteresting. The author also claims that “Russian male writers and critics have frequently been unduly harsh and dismissive in their judgements of women writers”⁴⁷, which partly explains the low representation of women in Russophone literature.

The idea of women not belonging to the literary world, indeed, has a strong basis formed on prejudices and gender norms of the 19th century. What partly constituted the novelty of Avdotya Panayeva’s literary production and public interest in her work is the writer’s close attention to the “woman question”. The question implied an ongoing discussion of the woman’s place in the society following cultural and economic reforms of the 19th century, such as the birth of

⁴⁵ Rosalind Marsh, *Gender and Russian Literature: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

⁴⁶ Marsh, *Gender and Russian Literature*, 4.

⁴⁷ Marsh, *Gender and Russian Literature*, 2.

female emancipation. Similar to Khvoshchinskaia and other women writers of the same period, Panaeva was “finding a way as a woman to negotiate the particular nature of the Russian literary political scene”⁴⁸. Panayeva shattered the existing gender stereotypes not only by her being an influential literary salon holder and a literary journal employee, but also by directly changing the tradition of the portrayal of the female characters through her novels and stories⁴⁹.

Since Panaeva is often attributed as the partner and collaborator of Nekrasov in the first place and only then as an independent writer⁵⁰, one should study the influence of her relationship with other literary figures and the effect it has made on the perception of her. Notably, the woman’s role in artistic couples notoriously often consisted in organizing collective or husband’s work in addition to producing her own. In spite of the additional “invisible” organizational activities and active work on “Sovremennik”, Panaeva’s contribution got sometimes addressed as a not serious one, but the one that is only concerned with spilling tea and chatting, while being in the office because of her romantic relationships with the men who supervised “Sovremennik” (Panaev and Nekrasov)⁵¹. Yet Panayeva combined many tasks, while reading writers’ manuscripts, worked as an editor and organized meetings for “Sovremennik”, her contribution tends to be systematically overlooked⁵².

Speaking about the limitations faced by women writers, one should not omit education. In spite of the homeschooling or attending the Institute of Noble

⁴⁸ Margarita Vaysman, "A Woman's Lot: Realism and Gendered Narration in Russian Women's Writing of the 1860s," *The Russian Review* 80, no. 2 (2021), 245. doi:10.1111/russ.12311.

⁴⁹ Kafanova, "Avdotya Panaeva between public and private space," 1.

⁵⁰ Korney Chukovsky, "Panaeva," n.p.

⁵¹ Korney Chukovsky, "Panaeva," n.p.

⁵² Kafanova, "Avdotya Panaeva between public and private space," 8.

Maidens, Prior to 1905 women in Russian Empire were not allowed to enter any other higher educational institutions⁵³. The author of the article “Everyone get out of the shadows: how to return the writers of the XIX century in the history of literature”, Mariya Nesterenko notices that the education and job restrictions could have played a major role in suppressing many women writers⁵⁴. This way, Nesterenko argues that women writers’ inability to access writing circles was partly connected to them not being allowed to receive legal education or to work in the majority of professional directions.

At the same time, Nesterenko brings an example of how the 19th-century Russian women’s literature flourished from the branches that women were allowed to be let in, which are translation and children’s literature spheres. She explains that “at the beginning of the 19th century, they declared themselves as translators (the noblewomen were fluent in foreign languages) and children's authors (it was believed that since women were engaged in education, they should be encouraged to write for children)”⁵⁵. These two directions acted as a starting point for a sufficient number of prospective women writers. Such a limitation of women’s placement within the literary world was not exclusive to the traditionalist society. Moreover, some of the Russian intelligentsia representatives, such as Karamzin, who actively supported the idea of social change, gravitated to the same approach. Karamzin has seen a specific nature of women’s writing to have two manifestations, “firstly this is pedagogical literature for children, and secondly the

⁵³ Ruth Dudgeon, "The Forgotten Minority: Women Students in Imperial Russia, 1872-1917." *Russian History* 9, no. 1 (1982), 10, doi:10.1163/187633182x00010.

⁵⁴ Nesterenko, "Everyone Get Out of the Shadows: How to Return the Women Writers of the XIX Century in the History of Literature," n.p.

⁵⁵ Nesterenko, n.p.

literature of feeling, devoted to love”⁵⁶. The rationale behind a specific destination for women writers was consisting of the idea of women’s special sense of intimacy, love and the world of feelings, which branch out from the social image of the 19th-century women.

In fact, up until the end of the 19th century, a woman willing to pursue higher education was heavily constrained not only by her gender, but also by such factors, like class, religion and nationality. While the number of peasant and working-class women obtaining higher education was extremely scarce, the upper-class representatives did not either have a well-trodden path, when it came to receiving a degree. Seeking the institutes and universities that could have allowed women to study on the equal grounds with men, some of the women from Russian nobility met a need to travel to Europe. However, even the European higher education institutions possessed a double standard with regard to female education, as the authorities valued men’s education more, hence, were ready to invest in it more than in women’s education⁵⁷.

A chance to get a solid education did not always indicate it empowering the future woman writer’s stability as an independent thinker and creator. As Barbara Engel notices in her article “Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia”, the role of higher education for women was often seen as a step towards strengthening the patriarchal tradition, not

⁵⁶ Arja Rosenholm and Irina Savkina, "How Women Should Write: Russian Women’s Writing in the Nineteenth Century," In *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture*, edited by Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi. OpenBook Publishers, 2012, n.p.
<https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0018/chap08.html>.

⁵⁷ Marcelline Hutton, *Russian and West European Women, 1860-1939: Dreams, Struggles, and Nightmares* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 7.

weakening it. Engel states, “because women’s lives were confirmed to home and family because of the traditions of marriage and motherhood, as well as the absence of the opportunities in the public domain, women did not enjoy even the circumscribed freedoms that men did” when it came to education⁵⁸. Similarly, Richard Stites, the author of the *Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia*, compared the higher education dedicated for women with the doll-factory, as the major part of the classes were concerned with looking and behaving appropriately.⁵⁹ For example, one of the major educational institutions in the 18-19th century Russia that was created for women by Catherine the Great, Smolny Institute has served more to support the existing restricting traditions of the past, rather than it was liberating. The main purpose of education was to “train girls for domesticity”⁶⁰.

Naturally, the question of higher education access could have significantly affected the number of women writers. Yet most noblewomen were homeschooled and knew the basics of some subjects in arts and science, being exposed to higher education often also indicated an opportunity for networking, inclusion into the common discourse of the educated people, as much as greater respect in the social circles.

The notion of the majority of women writers starting off their literary careers by publishing under masculine pseudonyms is yet another factor that

⁵⁸ Barbara Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 23.

⁵⁹ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930 - Expanded Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 32.

⁶⁰ Barbara Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, 24.

exposes the difficulty of being a women writer in the 19th century Russian society, as much as publishing under feminine name. Considering the realities of the 19th century Russophone literary sphere, the female figure behind the written literary piece was prone to receive biased feedback on her writing. Not only the authors with the female pen names were more inclined to receiving a reaction full of stereotypes, their literary works often automatically got less attention because of the long tradition of the male dominance in the literary field⁶¹. Additionally, women writers' literary production might have been overseen and neglected, while being perceived as a niche topic. As a result, a woman writer that was seeking an opportunity to publish own writing with fewer constraints, had a high chance of choosing a masculine pen name. The history of Russophone women writers confirms the trend of women writers hiding under masculine pseudonyms in order to minimize unnecessary attention.

Similarly, Maggie Scull, an author of the article "Challenged Ideals and Male Pseudonyms: Anne Brontë and Her Significance as a Female Author in the Nineteenth Century", notices how the social representation of women in the 19th century has tremendously affected women writers' artistic production. Generally, there seem to have been only two main categories that the female characters written by men authors could fit in: a woman was expected to be either an angel in the house or a monster⁶². Such a perception of women in literature, combined with the similar approach to treating women in real life, has a complicated social reaction to women writers, as much as to the characters that they have written. This way,

⁶¹ Arja Rosenholm and Irina Savkina, "How Women Should Write: Russian Women's Writing in the Nineteenth Century," n.p.

⁶² Maggie Scull, "Challenged Ideals and Male Pseudonyms: Anne Bronte and Her Significance as a Female Author in the Nineteenth Century," *Footnotes* 3 (2020), 79, <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/footnotes/article/view/6413>.

“female authors had to deal with being a public figure at a time when the public image of women in the literary world was a negative one”⁶³. Notably, as it is mentioned by Scull, a constraint resulting out of the angel/monster social construct dichotomy might be considered a leading cause for women writers to be perceived skeptically.

Naturally, the limitations that female name was condemning the author to forced many women writers to choose being published under the male pseudonyms. In Brontë’s case, Anne, Charlotte, and Emily, Charlotte, and Anne Brontë wrote under the pseudonyms Ellis, Currer and Acton Bell, respectively. The Russophone literary tradition was following a similar path. The list of the realist Russian women writers, who used a male pseudonym for publishing their writing materials, is represented, but not limited, by Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaya, Nadezhda Durova, and Advotyia Panayeva. Evaluating the case of Panayeva, one may see that she also published the majority of her writings under the masculine pen name of N. Stanitsky⁶⁴.

Elaine Showalter, an author of the article “Towards a Feminist Poetics”, claims that the women writers of the second half of the 19th century, “wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalised its assumptions about female nature”⁶⁵. For the same reason, they have chosen male pseudonyms that could have allowed them to feel on the same level as the majority of other (male) writers. Showalter calls this stage of the women writers’ history a

⁶³ Scull, "Challenged Ideals and Male Pseudonyms: Anne Bronte and Her Significance as a Female Author in the Nineteenth Century," 80.

⁶⁴ Petr Nikolaev, *Russian Writers 1800-1917: Biographical Dictionary*, 521.

⁶⁵ Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics," *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, 1997, 217. <https://literariness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Towards-a-Feminist-Poetics-Essay-pdf.pdf>.

“feminine” one due to the conflict between the femininity expected by the women writers and the “male” association with the profession of a writer. Ultimately, some women writers chose to abandon their real female names for the sake of getting closer to equality from the perspective of the perception of their literary work.

Critics’ reviews seem to be another serious obstacle on the way of the 19th-century women writers recognition. Panayeva’s case reveals it well: if some critics, like Belinsky, noted the writer’s innovative approach to female characters in her novels, others, like Pisarev, completely disregarded Panayeva’s prose⁶⁶. This way, Pisarev claimed Panayeva’s novel “A Woman’s Lot” to be an example of oversalted realism⁶⁷. Following the theme of the Russophone literary canon formation, Sukhikh, an author of the article “Russian Literary Canon of the 20th Century: Shaping and Functions”, suggests yet another important factor that influenced it. Sukhikh argues that the role of literary critics was immense when it came to the assessment of the newly published literary piece⁶⁸. This way, influential critics suggested whether a particular novel or poem suited the canon or it did not deserve massive attention.

Another important aspect connected to the perception of women writers is that their cultural production was and is still being mainly perceived as a niche topic of interest. This problem is discussed in the article of Goodrich and McQuade, where the authors notice how randomly women writers are usually grouped together

⁶⁶ Kafanova, "Avdotya Panaeva between public and private space," 7.

⁶⁷ Dmitry Pisarev, *Literary Criticism* (Leningrad: Hudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1981), n.p., http://az.lib.ru/p/pisarew_d/text_0350.shtml.

⁶⁸ Igor Sukhikh, "Russian literary canon of the 20th century: formation and functions," *Vestnik RHGA* 3 (2016), 329, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/russkiy-literaturnyy-kanon-hh-veka-formirovanie-i-funktsii>.

when included in the collections of writing⁶⁹. As opposed to men writers that are united by literary movements, women writers are often placed into a single section of the same title merely on the basis of their biological sex⁷⁰. This detail exemplifies women writers being marginalized into a separate category, while facing hardships to be naturally incorporated into the literary canon.

In a similar fashion, in the article “What were women writers?” Melissa Sanchez discusses how women writers are considered a separate literary category⁷¹. Indeed, in the compilations of Russian women’s literature one could easily find a symbolist poetess Zinaida Gippius neighboring the novelist Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaya or a military autobiographer Nadezhda Durova, all of which belong to completely different discourses and contexts, yet are being put together. Sanchez emphasizes the historical factors associated with the emergence of the artificial category of women writers and questions the grounds for the special treatment of women in writing. This way, she underlines how women writers usually face an increased level of standards when it comes to including them in the general canon⁷². For example, a woman writer should have made a significant political or scholarly contribution for literary authorities to treat her equal with men writers. In other words, women writers needed to excessively prove their self-sufficiency and professionalism as writers if they wanted to be included in the canon. Such a claim perfectly ties with Russophone women writers as well.

⁶⁹ Jaime Goodrich and Paula McQuade, "Beyond Canonicity: The Future(s) of Early Modern Women Writers," *Criticism* 63, no. 12 (2021), 6, doi:10.13110/criticism.63.1-2.0001

⁷⁰ Jaime Goodrich and Paula McQuade, "Beyond Canonicity: The Future(s) of Early Modern Women Writers," 5.

⁷¹ Melissa Sanchez, "What Were Women Writers?" *Criticism* 63, no. 12 (2021), 65, doi:10.13110/criticism.63.1-2.0063.

⁷² Melissa Sanchez, "What Were Women Writers?", 67.

In spite of the shortage of female authors in the Russophone literary canon⁷³, the question of their inclusion remains unsolved. Yet the attempt to equalizing the gender imbalance seems logical, it might cause worrying regarding the preservation of the existing predominantly male canon. One of the approaches allowing to bypass the mentioned problem, while also contributing to the women writers' literary contribution recovery, as it was suggested by Rosenholm and Savkina, is stated in the creation of the courses dedicated specifically for the women writers⁷⁴. The courses would thoroughly study the genres and fields of literature where women writers' presence was obvious. Similarly, "we can also look for the specificity, originality and independence of women's creativity and discuss women's writing within various models, which follow not the paradigm of struggle, but rather the 'model of connection and development'"⁷⁵. In any case, understanding the extent of the female contribution to the Russophone realist literature and rediscovering the almost forgotten female authors would sufficiently enrich the Russophone literary canon and help to recover the lost connections of why the existing canon has originally omitted women writers' legacy.

Overall, it might be observed how a combination of factors resulting from the gender bias prevented women writers, such as Panaeva, from rooting in the Russophone literary canon. Not only women writers did rarely publish their writings by their own name, which perpetuated the visible absence of women professionals in the field, but also got undervalued by the critics and fellow men writers because of the male dominance in the field and the remainders of the gender

⁷³ Nesterenko, "Everyone Get Out of the Shadows: How to Return the Women Writers of the XIX Century in the History of Literature," n.p.

⁷⁴ Rosenholm and Savkina, "How Women Should Write," n.p.

⁷⁵ Rosenholm and Savkina, n.p.

stereotypes from the past era. In spite of the Russian intelligentsia's engagement in the "woman question", the attitude towards women writers remained neglectable during the period of the 19th century. Ultimately, the realist women writers are rarely represented in the first rows of the best examples of the realist canon. Yet their literary pieces get occasionally published, though, in considerably lower quantity, and could not be evaluated as completely forgotten, the perception of the women writers' literary production seems to remain of the second-class literature. As a result, realist women writers tend to be shifted to the corner of the realist canon, as the case of Avdotya Panaeva exemplifies. Although the women writers are not completely excluded from the canon, their cultural production is still perceived as a rather niche topic of interest, but not as an integral part of the Russophone realist literary legacy.

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