

# Russian literature

Literature



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Russian literature: History Overview Russian literature has long been a cultural focus of the entire world. It's not surprising that the formation of Russia's first literary traditions goes back to the first century. The adoption of Christianity boosted the development of literacy, philosophy and theological literature. The earliest literary works were not written in the Russian language but in Old Church Slavonic which was developed in the 9th century by Greek missionaries Cyril and Methodius. Old Church Slavonic became the liturgical language of the Orthodox Church, prompting literary activity in Russia.

In 988 Vladimir I, Grand Duke of Kyiv, converted to Christianity and made it Russia's official religion. Eventually, religious ties between Russia, the Byzantine Empire, Ancient Rome and Greece strengthened and began to share common traits. As literacy rapidly developed, so did Russian literature. Historical chronicles, sacred scriptures, biblical texts, sermons, biographies of saints and other religious writings and poems were translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic which remained the literary language of Russia until the 17th century.

At that time, books served mainly as a means to foster religious awareness. In the long run, Christianity marked the character of the Russian literature. Church literature laid the foundation for the ideas of Russian unity and Russian national identity. First works of Russian literature Byzantine Greek writings influenced the first texts created during the Kyiv period. The most significant sermon, " Slovo O Zakone I Blagodati" (1050; " Sermon on Law and Grace"), is a detailed oration written by the head of the Orthodox Church in Russia at that time, Metropolitan Illarion.

It is believed to be the first original work of Russian literature. The chronicle "Povest' Vremennykh Let" (1113; "The Tale of Bygone Years," also known as "The Russian Primary Chronicle"), attributed to the monk Nestor, explores the history of the East Slavic peoples, namely Russians, Belarussians, and Ukrainians up to the year 1110. However, the most prominent work of the period is probably "Slovo O Polku Igoreve" (1185; "The Tale of Igor's Campaign"). It focuses on a Prince Igor's failed raid against an army of Asian nomads and is written in lyrical poetic language.

The creation of religious scripts went hand in hand with the creation of folkpoetry; songs, epics and fairy tales described authentic Russian life and culture. In the late 11th and early 12th century, "Teaching" by Prince Vladimir Monomakh and "Wanderings of Daniel" featured a fusion of religious scripts with folk literature. In 1240 the Tatars invaded Kyiv, bringing an early end to this period in culture. For the next 200 years the Tatars occupied most of Russia. While Europe was enjoying the Renaissance, Russian literature was at a standstill.

A series of upheavals and riots throughout the 16th and 17th centuries brought political and secular influences to literature. "Messages of Ivan the Terrible" and the autobiography of Arch Priest Avvakum were the first literary works written in spoken Russian. These works mixed the church and bookish languages with folk speech. One of the most important and notable literary works of the 16th century was "Domostroi" ("House-Orderer"). It set the rules for moral behaviour and gave instructions for running a household. In the 16th century folkloric poetry was on the rise as was the popular genre of the secular story of manners.

In the 17th century Russian culture was greatly influenced by Western European values. Tsar Peter the Great's fascination with European culture was looming large and brought the first printed books to Russia, almost all of which were religious in content. A number of Russian poets started composing verses imitating Western authors. In fiction, the influence of Western adventure tales such as "Don Quixote" by Miguel de Cervantes, is obvious in "The Tale of Savva Grudtsyn" ("Povest' o Savve Grudtsyne") and "The Tale of Frol Skobeev" ("Povest' o Frole Skobeeve").

In 1678, the first plays written by a Russian author, Symeon Polotsky, appeared. Step by step, modern Russian literature started to emerge as more and more writers began to develop their own unconventional styles. By the 18th century written Russian finally came into wide use, replacing Old Church Slavonic. Peter the Great and Catherine the Great were keen to promote literature in Russia. Perhaps the most important figure of Russian intellectual life in the 18th century was Mikhail Lomonosov who rose from peasant origins to become a prominent scientist and writer. One of the greatest poets of the time was Gavrila Derzhavin.

Russian author Denis Fonvizin dominated the drama. His plays "Brigadir" (written 1768-1769; published 1790; "The Brigadier") and "Nedorosl" (1782; "The Minor") mocked the manners and morals of the upper classes. One of the most interesting non-fiction works of the period was "Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu" (1790; "Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow") by Aleksandr Radishchev. It earned its author a ten-year exile to Siberia. Nikolay Karamzin established a Russian prose style in his travel writings with his

famous "Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo" (1818-1824; "History of the Russian State").

Golden Age of Poetry The 19th century was probably the most fruitful period in the history of Russian literature. Alexander Pushkin Alexander Pushkin 6 June 1799 – 10 February 1837 Mikhail Lermontov Mikhail Lermontov 15 October 1814 – 27 July 1841 Nikolai Gogol Nikolai Gogol 31 March 1809 – 4 March 1852 Ivan Turgenev Ivan Turgenev 9 November 1818 – 3 September 1883 Lyev Tolstoy Lyev Tolstoy 9 September 1828 – 20 November 1910 Anton Chekhov Anton Chekhov 29 January 1860 – 15 July 1904 The first few decades of the 19th century came to be known as the Golden Age of Poetry.

Without a doubt, Aleksandr Pushkin's renowned novel in verse "Evgeny Onegin" (1823-1831) cemented his name in history. Before the 19th century, drama received very little attention from Russian writers. It continued until two pillars of Russian drama Aleksandr Griboedov ("Gore ot Uma" 1833; "The Woes of Wit") and Aleksandr Ostrovsky ("Groza," 1860; "The Thunderstorm") stepped into the spotlight. But by the end of the century, several timeless plays were written by Anton Chekhov, for example "Chaika" (1896; The Seagull).

The author of the most famous short story in Russian, "Shinel" (1842; "The Overcoat"), Nikolay Gogol, is considered to be the original master of Russian prose of the 19th century. His comic, grotesquely humorous collection of short stories "Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki" (1831-1832; "Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka") are peppered with the local colour and ambience of Ukraine. Fyodr Dostoyevsky's novels examined political and social issues as

well as philosophical and moral problems of Russian society. His "Crime and Punishment" (1866) is considered to be one of the best novels of all time.

Leo Tolstoy, like his contemporary Dostoyevsky, was not just a brilliant novelist but a political thinker and philosopher as well. His novel "Voina i Mir" (1865-1869; "War and Peace") is a family and a historical novel in one and is said to be one of the greatest literary works in the history of world literature. Short fiction and poetry gradually replaced the novel and by the end of the 19th century were the dominant genres of Russian literature.

Silver Age Alexander Blok Alexander Blok 28 November 1880 – 7 August 1921 One of the most gifted lyrical poets produced by Russia after Alexander Pushkin.

Impressionism and symbolism replaced social realism. A new breed of Russian poets was inspired by Western European cultures, while Russian culture was gaining in popularity in Europe. Russian poet and novelist Valery Bryusov introduced symbolism to Russian audiences. One of the most sophisticated poets of the time was Aleksandr Blok. His greatest work, "Dvenadtsat" (1918; "The Twelve," 1920), described the mood of Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg) in the winter of 1918 in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Some of the greatest poets of the 20th century who opposed the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet rule were Anna Akhmatova (Requiem, 1964), Marian Tsvetaeva and Osip Mandelstam. The last of these was arrested in the 1930s and died in a labour camp. Socialist realism Among those who supported the 1917 Revolution was a prominent Soviet novelist and playwright, Maksim

Gorky ("Mother," 1907). He was also a founder of socialist realism. After the Revolution, many writers left Russia for Europe and the West.

Perhaps one of the most gifted among them was novelist Vladimir Nabokov who emigrated to the United States in 1940 and began writing in English. Under Joseph Stalin, the Soviet regime's enforcement of literary guidelines made many established writers withdraw from literature. Little literature was created at that time. Works by Andrey Platonov and Mikhail Bulgakov disappeared in the 1920s. Although Bulgakov had published several plays and stories, his masterpiece "Master and Margarita," completed shortly before his death in 1940, remained unknown until it was published in 1966.

After the end of WW2, the guidelines of socialist realism were enforced even more strictly than before, and the period from 1946 until the death of Stalin in 1953 was probably the bleakest in Russian literature of the 20th century. Russian literature in exile However, the decades after Stalin's death saw several thaws. Restrictions over literature were eased. In an effort to cast off Stalin's legacy, Nikita Khrushchev expanded the limits of what could be said in public and written in the press. In the 1960s a number of works that had previously been banned were republished and many writers felt relief.

Boris Pasternak finally published his legendary novel "Doctor Zhivago," although outside the Soviet Union. At first it was accepted by a Soviet magazine, but then rejected. Eventually it was published in the West in 1957. Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1958, but was forced by the Soviet authorities to decline the award. Khrushchev's campaign against Stalin also allowed the publication of another masterpiece, "Odn

den' Ivana Denisovicha" (" A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," 1963) by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

It appeared in the leading Soviet literary magazine, causing a sensation. It focused on the realities of life in prison camps to which tens of thousands of people suspected of anti-Soviet views, including Solzhenitsyn himself, were sent. But still, novels by Solzhenitsyn, such as " Rakovyi Korpus" (" Cancer Ward," 1968) and " V Krug Pervom" (" The First Circle," 1968) could not be published in the Soviet Union. Their publication abroad eventually led to an official campaign against the writer that resulted in his expulsion from the Soviet Union.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970. Among other prominent anti-Soviet authors was the poet Joseph Brodsky, who left the Soviet Union in 1972. In 1987 Brodsky too was awarded the Nobel Prize. Like Solzhenitsyn, he moved to the United States. New faces The early 1990s saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and with it the end of 70 years of state control over literature. Official censorship was over and the government proclaimed freedom of the press. This long-awaited independence had profound effects on Russian literature. Works by writers