



THE SOCIAL CONTEXT IN RUSSIA DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND ITS IMPACT ON LITERATURE

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Abstract

The second half of the 19th century witnessed some of the most significant events in Russian history, both economically and socially. The political unrest of the late 1950s revitalized Russia's intellectual community and led to the abolition of serfdom, which was followed by the peasant reform in 1861. This reform, of course, brought about new economic changes, such as the emergence of a proletariat class as peasants left their land and moved to cities.

Introduction

In the 1960s, the political activity of the most educated and literate segment of society was evolving into a new phase, which Russian intellectuals and liberals referred to as the liberation movement. This political turmoil was reflected in the division of the literary community into two groups: the democrats led by ideologues N. A. Dobrolyubov and N. G. Chernyshevsky, and the liberals supported by A. I. At the beginning of this literary division, Herzen published the works of I. A. Goncharov, D. N. Mamin-Sibiryak, and M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin in his magazine "Kolokol". Later, the liberal movement split into a new liberal magazine "Vestnik Evropy".

However, if it was still possible to draw clear political boundaries between different writers (although in reality, they were often very fluid, sometimes bringing together progressive thinkers of the time, and sometimes contrasting them), then how could we draw such boundaries within the works of each author? Thus, the works of Saltykov-Shchedrin, Chernyshevsky, Sleptsov, and Pomyalovsky - representatives of different and sometimes opposing political groups - simultaneously contain sharp satire on noble liberalism.

Despite this, the literature of the second half of the 19th century, thanks in part to the diversity of political perspectives, provided us with a wide range of depictions



of life in Russia. Through the works of writers who sought to create positive heroes fighting for social justice, we learn about the lives of ordinary people and the challenges of educating the generation that would create a new social order.

The most vivid images of new people, the builders of the future, can be found in the novels and novellas of N. G. Pomyalovsky, N. G. Chernyshevsky, and V. A. Sleptsov. These works reflect the changing social environment of the 19th century, particularly the development of critical realism and the rise of progressive youth.

N. G. Pomyalovsky's "Petty-Bourgeois Happiness" and "Molotov" depict the struggles of ordinary people in a rapidly developing capitalist society. N. G. Chernyshevsky's "What to Do?" explores the ideas of socialist utopia and the need for social change. V. A. Sleptsov's "A Difficult Time" portrays the struggles of students and the growing influence of populist ideas.

These works were written during a time of social unrest, marked by peasant uprisings and student protests. They reflect the growing dissatisfaction with the existing system and the desire for change. The populist movement, characterized by its focus on reaching out to the people, is also reflected in these works.

"Those were the times of general chaotic ferment that preceded the mass socialist movement of 1873-1874, when ripe forces were still seeking an unconscious way forward," wrote S. M. Stepnyak-Kravchinsky, a prominent figure in revolutionary Narodism¹.

Almost all progressive trends and political movements have raised the question of the fate of the people, who were still considered the Russian peasantry and remained in their former hopeless bondage even after the abolition of serfdom. They have also discussed the future development of the country.

However, in the absence of a more or less stable political force among the diverse group of fighters for people's freedom, everyone has "sung" their own song. Each person has offered their own way to fight, and no one has been willing to negotiate. Naturally, such turbulent processes in the socio-economic life of Russia were vividly reflected not only in journalism, but also in fiction of the 1970s. Almost every Russian citizen was familiar with the poetry of N. A. Nekrasov and the brilliant satire of M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin from school years. However, many of us are less familiar with the works of democratic fiction writers such as I. A. Kushchevsky, I. V. Omulevsky (Fedorov), K. M. Stanyukovich, A. K. Shelley-



Mikhailov, and others. They often came from among intellectuals or minor officials.

Since many young writers were published in the magazine "Otechestvennye Zapiski", their creative development was greatly influenced by the editors of the magazine - Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin. Although their young writers may not have been particularly talented, the editors appreciated in them a deep understanding of life and a love for the oppressed. As a result, their works help to understand not only the situation in society at the time, but also the atmosphere of the literature of the 1870s.

These writers of the democratic movement of the decade were still searching for ways to change society and create a new person. They were concerned with fostering the revolutionary spirit of the next generation, who would be able to criticize and denounce bourgeois liberalism.

The positive heroes of literary works from the 1870s come from the Russian working-class intelligentsia and the lowest ranks of society. These heroes are no longer simply fighting for a cause, but are actively planning and acting alone or with others to confront the enemy. They experience happiness in their struggle, but along with the euphoria of their first victories, they also face a difficult realization that they cannot defeat the masters of the world. As they reflect on the class system, they mature into active participants in socio-political struggles, showing a strategic approach to their actions.

Now, the dedication of young people to the struggle for the people's cause has become the leitmotif of not only the works of popular writers, but also other representatives of the democratic literary movement. However, experienced writers see significant flaws in the portrayal of the positive heroes in young Democratic fiction.

Thus, reviewing the works of Omulevsky, Mordovtsev and Sheller-Mikhailov, M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin criticized, first and foremost, their methods of characterization. He noted that literature of the 1870s had adopted and preserved the traditions of earlier democratic writers, while also addressing acute contemporary issues, but at the same time, it presented characters who were unable to put forward new ideas. Saltykov-Shchedrin did not blame young writers for this situation, but rather analyzed the real autocratic-feudal conditions in Russia, where a new type had not yet emerged that could fully manifest itself. Accordingly, under

such socio-political circumstances, it was difficult to clearly define the features of a new hero type.

However, speaking about the need to fully reveal these positive characters, he urged: "They must be brought out of the shadows in which they hide, and they must be cleansed of accidental flaws in order to see the moral goodness that lies within themⁱⁱ." Saltykov-Shchedrin emphasized the importance of a clear understanding of the paths of struggle, as well as the unwavering conviction in its rightness, which Chernyshevsky, for instance, possessed while writing his novel "What Is to Be Done?" within the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Indeed, the main characters in the novels of seventies-era Democrats were rarely developed with complete characterization, actions, or clear motivations for their actions. They were often political romantics who were similar to each other, and not very believable, because they were created in a somewhat schematic manner. The Democratic writers themselves had a rough idea of what these characters should be like and how and for what they should struggle, but most of the struggles for the people seemed boring, as they were endowed with lengthy and obscure arguments.

Therefore, harshly criticizing Mordovtsev's novels, Saltykov-Shchedrin blames the young author for the fact that the reader knows these new people perfectly well from life. The reader knows not only about bookish hobbies, but also real ones, about untimely forces destroyed and sacrifices made. Then, as if entering into a dialogue with writers who create new images of fighters against autocracy, Saltykov-Shchedrin gives them a valuable hint, asking: "Where are the victims? Where is the meeting of young and passionate conviction with self-confident reality? Or is the arena of struggle really limited to the walls of some house in Petersburgⁱⁱⁱ?"

In fact, not only D. L. Mordovtsev, a writer with a moderate view of democracy, but even those who were democratically minded, could not fully depict the class struggle or show the deep development of thought. This is because the representatives of Narodniks themselves did not have a clear understanding of these processes. They did not have a unified view on how to build a new society or how to change the social order in Russia.

Democratic writers, based on their ability to capture social movements, began in the 1870s not only to introduce new characters into their novels but also to reflect the process of capitalist development in Russia and criticize noble liberalism.

It was during this time that I.A. Kushchevsky wrote his novel "Nikolai Negorev, or The Prosperous Russian", which, according to many critics, made a significant contribution to the struggle against liberalism and apostasy. Maxim Gorky, in his article "On Literature", described the evolution of the protagonist of this novel as a process of "transforming a man into a servant"^{iv}. Kushchevsky's works show a vivid variety of the destinies and characters of young people from different social backgrounds. They vividly capture true pictures of national life and reveal the essence of historical events and revolutionary movements. All this is written in a simple and yet very figurative language, which makes his works interesting to read even today, thanks to their artistic merit.

The work of the Democratic writers is an original and aesthetically unique trend in Russian literature. Their ideological and aesthetic experiences were realized through a powerful "collective tradition" that contributed to the development and enrichment of 19th-century Russian realistic literature.

The outstanding Russian writer, M. Gorky, played a special role in understanding and appreciating the significance of the work of these writers. In his opinion, the Democratic writers of the 1860s provided "a vast material for understanding the economic life of our country and the mental characteristics of its people." They revealed "their customs, mores, moods, and desires," and their legacy is a valuable resource for studying the evolution of ideas in Russian society. It is even more significant for gaining a deeper understanding of people's lives, living conditions, and character.

The creative legacy of the Democratic movement is an integral part of the development of Russian culture and art. By adopting folklore traditions and the experience of great writers from ancient Russian literature, as well as entering into complex and mutually enriching creative contact with prominent contemporary writers such as Nekrasov, Chernyshevsky, Saltykov-Shchedrin and L. Tolstoy, democratic fiction writers were able to develop their own unique ideology and take an important step forward in the artistic evolution of the country. Their work has high moral and aesthetic significance for future generations, and continues to inspire and influence writers and artists today.



References

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ⁱⁱ Stepnyak-Kravchinsky S. M. Collected Works, vol. 2, St. Petersburg, 1907, p. 243.

ⁱⁱ Saltykov-Shchedrin M. E. Complete collected works in 20 volumes. Vol. 8. Moscow: Goslitizdat.- P. 58.

ⁱⁱⁱ Saltykov-Shchedrin M. E. Complete collected works in 20 volumes. Vol. 8. Moscow: Goslitizdat.- P. 400.

^{iv} Gorky M. Collection of articles On literature. St. About literature. Moscow, 1955. – p. 5.

^v Gorky, M. History of Russian Literature, Moscow, 1939, pp. 218-219.