

VS. S. SOLOVYOV'S OEUVRE IN THE CONTEXT
OF THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE RUSSIAN HISTORICAL XIX CENTURY FICTION

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Ключевые слова: историческая беллетристика, исторический роман, исторический романист, русская история, пенталогия, диалогия, мистицизм.

Vsevolod Sergeevich Solovyov (1849–1903) is one of the most outstanding Russian historical novelists of the XIX century. He was the eldest son of Sergey Mikhaylovich Solovyov – a very famous Russian historian, the author of the many-volumed work "The History of Russia since the Ancient Times" – and a brother of Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov – a well-known and very influential Russian religious philosopher, theologian, poet and literary critic.

Vsevolod Solovyov began his literary career as a poet and later turned to writing historical fiction. In 1876 he wrote his first historical novel – "Princess Ostrozhskaya" which explored the conflict between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the Russian-Lithuanian state during the sixteenth century [8, 131]. A great success of the novel made the writer continue his literary activity in this direction.

At the beginning of his literary activity V. S. Solovyov set three tasks: 1) to familiarize the readers with the little-known facts of the history of Russia; 2) to study the course and the development of the West European and Russian mysticism and its influence on the spiritual state of society; 3) to analyze particular phenomena of the current social and political life of Russia [5, 11].

After the first novel Vs. Solovyov created a long series of historical novels in which he successfully solved the mentioned tasks: "The Young Emperor" (1877), "The Captain of the Grenadier Company" (1878), "The Tsar-Girl" (1878), "Kasimov Fiancée" (1879), "Delusion" (1879), "The Magi" (1889), "The Great Rosicrucian" (1890), "The Tsarist Embassy" (1890), "The Tsarevna's Fiancé" (1893).

The author's most famous work and the main artistic achievement in the genre of the historical novel is his pentalogy "Chronicle of Four Generations" (1881–1886) in which he traces the history of the gradual destruction and decline of the ancient noble Gorbatov family. It consists of five novels: "Sergey Gorbatov" (1881), "The Voltairian" (1882), "The Old House" (1883), "The Outcast" (1885), "The Last Gorbatovs" (1886).

In these five novels Vsevolod Solovyov tells about several generations of the fictional Gorbatov family who had to live during extremely disturbing events of the XVIII-XIX centuries: the Great French Bourgeois Revolution, Napoleonic Wars, the period of Decembrism, the formation of the new, capitalist system in Russia, the emergence of the revolution-

ary movement [7, 7]. Thus, the novels of the “Chronicle” covered the whole century of the Russian history – since the reign of Catherine the Great (1762–1796), the most renowned and the longest-ruling female leader of Russia, to the era of the “Great Reforms” carried out by Alexander II during 1860–1870. ‘The “Chronicle” is permeated by an atmosphere of nostalgia for the vanished age of the nobility’ [8, 132].

In the last parts of the epopee the author brings to the foreground not historic figures but mere mortals, the children of his century, exponents of his morals. The accents are transferred to the painful issues of life, reflections on its inner mystery.

The historical epopee was a real success with the readers and contributed to the greater popularity of the author.

It should be said that the writer’s liking for the occult sciences was reflected in the “Chronicle”. Under the influence of his younger brother, Vladimir Sergeevich, who was keen on mysticism, Vsevolod Sergeevich first introduces the elements of it into his novel “The Old House”.

It can be assumed that the pentology “Chronicle of Four Generations”, to be more precise, its fifth part “The Last Gorbatovs”, became a “prelude” to a large philosophical and mystical dilogy consisting of two novels – “The Magi” and “The Great Rosicrucian” which deal with the great mystics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including the adventures of the Count Alessandro Cagliostro [1, 36]. These novels reflect the Russian society’s fascination with the esoterics of the time.

The novelist’s intention to write the dilogy can be explained to a certain extent by the indirect influence on him of F. M. Dostoevsky whom Solovyov considered to be his mentor.

At the end of life the writer began working on one more historical novel about Napoleon I Bonaparte under the title “Six hundred and sixty six” but he didn’t manage to accomplish this work [7, 7].

Vsevolod Solovyov wrote fourteen historical novels in which he represented the political activity and the personal life of the representatives of the House of Romanov who reigned in Russia and also their associates and favourites. In most of his works the writer depicted the politics of the Russian and European monarchs from the time of Ivan the Terrible and Sigismund II Augustus up to the reign of Nicholas I [5, 9].

Vs. Solovyov was one of the most widely read authors of his time. The critics wrote that “there was always a great demand for his historical novels in the libraries and reading rooms among various strata of the Russian society” [1, 61]. The novels were widespread among those readers who were interested in the past of their great motherland. After publication in the journals they appeared in separate editions and were constantly republished.

The literary critics called Vsevolod Solovyov “one of our Walter Scotts” [4]. He was really one of the most talented followers of the English novelist – the father of the historical novel – and meant for the Russian historical literature as much as Walter Scott for the English one.

The writer was a typical supporter of the so-called “state” school in historiography which proceeded in the interpretation of the events of the Russian history from the dominant impact of the state start. As far as the founders of this school, N. M. Karamzin and S. M. Solovyov, believed that the destinies of the nation were ruled foremost by the great princes, tsars and tsarinas, famous military leaders, church hierarchs, outstanding dignitaries, Vsevolod Solovyov devoted a lot of attention in his novels to the bearers of this state start

[7, 9]. Thus, in his views on the historical process the novelist was very close to the beliefs of his father who considered the history to be the product of actions of the individuals.

On the pages of his novels Vs. Solovyov represented a large number of the well-known historic figures who played an important role in the fate of Russia. Mainly they are the eminent figures of the XVII-XVIII centuries. The writer liked this period of the Russian history most of all and considered the events of this time to be an extremely rich material for writing the historical novels.

Constant characters of his novels are Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich, Tsarevna Sophia Alekseyevna, the first Emperor of All the Russias Peter the Great, general admiral Andrey Ivanovich Osterman, Emperor Peter II Alekseyevich, Prince Aleksandr Danilovich Menshikov, Empresses Anna Ioannovna, Elizaveta Petrovna and Catherine II, a famous Russian statesman and military leader Grigory Aleksandrovich Potemkin, Emperor Paul I, general Alexey Andreyevich Arakcheev and others. All of them are unique personalities with their own outlook on life, strong character traits and human weaknesses, particular likings and antipathies, hopes and disappointments, almost childish joy which is combined with an iron will and a cold state interest [7, 10].

It should be noted that the conception of one or the other person in Vs. Solovyov's novels sometimes differ from the generally accepted one.

The characters of the author's novels are not only eminent persons. They act among many other characters, not only those who really existed but also the fictional ones, they are surrounded by them. Indispensable characters of Vs. Solovyov's works are common people.

In his historical prose the writer skillfully represented the generalized portrait of Russia of the XVII-XVIII centuries [7, 11].

As a representative of the historical fiction, Vsevolod Solovyov believed that the books for the common people must be much easier than mass literature; the complex picture of the world should come to the myths, usual stereotypes and ready-made formulas. Only if the moral of the work is as clear as possible and the conclusions are unambiguous, the literature may do good to the readers [2, 178].

Vsevolod Solovyov wrote two novels dedicated to the problems of modern times: "The Evil Whirlwinds" (1894) in which the religious and philosophical teaching of L. N. Tolstoy with his idea of the nonresistance to evil by force was exposed, and "The Flowers of the Abyss" (1895) where the author showed the harm for the young generation of Nietzsche's theories about the overman which were gaining strength. Thus, the novelist continued the tradition of the Russian writers, initiated by F. M. Dostoevsky in his novel "The Demons", to create the works in which they tried to find the answers to the most painful issues concerning the life in their native country [3, 9-10].

The eighties of the XIX century became the peak of glory of Vs. S. Solovyov as the Russian historical novelist. Statistical data of the largest Russian libraries, which were regularly published during these years, were the following: Vsevolod Solovyov took the first place in popularity [6, 14]. The first complete set of works which was published in 1887 also contributed to the writer's nationwide fame. The critics noted that his works were "warmly greeted in the society and literature" [1, 38].

Thus, Vsevolod Solovyov achieved the goal which he was striving for persistently: he made the Russian history in its artistic form the national heritage. We cannot but see in it his great services in the history of the Russian literature.

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