

# Dictionary of RUSSIAN WOMEN WRITERS\_\_\_\_\_

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**LÁPPO-DANILÉVSKAIA, Nadézhda Aleksándrovna** ('N. A. Kredo'; b. Liutkevich; 1874, Kiev; d. Mar. 17, 1951, Charolles, France). Prose writer, singer, and actress.

Lappo-Danilevskaia was one of the most popular novelists of pre-revolutionary Russia and in emigration. She usually depicted the life of the upper strata of

society and people from the world of art, seen through a prism of passions and personal dramas. The lightness of her style, entertaining stories, emotionality of the exposition, and unfailing attention to women's fate guaranteed her work lasting success among a broad reading public.

Lappo-Danilevskaia was born into a military family. She was educated at the Elizabeth (Elisavetinskii) Institute in SPb. In 1898 she married the Guards' officer S. S. Lappo-Danilevskii, the brother of the well-known historian Aleksandr Lappo-Danilevskii. As a result of this marriage, which broke up around 1910, the writer had two children, a son Fëdor and a daughter Tat'iana. In her youth Lappo-Danilevskaia lived for a long time in Italy, where she learned to sing and made her debut as an opera singer on the stage of La Scala in Milan at the turn of the century.

By around 1910 she realized that her real calling was writing. Her first publication was a poem under the pseudonym 'Kredo' ('When evening darkness will fall . . .', [Kogda vechernii mrak spadet . . .], *Uchenik* 1911 29: 846) devoted to the feelings aroused in the soul during Lenten services. In 1911 as 'N. A. Kredo' she published her first novel, *In the Fog of Life* (V tumane zhizni, 6 edns., 1911–17), devoted to the love story of the thirty-six-year-old writer Viktor Smurov and the capricious beauty Irina. This was followed by a regular succession of novels in the next few years, all of which were republished at least once, most in multiple editions. They include *The Minister's Wife* (Zhena ministra, 1912); *Princess Mara* (Kniazhna Mara, 1914); *A Russian Gentleman* (Russkii barin, 1914)—one of the most famous and most widely read; *Tinsel* (Mishura, 1916); and the last pre-revolutionary novel, *The Duty of Life* (Dolg zhizni, 1917). While she was still living in Pg. she worked on a tetralogy, *The Collapse* (Razval, 1921–22).

How Lappo-Danilevskaia lived under the Bolsheviks and how she managed to emigrate can be re-constructed through her feuilletons and sketches printed in émigré newspapers. Here she describes the forced use of the population for public works (cf. *Golos Rossii*, Jan. 21, 1921), her unsuccessful attempt to flee to Finland (May 20, 1921), and her stay in the torture chambers of the Cheka (Mar. 13, 1921). Apparently by the beginning of 1921, she managed to flee with her children to the Baltic countries, where she lived for some time and from which she made repeated visits to Warsaw and Berlin. Her visit to Rome in 1923 and a private audience with Pope Pius XI became particularly significant events in the writer's life—she soon converted to Catholicism. She gave an emotional explanation of her conversion in the brochure *Emigration and Catholicism* (Ėmigratsiia i katolichestvo, 1924), which rejects Russian messianism and proclaims the need to follow the precepts of Vladimir Solov'ëv. From the mid-twenties, Lappo-Danilevskaia lived in France. In the last years of her life she was a selfless parishioner at the Holy Trinity Russian Catholic Church in Paris, and spent considerable time in philanthropic efforts. Sensitivity to the interests of the reading public was apparent in her choice of themes from émigré life in her first novel written outside Russia, *Ekaterina Nikitishna* (1922). How-

ever, the too clearly pro-Catholic bias characteristic of the novels *Fortunately* (K schast'iu, 1923) and *The Profaned* (Porugannyi, 1926) prevented them from finding sympathy in émigré circles and was evidently the reason she returned to the themes of life in pre-revolutionary Russia in the novels *On the Estate* (V usad'be, 1928) and *The Burlakovs' Millions* (Milliony Burlakovykh, 1929).

One of her most popular pre-revolutionary novels was *A Russian Gentleman*, which came out in four editions between 1914 and 1916 and was translated into English. The main hero, Mikhail Gurakin, a handsome Guards' officer, becomes the object of the blind and egotistical passion of Natal'ia Volynskaia: she obtains a divorce from her husband and induces Gurakin to marry her through a deception. Their family drama lasts more than thirty years: on her part, reproaches and the desire to attach him to her at any price; on his part, endless adulteries and debauchery. Gurakin's open and honest nature has an effect on everything; therefore, it is no accident that he dies heroically on the battlefield of World War I. It should be noted that in the features of Luka Neputev, an illiterate priest who becomes Natal'ia's intimate adviser, contemporaries readily recognized a caricature of Grigorii Rasputin. The writer's views on marriage are reflected in a parallel love story between Prince Bibish and Natal'ia's friend Anna, who do not rush their wedding: having tested their feelings, they unite their destinies only after several years.

The tetralogy *The Collapse* consists of four separate novels, *The Collapse* (Razval), *The Ruin* (Krushenie), *Who Bears the Blame?* (Na kom vina?), and *May There Be Light* (Da budet svet). Attention to the characters' inner worlds, so characteristic of Lappo-Danilevskaia, alternates here with the desire to convey a panorama of Russian life between 1916 and 1919 presented from the female point of view. The novel's heroine, the artist Veronika Kampioni, under all circumstances retains her faithfulness to the high ideals of art and the love for her of the officer Prince Sergei Surov—the central theme of the third and fourth parts. The tetralogy is also interesting evidence of the Bolsheviks' atrocities and the intelligentsia's and nobility's perceptions of the 1917 coup.

On the whole, Lappo-Danilevskaia's writing comprised one of the most vivid pages in the history of belles lettres in the 1910s and 1920s. Her works won her deserved recognition primarily among female readers—her books were read until they were literally in shreds. According to a record of literature borrowed from the Turgenev Library in Paris, Lappo-Danilevskaia was among the top fifteen most read authors in the 1930s. Still, critics brought up on the ideals of public service were at times undeservedly harsh toward her work, which is characterized by a keen interest in female psychology and the problem of personal happiness. The artistic cogency of the female personalities which she created cannot be denied, but, alas, the same cannot be said of the male figures, who are depicted in an extremely schematic way.

Of great interest in understanding the writer's work are her unpublished memoirs, "Une vie," written in French. No less curious, apparently, are the writer's diaries, the location of which is unknown: she kept them throughout her life,

from the age of fifteen, and they were mentioned in the writer's obituary in the *Russian Catholic Herald* (*Russkii katolicheskii vestnik*, 1951 3: 24).

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**IN TRANSLATION:** *Michail or The Heart of a Russian* (NY, 1917).

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