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Introduction: Framing The View: Russian Women In The Long Nineteenth Century

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1. Introduction: Framing the View: Russian Women in the Long Nineteenth Century

Sibelan Forrester

Thinking of nineteenth-century Russia, we may find ourselves thinking of a woman's image, perhaps one of the memorable heroines in the great Russian novels written by men: Sonia Marmeladova from Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*), Natasha Rostova from Tolstoi's *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*), or any of the Turgenev heroines so exemplary that a special adjective was created for the type. These characters have deeply influenced our perceptions of Russian life, to the point where one Western scholar could entitle his cultural history of Russia *Natasha's Dance*, and the publisher did not dissuade him.[1] But what of the non-fictional women who lived in that time, who left traces of their lives and concerns in written records and artistic production? Women were a vital part of the cultural process of their times and scholars in recent decades have worked to recover and interpret the records that inform us about their experiences. The present collection, edited by Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi, contributes to this effort, examining Russian women's history and creative activity during the long nineteenth century, 1800–1917.

1. Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Macmillan, 2002; New York: Picador, 2002).

By the end of the Imperial period, women's creativity was attracting more attention and admiration in Russia than ever before; the articles about female cultural figures in the Brokgaus-Èfron *Encyclopedic Dictionary* (*Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*) produced in St Petersburg in 1890–1907 are respectful and often quite detailed, even if most of the articles were authored by men. For a variety of reasons, the topic of women's creativity and self-perception fell out of favour in the Soviet period and was neglected for decades.[2] As late as 1985, a Western encyclopedia of Russian literature could provide an article, 'Women in Russian Literature', that treated women primarily as characters in works created by men, artefacts rather than artists.[3] In histories of Russia, any tendency to focus on rulers meant that the eighteenth-century empresses (often themselves born in Western Europe) were de facto representatives of Russian women.

Over the past three decades, however, ground-breaking publications in Russian women's studies have broadened our view of women's experiences and creative activity, recovering sources of information and framing them in suggestive new ways. Here is just a brief listing of some of the most important Western authors of monographs, editors of collections, and translators of primary sources. Rather than weigh down this introduction with a long list of works that should be easy to find, we offer this abbreviated series of names to inspire searching or recognize intellectual debts. In history, our work is shaped by Barbara Clements, Barbara Engel, Eve Levin, Barbara Norton, Christine Worobec; important presentations of women's lives and influence may also appear in biographies of individual women like the politician Aleksandra Kollontai, or in studies of pre-revolutionary philanthropy, or the Russian fashion industry.[4] In literature, vital scholars

2. The treatment of feminism under Soviet rule has been discussed in detail by scholars. Primarily, Bolshevik discourse assumed that socialism had solved 'the woman question' and that continuing attention to feminist issues revealed a bourgeois attitude. Indeed, as Amy Bug has shown, data on the number of female scientists in socialist Eastern Europe (based on her own field, physics) suggests that planned economies did relatively well at getting women into the professional 'pipeline' and keeping them there: Amy Bug, 'Has Feminism Changed Physics?', *Signs*, 28.3 (2003), 881–99.
3. Xenia Gasiorowska, 'Women and Russian Literature', in Victor Terras, *Handbook of Russian Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 519–22. The length of this article shows recognition of the importance of the topic, but where it discusses women writers its tone is generally dismissive.
4. Kollontai is best known for her activities during the Revolution and the early Soviet period, but her birth in 1872 gives her biography resonance for the nineteenth-century as well. See Beatrice Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980); Cathy Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai: The Lonely Struggle of the Woman who Defied Lenin* (New York: Dial Press, 1980).

and editors include Joe Andrew, Pamela Chester, Jehanne Gheith, Frank Göpfert, Diana Greene, Barbara Heldt, Catriona Kelly, Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal, Christine Tomei, and Mary Zirin. Monographs and articles on individual authors from the period (Akhmatova, Gippius, Tsvetaeva) offer insight to readers of women's writing. Issues that concern women, gender and sexuality frequently arise in interdisciplinary or cultural studies works by Lynne Attwood, Adele Barker, Toby Clyman, Jane Costlow, Helena Goscilo, Diana Greene, Beth Holmgren, Catriona Kelly, Andrea Lanoux, Rosalind Marsh, Wendy Rosslyn, Christine Ruane, Judith Vowles, and Faith Wigzell. Treatments of actresses and celebrities enrich the field as well, by Goscilo, Holmgren, and Catherine Schuler. Work by Russian scholars obviously offers essential information and perspectives: just one example, available in English, is Natalia Pushkareva's monumental history of women in Russia.[5] Recent volumes in Russian cultural studies that do not concentrate on women's issues *per se* include articles or sections on women's experience and issues of gender and sexuality.[6]

This collection differs from many (though not all) of the works mentioned above in bringing together articles from a variety of disciplinary positions in the framework of women's lives and culture in the long nineteenth century. The contributors are international, hailing from Britain, Canada, Finland, Russia, and the United States. While the overall result is largely historical, the different approach of each author allows the articles to strike sparks off one another. All are grounded in concrete detail and richly contextualized but also theoretically informed. Some topics have been relatively neglected until now, and establishing the presence of female artists, musicians or composers, and victims of gendered violence through institutional records and primary sources is a large part of the authors' task. Some of the articles present exciting archival discoveries, situated in a rich context and usefully interpreted. Other articles treat parts of the field that are relatively well-explored, allowing a

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See also Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Christine Ruane, *The Emperor's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

5. Natalia L. Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. and trans. by Eve Levin (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).
6. These include *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *The Human Tradition in Imperial Russia*, ed. by Christine Worobec (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

general overview of Russian women writers or a more detailed examination of the nature of the lives and memoirs of nineteenth-century Russian actresses. At the same time, some of the more historical presentations give subtle close readings of textual evidence. The result is a collection of essays that may with profit be read severally or as a whole.

As Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt note, 'If culture is more than a predetermined representation of a prior social reality, then it must depend on a continuing process of deconstruction and reconstruction of public and private narratives. Narrative is an arena in which meaning takes form, in which individuals connect to the public and social world, and in which change therefore becomes possible'.[7] Combining approaches drawn from history and from the humanities, this volume enriches the reader's knowledge and suggests promising avenues for future research and reading. Several threads run through more than one of the articles: the importance of religion in women's experience, both in what they received from the culture and what they (re-) produced in their own lives and experiences; and the vexed position of women with creative ambitions that tempted them to move beyond the realm of family life or domestic social gatherings. Most of all, the articles devote attention to the narratives with which women worked, which they created, and which they (sometimes) changed or exploited to suit their own purposes.

What distinguished the nineteenth century from the earlier Imperial period, and from the Soviet era that followed? In one review (1835),[8] the critic Vissarion Belinskii included the following passages concerning women authors:

> For her [woman] – the representative on the earth of beauty and grace, priestess of love and self-sacrifice – it is a thousandfold more praiseworthy to inspire *Jerusalem Liberated* than to write it herself, just as it is a thousandfold more praiseworthy to hand her chosen one a shield with the device 'With it or upon it!' than to throw herself into the heat of battle with weapon in hand (30).
>
> The mind of woman knows only a few aspects of being or, to say it better, her feeling has access only to the world of devoted love and submissive suffering; omniscience is horrible in her, repulsive, while for a poet the whole boundless world of thought and feeling, passions and deeds must be open (31).

7. *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. by Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 17.
8. I cite from my translation of his review of a French author's work in Russian translation: V. G. Belinskii, 'Review of *A Victim*', in *Russian Women, 1698–1917: Experience and Expression*, ed. by Robin Bisha, Jehanne M. Gheith, Christine Holden, and William G. Wagner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 28–32.

> *Une femme emancipée* – this word might be very accurately translated with a single Russian word, but unfortunately its use is permitted only in dictionaries, and not in all of them at that, but only in the most extensive. I will add only that a woman writer is, in a certain sense, *la femme emancipée* (32).

Although this represents just parts of one review by one critic, Belinskii acquired such prestige as a literary and social critic, especially with left-leaning readers and creators who might otherwise have tended to favour equal creative rights for women, that his comments are gravely suggestive and reminiscent of some of the comments Barbara Engel finds in judicial archives about women who strayed to physically different places rather than into artistic pretensions. It is no wonder that some creative women in Russia preferred to publish music only under their initials, or to write novels and stories under pseudonyms. Comments like these by Belinskii could serve to keep creative women in their place (perhaps only until marriage, as in the case of Evdokiia Sushkova, who published as Rostopchina), or endow the woman who dared to transgress gender boundaries with the energy of resistance and narratives of punishment (as for example in the writing of Marina Tsvetaeva). Julie Cassiday notes the success of Vera Komissarzhevskaia, whose career suggested that she was blending art and life by playing wounded, sexually fallen women in transgressive roles (p. 182). At the same time, the nineteenth century witnessed the development of scholars' and bibliographers' interest precisely in women as writers, autobiographers, and creators. Women who produced elite kinds of art were sometimes kept or written out by gate-keeping male critics or competitors, but sometimes they were cited with approval and respect as examples of Russia's rising level of culture and education, listed in reference sources or awarded prestigious prizes for their paintings and poetry. By the early twentieth century women had emerged as important creators or actors and canny manipulators of the emerging popular culture of the Russian empire.

Thus, this collection offers thought-provoking snapshots and outlines of the stages women in Russia moved through over time, from the still largely traditional society of the late eighteenth century to the greater cultural prominence, growing economic importance, and (on the whole) vastly improved educational and professional situation that many Russian women enjoyed on the eve of the Revolution. As the reader will observe in the overview below, the articles cover a wide range of topics and disciplinary angles, yet all will appeal to one another's readers: the very visible figure of

the actress would clearly shape the self-understanding (and much societal criticism) of women writers, visual artists and composers, while some actresses took on the role of author in writing their memoirs, continuing to shape their images. The status and depiction of Mary in writing by both clerical and lay figures could not help but impact the religious experience of Russian women and their descriptions of that experience. Violence against women or societal control of women's behaviour (by way of legal definition, literary depiction or journalistic reportage) would lurk at the edges of every woman's experience, no matter her level of safety and privilege (or not). In its breadth, the book aims to serve both students and experts in Russian culture, specialists in its various fields, as well as general readers from a variety of intellectual positions and backgrounds.

Barbara Engel's 'Women and Urban Culture' presents discoveries from legal archives about the lives of urban women from various 'middle' classes. As Engel points out, until recently (as indeed in the nineteenth century) most scholarly information about women treated either the women of the upper class — relatively powerful and culturally dominant in artistic, dramatic and literary depictions as well as in urban society — or of the peasantry, members of a mysterious and yet idealized group, though familiar to the aristocracy and merchant class as nannies and servants.[9] Engel usefully cites information on these women's lives from two distinct perspectives: their own words in the petitions they filed, which occasioned the preservation of those words, and the opinions of police and court officials about the women's reputations, recorded in other parts of the files. Engel teases out the implications of the contrast or clash between the women's self-images and society's image of them, and she notes the impact of these differences on the women's own subsequent lives and liberty. Drawn from different geographical areas, the three cases show changing mores over time as public discourse on the woman question percolated through popular literature, women's journals, and other entertainments to influence women's expectations and behaviour. The commercial culture women encountered when they moved to the city could inspire new ambitions, or fuel new discontent. As Christine Worobec notes

9. Ol'ga Semenova Tian-Shanskaia made the hero of her ethnography a generalized, composite peasant Ivan, but her *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia* (published in Russian in 1914, six years after her death, as *Zhizn' Ivana*) also includes copious information about peasant women and girls. See her *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia*, ed. by David Ransel, trans. by David Ransel and Michael Levine (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

elsewhere, even superficial changes such as new hairstyles and choices in clothing could significantly transform a woman's self-image, as well as the impression she might make on others.[10] Engel shows how much that impression could shape a woman's life as mores evolved and women were read by powerful men as either loose or respectable.

Worobec's 'Russian Peasant Women's Culture: Three Voices' likewise draws connections between individual records and larger social and historical patterns. Scholars of peasant women's culture have had to penetrate through layers of censorship (as Worobec puts it, archives come to contain 'sanitized versions of the originals'); moreover, she lists the many factors that might have limited the information provided by peasant women even before it reached the archive. (It is worth noting in this connection that when masses of peasant women became literate, in the 1920s or 1930s, they began making written records of the most precious things they held in memory, including their own repertoires of folk magic, especially medicinal and prophylactic charms, and fragments of liturgy, material that would similarly have languished in archives in the Soviet period, if scholars had dared to collect it at all.) This contrasts with the details left by women from the upper classes, such as Anna Labzina, Elizaveta Vodovozova, and Nadezhda Sokhanskaia, and underlines the importance of literacy in our access to women's understanding of their own lives and control of their representation.[11]

Even after emancipation ended serfdom, the Russian peasantry continued to exist in public discourse almost as a fantasy property of the educated classes, a repository of traditional culture that ethnographers (many of them with limited understanding of the nature of oral culture) feared would be

10. Christine Worobec, 'Introduction', in *The Human Tradition in Imperial Russia*, p. xv.

11. See Anna Labzina, *Days of a Russian Noblewoman: The Memories of Anna Labzina, 1758–1821*, ed. and trans. by Gary Marker and Rachel May (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001); Elizaveta Vodovozova, 'The Challenged Gentry', trans. by Sibelan Forrester, in *The Russia Reader*, ed. by Adele Barker and Bruce Grant (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 134–39 and Sokhanskaia (1825–1884), 'An Autobiography', in *Russia Through Women's Eyes: Autobiographies from Tsarist Russia*, ed. by Toby Clyman and Judith Vowles (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 47–59. Barbara Heldt, in her *Terrible Perfection* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), points out Russian women's success as authors of poetry and autobiography; the memoir, like lyric poetry, is at once personal and individual and thus free from the hubris of daring to depict larger society, as novelistic prose did. Authors like Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia proved that Russian women could be both artistically impressive and successful authors of prose fiction, but they did not become part of the nineteenth-century canon and are only relatively recently being rediscovered in Russia and the West.

lost in contact with modernity. Worobec notes that one and the same source might decry the backwardness of the peasants, especially the women, and then complain that they were acquiring 'corrupt' modern habits. She thoughtfully describes how collectors' attitudes towards 'authenticity' and the role of official and folk Orthodoxy impacted what was recorded from or about Russian peasant women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She also warns against overestimation of the extent of *dvoeverie*, the coexistence of pagan and Christian religious symbols and beliefs, in the Russian peasantry; as her citations show, women historians and scholars of women's history have played a major role in this corrective re-evaluation. The article points to the many cultural and economic connections between urban and rural Russia. After richly establishing this context, Worobec examines a group of letters written by three Russian peasant women in the nineteenth century. Orthodox language and practices are central in their communication, and in the lives their letters describe. The details remind us that many Orthodox practices (from purchasing candles to supporting oneself on a religious pilgrimage) required money and so were closely bound to the economic life of the family and of the country. Worobec's careful reading of these sources demonstrates that religious practice was largely a constant for Russian women across class boundaries. For some Russian women before the Revolution, the role of a religious pilgrim might be an unexpected alternative to other versions of a female life.

Vera Shevzov's 'Mary and Women in Late Imperial Russian Orthodoxy' examines nineteenth-century narratives about a central figure in Russian culture: Mary the Mother of God.[12] Authors of nineteenth-century *Lives of Mary* included men from the clerical hierarchy and monks as well as laymen, plus at least two women; Shevzov notes that copies of the two *Lives* which we know were authored by (noble) women eventually found their way into peasants' homes as well as libraries. She describes the ways the *Lives* could reveal opinions by Orthodox clergymen and church authorities about the equality of the sexes – or not – in reaction to discussions of women's emancipation. Over time, these *Lives* began to include reproductions of well-known icons of Mary, bringing together narrative and visual images in the era of mechanical reproduction and laying the groundwork for both scholars and believers to understand icons in new ways, though

12. Mary's image and prestige in Russian Orthodoxy are more strongly linked to her giving birth to Christ than to her virginity and she is described as Mother of God (*Bogoroditsa*, from the Greek *Theotokos*) more often than as the Virgin.

the illustrations accompanying the *Lives* were doubtless meant to serve as additional resources for readers' devotional practice. The *Lives* offer both exempla of ideal behaviour and illustrations of episodes from a human biography that might inspire or impact women's everyday choices. Narratives about Mary could be mined for spiritual insight, emulated by women in pursuit of a life agreeable to God, or interpreted as empowering women to do what they most needed to do in their own lives, as Shevzov notes: '[W]omen, and mothers in particular, might [...] have also identified with, and been emboldened by, her fierce sense of vocation and the fervent way she pursued it, despite the social precepts and political pressures of her times' (p. 89). The vocabulary of the Russian titles listed in Shevzov's abundant bibliography, *Tsaritsa nebesnaia* (heavenly tsarina) and *vladychitsa* (ruler, female), do indeed suggest why women might have felt entitled to read Mary as a source of authority, be it spiritual, moral, or even potentially political. This reader would love to hear more about the feminist theologian E. Liuleva: here, as elsewhere, the article points readers towards new topics of interest.

Rosalind Blakesley's 'Women and the Visual Arts' begins with a sensitive and thought-provoking reading of Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's portrait of Empress Maria Fedorovna (1800). This presentation is only possible because the picture survived in the collection of the Russian Academy: 'the occasional acclaimed foreigner' (p. 92) is the exception to the rule. Although women's faces and bodies were all over the canvases of elite male painters, Russian women who made art were practically invisible in the early nineteenth century, confined to the domestic sphere rather than active in the public one, and their work has rarely survived to be studied. Blakesley discusses the importance in women's lives of handicrafts or the applied arts, as distinct from elite work in the fine arts. Women's private production of artistic images in early nineteenth-century Russia was as widespread in the educated classes as in the peasantry: many women and men practiced drawing or painting in watercolors, much as we take photographs today as

mementos or travel records.[13] We know Aleksandr Pushkin's doodles and Mikhail Lermontov's drawings and paintings because their fame as writers preserved every scrap of paper they used, not because they were unusual in creating visual art of this kind. The Countess's portrait in Pushkin's 'Queen of Spades' ('Pikovaia dama') reminds us that women of means had themselves painted all the time, and such a painting could serve variously as a mirror, a signifier of female vanity, and a time machine.

Blakesley describes the kinds of artistic education that were available to girls, at first only to noble girls, then as time passed to girls from broader segments of society. Readers of fiction from the era might recall Lelenka, heroine of Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia's novel *The Boarding School Girl* (*Pansionerka*, 1861),[14] who at the novel's end makes a comfortable living by painting and selling copies of famous pictures in the Hermitage gallery. (One thing she enjoys in her liberated urban lifestyle is treating herself to regular tickets to the theatre: she participates in that realm of art as a spectator). Khvoshchinskaia does not intend to create an image of female genius – Lelenka is a talented copyist, not an original artist – but the idea that a woman could support herself in any way as a visual artist did not disrupt the realism of the novel. Indeed, Khvoshchinskaia's sister Sof'ia (1824–65) was a reasonably successful painter as well as being a writer. Women who had ability eventually acquired training and the right to make the kinds of high-status art for which male artists were recognized – paintings to hang on walls, not tapestries or purses knitted for charity balls. The chapter provides an important outline of the institutional history of women's access to artistic education and production, be it through the Academy or in more private spaces such as the workshops of Abramtsevo. At the same time, making works of art with expensive media, be they oil paints or cameos turned on a lathe, would have been prohibitively expensive for

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13. This was true not only in Russia. In the mid-1980s in Bloomington, Indiana, I discovered a detailed, beautifully rendered portrait of a young woman in Victorian dress, drawn in pencil on a blank page in the back of a novel by George Sand (perhaps the 1832 *Indiana*), a French edition published in the nineteenth-century. This anonymous example of skill in portraiture had survived at least a century because it was bound inside a library book in a university library, a book in French that had never attracted enough readers to damage it. This portrait is one exception to the disappearance of works of art by women, pointing up the importance of institutional recognition. A work kept in a museum (or library) is preserved, whereas one kept at home is liable to be damaged, lost in a fire, used to wrap pastries, or simply discarded by unappreciative heirs.
14. See Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia, *The Boarding School Girl*, trans. Karen Rosneck (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000).

most men in Russia, as well as for most women. Blakesley describes the repeated petitions of Mariia Kurt to the Academy for financial assistance; these may reflect the cost of the materials she favoured as much as her own lack of commercial success. However, by the early twentieth century many women had access to excellent artistic training, and Blakesley's study leads up to the famous names of the time.

Like other authors in this collection, Blakesley zooms in on instructive little-studied examples, such as the buttons made for Catherine the Great by her daughter-in-law, eventually Empress Maria Fedorovna (the same one painted by Vigée-Lebrun); she reads these with attention to the ways they defer to the male architect and male miniaturist who had created the buildings and their images, respectively. The buttons are at once practical and ornamental, associated with women's work in handicrafts but still placed behind glass in a frame, bringing all those associations together in a new medium. Feminist art historians have argued that the decorative arts should be valued in assessing women's creative careers, and the first generation of world-famous Russian women artists, tellingly, were engaged in scene painting and fabric design as well as elite easel painting. Blakesley's work is deeply informed by scholarship on female artists in Britain and France, as well as the literature on Russian women's culture. She cites cheering evidence of recent exhibitions (in Russia and abroad) and of serious scholarly attention to the work of Russian women artists, including some of those from the nineteenth century whose work has been preserved and recovered.

Philip Ross Bullock's chapter, 'Women and Music', broaches a topic that scholars have barely begun to study, as he himself points out. As in the visual arts, nineteenth-century women's access to music was determined largely by class, with folk songs (despite their tremendous importance in the development of a Russian school of classical music) analogous to handicrafts in their handmaid relationship to the fine arts and lack of authorial attribution. Bullock briefly outlines what is known about women's participation in music before 1800, then traces the institutional history forward until the twentieth century. Eighteenth-century empresses played a major role in the introduction of Western music to Russia, especially opera; unlike artists and writers, however, aspiring female musicians and especially composers had no Western European role models. Nevertheless, Bullock cites evidence of Russian women composing music as early as

the end of the eighteenth century. Aside from unusually prominent serf performers like Praskov'ia Kovaleva, whose life is treated in Douglas Smith's *The Pearl* and briefly outlined here by Bullock,[15] at that time only upper-class women had much chance of taking memorable steps in music, even if after modestly publishing their work with only initials they were left anonymous, gendered but not named.

Bullock addresses women's role in secular and society music-making, in composition as well as performance. The state theatres featured many foreign performers along with Russians, at first from the lower classes. The performances of dilettantes in upper-class salons have left traces in literature, supplementing the information on performances from memoirs and theatre archives. As Bullock suggests, citing some titles from 1820 collections of music aimed at women (p. 125), in the sentimental period music seems to have been considered particularly interesting and satisfying for women. Later, the lines between public performance and private amusement might have become blurred in a salon where the best minds in town were in attendance, but women understood the difference. Karolina Pavlova's *Double Life* (*Dvoinaia zhizn'*, 1848) describes the heroine and her best friend singing a duet together in the way marriageable young women were supposed to sing, demonstrating their talents and culture without being too talented or off-puttingly ambitious.[16] The male guests applaud even more enthusiastically than they do for genuine professionals: their interest is piqued by a performance where the marriage market is at stake. Bullock cites comments from men of the time suggesting that they meant to exclude women composers to keep the real estate values high in the most elite precincts of music, such as composition. At the same time, male composers relied on a largely female substrate of performers, copyists, and patrons (matrons?).

The mothers of modernist poets Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva were both marvellous pianists with outstanding musical training, but performing careers were precluded by their roles as mothers and wives. They turned, instead, to teaching music to their own children. The place of women in Russian music impacts our understanding of other spheres

15. Douglas Smith, *The Pearl: A True Tale of Forbidden Love in Catherine the Great's Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
16. Karolina Pavlova, *A Double Life*, trans. by Barbara Heldt (Oakland, CA: Barbary Coast Books, 1990), p. 57.

as well, and Bullock's survey of the topic suggests a number of promising figures to investigate. One can hope that graduate students, the next generation of scholars, are taking notes and making plans as they read.

Julie Cassiday's article, 'The Rise of the Actress in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia', examines the position of women in Russian theatre as it first took shape, connecting it with the careers and memoirs of the first female theatrical superstars in the early twentieth century. The development of the theatre in Russia, where for many decades the state directed its growth and content almost without reference to the public, had particular consequences for the lives of actresses, though in other ways they led lives not dissimilar to those in Western Europe. Quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the questionable virtue of actresses as 'public women', Cassiday underlines the societal assumption that actresses were more or less synonymous with prostitutes. Again, this equation dogged not only actresses but women who performed in any way, even those who published writing in what would seem to be a bodiless self-exposure. Concern with propriety kept many women from taking their art before an audience, sometimes only until marriage, like Rostopchina, but others for their whole lives. Women like Roza Kaufman Pasternak and Mariia Aleksandrovna Tsvetaeva found the outlet for their passionate artistic energy and ambitions in their children, female or male.

Cassiday points out the divide into private and public realms for women with dramatic talents: women were welcome (and eager) to take part in amateur theatricals in domestic spaces for audiences of friends and family, but professional actresses drew suspicion, perhaps, in part, because when the modern Russian theatre was born in the eighteenth century many were serfs, *devki*, a word used to refer to prostitutes as well as peasant girls. Evidently a peasant girl's virtue was already questionable, since she would have trouble fighting off unwelcome attentions from men of a higher class. Some of the scholars quoted in the article refer to the famous serf actress Praskov'ia Zhemchugova ('The Pearl') as 'Parasha', an intimacy that might suggest condescension or a peculiar, perhaps sympathetic, intimacy, but which in any case takes liberties with the respect Zhemchugova commanded as a brilliant actress. (Ekaterina Semenova, whose reputation for sublime tragic gifts was attenuated for some of her fans by her chillier public persona, as Cassiday notes, apparently does not inspire scholars to refer to her as 'Katia'.)

Alexandrine actresses not only moved audiences with the words of

male playwrights; they also took up the pen to initiate 'the sentimental narrative of the Russian actress' in memoirs that both explained their lives and fed their celebrity. Cassiday studies the way actresses began to write their own lives, building on publicity information to convey more of the sense of personal contact audiences wanted and supporting the sense that an actress was projecting her *self* to her audience. At the same time, Semenova insisted on her own artistic vocation. Cassiday also examines the way subsequent historians of the theatre have described and justified the lives and careers of these actresses, probably the best-known and most prestigious female artists of their day despite their questionable propriety and use (intentional or forced) of liaisons with powerful men to advance their careers.

Cassiday cites spectators' memoirs to describe the actress's function of bringing the audience to a climax of tears, and uniting the community of the audience in the shared experience of that emotional catharsis. The affective community thus created in the secular space of the National Theatre shares traits with the *sobornost'* (religious shared experience) advanced by the Slavophiles as a special trait of Russia. Though the status of actresses had improved tremendously by the end of the century, Vera Komissarzhevskaia (who had her own theatre) built her reputation playing wounded or fallen women like Nina Zarechnaia in Chekhov's *The Seagull* (*Chaika*). Though her professional success was even greater than that of the Alexandrine actresses, Komissarzhevskaia still played with the intersection of life and dramatic role that audiences had learned to expect, one that, as Cassiday points out, came to define other realms of art in Silver Age life-creation (*zhiznetvorchestvo*).

Arja Rosenholm's and Irina Savkina's article '"How Women Should Write": Russian Women's Writing in the Nineteenth Century' treats the realm of discourse that is perhaps best represented and most analysed among those covered in the collection. Literary activity has the advantage of producing results that take up relatively little space and can be mechanically multiplied in publication, and even forgotten authors may be retrieved from archives and libraries. In the early nineteenth century, Russian women wrote in French as often as in Russian, and the self-deprecatory strategies Rosenholm and Savkina connect to women associated with Karamzin's

movement are more broadly typical of European women at the time and the 'anxiety of authorship' in Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's famous formulation.[17] As Rosenholm and Savkina note, Karamzin's discursive project does allow room for women, but only on his terms. It is intriguing that literary women seemed to get a better reception from the *Colloquium of Admirers of the Russian Word* (*Beseda liubitelei russkogo slova*) than from the horny young men of the *Arzamas* circle; the outstanding poet Anna Bunina (1774–1829), an honourary member of the *Beseda*, is probably most familiar, if at all, to readers in the West because Dostoevskii cited Konstantin Batiushkov's sexist epigram (probably) about her in *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*); that novel's canonical status, rather than Bunina's importance and delightful poetry, means that the quote is glossed in critical editions.

Barbara Heldt in *Terrible Perfection* notes the greater prominence of Russian women who wrote poetry and autobiography, two genres that foreground and privilege personal experience, rather than prose fiction that aimed to depict and critique Russian society.[18] As Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd note, Russian literature was used in particular ways in the nineteenth century: 'The identification between literature and document was enhanced by the fact that social criticism rendered as fiction or literary criticism could more easily pass through the censorship than works of publicistic and journalistic enquiry'.[19] This high-stakes use of writing surely put special pressure on women who wished to compose prose fiction, the kind of work that typically involved social criticism, and it may in part explain the lack of attention to women like Khvoshchinskaia (who wrote under the masculine pseudonym V. Krestovskii), or later on Ol'ga Shapir and Valentina Dmitrieva, who were not involved in symbolist or modernist stylistic experimentation. The disruptive effect of the Revolution, on the other hand, may have 'frozen' and thus assured the status of the most important female figures in Russian symbolism and modernism: just as syllabotonic poetry remained the dominant form through the Soviet period, the women who had written important poetry in the Silver Age (no matter how the Soviet literary establishment tried to

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17. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), especially the Introduction and Chapter 1.
18. Heldt, *Terrible Perfection*, p. 7.
19. *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881–1940*, p. 1.

suppress it) could not be 'written out' of the narrative, as had happened with successful women writers in earlier generations. This too would tend to privilege poetry over prose genres in women's writing of the canon Heldt described in the late 1980s.

Rosenholm and Savkina point out the pernicious side of putatively feminist male writers such as Chernyshevskii, who so coddled his female characters that the male characters did everything for them. The authors rightly note that repeated revisions of feminine ideals, followed by the demand for a 'new woman', continued to require women to remake themselves according to male advice and preferences. Where female writers were cut off from their predecessors by changes in literary fashion (for who would want to learn from a writer who was mocked by Pushkin's friend?), they were thrown back for guidance on what men wrote and said, if they sought guidance for their own conduct in literature.

In the nineteenth century, Russia produced such a wealth of women writers that it is impossible to discuss more than a few in detail. By the end of the period, women enjoyed great success in many genres, from elite poetry or realistic muck-raking to pot-boiling best-sellers. The serious attention given to women in the Silver Age – and the fact that in the Silver Age women writers firmly entered the canon of Russian literature for the first time – runs parallel to that period's increased openness to otherness of many kinds, as peasants, Jews, gays and lesbians, and other ethnic and religious minorities joined the literary scene. Readers who picked up works by women as examples of some theoretical 'feminine' creative principle may have taken a condescending or essentialist approach, but it was certainly better for women than not being read at all. The Silver Age also moved to recover women authors from earlier decades: Rostopchina remained in print until the 1910s, and her lyrics were frequently set to music as romances, while Pavlova's work was reissued in 1915 in a collection edited by symbolist *maître* Valerii Briusov. As mentioned above, the literary production of women was considered part of the country's heritage and a mark of its advancement. This sense of a growing tradition, even if neglected or tendentiously shaped by some male critics,[20] surely contributed to the atmosphere for women writers in the early twentieth

20. The Silver Age also saw the emergence of a number of female literary critics. See Catriona Kelly, 'Missing Links: Russian Women Writers as Critics of Women Writers', in *Russian Writers on Russian Writers*, ed. by Faith Wigzell (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), pp. 67–80.

century. Many of the less familiar names Rosenholm and Savkina mention deserve to be more widely known: translated, read, taught, and studied.

The book's final chapter, Marianna Muravyeva's 'Between Law and Morality: Violence against Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia', turns from the production of culture back to the status of women in society. Here too, however, the issue of violence emerges in discourse, like the journalistic depictions of the kind that Dostoevskii would collect and weave into his fiction. The ingrained violence of proverbs that assert that a man beats his woman because he loves her contrasts with journalistic and literary depictions that deplored this treatment and the barbarity it suggested, viewing treatment of Russian women as an index of the country's level of civilization. Contemporary examples of violence set a benchmark and occasioned soul-searching; violence against women, especially sexual violence, continued to be an important topic of legal and journalistic discourse in the early Soviet period.[21]

Muravyeva poses urgent questions: '...why [did] relatively powerful and well-protected Russian women suddenly [turn] into the powerless and abused serfs of their families? What happened in the first half of the nineteenth century that demoted Russian women to the lowest level ever? How come that protection from rape, allegedly high in the seventeenth century, suddenly ceased in the nineteenth century and left women alone to prove their right to bodily integrity?' (p. 211). She examines the legal status of rape and statistics on its prosecution in thought-provoking detail.

Russian Women in the Nineteenth Century examines both women's actual lives and the narratives they tell about their lives, often interwoven in the same piece, as in those by Engel, Worobec, Shevzov, and Cassiday. Blakesley, Bullock and Muravyeva helpfully outline the institutional history in parts of the field that have until recently been neglected; Engel and Worobec bring rich new information from the archives. Rosenholm and Savkina offer alternatives to the literary narratives that have come to define Russian women and their literary production for readers. All this adds to and continues the work of research in the field of Russian women's and gender studies and it represents a significant contribution to scholarship in nineteenth-century Russian history and culture, where

21. See Eric Naiman on the case of Chubarov Alley, in his *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Dan Healey's *Bolshevik Sexual Forensics: Diagnosing Disorder in the Clinic and the Courtroom, 1917–1939* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

awareness of the roles and experiences of women are essential in good scholarship. Rosslyn and Tosi, this volume's editors, have done a service for each individual discipline: for courses in women's studies and for our overall understanding of Russia in the nineteenth century.