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Female School Story in Modernist Russian Literature: The Continuity of Tradition Despite the Prohibition

Abstract: The article focuses on the genre of girls' school stories, which was developing in Russian literature in 1900–1930, before and after the dramatic shift of the state ideology. The main subjects of the study are Lidija Charskaja's works *The Notes of an Institute Girl* and *Ljuda Vlassovskaja* (1901–1904) and a play by Aleksandra Brushtejn *Blue and Pink* (1936). The research demonstrates that the Russian girls' school story of that period, influenced by this genre's classical works, elaborated its specific language, plot elements, and system of characters. All those essential features were based on real-life experiences of boarding schools for girls of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Soviet era critics attempted to eliminate Charskaja's books from circulation among the new post-revolutionary readership. However, as this article attempts to demonstrate, even while the ideology of the school story has changed dramatically, the structure remained in tack for many years to come. The tradition of the genre was continued despite and, perhaps, due to the ideological pressures of Soviet censorship.

Keywords: school story, female literature, ideology in literature, Lidja Charskaja, Aleksandra Brushtejn.

While analysing the impact of the female literature, created in the period of Modernism, on the children and teenage reading on the territory of the former Russian Empire, a scholar is faced with a specific challenge. The social cataclysms of 1917 have caused a dramatic shift in the ideology which, in turn, has resulted in the demand for the creation of a brand new children's literature. This literature has adopted the strategy of nearly total elimination of the "old" books that were widely spread among the Empire's middle class.[1] Therefore, it appears to be more reasonable to discuss the breakdown of the tradition rather than to talk about its continuity: many authors were banned

[1] Some territories of the Russian Empire are now independent countries of the Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe: Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.

for the "propaganda of the bourgeois values", their books were withheld from the libraries, and their literary works were fiercely criticised by the new proletarian critics (Putilova, 1993: 23). In fact, this process could be compared with the modernist streams of the new culture denying the old classics. But, unlike the cultural movement based on the liberty of self-expression and search for new forms and feelings, the destruction of the "old" literature for children was supported by the official policy, and it was a part of the general ideological strategy of the "new socialist world" (Krupskaja, 1933). Meanwhile, the old children's books remained in the private collections, and they were imprinted in the family memory. The old beloved books were passed from the parents to their children, they were shared among schoolmates, spread unofficially and willingly (Dan'ko, 1934). Hence, it is possible to admit the existence of two parallel streams within the reading practices of the post-revolutionary children: the new developing communist canon and the old unofficial one that was based on those private family holdings. Both of these "streams" coexisted and interacted during the late modernism on the territory of a newly formed state – the Soviet Union.

The article aims to study the phenomenon of girls' school stories of the early 20th century as it was shaped in Russian literature for children. My focus is on the analyses of the main features that were passed to the Soviet school story, especially the one aimed at the girls' audience. My primary focus is on two novels by the highly popular pre-revolutionary writer Lidija Charskaja: *The Notes of an Institute Girl* (1901) and its sequel *Ljuda Vlassovskaja* (1904). Such works as *The Notes of a Little Gymnasium Girl* (1908), along with a play by Aleksandra Brushtejn *Blue and Pink* (1936), and the memoirs by Elizaveta Vodovozova *At the Down of Life* (1911) are incorporated to support my main argument about close interdependence between the pre-revolutionary examples of this genre and its post-revolutionary re-incarnation. Eventually, Aleksanda Brustejn's trilogy, *The Road Goes Ever On* (1956–1963) is chosen to demonstrate the functioning of a girls' school story describing the period of modernism (the plot of her book is set in Vilnus, in 1895–1901).

LIDIA CHARSKAJA: BACKGROUND NOTES

The topic of a girl's school story appears to be a substantial part of the developmental process in Russian literature for children, which took place in 1880–1917. The 1860s were marked by significant changes in female education: several progressive reforms launched by the democratically oriented pedagogue, Konstantin Ushinskij, were directly implemented to the Smolny Institute of Noble Maidens (1859–1862). The reforms were focused on the development of an independent self-sufficient personality due to the fundamental modification of the content of the school subjects and the manner of teacher-student communication. The meaning of female education rose

progressively, and the role of a woman in the Russian Empire was gradually changing. As a direct result of these democratic changes one could mention the high level of engagement by the Russian female writers in the development of literature for children. Women published fictional and educational children's books on history, geography, ethnography, and science (in particular, Vodovozova, Charskaja, etc.). The great impact had children's magazines (in particular, *Igrushechka,* which was published by Tat'yana Passek and Aleksandra Peshkova-Toliverova in 1882–1912 and *Rodnik,* founded by Ekaterina Sysoeva in 1880). Thus, women took an active part in the formation of new progressive pedagogical ideas and practice. Despite the years of the "Counterreforms"[2] in the 1880, those processes could not be stopped totally and the role of female authors in children's literature became more and more prominent.

Lidja Charskaja's author's career may be viewed as an emancipation effort: her entire life was presented as her way of gaining personal independence. Being raised by only one parent (her mother died giving birth), she was emotionally dependent on her beloved father, but due to the difficult family dynamics, she was sent to the Pavlovsky Institute of Noble Maidens. Only later was she able to restore her relations with her stepmother and re-enter the family. Her brief marriage resulted in a failure: she broke up with her husband and, while looking for financial support for her small son, she embraced a theatrical carrier. However, the drive to self-expression led her further in her personal odyssey: in 1901 she published her first book, *The Notes of an Institute Girl*, based on her Pavlovsky Institute experience. These fictionalized recollections served as the start of Charskaja's incredible popularity. Overall, she wrote more than eighty books (stories and novels). Her books were mainly published in two different formats: solid expensive hard-covers (the M. O. Wolf's Partnership, St. Petersburg) which were widely spread among the aristocratic educational institutions and used to be given as awards to their best students; and cheap paper-backs (V. I. Gubinsky Publishing House) with the target audience of city schools and middle-class families. Elena Dan'ko notes an important fact: these two publishing houses demonstrated different selective policies, choosing different Charskaia's works. While the expensive (and more durable books), published by M. O. Wolf's Partnership, depicted mostly the school life in the Maiden Institutes and presented adventures of aristocratic romantic heroines, the cheaper ones (which did not survive the coming decades) demonstrated more democratic values and social criticism. Consequently, the most expensive "aristocratic" and adventurous books by Charskaja used to be perceived as more prestigious reading and their popularity was instantly rising up to 1917.

[2] After the terrorist attack of March 1, 1881, which killed the tsar Aleksandr II, many of the liberal reforms were backtracked and replaced by the conservative and patriarchal official course (cf. Pinkevich).

At the same time, the critical reception of Charskaja's fiction was predominantly negative. As Valentin Golovin states in his detailed study *Literary Works by Lidia Charskaia*[3] *in the Critical Discourse of Her Lifetime*, (Golovin, 2018) in the critique of Charskaja's works, the pedagogical pathos dominated over literary analysis (Golovin, 2018: 88). Numerous negative reviews by the renowned educators were aimed at undermining the extremely high popularity of Chaskaja's books among the young readers. Her critics, who were mainly engaged in the pedagogical field, were worried about the impact of her books on youth education and behaviour, expressed their concern about Charskaja's rebellious heroines as potential role models etc. The critics who attacked Charskaja's style and the overall tone of her narratives were absolutely right: her excessive usage of pathetic expressions, plot clichés, and standard characters was present in her works but, nevertheless, her stories for children were marked by dynamic adventurous plots, thrilling romanticism of the characters and storylines, and happy endings as the victory of Good over Evil (Chukovskij, 1912). All these features, according to the critics elevated Charskaja's popularity to the before unheard heights (cf. Golovin, 2018).

Later, during the Soviet years, ideologically oriented critics added to all Charskaja's weaknesses listed above her bourgeois world view, and they incriminated her spreading of these views among the young readers (Shklovskij, 1932). Thus, her works were labelled hostile to the new socialist culture and her readers were subjected to systematic re-education: corrective talks, discussions, and intrusions. However, more serious critics and pedagogues understood that banning Charskaja's books could only raise their popularity. Therefore, the idea of creating alternative fiction books with an appropriate and politically correct style and plot which could attract the readers' interest and reorient them away from Charskaja's books was an important task for the writers working in children's literature at the time. (Gabbe, 1938). In particular, Elena Dan'ko whose analytical article *On Charskaja's Readers* was mentioned above (Dan'ko, 1934) argued that young readers lack appropriate adventure literature with a happy ending, thus, she concluded:

> They [Charskaja's readers] deserve to be given a book responding to their rightful age demands. […] If the reader tends to satisfy their sound appetite with a pitiful surrogate of literature, we ought to give them really healthy food, not a surrogate again. (Dan'ko, 1934: 12)

Some aspects of the girls' school story subgenre, which were introduced almost immediately after this message was sent to both writers and critics, allow making a suggestion that Dan'ko's appeal initiated a new "wave" of literary works that responded to the critic's concerns. These works are the subject of my analyses that follows.

[3] In the whole article an official Russian transliteration is used, *here* is the author's transliteration.

PLOT ELEMENTS OF A SCHOOL STORY IN CHARSKAJA'S BOOKS

The chronotope of a school story is marked by two permanent features: the space frame of the school building (and/or the dormitory of a boarding school) and time limits of a school year (with extension to the whole course) (Chernjak, 2017:3). This chronotope dictates other important elements of the school narrative:

a) entering the school,
b) meeting the new collective (group, class etc.),
c) relations with the teachers,
d) studying and success rate,
e) received knowledge and skills,
f) exams (optionally: school leaving party).

These plot elements can vary, of course, thus, for example, the meeting with the new group may be presented through the story of bullying or/and gaining a supportive and protective friend; the theme of studying and success may merge with a story of rivalry; relations with the teachers could evoke the theme of discipline and punishments etc. Within the framework of the girl' school story, some specific plot elements are added: the reflection on the importance of education for women, its content, quality of such education, and perspectives of a school-leaver. No doubt, these topics "infiltrated" the narratives and reflected direct changes in the ways the society viewed female education: quite often they were presented through the feminist gaze, even during the period of reaction and stagnation of the Russian society in the 1880–1900.

Charskaja's school stories contain all the elements listed above. Real-life school situations are reflected in her novels, foremost due to *her first-hand school experience*. Being a pupil of the Pavlovsky Institute for Noble Maidens (1886–1893), she wrote a diary and, subsequently, lots of characters and events, feelings and impressions came from these notes and personal memories. The life experience of a girl from a boarding school, isolated from the world outside the institutional walls, has never provided substantial material to create a story, so this is one of this possible explanations why numerous Charskaja's books were full of repeated motifs (for example, orphanage, an ideal, and kind head-teacher protecting the orphan etc.), plot elements, and situations (students' boycotting unpleasant teachers, punishments following these boycotts etc.). Meanwhile, the narratives gave the reader a clear and truthful picture of life in a girls' boarding school: the language of Charskaja's stories incorporates specific school vocabulary (Ex.: *siniavka* / a teacher wearing a blue (Russian: *синий*) uniform; *moveshka* and *parfetka* / a bad and an excellent pupil respectively, from French words: *mauvais* and *parfait*), teachers' nicknames, reflecting the relations of the students, describes customs and traditions of the institute life (for example the custom of *adoration* (*обожание*) – a demonstrative emotional attitude to a senior person). As readers, we learn a lot about the everyday

life of a boarding school: food, clothes, accommodation, and the educational system – all these realia are described in great detail. The very truthfulness of such descriptions could be verified by comparing Charskaja's fiction with other texts of a girl's school discourse, in particular, by the recollections of Yelizaveta Vodovozova (Vodovozova, 1911) or other memoirs and documents (Bokova & Saharova, 2005)[4].

When Charskaja starts to fictionalize her school experience, she does it along the lines of classical canonical texts. One of such comparisons, highly popular among girls' readership at the time Charskaja was creating her stories, was Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1847.) The elements of *Jane Eyre's* plot are easily recognisable in both of Charskaja's novels, *The Notes of an Institute Girl* and *The Notes of a Little Gymnasium Girl*. The table below demonstrates a direct correlation between the sequence of events described in Brontë and in Charskaja.

Table 1:

Jane Eyre (Brontë,1847)	*The Notes of a Little Gymnasium Girl* (Charskaja, 1908)
1. An orphan lives in her uncle's (her dead mother's brother) house. 2. Her three cousins (a boy and two girls) dislike her, practice teasing and bullying, reproach her for her poverty. 3. The girl fights back, hitting her cousin on his nose. The nose is bleeding. The girl is severely punished. She is locked in a scary, empty room. 4. The girl is sent to a boarding school with the message about her bad behaviour and an intention to punish her severely, however, the headteacher is unbiased and kind to a new pupil.	1. An orphan arrives at her uncle's (her dead mother's brother) house. 2. Her three cousins (a girl and two boys) dislike her, practice teasing and bulling, reproach her for her poverty. 3. The girl fights back, hitting her cousin. The falling boy breaks a vase. The girl is severely punished. She is locked in a scary room with a terrible owl. 4. The girl is sent to a gymnasium with the message about her bad behaviour and an intention to punish her severely, however, the headteacher is unbiased and kind to a new pupil.
Jane Eyre	*The Notes of an Institute Girl* (Charskaja,1901)
Jane enters the boarding school and there she meets a new close friend: a very clever girl, Helen Burns, who helps her to adapt to the rules of school life. Soon after, Helen dies of tuberculosis. Jane sneaks up to her room and gives her the last kiss.	Ljuda enters the boarding school and there she meets a new close friend: a very clever girl, the best pupil of the group, Nina Dzhavaha, who helps her to adapt to the rules of school life. Soon after, Nina dies of tuberculosis. Ljuda sneaks up to her room and gives her the last kiss.

Early death may seem like a common theme in the boarding school narratives: lack of nutritious food, cold dormitories, and severe conditions lead to a high level of illnesses among students. But for the boarding schools of

[4] For a study of the documentary foundation of Charskaia's school stories see Stanchevskaja, 2013.

St. Petersburg that is not true. According to Vodovozova, despite really unfavourable life conditions, the mortality rate was very low, because pupils with the first signs of illness would be immediately isolated in the dispensary (Vodovozova, 1911: part II., ch. 8). Nina Dzhavaha as an energetic, joyful and physically well-developed girl, who danced the male part of *lezginka* (a very fast Georgian national dance) and rode a horse, could hardly suffer from tuberculosis as Helen Burns (really weak and unhealthy) did. Nina's death seems to be an artificial plot element, which is used by the author only to create a more romantic halo around Nina as a bright rebellious character and the protagonist of the further books in which she would appear as the main character (1903, 1908, 1912). The textual comparison can easily prove that this death is an element consciously borrowed from *Jane Eyre* to create a strong intertextual link with the elements of a school story, presented in a popular novel. Such practice of plot adaptation was common for the mass Russian literature of the late 19th – early 20th century, and it was not "discriminatory": the plots were "appropriated equally from the domestic literary examples as well as from the foreign ones"[5]. Such broadly implemented practices hint at the existence of the popular proto-text which definitely has helped Charskaja at the beginning of her carrier in creating her characters and structuring her narratives. Thus, Charskaja's contemporary reader was provided with an installed set of clichés and patterns that were determining the reader's expectations and their perception. All elements listed above formed the core of a girls' school story, but Charskaja's impact on this subgenre was never limited only to elements of the traditional plot. The more she wrote, the more innovative and imaginative she became, and there were precisely those innovations that made her reputation so lasting among her readers.

PECULIARITIES OF "INSTITUTE" STORIES IN MASS CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF 1900

LIFE AND EDUCATION IN AN ISOLATED GROUP

Two important topics are to be mentioned in this regard. First of all, it is *the content and the quality of education in girls' gymnasiums and boarding schools* of the late 19th century. Before the reforms launched by Ushinsky, the pupils of the girls' school were mainly prepared for family life and education, so they were not required to obtain any type of substantial knowledge (Vodovozova, 1911).

[5] Vladimir Giljarovskij notes in his prominent book of lifestyle essays *Moscow and Moskovites* (Giljarovskij, 1912–1926; 2013: 286–287): the so-called "people's writers" used to retell and rewrite famous books by prominent authors, fulfilling the orders from small publishing houses, which were selling cheap books (I thank Elena Prokofieva for this quote which resulted from the discussion held in Mariana Skuratovskaia's Life Journal: https://eregwen.livejournal.com/448813.html).

More subjects were added to the curriculum, and the girls studied not only foreign languages (by memorizing poetry), penmanship, painting, dancing, and religion, but now they were required to learn history, geography, mathematics, and sciences. Those who graduated from this type of school aimed not only to get married, but they planned to work as governesses or school teachers. Thus, the big change was in an attempt of an institute/ gymnasium to prepare the girls for an independent life. In Charskaja's stories, we find such reasoning in the following statement:

> "There's no need to study", replied she indifferently and turned away from me.
> "Then, what are you going to do – with your uncompleted course?!" I wondered, even having stopped getting angry, **so shocked and surprised I was**.
> "I'll live at home, plant my kitchen garden, the flowers; I'll bake the cakes and make jam – I can do it quite well – and then…"
> "Then?" I interrupted.
> "I'll get married!" she said with innocence. (Charskaja,1901: 21) [6]

This conversation took place during the exam session; the subject the girls were preparing for is religion. The conversation like the one cited above clearly demonstrated educational priorities installed into the girls' minds. The main heroine passes this exam with flying colours, she knows all the material. Though she is not that good at geography, she still manages to learn ten of thirty questions, and as the "result" of her prayer to St. Nicolas, she also passed this exam successfully.

The other important point is *life in the collective, its emotional and social aspects*. Being isolated from the external world, the girls at the boarding school try to disrupt such isolation, however, not always successfully. They ask the doorkeeper to buy some tasty food from the street vendors (which is strictly forbidden), and they get punished (Charskaja, 1901: 18); they send letters not through official mail (the teachers are supposed to censor their communications with their families) but through their weekend visitors (Charskaja, 1901: ch.8); they try to communicate with the boys while having a holiday ride to the city (Charskaja, 1904: ch.17). At the same time, the concentration of emotions within such a closed environment is really high, and those feelings need to be exposed in one form or another, therefore, the custom of "adoration" (*obozhanie*) is so widespread, and the rivalry is so cruel that it evidently leads to the cases of bullying within the girls' collective. And it is no surprise that those emotional manifestations take the collective form as well: all girls cry and laugh together, they act up together during the lessons and the breaks, retell scary stories about ghosts, adopt similar language clichés (*дуся, медамочки, синявки, мовешки, парфетки* etc.) and behavioural patterns (hugs and kisses, tears, fainting etc.).

[6] In this paper, the references to Charskaja's works are given with the number of the chapter.

RUSSIAN FEMINIST ISSUES IN THE SCHOOL STORY

In Charskaja's school stories, the gender issues are quite notable: they are not presented as direct feminist massages, but they function as natural elements of her narrative plots, thus mirroring ideas widespread in the society of the Russian Empire in the early 1900. The necessity of female education and its practical applications for the lives of the girls led to competition for good grades, since the graduates strove to obtain a position of a governess in a rich and noble house – that was the only way to some sort of independence.

The social limitations for young girls were clearly demonstrated in the novels. The interactions between different genders clearly depicted in the novel's different levels of social freedom for boys and for girls. In particular, quite often the girls asked their male relatives of the same age to provide them with things that were easily accessible for the opposite gender (real food, books, etc) (Charskaja, 1904: ch.17). The standards of female behaviour and gender roles resonated with the everyday "adult-child" interactions. The worst characteristics a young lady could obtain from her adult supervisors was *a street urchin* [уличный мальчишка] (Charskaja, 1901: ch.11; Charskaja, 1904: ch. 7, 12; Charskaja, 1908 : ch.17). Such labelling was always followed by a punishment. The punishments were usually humiliating and were aimed at undermining the reputation of a girl. They were based on withdrawal from the collective and public shaming of the accused: a girl without an apron has to stand on display in the canteen during lunchtime; a lace of a specific color was taken away from a girl's hair, thus signalling to her classmates that she is isolated from the rest of them[7]. It is reasonable to conclude that such a system of punishments was common for girls' boarding schools. While in the communication "adult – child" the rule-breakers were compared to *street urchins*, in the communication "adult – adult" the comparison was also based on gender stereotype, but it contained the reference to the social system and the differentiation of the rights and roles of genders. The phrase "Вы распустили класс, они стали кадетами" (Charskaja, 1901: 13) means "you gave the group too much freedom and, thus, spoiled it. The girls have become the *cadets* (students of a military school)."

It is interesting to analyse the aspects of gender roles as they were revealed in the culture of dance. Though dancing was one of the obligatory school subjects for the girls' educational institutions, as daughters of high and medium strata were prepared for the balls (as the objects of the male marital choices), it was only a model of couple dancing, because the male part was performed by another girl with a folded corner of an apron. Dances did not serve as the entertainment; they were a sort of physical workout charged with the social perspective. But boarding schools followed the traditional calendar, and the celebrations of Christmas and Easter included the balls.

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[7] Cf.: in *Jane Eyre,* a girl has to stand on a chair of shame in the canteen or wear a shaming label on her forehead.

Here Charskaja'a narratives describe two aspects of dancing: dancing with a male partner and carnival cross-dressing dance when a girl, wearing a male costume, who performed the male part in a folk dance. Both cases provide bright illustrations for the perception of gender roles. During the balls, girls traditionally danced with specially invited partners, and an opportunity of a couple dance was a privilege for the senior students. There is an episode when Ljuda, the main character of Charskaja's novel, danced with a male partner, being still a junior pupil. She is shocked and horrified, having been asked by a tall student, she tries to escape and eventually leaves the ballroom (Charskaja, 1901: 14). Her classmates are excited and jealous because she has danced with "an adult" – for them, it is an act of initiation, a sharp increase of the female status due to the male attention. Being chosen by a male partner during a ball is one of the most common motifs in Charskaja's stories, which indicate the elevated status of her heroines.

Performing a dance in a male costume carries a totally different meaning. Two episodes demonstrate how a person changes while trying a cross-gender role. Nina Dzhavaha, another favourite character of Charskaja's stories, performs the male part of *lezginka*, the Georgian folk dance known for its complexity (Charskaja, 1901: 16). She was taught how to dance the male part when living at home in Georgia; she even brought the costume to the Institute and kept it for nearly a year, subconsciously looking at it as a reminder of her past freedom[8]. So, according to Charskaja, a woman in Nina's home culture was treated in another way than in an official culture of the Russian Empire: she was more active, more open to the world, and the male social territory was not forbidden for her. But for Nina's classmates, it is a wonder, they don't understand how the girl was *allowed* to dance like this, they admire Nina's dance, her boy's image; her status rises up immediately (she spends the rest of the party with the senior students). This episode is mirrored by a staged Russian folk dance (Charskaja, 1904: 19) prepared and well-rehearsed by a teacher for the last year's students in the second part of the book: Ljuda's new friend Marusja wearing a luxurious male costume is her partner for this performance. In both episodes, the author emphasizes the dashing energy of the girls who perform male parts, their inner freedom and courage, and the admiration of their audience.

THE IDEOLOGICAL PILLAR OF CHARSKAJA'S SCHOOL STORY

Unlike Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* with its idea of individual freedom and integrity, or Elizaveta Vodovosova's *At the Down of Life* with its focus on the meaningful development of a woman's personality, school stories by Lidija

[8] The case of a girl dancing the male part in a male costume is not an unusual or banned thing in the tradition of the Caucuses dances: there are the examples of such practices which are preserved by the modern schools of the Georgian folk dance (See, for example, *samany* or *iloury* (Istina v tance)).

Charskaja are stuffed with official ideology, which used to be summed up in a slogan "Orthodoxy-autocracy-nationality" (or compare with another formula: «*За веру, царя и отечество*»)[9]. The main subject for the institute girls remained religion. The girls were passionately devoted to their priest, their prayers, and fasts, and those feelings were totally sincere: the scene of confession covers nearly the whole chapter XIX in Part I (Charskaja, 1901: 19). The girls truly believed in the holy sacrament of confession, they were thrilled while anticipating it; they revealed all the tiniest sins and answered all the priest's questions. The priest is portrayed as an ideal of a human: fair, kind, and perfect in every instance. After the confession, Ljuda feels "excited and deeply impressed". The scene of confession is one of the key points of the novel.

The idealised presence in Charskaja's stories is occupied by the royal family: Emperor and Empress, occasionally visiting the Pavlovsky Institute, are depicted as ideally handsome, noble, sweet and kind people. In this case, the adoration as an institute's mode of behaviour reaches its highest point in the scene of royal visits. The royal eyes "sparkle like dark-blue stars", their voices sound with divine harmony, their visits always pour the honey of happiness on the girls. The Emperor for them is "dusia" (*дуся* derives from *душа, душенька* – the soul, the dearest person) (Charskaja, 1904: ch. 16), an angel, and an object of adoration. The Emperor communicates with the girls, asks about their needs. Ljuda's friend Marusja asks him about the promotion for her father – a poor teacher in a remote village, and the Emperor gives him solid welfare (Charskaja, 1904: ch.16, 18).

The motherland for the girls is the Russian Empire, and the highest point of patriotic love is to give their life for it. Ljuda is the daughter of "a hero of Plevna[10]" who died in the battle, the Emperor himself knew him in person (he remembers her father at each of their meetings, see: Charskaja, 1901: ch.17; Charskaja, 1904: ch.16). The girls call themselves "Russian", no matter where they came from: when a Georgian girl is referred to as a foreigner, she takes it as an offence and corrects: "I am Russian" (Charskaja, 1901: ch. 11).

Belonging to some other nationality is something that causes teasing and mocking. The object of that kind of "jokes" immediately tries to deny her non-Russianness, so the citizenship is viewed through the prism of the titular nation: Ljuda being referred to as "hohlushka" (an offensive name for Ukrainians), makes excuses and insists that her family comes from St. Petersburg ("We just live near Poltava"). The other girl responds accordingly: "Does it matter whether she is a hohlushka or a gipsy?" (Charskaja, 1901: ch.2).

Thus, Charskaja's school story presented an officially established pattern as an official ideological pillar with exaggerated emotional charge and content,

[9] For the origin of this slogan, see Nikolas V. Riazanovsky, S History of Russia, Fourth Edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984

[10] The Siege of Plevna, was a major battle of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878.

which automatically made it unacceptable for the children's literature after the collapse of the Russian Empire. But the language and cultural landscape was changing slower than the social one. Therefore, it was no surprise that the traditional elements of the school story of the 1900 catapulted into the texts of 1930. So, these elements could be traced in the new Soviet era children's literature that has denounced the pre-revolutionary books and has claimed a new beginning after the revolution of the 1917. This paradox in the development of the new socialist literature will be discussed further.

BLUE AND PINK BY ALEKSANDRA BRUSHTEJN AS A REINCARNATION (NEW DESCRIPTION) OF THE OLD GIRL'S SCHOOL STORY

Alexandra Brushtejn (1884–1968) was born in Vilna (now – Vilnius, Lithuania) in a family of a medical doctor. She enjoyed a happy childhood in a big loving and caring family, studied at the gymnasium for girls, then left Vilna for St. Petersburg and graduated from the Bestuzhev Courses (the most significant higher education institution for women in the Russian Empire). From her youth, Brushtejn was a social activist and volunteer, after 1917 she participated in the company on liquidation of illiteracy (173 schools and 38 libraries opened personally by her in 1920 (Orlova, Kopelev, 1990: 56). It is interesting to note the connection of both Charskaja and Brushtejn with the theatre. But while Charskaja was an actress on supporting roles (she performed on stage until 1924), Brushtejn was a passionate theatre activist, children's play writer, and an author of the essays about the prominent theatre figures of Vilna St. Petersburg (Brushtejn, 1956).

The period of the late 1920 – early 1930 in Soviet literature for children is marked with a line of Bildungsroman and school stories containing the memoirs about "pre-revolutionary" school childhood (A. Gajdar, L. Kassil', V. Katajev etc.) Most of them were intended to contrast the "old and the new life". As Marina Balina notes,

> Gorky's anti-childhood model served best to further Soviet ideology and introduced a sharply defined political divider into the area of personal recollections. It marked pre-revolutionary life as bad, abusive, and depraved in its treatment of underprivileged children who from the early days of their lives existed in a world of social inequality. (Balina, 2008: 15)

Some autobiographical children's books written in 1930 (the period of Great Purge) were published (or edited and republished) much later, in the late 1950s or 1960s in the period of the Thaw (K. Chukovskij, L. Kassil' and others). Thus, Brushtejn's full-sized Bildungsroman *The Road Goes Ever On*[11] may be

[11] I propose my version of the title translation. There are also others. In particular, Yuri Slezkine in his book *The Jewish Century* (Princeton and Oxford, 2019) translates as the following: *The Road Leads Off into the Distance*.

justifiably regarded in the same context – as the continuation and development of her "school story" drama *Blue and Pink* written in 1935.

The play *Blue and Pink* was based on Brushtejn's teenage diary (as well as Charskaja's school stories were based on her diary) and was published with an extensive author's introductory notes where Brushtejn describes the problem of anti-Semitism which was a governmental policy of the Russian Empire and a common behaviour toward Jews of provincial towns in the Pale of Settlement. Brushtejn concluded the introduction with a panegyric to Iosif (Joseph) Stalin quoting the catchphrase of that time: "We thank Comrade Stalin for our happy childhood". The whole paragraph looks odd and artificial, like an obligatory element inserted to demonstrate loyalty, which definitely was just for the purpose of severe censorship of the time. Therefore, the ideological reference is presented twice: firstly, by focusing on the contrast of the pre-revolutionary old and new socialist life, secondly, by appealing to Stalin – the infamous "Father of the Nations". Unlike Charskaja's sincere adoration of Russia's royal family, in Brushtein's text, the name of Stalin serves as an obligatory protective cliché.

Table 2:

Jane Eyre (Brontë,1847)	*The Notes of an Institute Girl* (Charskaja,1901)	*Blue and Pink (Brushtein*, 1936)	*The Road Goes Ever On (Brushtein*, 1956–63)
1. The Supervisor detects a girl with curly hair who does not respond to the school rules. 2. He demonstrates his righteous fury at this hairstyle and demands to cut off the hair entirely[12].	1. The new pupil's curly hair is detected by the headteacher of the Institute. 2. She demands to cut it off as this does not respond to the school rules.	1. The headteacher detects the curly hair of a girl, who is the object of teachers' bullying. The girl explains that her hair curls naturally. 2. The girl is forced to wet her hair to make it straight.	1. The headteacher detects the messy hair of a girl, who is the object of teachers' bullying, and demonstrates his righteous fury. 2. The other girls try to help their friend and comb her hair.

An attempt of regarding *Blue and Pink* as an example of a school story (in a form of a drama) allows the reader to trace all elements of the genre as they were elaborated in the 1900s. The reader can easily recognize the atmosphere of an old boarding school for girls. The school vocabulary is the same (*siniavka, dusia* etc.); the teachers have nicknames (except the teacher of dance, as she is kind, humane, and treats the pupils with respect). The same vocabulary will be later used in *The Road Goes Ever On*, also some names of the students and teachers mentioned already in the play will be introduced again in the novel. The atmosphere of the gymnasium's boarding school is recognizable for those who read Charskaja's stories. The author emphasises the disciplinary demands like the length of the uniform dress (it must be 28 cm from the ground, without

[12] "Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature; […] Miss Temple, that girl's hair must be cut off entirely" (Brontë, 1847; 1994: 66).

considering that the girl could grow during the school year). The same strict rules apply to the hairstyle. The scene with a curly-haired girl (see Table 2) mirrors the same in *Jane Eyre* and echoes the cut of Ljuda Vlassovskaya's curls (Charskaja, 1901: ch. 5), which did not contain a repressive connotation, but only a bit of nostalgia ("Mum will not recognize me!"). The same episode with messy curls will be acted out by Brushtejn in her later novel. In three scenes, the remark on the hairstyle is the way to humiliate and oppress a pupil.

The other "disciplinary" element of a school story plot is a punished girl, locked in an empty room with a scary portrait, which can be regarded both as a real way of detention and as an allusion to Brontë and Charskaja's books (see Table 3).

Table 3:

Jane Eyre (Brontë,1847)	*The Notes of a Little Gymnasium Girl* (Charskaja, 1908)	*Blue and Pink (Brushtein*, 1936)	*The Road Goes Ever On (Brushtein*, 1956–63)
The punished girl is locked by her family for a night in a room with a huge portrait. She falls unconscious.	The punished girl is locked by her family for a night in a room with a huge portrait. She falls unconscious.	The punished girl is locked by the teachers for a night in a hall with a huge portrait. She falls unconscious.	The punished girls were used to be locked by the teachers for a night in a hall with a huge portrait. They sometimes fell unconscious.

The main character of the play, Zhenja Shavrova, in some aspects also mirrors Charskaja's rebellious characters (Nina, Ljuda, Marusja etc.): she is an orphan brought by a beloved father, a military doctor, who educated her himself and taught her freedom and critical thinking. She is a "desperado": she feels bored and stuffy in the atmosphere of the boarding school; sometimes she has an urge to scream, to shock the teachers, to break the stifling rules and boredom. As the main heroine of the play, she generates the ideas and connects all the characters with her energy and the striving for justice and real life.

The elements of a girls' school story pattern are fully present in *Blue and Pink,* but with the shift of the accents: neutrally developed themes (common elements of the institute life) are criticized and ridiculed with the use of stylistic means. For example, the custom of *adoration* in Charskaja's books is just a way of channelling emotions and affection (for example, Nina Dzhavaha adores a senior student, and this is really important for her). In Brushtejn's play, (and later – in the novel) this custom is portrayed as extremely stupid and senseless[13]. The author did not criticize adoration directly but provided brilliant speech characteristics, created dialogues and situations demonstrating the nonsense of this custom: one of the girls is excited before the

[13] The same is Ushinsky's respond on adoration in the Smolny Insitute of Noble Maidens (Vodovosova, 1911:II– 9)

confession not because of her genuine faith, but because she adores the priest; the other just walks after her adorable object during the breaks, following her step by step; the third student tries to throw a letter to her adorable tsar's portrait, asking him for help with a hard lesson etc. The same strategy Brushtejn uses with the *album rhymes*, which are quite popular in Charskaja's books: the characters deconstruct the rhymes, focusing on their poor stylistics and simplicity, to contrast them to the examples of classical poetry. The same accent is on the strict discipline at the dancing lessons, which eliminates the very idea of joy: "We do not have dances. There are dances at the ball. It is entertainment. We have *dancing* as a lesson, a study subject. You are learning *dancing* to be graceful and elegant" (Brushtejn, 1936 : Act I).

A very interesting point in this comparison is the situation when the better students help the weaker ones. In *The Notes of an Institute Girl,* the better students are encouraged by the teachers to help the lagging behind (Charskaja, 1901: ch. 21). In *The Road Goes Ever On* the attempt to help the weaker students is strictly banned, the organizers are punished (Brushtejn, 1969: 352–362). Such a difference might be regarded as an ideological accent, but, according to Marija Gel'fond's [Мария Гельфонд] research, in Vilnius archives, there are the documental pieces of evidence of the prohibition for such kind of help (Gel'fond, 2012: 91). It is logical to conclude that for the national edges of the Russian Empire any kind of unofficial group volunteering was stricter banned than in the capital because the local authorities feared organized resistance, group movements and rebellion. The prohibition of speaking Polish privately in the territory of a state school in Vilna (Brushtejn, 1969: 296–297) is an example of the same category[14].

The *theme of education* for women is much more important in Brushtejn's works. The example of Bljuma Shapiro (*Blue and Pink*) shows how education was valued by the oppressed strata as the way to a decent life. The other traditional way for a girl, presented in the play, is marriage (the senior students dream about it: "We'll visit the balls! We will get married!" (Brushtejn, 1936 : Act III). The third way is becoming a teacher (a pair of mirroring characters – Mopsja (a teacher) and Katja (her too enthusiastic and helpful student) are both orphans with no prospect of marriage (no dowry). The fourth way is the way of Zhenja Shavrova: she chooses freedom, leaving the gymnasium and going nowhere, breaks the standards, limits, and traditional gender expectations.

The next plot element of *Blue and Pink* which echoes Charskaja's story is the scene of confession. As it was shown above, the procedure of confession for Charskaja'a characters is a deeply mystical experience, based on deep faith and belief. In *Blue and Pink,* Brushtejn replicated the scene of the confession with nearly the same details as Charskaja does. But the faith and mystique are

[14] This prohibition was the part of the repressive policy conducted on the territory of the whole North-Western Land of the Russian Empire, launched by the general-governor Muravjov-Vilensky to oppress the Polish national movement after the Uprising of 1861.

now corrupted: the teachers willing to find out whether the girls have any kind of banned literature or leaflets, asked the priest to interrogate them during the confession. The teachers even say: "The Father is our last hope" (Brushtejn, 1936 : Act IV). The priest breaks the seal of the confessional and abuses the girls' faith for the sake of authoritative investigation, actually, he betrays both the girls and God.

That is how Brushtejn, step by step, deconstructed the romantic image of a girls' boarding school created by Charskaja. She replicated the recognizable elements of a traditional school story and charged them with new, more realistic content, while preserving the structure familiar to the Charskaja's reader. The high level of vivid dramatic dialogues, the chain of emotionally filled events shifted the focus of the reader's attention to the difference between the old school environment to the new school one while employing for this purpose the well-established vocabulary and structural devices of the 1900s, Charskaja's narratives.

This stagnated old school environment is depicted as completely closed and isolated. All kinds of external information are strictly prohibited (newspapers, handwritten journals or out-of-curriculum books). Even the windows of the gymnasium building are half-covered by chalk. The motif of the informational barrier between stagnated school and the world outside is developed throughout the play: the girls try to make small gaps in the window paint, they try to see what is happening in the streets, to grasp the reason for the street manifestations. Zhenja suggests breaking the windows, Bljuma climbs the ladder to see what is happening in the street. The image of the painted blind windows becomes the core symbol of the play: it is one of the major elements of the story that the play is conveying. The culminating point is when the headteacher orders the doorkeeper (and Zhenja's friend) to paint all the space of the windows. This moment becomes the breaking point of the isolation: Zhenja and her friend leave the gymnasium, entering the wide world, facing the information, which they were deprived of.

CONCLUSION

A female school story that has developed during the period of modernity in Russian literature, was influenced by canonical genre patterns of such narratives as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and by the reality and atmosphere of the "maiden's institute" culture in the pre-revolutionary Russia. It absorbed its specific language, a set of plot elements and its choice of characters. As a part of the mass literature of the 1900s, the school story gained an ideological core, which had been adopted by the new ideology after the revolution of 1917. The best examples of the school story managed to avoid the high pressure of ideological demands of the new socialist-realist narratives with its specific attitude toward the past. *The Road Goes Ever On* along with the other Bildungsroman

examples, written and published after 1956, depict the evolution of the protagonist, her/his personal development, and the relations between the society/school and an individual. A successful fight of the Soviet critics against Charskaja's books prepared the ground for a school story which used the familiar elements with a new content performed with much better stylistics. It is difficult to conclude that Charskaja's books were totally replaced by Brushtejn, but the tradition of a school story has been continued. Nowadays, both these authors are published again, so they both have their readership that could successfully exercise their freedom of choice. But the idea of breaking the blind painted windows is exactly the key of this freedom: unlimited access to the information, critical thinking, and the desire to act according to your personal choice can provide the new generation of readers with a better sense of the past and lead them into the new road to the unrestricted possibilities of the future.

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