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# Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko, 1853-1921

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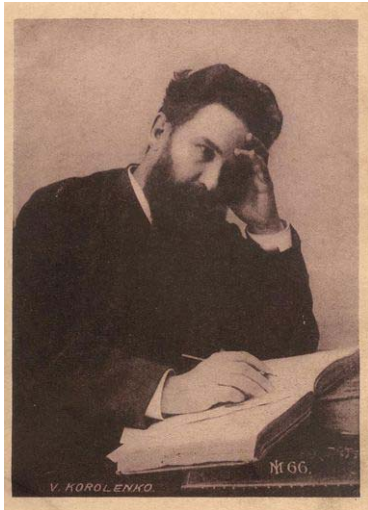


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## Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko

1853-1921

Prose writer

### Biography

Born in Zhitomir, 17 August 1853. Attended gymnasium, until 1871; St Petersburg Technological Institute; did not graduate because of family commitments. Moved to Moscow to study at Petrov Academy of Agriculture and Forestry, 1874. Arrested for association with Populists and exiled to Kronstadt, 1876. Because of Populist militancy Korolenko and his elder brother were exiled to Glazov in Viatka province, 1879. Began his writing career in 1879. After refusing to sign an oath of allegiance to Alexander III, was exiled to East Siberia, 1881. Spent next three years in Amga region, 1881-84. After exile chose to live in Nizhnii Novgorod and became active as a journalist. Married: Evdokiia Semenovna in 1886; three daughters. Preoccupied with the famine in Lukianov district, Nizhnii Novgorod, 1892. As correspondent for *Russkie vedomosti*, visited Chicago World's Fair,

via Europe, 1893. Involvement with *Russkoe bogatstvo* took him to St Petersburg in 1896; moved to Poltava, 1900. Elected to the Academy of Writers, from which he resigned in protest. Began writing his autobiography in 1905. Continued to write about social injustices. Died on 25 December 1921. Given a civic funeral.

### Publications

#### Collected Editions

*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 11 vols. St Petersburg/ Petrograd, 1914.

*Makar's Dream and Other Stories*, translated by Marian Fell. New York, Duffield, 1916.

*Birds of Heaven and Other Stories*, translated by Clarence A. Manning. New York, Duffield, 1919.

*Sobranie sochinenii*, 10 vols. Moscow, 1956.

*Selected Stories* [no translator named]. Moscow, Progress, 1978.

#### Autobiography

*Istoriia moego sovremennika*. St Petersburg, 1906–22; translated as *The History of My Contemporary*, by Neil Parsons, London, Oxford University Press, 1972.

### Critical Studies

*V.G. Korolenko kak chelovek i pisatel'*, by F.D. Batushkov, Moscow, 1922.

"V.G. Korolenko i ego khudozhestvennyi metod," by S.M. Gorodetskii, *Nashi dni*, 11 (1922), 335–49.

*V.G. Korolenko: zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, edited by A.B. Petrishchev, Petrograd, 1922.

"V.G. Korolenko," by A.B. Derman, *Russkaia mysl'*, 12 (1925), 1–24.

*V.G. Korolenko*, by G. A. Bialyi, Moscow, 1949.

"V.G. Korolenko (1853-1921): A Centennial Appreciation," by R.F. Christian, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 22, (1953–54), 449–63.

*Sibirskie rasskazy V.G. Korolenko*, by L. S. Kulik, Kiev, 1961.

*Korolenko*, by G. Mironov, Moscow, 1962.

Ð"Korolenko's Stories of Siberia," by Lauren G. Leighton, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 49 (1971), 200–13.

“Elements of Light in the Fiction of Korolenko,” by Natalia M. Kolb-Seletski, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 16 (1972), 173–83.

“Nature Descriptions and Their Function in Korolenko’s Stories,” by Victoria Babenko, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 16 (1974), 424–35.

*Vladimir G. Korolenko: 1853–1921. L’homme et l’oeuvre*, 2 vols, by Maurice Comtet, Lille, Université Lille III, 1975.

“Harmonious Composition: Korolenko’s Siberian Stories,” by R. Balasubramanian, *Rocky Mountain Review*, 44/4 (1990), 201–10.

*The Poetics of Korolenko’s Fiction*, by Radha Balasubramanian, New York, Peter Lang, 1997.

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*V.G. Korolenko, Opyt biograficheskoi kharakteristiki*, by N. Shakhovskaia, Moscow, 1912, 167–85. “Bibliograficheskii ukazatel’ proizvedenii V.G. Korolenko i literatury o nem,” in *Zhizn’i tvorchestvo V.G. Korolenko, Sbornik stat’ei i rechei k 65-emu iubeleiu*, by V.S. Vengerov, Petrograd, 1918, 98–140.

*Istoriia russkoi literatury kontsa XIX–XX veka. Bibliograficheskii ukazatel’*, edited by K. D. Muratov, Moscow and Leningrad, 1963, 261–71.

Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko is well known not only as a publicist and a humanitarian, but also as a writer. His voluminous publicistic writing, based on his service to the people, championed truth and justice. It ranges from exposing activities of the local gentry in their manipulation of the city’s bank, court, and local *zemstvo*, to condemning the revolutionaries openly, after they took over power, for not complying with the law and for forcing changes too rapidly. The help he rendered to the people in Luki-anov province, Nizhnii Novgorod, during the famine of 1892, and their pathetic plight were described in articles and later compiled in book form and reprinted several times as, *V golodnyi god* [In the Year of Famine]. In 1896, along with Mikhailovskii, he was designated the “publisher” of *Russkoe bogatstvo*. At the same time Korolenko became involved in the “Udmurts case” and took over the defence of the Udmurts who were sentenced for a ritual murder. His triumphant ordeal was later published in the report “Multanskoe zhertvoprinoshenie” [Multan’s Sacrifice]. Korolenko condemns the persecution of the Jews in works like “Pavlovskie ocherki”

[The Essays about Pavlovo], “Dom No. 13” [House No. 13], and others. The ineffectiveness of the first Duma in carrying out legislation is bitterly described by Korolenko in his article “Bytovoe iavlenie” [An Everyday Occurrence]. Against doctor’s advice Korolenko participated in Beilis’s trial and saved Beilis’s life after a guilty verdict. The ordeal is published as “Delo Beilisa” [The Case of Beilis]. Just before his death Korolenko wrote six letters to Lunacharskii, Minister of Education, about economic, social, and political problems. But they were not published in Russia until the policy of glasnost was adopted in the 1980s.

As a writer of fiction, Korolenko’s contribution to Russian narrative prose is in the form of short stories. Korolenko has three different types of stories: (1) stories from actual memories and facts that can be easily discerned as fiction by their subtle artistic devices; (2) imaginative, artistic stories (legends and fairy-tales) that are unmistakably fiction; and (3) travelogues and essay-type sketches.

Korolenko’s popularity as a writer of fiction is based on the first group (stories from actual memories and facts), which includes the Siberian stories. “Son Makara” (“Makar’s Dream”) 1885, which is the most famous of them, portrays an inarticulate hero, Makar, who is perceived as representing a typical Russian peasant reduced to a primitive state of hardship, exploitation, and oppression. “Sokolinet” [The Falconer] (1885), Chekhov’s favourite story, is taken from a tale about escaped prisoners from Amga. The symbolic use of light and darkness corresponds to the mental state of the characters and adds to the poetic quality of this story.

The relationship between the people and the intelligentsia becomes a very important problem in such stories as “Chudnaia” [The Strange One] (1905), “Moroz” [The Frost] (1901), and “Fedor Bepriiutnyi” [Fedor the Homeless] (1885). The interaction between the first-person narrator and the people of different strata creates an opportunity to understand them and decide about their aspirations, motives, and dreams. Thus the narrator’s relationship (or a character’s who is similar to the narrator) to another person in the story becomes itself a theme of Korolenko’s Siberian stories. His main concern is to reveal the totality of human beings—their strengths and weaknesses. He achieves mastery by combining nature and time to suit the characters’ moods, actions, and thoughts. His short stories unravel spatially rather than temporally—that is, juxtaposition of episodes in a moment of time takes precedence over sequential presentation. It is as though

the very volatility of the characters' present situation helps disclose a moment of decision from their past.

Korolenko wrote *Bez iazyka* [Speechless] (1895), a novella based on his impressions and observations when he visited the Chicago World's Fair, with a light refreshing humour. Instead of a travelogue, he presents a fictitious hero, Matvei Dyshio, who travels to America in search of his sister's husband. The conflict between this natural man and the civilized world becomes an important theme in the work. Besides this, through the adventures of the illiterate hero, the narrator paints an unflattering picture of political, labour, and industrial institutions in America. The author also delves into the minds of immigrants, to search for their motives, the goals that led to their immigration and the changes that have taken place in them since their move.

Among the imaginative, artistic stories of the second group, "Noch'iu" [At Night] (1888) is a treat to read, conveying light humor through the technique of "making strange," as it was called by the Formalists. The birth of a child and the activity connected with this in the household is viewed from a young boy's point of view. The story ends with the child's innocence and outlook preserved and, maybe, that is one of the reasons for this story's success. The popular story "V durnom obshchestve" [In Bad Company] (1885) tests childhood logic and, fortunately, the adults comply with it, so reaffirming the qualities of compassion, sharing and friendship in the young mind and condoning thievery (the boy stealing his sister's doll), if done in a good cause. These stories leave the reader believing in universal goodness. Korolenko's famous, but controversial novella, *Slepoi muzykant* [The Blind Musician] (1886), does not so much strive to depict a blind person's struggle, as to show the natural attraction for a human being to the mysterious and unattainable. The story lacks psychological depth, but has a plot structured around the boy's reaction to light and darkness. It is a keen sense of hearing that replaces the boy's inability to see.

"Les shumit" [The Murmuring Forest] (1886), a tale of oppression, rape, and revenge, is presented through a framed setting that removes the horror and gives a feeling of melancholy and tragedy. The romantic aura in the frame encloses the reality of the human situation. Korolenko's "Skazanie o Flore, Agrippa i Menakheme, syne Iegudy" [The Legend of Flor, Agrippa, and Menakhem, Son of Yehudah] (1886) is not just a historic account of the Judean war, but also an answer to Tolstoi's motto of "non-re-

sistance to evil". According to Korolenko, force cannot be judged as good or bad without knowing the purpose for which it has been used. Truth—the ultimate goal in Korolenko's life—is reworked in "Teni" [The Shadows] (1891) from the Socratic dialogues and is shown to be symbolized by light.

"V pustynnikh mestakh" [In Uninhabited Places] (1914) is a travelogue which, belonging to the third group, traces Korolenko's tours undertaken when he lived in Nizhnii Novgorod. Like his other sketches, it comprises descriptions full of his romantic and sentimental attachments to places and their pasts, with some historical facts. These works range from idyllic descriptions of nature to fantastic legends.

Korolenko spent his last 15 years writing the work *Istoriia moego sovremennika* (*A History of My Contemporary*) which he did not complete. In both fiction and autobiography, he wrote about that which was most familiar to him—namely, his own life.

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