

LITERARY MUSEUMS OF ST. PETERSBURG – THE LIVING HISTORY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract. The article dwells on the role of the literary museums of St. Petersburg in the study of Russian literature. In the XVIII – XX centuries, St. Petersburg was the focus of Russian literature, and the stories of life and creative legacy of St. Petersburg writers were intrinsically linked to the places where they lived and worked. At the moment St. Petersburg hosts ten literary-memorial museums. The article gives an account of the history of their foundation from 1905 till present time and provides an insight into the exposition and scholarly and educational activities of the majority of them. A core finding of the article is that the existing system of the literary museums of St. Petersburg represents a sound basis for the study of the history of Russian literature and can be a great help to students, school-children, philologists, cultural historians and all those, interested in Russian literature and culture.

Key words: literary-memorial museums, the Pushkin House, the Pushkin Apartment Museum, the Nekrasov Apartment Museum, the Dostoevsky Literary-Memorial Museum, the Blok Apartment Museum, the Fountain House.

Introduction.

In the context of the diversity of St. Petersburg museums a group of literary museums should be singled out. Despite being overshadowed by world-famous picture galleries in the popular consciousness, they have deep symbolic meaning. Their expositions feature the history of the Russian literature of the XVIII – XX centuries, providing insight not only into the biographies and careers of particular writers, but also into relevant historical periods and some private issues (such museums as the Nekrasov Memorial Apartment Museum, the Museum of G.R. Derzhavin and Russian Literature of his Time, the Anna Akhmatova Literary-Memorial Museum at the Fountain House etc. can serve as an example of this). The existing system of St. Petersburg literary museums represents a sound basis for the study of the history of Russian literature and can be used by students, specializing in the humanities, schoolchildren, professional philologists and cultural historians of Russia and other countries and all those, interested in the history and culture of Russia.

The educational activities of St. Petersburg literary museums are carried out not only through their expositions, but also through the dedicated work of their employees – enthusiasts and committed professionals. Due to their efforts these museums have transformed into serious research institutions with regular historical and literary conferences, seminars, focusing on the lives of the writers and their contemporaries, literary meetings, concerts and thematic exhibitions. Twice a year (on the writer's death and birth anniversary) scholarly conferences are held.

St. Petersburg currently hosts ten literary museums: the Literary Museum of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskij Dom) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Makarova embankment, 4); the Pushkin All-Russian Museum (Moika river embankment, 12); the Nekrasov Memorial Apartment Museum (Liteinyi avenue, 36); the Dostoevsky Literary-Memorial Museum (Kuznechnyi lane, 5); the A.A. Blok Apartment Museum (Dekabristov street, 57); the Anna Akhmatova Literary-Memorial Museum at the Fontannyi Dom (Liteinyi avenue, 53); the V.V. Nabokov Museum (Morskaja street, 47); the M.M. Zoshchenko Museum (Griboedov canal embankment, 9); the Museum of G.R. Derzhavin and Russian literature of his time (Fontanka river embankment, 118); the St. Petersburg museum of Avant-garde (Matiushin's House, Professora Popova street, 10). The museums are constantly expanding, sprouting branches, which with time grow into self-sustaining museums.

The Literary Museum of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskij Dom).

A century-old history of Russian, in particular, St. Petersburg museums dates back to the Literary Museum of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskij Dom) of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Most of the successive literary museums initially sprang from it and later became autonomous. Without going into the details of its history, elaborated in special literature [1], we will only mention that the "Literary Museum of Pushkinskij Dom, run as an institute's department, was the first and the biggest national literary museum". Its funds accommodate about 300000 units of storage, including decorative objects and historical documents. Among the founders of the museum, which originated from the Pushkin Commission, there was academician L.N. Maikov, B.L. Modzalevskii, N.A. Kotliarevskii and Grand Duke Konstantin Mikhailovich (poet K.R.). The museum funds were being replenished through voluntary contributions from individuals – descendants of Russian writers and their friends, who donated their memorabilia, as well as through the handing over of some collections of other museums to the Pushkinskij Dom.

At the moment the museum exposition is located in six big halls, with the artifacts, related to the Russian culture of the XVIII century, being exhibited in the Big Conference Hall. Among them there are portraits of writers, Academy

members and Russian statesmen. The second hall holds the objects of the Pushkin era. One of the rooms is devoted entirely to Lermontov. Among the exhibits there are pictures and graphic works of the poet himself, memorabilia, Lermontov's personal items, portraits of his friends and family and images of some memorable places, related to his biography. The L.N. Tolstoi exposition includes his portraits and numerous photos, featuring the daily life of the writer and his family in their estate Iasnaia Poliana. One corner of the room is dedicated to his novel "War and Peace" and recreates the drawing room, typical of the noble residences of that period.

Most of the Turgenev collection, which came from A.F. Onegin's (Otto) museum in Paris, displays portraits of the writer, painted by different artists, his contemporaries, and sculptures. The walls are lined with drawings and prints, related to the writer's life in Paris. The same hall holds the objects, related to I.A. Goncharov (including an authentic writing desk, which belonged to the writer), Ia.P. Polonskii and A.A. Fet. One section of the hall tells about the founders of the museum – the Maikoff family, Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich and A.F. Onegin (Otto).

In 2004, the Pushkin House Literary museum opened a new hall, focused on the Russian literature of the late XIX – early XX centuries. Its exposition "The Silver Age. Mysticism and reality" covers two main trends in the Russian literature of that time – realism and modernism.

The museum regularly conducts guided-tours for schoolchildren and students of St. Petersburg institutions of higher education, specializing in the humanities.

The Pushkin All-Russian Museum.

The first state literary-memorial museum, highlighting the life story of a particular writer was the museum of A.S. Pushkin, located in his latest apartment on the river Moika, 12. All together in St. Petersburg there are about 20 addresses, associated with the poet. In some of these places he stayed for a few years. However, it was the latest apartment, rented in the house of S.G. Volkonskaia in September of 1836 that was chosen for the museum. The poet had lived there only for four months. It was there that the wounded poet spent his final days after the fatal duel on January 27, 1837, with hundreds of people crowding at the doorstep. Two days later on January 29 (old style) they would receive the devastating news of his demise. From that moment on every year on this day citizens of St. Petersburg used to come to this house on the Moika river, which became both a memorable place and the site of the poet's tragic death. This tradition, passed on from generation to generation, appears to have survived the turbulent events of the XX century and has continued to this day. For these reasons in 1925 the decision was made to hand over the latest apartment of the poet to the Pushkin House with a view to organizing a memorial museum. The museum has recently withdrawn from the Pushkin House and become autonomous [2].

The concept of the memorial exposition is based on two motifs – life and death of the poet. In terms of memorial value the study is the most important room. As in the poet's lifetime the bookshelves along the walls are filled with books. Pushkin's personal library numbered as many as 4500 books in fourteen foreign languages. The originals are stored in the funds of the Pushkin House, while the memorial study has duplicates. The antique clock stopped at 2.45 p.m. (the moment of his death).

Two upper floors of the same house on the Moika river are reserved for the literary-monographic exposition "A.S. Pushkin, his life and works". It dates back to the Imperial Aleksandrovskii Lyceum museum. In 1999, it was transferred to Moika, 12 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the poet's birth. 17 halls display the items, related to Pushkin's life and career. The historical and literary part of the exposition consists of two sections, situated on different floors.

The Nekrasov Memorial Apartment Museum.

The second-oldest literary-memorial museum, which initially was managed by the Pushkin House and later on separated from it, was the Nekrasov Memorial Apartment Museum. The first literary exposition was opened in the poet's apartment on Liteinyi in tough post-war 1946. The museum was founded by a group of enthusiasts, committed to their work: Professor V.E. Evgeniev-Maksimov, the foremost authority on Nekrasov; M.M. Kalushin, the then director of the Pushkin House; a professor of the Leningrad University and a connoisseur of Nekrasov's work V.E. Kholshchennikov and his wife O.V. Loman, the first director of the museum [3].

The concept of the museum combines both literary and memorial expositions. This is due largely to the fact that the above-mentioned apartment, where Nekrasov lived with his friend I.I. Panaev since 1857, at the same time served as an editorial office of the "Sovremennik" (Contemporary), the journal, run by Nekrasov.

The first room is a reception, where members of the editorial board used to meet. The bookshelves contain items, related to Nekrasov's younger days. The study and the hall feature Nekrasov as a person. The hall was used for the dinner parties, given every month on the day a new issue of the journal was published. The dining room, used for daily meals, reflects a later period of the poet's life – the 1870s and his work in the "Othchestvennye Zapiski" (Fatherland Notes), the journal he headed after the closure of the "Sovremennik". On the walls there is a portrait of Nekrasov's co-editor M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin by I.N. Kramskoi, a late portrait of I.S. Turgenev, painted by K.A. Gorbunov in 1872, and a portrait of Nekrasov in the last year of his life by I.N. Kramskoi.

The bedroom gives an account of the final months of Nekrasov, gravely ill by that time. This might have been the only room, which can be considered his personal realm. The one he returned to from the trip to Yalta, which he undertook in October 1876 in the hope of getting better. The one, where he wrote his last collection of poems "Poslednie

pesni” (the Last Songs). The design of the room is modeled on I.N. Kramskoi’s famous painting ‘Nekrasov v period “Poslednikh pesen”’ (Nekrasov at the time of the Last Songs).

In 1985, the rooms, occupied by Nekrasov’s co-editor and friend I.I. Panaev, were restored and added to the exposition. Panaev’s quarters display artifacts, telling about the life and career of this talented writer and journalist, and some portraits of his ancestors. The items from the Panaev family collection in Paris, donated by his relatives, living in France, as well as the objects, handed over by his St. Petersburg descendants, constitute the core of the collection.

The Dostoevsky Literary-Memorial Museum.

The Dostoevsky Literary-Memorial Museum was opened in 1971 on the 150th anniversary of the writer’s birth after a major renovation of the building. Dostoevsky’s apartment was restored with the help of the original architectural plans and the memoirs of his contemporaries. [4]. The study of the writer was reconstructed from the photo of V. Taube, taken after Dostoevsky’s death. Dostoevsky’s grandson Andrei Fedorovich Dostoevsky (1908 – 1968) and his great-niece, Maria Vladimirovna Savostianova, greatly contributed to the establishment of the museum, having donated their family heirlooms.

The concept of the exposition implies clear distinction between its literary and memorial parts. The last apartment of the writer, where he moved with his family in 1878, has 6 rooms. A visit to the museum starts with the nursery of Liuba and Fedia, where one can see their books, toys and little notes, addressed to their father. The next room is the study of Anna Grigorievna Doskoevskaia, a faithful friend and a permanent secretary, who was in charge of accounting and correspondence with publishers. The dining room and the parlor display authentic artifacts, donated by writer’s descendants (antique china and two paintings by an unknown Italian artist). The dining room re-creates the atmosphere of a typical apartment of St. Petersburg intellectuals of the second half of the XIX century. The writer’s study, which was also used as a bedroom, is the most precious part of the memorial exposition. It is the room where “The Brothers Karamazov” was written. The windows of the study face Kuznechnyi lane. In the middle of the room there is a writing table, with the galleys of “A Writer’s Diary” sitting on it. Among other authentic objects there are a pen, an icon in a silver frame “Bozhia Mater’ Vsekh Skorbiashchikh Radost’” (Our Lady, consoling those, who are in grief), a replica of the “Sistine Madonna” by Raphael above the sofa. The clock stopped at 8.30 p.m., the time, when Dostoevsky passed away on January 28, 1881.

Next to the memorial part of the museum, the imposing literary exposition, focused on the life and work of the writer, is presented. The story of his life and career unfolds in numerous photos and drawings. Dostoevsky’s entire adult life and his books are inseparably linked with St. Petersburg, where he had lived for 28 years. Unsurprisingly, the motif of St. Petersburg is a cross-cutting theme of the exposition [5].

The A.A. Blok Apartment Museum.

On November 25, 1980, to mark the centennial anniversary of A.A. Blok’s birthday, the first in the country museum, dedicated to a Russian Silver Age poet, was opened at the initiative of the State Museum of Leningrad History in the house on Dekabristov (former Ofiterskaia) street, 57, where Blok had spent the final nine years of his life (19012 – 1921). D.E. Maksimov, a Leningrad University professor and an authority on the early XX century poetry, contributed greatly to the formation of the collection, having donated from his family archive a number of albums, photos and documents, providing an insight into the life and work of Blok and his contemporaries. Poet’s personal belongings, stored in the Pushkin House after the death of Blok’s widow Liubov Dmitrievna Mendeleva-Blok, returned to their original place, the apartment of the writer.

The museum, actually, occupies two apartments – № 21 on the fourth floor and № 23 on the second. The first one had been the poet’s home till February 1920. The second one belonged to his mother A.A. Kublitskaia-Piottukh. After the death of his stepfather, the poet moved to his mother’s flat (out of concern that the new regime could reduce space per person in the flat), where he passed away on August 7, 1921. The upper apartment hosts the memorial exposition, the other one – the literary.

The windows of the flat, which the Bloks moved to in June 1912, face west, overlooking the Gulf of Finland. In 1913, Anna Akhmatova, a young aspiring poetess used to come here to visit Blok. It is her, who wrote the lines about “a grey house, towering over the sea gate of the Neva” [6].

The first room in the exposition is the poet’s study with its atmosphere of simplicity and emphasized austerity. In this room Blok used to entertain guests – his friends and writers. Apart from Akhmatova, whom we have already mentioned, such figures as A. Belyi, V.I. Ivanov, O.E. Mandelshtam, V.E Meyerhold, K.I. Chukovskii and many others at different times visited this room. The table and the sofa belonged to the poet’s grandfather A.N. Beketov, a professor of botany and the rector of Petersburg University, and were kept in the “rector’s wing” of the university in the very room, where Blok was born in 1880. Blok took pride in the fact that F.M. Dostovesky and D.I. Mendelev, who used to visit the Beketov family, would often sit on that sofa. The next rooms – the dining room and the bedroom are furnished in the same simple fashion. In the dining room there is a wedding icon of Our Lady of Kazan, a family relic of the Blok family, and a portrait of Liubov Dmitrievna. In the bedroom the photos of the poet’s parents are displayed, on a little table by the wall sits a photo of Blok’s wife in a simple wooden frame (“your face in a simple frame”). The décor of Liubov Dmitrievna’s room reveals a multi-faceted realm of her interests – acting, history of art, collecting. The walls are

lined with posters, advertising her performances, some photos of an amateur play in 1898, in which she poses in Ophelia's outfit, a painted portrait of Liubov Dmitrievna and some photos of her father, D.I. Mendeleev.

The literary exposition was reopened in 2005 in the flat two floors down, where Blok had spent his last days. It is organized along thematic rather than traditional chronological lines with every cycle of poems or significant literary work being covered by a corresponding installation, comprised of the texts' copies, the enlarged copies of the poet's signatures on the walls and other artifacts, related to a particular cycle or literary work. The motif of "Blok and theatre" holds an important place in the exposition. The first room provides an insight into Blok's work of the prerevolutionary period, the next two rooms tell about his public activities in the early post revolutionary years.

On the first floor there is a hall, where academic conferences, literary and musical events and memorial exhibitions are regularly conducted. As a research institution, the museum is engaged in the study of the literary heritage of not only Blok, but other Symbolist poets as well [7].

The Anna Akhmatova Literary-Memorial Museum at the Fontannyi Dom.

In 1989, to commemorate the centenary of A.A. Akhmatova's birthday the Anna Akhmatova Literary-Memorial Museum at the Fontannyi Dom was opened. It was the first museum in Leningrad-Petersburg, which provided information about the Soviet period of the history of Russian literature, when the representatives of the Silver Age intelligentsia had to maintain their worldview and their identity in the conditions of the totalitarian Soviet regime [8].

The museum has grown considerably over the past fifteen years. In 2003, its exposition was revised and divided into two parts – the memorial one (the apartment of the Punin family and Akhmatova) and the one, focused on literature and history.

Akhmatova had lived for 35 years in the south wing of the Sheremetiev Palace (the Fountain House). For her this house symbolized the continuity of a centuries-long cultural tradition. It is not a coincidence that the motto of the Sheremetiev family "Deus conservat omnia" ("God keeps everything"), etched on the façade of the palace and used by Akhmatova as an epigraph to her "Poem without a Hero", became her motto as well - the ethical aspect of keeping memories, which helps to realize the bond between poet and history. This particular concept formed the basis of the literary exposition, placed in the rotunda, adjacent to the flat and situated next to the White Hall of the Fountain House, praised in the "Poem without a Hero".

The memorial part of the collection is composed of the objects, donated by Akhmatova's friends and relatives: L.N. Gumilev, I.N. Punina, A.G. Kaminskii and many others. The exposition reconstructs the atmosphere and décor of Punin's flat and the chronicle of Anna Akhmatova's life. At the end of 1926, she moved in the study of Nikolai Nikolaevich. The next room - the dining room, covering the early 1930s, had always been the heart of the house. On the table one can see a family photo album. It was in this room that relatives and friends could find refuge, while going through a rough patch. In one corner of the room a copy of a portrait of Pushkin by O. Kiprenskii is displayed. Pushkin's talent was an ideal Anna Akhmatova always looked up to. She spent a lot of time, studying his work and biography, and her research articles were highly appreciated by experts. The next room, which the poetess moved to after breaking up with Punin, features the events of 1938 – 1940. It was in this room where she survived the period of the "Great Terror", when her son, L.N. Gumilev was imprisoned, where she started writing poetry again. In this room sits a bureau, at which "Requiem" and "Poem without a Hero" were written. The last room, where she had lived since 1945 after her return from evacuation till 1952, when she moved to a new apartment, is sparsely furnished. Its exposition gives an account of the events of the autumn of 1945, in particular, of the visit of Jesaja Berlins, which played a fateful role in her life and triggered subsequent persecution. The memorial exposition represents not only the living quarters, but the household premises as well. In the late 1930s, the flat actually became a shared one and the décor of the kitchen recreates the atmosphere of a typical Soviet communal flat. In a narrow corridor a small spot was allocated for the desk of Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, who moved into the Fountain House in 1929.

At the moment the stuff of the museum is largely engaged in scholarly and cultural activities. Exhibitions, literary events and academic conferences are regularly conducted in the second floor hall. A few years ago a new brunch, the museum of L.N. Gumilev, was opened on Kolomenskaia street, 1/15, where Lev Nikolaevich had spent his last years.

The Museum of G.R. Derzhavin and Russian Literature of his Time.

In 2003, the first St. Petersburg museum, dedicated to the XVIII century Russian literature - "The Museum of G.R. Derzhavin and Russian Literature of his Time" was opened to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the city's foundation. The museum is located in a mansion on the embankment of the Fontanka river, 118. Derzhavin owned this house, designed by his close friend and brother-in-law architect N.A. Lvov, since 1791. In the concept of the exposition the memorial and literary parts are intertwined [9]. Moving from one room to another, visitors can trace the main milestones of Derzhavin's life and career of a poet, a statesman and a renowned public figure of the XVIII century. Having started as a common soldier, he worked his way up the social ladder to become a member of gentry, a minister and a chancellor. At the same time he had enough courage to "tell the truth to kings with a smile on his face".

The lower floor consists of a succession of sitting rooms. Authentic objects are few; the décor of the rooms recreates the typical atmosphere of the second half of the XVIII century. The first hall tells a story of the development of new Russian literature, which portrayed Russian realities after the reign of Peter the Great. The wall is decorated with a big portrait of Derzhavin by S. Tonci. The artifacts, exhibited in the next room – the "Room with a Sofa" or the "Blue

Parlor”, describe the activities of the literary club, run by N.A. Lvov and G.R. Derzhavin. Among its members there were N.I. Hemnitsler, V.V. Kapnist and others. In the room there are portraits of the above-mentioned writers and copies of the front pages of their works.

One of the most interesting places of the mansion was the oval “Straw Parlor”, overlooking the garden, and named so after the straw wall panels, embroidered with multicolored woolen thread. The idea of this decoration belongs to N.A. Lvov. The current panels have been recreated from the memories of contemporaries. The central wall displays a portrait of Catherine II (a copy of D.G. Levitskii’s painting). In June 1797, Derzhavin was appointed State Secretary of the Empress. In his poems he praised her as “wise Felitsa” and a law-giver.

The biggest and most festive room on the first floor is a conference room, called “the Discussions of Russian Literature Lovers”. Since 1811, the meetings of this literary club, set up as early as in 1807 by admiral A.S. Shishkov, were regularly conducted there. Initially this large two-level hall was used as a dance hall, but later on the admiral put it at the disposal of the club.

The exposition of the first room on the second floor provides an insight into the polemics between “the Discussions of Russian Literature Lovers” club members - Shishkov’s followers, and members of another literary club “Arzamas”, headed by N.M. Karamzin. Further on the living quarters are located. A small semicircular parlor, situated above the “Straw Parlor” was nicknamed “the Settee”. This room saw only the closest friends and relatives. The walls of the next room – the ceremonial dining room witnessed numerous guests of the era of Catherine the Great, Paul I and Alexander I. In the middle of the room there is a big centipede table. The walls are lined with portraits of Derzhavin’s second wife Dariia Alekseevna in front of their Novgorod family estate Zvanka and some friends, who often stayed in the house. The heart of the memorial exposition is the writer’s study, located in the most spacious room of the second floor with a semi-circular window, facing the Fontanka river. By the window one can see the writing table and the authentic writing set of Derzhavin. Famous Derzhavin’s sofa, featured by many memoirists is also here. Over the sofa there is a map, showing the historical “river of time”, poetized by Derzhavin in his last poem.

Research fellows of the 18th century department of the Institute of Russian Literature (the Pushkin House), chaired by professor N.D. Kochetkova, contributed to the development of the exposition. The museum regularly hosts academic conferences, dedicated to Derzhavin. This tradition is still ongoing and flourishing.

Conclusions.

Metaphorically, each of these literary museums represents a miniature “Pushkin House”. The author of this article, whose teaching duties imply regular visits with groups of students to the literary museums of St. Petersburg, can attest to their invaluable contribution to the teaching of Russian literature at St. Petersburg universities. Contemporary Russian students (let alone foreign students) often forget that St. Petersburg used to be the capital of the Russian Empire in the XIX century and underestimate its role of the chief literary center of the country. Lectures in the history of Russian literature, included in the programs of philological departments, are not sufficient to provide a full-scale picture of this role. Guided tours to literary museums, conducted by highly qualified members of staff (mostly PhD holders and authors of numerous publications) actually represent lectures in the history of Russian literature and culture, delivered in a visual format.

The author of this article for many years has been teaching the course “Literary museums of St. Petersburg” at St. Petersburg University. The course includes visits to the museums and lectures on the writer’s personality to be followed by discussions in the classroom. It can be stated that the course is extremely popular with students and the number of attendees is increasing every year.

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