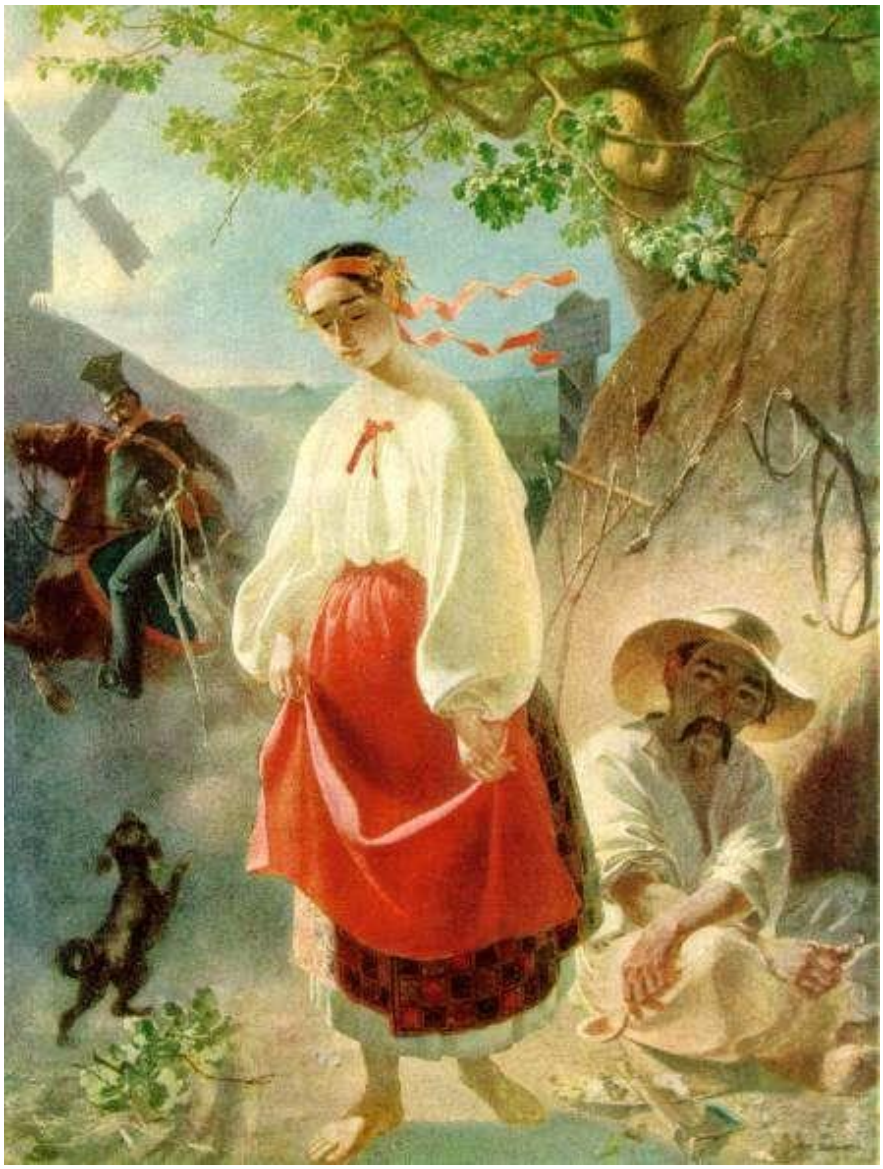
Marko Vovchok

The Voice of the Ukrainian Peasant Woman



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Frontispiece: Taras Shevchenko. *Catherine*. 1842. [St. Petersburg]. Oil on canvas. 93 × 72.3 cm. Taras Shevchenko National Museum, № 100

Contents

1.Introduction

1.1 The Context of Vovchok's Early Ukrainian Work

Maria Vilinskaia,[1] hereafter referred to by her literary pseudonym Marko Vovchok, was a prominent figure in Ukrainian literature in the nineteenth century, and indeed, its first female writer.[2] She took a male pseudonym Marko Vovchok for reasons outlined in subchapter 3.1. In this thesis, I will focus on her main phase of Ukrainian language writing before the abolition of serfdom in 1861, when she chose to use the voice of contemporary serf and peasant women as her narrators. She would later write largely in Russian.[3]

Her early Ukrainian works were admired by such masters of Ukrainian and Russian literature as Taras Shevchenko, Panteleimon Kulish, Ivan Franko, Ivan Turgenev and others.[4] Their admiration, however, has perhaps coloured subsequent views of her work, which focus on themes that they were concerned with like social reform, the emancipation of the serfs and political reform. Her fellow Ukrainian literati, such as the poet Taras Shevchenko and the writer Panteleimon Kulish, also the publisher of her first collection of *Folk Stories* (*Narodni Opovodannia*), admired her employment of vernacular Ukrainian language. Concerns with patriotism and nationalism have also been attributed to Vovchok because of her historical rather than contemporary novel *Marusia*, written later and in Russian.[5]

Her use of serious prose language differed from that of contemporary Ukrainian writers. A few scholars (M. Pavlyshyn, O.V. Rudko) have pointed out the importance and innovativeness of the

[1] Vovchok's maiden name was Russian – 'Vilinskaia.' Due to her later association with the Ukrainian language, some sources write it 'Vilinska' which would be the Ukrainian equivalent.
[2] Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak *Feminists despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884–193*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988
[3] Percival Cundy "Marko Vovchok." *Slavistica*, No.84, 1984
[4] Ibid; [Panasenko] Т.М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий" in Вовчок, Марко. *Три долі*, Харків: Фоліо 2019, pp.401-407
[5] Victor O. Buyniak "Marko Vovchok and Leo Tolstoi." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 14.2 (1972): 300-314.

peasant and serf woman's voice for the Ukrainian national identity.[6] For instance, M. Pavlyshyn identifies her pioneering role in creating "a voice suitable for articulating Ukrainian intellectual identity,"[7] rather than analysing her narratological use of serf and peasant women's voices.

Even though it was her Ukrainian writing that brought her success, only a seventh of her works are in Ukrainian, the most well-known publication being her first collection of *Folk Stories* (*Narodni Opovidannia*).[8] Such stories about peasantry and serfdom were acutely relevant and popular among Russian and Ukrainian authors just before the abolition of serfdom in 1861.[9]

In her Ukrainian works, Marko Vovchok, a member of the gentry, used the device of first-person narrator. Ivan Turgenev, a good friend, and later mentor of Marko Vovchok also wrote his *Huntsman's Notes* (1852), stories about serfs and peasants albeit from his first-person patrician's perspective. However, before Vovchok, no one in Ukrainian or even Russian literature in the nineteenth century had used this technique of having a peasant or serf woman narrator.

1.2 Why the Serf and Peasant Women as Narrators?

This thesis investigates why Vovchok, as an upper-class woman, chose to tell her stories through the voices of Ukrainian peasant and serf women. Aside from the well explored national identity and patriotic themes of her time at the juncture of Romanticism and Realism, there is an interesting gap. The female aspect of her narrators has yet to be examined in any depth. There is real potential to understand the nuances of gender alongside those of class.

[6] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Marko Vovchok (1833-1907)." *Australian & New Zealand Journal of European Studies* 5.2, 2013, 61-70 – see pp. 69-70
[7] Ibid, p.66
[8] Ibid
[9] Richard Stites *Serfdom, society, and the arts in imperial Russia: The pleasure and the power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008, p.37

A further issue I deal with in this thesis is Vovchok's choice of the Ukrainian language as the medium of narrative. Again, past commentators have not fully explored this factor beyond connecting it with Ukrainian identity. Vovchok's use of Ukrainian is all the more curious given that, outside of this early phase of her writing and one work at the end of her writing career, she wrote in Russian. This anomaly deserves some explanation.

As Pavlyshyn pointed out, Vovchok made the Ukrainian language the "sphere of intellectual communication"[10] in Ukrainian literature, a role previously occupied by the Russian language.[11] Vovchok's writing certainly does not exclude ethnographic folkloric exploration of the Ukrainian language. That feature stands out in nearly all her Ukrainian works. But was the Ukrainian language uttered by peasant and serf women in her stories of any significance apart from its folkloric and national values, or has it any further significance for questions of gender?

1.3 The Wider Academic Debate

Influences of Romanticism were a powerful force in the literature of the early nineteenth century, though on the wane by the 1840s with writers such as Nikolai Gogol and Dmitri Grigorovich of the Natural School (Natural'naia shkola), the early phase of Realism.[12] Indeed, Romanticism was part of national and regional identity in the nineteenth century.[13] However, whilst nationalism and patriotism may be part of Vovchok's work, more fundamentally it tells the stories of ordinary peasant and serf women. Therefore, I would argue, these stories were in the Realist genre, depicting these women as they were. Her peasant and serf women were not just narrators of her stories despite their low status

[10] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the Nineteenth Century', p.69
[11] Even Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko (1778-1843), who is often seen as the founder of Ukrainian classicist prose, did not achieve this – Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the Nineteenth Century," p.62
[12] Molly Brunson "Gogol Country: Russia and Russian Literature in Perspective." *Comparative Literature* 69.4 (2017): 370-393.
[13] Stefan Berger "The Invention of European National Traditions in European Romanticism." S. Macintyre & J. Maiguaschca eds. *The Oxford History of Historical Writing. 1800–1945* (2011): 19-40 – see pp.19-22

and education, but also their language was adopted by Vovchok as her medium for communication in Ukrainian.

Part of the reason why she chose female narrators might also be due to attitudes towards female writers. Diana Greene's gynocriticism[14] analyses how women writers in the nineteenth century received more critical responses than men when using literary forms and subject matter that were seen as more highbrow or strictly male.[15] It may be that Vovchok's choice of Ukrainian (otherwise known as Little Russian) gave her a better chance of standing out and receiving recognition (as it was considered a lesser form of speech) than if she had written in Russian, especially Russian prose - see subchapter 2.2).

The emergence of Russian Realism with Turgenev as a leading figure no doubt helped make her use of prose more acceptable. Realism placed more of an emphasis on prose as a more rational form of writing. Other women began to take up prose under the Realist trend[16] such as Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia. Realism with the trend towards prose became the dominant trend over poetry by the 1840s, though it was still not considered a medium that suited women.[17]

1.4 The Primary Sources Chosen

The stories analysed in this thesis come from the early Ukrainian phase of Vovchok's prose work (before Serf Emancipation in 1861). The selection here covers different perspectives and techniques

[14] Elaine Showalter who invented the term 'gynocritics', defines it as a female-centred approach, seeking to establish what is distinct about women's writing – p.185 in Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness." *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 179-205

[15] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, p.5

[16] R. Marsh "Realistic prose writers, 1881-1929." In A.M. Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith, eds. *A history of women's writing in Russia*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 175-206 – see p.179

[17] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.138; Gheith, J. M. "Women of the 1830s and 1850s: alternative periodizations." In Adele Marie Barker and Johanne M. Gheith, eds. *A History of Women's Writing in Russia,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.85–100

to represent the breadth of her style from this time. I have included short stories ("Sister" and "Lazy Bones") and two long stories (*The Boarding School Girl* and *Three Destinies*).

The first stories are significant in that she could not have known whether they would have achieved success, so they were not built on any earlier critical feedback. These and the other early stories mark the period before her international fame and before she gained widespread recognition. She was still exploring her style and her material. Each chapter in this thesis moves to a lengthier work in which her character development and the complexity of the plots increase. The stories chosen largely focus on inter-female relationships.

The stories chosen for this thesis thus do not explicitly cover male sexual oppression, excluding tangentially "Lazy Bones," where the character Nastia tries to trade her body for freedom. The decision to mostly exclude negative male interactions is deliberate in order to explore the gender issues of Vovchok's stories within the context of largely female relationships. This was an unusual aspect of her work that marked it out from other writers of the time and more helpful in exploring her female 'wilderness', the area of experiences that women have, which are not accessible to men.[18] This could include biological aspects such as childbirth or social aspects such as the restrictions on their independence, and the ways in which they were expected to express themselves in writing – in other words their language.

She chose her female characters because while living in Ukrainian cities and towns she often met women like her stories' characters in the markets and social gatherings.[19] She went to these occasions not only to learn the Ukrainian language, ethnography, and folklore, but clearly to socialise with peasant women and chat away and enjoy herself, while among men and women of her class she was rather reserved and even called a silent goddess.[20]

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[18] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.185

[19] [Rudko] О. В. Рудько "Втілення ідеї національної ідентичності у творчості Марка Вовчка" / О. В. Рудько // Науковий вісник Національного університету біоресурсів і природокористування http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/nvnau_fil.n_2015_225_18

[20] [Rudko] О. В. Рудько "Втілення ідеї національної ідентичності у творчості Марка Вовчка"

The stories as a collection were published in book format by Panteleimon Kulish, who was a member of the same underground Ukrainian nationalist organisation as Vovchok's husband, the Brotherhood of Sts Cyril and Methodius. Further Vovchok stories were then published in the journal *Osnova* (*Foundation*), also with Kulish as publisher.[21]

1.5 The Analytical Method

I have chosen to explore Vovchok's early work in chronological order to examine the development of her style and the issues and perspectives she raises. Given the nature of her material (peasant and serf women) and the use of the Ukrainian language as a serious media of communication, it is important to understand how and why her early work developed in the way it did.

I will undertake close textual analysis of individual works, especially the 'wilderness' aspects. As Elaine Showalter has suggested, women have areas of experience to which men do not have ready access, which she terms 'wilderness'.[22] Diana Greene (see above), applying such gynocriticism to nineteenth century Russian literature, has examined how women had to navigate themes carefully to find ways of expressing their female experience.[23] Part of that will concern how Vovchok's style and techniques, and her use of female peasant and serf language worked, whilst being mindful of how this oeuvre fitted into the prevailing trends of Romanticism and Realism. Pavlyshyn has her early Ukrainian work already breaking from aspects of the Romantic tradition, [24] and it may be that elements of her work at least reflect the Realist influences of Turgenev.

[21] Віктор Дудко "Марко Вовчок у журналі «Основа»: реалії і міфи." *Спадщина. Літературне джерелознавство. Текстологія*, 2007.
[22] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness." *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 179-205; Showalter, Elaine. *The new feminist criticism: essays on women, literature, and theory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985
[23] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*
[24] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the Nineteenth Century"

In “Sister” and in *Three Destinies*, I will also use Mieke Bal’s theory of focalization.[25] It is useful here in examining the way each narrator reflects on her past life and experiences: in “Sister,” comparing her happy childhood self to her very different adult self, and in *Three Destinies,* comparing how she saw her experiences as a young woman and how she now views them as a mature woman years later.

The following chapter (2) provides an overview of the context in which Vovchok lived and worked in the form of a literature review, and the three chapters after that are aimed at analysing four of Vovchok’s pieces (two short stories – chapter 3 - and two long stories, chapters 4 and 5) as a unique figure in the literary landscape of the Russian Empire during the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Diana Greene’s *Reinventing Russian Women* showed how Russian women poets (and prose writers) of the nineteenth century performed and established themselves in the patriarchal society – in this case within Romanticism. How they used various techniques to overcome the social constraints imposed by patriarchal society. In other words, they comprised a ‘muted’ part of society. The techniques included the use of natural imagery, pseudonyms, short works, inventive and nonconventional methods (not participating in a particular genre) and the explicit discussion of women’s experiences (as in the case of Elena Gan’s case – see chapter 2.1).

Within the framework of the Russian Empire, Vovchok as a Russian born woman began her career writing in the Ukrainian language. Only men had thus far engaged in Ukrainian writing, although it was sort of burlesque usage of the language. Her role thus, according to Pavlyshyn, was as the founder of a neutral intellectual Ukrainian prose language, a key component of national identity.[26] Pavlyshyn assigned a special role for her first voice narrator technique. According to him, this technique was based on the use of the vernacular language, folklore and Ukrainian peasant culture.[27]

[25] Mieke Bal *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Third ed, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2009, pp.145-163
[26] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the Nineteenth Century,” pp.69-70
[27] Ibid

As for the female aspects of her writing, Showalter's wilderness theory opens the possibility of viewing Vovchok's fiction through the gender lens, with focalization highlighting past and present perspectives of the female narrators.[28]

2. Ukrainian and Russian Literature in the Nineteenth Century

Literature in the Russian Empire (including Ukraine) during the nineteenth century was marked as a period when the tradition of a second voice in Russian society, 'the alternative government'[29] was established. In other words, social themes and civic involvement became the dominant leitmotif of literature, the only possible albeit indirect way to challenge established ideas.[30] It was followed by the rise of Realism resulting from considerable social change, the end of a semi-feudal society and the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. The Romanticism of the first half of the century was followed by a gradual transformation into Realism which also became a challenge to the existing ideology and politico-social system of the Empire. Under the strict censorship during the reign of Nikolas I (1825-1855) writers nevertheless challenged the social injustice, above all the system of serfdom which existed in the whole Russian Empire,[31] including Ukraine as a colony. The theme of serfdom before its abolition in 1861 became the leitmotif of Russian and Ukrainian writers such as Ivan Turgenev (*Huntsmen's Notes*) and Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861).[32] Shevchenko was born a serf,

[28] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness."
[29] Joe Andrew *Writers and society during the rise of Russian realism*. London: Macmillan, 1980, p.163
[30] Ibid, p.153
[31] Joe Andrew *Writers and society during the rise of Russian realism*, p.117
[32] Richard Stites *The women's liberation movement in Russia: feminism, nihilism, and bolshevism, 1860-1930*, p.435

and alongside social injustice, he addressed the colonial oppression of his country through his poem *Haidamaky* (1840-1841).[33]

Within this context, women writers had to navigate both the difficulties of choosing acceptable themes and techniques as well as the literary circles that governed publishing. The work of Diana Greene has been particularly enlightening in this respect covering the fate of several women writers of the mid-nineteenth century.[34] The next subchapter will deal with these issues, setting the female context for Vovchok's writing, outlined in the subchapters after that. The second subchapter deals with her biography and the third with her place within Ukrainian language literature as analysed especially by Pavlyshyn from the national identity viewpoint. While Pavlyshyn takes this view, I outline the possibility of taking Showalter's gynocriticism as a prism through which to consider Vovchok's female perspective, especially through the first-person peasant and serf women narrators.

2.1 Russian Women Writers in Nineteenth Century Literature

While male literature of this time in the Russian Empire transformed from Romantism to Realism and addressed various social political themes under the strict surveillance and censorship of the Russian authorities, women's writing experienced its own difficulties. It was limited to certain topics. Social subjects were not usually acceptable for women writers. If they dared to write about the socio-political, military, or other male subjects, they had to device their own techniques of writing to avoid crossing limits set by patriarchal society. Therefore, their writing was limited to such subjects as pedagogical literature for children, and the literature of feelings and love.[35] Male writers critiqued women's writing according to what they considered higher themes such as nationalism and social

[33] "Шевченко Тарас" in [Onatskii] Є. Онацький *Українська Мала Енциклопедія*, Буенос-Айрес, Аргентині : Накладом Адміністратури УАПЦ, 1967 https://archive.org/stream/UkrMalaEn/kn_16_%D0%A3%D1%88-%D0%AF#page/n103/mode/2up

[34] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.4

[35] Arja Rosenholm and Irina Savkina. ""How Women Should Write": Russian Women's Writing in the Nineteenth Century." *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture* (2012): 161-207.

reform, seeing what women could and wanted to write about as of lesser importance. Women had to write about socially predetermined female themes and their endeavour to embrace a broader perspective was frowned upon; therefore, in terms of gynocriticism they were 'muted'.[36]

Women writers were faced with difficulties when dealing with the major movements of the period, Romanticism and Realism. The issues and themes employed by the leading male writers of these genres did not always match female concerns well. For example, the use of negative female imagery like the sexualised female muse or an objectified and 'assimilated' female nature in Romanticism made it difficult for women to engage in common literary devices with confidence.[37]

Diana Greene points out that Russian women poets were not included into the canonicity of Russian Romanticism. Alexander Pushkin as the main representative of this hierarchy, mentored only male poets such as Michael Lermontov. Diana Greene argues that even women poets with whom Pushkin was personally acquainted, for example Evdokia Rostopchina and Karolina Pavlova, were neither included in this canon nor mentored by Pushkin. Greene assigns this exclusion from the canon to the lack, in this case, of Pushkin's mentoring and indeed respect.[38] Greene points out that to study the work of those poets women, it is important to look at their works through gynocritical studies, in other words to analyse their words "defining women's literary traditions, and developing "interpretive strategies" appropriate to their work."[39] Besides, Greene argues that the works of both gender writers should not be treated separately, and in that way Elaine Showalter's central question "What is the difference of women's writing?" may be answered.[40] Greene in her work indeed compares Russian male and female poets, for example Iuliia Zhdanovskaia's poems are compared with Yevgenii Baratynsky's works.[41] That reveals how different and similar they can be. Zdanovskaia's poem does

[36] Edwin Ardener "Belief and the Problem of Women" in Shirley Ardener ed. *Perceiving Women*" London: Dent, 1977: 1-17 – p.5
[37] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, pp.3-4
[38] Ibid, p.8
[39] Ibid. p.9
[40] Ibid, p,9; Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.185
[41] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.4

not seem to be self-effacing as other women's poems look, the technique to withstand male critics, which Anna Miller describes as a "modesty topos."[42]

Even so, there is a wider pattern of gender stereotyping beyond schools of thought like Romanticism and Realism. Hélène Cixous explains male-centring and dominance in Western literary thought by the use of binary oppositions in which the first term (male) is considered superior to the second term (female): activity / passivity; sun / moon; culture / nature.[43] In this way, women are defined in terms of how they differ from men. Russian male authors such as Pushkin and Lermontov frequently used women to represent Otherness. In other words, female characters represented extreme stereotypes as opposed to more complex and complete figures. For example, the destructive female spirit in Pushkin's *Rusalka*, and Lermontov's sea princess are dangerous, alluring and inconstant.[44]

Even some women writers such as Mariia Lisitsyna and Praskov'ia Bakunina sometimes accepted these characteristics of female nature in their poems, including ones that are self-effacing, though Lisitsyna also portrays men as inconstant (as will also be seen in Vovchok's *Three Destinies*, chapter 6). Such poems include Lisitsyna's "Golubok" ("The dove") and Bakunina's "Groza" ("The storm"). However, Bakunina also has poems where she avoided such issues of female negative stereotypes by alluding to Slavic folklore and Greek legend with both male and female characters representing nature.[45] Vovchok does not neatly fall into the Romantic or Realist categories.[46] It will be important to note though how she portrays female characters whether real or legendary in her fiction.

Apart from the negative and in some cases positive views of nature, the latter can additionally represent a haven of comfort and safety for women writers as well as female characters. For instance,

[42] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.10
[43] H. Cixous and C. Clement *The Newly Born Woman*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1986, pp.63-5
[44] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, pp.3-4
[45] Ibid
[46] O.J. Frederiksen "Review: *Ukrainian Literature: Studies of the Leading Authors* by Clarence A. Manning; *The Ukraine: A Submerged Nation* by William H. Chamberlin." *The Russian Review, 4*(2), 1945, 97-99. doi:10.2307/125147 - pp.97-98

Nadezhda Teplova uses nature in this manner in her poem about her childhood “K rodnoi storone” (“To native parts,” 1827).[47]

Nature is likewise one of Vovchok’s main devices as Rudko points out in depicting a range of spiritual states of women characters. These spiritual states include comfort, safety, injustice, memory, and fate. Rudko also notes that the description of nature is associated with the Ukrainian landscapes and often is narrated by Ukrainian peasant women using the language of folklore.[48] In its turn, folklore is associated with legends, songs and sayings.

Moving on from considerations of women’s writing styles and themes, there are further difficulties to consider in their personal circumstances. Women had to put the needs of others ahead of their own activities, for example writing. Diana Greene for instance, points out that women writers were constantly interrupted by social circumstances and demands of family, spouses, pregnancy, and menstruation.[49] Women writers often did not have extended periods of time to write without disruption, therefore they turned to short genres of writing. This has not only been seen in Russian literature: Elaine Showalter suggested that women’s literary work, like for example *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, could be compared to that of quilts with a patchwork of smaller units sewn together.[50]

Interestingly, Percival Cundy in his article “Marko Vovchok” points out that when Marko Vovchok’s *Folk Stories* came out, she was immediately compared with Stowe.[51] However, the comparison was associated with the motive of social injustice (slavery in America, and serfdom in Ukraine).[52] Social commentary may have played a significant role in the comparison, but I suggest that the short story format may have cemented this resemblance.

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[47] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, pp.51-53
[48] [Rudko] О. В. Рудько “Втілення ідеї національної ідентичності у творчості Марка Вовчка,” p.7
[49] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.15
[50] Elaine Showalter "Piecing and writing." *The Poetics of Gender* (1986): 222-47 – see pp.234-237
[51] Percival Cundy “Marko Vovchok”
[52] Ibid

Yet regardless of all the hurdles women had to overcome in writing and subsequently publishing, some women writers of the nineteenth century in the Russian Empire and elsewhere in the West, searched for creative means of self-expression and wrote what they wanted to write about and in the ways, they wanted to write it.[53] This sometimes came about, as Greene points out, due to social circumstances when women became isolated as overseers of the domestic sphere. This meant that they often did not end up belonging to any formal schools of thoughts or style.[54] Indeed, not belonging to any particular formal groups or genres of writing was, to some extent, beneficial to them. Not belonging to any such groups, they gained some freedom in experimenting with their styles although within the topics allocated to them by social convention. For example, Zhadovskaia invented her own original style of meter and rhyme, while Khvoshchinskaia wrote in unusually lengthy but impressive lines.[55]

Whilst some female writers experimented with unusual forms of expression, others (as argued by Joe Andrew[56]) sought to make their situation explicit by directly addressing the issues. For example, concerns about restrictions caused by social convention were dealt with by Elena Gan, a writer of "Svetskaya Povest" ("Society Tales"), a noblewoman herself. In *Futile Gift* (1843) her unfinished novel, one of the protagonists Aniuta, is a Romantic poet who found her secure haven in writing poetry. For society at large she was not acceptable; for her mother she even appeared crazy. This real world posed a threat to her gift, a 'futile gift' as Gan named it, to establish herself as a poet in "the male world of competition and conflict."[57] That disapproval of her as a creator constitutes what Showalter calls the 'muted' part of literature, where women were silenced in their writing.[58] It is impossible not

[53] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.41
[54] Ibid, p.15
[55] Ibid, p.16
[56] Joe Andrew *Narrative and desire in Russian literature, 1822–49: The feminine and the masculine*. London: Macmillan, 1993, p.85
[57] Ibid
[58] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.200

to observe the author's personal concerns about women's authorship, that is the restricted or 'muted' side of writing.

As Joe Andrew further argues "what is striking about her oeuvre, is not merely the questions she asked about women's roles, but also the challenging way she dealt with these problems."[59] In her society tale, *Futile Gift*, she begins with a woman speaking in the first voice, discussing tales she has heard and events she has witnessed that concern inequality. Likewise, in *The Ideal*, *The Lockett* and *Society's Judgement*, the stories end with a woman's story in the first-person voice with which she "valorised the woman as writer."[60]

Marko Vovchok likewise used the first voice of a female narrator. Albeit while Gan's first voice belonged to a woman of the same upper class as Gan and Vovchok, Marko Vovchok's narrators were peasant or serf women.

One more problem observed by Diana Greene was that many talented women writers encountered significant obstacles in early to mid-nineteenth century Russia (and arguably later too) to get published and were lost to future generations and at best remained in archival form.[61] Even better-known women poets like Bakunina and Khvoshchinskaya had problems publishing much of their work.[62]

A possible way to be published as a woman author was to use male pseudonyms. For example, a poet woman Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia used a male pseudonym V. Krestovsky for much of her prose but not her poems.[63] Marko Vovchok also chose this path, and in subchapter 3.1, I will explore whether this is an entirely satisfactory explanation for her decision to adopt her pseudonym.

[59] Joe Andrew *Narrative and desire in Russian literature, 1822–49: The feminine and the masculine*. London: Macmillan, 1993, p.85
[60] Joe Andrew *Narrative and desire in Russian literature, 1822–49*, p.131
[61] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.3
[62] Ibid, p.7
[63] Ibid, p.43

2.2 Marko Vovchok's Pathway to the Ukrainian Culture and Language

Having analysed the background and circumstances of women's writing in the mid nineteenth century, I will examine Marko Vovchok's place within the literary achievement of this time. Firstly, in this subchapter, I will outline her personal and cultural background, and in the next subchapter, I will place her literary development within the framework of the Ukrainian language and literature. in addition, I will look at other scholars such as Marko Pavlyshyn who placed Marko Vovchok as an author who contributed to the development not only of a Ukrainian intellectual identity but also stated that 'universalism'[64] was "a key factor in the intellectual's identity" of her oeuvre.

And indeed, Marko Vovchok, despite having a Russian mother and being born in Russia, started her career by writing in Ukrainian.[65] However, T. Panasenko, the author of Marko Vovchok's biography, claims that she was of Ukrainian, Russian and Lithuanian origin.[66] Thereafter, her first encounter with the Ukrainian language and culture could have begun with her family when her amateur musician father sang her Ukrainian folk songs.[67]

Her traumatic childhood began with the early death of her father and consequent marriage of her mother to a villainous stepfather. As a young girl she was sent to a Kharkiv boarding school for nobility but did not graduate because she disliked it, and at the age of sixteen began to serve at her relative Katerina Petrivna Mardovina's house in Orel as governess for Katerina's children. Maria's position of poor relative with no room of her own was traumatic, so at the age of seventeen she married the Ukrainian writer and ethnographer Opanas Markovich who was eleven years her senior. He was exiled to Orel for his participation in the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius.[68] This was a secret

[64] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the nineteenth Century," p.65
[65] Marko Vovchok, née Maria Vilinskaia (1834-1907), born in Orel district in Russia with an army officer Olexandr Oleksiiovich Vilinski as her father, whilst her mother Praskovya Petrivna Danilova was from the Russian nobility, and her paternal grandmother was from the Lithuanian gentry – see [Panasenko] T. M. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий"
[66] [Panasenko] T. M. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий"; Patrick Waddington "O Marko Vovchok; vospominaniya." *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, no. 2, 1988: 186-188; B.B. Lobach-Zhuchenko "Vovchok, Marko and Turgenev, I.S. (Several Errors and Unknown Biographical Facts)." *Russkaia Literatura* 2 (1983): 143-147
[67] Ibid
[68] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the Nineteenth Century," p.63

society which strove to abolish serfdom, and campaign for equality among Slavic people and the development of the Ukrainian language and culture.[69]

As an ardent supporter of the Ukrainian language and culture as well as an opponent of social injustice and serfdom, Opanas probably had an influence on Maria Vilinskaia (Vovchok's maiden name) when she began writing in Ukrainian, the language which she learnt while living in various Ukrainian cities and meeting simple peasant women in the markets and various gatherings.[70]

Her Ukrainian pieces written at the beginning of her career (1850s-60s) appear to be the most successful. According to Ukrainian poet Ivan Franko, her most valuable and best works are her Ukrainian-language works.[71] Although she never stopped writing and translating while living in Western Europe and later Russia, she resumed writing in Ukrainian only by the end of her life when she wrote some Ukrainian notes and her novel *Haidamaky*.[72] With this background, it is now important to assess her place at the time within the wider Ukrainian literary scene.

2.3 Ukrainian Language: a woman's voice as a way of finding a space in the patriarchal milieu

This subchapter reviews critical opinion about why Vovchok chose to write in the Ukrainian language, especially given her mother tongue was Russian. A further factor to consider is her decision to use serf or peasant women as narrators despite her noble background.

The peculiar state of the Ukrainian language of that time in Tsarist Russia poses an additional question as to why any writer would use it: it was and had been after all intensively discouraged by the Russian

[69] Yurii Tereshchenko "The 19th Century in Ukraine: Assimilation Impossible." *The Ukrainian Week, International edition*. 26 September 2014
[70] [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий," p.403
[71] [Rudko] О. В. Рудько "Втілення ідеї національної ідентичності у творчості Марка Вовчка", p.2; Ivan Franko "Maria Markovich (Marko Markovich). Posthumous mention / Ivan Franko" // *Ivan Frank. Works in 20 volumes*, Volume XVII. Literary-critical articles – K., 1955, pp.444-447}; Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the nineteenth Century," p.63
[72] V. Boyko *Marko Vovchok*. Leipzig: Ukrains'ka Nakladn'a, 1918

authorities in attempts to Russify the Ukrainian elite since the annexation of Ukraine in 1654.[73] Russian had ousted Ukrainian in the administration, schools and churches.[74]

Many writers of Ukrainian origin wrote in Russian, a good example being Nikolai Gogol. However, as Pavlyshyn points out some authors wrote in Ukrainian such as Ivan Kotliarevsk'y (*Eneida*, 1789), Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko's epistolary prose "Petition to Mr Publisher" in *Utrenniaia zvezda* (*The Morning Star*, 1833) and Ievhen Hrebinka's "To Our Countrymen, More or Less" in *Lastivka* (*The Swallow*, 1841). They wrote in an eccentric, burlesque manner. Even the best-known Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko wrote his diary of 1857-58 and his short stories in the same fashion.[75] Yet Shevchenko wrote his poems (*Haidamaky* and many others) in pure Ukrainian, his mother tongue. He, like others, regarded Ukrainian as more suitable for the expression of emotions in poetry and Russian as more suitable for the structured language of prose.[76]

Despite being a native Russian speaker, Vovchok became the Ukrainian language's first woman prose writer.[77] As mentioned above, perhaps her ethnographer husband Markovich, a staunch defender of Ukrainian identity and language, influenced her. He encouraged her to write more after reading her first story of the collection "Sister," sending it to the Ukrainian publisher and writer Panteleimon Kulish. This marked the beginning of her Ukrainian literary achievements.[78]

The importance of her work for Ukrainian national identity is underlined by the weaker level of success of similar works in Russian. As Pavlyshyn points out, Vovchok's later collection of stories *Tales From Russian Peasant Life* written in Russian and published as *Rasskazy iz narodnogo russkogo byta* (1859) did not reach the same level of acclaim. From Pavlyshyn's point of view of intellectual identity the

[73] Yurii Tereshchenko "The 19th Century in Ukraine: Assimilation Impossible."
[74] In 1863 Infamous Valuev Circular further imposed restrictions on it, and in 1876 it was entirely prohibited; Ibid
[75] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the nineteenth Century," pp.61-62
[76] Ibid
[77] Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak *Feminists despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884–193*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988
[78] [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий"

"imperial language there already existed as an established sphere of intellectual communication."[79] Therefore, he argues that her contribution in Russian literature did not match her Ukrainian success.[80]

As for her Ukrainian oeuvre, Pavlyshyn places Vovchok firmly within the context of the creation of a national language. In the nineteenth century, elites, especially European elites, used their national languages to discuss and present universal Enlightenment ideas like social justice, human dignity, and equality before the law.[81] For them, their education and intellectual experience in their own language permitted them to achieve this with ease. However, the Ukrainian elite, at least those regarding themselves as a national unit separate from Russia, had more difficulties. Their knowledge of Russian was more than sufficient to express universal social and political ideas, but their Ukrainian was limited. It was restricted to what they had learnt as children interacting with peasant servants and children.[82] This Ukrainian did not equip them to even imagine coping with complicated ideas.

Authors like Shevchenko (even though born a serf was still educated in Russian) and Kvitka-Osnovianenko could use Ukrainian for emotional and patriotic purposes (see above) but regarded Russian as the medium for expressing intellectual ideas.[83] What Vovchok achieved was to reach beyond her Russian education to imagine what Ukrainian peasants would say when trying to express universal concerns such as justice and fairness.[84] She did this by telling her stories through making the first voice narrator a Ukrainian peasant or serf woman. She did not attempt to superimpose the unlikely ability to use abstract concepts and other devices used by the elites, but simply had her peasant and serf women express these ideas in their own natural language and way of reacting and commenting.[85] This meant that her Ukrainian prose laid the basis for a universal and natural language

[79] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the nineteenth Century," p.69
[80] Ibid
[81] Ibid, pp.63 & 65
[82] Ibid, p.62
[83] Ibid, pp.69-70
[84] Ibid, pp.64-65
[85] Ibid

for the expression of higher-level concerns. Pavlyshyn argues that this was a vital missing element in the creation of a Ukrainian national identity.[86]

Although Pavlyshyn referred to Vovchok's contribution to the establishment of the Ukrainian intellectual identity through the milieu of the Ukrainian language, he further asserts that it does not diminish the importance of its universal significance for the dignity of the culture of all repressed people.[87] As for the Ukrainian intellectual identity, before Marko Vovchok's prose, in the words of Pavlyshyn "there was no usable tradition of neutral, 'serious' public issues of, indeed, any matters requiring intellectual abstraction or generalisation"[88] – a lack of a serious intellectual version of the Ukrainian language. Although Vovchok's Ukrainian fiction is far from being in an intellectual environment - her characters and narrators are mainly peasant or serf women and her language is endowed with folklore elements - her peasant and serf women are "independent of particular social or other group interests, and that authorises the intellectual to speak on behalf of society - indeed of humanity at large."[89]

From a gender perspective, there is room to explore whether in her Ukrainian peasant / serf women's voices, she made any contributions to women's perspectives too, whether on a national or even on a universal scale. For this research, the work of Elaine Showalter's concept of 'wilderness' is used as a way forward. In her gynocritical approaches in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," she argues that women write within a male-dominated structure. However, "women's culture[90] redefines women's activities and goals from a woman-centred point of view."[91] Women writers form a 'muted group', mediating their beliefs through allowable forms of the dominant structure.[92] In other words, they

[86] Marko Pavlyshyn "Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the nineteenth Century," p.62
[87] Ibid, p.65
[88] Ibid, p.62
[89] Ibid, p.65
[90] 'Women's culture' is defined by Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness." *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 179-205 as the way in which women's bodies, language and psyche are interpreted within social and cultural environments (p.197).
[91] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.198
[92] Ibid, p.200

speak through it.[93] Finding their own way to express themselves, women writers cross the bounds of the male dominated structure of language into the wilderness, a no man's land.[94] Examples of this phenomenon have already been outlined for Russian literature earlier in this chapter in particular using the work of Diana Greene.

Furthermore, Showalter explores whether "Sex difference in language use can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization, or culture; whether women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked."[95] The biological language difference emerges from the different bodily experiences of men (e.g. phallic) and women (e.g. ovarian).[96] The linguistic social structure and cultural language is male-centred, but includes a separate unity of language for each gender like Ukrainian peasant women's songs. However, to avoid essentialism, these differences must be given historic and cultural context as in Greene's work on Russian nineteenth century female poets.

2.4 Conclusion

Diana Greene's *Reinventing Russian Women* showed how Russian women poets (and prose writers) of the nineteenth century performed and established themselves in the patriarchal society – in this case within Romanticism. How they used various techniques to overcome the social constraints imposed by patriarchal society. In other words, they comprised a 'muted' part of society. The techniques included the use of natural imagery, pseudonyms, short works, inventive and nonconventional methods (not participating in a particular genre) and the explicit discussion of women's experiences (as in Gan's case).

[93] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness,", p.200
[94] Ibid, p.200
[95] Ibid, p.190
[96] Ibid, p.187

Within the framework of the Russian Empire, Vovchok as a Russian born woman began her career writing in the Ukrainian language. Only men had thus far engaged in Ukrainian writing, although it was sort of burlesque usage of the language. Her role thus according to Pavlyshyn was as the founder of a neutral intellectual Ukrainian prose language, a key component of national identity. Pavlyshyn and Rudko assigned a special role for her first voice narrator technique. According to those critics, this technique was based on the use of the vernacular language, folklore and Ukrainian peasant culture.

As for the female aspects of her writing, Showalter's wilderness theory opens the possibility of viewing Vovchok's fiction through the gender lens, with focalization highlighting past and present perspectives of the female narrators.

3. Marko Vovchok's Debut: *Folk Stories*

This chapter will cover the debut of Marko Vovchok, and gaining not only fame, but also criticism through her *Folk Stories* collection, by Ukrainian and Russian authors and critics. This further raised doubts about her authorship. The similarity or even the suspicion of some degree of plagiarism of Turgenev's work was suggested. I will analyse two stories of the collection "Sister" and "Lazy Bones" using ideas from gynocriticism like Greene and Showalter and from Bal's focalization concept.

3.1 Doubts and Influences

There were eleven stories in Vovchok's first collection of *Folk Stories* (*Narodni Opovidannia*) when first published by the Ukrainian ethnographer and writer Panteleimon Kulish in 1857.[97] Upon publishing the collection, she took the male pseudonym of Marko Vovchok. One version for this states that Marko sounded like her husband's name Markovich. Yet another version states that Marko was a popular name, and there is a village called Vovchok (Vovchyk) in the Nemirov district. Nemirov was one of the places where Vovchok lived in Ukraine. Therefore, the name Marko Vovchok became a sort of symbol of "a narrator from the people."[98]

Another factor in her decision may have been to follow the Western European fashion for taking a male pseudonym (for instance: George Sand, George Eliot), or from a commercial point of view believing that a male author's name would attract more readers.[99] Diana Greene's study showed that some Russian Romantic women poets also did this (see subchapter 2.1).[100] Apart from her Ukrainian male pseudonym, she also gained the sobriquet of the Ukrainian George Sand from readers and critics of the *Folk Stories*.[101]

The title of the collection and the link of her pseudonym to an actual village name in Ukraine suggest an assembly of folk stories based on the lives of peasants and serfs. Later some of her other stories like *The Boarding School Girl* (*Institutka)* were added, though they were originally separate publications.[102] Here I stick to the integrity of the original collection. Some of the stories of the collection were about the social and family relationships of free Ukrainian peasants, while most of them deal with life under the conditions of serfdom.

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[97] [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий," pp.403-404
[98] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, Харків: Фоліо 2019*;* [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий," p.403: translated by me from Ukrainian, N.B.P
[99] [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий"; V. Boyko *Marko Vovchok*; [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*
[100] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century,* p.43
[101] Victor O. Buyniak "Marko Vovchok and Leo Tolstoi." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 14.2 (1972): 300-314 – see p.307
[102] Percival Cundy "Marko Vovchok," p.5

The very first appearance of the stories brought her success, but at the same time brought disbelief that a Russian woman could write in such beautiful Ukrainian vernacular language. This was especially the case among the Ukrainian community in St. Petersburg including prominent Ukrainian and Russian literary figures.[103] Kulish himself at the beginning did not spare any accolades regarding her rich language of "ordinary folk, as they adopt a song, and speak to us as simple people speak to the cleverest person with the kindest heart, the purest soulful literature."[104] Later on, however, he claimed that the style of the writing was that of Opanas Markovich.[105] Whether it was for personal reasons (he was infatuated with her)[106] or some other unknown reason, he failed to appreciate Marko Vovchok's linguistic abilities of rendering Ukrainian text from a female perspective.

Even Ivan Franko, a famous Ukrainian writer, although appreciating her unique style, I would argue, was not able to fully comprehend that Marko Vovchok's rendering of the Ukrainian first-person voice was her search to reinvent language. This reinvention was further to establish a discourse outside the patriarchal structure. Franko instead simply understood that Vovchok had been influenced by Taras Shevchenko who recommended her to write the Ukrainian stories.[107] In other words, he placed her within the dominant male structure of literary developments.

Franko though was certain that Vovchok was the sole author of the collection, when in 1902 he wrote about the *Folk Stories* in the tenth book of *Kyivska Starina*.[108] In it, he demonstrated that her entire oeuvre with its unique style proved that she was genuinely the author. However, doubts about her authorship were only finally put to rest after Vovchok's death in 1907, when the Ukrainian critic V. Domanitski studied and analysed her notes. He concluded that she and only she, Marko Vovchok, alone was the author of *Folk Stories*.[109]

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[103] V. Boyko, *Marko Vovchok*, Translation done by me N.B.P.
[104] Ibid, p.10.
[105] Ibid, pp.10-12
[106] Serhiy Osoka "Marko Vovchok – Ukrainian Emma Bovary." *Opinion* Thursday 21 Dec 2018. Available at: https://opinionua.com/en/2018/12/21/marko-vovchok/
[107] V. Boyko, *Marko Vovchok*, p.31
[108] Ibid, p.31
[109] Ibid. p.31

Additionally, at the time of its publication, many critics stated that apart from Taras Shevchenko she was influenced by Ivan Turgenev's *Huntsmen's Notes* (*Zapiski Okhotnika*). At a later stage, in 1884 the Russian critic K. Leont'ev openly accused her of copying Turgenev's *Zapiski Okhotnika*.[110]

Certainly, I would strongly argue that Turgenev had some kind of influence, not only on *Folk Stories* but also on other works of Vovchok (for instance, *Three Destinies*): the subject of serfdom and peasantry, the penchant for landscape description and the psychological characters are Turgenev traits. Besides, according to many critics[111] Turgenev and Marko Vovchok had a strong friendship and Turgenev remained her mentor for many years while she lived in West Europe. This friendship played an important role in her career. In 1859, Turgenev edited her own translation of *Folk Stories* and consequently translated her other pieces.[112] Unlike Diana Greene's Russian women poets who did not enjoy a great deal of recognition due to the lack of men mentors (see subchapter 2.2 for the example of Pushkin), Vovchok did gain fame with her debut of *Folk Stories* for she was highly appreciated by above all by Turgenev, Shevchenko and others.[113] One would not exclude the role of her mentors in her case.

As for any resemblance with Turgenev, one of the main resemblances is the peasant and serfdom topic recounted by the first-person narrator. In Turgenev's case, it was a typical aristocrat, a hunter, who observed serfs and peasants from his superior, slightly condescending position, not devoid of irony but at the same time with respect to simple Russian men.[114] His characters have nicknames such as Khor (meaning 'ferret', from his story "Khor and Kalinich") or Blokha (meaning 'flea' from his story "Kastian from Krasivaya Mech"). Furthermore, Turgenev did not fail to appreciate their peasant wisdom and humanity as Marko Vovchok did in her works. Turgenev's Khor was practical with a head

[110] Jordan E. Kurland "Leont'ev's Views on the Course of Russian Literature." *American Slavic and East European Review* 16.3 (1957): 260-274.
[111] V. Boyko, *Marko Vovchok*, p.57
[112] Percival Cundy "Marko Vovchok"
[113] V. Boyko, *Marko Vovchok*, p.57
[114] "Huntsman's Notes" [Из Записок Охотника] – pp.5-60 in И.С. Тургенев *Избранные Произведения*, редакция текста, И. Примечания & Н.Л. Бродского, Москва, Ленингра: ОГИЗ государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1946

for administration, and a rationalist, while Kalinich, another protagonist of the same story was idealistic, romantic, excitable and a dreamer (from his story "Khor and Kalinich"). Kastian (known as 'blokha') was considered a simpleton – 'urodivii' (simple), but his humane qualities as a protector of nature are relevant even nowadays. He gently reprimanded the aristocrat hunter for killing God's creatures - "birds and animals."

Unlike in Turgenev's stories, there is no irony or condescension in Vovchok's *Folk Stories*. In *Huntsman's Notes*, no distinct female characters other than Lukeria in "Living Relic" ("Zhivie moshchi") are portrayed. Women themselves are presented as 'Baba' - in Russian this has often been used at least since the eighteenth century as an insulting term for a woman,[115] who has to be beaten for her own good (see "Khor and Kalinich"). In contrast, Vovchok's characters are in most cases women, both positive and negative, and even some of the titles of her stories allude to this ("Sister" ("Sestra" in Ukrainian); "Lazy Bones" (in Ukrainian "Ledashchitsa"), *The Boarding School Girl* (*Institutka* in Ukrainian) – the last two are grammatically of feminine gender).

Showalter suggests that critics should not assume that women writers "imitate their male predecessors or revise them and that this simple dualism is adequate to describe the influences on the woman's text," and they (women writers) "can generate [their] own experience and symbols which are not simply the obverse of the male tradition."[116] Thus the critic K. Leont'ev by claiming[117] that Vovchok copied Turgenev's *Huntsmen's Notes*, failed to grasp the very different approaches of Vovchok and Turgenev.

[115] Anisimov gives an example of a Tsarina referred to as Baba when being criticised as an unsuitable and incompetent ruler- in E.V. Anisimov The Question of Women in Power in the Eighteenth Century. In M. Di Salvo, D.H. Kaiser & V.A. Kivelson (eds.) *Word and Image in Russian History. Essays in Honor of Gary Marker*. (pp. 191-205). Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2015 – see p.200; Smith gives examples of the use of Baba among men insulting women co-workers in Stephen A. Smith "The social meanings of swearing: Workers and bad language in late imperial and early soviet Russia." *Past & present* 160.1 (1998): 167-202 – see pp.176, 189 & 196

[116] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.204

[117] Jordan E. Kurland "Leont'ev's Views on the Course of Russian Literature."

In the following subchapter through the lens of gynocriticism and the concept of focalization and by analysing Marko Vovchok's stories "Sister" and "Lazy Bones", I will look at the significance of her strategies in employing a Ukrainian peasant/ serf woman narrator to recount the texts.

3.2 The Voice from Within ("Sister")

"Sister" is the first story of the collection. As T.M. Panasenko puts it: "After a few secret hesitations, doubts and an inner struggle, Marko Vovchok dared to write the story of "Sister" ("Sestra")."[118] The story itself is interesting in that it was her first attempt to portray the character of a free peasant women. "Sister" is the title of the story and at the same time the main protagonist who narrates one episode of her life, as a first voice narrator.

Sister is a hard-working free peasant woman. At the beginning of the story, she recollects her happy childhood: her beloved father who mothered her and her brother, after the death of their mother, and who never remarried for the sake of his children - Sister and her brother. Her marriage was also happy although did not last long, only two years. Her husband died young and she was taken by her father back to her birth home. However, the death of her father, soon after, heralded new difficulties in her life: her sister-in-law became abusive and in spite of Sister's great love for her brother and nephews and nieces, she left home in search of some work in another village. There she found some work at an old, blind priest's house where she looked after a young, orphaned granddaughter of the priest. Like her father, the old priest was very kind to her. But a messenger from Sister's brother arrived one day and informed Sister that her brother's family, especially the children missed her. Sister returned to her brother's house and gave them everything that she had raised from the sale of her husband's house and the money she had earned. That still did not satisfy her abusive sister-in-law and Sister left the family once more, this time seeking work further away from home - in Kyiv. In a Kyiv

[118] [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий," p.403

market she found a position with a petty bourgeois family household. There too an abusive daughter of her landlady, unsatisfied with her petty bourgeois social position, never stopped humiliating and abusing Sister. However, proud Sister would not allow herself to be abused, to the extent that she wanted to leave the house:

> "God be with you" - she said, "find somebody to serve you. Nobody ever beat me, and God save me, nobody will ever do it whilst I am alive."[119]

Despite the abuse of the young landlady, she decides to stay in the house to earn some money to help her brother who had experienced hardship and found her and came himself to fetch her back. But Sister wants to help him out and asks for money in advance and decides to stay at the household for two more months until the end of the year. Her final hopeful words are:

> "I will stay until the end of the year, God will help me, I will find a nice place for myself. Where there is a will there you will find some trouble."[120]

When reading the biography of Marko Vovchok's early life (see subchapter 2.2) - her childhood and later her life in Ukrainian towns and cities, it is difficult to resist the feeling that she drew her inspiration for the story from her own life. Firstly, she lost her own father who died when she was young, though he had clearly left unforgettable memories in her life. This included elements of Ukrainian culture, songs, and language, and this can be identified with male characters in the story: Sister's father, the old priest who was like a father, the Kyiv household's father. The early loss of her father and the appearance of a drunkard stepfather created some insecurity in young Vovchok's life. Her consequent life in the Mardovins' household as a poor relative added to her insecurity, which may be compared with Sister's humiliating position in her brother's household and the Kyiv household.

So, Sister delivers her story from an abused woman's point of view. However difficult it is to imagine a noble woman having something in common with a peasant, it is important to go beyond class

[119] [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий," p.256
[120] This is a Ukrainian proverb - [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.266

identity. Vovchok's perspective is delivered as a female one which the author shared with her protagonist, Sister. The female characters in the story recall the behaviour of the female relatives of Marko Vovchok. With them, she was allocated a position near to that of a servant, and she had to get away by marrying at the tender age of seventeen (see subchapter 2.2). Therefore, it seems that the first-person voice narrative employed in the story magnifies the anguish which Vovchok might have experienced and felt in her youth. Despite her independent character living apart from her husband abroad, she like many other women of her time always depended on mentors: Turgenev and others, who supported her in various aspects of her life, such as finance and work opportunities.[121]

Marko Vovchok's first Ukrainian heroine, Sister, is likewise independent, but she is somehow always bound to the good will of people around her. Foremost among them are her brother, his difficult wife, and the household where she serves. In other words, she is free but not entirely. There is always competition with other women for space and security: her sister-in-law and the daughter of the landlord. It is unlikely a man would have experienced the same levels of insecurity in the elite society of Vovchok's peers. Therefore, Marko Vovchok to some extent relied on her own experience and wrote what would have been difficult to imagine men writing, either due to a lack of interest or awareness. For male authors, that would have been an observation from the distance, while for female writers, the experience would have come from within themselves: "Observation from an exterior point of view could never be the same as comprehension from within."[122]

The scene of the Kyiv market where she went to look for her job is one of the proofs that Vovchok relied on her experience, for she frequented the Ukrainian town markets[123] where she socialised with peasant women as mentioned above. Hence her vernacular peasant woman voice and rich description of the market scenes:

[121] [Panasenko] Т. М. Панасенко "Талант Сильный, Чудовий," pp.404-405
[122] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.199
[123] [Rudko] О. В. Рудько "Втілення ідеї національної ідентичності у творчості Марка Вовчка"

> "I stand and wonder: crowds of people, mingling, stopping on each other's toes, coming, going, chatting, shouting - people, masters, petty bourgeois; knocking, rumbling. That one sells his goods, another bargains. Two young women chat nicely away on the cart, and here children are arguing - unable to share something. A woman seller, dark in complexion, is standing against the sun rustling the corals and shouting out…"[124]

A further aspect likely drawn from her experience during her stay in Ukraine is her emotional description of nature in Ukrainian villages. As mentioned above (in chapter 2), her name Marko Vovchok itself might have been taken from a Nemirov village. In "Sister" for instance, the familiar landscape of Sister's home is also associated with the memory of her childhood and therefore a feeling of security. On her way in search of work she goes up the hill, looks down on her own village and recalls the memory of her happy childhood which floods into her consciousness.

The first-person female narrator depicts not only her vision of the natural world surrounding her, but also that of her emotional ties and relationships. These become obvious when she talks about the landscape of her village: her positive attitude towards her male relatives and other male characters (her father, her brother, the old priest), her proud character when she stands her ground against her abusive mistress in the Kyiv household.

Through the lens of gender, as mentioned before, it was a revolutionary step in Ukrainian literature for a high-born woman to describe the peasant woman's lot through a woman's voice, although I would say it is possible to identify her (Sister's) voice with the author's (Vovchok's) voice and experience. That voice intensifies the experience of insecurity, dependence, but at the same pride and hopefulness which I would argue can be attributed to Marko Vovchok herself, and likewise not only to Ukrainian women but in general to all women finding themselves in similar situations.

In the next subchapter, the story "Lazy Bones" will be analysed. It is part of the same collection as "Sister." It is also narrated in the first-person voice, although with significant differences that demonstrate Vovchok's range of perspectives and ideas as we will see.

[124] [Vovchok, Marko: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.260

3.3 A Woman's Body: "Lazy Bones" ("Ledashchitsa")

The narrator, in the second selected story "Lazy Bones,"[125] is a serf woman who narrates from her own perspective about her and her fellow serf women and the events of their lives in their communal household.

In this household of oppressed serf women, two women, a mother (Gorpina) and her daughter (Nastia), lament their supposedly lost freedom as descendants of free Cossacks. They present two very different character dispositions in response to their situation: the mother is gloomy and silent; the daughter young, bright and bubbly. Both women rebel against their loss of freedom. However, it is not clear from the story whether either of them was born in freedom, or whether it is just a historical memory of the freedom of their ancestors which doubles their desire to get away from their oppressor.

Their oppressor is an impoverished princess who in turn constantly refers to her 'glorious' past and origin and laments her somewhat 'difficult' circumstances. Her point of reference is a portrait of her late father (a bankrupt prince), which she treats as if it were a living person. Every time she wants to scold household serfs, she addresses the portrait in search of her late father's approval. For her, her father is the ultimate authority, despite having deprived her of her inheritance due to his financial incompetence. She oppresses the serfs using her father's portrait as a perceived source of patriarchal authority. For example, the princess constantly and dementedly seeks approval from the portrait every time she accuses young Nastia (the serf daughter) of being lazy and drunk – a lazy bones. The landlady knows that her position is precarious given the rules of the period: she has no right to possess serfs unless she owns the land. She could lose her serfs according to the law. She seeks approval from

[125] "Lazy Bones" ["Ледащиця"] – Марко Вовчок *Сон. Одарка. Чари. Ледащиця; народні оповіданя*, В Kolomyï: Галицька накладня якова Оренштайна, 1903, pp.42-67; "Lazy Bones" – Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*. Translated by Maria K. Manchester: TSK Group LLC, pp. 221-239

her father's portrait to justify her appalling treatment of the women's household, thus exacerbating her 'weak woman's' position by relying on a patriarch, her father.

Marko Vovchok, by having the first-person voice narrator frame the landlady's character in terms of her 'relationship' with her late father's portrait. This depicts the weak but capricious landlady without having to describe her character, but instead implying it through her behaviour, constantly deferring to the portrait of her father.

As for Gorpina, the mother serf, the narrator describes her as a silent and decisive woman and highlights her desire for freedom. Uneducated (serfs were illiterate) but smart, she tries to gain her own and her daughter's freedom in a legal way by applying for her freedom from the authorities. That step of hers unsettles the landlady, and she appears a great deal weaker when she capriciously complains to her male tenants about Gorpina's 'unimaginable behaviour'[126] of trying to gain freedom. Once more she addresses male authorities, her male tenants, and seeks consolation and approval from them. Gorpina resigns herself to her situation, but her daughter rebels and looks for freedom via her body.

Nastia unlike her mother does not succumb to her fate but seeks a different way of freedom: she trades her body for it. She sleeps with a man hoping to achieve her goals. To overcome the horrors of selling her own body, she becomes a drunkard. She has a baby, but she refuses to feed the baby. She does not grieve the death of the baby as most mothers do; a role which her own mother and the narrator as a fellow female householder take upon themselves. The narrator herself thus becomes an actor within the story. She and the mother together wash and prepare the body of the child to bury. Eventually all serf women in the household receive their freedom including the narrator. However, by that time, Nastia loses her mind and dies. The narrator never directly says she is mad, although it is obvious that what has happened.

[126] "Lazy Bones" – Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, pp. 221-239

Thus, the narrator merely observes that Nastia behaves in a strange way, not recognising anyone or never ceasing to shout, begging her own mother not to kick her out of the house for being a drunkard and a lazy bones. Her last words before she dies are: "It's cold out there,"… "why must you send me away?"[127]

It is noteworthy that the woman serf narrator does not give any explicit description of Nastia's body and what happens with her body. It would be difficult to imagine any serf woman describing all these events in a bolder way. The modesty and silence imposed upon women about such a subject in a patriarchal society would not permit a more explicit description of the events. Yet, the first-person voice of the serf woman faithfully delivers all the horrors to the reader, in this case the corporeal ones, which women and few or no men go through (the selling of her own body, childbirth and lactation).

Marko Vovchok conveys women's biological functions,[128] implementing the language used by serf women themselves in social situations surrounding these functions as encountered by serf women. She describes, without any explicit details, young Nastia's body and what she does with her body. In this manner, she succeeds in portraying the physical and mental tragedy that Nastia experienced for the sake of freedom, not condemning her as society might demand.

3.4 Conclusion

The first Ukrainian collection of Marko Vovchok *Folk Stories* (two of which have been discussed in detail above) brought her recognition among Russian and Ukrainian writers and critics such as Ivan Turgenev, Taras Shevchenko and others. The collection was published by Ukrainian writer Panteleimon Kulish and later translated into Russian by herself but edited by Turgenev. The latter consequently became her good friend and mentor, which ultimately helped her to establish herself in

[127] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.239
[128] cf. Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.189

the world of writers. Apart from accolades, her collection also raised some criticism. The authenticity of her being an author was consequently proved by Franko and Domanitski. As for accusations of copying Turgenev, Vovchok's narrator was a Ukrainian peasant /serf woman, while Turgenev's narrator was a representative of his own class.

The first story of the collection "Sister" described peasant women's oppressed lives. Vovchok's own life experience helped her to recreate an oppressed woman's albeit a peasant woman's life. Therefore, the story was told from within herself rather than from the distance. While the story "Sister" was about a free peasant and her life, the story "Lazy Bones" describes the unbearable state of Ukrainian serfs narrated by a serf woman.

The continuation of the female serf experience is explored in the next chapter with a longer story which Marko Vovchok published after *Folk Stories*.

4. *The Boarding School Girl* (*Institutka*): Unity and Love Amidst Abuse

The story *The Boarding School Girl (Institutka),*[129] first appeared in Turgenev's translation in 1860,[130] and in 1862 it was published by Panteleimon Kulish in Ukrainian in the journal *Osnova,* in Saint Petersburg.[131] In this first Ukrainian edition, it is dedicated to Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian poet.[132]

[129] In some translations - *The Aristocrat* – Percival Cundy "Marko Vovchok," p.9
[130] Percival Cundy "Marko Vovchok," p.5
[131] "Boarding School Girl" [Институтка] – [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, Харків: Фоліо 2019, pp.277-319
[132] Віктор Дудко "Марко Вовчок у журналі «Основа»: реалії і міфи." *Спадщина. Літературне джерелознавство. Текстологія*, 2007

Shevchenko valued Marko Vovchok highly and called her his daughter and like Turgenev mentored her.[133]

Like many of her earlier Ukrainian stories, *Institutka* concerns serfdom. Unlike her previous stories, this work is relatively long and contains several subplots and more characters. Again, the first-person narrator, a serf woman Ustia, herself a participant in the plot, recounts the story. The difference with the previous stories is that the first person singular 'I' is frequently replaced by the first-person plural 'we'. That means that instead of the narrator considering herself an individual, she refers to herself and her fellow serf women, who all work and socialise in the same household, as a collective 'we'. 'We' helps to reinforce the sense of unity and solidarity. The serf women sing folk songs while working and resting together. Vovchok further demonstrates this through incorporating the vernacular Ukrainian language, folk songs, proverbs, sayings, and serf culture, especially women's gatherings and the practices associated with them.[134]

Another leitmotif, no less important, is that of abuse. The main narrator and many characters of the story are mentally and physically abused, among them a young mother, Katria, and an old woman, the granny, by the Institutka (the granddaughter of their mistress). The theme of motherhood stands out as an acute example of abuse. There are two cases of this motherhood abuse: that of the abused mother Katria who loses her child, and another mother figure the granny, also physically and mentally abused by the mistress of the house.

As for the main narrator, Ustia narrates her own story too, her love for her fellow (male) serf Prokop, her hopes, and aspirations. Despite the hardship of serfdom which brings a lot of difficulties into her life, Ustia remains hopeful and cheerful. She prefers to gain her freedom by leaving the household with her husband who has to serve in the military for twenty-five years.

[133] Serhiy Osoka "Marko Vovchok – Ukrainian Emma Bovary." *Opinion* Thursday 21 Dec 2018. Available at: https://opinionua.com/en/2018/12/21/marko-vovchok/

[134] [Rudko] О. В. Рудько "Втілення ідеї національної ідентичності у творчості Марка Вовчка"

4.1 Ustia and her Fellow Serf Friends

As an orphan, Ustia, the narrator, never knew her parents nor any parental love and care. Surrounded by strangers and being homeless, she felt lonely. This was because nobody remembered her existence, and took no notice whether she was hungry, sick or cold. Her happy disposition protected her even when she was beaten. She would cry her eyes out but would laugh soon after, citing a Ukrainian proverb:

> "There's trouble that cries, and there's one that jumps around - that last one is my kind of trouble."
>
> Or "People always wonder I'm so merry as if I've never known grief."[135]

She recounts how at the age of ten, she was taken to an old lady's manor house. She felt happier there, because she acquired a stable place to live and most importantly friends – the other young serf women of the household. The previous insecurity from a lack of a sense of belonging was balanced out by her new friendships with those other women who shared her fate as a lowly serf.

However, the narrator goes on to recount an adult serf life where the misery increases again. The cruelty of the serfs' new mistress, Institutka, is clearly one of the main causes of the vicissitudes of their lives. Their lives are at the mercy of the manipulative, self-indulgent, oppressive, self-centred selfish granddaughter of the old landlady and owner of the serfs including Ustia herself.

In order to show the shared fate of herself and her fellow serf women, the narrator Ustia, often uses the plural 'we' instead of the singular 'I'. That way the sense of unity, friendship and understanding of each other's troubles caused by oppression becomes a common bond.

Gynocriticism is a good source of critical ideas to help interpret this text. In Elizabeth Abel's theory of female bonding, she uses Chodorow's core gender theory[136] of the importance of female friendship in

[135] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.71

[136] Chodorow suggests that boys are brought up with a negative gender identity with respect to their mothers, whereas girls are brought up with a positive one reinforced by their communality and sense of continuity with their mothers – see C. Nancy *The reproduction of mothering: psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978

contemporary women's novels to demonstrate the dynamics of female friendship.[137] I would suggest that these dynamics are influenced by a female psychological state caused by their insecure position in society in the case of this story. That refers most acutely to the state of the serf woman: the most oppressed and 'muted'[138] position in mid-nineteenth century Russian and Ukrainian society, being both female and serf at the same time. This sense of insecurity, though common to women writers and their female fictional characters, varies from place to place and from period to period according to "diverse cultural situations."[139] For this story, the situation is set in nineteenth century Ukrainian serf society, but could be modified and adapted to other cultural situations. Vovchok portrays the concerns of nineteenth century Ukrainian serf women. In this story, through the lens of gender, her understanding of their concerns can be viewed as the common struggle of women for security.

In order to accomplish a broader picture, Vovchok not only had to explore the individual psychological state, but she also had to widen her narrative to the group psychological state. She achieved this by alternating between the first-person singular narrator 'I' and the first-person plural 'we'. Wherever the narrative refers to this group of serf women, for example, while they embroider together in the evening or are all punished by the mistress, the narrative is delivered not by 'I' but by 'we'. The 'we' narrator carries the women's sense of togetherness and security not only in happy times but also in the troublesome events caused by the arrival of the abusive granddaughter, the Institutka.

Their gatherings in the maidservants' room after a day's work or during breaks were always accompanied by the singing of Ukrainian songs, joking, embroidering and making flower wreaths. All these cultural elements of their activities, especially through the Ukrainian language, were at the heart of Ukrainian folklore, and women, in my opinion, were the vehicle through which this culture passed down the generations. I would argue that this Ukrainian vernacular language and folklore helped

[137] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.196; Elizabeth Abel "(E) merging identities: The dynamics of female friendship in contemporary fiction by women." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6.3 (1981): 413-435 p.434
[138] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.200
[139] Ibid, p.197

create bonds of solidarity. It was a kind of sanctuary in their struggle against oppression (in this case against the capricious Institutka). I would argue that this sanctuary was articulated through the narrative of one of the serf women, Ustia, as she observed and experienced herself. In Showalter's words, mentioned above: "Observation from an exterior point of view could never be the same as comprehension from within."[140]

In contrast to the togetherness of serf women, their mistress Institutka stands out alone as one of the main causes of their collective misery. The injustice of the system is acutely obvious: many serf women and their difficult lives versus one mistress, albeit she was backed up by the state system of serfdom in the Russian Empire.

4.1 Abusive Mistress

Institutka had been sent to one of the exclusive 'institutes' or boarding schools for gentry and noble girls. They were intended to instil obedience as well as teach domestic skills suitable for marriage.[141] Institutka abandons her institute out of boredom and because of her rebellious nature. She could not endure being told what to do herself or learn how to please a future husband. Therefore, when her grandmother inquires her reason for abandoning the institute, she replies haughtily:

> ""Ah, Grandma! What's there to tell? It's boring!" … "It's nice for you, Grandma, to live here free as you please. The things I've been through with all these studies! Don't ever remind me!"" [142]

Institutka's arrival causes enormous turmoil among the female serfs due to her abusive nature. Ustia, her handmaid, especially suffers from her constant verbal and physical attacks. The abuse extends to

[140] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.199
[141] Richard Stites *The women's liberation movement in Russia: feminism, nihilism, and bolshevism, 1860-1930*. Vol. 59. Second Ed., Princeton University Press, 1991, pp.4-5
[142] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.73

the other maidservants too, as the reader learns through the narrator's use of 'we' and 'I'. The girls are unjustly reprimanded for being lazy and stupid.

In this oppression, they all share the same lot and are constantly flogged, hit and pinched. Ustia once was beaten so badly that she lost consciousness and could not work for several months. The girls in turn were flogged and whipped too. From time to time, one of the girls would run in from the main house to Ustia.

> '"What's going on out there, sister?" - I ask. "Don't ask, Ustia, nothing but troub![143] Ganna was flogged today, Paraska – yesterday, and tomorrow it might be my turn. Oh, goodness, I hope they do not miss me! Oh, Ustia, our poor heads!"'[144]

Even when the young mistress marries, she is still unhappy because she marries an ordinary doctor, and not a prince as her grandmother had wished. Ustia accompanies her mistress to the husband's home in the village. Moving to a new place with her abusive mistress unsettles Ustia. In the new place, her mistress immediately starts bossing around the servants of the new place, thus causing trouble not only among the women but also the men. In spite of the havoc created by the move, Ustia finds some security among her new serf friends: a married couple - Nazar and Katria and their young baby, an old woman whom everybody addresses as the granny and Prokop – Ustia's sweetheart (and later husband). The young mistress does not spare anyone. Even the mistress' placid husband is constantly insulted and forced to fulfil her whims, many of them pointless: one day he wanted to drink water, but she ordered him not to drink. Her husband could not understand why not, but she answered:

> "I don't want you to! Don't drink! … I don't want you to! Do you hear me?"[145]

[143] The word 'trouble' is incomplete in the original too
[144] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.82
[145] Ibid, p.88

Her unreasonable behaviour causes a lot of grief especially among the serf women, being the owner of their bodies. However, their souls remained free, as we see below (in the next subchapter) in the development of their characters.

Through her own experience, feelings and therefore interpretation, Ustia as a narrator conveys a portrait of a merciless mistress, while the 'we' collective pronoun extends the sense of solidarity to the other serf women and perhaps further to the voice of women more generally in similar situations.

The mistress' cruelty manifests itself through her relationships with other characters in the story as well: her relationships with other serf women like the young mother Katria, and with the granny, a relationship which intensifies the reader's negative impression of the nasty character of Institutka.

4.2 Motherhood

The theme of motherhood is frequently encountered in Russian women's fiction. As Diana Greene notes motherhood was a concern of Russian women poets, along with female heroism, family and community.[146] For example, motherhood is a theme in Rostopchina's "Iskushenie" ("Temptation," 1839), Mordovsteva's "Kolybel'naia pesnia" ("Cradle song," 1877), and Garelina's "Spi, moi kroshechka beztsennoi" ("Sleep my priceless, little one", 1870), and many of these poems were in the form of lullabies. Some of them express concerns about the future lives of babies.[147] Whilst those mothers were melancholic, Vovchok's Katria was a tragic figure like Nastia in "Lazy Bones" (see subchapter 3.3). This was a recurring theme in Vovchok's early Ukrainian works – that of the tragic serf mother. The extremely low status of serf mothers made motherhood more fragile than in any other social group due to poverty and oppression.

[146] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.83
[147] Ibid, p.251

4.2.1 Katria

The dynamic of the events in *Institutka* is similar to that in "Lazy Bones": in both cases, mother and child eventually die. In *Institutka*, Katria a young mother loses her child and later goes mad, falls into the river and drowns. In spite of being an uneducated serf, Ustia, as an observer of the events, portrays a thorough psychological picture of Katria and her personal tragedy; she notices subtle changes in Katria's mood:

> "while Katria was chatty and lively, she seemed to be sad and restless for some reason."[148]

Katria the mother has a premonition and feels some trouble could befall her as a result of the mistress' arrival. She asks Ustia whether the mistress is wicked and when she learns that the latter is unkind, she exclaims:

> '"Oh, God have mercy!... I knew it in my heart, I knew it! Oh, my baby!" she ran to the crib and leaned over the child, "what was I thinking when I married from free peasants into serfs! She might as well burn us all with her eyes!" And she began crying and kept crying as if the mistress truly had burned her baby just by looking."[149]

Her motherly instinct and intuition observed by Ustia, that her baby might suffer by the arrival of the mistress, can immediately be interpreted through her behaviour. Her physical reaction began with crying. She imagined the mistress burning the child with her eyes when the mistress looked at the baby. Burning the child's eyes is a metaphor of trouble depicted once more with the 'eye'. Again, Vovchok draws on folklore for her imagery. The concept of the 'evil eye' in Ukrainian folk culture accords the eye with special magical powers to cause damage and suffering.[150]

Consequently, Katria's premonition and her motherly intuition prove to be true. The baby gets sicker and sicker, probably because Katria cannot look after her child properly due to the enormous load of

[148] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.100
[149] Ibid, p.101
[150] Sarah D. Phillips "Waxing like the moon: women folk healers in rural Western Ukraine." *Folklorica-Journal of the Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Folklore Association* 9.1, 2004

work imposed upon her by her mistress. Yet there is no way to please the mistress. After becoming exhausted and overworked, in her manifestations of motherhood, she passes out by the baby's crib:

> "The moment the poor mother looked at her, the moment she clasped the baby to her heart [the motherly instinct to bring the baby closer to yourself], the baby passed away."
>
> Katria cried ached and … wailed: "who will hold out her little arms to me? Who will bring me joy in this world? My baby! My little daughter is gone!"[151]

Her motherly grief manifests itself in physical crying, lamenting, and wailing. The grief caused by her child's death awakens protest in the mother and she disobeys her cruel mistress. She is sent to do even harder work, in the fields. Unbearable physical and spiritual pain affects her mental health:

> "Katria did not live long after that. [Ustia, the first-person narrator, observes:] Something happened to her after this last abuse. She ran around the gardens and swamps, looking for her baby, fell into the river and drowned, poor thing."[152]

Ustia either does not fully understand or does not wish to understand that Katria went mad. Ustia's lack of acknowledgment of what happened heightens the sense of her upset: "something happened to her [Katria]."[153] She cannot bring herself to address the circumstances out of compassion. Among serfs and peasants in Ukraine, madness was considered shameful.[154] The attitudes toward male and female madness in the Russian Empire were generally different: while insane men could have been considered holy lunatics, who had been "touched by the hand of God,"[155] women were often seen as dysfunctional.[156] Whether she accidently fell into the river or deliberately fell there and committed

[151] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.106
[152] Ibid. p.107
[153] Ibid
[154] This same attitude of the narrator is observed in "Lazy Bones," where the narrator just describes Nastia's behaviour instead of directly stating that she has gone mad.
[155] A good example is Fedor Dostoevskij's Idiot- prince Mishkin – see pp.241-242 in G. Gibian "Dostoevskij's Use of Russian Folklore." *The Journal of American Folklore*, *69*(273), 1956, 239-253
[156] J. V. Brown "Female Sexuality and Madness in Russian Culture: Traditional Values and Psychiatric Theory." *Social research*, 1986, 369-385.

suicide is therefore a pertinent question; as suicide was an immoral act according to the teachings of the Church,[157] Katria's reputation was in question.

In this story, dignity and respect are issues even for poorest and most oppressed. Whilst Ustia avoids the sensitive issues, it is the mistress who without any hesitation carries on her abuse even on the dead body of Katria: she announces to her spineless husband that Katria was in fact crazy (and therefore shameful). So, the spiritual and reputational abuse of Katria extends beyond her death too. It is because Katria is dead, that a narrator of her background is needed to speak for her and show her the solidarity that she and her fellow serfs had shared in life. This account by Ustia contrasts with the official abusive and dismissive commentary that women, even mothers (normally a respected status) such as Katria, could often receive as their obituary from the elite.

As a female serf narrator, Ustia's perspective and understanding of Katria's plight as an abused serf mother losing her child is sympathetic. After all, she comes from the same class and is part of the same community of women, even if she is not a mother herself yet. Ustia also sympathises with the granny, a motherly figure, whose story will be discussed in the next subchapter.

4.2.2 The Granny

Although it is not clear from the story whether the granny had her own children, she acts as a mother to the serf women and village children. For example, she looks after Katria's sick child and consoles her (Katria).

The granny remains composed throughout the story - a stable mother for everyone else. Ustia also felt the granny was like a mother; that she was a shoulder to cry on. When Ustia was unhappy being abused by her mistress, she said:

[157] Susan K. Morrissey *Suicide and the body politic in imperial Russia*. Vol. 9. Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.28

> "Sometimes, before you know it, you'd lean against her and cry - like a child to its mother." '"Don't cry, my child, don't cry!"" The granny said quietly and gently. ""Let the wicked people cry, but you must get through it all, through every trouble! I know you have it in you, don't you?"'[158]

The situation in the household grew more and more tense and troubled:

> "People woke up and went to bed crying and cussing. The young mistress twisted everything in her own way, made everyone work harder; found a burning hell for everyone."[159]

In spite of the common unhappiness and unease, the granny maintained her composure:

> "Everyone has grown thin and sad; only the granny remained as serene as ever. As much as the mistress yelled and screamed at her - the granny never got scared and never stumbled; she walked quietly, talked calmly, and gazed solemnly with those bright eyes of hers."[160]

The quiet, calming atmosphere around the granny changes when the mistress accuses her of theft. This so-called theft involved giving away fallen apples to poor children; an act, we can say, of motherly kindness, which the granny had always done before the arrival of the new mistress. She answers that she has never been a thief and the usual silence and calm of the granny's words sends the mistress into fury.

> "Thief, thief!" the mistress yelled at the granny, sinking her nails into the old woman's shoulder and shoving her away … She reared up, as if there was a sword in her hand, and slapped the old woman in the face! the granny staggered."[161]

Ustia runs to her, but the mistress grabs her by the braids. In order to protect the women, Ustia's husband grasps the mistress' hands and holds them until she starts to scream and her husband, a doctor, appears. She blames everybody around for trying to kill her, among them Prokop, who because of the accusation is able to gain their (his and Ustia's) freedom by agreeing to serve in the military for twenty-five years.

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[158] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.103
[159] Ibid
[160] Ibid, p.103
[161] Ibid, p.114

The events are very physical with abuse directed especially towards the old granny. If Katria suffered the physical-bodily grief of a grieving mother, the granny also suffers for her motherly care of giving away apples to children. Her suffering is also both spiritual (the insult of being called a thief) and physical – being attacked by the mistress.

The first-person voice female narrative is quite powerful, for the narrator herself can connect with them both as a woman and as a serf. From the lens of gender, the subject of motherhood is biologically and culturally in the women's sphere, as men cannot experience and convey this in the same way women do.[162] That certainly does not exclude a male writer's ability to portray childbirth or motherhood, the most prominent example being the childbirth scene in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, which is quite descriptive and explicit. Marko Vovchok's 'motherhood' on the other hand, is more engaged with inner motherly feelings, premonition, and suffering achieved by the female first-person voice narrator.

Contrasting with the events described above, which unfold against the background of tragedy caused by serfdom and specifically the difficult role of mothers in this situation, this story also has a positive twist – the love story of Ustia, the narrator. The love expressed by Ustia bears elements from Ukrainian folklore, in this case a love song. In the next subchapter, I examine the romantic development of the story as told from a serf woman's perspective.

4.3 The "Gaze" of Love

A subplot of *Institutka* is the love story of Ustia. The narrator finds herself under the persistent gaze of a young man Prokop as soon as she arrives at her mistress' new house:

[162] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.200-201

> "The younger fellow didn't speak two words, but everywhere I looked, I saw him watching me"[163] or – "why was he looking at me like that?" [The 'gaze' affected her physically too:] "I went back to the maidservants' room and my heart was pounding ever so quickly."[164]

A pounding heart is associated with strong emotions, love, fear and expectations. Although she was worried about the nasty mistress, she could not help but think about him.

As the narrator, she observes both herself and him:

> "Why was that fellow following me? Damn him - and what a good-looking one!"[165]

In parallel she turns to the moon, which also seems to be looking at her from outside the window. The Ukrainian word for moon is 'misiats' (місяць) in the masculine gender. As Diana Greene argues, nineteenth century Russian women poets often used masculine gender through 'mesiats' ('месяц' - the Russian version of misiats/moon) to personify the moon as a male character, and often to represent male inconstancy too, instead of the feminine form as their male counterparts often did. For example, the early nineteenth century Russian woman poet, Mariia Lysitsina, often refers to both gender versions of the moon, masculine and feminine, to describe inconstancy.[166] In Ukrainian, however, 'misiats', the masculine version is the only option, unlike in Russian where there is a female word 'luna' for moon. However, it still provided opportunities for Vovchok (brought up in the Russian language) to explore this in terms of gender differentiation. In other words, she could contrast the female lovesick serf with the male moon cast as a metaphorical admirer.

'Misiats' for Ustia becomes an object of desire and she fears that it might shine, in other words pay attention to somebody else:

[163] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.101
[164] Ibid, p.101
[165] Ibid, p.101
[166] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.52

> "Oh moon, sweet moon, don't shine at anyone![167] The song kept knocking into my soul. I did not know what my soul desired, for him to call out from outside the window again or not to come back?"[168]

The moon personified as a male lover like a real man makes her heart pound. In this case, 'misiats' is a symbol of love – secret love in the evening.

It is also noteworthy that songs to the moon date back to pre-Christian times,[169] therefore, constituting a long-term part of folklore and folk memory. The concept of women's language is "ancient and appears in folklore and myth."[170] The song about the moon kept coming into Ustia's mind. It is not clear whether she sang it or whether it was just playing in her mind. Whatever it could have been, she hears or sings this song from a woman's perspective: the moon for her is like a young fellow who stirs up her soul and makes her heart pound.

The evening ('vecher' -also masculine[171]) like the moon becomes a symbol and witness of their love. Ustia exclaims: "oh my dear! How I waited for the evening – protective and dark!"[172]

The darkness of the evenings for Ustia was protective, while the daytime was unbearable - the mistress always abused and scolded her. If the darkness gave her the sense of security, during the days even her sweetheart Prokop could not console her.

Thus, the moon was compared with Prokop, for they both made Ustia's heart pound; evenings were her security, and daytimes menacing with threats from the abusive mistress.

Like the other leitmotifs, this was very much portrayed through female eyes. For instance, she contrasted the moon and the evening as active males with herself as a traditionally passive female. Both her lover and the moon pursue her, not the other way around. Unlike where Russian male

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[167] My translation of the original for this part - [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі,* p.302 – as the English translation from Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.102 suggests "Who are you shining at?" which is not literally what is said and gives a different slant on the words

[168] For the rest of this quotation, I return to the English translation in Marko Vovchok, *The Way Things Were*, p.102

[169] [Rudko] О. В. Рудько "Втілення ідеї національної ідентичності у творчості Марка Вовчка," p.5

[170] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," pp.191-192

[171] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі,* p.304

[172] Marko Vovchok *The Way Things Were*, p.104

authors portray nature, including the moon as a female muse (passive),[173] her moon is active and male. With her narrator as a serf woman, there is a folklore element to this with the use of song.

4.4 Conclusion

In *Institutka*, Marko Vovchok portrays the explicit picture of the serf woman's lot through the eye of one of the serf women Ustia, the narrator. The sense of togetherness and unity is shown through the shared lot of happy times (singing, embroidering and socialising) on the one hand, and the shared undeserved punishment of the abusive mistress is depicted by a 'we' rather than by an 'I' narrator. This is Ustia herself speaking for herself and her fellow serf women, who are subject to constant abuse by Institutka. The serf mothers are not excluded from this abuse. On the contrary, they suffer physically trying to protect the baby in the case of Katria and looking after the younger serf women and village children in the case of the granny. The mothers are also mentally abused through insults by the mistress. Ustia observes and participates in the tragic events of her fellow serfs, but her life is not all unhappiness because her love for her future husband Prokop also elevates her spirits and makes her hopeful. Ustia's language is that of a serf-peasant woman's vernacular Ukrainian language, which Marko Vovchok employed to write not only about the injustice of serfdom in general, but particularly the injustice meted out to serf women, as well as to tell the beautiful love story of Ustia herself.

The next long story *Three Destinies*, which I analyse in the next chapter, also deals with the theme of love as well as the complex psychological characteristics of the three female protagonists.

[173] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, p.51

5. *Three Destinies* (*Tri doli*)

The long story (povest) *Three Destinies* significantly differs from Marko Vovchok's previous works. If her previous *Folk Stories* and *Institutka* primarily concern social injustice, this work was a subtle analysis of the emotional experiences of free Ukrainian peasants. The Ukrainian poet and literary critic Franko noted that it was less relevant for social issues, but instead was of "great psychological interest."[174]

The starting point of the peasant woman narrator, Khima's story is when she is already old; when she recounts how everything happened:

> "I am an old woman, but the young memories are not forgotten."[175]

The story opens with an 'I' narrator, explaining who she was:

> "I was born in the settlement of Pyaitigir."[176]

As an orphan she grew up in a household of well-off peasants - that of her relatives' family (of her friend and cousin Katria[177]). Her memory and storytelling then shift to events at a later stage of her life, when the three women (herself and two friends Katria and Marusia) pursue their unrequited love for one and the same man, Yakov Chaichenka. She recounts the times when the three friends fell in love with Yakov, and the events which surrounded the circumstances of that time. All three characters differ in their response to this complicated situation. Katria is haughty and proud; Marusia accepts fate in her stride; whilst Khima, the narrator and observer, is modest and reserved.

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[174] [Ivakina] Ирина Васильевна Ивакина ""Три Долі" М. Вовчок И "Дворянское Гнездо" И.С. Тургенева."" *Спасский вестник* 12 (2005): 117-121. Available at: http://www.turgenev.org.ru/e-book/vestnik-12-2005/ivakina.htm

[175] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.321

[176] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.320; Translation done by me N.B.P

[177] Not the same person as Katria in "Lazy Bones"

The young man, Yakov Chaichenka, is in love too, but his heart does not belong to any of three women but to a widow who twists him around her little finger. His arrival in the village with his elderly mother attracts the attention of many young women as an eligible bachelor. However, at that stage nobody knows that he just left another village together with his mother in an attempt to forget a widow who had rejected him. He loved the widow, but she didn't want him. The relationships between Yakov and the three women are set in a landscape which metaphorically depicts their feelings and attachments, using natural and folkloric imagery.

5.1 Katria

Katria falls in love with him at first sight (and so do Khima and Marusia). She is courted by Yakov, but her father refuses to give his permission for her to marry him. Eventually gossip about his affair with the widow reaches the village and the proud Katria reacts by leaving for a convent, against her parents' wishes. Yakov's indifference and non-intervention in Katria's unhappiness is striking. Furthermore, so is his phlegmatic behaviour towards Marusia, whom he marries later in the story. This increases the contrast between the women's personalities and his self-centred selfish one. Vovchok achieves a powerful depiction of Yakov's character by highlighting the dynamics of the events rather than making the narrator Khima describe his qualities.

Whilst Khima refrains from describing Yakov directly, she does not shrink from giving a comprehensive picture of her friends Katria and Marusia. Katria is rebellious; she rebels against her despotic father who tries to keep control of his wife and Katria. In contrast, Katria's mother is subservient and docile. This difference between mother and daughter emphasises Katria's character even more. She is beautiful and becomes more beautiful when she falls in love with Yakov, who seems to be uncertain of his choices. Double misfortune befalls Katria. On the one hand, her father refuses to give his consent for her marriage to Yakov, and on the other hand she learns through the village gossips that

Yakov's heart belongs to another woman. Betrayed and humiliated, she escapes to a convent. Her escapism through monasticism could be seen as a means to rescue her dignity. She exchanges her earthly life for a monastic existence.

As Vira Ageeva, a Ukrainian literary critic, notes, Katria "is a maximalist" and "if the chosen one betrayed her, if her feelings are trampled, she will renounce everything."[178] Nevertheless, unlike many heroines of the nineteenth century who retired to nunneries, Katria lacks total humility. A good comparison is Turgenev's Liza Kalitina (*The Nest of the Gentry*) who enters a convent as the result of an unhappy life.[179] Liza is the epitome of modest femininity and religious piety which was expected and encouraged in Russian society at that time. While Katria, a proud and disobedient character (and we know this from Khima, the narrator) is also unhappy, her departure for the convent, as mentioned before, is caused mainly by her wounded dignity.

That becomes explicit during the scene when Khima sees her for the first time after the death of her (Katria's) parents. She comes neither to see them for the last time when they are ill, nor to attend their funerals, but only comes to inherit whatever is left to her. Khima feels uncertain whether Katria recognises her, or if she does, whether she still loves her, or even whether Katria regards her as an enemy. Khima as narrator once more emphasises Katria's appearance and the change in her expression, which is anything but Godly or humble. She becomes the old rebellious Katria, and as for Khima's question as to whether she thinks Khima is her enemy, she answers:

> ""every man is an enemy to another, a very bad enemy"; she answered with passion, her eyes flashed, her lips trembled; (and I recognized the old Katria). Fire and bullets dashed from her as I knew the old Katria."[180]

As Julia Kristeva, a feminist literary critic, noted, a woman can best correspond to the Christian ideal of femininity through the status of a nun, through the abdication of her body.[181] Neither spirituality

[178] [Vira Ageeva] Віра Агеева "Чоловічйи псевдонім жіноча незалежність (спроба пнокритики)," 2005, pp.12-23
[179] [Ivakina] Ирина Васильевна Ивакина ""Три Долі" М. Вовчок И "Дворянское Гнездо" И.С. Тургенева.""
[180] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.395; Translation done by me N.B.P.
[181] [Vira Ageeva] Віра Агеева "Чоловічйи псевдонім жіноча незалежність (спроба пнокритики)," 2005, pp.12-23

nor the Christian ideal of femininity, I would argue, fit Katria's character and her reasons for her renunciation of a secular life. She seems aloof and indifferent to everything around, as Khima notes:

> "she was very beautiful, but somehow wasted and her eyes sank. She looked spiritual in her appearance and her aloof glance. Her long black nun's dress and veil also added some aloofness to her."[182]

Yet her outburst regarding "every man being an enemy to another"[183] is far from being Christian. It is more, as Vira Ageeva describes it, an act of passion in support of the humbleness of pride,[184] and it is difficult to disagree with her oxymoron in this instance.

Khima the narrator thus portrayed Katria's character according to her own observations. As the narrator, she noticed the changes in her friend: from happy Katria to aloof nun, although she does not believe that Katria's monastic life is caused by her piety. This contrasts with the modest and pious behaviour shown in the case of Lisa Kalitina depicted by Turgenev in his *The Nest of the Gentry*. Vovchok's character acts not from social expectations, but from her independent will, and she exhibits a heroism based on her pride and independence, whereas for Turgenev's Lisa, the heroism was based on loyalty and obedience to God and social convention.

The first-person voice narrator Khima in this case describes not only the "stretch of time"[185] (from happy Katria to unhappy one), but also makes an "ideological and aesthetic effect on the text."[186] 'Ideological' because Katria despite her unfortunate love, does not lose her pride even in the attire of a nun ("and I recognized the old Katria").[187] 'Aesthetic' because Khima observes, recalls, and narrates Katria's feelings from her own perspective.

As analysed in the following subchapter, the same empathy is shown by the narrator, Khima, to her other friend Marusia.

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[182] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.320; Translation done by me N.B.P.
[183] Ibid, p.395; Translation done by me N.B.P
[184] [Ivakina] Ирина Васильевна Ивакина ""Три Долі" М. Вовчок И "Дворянское Гнездо" И.С. Тургенева.""
[185] Mieke Bal *Narratology*, p.36
[186] Ibid
[187] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.395; Translation done by me N.B.P.

5.2 Marusia

Marko Vovchok builds up her characters by contrasts. The narrator Khima portrays an entirely different picture of Marusia than she did of Katria, even if both were depicted with love and dedication. Marusia, who is also in love with Yakov, marries him when the latter receives one more refusal from the widow he loves, who marries an inn keeper instead. Yakov has no feelings for Marusia (she knows that) but marrying him still makes her happy. Khima cannot help but be surprised as to why and how Marusia bears her husband's unfaithfulness with the widow. But then she finds some sort of answer to it, and she notes that:

> "Marusia did not live like us. She drank bitter water, but this water was alive… her sun did not shine like ours; her birds sang in a different way."[188]

By using this metaphor, Marko Vovchok portrays Marusia's nonchalance towards the wavering fortunes of life, and her acceptance of her fate for the sake of love. One more feature of Marusia is her initial obedience and docility towards her very strict domineering mother. However, her mother cannot prevent the marriage, nor end it afterwards with evidence of the unfaithfulness of her son-in-law, Yakov Chaichenka. After Marusia's marriage, her determination to stay with her husband means that neither her mother nor her husband's behaviour can weaken her loyalty to Yakov, her husband. Moreover, she even follows him to prison when he is suspected of murdering his widow lover and her husband, thus sacrificing her own (Marusia's) freedom and abandoning her children.

The self-sacrifice of women is not an alien concept in the literature or in the history of the Russian Empire. For instance, the Decembrists'[189] wives, Princess Trubetskaya and M.N. Volkonskaya, followed their husbands to Siberia and were much glorified by Nekrasov in his poem *Russian Women*.[190] Whether it was their duty to their husbands or their love for their husbands, women were

[188] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.394; Translated by me from Ukrainian, N.B.P
[189] A rebellion against Tzar Alexander I in 1825, which ended up in exile for some of the conspirators
[190] [Nekrasov] Н. Некрасов: Руссие Женщины Strelbytskyy Multimedia Publishing, 2018 [1872-1873].

prepared to endure hardship for their husbands, though not at the expense of their personal humiliation and pride. As for Marusia, in contrast to the self-sacrificing Decembrist wives with their brave husbands, she had no such duty, I would argue, to her unfaithful husband. Yet through her love for him, Marusia presents herself as a manifestation of womanly duty, albeit at the expense of her own dignity as a wronged wife. She pays for her triumph of passion, through self-sacrifice and humiliation.

Whereas Nekrasov presents a classic case of female heroism, Vovchok shows the gritty reality for some women, particularly at the lower end of society. In spite of Marusia's unnecessary humiliation, Khima recognises Marusia's personal striving for love and life. However, it should be noted that Khima is not merely an observer in this story, but also a character in her own right, as is explored in the following subchapter.

5.3 Khima

The preceding subchapters show how the characters Katria and Marusia are depicted from the perspective of the main narrator, Khima, in other words through the lens of another female character. As for Khima's own character, only her actions and indirect indications (like her dreams) give some clue that she is also in love with Yakov. Khima's character seems to be the most stable and balanced among her friends. After she herself dreams about Yakov, she starts admitting to herself that she might be in love with him. The realisation of her feelings does not unbalance her. She talks about her feelings but by way of her dreams. Her refusal to marry either of her two other suitors and her preference for being alone also appear as signs of her love for Yakov: if not him then no one else. In this way, she resembles Katria in her maximalism.

The use of Khima as narrator and Khima as participant worked well, for the story was told within the soul of the protagonist herself, leaving some space for readers' interpretation. As Irina Ivakina

observes: “The novel itself is an example of a woman’s text of the nineteenth century with its unique solution to the subject of self-expression and self-affirmation of a woman, the innovative organisation of the text and her method of psychological analysis.”[191] That is exactly what Khima achieves by expressing her own feelings for the man, by interpreting her dreams and thereby inadvertently analysing her own psychological state.

A further feature which made it possible to discern the nature of her innovative organisation of text is Vovchok’s Ukrainian landscape and folk culture. Be it the language, traditions or myths which abound therein, they are a deeply engrained part of the life of the peasant women of the Ukrainian village. In the previous chapters, I have addressed the question of vernacular language, and I will analyse it in *Three Destinies* too. For it is an essential part of character building through the ‘I’ narrator Khima; herself tied to that land and culture.

5.4 Landscape, Mysterious Touch and Folklore

Nature and environment have a special place in Vovchok’s work as already mentioned in “Sister” (subchapter 3.2). They also have an importance in *Three Destinies*. According to Diana Greene, although women writers of the Russian Empire engaged with these themes, they found difficulties, given the way in which male Romantic poets had depicted nature as a female binary opposition to male culture. Female nature could sometimes be sexualised or made into a destructive force.[192] Women writers sought ways of tackling such issues by describing nature in terms of nostalgia and safety (for instance, Teplova’s “K rodnoi storone” – “To native parts,” 1827), by making nature

[191] [Ivakina] Ирина Васильевна Ивакина “"Три Долі" М. Вовчок И" Дворянское Гнездо" И.С. Тургенева."”
[192] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, pp.51-52

masculine, or by using legends and folklore to divide nature up into both masculine and feminine aspects, or even just neutral aspects.[193]

Some women and men writers incorporated folk legends or mystical elements. In Turgenev's *Huntsmen's Notes* lengthy descriptions of nature, legends and tales are abundantly present (for example, one of the stories, "Bezhin Meadow"*)*. Marko Vovchok too refers to nature, legends and folklore in her Ukrainian fiction. Mysticism was employed fruitfully by women writers to verbalise feelings and mysticism, while male poets were more likely to resort to overt sensuality.[194] Mysticism derives from legends, songs and poetry often associated with nature, passed from generation to generation. The oral folklore such as that employed by women peasants in this story certainly features these traits.

The legends found in Vovchok's work are associated with people's memory. In her book *Narratology*, Mieke Bal defined the concept of time and place where "memory is 'a joint element" between them.[195] Khima's recollection of her childhood and youth is associated with milky mountains and caves. This is the location where Katria decides to go to the convent. The landscape is associated with a legend, containing elements of Christian mysticism, and from her words we learn that people of that area are very familiar with it:

> ""Perhaps [if] you have been to that side of Slobodyanski, you heard that an old woman dug a cave in the chalk mountain. She dug for thirty or forty years, and she dug such a lot, oh God! It happened that when we were young, we used to walk in those caves. We would light up pine branches and walk inside. The passage was narrow and low and very difficult to get through. There is a saying among people that that woman was very ancient and feeble, but with a great spirit. And that it happened that when strength would leave her, she would collapse from her

[193] For instance, for mixed gender as in Praskov'ia Bakunina's "Prolog igrannyi v Uitnom 8 juli' 1835 v den' rozhdenia M.M. Bakunina" - "Prologue performed at Uiutnyi on July 8, 1835 on M.M. Bakunina's birthday") or for the neutral aspects (Karolina Pavolva's "Nebo bleshchet biriuziu" - "The heavens sparkle turquoise," 1840) – see Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, pp.52-53

[194] Ibid, p.86

[195] Mieke Bal *Narratology,* p.151

> hard labour, and as soon as she would weep for God, she would revive like the grass under the dew. And then, she would dig again and again. She was loved by God. And so, the memory of her remained sacred."[196]

She moves from her memory of herself as young Khima to the place with which this memory is associated: the village (Sloboda) which stood on five chalk mountains, a natural observation point and protection against Tatar invaders.[197] A parallel can be drawn between the caves, the narrow passage to get to those caves and the difficulties which enemies may encounter in invading the village. God protected the old woman, and the chalky mountains protected the Ukrainian people from invasion. God revived her like grass revived by the dew, and Ukrainian nature itself served as a saviour for the people, for once they saw the Tatar hordes from the safety of the mountains, they had enough time to meet their enemies. As Showalter argues, women writers in fiction often refer to certain places such as caves, the so-called 'idyllic enclave', or in other words a 'wild zone as an abstraction', which was so organic for women's texts.[198] Therefore, the caves and chalky mountains are a safe native haven like Teplova's homeland.[199]

Moreover, the description of the Ukrainian village by Khima "helps the imagined world of the fabula become visible and concrete."[200] It also shows her love for and attachment to her native land: and here her young self merges with the narrator of the current times.

> "when you come out of those caves and stand against the sun, only the whiteness of the chalky mountains rises, and between those mountains a narrow river runs and twists, transparent and deep it murmurs."[201]

And in another part:

> "the mountains were already covered in green; the thick gardens grew around. Among white huts cherry trees blossom …"[202]

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[196] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.320; Translation done by me N.B.P
[197] Ibid, p.320
[198] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.201
[199] Diana Greene *Reinventing Romantic Poetry: Russian women poets of the mid-nineteenth century*, pp.52-53
[200] Mieke Bal *Narratology.* p.36
[201] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі*, p.320; Translation done by me N.B.P
[202] Ibid

Cherry trees and white huts are typical Ukrainian scenery. Khima with excitement exclaims that there is so much greenery, so much in blossom. There are narrow paths to the river where young girls' light feet trample the grass.

Turgenev also associates nature with Russian aesthetics:

> "Dark and clear sky jubilantly and vastly towered over us in all its secret glory. One's chest sweetly contracted, inhaling that special, lingering and fresh smell - the smell of the Russian night."[203]

The landscape Turgenev refers to, Bezhin Meadow, is only the background to the unfolding fabula where young fellows tell various 'spooky' stories about ghosts (domovoi), goblins (leshii), mermaids (rusalka) and water apparitions (vodovoi) - common features of Russian folk culture. However, the role of mythology and folklore in Turgenev's story shows no clear emotional attachment to the landscape: the young fellows just entertain themselves by recounting these magical occurrences to while away the long nights spent herding horses in Bezhin Meadow.

Turgenev's first-person voice narrator is not a native of the land; he is a 'witness' rather than a central participant like Khima. She not only presents a background of events but also harmonises this with her feelings and moods and her attachment to her native land, thus creating classic examples of the national landscape.[204]

Khima's description of the chalky mountains and the caves dug from them by an old woman with the help of God, who revived the exhausted woman, gives a touch of mysticism and a sense of supernatural protection. Showalter argues that these concepts of mysticism and the supernatural, are ones that women so often refer to in their writing.[205] The caves additionally give an impulse to the betrayed and unhappy Katria to become a nun, to seek protection to maintain her dignity with the help of God, the same god who gave the old woman the strength to continue her digging. A cross

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[203] "Huntsman's Notes" [Из Записок Охотника] – pp.5-60 in И.С. Тургенев, *Избранные Произведения*, редакция текста, И. Примечания & Н.Л. Бродского, Москва, Ленингра: ОГИЗ государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1946 - Бежин луг. Translation done by me N.B.P

[204] [Khandris] Ю. Хандрис "Функціонування пейзажу," p.9

[205] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," pp.191-192

which was installed in the caves helps Katria to make her decision to go to the nunnery - so Katria tells Khima as they walked through the caves.

The present tense of the narrator points out that the landscape was like that many years ago and it is still like that at the time of the narrative. In this, she distinguishes herself as narrator in the present from herself as a participant in the past, even if only to stress the continuity of her attachment to the unchanging landscape. So, it is probably Khima's wish for it to remain like that for years to come, a sense of permanency and security.

It is symbolic that Khima delivers the legend and the environment associated with the legend, herself. For it is she that is the bearer of the tradition of the people of the village and at the same time a witness of the place with which the legend is associated. She is the first person who learns about Katria's decision to become a nun.

In another part of the landscape and at an earlier pivotal point in the women's story before Katria's decision to go to the nunnery, a more psychological approach is taken by Vovchok through the voice of Khima. This is the moment when Katria's relationship with Yakov begins to change. The description of the woods where Katria overheard Yakov Chaichenka's song when he was cutting the wood is symbolic of his mental state. Khima and Katria went to the woods to look for Yakov, whom Katria had not seen for a long time. Katria could not understand the reason for his unwillingness to see her.

The narrator moves her attention to the season and weather:

> "the autumn was coming to an end, leaves were red, yellow, faded and fallen, and the cold wind was whistling among the leafless trees. It was noisy and spacious all around; the fresh wood smell was pervasive."[206]

As Khandris, a Ukrainian literary critic of landscape description, notes about such treatments of landscape: "the landscape creates an emotional background in which the action unfolds."[207]

[206] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі,* pp.343-344; Translation done by me N.B.P
[207] [Khandris] Ю. Хандрис "Функціонування пейзажу," p.6

Katria and Khima saw Yakov Chaichenka cutting the wood. He was surrounded by newly cut fresh wood; the sun was shining brightly over him. His shining axe reverberated against the wood; he was deep in his thoughts and sang a sad song.

The noisy wind, the noise of the wood, despite the sun shining simultaneously, and the sad song resonated with the man's unsettled emotional thoughts. The landscape and weather act as a mirror of Yakov's state of mind. Both Khima and Katria are in this instance witnesses, as they listen to Yakov's song, though Khima adds this wider atmospheric interpretation to her narrative.

Vovchok turns to Ukrainian folklore which is so organic for the language in her stories.

> "She is gentle, and she has dark eyebrows [a symbol of Ukrainian women's beauty].
> But she is not as good as my first sweetheart."[208]

Katria begins to suspect that Yakov's heart does not entirely belong to her and questions him. Yakov feels trapped and asks her to pity him. Katria believes him. However, Khima is not quite sure of Yakov's love toward Katria. Later Katria learns from gossip that he loves another woman.

The folk song is a subtle revelation of Yakov's unfaithfulness. Khima as a witness of the scene, in Bal's words, "stands apart, observes the events and relates the story to her point of view."[209] Although Khima's role in this scene is not important, what is important is how she as a narrator narrates this scene: she does not explicitly notify the reader about Yakov's unfaithfulness, but the song which he sang points out that he loves a different woman. Khima shows her solidarity as a woman to Katria. The delicacy and understanding of womanhood, and in this case sisterhood, in Showalter's view, is what makes women's writing different from the dominant structure, the patriarchal structure of writing.[210]

[208] [Marko Vovchok: *Three Destinies*] Марко Вовчок *Три долі,* p.344; Translation done by me N.B.P
[209] Mieke Bal *Narratology,* p.27
[210] Elaine Showalter "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," p.195

5.5 Conclusion

In *Three Destinies*, Marko Vovchok created complex psychological characters for her Ukrainian women, in Ageeva's words: "a woman [who] begins to act outside the family framework, and its circle of strong feelings, is no longer limited merely by love and motherhood in her powerful passions."[211]

The rebellious character and nonchalance with the fate of Katria who goes to the nunnery, I would argue, is exactly a woman who obtains her independence paradoxically by becoming a nun. In doing so, she escapes the role of a rejected lover.

Marusia who also shows her disobedient character by not obeying her mother on the one hand, but on the other hand following her unfaithful husband to the prison at the price of humiliation, also acts independently.

Finally, Khima, the most balanced of those women, who presents the events from her own perspective, shows her maximalism too by not marrying anyone just for the sake of marriage.

Thus, all three women show their characters through some degree of sacrifice. The behaviour of all of them could be viewed as succumbing to fate. However, I would argue it is the opposite: all of them showed their ability to make their own decisions however self-destructive it might have been.

The legends and landscape link all three women with the Ukrainian folklore and culture, but their behaviour does not always fit into the framework of Ukrainian social conventions.

The significance of this long story is that it is about free peasants unlike her previous stories, which concern serfdom and injustice. Moving away from issues of social injustice in this story, Vovchok explores the psychological characters of Ukrainian peasant women more thoroughly.

[211] [Vira Ageeva] Віра Агеева "Чоловічйи псевдонім жіноча незалежність (спроба пнокритики)," 2005, pp.12-23

6. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated why Marko Vovchok, a Russian noblewoman, chose to narrate her stories through the voices of Ukrainian serf and peasant women. Likewise, this research sought to determine what significance her use of the Ukrainian language in her early prose fiction had apart from its folkloric / national values, and whether it had any significance for the topic of gender.

As a woman talking mainly about women, Marko Vovchok used female narrators and women's language to give a uniquely female perspective on the issues of oppression, injustice, identity, motherhood, and love. In order to see and understand women characters as they really are, Vovchok used serf and peasant women narrators, who reflected how those women would usually express themselves and communicate with each other. In other words, she gave those Ukrainian women a voice. Her inspiration might have been drawn from those women themselves while she attended various Ukrainian markets and gatherings during her early years of marriage with her Ukrainian ethnographer husband, also a member of the Ukrainian brotherhood of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. Likewise, in one of her *Folk Stories* "Sister", her narrator goes to such a market – the Kyiv Market - in search of work. In such markets and women's gatherings, she might have witnessed the unity and solidarity women showed to each other while singing and socialising, sharing their joys and worries.

Vovchok also used her own life experiences as a bridge to those of the serf and peasant women narrators, albeit not at the same level of suffering that those women would have endured. Her unhappy sojourn at her relatives' house as a poor relative at least partly resembles the circumstances that Sister endured in the eponymous story. In *Institutka*, the main protagonist abandons her boarding school before she moves back with her grandmother out of boredom just like Vovchok did.

As for her use of the Ukrainian language, there was no real precedent for her development of a neutral national style of prose before she published these stories, as Marko Pavlyshyn has pointed out. In this thesis though, I have taken this further to determine the significance of these early Ukrainian works

of hers for gender issues. The language which she has her narrators employ is based on that of actual peasant and serf women. It lacks the abstraction of elite language, instead employing folk expressions, sayings and proverbs. Since the narrators discussed in this thesis are women, the language uses feminine endings and is conditioned by women's culture. That is to say that the female narrators expressed their ideas in ways that such low status women were permitted to say them in nineteenth century Ukraine – for example, how the narrator conveys childbirth and death in "Lazy Bones" or in *Institutka* is forceful and emotional without being explicit. Vovchok was innovative in allowing such women to speak for themselves about their lives and their problems without any elite or abstracted narrative. Everything is embedded in a language suitable for the context of peasant and serf women in their own communities.

Finally, although Vovchok was noted as being reserved in the company of her own class, in these stories, she appears freer and more open about discussing women's topics that would have not been deemed appropriate for gentry society as well as the issues of serfdom and justice that were not welcomed from women writers in high society. Before her, women writers in the Russian Empire found their own techniques to write about the subjects which had been established by men within a male framework, thus navigating the very narrow passage left for women to tread as pointed out by Diana Greene. Even topics like nature, which are seemingly innocuous, could have been problematic for women to deploy.

By combining the Ukrainian language uttered by peasant and serf women, Vovchok found a way to talk about otherwise difficult issues through a kind of 'wilderness', as defined by Elaine Showalter as outside of male experience. The Russian language was well established as an elite literary medium, but even amongst Russian women female bodily, cultural, and social issues were problematic. Therefore, her deployment of a neutral form of Ukrainian, but based on peasant and serf forms of speech with folk elements, opened up a 'wilderness' of expression not yet available to anyone in Ukrainian – whether they were male or female authors. In addition, her neutral Ukrainian prose

looked at the female aspects of this 'wilderness' that explored female experience outside of the male sphere of writing. She also had her own independent almost feminist approach to the psychology of women in love, taking their passions and pride beyond the acceptable bounds of family and society. For example, in *Three Destinies*, all three women characters show their independence in making decisions concerning their own lives even if these decisions brought about destructive consequences.

Another important feature of her stories and their language is their universalism: firstly, in their applicability to oppressed people everywhere, and secondly in their applicability to oppressed women everywhere. Marko Pavlyshyn argues that the voice of Vovchok's narrators does not only belong to the Ukrainian struggle against oppression but was universal to all oppressed people. I would argue that the serf and peasant women narrators in her stories not only represented the physical and mental hardship of Ukrainian serf and peasant women, but all oppressed women. As a writer from the higher classes of the Russian Empire, Vovchok uniquely chose to give a voice to Ukrainian peasant and serf women through all her stories and all her narrators and protagonists. All of them not only endure hardships, but more fundamentally, they are women who make their own decisions, even when it makes their lives harder.

Therefore, Marko Vovchok's women's voices were the start of a universalist tradition in Ukraine

> "… defining the right of women to be themselves."[212]

Marko Vovchok beat a path that was followed by the so called "New Women" of Ukrainian modernism like Olha Kobylianska and Lesya Ukrainka.[213]

[212] [Vira Ageeva] Віра Агеева "Чоловічйи псевдонім жіноча незалежність (спроба пнокритики)"
[213] Ibid

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9. Appendix: Ukrainian Romanization

This thesis uses the BGN/PCGN System, an adoption of the Ukrainian national system in use since 2010.

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Ukrainian		Romanization
А	а	A
Б	б	B
В	в	V
Г	г	H
Ґ	ґ	G
Д	д	D
Е	е	E
Є	є	ye initially, ie
Ж	ж	Zh
З	з	Z
И	и	Y
І	і	I
Ї	ї	yi initially, i
Й	й	y initially, i
К	к	K
Л	л	L
М	м	M
Н	н	N
О	о	O
П	п	P
Р	р	R
С	с	S
Т	т	T
У	у	U
Ф	ф	F
Х	х	Kh
Ц	ц	Ts
Ч	ч	Ch
Ш	ш	Sh
Щ	щ	Shch
Ю	ю	yu initially, iu
Я	я	ya initially, ia
Ь	ь	Not romanized
’	’	not romanized