Fall 2002

Review Of "An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, And Journalism In Late Imperial Russia" By Edited By B.T. Norton And J.M. Gheith

Sibelan E.S. Forrester
Swarthmore College, sforres1@swarthmore.edu

Recommended Citation
Sibelan E.S. Forrester. (2002). "Review Of "An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, And Journalism In Late Imperial Russia" By Edited By B.T. Norton And J.M. Gheith". *Slavic And East European Journal.* Volume 46, Issue 3. 621-622. DOI: 10.2307/3220224
https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-russian/23

picture of the development of the region over time. The significance of the accounts can be summed up in the words of the Bosnian writer, Ivo Andrić: "Only when a man ceases to travel, only when he can follow the departures and returns of others, and when he has learned how to listen attentively to their stories—only then, while he listens to and looks at others, is the true meaning of roads and traveling revealed to him" (Epigraph, 201; Andrić, *Znakovi pored puta*, Beograd, 1981, 101). I recommend it highly.

James Satterwhite, Bluffton College

Barbara T. Norton and Jehanne M. Gheith, eds. *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia.* Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001. List of terms. Appendix. Bibliography. xii + 320 pp., $19.95 (paper).

An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia is a substantial and absorbing collection of articles, covering a broad range of female journalists. The topics range from feminist separatists to taste-makers in fashion, from war correspondents to publishers and critics anxious to introduce the latest happenings in Western European high culture, along with some of the men whose writing or publishing aimed for a female audience. The articles begin with material from the early nineteenth century, but concentrate in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, with attention to the early twentieth century as well. The contributors offer a wide variety of topics and approaches, reflecting the variety of fields in which they work—history, literature, culture, and information sciences. Many of the articles supplement or re-vision one another, either coincidentally, as they cover the same periodicals or writers from different perspectives, or intentionally, as editors Barbara T. Norton and Jehanne M. Gheith and contributors refer helpfully within their own texts to the other articles included. The list of authors is admirable in its range and includes a good number of the names one would most wish and expect to see in an interdisciplinary volume on Russian women.

Gheith's superb introduction provides the essential background context for approaching and interpreting a relatively unstudied area, and she elegantly sets up the editors' concerns and poses a variety of questions for further study. Gheith argues that journalism in Russia has until now been narrowly studied and too narrowly defined, and sets out to conceptualize the topic and its implications more generously. Any area or era will by necessity appear in a new light if the reader or researcher chooses an unfamiliar point of view:

> One could easily make a case for the "feminization" of Russian journalism from its inception, by exploring Princess Dashkova's or Catherine II's achievements as central to the development of Russian journalism. Or one could point at women's involvement in *Vestnik Evropy* [*European Herald*, 1802–1830], founded by Nikolai Karamzin and one of the most important periodicals of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. [. . .] [R]ather than focus on Karamzin's role in elaborating a Russian literary language, for example, we might instead view Dashkova's insistence that women become literate in Russian (rather than French) as a central fact in the development of a Russian reading public. (11–12)

Since, as Gheith points out, not even the men in Russian journalism have been adequately studied to date, this collection has the potential to shape the progress of future research on journalism in Russia with particular power.

Although each article differs in tone and emphasis, they are all well-written, lively, informative, and thought-provoking. Miranda Beaven Remnek examines the earliest period, studying female readership, fiction and the periodical press in the reign of Nicholas I. Gheith's "Rede-

fining the Perceptible: The Journalism(s) of Evgeniia Tur and Avdot'ia Panaeva" addresses two women who wrote both fiction and journalism proper, and who were (especially Panaeva) until recently best-known from the point of view of their work or relationships with famous men. Christine Ruane gives a stylish overview of the fashion press in late imperial Russia, concentrating on the journal *Moda: Zhurnal dlia svetskikh liudei.* Carolyn R. Marks looks at the development of a "women's" segment of the journalistic market in "Provid[ing] Amusement for the Ladies': The Rise of the Russian Women's Magazine in the 1880s." Adele Lindenmeyr outlines the career of Anna Volkova (1847–1910) in her unusual evolution "from Merchant Wife to Feminist Journalist." In "Meeting the Challenge: Russian Women Reporters and the Balkan Crises of the Late 1870s," Mary F. Zirin shows how war, like censorship or gender-biased patterns of education or employment, could create opportunities for women quite distinct from those of men. Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild looks at well-known journalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in "Writing for Their Rights: Four Feminist Journalists: Mariia Chekhova, Liubov' Gurevich, Mariia Pokrovskaia, and Ariadna Tyrkova." Linda Edmondson focuses more narrowly on Pokrovskaia and her work in "Mariia Pokrovskaia and *Zhenskii vestnik*: Feminist Separatism in Theory and Practice." Barbara T. Norton offers the latest topic chronologically, "Journalism as a Means of Empowerment: The Early Career of Ekaterina Kuskova." June Pachuta Farris's "Sources for the Study of Russian Women Journalists: A Bibliographic Essay" provides valuable guidance to the aspiring researcher. The appendix, a "Checklist of Women Journalists in Imperial Russia," is both informative in itself and useful in keeping the information from the articles proper in perspective: for all the names that have become familiar as one reads the volume, so many more are only touched on in footnotes or not mentioned at all.

As a whole, *An Improper Profession* is a richly conceived and elegantly constructed interdisciplinary volume: it succeeds admirably in its ambitious goals without oversimplifying or jumping to premature conclusions. The contributions work at once to recover or discover the lives and careers of individual journalists, to provide contexts for that work, and to explore its possible significance in Russian culture and women's writing and history. The collection will be good reading for several audiences—students in literature, history or area studies courses, specialists in the same fields, and anyone interested in gender studies, women's studies, the history of journalism, or Russian history and culture. The variety of contributors provides a chance for Slavists who rarely dip into scholarship in history or library science to make the acquaintance of a few of their most interesting practitioners. I hope that the contributors, editors, and publisher will continue to produce work of this scope and value, whether on Russian female journalists or on other broad and hitherto neglected topics.

Sibelan Forrester, Swarthmore College

Katherine Verdery. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change.* The Harriman Lectures. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. xvi + 185 pp., $21.50 (cloth). $14.95 (paper).

Given that Katherine Verdery is an accomplished specialist in Eastern European anthropology and postsocialist culture, it should come as no surprise that she knows where the bodies are buried. But the unusual and provocative basis of her latest book lies in the fact that she also knows where, how, and perhaps even why so many of the bodies are exhumed: in Verdery's *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, the corpses of Balkan national heroes and martyrs cannot rest in peace. Unlike the "unquiet dead" from the European folkloric tradition that inform Verdery's critical stance, if these ghosts haunt their countries, it is because their