The Non-Canonical Canon: From Nikolai Novikov’s Historical Dictionary to Dictionary of Russian Women Writers

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With an international team of 3 editors and 101 contributors from the United States, Russia, and Europe, Dictionary of Russian Women Writers contains many writers who, though born in Russia, died in Asia, Europe, and America, and wrote in languages other than Russian.\(^1\) It makes two related arguments: for the inclusion of Russian women writers in Russia’s literary history, and for the integration of the diasporan writers created by the Russian Revolution into a literary history that once excluded émigré writers. Dictionary of Russian Women Writers belongs to a long, extremely coherent, international genre of collections of women worthy, which we know exists thanks to compilers’ professional habit of acknowledging and often disagreeing with their predecessors.\(^2\) International exchanges about virtuous, learned, heroic, civic, and some not so excellent women constitute early, durable, and significant transnational debates about tradition, culture, gender, and nation. The continuous national and transnational tensions among important primary sources of women’s literary history bear out the arguments of Karen Offen in European Feminisms, 1700–1950: A Political History that feminism has a long history and is both comparative and political.

Distinctive features of Dictionary of Russian Women Writers suggest, as scholars rightly argue, that in comparison to European women, Russian women writers have been and remain under-researched. Like all such Russian compilations, but unlike their French and English counterparts, it contains a very large number of writers, and the entries contain reference works and list archives. Yet these unusual aspects of Dictionary of Russian Women Writers in a comparative context also raise issues about Russian literary history more generally. The latest comprehensive Russian bio-bibliographical dictionary, Russian Writers 1800–1917 (Russkie pisateli 1800–1917, 1989–), with 3,500 planned entries, takes stock of 200 years of problems: lack of access to archives, the need to check information handed down from one source to another, the focus on a few stars, the importance of non-canonical genres for

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\(^1\) Ledkovsky, Rosenthal, and Zirin, Dictionary of Russian Women Writers.

\(^2\) See my comprehensive article, which covers close to 100 compilations (Hoogenboom, “From Bibliography to Canon”).

tracing literary culture, and perhaps most important, the problem of politics, with writers in internal and international exile, leading to distorted information.3 Features that might seem specific to women writers appear to apply to Russian writers as a whole.

Nevertheless, like other such compilations of women, Dictionary of Russian Women Writers addresses a very serious issue specific to all women writers. The strength of this long transnational tradition of compilations of notable women stands in profound contrast to the problem they continue to address: the exclusion of women from national literary histories. Scholars have analyzed women’s exclusion from French and English literary histories; this article outlines the tensions surrounding women that were particular to Russian literary history in the past three centuries.4 As feminist scholars move back into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the study of gender raises new questions about the very roots of literary history itself, by probing such fundamental categories as authorship, publication, literary and non-literary genres, periodization, aesthetic schools, canons, and national literatures.5

A central problem that confronted both Russia’s very first literary bibliographer and compilers of Russian women may be called the “politics of a non-canonical canon.” Canons are political narratives of significant works, while collections of all writers disrupt easy generalizations about lone great writers. The inclusive, extensive nature of Russia’s first compilation by Nikolai Novikov (1744–1818) is readily apparent from the title: Essay of a Historical Dictionary of Russian Writers: From Various Printed Books and Manuscripts, Reported Proceedings, and Oral Legends (Opót istoricheskogo slovaria o rossiiskikh pisateliakh, iz raznykh pechatnykh i rukopisnykh knig, soobshchennykh izvestii i slovesnykh predanii, 1772). In a quantitative move, Novikov aims not to create a limited hierarchy of great works, but to show the extent of Russia’s enlightenment: “I tried to collect the names of all our writers….6 Critics noted that a number of writers in Novikov’s Historical Dictionary could not be found in any other place; some had never published and others were not even known to contemporaries at the time.7 Plans to update it were never carried out and it became a rarity, to be republished only when it was again necessary to literary historians, in 1867 and 1987. A similar critical reception plagued the last and largest compilation of Russian women, Bibliographic Dictionary of Russian

4 Deljean and Miller, Politics of Tradition; and McDowell, “Consuming Women.”
5 Ezell, Social Authorship; Bell, Parfitt, and Shepherd, Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720; Cohen, Sentimental Education of the Novel; and Cohen and Dever, Literary Channel.
6 Novikov, “Predislovie” in Opót istoricheskogo slovaria, n.p. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
7 Konstantinov, “Bibliograficheskie dopolneniia k slovariu,” 33.
**Women Writers (Bibliograficheskii slovar' russkikh pisatel’nits, 1889),** by Prince Nikolai Golitsyn (1836–93) with 1,286 entries. Sergei Ponomarev summed up the problem in an appended essay, “Our Women Writers” (“Nashi pisatel’nitsy,” 1891): it is “hard to read” a bibliography. In other words, extensive compilations require complementary literary historical narratives to contextualize plain facts.

Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal, and Mary Zizin shared some of Novikov’s difficulties related to the extensive nature of their works, such as funding. Ledkovsky, Rosenthal, and Zizin were turned down for a grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities on the grounds that except in the case of 43 writers, their list of writers overlapped with other reference works. As Ledkovsky, Rosenthal, and Zizin note, the NEH under Lynne Cheney stood “accused of being reluctant to support projects that focus on the non-canonical” (xxiv). Indeed, “we compiled literally thousands of names, so many in fact that we were forced to make somewhat drastic decisions about guidelines for inclusion” (xxiv). Ultimately the editors included 448 women “who wrote and published works in the modern literary language,” deciding to omit women who did not publish and those who wrote before the eighteenth century. Fortunately, unlike Novikov, Ledkovsky, Rosenthal, and Zizin had solid scholarly narratives and good timing. The publication of *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* in 1994 coincided with that of the first large literary history of Russian women writers, *A History of Russian Women’s Writing 1820–1992*, and *An Anthology of Russian Women’s Writing, 1777–1992* by Catriona Kelly. A later collection that combines bio-bibliographic entries with translated selections, *Russian Women Writers* (1999) complements Kelly’s works; together they at long last provide extensive literary historical narratives to make sense of the extensive data of Russian women’s literary production.

Compilations of women have existed in Russia since 1819, but the real roots of the *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* lie in the eighteenth century and attempts to determine Russia’s place as a nation in Enlightenment Europe. In 1772, Novikov included nine women without any fanfare in his *Historical Dictionary*. Surprisingly little has been written about the significance of this original document, which includes a preface and 317 entries (with 4 duplicates), since scholars use it for information and debate his sources, rather than reading it as a complete historical work. Studies of Novikov’s journalism at this time emphasize the spirited give and take of a nascent public sphere, while larger studies place his work among the factors that gener-

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8 Ponomarev, “Nashi pisatel’nitsy,” 1.
9 In 1783, Novikov was dunned repeatedly by Ekaterina Dashkova because he owed money to the Academy of Sciences, which had printed 606 copies of his *Historical Dictionary*. Semennikov, *Materialy dlia istorii russkoi literatury*, 75–77.
10 Tomei, *Russian Women Writers.*
ated a civil society. Novikov’s *Historical Dictionary*, far from being a passive record of Russian literary history, played as active a part as his journalism, and like his other publishing activities, clearly belonged to the political agendas of its own time, as would its progeny.

Novikov’s many literary activities as a publisher of journals, newspapers, and translations, and as journalist and Freemason, put him at the center of the flow of publications and ideas within Russia and between Russia and Europe. He borrowed his title, *Historical Dictionary*, from *The Grand Historical Dictionary* (*Le Grand dictionnaire historique*, 1674) by Abbé Louis Moréri (1643–80) and *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (*Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1697), written as a response to Moréri by Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). Among educated readers, these were two of the most widely read reference works of the eighteenth century. Evgenii, Metropolitan of Kiev (1767–1837), actually mentions Bayle in introductions to his *New Essay of a Historical Dictionary of Russian Writers* (*Novyi opyt istoricheskogo slovaria o Rossiskikh pisateleakh*, 1805), and its final published version, *Dictionary of Russian Secular Writers, Compatriots and Foreigners, Writing in Russia* (*Slovare’ russkikh svetskikh pisatelei, solechestvennikov i chuzhestvennikov, pisavshikh v Rossii*, 1845).

Though Novikov’s and Evgenii’s compilations differed significantly in content from that of Bayle’s *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, it stood as a model for the kind of important enlightenment role their works might play. Novikov published his *Historical Dictionary* in the period when he and others, including Catherine, founded several short-lived satirical journals that led to various polemical exchanges. But I would argue that Catherine’s other, international, writings at that time form the broader context for Novikov’s *Historical Dictionary*. Novikov may have disagreed with Catherine over whether the poet Vasily Petrov was more likely an “imitator of” than a “second” Lomonosov, but the *Historical Dictionary*, especially the introduction, represents a long-overlooked continuity with Catherine’s international agenda for Russia, which included literature.

Novikov stated that he was provoked by a sympathetic anonymous German publication, but I think that another unstated provocation was the negative international debate about Russia as a modern nation. In 1768, the astronomer Abbé Chappe d’Auteroche of the French Royal Academy of Sciences published a long, mostly scientific, account in six parts of his official

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13 “Meanwhile, in 1766 some Russian traveler informed a Leipzig journal with news of several Russian writers, which were printed in German in this journal and received with great pleasure. But this news was quite short and moreover, not completely accurate, and in other places written with bias.” Novikov, “Predislovie,” in *Opyt istoricheskogo slovaria*, n.p.
expedition to Russia in 1761–62 to view an eclipse, *Voyage en Sibérie*. Catherine fought strenuously through various diplomatic and other channels to prevent the publication of a work that thoroughly criticizes Russians and Russia. In chapter 6, “On Progress of the Sciences and the Arts in Russia; on the Genius of a Nation and on Education,” Chappe d’Auteroche briskly recaps actions taken by Peter the Great to enlighten Russia after his embassy to Europe, but concludes that despite the great progress under Peter and his successors, the situation had not really changed: “The sovereigns keep providing their subjects with capable teachers, stimulating and encouraging their talents; nevertheless, after more than sixty years, could one name a single Russian who is noteworthy in the history of the sciences or the arts?”

In 1770, Catherine anonymously published in French a co-authored rebuttal, *Antidote*, which seethed with frustration over the poor knowledge that foreigners had of Russia, Russians, Russian, and Russian literature. After quoting the above passage not once but twice, she responds: “Is it the fault of Russians that Chappe knows nothing of their language, that he knows nothing of the authors… I accept the challenge of Monsieur l’Abbé and I will name first Prokopovich…. Kantemir…. Tatishchev…. Trediakovskiy…. Lomonosov…. Sumarokov…. Petrov…. Each name is followed by a brief sketch of the writer’s importance. Novikov’s dictionary was in some ways an extension of this international ethnographic debate, an exhaustive survey of Russia’s literary history with overly general praise.

In his preface, Novikov presents a rich narrative of Russia’s quick progress through her writers, and argues that this first compilation is like those of Europe: “The usefulness deriving from such books is evident to any enlightened reader … all European peoples have attempted to preserve the memory of their writers…. Only Russia at this time does not have such a book…. The time has now come … to correct the errors of our ancestors.” In 1805, Evgenii echoes Novikov’s idea: “To know foreign writers is an extraneous honor for us; not to know our own compatriots is our true shame.” In making the case for the European significance of Russia’s Enlightenment, Novikov bears out the argument of the opening of Catherine’s *Great Instruction* (1767) to the Legislative Commission: “Russia is a European power.”

Under the successful rule of Catherine the Great, Russia has attained such a degree of greatness that all foreign peoples envy and are surprised at her fortune. The female Tatar slave makes Mustafa and Mohamed tremble; formerly mired in ignorance, Russia competes for the lead in sciences with peoples who have been renowned for their learning for centuries; sciences and arts are spreading in Russia, and

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14 Chappe d’Auteroche, *Voyage en Sibérie*, 240.
15 Anonymous [Catherine II], *Antidote*, 584–85.
our writers are famed. This is evidenced by many original books by our writers that have been translated into foreign languages. All news concerning Russian history is received by foreign peoples with pleasure.17

Novikov effectively links the military might of the Russian empire, personifying the First Russo-Turkish War (1768–74), with enlightenment and literature.

Russian writers, especially women, served as a litmus test for Russia’s level of enlightenment, both at home and abroad. In Antidote, Catherine addressed the issue of women more generally. Where Chappe d’Auteroche charges that “[w]omen, previously confined to their homes, appear in assemblies, which were unknown in Russia until this era,” Catherine notes that “women were not any more confined to their homes in the past than they are today … that our ladies in the past were less confined than François I would find women in France,” and that royal women in Russia had to live a confined life, but this was common in royal families elsewhere.18

Like the French, Germans and Italians too were interested in Russian women, especially writers. Novikov’s German source includes three Russian women writers.19 An Italian reviewer of this German publication points out that it mentions “‘various Russian ladies who have devoted themselves to literature and praises them....’”20 Novikov added six; these nine writers were all listed by the German historian Johann Bernoulli (1777–78), while the French historian Nicolas-Gabriel Clerc (1783) named five, and mentioned plays by an anonymous, possibly woman, writer (who was indeed Catherine).21 Although Novikov does not point out that he has included women, he does include “Verses to the Essay of a Historical Dictionary of Russian Writers,” by Ivan Rudakov, a typesetter whose only published work is this very poem: “Try to hear the rhyme of a Russian de la Suzé, / In which her pleasantness is all apparent. / In Russia Sappho exists and not just one Sappho” (195), demonstrating that at least two Russians felt pride in both the quantity and the quality of Russia’s female writers. By the end of the decade, Novikov pioneered another new genre in Russia, the first journal for women, Modnoe

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18 Anonymous [Catherine II], Antidote, 581–82.
20 Bernoulli, Reisen, 120–21, quoted in Sukhomlinov, “Dopolnenie k sta‘e,” 115.
Although most of Novikov’s writers and even his very words found their way into subsequent bio-bibliographic compilations, the next generation of Russian compilers to follow in Novikov’s footsteps included fewer and rather different women, even as more women wrote and published. Women could claim less prominence as the historical significance of writers became equated with their literary roles. Nineteenth-century compilers succumbed, I would argue, to the effect of the discovery of The Lay of Igor’s Host in 1795, which transformed the periodization of Russian literature. Some eighteenth-century periodizations posited an early period based on folklore without any extant materials, and an empty middle period under the Tatar Yoke, while others included chronicles and religious works. The Lay, however, gave Russian literature a beginning—Boyan, the ancient poet invoked by the author—as well as a middle, the Lay itself. Russians explained their meager literature in the eighteenth century as the result of a somewhat meager past, in response to foreign scholars, who blamed the present—serfdom.

Literary historians became heavily invested in this medieval tale and other newly discovered religious and historical texts from the past for their narrative about the significance of the present, which could be either the first flowering of Russian literature or the rekindled embers of an unknown past. Shortly after the discovery of the Lay, Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826) spoke confidently of five periods in Russian literature, with three periods in the eighteenth century and one each before and after. In 1805, Evgenii introduced his New Essay of a Historical Dictionary of Russian Writers by averring, “Our fatherland, having recently been enriched by the sciences, has however long had its writers, and in some sense we can justly call the period today a renewal or a completion, unlike the new introduction of the sciences.... But ... we are poorer than foreigners.”

One small yet important compilation by Russia’s first state-appointed historian, together with the effect of the discovery of The Lay of Igor’s Host, would make history, and women in history, more important than women writers. In his “Pantheon of Russian Authors” (“Panteon rossiiskikh avtorov,” 1802), Karamzin reintroduced the historical approach. Novikov had avoided the historical emphasis of all his sources, which listed names in chronological order, by putting names in alphabetical order. Karamzin returned to chronology, which would serve him in his History of the Russian State, his next, last, and major project. He included only one woman, Sophia Alekseevna (1656–1704).

22 Hammarberg, “Women, Critics, and Women Critics.”
23 Kurilov, Literaturovedenie v Rossii XVIII veka, 207, 262.
24 Karamzin, “Panteon rossiiskikh avtorov,” 188.
25 Evgenii, Novyi opyt istoricheskogo slovaria, 35–36.
Despite the increased activity of women writers, the selections made by Novikov and Karamzin would hold steady in compilations of the first four decades of the nineteenth century. In 1805, Evgenii included the same three women writers who overlapped with Novikov’s German source, but he added Sophia Alekseevna and Catherine the Great. In 1822, Karamzin’s short biography of Sophia Alekseevna and Evgenii’s long biography of Princess Dashkova found their way into Russia’s first pedagogical literary history, *Essay of a Short History of Russian Literature (Op’ytko kratkoi istorii russkoi literatury)*, by Nikolai Grech (1787–1867), whose title echoes Novikov’s. The only other woman writer he mentions is Anna Bunina (1774–1828), who “occupies an excellent place among writers and is first among women writers of Russia.”26 One of Grech’s most important criteria for including writers in his *Essay* was the actual publication of books (especially what he simply called “good books”); though many women had in fact published books by 1822, his capacious index includes only three women. In 1838, a first volume of Evgenii’s *Dictionary* was reissued posthumously by Ivan Snegirev (1793–1868), who made his own additions, with Evgenii’s approval, based on Grech and Novikov, and included Anna Bunina and the Veliasheva-Volynzeva sisters, Anna and Pelegeia.27 But in 1845, the subsequent publisher, the Slavophile and conservative historian of early Russian history, Mikhail Pogodin, deleted these three women (and all other additions), to return to Evgenii’s original *Dictionary*.

Russia shares with France the pattern of the erasure of most women from the national literary history. In France, this process happens in the name of pedagogy for boys, through repetition of entries and judgements for the canonization of a small handful of women. In a special issue of *Yale French Studies* on the topic of gender and the French canon, Joan deJean concludes that at the end of the eighteenth century, literary historians eliminated the worldly literature of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novels by women from the new French pedagogical canon, creating what she terms a “new pedagogical nationalism” that survives in anthologies and manuals today.28 It is one thing to try to erase two centuries of an extraordinary tradition of women writers in France, and another to simply leave out two generations of barely known women writers in Russia. Nevertheless, thanks to Russians’ growing historical consciousness and Karamzin’s selection of one particular woman writer, other Russian women, like their French counterparts, came to the fore, even while Russian women writers were separated from general compilations and treated separately.

27 Evgenii, *Slovar’ russkikh svetskikh pisatelei, sootechestvennikov i chuzhestransev, pisato-shchikh v Rossii, sluzhashchih dopolneniem k Slovariu pisatelei dukhovnogo chyna*, 1838.
Tremendously popular French pedagogical publications that incorporated France’s tradition of great women and women writers presented Russians the opportunity and format to create their own tradition of great women, only some of whom were writers. In 1819, the first compilation of biographies of Russian women was published as the fifth volume of a translated French compilation, Plutarch for the Fair Sex, or the Lives of Great and Famous Women of all Nations in Ancient and New Times. In 1820, yet another volume on Russian women was added. These two volumes were subtitled, The Gallery of Famous Russian Women, a title borrowed from Karamzin, who suggested in 1803 the need, “to depict A Gallery of Russian Women, famous in history or worthy of such honor.” According to the anonymous editor, this is the first such book in Russian, and the “young Russian women” who wrote the entries based on Karamzin and other research, “hope that their weak, first essay gives cause for a more perfect such work, which would show all foreigners that Russians are able and love to boast of the virtues of Russians.” Of the twenty-one women chosen to impress Europeans, from Princess Olga to Princess Dashkova, all but three are members of the royal family; those who wrote have their writings, with extensive quotations, mentioned at the end of their biographies. By contrast, the lone Russian woman in the original French compilations was Catherine I. The Russian women most reliably found in similar Russian compilations of women worthies—Princess Dashkova, Princess Dolgorukova, and Catherine II—were both historically royalty and writers.

Karamzin’s historical trend animates the selection of women in Dictionary of Memorable People of the Russian Land, Containing the Life and Actions of Famous Military Leaders, Ministers and Men of Government, Great Fathers of the Orthodox Church, Excellent Writers and Scholars, Known for Participation in Events of National History (Slov’ dostopamiatnykh liudei russkoi zemli, soderzhashchii v sebe zhizni i deiania znamiennykh polkovodtsev, ministrov i muzhei gosudarstvennykh, velikikh ierkhov pravoslavnoi tserkvi, otlichnykh literatov i uchenykh, izvestnykh po uchasti v sobytiiakh otechestvennoi istorii, 1836, 1847), by Dmitry Bantysh-

29 Blanshard and Propiak, Plutarh dlia prekrasnogo pola (1816–17). This was a translation of Propiak, Le Plutarque des jeunes demoiselles (1806) and Blanchard, Plutarque de la jeunesse (1803–04), which was translated into German (Neuer Plutarch, 1806–07); this German translation added women in 1815, a model that found its way into Russian. In France, Blanchard had ten editions through 1890, while Propiak had four editions through 1825.


31 Blanshard and Propiak, Plutarh dlia prekrasnogo pola, 5: iv.

32 On this phenomenon, see Hammarberg, “Canonization of Dolgorukova.”
Kamensky (1778–1850), who refers to Karamzin’s phrase, “famous Russian women,” in his introduction (1847). Among the 19 women (out of 620 biographies) are Dashkova and Dolgorukai; the others are noblewomen, not writers, and they are not included in other compilations.

As Bantyshev-Kamensky’s impressive title suggests, Novikov’s principle of inclusiveness did live on in comprehensive compilations, but only applied to men and men writers. In addition to women, Novikov also included foreigners and religious writers. Evgenii and Bantyshev-Kamensky, like Novikov, brought together religious and secular writers. The title of Evgenii’s Dictionary of Russian Secular Writers, Compatriots and Foreigners, Writing in Russia made explicit Novikov’s principle of including foreigners. Bantyshev-Kamensky drew on his own earlier compilations of men in the military and civil service, and his works, together with those by Evgenii, would dominate for the next half century, with limited room for women in their formats.

Novikov’s principle of inclusiveness also lived on in the compilations devoted specifically to women. The first two compilations of Russian women writers, which appeared in quick succession and together counted 123 women, reflect Novikov’s extensive approach on the one hand, and Karamzin’s historical view on the other. In St. Petersburg, the historian Stepan Russov (1768–1842) arranged 97 entries alphabetically in Bibliographic Catalogue of Russian Women Writers (Bibliograficheskii katalog rossiiskim pisatel’nikam, 1826), while in Moscow, the publisher of one of the early journals for women, Zhurnal dla milych (Journal for the Darlings, 1804), Mikhail Makarov (1785–1847), began Materials for a History of Russian Women Authors (Materialy dla istorii russkikh pisatel’nik, 1830–33), which covers 68 women chronologically, where Karamzin left off, with Sophia Alexeevna. As is typical of the genre, both borrowed verbatim from their few predecessors, whom they mention (though not always)—Novikov’s Essay, Karamzin’s Pantheon, Evgenii’s New Essay, and The Gallery of Famous Russian Women. (But Makarov, in Moscow, seems to have been unaware of Russov’s publication in St. Petersburg.) Like Novikov and Karamzin, Russov makes explicit the international competition among nations for the quantity of learned women: “The number of any nation’s woman writers shows its particular degree of enlightenment.”

The process of getting scarce information, a common theme in the history of women’s writing, especially Russian women’s writing, becomes a central part of the stories that Russov and especially Makarov tell. Russov apologizes for failing to deliver the historical dictionary his patron asked for because of the “endless correspondence” that acquiring the necessary information would have entailed. Makarov included poems, prose, and biographical information, and asked readers of Danskii zhurnal (Ladies’ Journal) for more details. He thrice published additional information, from Dmitry Khvostov (1757–1835),

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33 Evgenii published an additional compilation in 1818, Slovar’ istoricheskii o byvshikh v Rossii pisateliakh dukhovnogo china greko-rossiiskoi tserkvi.
whose wife was the poet Aleksandra Khvostova and who himself was working on a “Dictionary of Russian Writers,” and had published Evgeni’s first incomplete Dictionary (1805–06). Makarov included many oral tales, such as what Catherine II, or Derzhavin, or Fonvizin had said about a writer, and who had sponsored or promoted a writer. Given the scarcity of sources, both Russov and Makarov, like Novikov, seem to treat written and oral accounts as equally valid sources. It seems paradoxical that despite substantial efforts by professional journalists and historians to document the phenomenon, as well as the increasing number and published presence, of women writers, the published and oral information about them remained and still is scarce.

The peculiar reliance of Russian compilers on word of mouth stands out even more when we compare it to literary methods for biographical writing in France and England at this time. The editor of French Plutarch, the Lives of Illustrious Men and Women of France (Le Plutarque Français, vies des hommes et femmes illustres de la France, 1835) lists as contributors such major novelists and critics as Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas, Charles Nodier, Eugène Sue, and especially the biographer Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, who could use the new techniques of literary realism to show people, he claims, not only as they appear to the world, but as they really are, “in private life, in their personal habits, in their lifestyles, because that is real life.”34 In England, which, like France, had a tradition of bio-bibliographic compilations and literary biography going back to the seventeenth century, Paula McDowell argues that by the eighteenth century, the even longer tradition of the compilations of female worthies, in conjunction with new mass market forces, served to level differences and emphasize instead such stereotypically feminine virtues as “friendship and domestic concerns.”35 In particular, the significant details of politics were written out of women’s lives, as clichés took over. In these literary landscapes, the Russian feature of personally hearing information from someone first- or second-hand, orally or in a letter, has no place.

The emphasis on personal contact is evident in the very format of Ivan Kireevsky’s essay “On Russian Women Writers” (“O russkikh pisatel’-nitsakh,” 1834), written as a letter to Anna Zontag (1786–1864), his aunt and publisher of the volume in which his article appeared. He writes: “As a result of such prejudice [against women writers], the greater part of our lady poets write little and either do not publish at all or publish anonymously.” Next he presents short portraits of writers without their names, as if to suggest that like him and his aunt, everyone already knows who they are.36 This review functions as an extension of Russian literary salon culture and the salon run

34 Mennechet, Le Plutarque Français, 5.
by his mother, Avdot’ia Elagina (1789–1877), known for her literary correspondence.37

The narratives of how Russian compilers got or failed to get their hard-won details turns out, I think, to be only part of the story these compilations tell about women writers. In her study of biographical sources, and especially what she terms the “anecdotes, legends, and rumors,” for Vasily Trediakovsky, Mikhail Lomonosov, and Alexander Sumarokov, Irina Reyfman argues that the virulent polemics they generated are the eruptions of a deeper conflict, between ideas of a new Russian literature and the old past.38 Reyfman does not address the role of women writers in this dynamic, because they do not have one, at least not the visible one that men have. Women writers are technically present but invisible in Russian literary history because male writers and critics excluded them from the polemics that inscribed men into the story of the development of Russian literature. As Kireevsky notes, “It is painful to see how strangely our inveterate critics deal with them [women writers], about whom they are either silent or speak in such a way that silence would be better.”39

Instead, the exaggerated politeness of Kireevsky and other writers and critics effectively did nothing for the literary reputations of Russian women writers (and readers). Makarov notes that Karamzin set the tone:

In 1791 and 1792, Karamzin published his Moscow Journal, and positively encouraged our women to occupy themselves with literature; he pointed out Catherine to them; and published in the above journal the poem of one unknown woman writer, “A Change in my Fate,” and a translation by another from the works of Sterne, and said that he did not know what to correct in them. And so it stands to reason that at that time wives and daughters of the best families considered it an honor, and a glory, and a singular pleasure to be known among the circle of writers....40

In her study of women’s literary journals, Gitta Hammarberg traces this exhaustive and exhausting praise, which writers parodied and some women objected to.41 As Bunina responded to Aleksandr Shishkov in her album, “A [male] poet is more eager to shower flattery on a woman writer than on a

37 Bernstein, “Avdot’ia Petrovna Elagina.”
38 Reyfman, Vasilii Trediakovsky, 4.
41 Hammarberg, “Women, Critics, and Women Critics.”
fellow [male] writer..." 42 One explanation for this lopsided picture may lie in what Hammarberg calls "the ultimate irony," the fact that journals for women were run by men who also did most of the writing, often posing as women. As a result, Golitsyn, by mistake, did include several men in an early version of his Bibliographic Dictionary of Russian Women Writers. 43

Perhaps men’s flattery of women served a function in men’s relations with each other, as a criticism of how other men treated women. In the quotation from Kireevsky above, other critics behave badly while he behaves well. The most extensive literary anecdote in Makarov’s Materials concerns two stories about Elisaveta Kheraskova (1737–1809) and her husband, the poet Mikhail Kheraskov (1733–1807). 44 The first story contains a well-known bon mot by Vasily Maikov (1728–78), who “if one believes other stories, always would initiate an argument against our then women authors, the authorial wives and daughters.” Maikov, known for his bawdy mock-epic Elisei, or Bacchus Enraged (1771), which mixes high and low levels of language and subjects, said, “He writes, she writes, and well who cooks that cabbage soup?” In the second story, Kheraskov decides to publish a poem at his own expense, without telling his wife. Kheraskova hands out subscriptions and expects complimentary copies, but instead of getting books from the bookseller, ends up paying for them with her own money. Confronted with Kheraskov and the bookseller, she composes a couplet on the spot about her suffering because of her husband’s writing, and he answers: “How unfortunate, Lizanka, that you did not take it into your head to be a real poet.” According to Makarov, the moral is not that she was a real poet, but that Maikov was wrong; she was in fact a “thriftly housewife.” While easy to dismiss as literary and misogynist fluff that probably never happened, these anecdotes are not necessarily only about women. Here the men prove themselves to each other—through their wit primarily, but Kheraskov also gets to show off his wife (he gets the girl, as it were), and as for Makarov, he gets the story. 45

The increased criticism of women writers that began in the late 1830s was a healthy development that finally inscribed women into written Russian literary history. If the previous generation argued over whether noblewomen should write— as in Rakhmannyi’s infamous The Woman Writer (Zhenschchina-pisatel’nitsa, 1837)—the new generation, including women critics, argued about the quality of women’s writing. Notions of critical gallantry towards women writers change in the middle of the nineteenth century. In contrast,

44 Makarov even footnotes the source of this “oral story by contemporaries” (”Mater-ially dla istorii ruskikh zhenschin-avtorov,” 29, no. 7 [1830]: 100-02).
45 Classic studies of the cultural function of women as exchange between men include Rubin, “Traffic in Women” and Brownmiller, Against our Will.
criticism for women became more severe, and in some sense, like men’s criticism of each other. In his review of Maria Zhukova’s (1804–55) *Evenings on the Karpovka* (*Vechera na Karpovke*, 1838–39), Vissarion Belinsky (1811–48) ushers in this new era of criticism for women writers:

[T]oday, even in sitting rooms, compliments are becoming bad taste, and in literature they are simply vulgar. In mental activity there are neither titles nor sexes; there is strength, and that strength is talent. Condescension is shameful, insulting for talent; only mediocrity needs it. Therefore there is no other way for us to express our respect to the author of *Evenings on the Karpovka* than by telling the whole truth.46

Not only did men take on the literary and personal reputations of such established women writers as Zhukova, Elena Gan (1814–42), Karolina Pavlova (1807–93), Evdokia Rostopchina (1811–58), and Evgeniia Tur (1815–92), but such women rivals as Pavlova and Rostopchina, and Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia (1820–89) and Nadezhda Sokhanskaia (1823–84), publicly fought with each other. These were critically the most visible women, and it is no accident that these are the very women to make it into *Handbook of Russian Literature* (1985), which contains relatively few women.47 In addition to publications, critical recognition, whether bad or good, greatly aided literary durability.

Aside from aesthetic issues, the professionalization of writing made Russian women writers more visible to critics. Belinsky began two of his three reviews of Zhukova by noting how well her books were selling. Sokhanskaia wrote that she wanted to make as much as Khvoshchinskaia, the highest paid woman writer. Attacks on women writers used aesthetic criteria to mask economic envy. In *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, Margaret Cohen argues that in France in the 1830s, aspiring men writers aggressively used the Realist aesthetic to edge out popular Sentimental women novelists even while borrowing from Sentimentalism. When in the 1830s Balzac denigrated women novelists, their books, not his, were bestsellers.48 In contrast, Makarov’s story about the Kheraskovs was not really about the amount of money because writing was not the source of their livelihood.

In the 1840s, two literary histories of Russian women writers attempt at the same time to address the problem of no adequate literary history of male writers. In 1843, in a review of Gan, Belinsky energetically digs into Aleksandr Smirdin’s *Catalogue of Russian Books* for names of women writers, like Grech singling out Bunina: “but the brilliant list of our ancient women

46 Belinskii, review of *Vechera na Karpovke*, 2: 574–75.
writers does not end with Mademoiselle Bunina.”49 He falls on Maria Izvekova (1797–1830), and as a measure of Belinsky’s and this review’s importance for Russian women’s literary history, Zirin writes: “Izvekova is best known in Russian literature for the critic Vissarion Belinskii’s sarcastic exhortation in 1843 to read her three novels.”50 In a good-humored rant against second-rate literature, he lists men writers too, their works, journals, and publishers. As he puts it ironically, “We have literature,” a rueful paraphrase of his famous phrase as a young critic in 1834, “We have no literature.”51 Belinsky seems to have realized that literary history was more than just finding the greatest writer, and included a good deal of second-rate literature.

In 1847, Nikolai Bilevich (1812–60), a bibliographer, writer, and Fedor Dostoevsky’s literature teacher, prefaced On Russian Women Writers (O russkikh pisatel’nitsekh) with an overview of literature and journals in Karamzin’s time, “to more clearly determine the character of Russian women writers’ works.”52 Bilevich wove examples of poetry and prose into biography and criticism of work. He classified periods by major writers—Karamzin, Batishkov, Zhukovsky, and Pushkin. In contrast, both Grech and Makarov classified women writers by reign, which suggests that Bilevich had moved from a historical to a literary historical model.

But to paraphrase Belinsky, by the end of the nineteenth century, Russia had professional historians and histories, but no literary history, only the unfinished bibliographies of Grigory Gennadi (1826–80), Dmitry Iazykov (1850–1918), and Semen Vengerov (1855–1920), which became the basis of all twentieth-century scholarship and the still unfinished Russian Writers 1800–1917. In History of Russian Literature (Istoriia russkoi literatury, 1898–99), Aleksandr Pypin (1833–1904) lays out the deep progressive structures of Russian literature’s development as part of history, and with the exception of Catherine the Great, and mentions of memoirs by Dolgorukaia and Dashkova, he includes no women writers. In England, Prince Dmitry Sviatopolk-Mirsky (1890–1939) wrote A History of Russian Literature (1926) in English for a very general audience, and he mentions roughly the same women as Handbook of Russian Literature.53 In a sense, Novikov’s and Golitsyn’s non-canonical canons provide a more accurate picture of the disorderly but productive ferment of Russian literary production, sidestepping literary history’s need for a narrative. World War I, the Revolution, and World War II, in conjunction with Soviet cultural politics,

49 Belinskii, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 7: 652–53.
51 Belinskii, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 7: 650; 1: 22.
52 Bilevich, O russkikh pisatel’nitsekh, no. 108 (1847): 436.
53 Terras, Handbook of Russian Literature.
only made it even more difficult to produce a literary narrative both coherent and accurate.

In post-Soviet Russia, the deficiencies of Russian and women’s literary history are surprisingly similar when politics are involved: problems with archives, documents, and censors. Once Russian women writers moved from an oral and manuscript culture to one where critics wrote about them, they firmly entered Russian literary history. Nevertheless, despite more bibliographic data, the number of Russian women writers in literary histories and national compilations decreased. *Russian Writers 1800–1917* and *Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century Russian Writers* (*Slovár russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, 1988–) are exceptions.¹⁴ The NEH reviewers could conclude that most of the women in *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* “are already documented,” but not in comprehensive narrative forms.¹⁵ Scholars understand the real need for a new compilation to bring Russian women writers together and to the fore as Russians once more rewrite their literary history in the post-Soviet period. *Russian Writers 1800–1917*, especially its historical appendices, reflects a need to go back to basics, to fill in historical lacunae after nearly a century of tendentious Soviet literary history on the heels of another century of censorship.

*Dictionary of Russian Women Writers*, by its very completion as well as by the force of its arguments, accomplishes its goals against the historical odds. From an international feminist perspective, it poses once more some old questions about the shape of Russia’s literary history. The historical tensions about the breadth of Russian literature at the turn of the nineteenth century erased women writers from general compilations, consigning them to separate compilations that emphasized the depth of women’s participation in Russian literature. New histories of Russian literature must now negotiate the historical discontinuities of the revolutions of 1917 and 1991. Another narrative of Russian literature remains to be written—one that incorporates old and new, religious and secular, political and apolitical, foreign and Russian, major and minor, canonical and non-canonical, and men and women writers, in the non-canonical canon that Novikov and compilers of women writers have long envisioned as the tradition of an always somewhat new national literature.

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