

A letter from Malevich to Semevsky about Kovalevskaya

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Abstract

The biographical literature on Sofya Vasilyevna Kovalevskaya has to a large extent relied on her own memoirs, published in *Vestnik Evropy* only months before her death, and an autobiographical story published posthumously in *Russkaya Starina*. In this paper we present and discuss the full Russian text with English translation of a letter, previously unpublished, from Kovalevskaya's teacher in childhood and adolescence, Iosif Ignatyevich Malevich, to the editor of *Russkaya Starina*, Mikhail Ivanovich Semevsky, in which he repudiates her depreciation of his role in her schooling, criticizes her self-portrayal, and provides information about her early education which runs counter to parts of the biographical literature on Kovalevskaya.

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Резюме

Биографическая литература о Софье Васильевне Ковалевской опиралась в основном на её собственные воспоминания, опубликованные в *Вестнике Европы* всего за несколько месяцев до её смерти, и автобиографический рассказ, изданный посмертно в *Русской Старине*. Мы приводим полный русский текст и перевод на английский язык ранее неопубликованного письма учителя С. В. Ковалевской, обучавшего её в детском и юношеском возрасте, Иосифа Игнатьевича Малевича редактору *Русской Старины* Михаилу Ивановичу Семевскому. В этом письме И. И. Малевич утверждает, что Ковалевская незаслуженно принизила его роль как учителя в формировании и развитии ее способностей и критикует свою ученицу за самовосхваление. Его письмо проливает свет на домашнее обучение С. В. Ковалевской и предоставляет некоторые факты, которые противоречат существующей биографической литературе о С. В. Ковалевской.

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Contents

1. Introduction: Kovalevskaya, Malevich, and Semevsky	93
2. Anecdotes from Kovalevskaya’s autobiography	96
3. Letter from Malevich to Semevsky, January 17, 1892; English translation with comments	98
4. Discussion	106
4.1. “An angry clarification, which has remained unpublished” – excerpts in Shtraikh 1951	106
4.2. “A very bitter section (unpublished)” – Stillman’s mention of the letter 1978	107
4.3. Kovalevskaya’s “circle of interlocutors” in Stockholm and “admiring listeners” in St. Petersburg	108
4.4. Chronology of Kovalevskaya’s studies with Strannolyubsky	108
4.5. Was Malevich vindicated?	110
Acknowledgements	111
Appendix. Russian transcript	113
References	118

1. Introduction: Kovalevskaya, Malevich, and Semevsky

The Russian mathematician Sofya Vasilyevna Kovalevskaya¹ (1850-1891) was something of a celebrity, being the first woman ever to work as a professor of mathematics.² She was educated in St. Petersburg, Heidelberg, and Berlin, and was granted a doctorate in absentia from the University of Göttingen in 1874. She taught at the then newly established Stockholms Högskola from 1884, where she was later promoted to full professor of mathematics.

From age 8 to 17, she was home schooled in mathematics and other subjects by Iosif Ignatyevich Malevich (1813-1898), a licenced house teacher. One had to take a special exam to become licenced. This regime was instituted during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I in 1834, in part as a countermeasure against liberalist tendencies brought in by unregulated use of foreign house teachers (Sergeeva, 2007, pp. 453-4). His position as a licenced house teacher entailed the obligation to report to the authorities about the attitudes and values of the pupils in his care, not only their academic prowess. In this way, the imperial authorities used house teachers as means of societal control.

Malevich had completed the six-year Jesuit missionary school in Dinaburg³ with excellent results, gaining a gold medal. This school had the status of a gymnasium, and prepared its pupils for university studies and positions within the civil service of the Russian Empire. He never completed a university degree, although he attended lectures at the universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and also travelled abroad in order to perfect his knowledge of languages. We are not aware of any mathematical publications of his, but he elaborated a system of early mathematical education according to a method very similar to that devised by August Wilhelm Grube (1816-1884). This method emphasises intuitive familiarity with each number, starting with single-digit numbers and proceeding by stages as familiarity with ever larger numbers is achieved (Seeley, 1891; Soldan, 1878). The method is time-consuming, and attracted strong criticism, cf. e.g. (Badanes, 1895; Tolstoy, 1860-63, p. 300).

¹ Née Korvin-Krukovskaya.

² We avoid the term “university professor” here, since Stockholms Högskola, founded in 1878 as a university college, only acquired the right to bestow doctoral degrees in 1904, and changed its name to Stockholms Universitet as late as 1960. Some consider Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718-1799), who was offered a professorship of mathematics at the University of Bologna in 1750, to have precedence, but she never took up the position and never practised as a professor. Laura Caterina Bassi (1711-1778) held a professorship in physics at the University of Bologna from 1732 onwards.

³ Present-day Daugavpils in Latvia.

Malevich's memoirs, written in Kovalevskaya's honour after she had received the Prix Bordin⁴ in 1888, give details about his didactical methods in general and his tutoring of Kovalevskaya in particular. They were published in the journal *Russkaya Starina*⁵ in 1890 (Malevich, 1890, p. 452) after scrutiny and amendments by both Kovalevskaya and the journal editor Mikhail Ivanovich Semevsky (1837–1892). Semevsky was a former pupil of Malevich's, and they maintained a life-long friendship. He was also an acquaintance of Kovalevskaya's family. Kovalevskaya and Semevsky were presumably among the best pupils of Malevich's entire career as a house teacher, and Kovalevskaya by far the most successful one. As her teacher in childhood and adolescence, Malevich had reason to be proud of her success, and in the letter which follows, he makes it abundantly clear that he feels she should have been more appreciative of the tutelage he had given her.

Kovalevskaya was writing her own memoirs at this time, and they appeared in *Vestnik Evropy*⁶ (Kovalevskaya, 1890) in the same year as Malevich's memoirs. A shorter autobiographical story, written during her visit with Semevsky in May 1890, was published posthumously in *Russkaya Starina* (Kovalevskaya, 1891). The copious biographical literature on Kovalevskaya relies heavily on these two autobiographical publications.

Malevich was so incensed at Kovalevskaya's description of him and his tutoring in (Kovalevskaya, 1891) that he wrote the following letter to Semevsky in January 1892. It has hitherto remained unpublished, except for some excerpts in the endnotes of the collection of her memoirs and letters which Solomon Yakovlevich Shtraikh (1881–1957) edited for the centenary of her birth (Kovalevskaya and Shtraikh, 1951).

In this letter, aside from vehemently repudiating Kovalevskaya's deprecatory remarks about him, ironically distancing himself from her description of her uncle's seminal influence on her mathematical interests, and roundly accusing her of self-glorification, Malevich provides a chronology of Kovalevskaya's mathematical education during the last part of his tutelage at the family estate in Palibino and the transition to her studies in St. Petersburg, an account which contradicts Kovalevskaya's own report about her private lessons with Aleksander Nikolaevich Strannolyubsky (1839–1903).⁷

Before presenting Malevich's letter to Semevsky in English translation and in Russian transcription, we make some remarks about the circumstances in which he wrote it, focusing on the paths taken by each of the three protagonists during the last few years before the letter was written.

It is not surprising that when Kovalevskaya started lecturing in Stockholm, she became something of a celebrity. Her reputation had preceded her, and Gösta Mittag-Leffler (1846–1927), who had lobbied to secure her position, wrote about her first lecture in his diary: “There were not only students, teachers, professors from the Academy and officials of the Stockholm University⁸ - but also many visitors who were

⁴ The Prix Bordin, created in 1835 and named for Charles-Laurent Bordin (1794–1820), is awarded annually in five disciplines by the five academies which make up *l'Institut de France*.

⁵ *Русская Старина* – *Russkaya Starina* – *Russian Antiquity*. A monthly historical periodical, founded in St. Petersburg in 1870 by M. I. Semevsky. The main purpose of the journal was to serve the development of contemporary Russian history, beginning with Peter the Great. Occasionally, however, it also published original research of the history of pre-Petrine Russia. Special importance was given to notes, memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, etc.

⁶ *Вестник Европы* – *Vestnik Evropy* – *Herald of Europe*. A monthly liberal journal covering history, politics, and literature, published 1866–1918 in St. Petersburg. Politically, it was reformist rather than revolutionary. It was named for an earlier periodical of the same name published in Moscow 1802–1830. Since 2001 the Gaidar Institute of Economic Politics in Moscow publishes a journal of the same name.

⁷ Strannolyubsky was a graduate of the Naval Academy in St. Petersburg, and himself a teacher of mathematics at the same Academy from 1867 to 1894, when he retired as a rear admiral. He published a didactical work on a method of teaching algebra (Strannolyubsky, 1868). At a time when women were barred from university education in Russia, he eagerly supported the Courses of Higher Education for Women, which led a precarious existence outside of the regular university structure, in a constant struggle with the repressive regime of Tsar Aleksander III (Dudgeon, 1982; Zavarzina, 2005).

⁸ I.e. Stockholms Högskola.

curious to watch a person spoken of as the ‘Queen of Science’ in the newspapers” (Mittag-Leffler, 1884, February 11).

In her broadly based survey of how Kovalevskaya was recognized, Eva Kaufholz-Soldat explores how Kovalevskaya’s legendary status was instrumentalized by various interest groups during her lifetime and after her death (Kaufholz-Soldat, 2019). Kovalevskaya had befriended both Anna Charlotte Leffler-Edgren (1849–1892), Gösta Mittag-Leffler’s sister, and Ellen Key (1849–1926), both well-known feminists, and she was close to the later social-democratic prime minister Hjalmar Branting (1860–1925). When Kovalevskaya’s promotion to full professor came before the board of Stockholms Högskola in 1889, her detractors made a futile attempt to use her relationship to Branting against her.

Kovalevskaya combined her successful career as a professor of mathematics at Stockholms Högskola and assistant editor of *Acta Mathematica* with her creative literary interests, writing short stories, novels and plays (Koblitz, 1993). Her literary ambitions were greatly stimulated through her acquaintance with Anna Charlotte Leffler-Edgren, who was also a well-known writer. Together, they composed the theatre play *The Struggle for Happiness* (Leffler and Kovalevskaya, 1887), which did not meet with much acclaim when it was published, and was rejected by several theatres in Scandinavia. It was not performed on stage until 1894, in Moscow (Shchepkina-Kupernik, 1951; Wirmark, 2000).

As many writers do, Kovalevskaya found much of the raw material for her literary work in her own life. The short stories *A Nihilist Girl* and *The Nihilist* reflect Kovalevskaya’s sympathies with the Russian nihilist movement and contain parallels with her fictitious marriage to Vladimir Onufrievich Kovalevsky (1842–1883). The latter story is based on the life of the utopian socialist Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky (1828–1889), the protagonist of whose manifesto *What is to be done?* (Chernyshevsky, 1863)⁹ is a woman who escapes the control of her family in search of her personal independence, echoing Kovalevskaya’s own struggle against tradition and convention. The line between fiction and autobiography in Kovalevskaya’s authorship is fuzzy, and an early version of what became her autobiographical work *Memories of Childhood* (Kovalevskaya, 1890) was a novel about the semi-fictitious Rajevsky sisters, first published in Swedish (Kovalevskaya, 1889b).

As we shall see below, as evidenced by Malevich’s letter to Semevsky, Kovalevskaya’s depiction of self (or a protagonist close to herself) in these works could invite allegations of self-aggrandizement. But a more relaxed view is also possible, as articulated by Andrew Wachtel in his book *Battle for Childhood* (Wachtel, 1990), where he explores the theme of Russian childhood in the period 1850–1930 through the development of a narrative form which he calls “pseudo-autobiography – a boundary genre”, halfway between fiction and fact. Tolstoy’s book *Childhood* (Tolstoy, 1852) employs the then innovative technique of separating the rendering of own experience into three distinct voices: author, narrator, and child. The interplay between these three voices allows the actual memories of the child to blend with the narrator’s mythologized versions of them, all the while retaining the author’s critical distance. Wachtel identifies this pattern in dozens of Russian autobiographical works in the decades following Tolstoy’s pioneering publication, not only those of Kovalevskaya, where children of well-to-do parents grow up in idyllic surroundings. The genre was overturned by Gorky’s *Childhood* (Gorky, 1914), which offers a different version of childhood in non-gentry families, and heralds a new, post-revolutionary, literature. But (Kovalevskaya, 1890) and (Kovalevskaya, 1891) fall squarely in the tradition started by Tolstoy, on Wachtel’s account. His view of Kovalevskaya’s apparent exaggerations is not that they are deliberate distortions of self, but that they express “a desire to repudiate her gentry past and the myths associated with it” (Wachtel, 1990, p. 227).

As will be obvious from the letter we are about to discuss, that view was not shared by Malevich. He disdains the inaccuracies and embellishments he finds in (Kovalevskaya, 1891), and launches into angry

⁹ Not to be confused with Lenin’s pamphlet of the same title (Lenin, 1902).

speculations about her motives for not reporting the actual facts as he sees them, especially about his own involvement in her early training in mathematics.

Malevich's work as house tutor in Kovalevskaya's family ended in 1868, and he taught in another family until retirement. He was then invited back to live with Kovalevskaya's parents and help with practical matters at the family estate in Palibino. He also kept in regular touch with his former pupil and life-long friend Semevsky, whom he refers to as "one of the best of my first pupils".¹⁰

The historian and biographer Olga Borisovna Kokh paints a fond, but unsentimental picture of Semevsky, who after initial careers in the military and the educational sector, and by the way failing to woo Kovalevskaya's older sister Anyuta, had established himself as a publicist and aspiring socialite in St. Petersburg around 1870 (Kokh, 2005, 2001). Kokh reports that Semevsky's fiery temper prevented his rise in the military sector and in the civil service. As editor of *Russkaya Starina* from 1870 onwards, he sought to publish biographical material of historical interest from the time of Peter the Great up to his own time. He contributed much material himself, and actively solicited biographical material and memoirs from contemporaries. Thus both Malevich's memoirs (Malevich, 1890) and Kovalevskaya's autobiographical story (Kovalevskaya, 1891) fit the editorial policies of *Russkaya Starina* very well. Semevsky hosted frequent literary salons, at one of which the above-mentioned autobiographical story by Kovalevskaya was stenographed. The guests at these salons were all asked to contribute to Semevsky's guestbook, which he proceeded to publish (Semevsky, 1888), to the dismay of contributors who felt that private information should have stayed private (Kokh, 2001, p. 46).

2. Anecdotes from Kovalevskaya's autobiography

In the letter we are about to discuss, Malevich polemically refers to some episodes from (Kovalevskaya, 1891): one about her paternal uncle Pyotr Vasilyevich Korvin-Krukovsky,¹¹ another about how young Sofya had to read algebra furtively and by candlelight, and yet another about the family's neighbour Professor Nikolay Nikanorovich Tyrto (1822-1888)¹² and his colleague A. N. Strannolyubsky, whom we presented above. Let us recall these anecdotes here, as context for what follows below.

Uncle Pyotr takes pride of place among those who guided young Sofya towards an appreciation of mathematics, expressly to the detriment of Malevich. During her long chats with her uncle, she was regaled with his wide self-taught knowledge of many things, some of them mathematical:

And thus, during the hours of our conversations, I first got to know some mathematical concepts which made an especially strong impression on me. Uncle spoke about the quadrature of the circle, about asymptotes - straight lines which a curve steadily approaches, but never reaches, and about many other, for me completely incomprehensible things, which never-the-less seemed to me somehow secretive and at the same time particularly attractive. (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 451)¹³

¹⁰ "Припоминаю, что в конце 1862 года – начало 1863 годов меня посетил в Палибино один из лучших моих первых учеников М. И. Семевский." (Malevich, 1888) "I remember that at the end of 1862 – beginning of 1863 one of the best of my first pupils, M. I. Semevsky, visited me at Palibino."

¹¹ Exact lifespan unknown.

¹² Of the Naval Academy in St. Petersburg.

¹³ И вот, в часы этих бесед, между прочим, мне впервые пришлось услышать о некоторых математических понятиях, которые произвели на меня особенно сильное впечатление. Дядя говорил о квадратуре круга, об асимптотах – прямых линиях, к которым кривая постоянно приближается, никогда их не достигая, и о многих других, совершенно непонятных для меня вещах, которые, тем не менее, представлялись мне чем-то таинственным и в то-же время особенно привлекательным.

Her description of Malevich’s influence on her does not bear witness to similar flights of the imagination:

I am indebted to I. I. Malevich for my first systematic training in mathematics. This was so long ago that I don’t remember his lessons at all now; they remain a dim memory for me. But no doubt they had a great influence on me and meant much for my development. (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 452)¹⁴

As we shall see, Malevich did not take this lightly.

Another anecdote of Kovalevskaya’s relates how she had become so infatuated with mathematics that her father decided that her lessons with Malevich had to stop. She then asked Malevich to give her Bourdon’s algebra-book (Bourdon, 1844), which she read in secret by candlelight after bed-time,¹⁵ to avoid nanny’s watchful eyes:

However, I somehow managed to borrow from Iosif Malevich the book *Bourdon’s Algebra Course*. Since I was under the strict supervision of the governess all day, I had to resort to trickery. When I went to bed I would put the book under my pillow, and then, when everybody was asleep, I would read it all through the nights in the dim light of a lamp or candle. (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 453)¹⁶

Malevich repudiates each part of this story in the letter below.

In the third anecdote we are offering as context, Professor Tyrtov one day presented the Korvin-Krukovsky family with his elementary physics textbook (Tyrtov, 1862), and Sofya attempted to read it. To her irritation, she encountered some functions unknown to her in the chapter on optics: sine, cosine, tangent. Not knowing what a sine was, she asked Malevich about it. But as this did not enter into his programme of instruction, he replied that he did not know. She then proceeded to teach herself what they meant, using the chord of an angle as an approximation to the sine, for small angles. Talking to Tyrtov about this some time later, he did not believe her at first, but when she explained how she had come to understand the sine function he was elated, and even compared her to Pascal, that epitome of young genius:

But when I told him by which route I had arrived at the clarification of trigonometric formulas, he completely changed his tone. He immediately went to my father and fervently began to persuade him to teach me in the most serious way. In doing so, he compared me to Pascal. (Kovalevskaya, 1891, pp. 453-4)¹⁷

He then recommended to her father that she take private lessons with his colleague Strannolyubsky in St. Petersburg. In the letter we are about to discuss, Malevich takes issue with the chronology of these events.¹⁸

¹⁴ Первоначальным систематическим обучением математики я обязана И. И. Малевичу. Это было так давно, что я теперь совсем не помню его уроков; они остались у меня тёмным воспоминанием. Но несомненно, что они произвели на меня большое влияние и имели важное значение в моём развитии.

¹⁵ Kovalevskaya’s namesake Sophie Germain is also reputed to have learnt her mathematics in this way (Grinstein and Campbell, 1987). We have no information that Kovalevskaya knew Germain’s story.

¹⁶ Однако, мне удалось кое-как выпросить у Иосифа Игнатьевича книгу: ‘Курс Алгебры Бурдона’, который я стала прилежно изучать. Так как целый день я была под строгим надзором гувернантки, то мне приходилось пускать в дело хитрость. Идя спать, я клала книгу под подушку и затем, когда все засыпали, я, при тусклом свете лампы или ночника, зачитывалась по целым ночам.

¹⁷ Но когда я рассказал ему, каким путём я дошла до объяснения тригонометрических формул, то он совсем переменял тон. Он сейчас-же отправился к моему отцу и горячо стал убеждать его в необходимости учить меня самым серьёзным образом. При этом он сравнил меня с Паскалем.

¹⁸ For a further critical perspective on this anecdote, see (Birkeland, 2020).

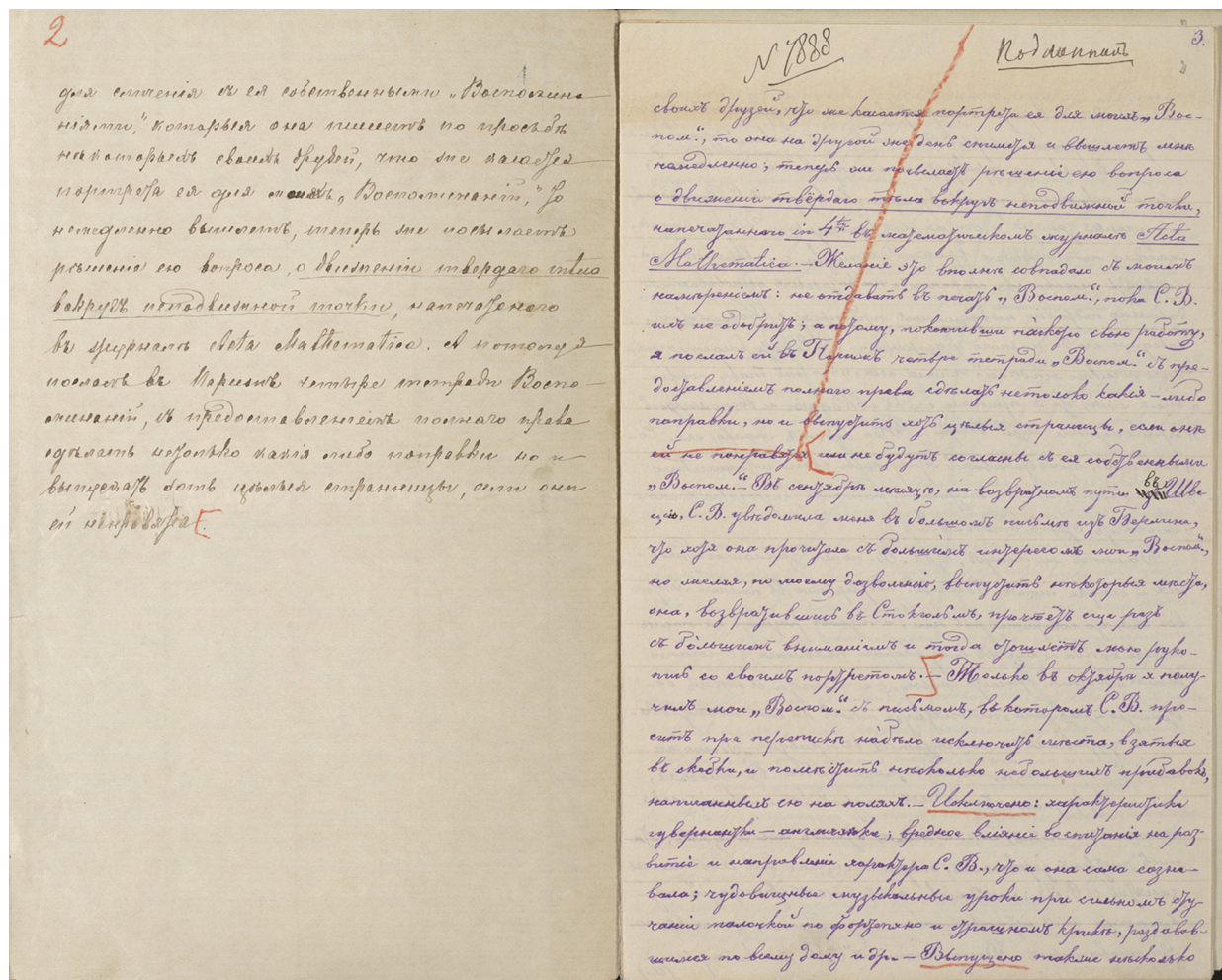


Figure 1. Pages 2 and 3 of the manuscript.

3. Letter from Malevich to Semevsky, January 17, 1892; English translation with comments

The manuscript contains 14 handwritten pages, and is held in the Semevsky archive of Pushkin House in St. Petersburg (Malevich, 1892).¹⁹ The two first pages are marked “Copy”, and are in a hand unknown to us, the rest are in Malevich’s own handwriting. The two first pages are tidier than the rest, in which there are many corrections and deletions. We conjecture that the first two pages represent the form in which Malevich had intended to send this letter, and that the remaining pages are a draft. But we can only speculate about why, in that case, he decided to send the letter in partly draft form.

In the upper right corner of page 3 (see Figure 1) there is the remark “Подлинный”, meaning “Original”, in Semevsky’s handwriting. In the transition between copy and original, a few lines are repeated, albeit not quite verbatim.

There exists an undated typewritten transcription attested by the historian and archivist Lev Borisovich Modzalevsky (1902-1948). It is in post-revolutionary Russian orthography, so it must have been made

¹⁹ The file containing the letter is rather misleadingly labelled “Заметки – воспоминания его о Ковалевской, Софии Васильевне” (Notices – his memories of Sofya Vasilyevna Kovalevskaya).

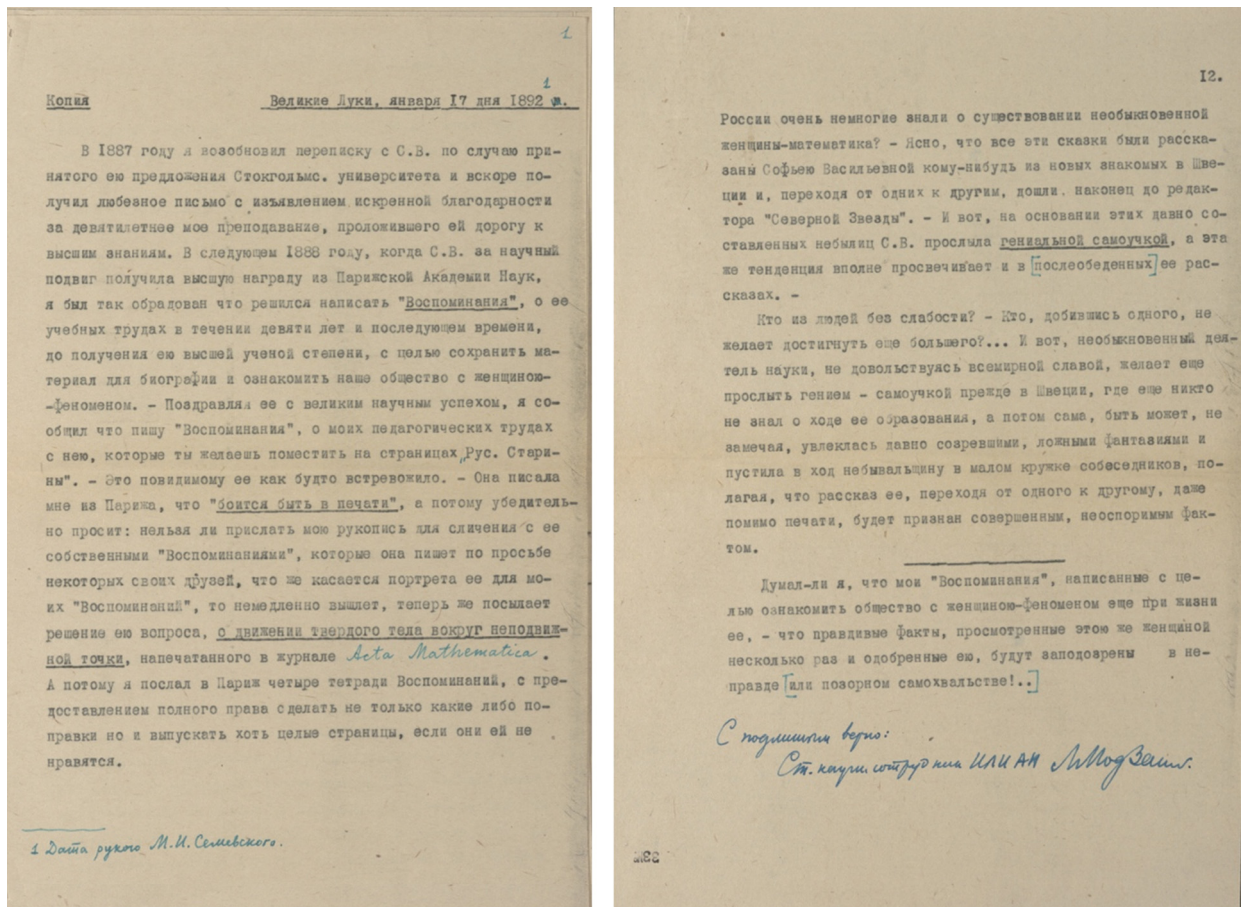


Figure 2. The first and last pages of the transcript. At the bottom of the last page there is an attestation of correctness handwritten by Modzalevsky: “С подлинным верно” – “С подлинным верно” – “True to the original”.

between 1918 and 1948. The transcript may plausibly have been ordered by Shtraikh during the preparations of (Kovalevskaya and Shtraikh, 1951), the collection of Kovalevskaya’s memoirs and letters which he edited for the 100th anniversary of her birth, and in which some excerpts of Malevich’s letter are quoted in the endnotes, or it may have been for Modzalevsky’s own research (cf. Figure 2).

The transcript is 12 pages long. We have checked the transcript against the manuscript, and the differences are purely orthographical. While the orthography is modernized according to the 1918 standard, the transcript is faithful to the point of reproducing text crossed out but still legible in the manuscript. Such text is reproduced in [square brackets]. We adhere to the same convention in our translation. Occasional idiosyncratic punctuation is also reproduced.

Velikie Luki, 17. January 1892²⁰

In 1887 I resumed my correspondence with S.V. on the occasion of her acceptance of the offer from the University of Stockholm,²¹ and soon received an amiable letter²² with the expression of sincere gratitude for my nine years of instruction, which paved the way for her to higher knowledge. In the following year

²⁰ Date handwritten by M. I. Semevsky.

²¹ I.e. Stockholms Högskola.

²² We do not know whether the letters of this correspondence between Malevich and Kovalevskaya have been preserved.

1888, when S.V. received the high prize from the Parisian Academy of Science for her scientific activities, I was so delighted that I decided to write “Memories”, about her nine years long studies and the following time, until she received the highest scientific degree,²³ with the goal of collecting material for a biography and to acquaint our public with this female phenomenon. – Congratulating her with her great scientific success, I informed her that I was writing “Memories”, about my pedagogic work with her, which you wish to enter into the pages of “Rus. Starina”.²⁴ – This seemed to worry her somehow. – She wrote to me from Paris,²⁵ that she “feared to be in print”, and therefore imploringly asked if I might send her my manuscript for comparison with her own “Memories”, which she was writing at the request of some of her friends. Concerning her portrait for my “Memories”, she will send it very soon, and now she sends her solution of the question of the movement of a solid object around a stationary point, printed in 4^{to} in the mathematical journal Acta Mathematica.²⁶ – This wish fully coincided with my intention: not to put in print “Memor.”²⁷ until S.V. approves them; and therefore, after quickly finishing my work, I sent four notebooks of “Memor.” to her in Paris, with concession of full rights not only to make some amendments, but also even to omit entire pages, if they should displease her or disagree with her own “Memor.” – In September, on her way back to Sweden, S.V. informed me in a long letter from Berlin that although she had read my “Memor.” with great interest, she wished, with my permission, to omit some parts. After returning to Stockholm, she would once more read it attentively, and then she would send my manuscript with her portrait. – Only in October did I receive my “Memor.” with a letter, in which S.V. asks that when preparing the manuscript for publication, I omit what she had put in brackets, and insert some small additions which she had written in the margins. – Omitted: characterization of the English governess; the harmful influence of the upbringing on the development and direction of S.V.’s character, which she herself was aware of;²⁸ monstrous musical lessons with loud knocking of a baton on the piano and a terrible scream which resounded all over the house etc. – Left out also some parts where there is talk of the obstinate and unbridled character of S.V.’s older sister, who had a similarly bad influence not only on S.V.’s character, but also on the direction of her development; further was omitted the period of time when S.V., having quit academic studies, reckoning that they were useless for women, deplored the time she had wasted on science and, above all, some pages were crossed out where the thoughtless business venture of Mr. Kovalevsky,²⁹ which completely devastated him, was described in some detail. – “But as concerns the pedagogical part”,³⁰ she wrote, “it pleased me so much, that I took note of it and am using it in the education of my daughter. – But it would be a pity if Semevsky, in keeping with the programme of his historical and not pedagogical journal, finds it unsuitable to include this part.” –

Now note that S.V., after mature consideration and amendments of my “Memor.”, fully approved of everything that is said about her; and therefore her story, after the lunch with you, also in view of the expeditious³¹ appearance in print of my “Memor.”, casts a strong and incomprehensible shadow, together with well justified surprise, over my narrative and makes one doubt the truth. – My “Memories” of the person, then alive,

²³ This refers to the doctorate, summa cum laude, which the University of Göttingen awarded Kovalevskaya in absentia in 1874.

²⁴ Русская Старина (*Russkaya Starina*), the historical journal edited by M. I. Semevsky, the recipient of the letter.

²⁵ Kovalevskaya had close working relationships with Hermite, Picard, and many other prominent French mathematicians.

²⁶ (Kovalevskaya, 1889a). This was the topic for her submission to the Prix Bordin.

²⁷ Malevich uses the abbreviation “Воспом.” for “Воспоминания”, i.e. “Memories”, here and in several other places, referring most often to his own memoirs (Malevich, 1890) and only once to Kovalevskaya’s memoirs (Kovalevskaya, 1890). It is clear from context in each case which is intended. We have chosen to render this as “Memor.” in the translation.

²⁸ характеристика гувернантки-англичанки; вредное влияние воспитания на развитие и направление характера С.В., что и она сама сознавала.

²⁹ Kovalevskaya’s husband Vladimir Onufrievich Kovalevsky committed suicide after his commercial undertakings failed and left him financially ruined.

³⁰ Cf. discussion of Grube’s method above.

³¹ скорого.

after twofold reading of them, amendments and omissions in many places by that same person, remain a clean mirror in which every step of my lessons with S.V. is reflected; they are far from those fantasies and deviations from veracity which so often occur in the poeticized “Memories” of S.V., about which I expressed no small surprise when you read them to us in Fyodortsev.³²

I will now review those places in Sofya Vasilyevna’s printed story where she speaks about me.

[I am puzzled, many are surprised, having read this story, because you declared authoritatively in its foreword that “you consider it necessary (!!!)³³ to retrieve³⁴ from your archive the autobiographical story of your friend” (!!!) sic . . .³⁵ I repeat, if you took from this story the period from 1880 to 1890, then that would have been a true and valuable supplement of material for S.V.’s biography; but by some incomprehensible, malicious³⁶ glance, you, as the saying goes, put a spoonful of tar into the barrel of honey,³⁷ and shrouded in thick fog all that was said by me and Fyodor Vasilyevich³⁸ about the phenomenal woman’s nine years of study.³⁹ – But the irreparable deed is done, the story is printed and for you it remains to rub your hands together in satisfaction that the work of your old friend,⁴⁰ that his “Memor.,” written with the danger of losing eyesight at the end, with full faith in friendship, gifted to you of a clean heart for remembrance, fell into some kind of maelstrom from which it is difficult to extract the truth, when the story of the mathematics professor herself contradicts the narrative of her teacher. –]

On page 4 of the story, to the surprise [of anyone who has not lost mental health], we find the following: “this was so long ago, that now I do not remember his lessons at all; they remain a dim memory for me!”⁴¹

³² Semevsky’s home in childhood. He hosted frequent literary salons there and in St. Petersburg. At one of them, with Malevich among the guests, Kovalevskaya’s memoirs were read (Kovalevskaya, 1890).

³³ Triple exclamation marks stricken but legible in the manuscript.

³⁴ извлечьь.

³⁵ Malevich is referring to the editorial preface to (Kovalevskaya, 1891), where the editor Semevsky recounted that he had known Kovalevskaya since 1862–1863, and that he had had the pleasure of having her as his guest at a small party in May 1890, where she dictated her autobiographical story, which was stenographed by her brother Fyodor Vasilyevich Korvin-Krukovsky and placed in the archive of *Russkaya Starina*. Semevsky then writes:

“The unexpected fateful death on the 30th of January 1891 robbed Russia of one of its most glorious women, and so, placing in the pages of our publication material for the biography of the famous scholar and professor S. V. Kovalevskaya (see “*Russkaya Starina*” ed. 1891, v. LXXI, September, pp. 623–641), we felt it necessary to also retrieve from our archives the above-mentioned autobiographical story by our friend.”

(Our translation from the Russian original: “Нежданная роковая смерть 30-го января 1891 г. лишила Россию одну из славнейших её женщин, и вот, помещая на страницах нашего издания материал к жизнеописанию знаменитого учёного и профессора С. В. Ковалевской (см. “Русскую Старину” изд. 1891 г., т. LXXI, сентябрь, стр. 623–641), мы сочли необходимым извлечь из нашего архива и помянутый автобиографический рассказ нашего друга.”)

The citation of the September 1891 issue of *Russkaya Starina* refers to: 1) a short biographical note by Kovalevskaya’s brother Fyodor Vasilyevich Korvin-Krukovsky, 2) a translation into Russian of (NN, 1886), and 3) Kovalevskaya’s entry into Semevsky’s guestbook.

The death certificate states that Kovalevskaya passed away on January 29 (February 10 by the Gregorian calendar), not January 30 as Semevsky writes here.

³⁶ Stricken but legible in the manuscript: злобному.

³⁷ A Russian adage which means to purposely destroy something nice.

³⁸ Referring to his own memories of Kovalevskaya (Malevich, 1890) and to the biographical note by Kovalevskaya’s younger brother Fyodor Vasilyevich Korvin-Krukovsky (1855–1920), cf. (Korvin-Krukovsky, 1891).

³⁹ о девятилетних учебных занятиях феноменальной женщины.

⁴⁰ Here Malevich is referring to himself, and indeed he and Semevsky, one of his first pupils, maintained a life-long friendship.

⁴¹ Это было так давно, что я теперь совсем не помню его уроков; они остались у меня темным воспоминанием. (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 452) Malevich rather strangely ignores the next sentence: Но несомненно, что они произвели на меня большое влияние и имели важное значение в моем развитии. (But there is no doubt that they had a great influence on me and were very important in my development.)

Having read the pedagogical part of my “Memor.” and then these words by S.V., anyone, even a complete simpleton, would be stupefied, and might ask how such a gifted person as Kovalevskaya, with great capabilities and unusual memory seldom found in a person, could forget the nine-year long course, taught to her with great success during a person’s most receptive years, which are forever remembered, from 8 to 16 years of age? – This strange trickery for dramatic effect⁴² casts a strong shadow over the hitherto bright face of the unusual mathematician. [– And who is at fault, I ask in my turn? – On whose conscience lies the heavy burden of untruth and deceit, hastily put in print without employing a critical attitude to the story or weighing it on the scales of veracity?⁴³ –] Further the narrator says: “Malevich taught arithmetic especially well and idiosyncratically”.⁴⁴

What does the word idiosyncratically mean? – It is synonymous to originally, peculiarly. – To call a method idiosyncratic when it is completely rational, elaborated during many years of experience and originates with the excellent method of A. Grube,⁴⁵ is not only brazen, but also unforgivable⁴⁶ for a mathematician. – All my pupils, without exception, loved arithmetic, succeeded well in it, and some of them completed a higher course of mathematics in universities or academies following the idiosyncratic teaching, tightly connected with full development of mathematical skills even in less capable pupils. –

“In all probability”, says S.V. “thanks to the influence of my uncle, I was more occupied with various diversional considerations, (the desire to show off is evident) for example about “infinity”.⁴⁷ – (!!!)

It is at least strange and even funny to hear that a person of 11 or 12 occupied herself with the question of infinity, promulgated by a person who occupied himself with every scientific question without having basic notions of that which he thoughtlessly discussed with the girl. – I could have said much here about the considerable harm inflicted on my pupils by a person of good intentions, but insupportable in his strange and even ridiculous judgements – about this or that science – more than once I confronted him with the great damage resulting from his teachings; he apologized and promised to interrupt his fooleries; but when he resumed them, I asked of my pupils’ father to take the necessary measures. – And so, when the old man habitually touched upon some scientific question or other, the general told him: “Pyotr, I seriously ask you to stop talking about that which you fundamentally do not know and which exceeds your concepts and, what is more, those of my children: it is very harmful for my daughters. – One in her childish mind imagines finding the quadrature of the circle, and the other,⁴⁸ at your behest, is entering into philosophy in her, as she calls them, philosophical letters!. Such silly pretences and frantic exertion of an immature brain could lead to the yellow house”.⁴⁹ –

If their uncle, and you are aware of the age and knowledge of my pupils, had talked to them both about what they had studied or were studying, this might, of course, have been of some use; but by his inherent strangeness he sank into a dream about questions long abandoned by scientists due to the impossibility of untying Gordian knots, or indeed explained to the girls about asymptotes of straight lines, about the philos-

⁴² Это странная выходка ради красного словечка – the expression “ради красного словца/словечка”, literally “for the sake of a small red word”, indicates that the purpose is to embellish the actual facts.

⁴³ The seemingly harsh tone of this reproach against Semevsky is not unique in the correspondence between the two, whose friendship survived, and possibly thrived upon, direct and unbridled exchange of views.

⁴⁴ В особенности хорошо и своеобразно Малевич преподавал арифметику (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 452). The word which annoyed Malevich is “своеобразно”, literally “according to his own pattern”.

⁴⁵ Cf. discussion of Grube’s method above.

⁴⁶ An exaggeration typical of the style of the letter.

⁴⁷ По всей вероятности, благодаря влиянию дяди Петра Васильевича, меня более занимали разные отвлеченные рассуждения, напр. о бесконечности (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 452). – Kovalevskaya attributed her early awareness of and interest in such topics as infinity, quadrature of the circle, and asymptotes, to her uncle Piotr Vasilyevich Korvin-Krukovsky, an elder brother of her father.

⁴⁸ Sofya’s older sister Anna Vasilyevna Korvin-Krukovskaya (1843–1887).

⁴⁹ I.e., the insane asylum.

ophy of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, about whom he had managed to read in our periodic publications. – And so, Sofya Vasilyevna, from her first impressions in childhood, not only ascribed some meaning to her uncle’s ravings, but thought this nonsense brought her love for mathematics. – Below I will tell, with S.V.’s own true words, when it was that she actually came to feel a strong attraction to mathematics.

In her story S.V. further declares: “in addition to arithmetic, Malevich also taught me elementary geometry and algebra. Just when I had acquainted myself with the latter, I felt such a strong attraction to mathematics, that I started to neglect other topics.”⁵⁰ –

This is where the true beginning of her love for mathematics is and not in her uncle’s rantings, not understanding, like his listeners, what he was talking about. – Indeed, I well remember that S.V. with a kind of special enjoyment took up the study of algebra, when having acquainted herself with first degree equations, started solving tasks which even with excellent knowledge of arithmetic seemed insurmountable. – Combinations of given numbers and unknowns, more or less close relationships between them, and in the wake of this, logical formulation of equations brought S.V. to some kind of ecstasy, clearly visible in her excited state of mind and her face, which shone with pleasure. –

Furthermore, there is not even a shadow of truth in the following words of Kovalevskaya. – “Seeing in me such an attitude”, she says, “my father, who on the whole had a strong prejudice against erudite women, decided to stop my mathematical lessons with Malevich”.⁵¹ –

Nothing of the sort ever happened. – Distracted by improvisation, S.V. immerses herself, like a poet, in the world of fantasy, however striving to show, according to her pium desiderium,⁵² that she owes everything to herself. – But anyone, even not having delved very deep into her tale, will soon notice her mistake and uncover the untruth. – I shall prove this by incontrovertible facts. –

I started to teach her algebra in the beginning of 1865, i.e. soon after the English governess was let go from Palibino. – After some months, concerned with S.V.’s unusual attraction to mathematics and her splendid successes to the obvious detriment of other topics, I asked the advice of her father, who, upon learning about his beloved daughter’s great success in mathematics (cf. “*Rus. Star.*” December 1890 p. 630) heartily thanked me for my work and asked me to continue my gainful lessons. – And how should the general have arrived at the thought of stopping the mathematics lessons, when at the beginning of my service at Palibino he asked me for one thing only: “more mathematics and less philology”.⁵³ – (See my “*Memor.*” in manuscript, part III at the start.) Additionally, the year after, in 1866, before my pupils’ departure to Switzerland, I started to go through second degree equations with S.V., and hence she acquainted herself with algebra not somewhat but very solidly; indeed when after her request to her father – to invite me to Switzerland with mathematical books – I travelled abroad, (See “*Memor.*” Part II, p. 642) first in Montreux and later at the baths in Germany S.V. finished second degree equations with great success, the general study of them as well as those parts which might be useful for her in higher mathematical studies; (See my “*Memor.*” Part I, p. 629) After returning to Russia, I had intended to begin teaching Trigonometry. –

After everything laid forth by me and well known to S.V., how could she say that her father decided to interrupt my lessons? – To this improvisation she added another such unforgivable fib which amazed me exceedingly: “However, I managed”, she said, “somehow to beg of Iosif Ignatyevich the book: ‘Course of

⁵⁰ Кроме арифметики, Малевич преподавал мне также элементарную геометрию и алгебру. Только ознакомившись несколько с этой последнею, я почувствовала настолько сильно влечение к математике, что стала пренебрегать другими предметами (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 452).

⁵¹ Увидя во мне такое направление, отец мой, имевший вообще сильное предубеждение против ученых женщин, решил, что надо прекратить мои уроки математики у Малевича (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 453).

⁵² A pious wish.

⁵³ побольше математики и поменьше словесности.

Algebra' by Bourdon,⁵⁴ which I eagerly started to study. – Since I was under the strict supervision of the governess all day, I had to resort to trickery. When I went to bed, I laid the book under my pillow, and then, when everyone was asleep, in the dim light of a lamp or night-light, I read all through the nights!"⁵⁵

In this improvisation, S.V. runs her mouth off to the extreme. – She begged the book Algebra from me, as if it were forbidden fruit!!! – Well, this is not even an improvisation anymore, but Allah knows what to call her story, hastily put together, here, for admiring listeners,⁵⁶ who consider everything emanating from the lips of the woman mathematician to be incontrovertible truth. – But what was I doing in Palibino in 1865 after the governess Margaret Frantsova had been let go, then in 1866 and finally, in 1867, the last year of my lectures, [(I ask my old friend to notice this!)] when I travelled with the general to Switzerland, taking with me mathematical books at her own request and taught her precisely algebra, as related above, until our return to Russia, which no doubt S.V.'s brother Fyodor Vasilyevich remembers and can testify to? – I ask you to also notice, that at the beginning of September in the same year 1867 my lectures with S.V. stopped for good, when it was decided on my initiative that her brother would enter the gymnasium. – (See "Rus. Star." December 1890 p. 643)

I assure you on my word of honour in the name of the holy truth, that to beg me to give her the algebra book, which like every other learning aid had always been available to S.V. for preparation of given lessons, that this cunning trickery to fool the strict surveillance of the governess, who already long before had been let go from Palibino, that these lamps and night-lights, by which she allegedly read Algebra all through the nights, like everything that is said above, is idle nonsense, hastily baked here after lunch for her admiring interlocutors⁵⁷ [and accepted by the editor of "Russkaya Starina" with a kind of strange, unintelligible for me, belief in the infallibility of the one he had called his new friend, but who is actually an imagined one ! –] It remains, finally, to state an obviously irrefutable proof of the confusion, or rather the astonishing untruth in the next passage of S.V.'s story: "Only after some hesitation," she says, "my father agreed to invite A. N. Strannolyubsky as a teacher. He and I embarked on the work, and in the course of the winter we went through analytic geometry and differential and integral calculus."

In my "Memor." (Rus. Star. December 1890, p. 644) it is said that when it was decided to place Fyodor Vasilyevich in the gymnasium, the general's wife and her daughters went to St. Petersburg at the start of October 1867, and I, at the request of the general, prolonged my lessons with my pupil⁵⁸ until the first days of January 1868. – Only on Kreshchenie⁵⁹ did the general and his son head for the capital, and hence he could not permit himself to invite A. N. Strannolyubsky to give lectures until the middle of January. – In May, these lessons were stopped, and therefore not during winter, as S.V. says, but in three months she succeeded in learning not only analytic geometry, that higher branch of mathematics, but also differential and integral calculus, so to speak, the crown of science. I suppose that before her university lectures S.V. mastered these parts of higher mathematics, but having admitted that, not only a mathematician, but also any pupil in the 5th grade of the gymnasium, will say that to master analytic geometry and, what is more, to

⁵⁴ A textbook which went through many editions and was translated into several languages. The one referred to here could be (Bourdon, 1844), a translation into Russian of the 8th French edition.

⁵⁵ Однако, мне удалось кое-как выпросить у Иосифа Игнатьевича книгу: "Курс алгебры Бурдона", который и стала прилежно изучать. Так как целый день я была под строгим надзором гувернантки, то мне приходилось пускаться в дело хитрость. Идя спать, я клала книгу под подушку и затем, когда все засыпали, я, при туклом свете лампы или ночника, зачитывалась по целым ночам. (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 453).

⁵⁶ A sarcasm aimed at Semevsky's literary salons, at one of which Kovalevskaya's autobiographical story was stenographed.

⁵⁷ A reference to Kovalevskaya's visit with Semevsky on May 29, 1890.

⁵⁸ After Sofya had left for St. Petersburg with her sister and mother in October 1867, Malevich's only remaining pupil at Palibino was Kovalevskaya's younger brother Fyodor Vasilyevich Korvin-Krukovsky.

⁵⁹ Крещение Господне, Kreshchenie Gospodne, Baptism of the Lord, which Russian-orthodox churches celebrate on the 6th of January. Civil Russian society changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in February 1918, but the Russian-orthodox church did not. Thus nowadays, according to the Gregorian calendar, Kreshchenie Gospodne falls on the 19th of January.

digest differential and integral calculus, requires a solid and foundational preparation or, at the very least, a gymnasium course in mathematics. – When and by whom was this preparation provided? – I should think it is clear from my “Memor.” and the facts presented above, that until the autumn of 1867 I taught S.V. both abroad and in Palibino, and in four⁶⁰ months she already mastered analytic geometry and differential and integral calculus; but apparently she has forgotten that she studied with me for nine years and with some aplomb tells her interlocutors: “This was so long ago, that now I don’t remember his lessons at all; they remain a dim recollection for me!” – In which way, with her unusual memory, did she suddenly forget her nine years long studies in the best and most receptive years of a person’s life, the impressions from which remain in every person’s mind until deep old age? – I admit that these words, after she had twice read my “Memor.” attentively and thought carefully about what to delete, what to retain, and what to add, which is even stranger in view of the close appearance in print⁶¹ of these same “Memor.”, that her words seem a little dishonest.

Having read all the articles about S.V. which have appeared in “Russkaya Starina”, it is easy to notice that S.V.’s story follows from the information from Sweden which was promulgated by herself, and which she, so to speak, assimilated, information printed in the Norwegian⁶² illustrated magazine “Northern Star”⁶³ already in 1886 and translated from the Swedish⁶⁴ language in “Russkaya Starina”! [as if to confuse and mix actual facts with inventions]. – (“Russkaya Starina” September 1891 p. 638).⁶⁵ In this article it says: “her family was very wealthy, and she received basic training... (where exactly and from whom?) “Occasionally she took part in mathematical lessons with her second cousin⁶⁶ (!?) and thereby the passion for mathematics appeared in her, and she showed great ability in it. – But her parents did not wish that she should learn this (!!!) and the lessons were stopped, much to the chagrin of the child!” (Compare this information with S.V.’s story, and sound reasoning will show that it was promulgated in Sweden by herself.) “Nevertheless, she continued to study on her own”. – (sic) (Wasn’t it in bed – and by a night-lamp? . . . Again the same as in her story.) “and once when she was in St. Petersburg, she happened to track down⁶⁷ (!) a good teacher, who was surprised that the young self-taught (!) girl had obtained such deep knowledge of mathematics”. – (I ask again: where did she obtain it and from whom? – Self-taught! . . . Well this is already a complete transgression in S.V.’s story)

Where is this information taken from, already in 1886, when very few in Russia knew about the existence of this unusual female mathematician? – It is clear that all these stories were told by Sofya Vasilyevna to one of her new acquaintances in Sweden,⁶⁸ and, transmitted by word of mouth, finally came to the editor of “Northern Star”. – And then, on the basis of these long-established concoctions by S.V., she is considered to be a self-taught genius, and this same tendency completely shines through in her [afternoon]⁶⁹ stories as well. –

⁶⁰ Probably a better approximation than the three months indicated above.

⁶¹ в виду близкого появления в печати; Kovalevskaya and Semevsky had been in correspondence about Malevich’s memoirs before they were printed, and had agreed on some adjustments, seemingly without consulting Malevich. For excerpts of this correspondence see (Birkeland, 2020). Malevich’s turn of phrase here could conceivably mean that he had been aware of the last-minute editing that took place behind his back.

⁶² The weekly illustrated magazine *Nordstjernen* was Danish, not Norwegian. The editorial postscript to the translation (NN, 1891) confuses the Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish languages, which are distinct but mutually intelligible.

⁶³ (NN, 1886).

⁶⁴ (NN, 1891), translated from Danish, not Swedish. The translator is given as Г-ша Ренстрём (Ms. Renstrøm).

⁶⁵ Incongruous bracketing reproduced from the original.

⁶⁶ с её двоюродным братом, probably a reference to Kovalevskaya’s two years older cousin Mikhail, another of Malevich’s pupils.

⁶⁷ отыскать = track down, locate, find.

⁶⁸ Malevich seems to be hinting at Anne Charlotte Edgren-Leffler.

⁶⁹ Another reference to Kovalevskaya’s visit with Semevsky on May 29, 1890.

Who among people is without weakness? – Who, having achieved something, does not wish for more?... And so the unusual scientist, not content with world fame, wishes to also be known as a self-taught genius, first of all in Sweden, where nobody knew about her course of education, and then, maybe not noticing it herself, she got carried away with ripened, deceptive fantasies and set in motion an unprecedented tale in a small circle of interlocutors, believing that her story, going from one to the other, even aside from printing, would be considered a true, undisputable fact.

Did I think that my “Memories”, written with the goal of acquainting the public with the female phenomenon⁷⁰ during her lifetime, – that truthful facts, read by this same woman several times and approved by her, would be suspected of falsehood [or shameful self-glorification]!..

4. Discussion

What’s in a name? Very much, judging by the efforts people make to build and protect their reputations. Kovalevskaya sought to portray herself as a child prodigy, whose mathematical talents flourished spontaneously. The anecdotes we have referred to above, about uncle Pyotr, and about reading Bourdon’s *Algebra* in secret at night, and about Professor Tyrtoev who compared her to Pascal, all serve to reinforce the image of a precocious wunderkind who did not need teachers for her mathematical education, relying solely on the force of her own intellect and the inspiration of books and her beloved uncle.

This project of reputation-building could not accommodate a central role for Kovalevskaya’s teacher in childhood and youth, and she described her lessons with Malevich rather dismissively.

Malevich, on the other hand, wanted to be remembered for his successful home-schooled pupils, whose mathematical skills relied on the training he had given them, using his version of the slow and meticulous method of Grube. Kovalevskaya, the world’s first female professor of mathematics, was to be the triumphant pinnacle of Malevich’s legacy.

In painting this picture of himself as the successful educator of a famous professor, Malevich completely depended on Kovalevskaya for confirmation of his role in her formation as a mathematician. But alas, no such confirmation was forthcoming. He had cautiously let her read the draft of his memoirs, asking her to correct and amend any part not agreeable to her, and she had taken ample advantage of his invitation to do so. Even so, Malevich’s intentions were thwarted by Kovalevskaya, who in her own memoirs and in her autobiographical story downplayed his role to such an extent that it seems she wanted him out of the picture. In particular, the anecdotes we have mentioned leave little room for Malevich in Kovalevskaya’s early mathematical education.

The contrast in motivations and intentions between the illustrious professor and her former teacher is most striking, and Malevich’s tone is correspondingly irate. While his resentful letter to Semevsky is previously unpublished, let us start our discussion by acknowledging that it has been mentioned in at least two places in the literature:

4.1. “An angry clarification, which has remained unpublished” – excerpts in Shtraikh 1951

The passage from Kovalevskaya’s “Autobiographical Story” about how she came to understand the sine function with the help of Tyrtoev’s physics textbook (Tyrtoev, 1862) is reprinted in Shtraikh’s edition of her memoirs and letters which appeared at the centenary of her birth (Kovalevskaya and Shtraikh, 1951, pp. 141-142). In an endnote, Shtraikh says that when Malevich had read this, “he sent Semevsky an extended

⁷⁰ ознакомить общество с женщиною-феноменом.

and angry clarification, which has remained unpublished. I will cite some excerpts of the manuscript, interesting for the biography of Kovalevskaya”.⁷¹

The extended and angry clarification which Shtraikh mentions and quotes excerpts from, and which has remained unpublished (until now), is the letter which is the topic of the present article. The excerpts Shtraikh gives appear in (Kovalevskaya and Shtraikh, 1951, pp. 475-476) and cover most of the first four pages of the manuscript.

4.2. “A very bitter section (unpublished)” – Stillman’s mention of the letter 1978

According to the records of the Semevsky archive, the American linguist and translator Beatrice Stillman (1922–2006) is the only Western scholar who has had access to Malevich’s letter to Semevsky until one of us (Birkeland) obtained permission to scan it for publication. Unfortunately, in (Stillman et al., 1978) the letter is placed somewhat out of context and chronology, and we take this opportunity to fill in some information apparently unavailable to Stillman at the time. Stillman maintains that Kovalevskaya depreciated Malevich’s influence on her education, and that Malevich was so offended that he decided to write his own memoirs:

Malevich himself had been highly incensed by Kovalevskaya’s slighting remark, and in response he wrote a lengthy reminiscence of his nine years as tutor in the Korvin-Krukovsky family, elaborating his entire course of study in detail. This reminiscence was published in *Russkaya Starina* in 1890, except for a very bitter section (unpublished) in which Malevich depreciated the influence of Uncle Pyotr Vasilyevich and Professor Strannolyubsky, and maintained that it was he who had started Kovalevskaya on her mathematical career (Stillman et al., 1978, p. 229).

The “very bitter section (unpublished)” mentioned by Stillman is the letter which is the topic of this article. However, it was neither a section of Malevich’s memoirs, nor was it written in the context, nor even at the time, indicated by Stillman. To better understand the correct sequence of events, let us assemble the facts in a table:

	Written	Published	Journal
Malevich’s “Memories”	1888-1889	1890	“ <i>Russkaya Starina</i> ”, vol. 68
Kovalevskaya’s “Childhood Memories”	1889-1890	1890	“ <i>Vestnik Evropy</i> ”, vol. 144
Kovalevskaya’s “Autobiographical story”	May 1890	1891	“ <i>Russkaya Starina</i> ”, vol. 72
Malevich’s letter to Semevsky	January 1892	2022	This journal

No doubt Malevich was offended by Kovalevskaya’s remarks, but his memoirs were not written in response to them. On the contrary, as Malevich himself writes to Semevsky, he was so proud of his former pupil that when she received the Prix Bordin from the French Académie des Sciences in 1888, he decided to write his memoirs in her honour.

Malevich’s “Memories” and Kovalevskaya’s “Childhood Memories” and “Autobiographical Story” were all written and published around the same time. Malevich reports about the amiable correspondence with Kovalevskaya where he invited her to correct and amend any parts of his manuscript not agreeable to her, and indeed she took ample advantage of his offer. Stillman is therefore not justified in saying that Malevich

⁷¹ Прочитав в комментируемом рассказе строки, отмеченные настоящим примечанием, Малевич прислал Семеvскому обширное и сердитое разъяснение, оставшееся ненапечатанным. Приведу из рукописи несколько отрывков, интересных для биографии Ковалевской.

wrote his memoirs as a reaction to Kovalevskaya's. Furthermore, the letter we have presented in translation in this article was not, as Stillman indicated, an unpublished section of Malevich's memoirs. Those were already in print at the time when the letter was written.

4.3. Kovalevskaya's "circle of interlocutors" in Stockholm and "admiring listeners" in St. Petersburg

Malevich is especially vitriolic in his description of how Kovalevskaya spread favourable but untrue stories about herself to her new friends in Sweden, information which then found its way to the editor of the magazine *Nordstjernen* (NN, 1886). Her interlocutors are gullible enough to believe what she says. He uses similar language to denigrate the participants at Semevsky's literary salon May 29, 1890, where (Kovalevskaya, 1891) was stenographed.

It is painful to see how hard it was for Malevich to accept the wording in the illustrated magazine article (NN, 1886), available to him in Russian translation as (NN, 1891). As pointed out in (Kaufholz-Soldat, 2019, p. 65), and easily verified by searching old magazine and newspaper archives, a great number of such articles, based on similarly imprecise information, were published all over Northern Europe during Kovalevskaya's years as professor in Stockholm.

On closer scrutiny, the translation of (NN, 1886) into (NN, 1891) leaves something to be desired. The Danish phrase "lykkedes det hende at faa" (she succeeded in getting) is translated as "ей случилось отыскать" (she happened to track down/search out/locate/find). Malevich is unhappy about the latter word, underlining it where he quotes it in his letter, and placing "(!)" after it. But his discontent is simply based on a poorly nuanced translation.⁷²

4.4. Chronology of Kovalevskaya's studies with Strannolyubsky

Malevich rejects the information Kovalevskaya gave, and which her brother confirmed in (Korvin-Krukovsky, 1891), about the timing of her lessons with Alexander Nikolayevich Strannolyubsky. Let us consider the various existing reports about when these lessons started.

It is undisputed that Kovalevskaya spent the winter 1867-68 in St. Petersburg, taking private mathematics lessons with Strannolyubsky. Returning to St. Petersburg after the summer of 1868, she continued her studies with him through the winter. She left St. Petersburg in April 1869, and spent three semesters in Heidelberg studying with Helmholtz and Kirchhoff before moving to Berlin in October 1870 to study with Weierstrass. Kovalevskaya's personal impressions of Strannolyubsky are vividly described in her correspondence with her sister Anyuta (Birkeland, 2020).

In her memoirs, Kovalevskaya indicates that she started taking lessons with Strannolyubsky much earlier, when she was fifteen years old, which would have been in 1865, and this version seems to have taken hold in the biographical literature. She says, in connection with the familiar story of how one wall of her childhood

⁷² (NN, 1886): Hendes familie var meget velhavende, og hun nød en omhyggelig Undervisning, særlig i Sprog; da blev hun tilfældig Deltager i nogle Matematik-timer sammen med en Fætter, hvis Kappelyst skulde vækkes derved, og med Et aabenbarede hun sine store Evner i denne Retning. Men Forældrene ønskede ikke, at deres Datter skulde studere, og Læretimene ophørte til barnets store Sorg. Men paa egen Haand arbejdede hun videre, og under et Ophold i St. Petersburg lykkedes det hende at faa en dygtig Lærer, der forbavsedes over, at den unge Pige allerede paa egen Haand havde arbejdet sig ind i et vigtigt og vanskeligt Afsnit af Mathematiken.

(NN, 1891): Её родственники были весьма состоятельны и она получила основательное образование, в особенности в языках; случайно она приняла участие в уроках математики с её двоюродным братом; при этом у неё явилась страсть к математике и она оказала в ней большие способности. Но родители её не желали, чтобы она этому училась, и уроки прекратились к большой печали ребёнка. Тем не менее, она сама продолжала учиться и в одно из пребываний в С.-Петербурге ей случилось отыскать хорошего учителя, который удивился, что молодая девушка самоучкой уже достигла таких глубоких познаний в математике.

bedroom, for lack of wallpaper during redecoration, was covered in ordinary paper, which happened to contain lithographed lectures by Ostrogradsky⁷³ on differential and integral calculus:

When, many years later, as an already fifteen-year-old girl, I took my first lesson in differential calculus from the famous mathematics teacher in St. Petersburg, Alexander Nikolayevich Strannolyubsky, he was surprised at how quickly I grasped and mastered the concepts of the limit and derivative, “as if I knew them beforehand”. I remember that’s how he put it. And the thing was, indeed, that the minute he was explaining these concepts to me, I suddenly vividly remembered that all this stood on the sheets of Ostrogradsky I remembered, and the very notion of the limit seemed long since familiar to me. (Kovalevskaya and Shtraikh, 1951, p. 53, our translation)

Her version is supported by her brother, who in his biographical note includes the anecdote of how she was inspired by professor Tyrto’s textbook on physics when she was fourteen years old, and asserts that Tyrto mediated contact with his young colleague Strannolyubsky who gave Kovalevskaya lessons in mathematics during the family’s winter sojourn in St. Petersburg 1864-1865:

... her work, although not of direct scientific importance, reveals a talent that is completely out of the ordinary, especially when you consider that it came from a 14-year-old girl!
 ... Shortly afterwards, at the start of the winter season in St. Petersburg, on the recommendation of the same N. N. Tyrto, a good acquaintance of his, a teacher of mathematics at the Naval School and a very famous pedagogue in St. Petersburg, A. N. Strannolyubsky, was invited to give Sophie lessons. (Korvin-Krukovsky, 1891, pp. 631-632, our translation from the Russian)⁷⁴

However, in the letter we are discussing here, Malevich maintains that the first of these lessons could not have taken place before the middle of January 1868:

... the general’s wife and her daughters went to St. Petersburg at the start of October 1867, and I, at the request of the general, prolonged my lessons with my pupil until the first days of January 1868. – Only on Kreshchenie did the general and his son head for the capital, and hence he could not permit himself to invite A. N. Strannolyubsky to give lectures until the middle of January. (Malevich, 1892)

Which version is to be believed? Did Kovalevskaya’s lessons with Strannolyubsky start in the winter of 1864-1865, or 1867-1868?

Taking into account that Malevich taught Kovalevskaya basic algebra at the family estate in Palibino from 1865, proceeding to second degree equations in 1866, and continuing with algebra lessons during the family’s trip to Switzerland and Germany in 1866-67, it seems somewhat incongruous that Kovalevskaya should have been introduced to differential and integral calculus by Strannolyubsky in St. Petersburg, starting as early as the winter 1864-1865. Also, it appears that Strannolyubsky may have been away from St. Petersburg for some of the time in question. During the winter 1866-1867, he submitted for publication a report on a scientific mission studying battleships in England and France which he had recently undertaken

⁷³ Mikhail Vasilyevich Ostrogradsky (1801-1862), mathematician, mechanist, and physicist, studied in Paris 1822-26, returned to St. Petersburg, and became one of the leading mathematicians of Imperial Russia.

⁷⁴ ... труд её, хотя и не имевший непосредственно научного значения, обнаруживает в ней дарование, совершенно выходящее из ряда обыкновенных, в особенности, если принять во внимание, что он исходил от 14-летней девочки! ... Вскоре за этим, по приезд на зимний сезон в Петербург, по рекомендации того же Н. Н. Тыртова, был приглашён для занятий с Софьей хороший его знакомый, преподаватель математики в Морском училище и весьма известный в Петербурге педагог А. Н. Страннолюбский.

(Strannolyubsky, 1867).⁷⁵ Kovalevskaya arrived in St. Petersburg with her mother and sister in October 1867, and she took private lessons with Strannolyubsky on differential and integral calculus, starting some time that winter. Her letters to her sister Anyuta in 1868, in which she makes frequent reference to Strannolyubsky, contain no mention of any previous lessons with him three years earlier.

Let us cite a passage from Kovalevskaya's autobiographical story which seems to corroborate Malevich's version. She is describing how her father reacted to Tyrtov's elation on realizing that she had understood trigonometric formulas by reading his physics textbook:

Then, after some hesitation, my father agreed to take A. N. Strannolyubsky as my teacher, with whom we then set to work successfully and during the winter went through analytic geometry, differential, and integral calculus.

The following year I married V. O. Kovalevsky and soon after that we went abroad, but there we again went our separate ways. (Kovalevskaya, 1891, p. 454)⁷⁶

She married Kovalevsky in 1868, so here she places her first lessons with Strannolyubsky in the winter 1867–1868, confirming Malevich's description of the events.⁷⁷

We submit a final piece of evidence in support of Malevich's version: In February 1891, Strannolyubsky himself published what must have been one of the first obituaries of Kovalevskaya to appear in a journal (Strannolyubsky, 1891). One might expect that he would have confirmed having taught her from an unusually early age if that were the case, but he did not. He simply stated that she had received basic education at home before continuing her studies in mathematics and natural sciences in St. Petersburg at the end of the 1860s.⁷⁸

4.5. Was Malevich vindicated?

While it is more than plausible that Malevich's account of the sequence of Kovalevskaya's lessons with himself and with Strannolyubsky is correct, this was hardly his only reason for writing the letter. He was incensed at the belittlement he perceived in Kovalevskaya's depiction of him and his role in her early education. It therefore seems appropriate to also ask the broader question of whether his goals in writing this letter were achieved.

And what were these goals, precisely, beyond letting off steam? We must speculate. Let us remark that copious amounts of steam was not unprecedented in the correspondence between Malevich and Semevsky. They exchanged letters during several decades, and occasional unrestrained rebukes did not abrade their friendship.

Had Malevich hoped to have a rebuttal printed in *Russkaya Starina*? We shall never know. Even though Semevsky was an avid archivist, no reply or copy of a reply has been found which could serve to illuminate

⁷⁵ We are unfortunately unable to ascertain the exact dates of this trip, but Strannolyubsky's report cites the 3-volume shipbuilding reference work (Russell, 1865) which had been available to him, so it is plausible that he was abroad during parts of 1866.

⁷⁶ Тогда, после некоторого колебания, отец мой согласился взять мне в учителя А. Н. Страннолюбского, с которым мы вслед затем принялись успешно за работу и в течение зимы прошли аналитическую геометрию, дифференциальное и интегральное исчисление.

В следующем году я вышла замуж за В. О. Ковалевского и вскоре после этого мы уехали за границу, но там снов разъехались в разные стороны.

⁷⁷ This discrepancy between (Kovalevskaya, 1890) and (Kovalevskaya, 1891) was also noted by Stillman in (Stillman et al., 1978, p. 204).

⁷⁸ Получив дома основательное общее образование, Софья Васильевна, по переезде с родителями в С.-Петербург, в конце 60-ых годов, продолжала здесь, дома же, занятия математическими и естественными науками. (Strannolyubsky, 1891, p. 213)

how the letter was received. Semevsky was already ill, he had put his affairs in order and died within weeks of receiving this letter. Thus, it remained unnoticed in Semevsky's archive until Shtraikh and/or Modzalevsky had it transcribed at an unknown date between 1918 and 1948, and it has not been published in its entirety until now.

Surviving both of his two remarkable pupils by several years, Malevich lived out his otium without redress, either from Semevsky or from Kovalevskaya herself. We have found no eulogy, not even in the pages of *Russkaya Starina*, which after Semevsky's death in 1892 was edited by his younger brother Vasily Ivanovich Semevsky (1848-1916), also one of Malevich's previous pupils. Malevich is an unsung hero of Kovalevskaya's story.

It is noticeable that, despite his bitterness at Kovalevskaya's perceived lack of esteem for him, Malevich never wavers from the utmost respect for her as a scientist and a remarkable woman. He wears on his sleeve his disappointment at her depreciation of him and his tutelage of her, but there is not a hint of any intention to damage her reputation as a pioneering female professor of mathematics. Indeed, to this day she remains an icon of feminist ambition and achievement.

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Sofya Vasilyevna Kovalevskaya (1850–1891). Source: *Russkaya Starina* vol. 68, November 1890. <https://runivers.ru/bookreader/book201817/#page/315>.



**Иосиф Игнатьевич
Малевич**

Iosif Ignatyevich Malevich (1813–1898). Source: Public domain photograph provided by the Polytechnic Museum (Политехнический музей) in Moscow. <http://www.imyanauki.ru/rus/photos/index.shtml>.



Михаил Иванович Семевский

Mikhail Ivanovich Semevskiy (1837–1892). Source: Public domain photograph provided by Lyudmila Pimanova (Людмила Пиманова). <http://lyudmila-pimanowa.narod.ru/>.

Appendix. Russian transcript

Великие Луки, января 17 дня 1892г.⁷⁹

В 1887 году я возобновил переписку с С.В. по случаю принятого ею предложения Стокгольмского университета⁸⁰ и вскоре получил любезное письмо с изъявлением искренней благодарности за девятилетнее мое преподавание, проложившее ей дорогу к высшим знаниям. В следующем 1888 году, когда С.В. за научный подвиг получила высшую награду из Парижской Академии Наук, я был так обрадован что решился написать “Воспоминания” о ее учебных трудах в течении девяти лет и последующем времени, до получения ею высшей ученой степени, с целью сохранить материал для биографии и ознакомить наше общество с женщиною-феноменом. – Поздравляя ее с великим научным успехом, я сообщил что пишу “Воспоминания”, о моих педагогических трудах с нею, которые ты желаешь поместить на страницах “Рус. Старины”. – Это повидимому ее как будто встревожило. – Она писала мне из Парижа, что “боится быть в печати”, а потому убедительно просит: нельзя ли прислать мою рукопись для сличения с ее собственными “Воспоминаниями”, которые она пишет по просьбе некоторых своих друзей, что же касается портрета ее для моих “Воспоминаний”, то немедленно вышлет, теперь же посылает решение ею вопроса, о движении твердого тела вокруг неподвижной точки, напечатанного in 4^{to} в математическом журнале Acta Mathematica. – Желание это вполне совпадало с моим намерением: не отдавать в печать “Воспом.”, пока С.В. их не одобрит; а потому, покончивши наскоро свою работу, я послал ей к Парижу четыре тетради “Воспом.” –

В сентябре месяце, на возвратном пути в Швецию, С.В. уведомила меня в большом письме из Берлина, что хотя она прочитала с большим интересом мои “Воспом.”, но желая, по моему дозволению, выпустить некоторые места, она, возвратившись в Стокгольм, прочтет еще раз с большим вниманием и тогда отошлет мою рукопись со своим портретом. – Только в октябре я получил мои “Воспом.” с письмом, в котором С.В. просит при переписке набело исключить места, взятые в скобки, и поместить несколько небольших прибавок, написанных ею на полях. – Исключено: характеристика гувернантки-англичанки; вредное влияние воспитания на развитие и направление характера С.В., что и она сама признавала; чудовищные музыкальные уроки при сильном стучении палочкой по фортепьяно и страшном крике, раздававшемся по всему дому и др. – Выпущено также несколько мест, где говорится о строптивом и необузданном характере старшей сестры С.В., имевшем также дурное влияние не только на характер, но и направление последней; затем исключен период времени, в котором С.В., бросившая ученые занятия и считая их бесполезными для женщин, жалела потраченного времени для науки и, сверх того, зачеркнуты несколько страниц, на которых описывается довольно подробно необдуманное предприятие Ковалевского, доведшее его до полного разорения. – “Но, что касается педагогического отдела”, писала она, “то он так понравился мне, что я приняла его к сведению и воспользуюсь при обучения моей дочери. – Но будет жалко, если Семевский, придерживаясь программы своего исторического а не педагогического журнала, найдет неудобным поместить этот отдел”. –

Заметь же теперь, что С.В. после зрелого обсуждения и отчистки моих “Воспом.” подтвердила в полной мере все то, что говорится об ней: а потому рассказ ее после твоего обеда и еще в виду скорого появления в печати моих “Воспом.” бросает сильную и вместе с тем достойную удивлению, непонятную тень на мое повествование и заставляет сомневаться в правде.

⁷⁹ Дата рукою М. И. Семевского.

⁸⁰ Т.е. Стокгольмского университета, вернее Stockholms Högskola.

– “Воспоминания” мои о лице, находящемся тогда в живых, после двукратного чтения их, поправок и исключения многих мест, сделанных этим же лицом, остались чистым зеркалом, отражающим весь ход моих занятий с С.В.; они далеки от тех фантазий и уклонения от истины, так часто попадающихся в поэтизированных “Воспоминаниях” С.В., на которые я указывал с немалым удивлением, когда эти “Воспомин.” ты читал нам в Фёдорове. – Приступаю к обзору тех мест напечатанного рассказа Софьи Васильевны, где она говорит обо мне.

[Недоумеваю я, удивляются многие, читавшие этот рассказ, почему ты в предисловии к нему авторитетно заявил, что “считаешь необходимым ~~(!!!)~~⁸¹ извлечь из своего архива автобиографический рассказ своего друга” ~~(!!!)~~ sic ... Повторяю, если бы ты взял период времени от 1880-й по 1890-й год, то это было бы истинным и ценным пополнением материалов для биографии С.В.; но по какому-то непонятному злобному⁸² взгляду ты, как говорится, к бочке мёду прибавил ложку дёгтя и облёк в густой туман всё то, что было сказано мною и Федором Васильевичем о девятилетних учебных занятиях феноменальной женщины. – Но непоправимое дело сделано, рассказ напечатан и тебе остается потирать руки от удовольствия, что труд давнего твоего друга, что “Воспом.” его, написанные с опасностью окончательно потерять зрение и, при полной вере в дружбу, подаренные тебе от чистого сердца на память, попал в какой-то водоворот, из которого трудно извлечь правду, когда рассказ самого профессора-математика почти опровергает повествование его учителя. –]

На 4-й странице рассказа, к удивлению [всякого, не потерявшего здравый смысл], находим следующее: “это было так давно, что теперь совсем не помню его уроков; они остались у меня тёмным воспоминанием!” –

Прочитавши педагогический отдел в моих “Воспом.” и потом эти слова С.В., всякий, даже весьма недалекий человек, недоумеая, может спросить: каким образом такая даровитая личность, как Ковалевская, с громадными способностями и необыкновенною памятью, редко встречаемое в человеке, могла забыть девятилетний курс учения, преподаваемый ей с великим успехом в самые восприимчивые и оставшиеся навсегда в памяти годы человека с 8-и до 16-ти лет возраста? – Это странная выходка ради красного словечка бросает сильную тень на светлую до сих пор личность необыкновенного математика. [– А чья вина, спрошу в свою очередь? – На чьей совести ляжет тяжелым гнетом неправда и путаница, брошенная в печать, не отнёсшись к рассказу критически и взвесивши его на весах истины? –]

Далее рассказчица говорит: “в особенности хорошо и своеобразно Малевич преподавал арифметику”. –

Что такое своеобразно? – Оно тождественно со словами оригинально, диковинно. – Назвать своеобразной методу вполне рациональную, выработанную многолетним опытом и сходную с превосходной методой А. Грубе, не только смело, но и непростительно математику. – Все мои ученики, без изъятия, любили арифметику, делали в ней хорошие успехи, и некоторые кончили высший курс математики в университетах или академиях вследствие своеобразного преподавания, тесно соединенного с полным развитием математических способностей даже весьма мало способных учеников. –

“По всей вероятности”, говорит С.В. “благодаря влиянию дяди, меня более занимали разные отвлеченные рассуждения, (так и видно желание порисоваться.) например, о бесконечности”. – (!!!)

Странно по малой мере и даже смешно слышать, что девочку 11-и или 12-и лет занимал

⁸¹ Восклицательные знаки перечеркнуты в рукописи.

⁸² Зачеркнуто слово “злобному”.

вопрос о бесконечности, проповедываемый человеком, который хватался за все научные вопросы, не имея основных понятий о том, о чем необдуманно рассуждал с девочкой. – Я мог бы здесь много сказать о положительном вреде, который делал моим ученицам человек добрейшей души, но невыносимый в своих суждениях странных и даже смешных – о той или другой науке, – я неоднократно ставил ему на вид большой вред от его проповедывания; он извинялся и обещал прекратить свои балагурства; но, когда опять они возобновились, то я просил отца учениц моим самому принять необходимые меры. – И вот, когда старик по обыкновению затронул какой-то научный вопрос, генерал сказал ему: “Пётр, я серьёзно прошу тебя перестать говорить о том, чего не знаешь основательно и что выше твоих понятий и тем более моих детей: Это очень вредно влияет на моих девочек. – Одна в детском своем уме воображает найти квадратуру круга, а другая, по твоему почину, лезет в философы в своих, названных ею философских письмах! Ведь такие глупые претензии и сумасбродное напряжение неокрепшего мозга могут довести до желтого дома”. –

Если бы дядя, соображаясь с возрастом и познаниями моих учениц, толковал им обоим о том, что они изучили или изучают, это, конечно, могло бы принести некоторую пользу; но по присущим ему странностям он утопал в мечте о вопросах давно оставленных учеными за невозможностью развязать Гордиев узел, или же толковал с девочкой об асимптотах прямых линий, о философии Канта, Фихте, Гегеля, о которых ему удавалось прочесть в наших периодических изданиях. – И вот, Софья Васильевна по первому впечатлению в детстве не только придает какое-то значение бредням дяди, но думает, что эти бредня привели в ней любовь к математике. – Ниже скажу правдивыми уже словами С.В., когда действительно она почувствовала сильное влечение к математике. –

В рассказе своем С.В. заявляет далее: “кроме арифметики Малевич преподавал мне также элементарную геометрию и алгебру. – Только ознакомившись несколько с этой последней, я почувствовала настолько сильное влечение к математике, что стала пренебрегать другими предметами”. –

Вот где истинное начало любви ее к математике а не в разглагольствованиях дяди, непонимающего, как и его слушательницы, того, о чем он толковал. – Действительно, я помню хорошо, что С.В. с каким-то особенным наслаждением принялась изучать алгебру, когда, ознакомившись с уравнением первой степени, принялась за решение задач, которые даже при отличном знании арифметики казались неодолимыми. – Комбинация над данными числами и неизвестными, более или менее близкое отношение их и, вследствие этого логичное составление уравнений доводили С.В. какого-то экстаза, явно просвечивающегося в ее возбужденном состоянии духа и сияющем от удовольствия лице. –

Следующие затем слова Ковалевской не имеют и тени правды. – “Увидя во мне такое направление”, говорит она, “отец мой, имевший вообще сильное предубеждение против ученых женщин, решил, что надо прекратить мои уроки математики у Малевича”. –

Никогда ничего подобного не было. – Увлеченная импровизацией С.В., как поэт, утопает в мире фантазии, стремясь, однако ж, к своему rium desiderium доказать, что она всем обязана самой себе. – Но человек, даже не очень вникающий в ее повествование, скоро заметит путаницу, обнаруживающую неправду. – Докажу это неопровержимыми фактами. – Я стал преподавать ей алгебру в начале 1865-го года, т.е. вскоре после удаления из Палибина гувернантки-англичанки. – Спустя несколько месяцев, встревоженный необыкновенным влечением С.В. к математике и прекрасными ее успехами с явным ущербом для других предметов, я просил совета отца ее, который, узнавши о прекрасных успехах в математике любимой дочери, (См. “Рус. Стар.” Декабрь 1890-го г. стр. 630.) сердечно благодарил за мои труды и просил продолжать полезные уроки. – Да и каким образом могла прийти генералу мысль о прекращении уроков математики, когда он при начале моих занятий в Палибине

просил меня об одном только: “побольше математики и поменьше словесности”. – (См. мои “Воспом.” в рукописи, отд. III в начале.) В следующем затем 1866-м году, перед отъездом учениц моих в Швейцарию, я начал проходить с С.В. уравнения второй степени, следовательно, она ознакомилась с алгеброй не несколько а очень солидно; когда же по ее просьбе у отца – пригласить меня в Швейцарию с математическими книгами – я поехал за границу, (См. “Воспом.” отд. II, стр. 642.) то прежде в Монтрё а потом на водах в Германии С.В. кончила с большим успехом уравнения второй степени, общее исследование их и даже те отделы, которые могли бы служить ей в пользу при изучении высшей математики; (См. мои “Воспом.” отд. I, стр. 629-я) возвратившись же в Россию, я думал начать преподавание Тригонометрии.

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 После всего, наложенного мною и хорошо известного С.В., могла-ли она сказать, что отец ее решил прекратить мои уроки? – К этой импровизации она присоединила еще такую непростительную небылицу, которая меня до крайности изумила: “Однако, мне удалось”, рассказывала она, кое-как выпросить у Иосифа Игнатьевича книгу: “Курс Алгебры Бурдона”, который я стала прилежно изучать. – Так-как целый день я была под строгим надзором Гувернантки, то мне приходилось пустить в дело хитрость. Идя спать, я клала книгу под подушку и затем, когда все засыпали, я, при тусклом свете лампы или ночника, зачитывалась по целым ночам!” В этой импровизации С.В. зарпортовалась уже до крайности. – Она выпрашивала у меня книгу Алгебры, как запрещенный плод!!! – Да ведь это уже не импровизация, а Аллах знает, как назвать ее сказки, сочиненные наскоро, тут же, для почтенных собеседников, считавших непреложным всё, что исходило из уст женщины-математика. – Да что ж я делал в Палибине в 1865-м году по удалении гувернантки Маргариты Францовны, потом в 1866-м году и, наконец, в 1867-м последнем году моих занятий, [(прошу моего давнего друга заметить это!)] когда я поехал с генералом в Швейцарию, взявши с собой математические книги по ее же просьбе и преподавал ей именно Алгебру, как сказано выше, до возвращения нашего в Россию, что без сомнения помнит и может подтвердить родной брат С.В. Федор Васильевич? – Прошу еще заметить, что в начале Сентября того же 1867-го года занятия мои в Палибине с С.В. прекратились навсегда, когда по почину моему решено было поместить брата ее в гимназию. – (См. “Рус. Стар.” декабрь 1890-го г. стр. 643-я)

Подтверждаю честным словом во имя святой правды, что выпрашивание у меня Алгебры, которая всегда была в руках С.В. для приготовления данных уроков, как и все другие учебные руководства, что эта выдуманная хитрость обмануть строгий надзор гувернантки, которой давно уже не было в Палибине, что эти лампы, ночники, при которых она будто зачитывалась Алгебру по целым ночам, как и всё выше сказанное, чистое произведение досужего, послеобеденного времени, испеченные тут же, наскоро для почтенных собеседников [и подхваченные редактором “Русской Старины” с какою-то странною, непонятною для меня, верою в непогрешимость названного им, а в сущности воображаемого, нового друга! –]

Остается, наконец, привести явное, неопровержимое доказательство путаницы или, лучше сказать, поражающей неправды в следующем месте рассказа С.В. “Только после некоторого колебания”, говорит она, “отец мой согласился взять мне в учителя А. Н. Страннолюбского, с которым мы вслед за тем успешно принялись за работу, и в течение зимы прошли аналитическую геометрию и дифференциальное и интегральное исчисление”. –

В “Воспом.” моих (“Рус. Стар.” декабрь, 1890-го г. стр. 644,) сказано, что когда решились поместить Федора Васильевича в гимназию, то в начале Октября 1867-го года генеральша с дочерьми уехала в Петербург, а я, по просьбе генерала, продолжал мои занятия с уче-

ником до первых чисел Января 1868-го года. – Только в Крещение⁸³ генерал отправился с сыном в столицу и, следовательно, не раньше половины Января мог позволить пригласить А. Н. Страннолюбского давать уроки. – В Мае месяце уроки эти прекратились, а потому не в течение зимы, как говорит С.В., а в три месяца она успела изучать не только аналитическую геометрию, – эту высшую отрасль математики, но и дифференциальное и интегральное исчисление, так сказать, венец науки. – Допускаю, что раньше университетских лекций Ковалевская изучила эти отделы высшей математики; но, допустивши это, не только математик, но и всякий гимназист 5-го класса скажет, что для изучения аналитической геометрии и, еще более, для усвоения дифференциального и интегрального исчислений требуется солидная подготовка или, по крайней мере, гимназический курс математики. – Когда же и кем сделана эта подготовка? – Ведь ясно из моих “Воспом.” и выше приведенных фактов, что до осени 1867-го года я преподавал С.В. и за границей и в Палибине а через четыре месяца она уже изучала аналитическую геометрию и дифференциальное и интегральное исчисления; но она повидимому забыла, что училась у меня девять лет и с каким-то апломбом говорит своим собеседникам: “Это было так давно, что я теперь совсем не помню его уроков; они остались у меня тёмным воспоминанием!” – Каким же образом она при своей необыкновенной памяти вдруг забыла своё девятилетнее учение в лучшие и самые восприимчивые годы жизни человека, впечатление от которых остается в памяти каждого до глубокой старости? – Признаюсь, что слова эти после двукратного чтения ею моих “Воспом.” при котором она обдумывала, что выпустить, что оставить, или что прибавить и, что еще более странно, в виду близкого появления в печати этих же “Воспом.”, что слова ее по малой мере недобросовестны.

Прочитавши все статьи о С.В., помещенные в “Русской Старине”, нетрудно заметить, что рассказ С.В. есть следствие тех, распространенных ею, сведений в Швеции, с которыми она, так сказать, сроднилась, сведений, напечатанных в Норвежской иллюстрированной газете “Северная Звезда” еще в 1886-м году и переведенных со шведского языка в “Русской Старине” [как будто для того, чтобы спутать и смешать действительные факты с вымыслом. –] (Русская Стар.” сентября 1891-го г. стр. 638). В этой статье сказано: “ее родственники были весьма состоятельны и она получила основательное образование (Где же и у кого?) “Случайно она приняла участие в уроках математики с ее двоюродным братом; (!?) при этом у нее явилась страсть к математике и она оказала в ней большие способности. – Но родители ее не желали, чтобы она этому училась (!!!) и уроки прекратились к большой печали ребёнка!” – (Сравни эти сведения с рассказом С.В., и здравый смысл укажет, что они распространены в Швеции ею же.) “Тем не менее она сама продолжала учиться”, – (sic.) (Не в постели-ли при ночнике? ... Опять то же самое, что и в рассказе.) “и в одно из пребываний в Петербурге ей случилось отыскать (!) хорошего учителя, который удивился что молодая девушка самоучка (!) достигла таких глубоких познаний в математике”. – (Опять спрошу: где же она достигла и у кого? – Самоучкой! ... Да это уже полное сходство с рассказом С.В.)

Откуда взяты эти сведения да еще в 1886-м году, когда в России очень немногие знали о существовании необыкновенной женщины-математика? – Ясно, что все эти сказки были рассказаны Софьею Васильевной кому-нибудь из новых знакомых в Швеции и, переходя от одних к другим, дошли наконец до редактора “Северной Звезды”. – И вот, на основании этих давно составленных небылиц С.В. прослыла гениальной самоучкой, а эта же тенденция вполне просвечивает и в [послеобеденных] ее рассказах. –

Кто из людей без слабости? – Кто, добившись одного, не желает достигнуть еще большего?

⁸³ 6 января по старому стилю.

... И вот, необыкновенный деятель науки, не довольствуясь всемирной слабой, желает еще прослыть гением – самоучкой прежде в Швеции, где же никто не знал о ходе ее образования, а потом сама, быть может, не замечая, увлеклась созревшими, ложными фантазиями и пустила в ход небывальщину в малом кружке собеседников, полагая, что рассказ ее, переходя от одного к другому, даже помимо печати, будет признан совершенным, неоспоримым фактом.

Думал-ли я, что мои “Воспоминания”, написанные с целью ознакомить общество с женщино-феноменом еще при жизни ее, – что правдивые факты, просмотренные этою же женщиной несколько раз и одобренные ею, будут заподозрены в неправде [или позорном самохвальстве!..]

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