

No Good without Reward:
Selected Writings
A BILINGUAL EDITION

LIUBOV KRICHEVSKAYA



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Introduction

Friend of the gentle Muses! You dispense their
gifts
As much with brilliance as with modesty.
Your voice rang out among us first,
And all Ukraine applauds thee
LXX ... CC ... , 1816¹

The Other Voice

Many readers will be surprised to find Liubov Yakovlevna Krichevskaya, a writer born in the first year of the nineteenth century, in a series entitled the Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. However, the “early modern” age, that is, “the period in which Russia was transformed from an essentially medieval, feudal culture into a modern, secularized, European empire,”² is generally acknowledged among Russian historians to have begun later and lasted much longer than the comparable period in the West. In terms of literature, Marcus Levitt explains, the early modern period extends into the early nineteenth century: “During what might be called the ‘early modern’ period ... , the ‘classical’ hierarchical system of genres underwent three basic transmutations in Russia before it was finally dethroned in the nineteenth century: the seventeen-century baroque; mid-eighteenth-century Russian classicism; and the sentimentalism of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century.”³ In fact, of the forty-nine writers included in the volume *Early Modern Russian Writers*, over a third lived well into the nineteenth century. And while Krichevskaya’s cosmopolitan contemporary Alexander Pushkin would be honored as

1. This poem, signed with the cryptograph “LXX ... CC ...,” was dedicated to L. Krichevskaya. It appeared in the journal *Ukrainskii vestnik*, volume two, issue 4, of 1816, alongside the first two published verses of Krichevskaya, “Vera, Nadezhda, Liubov” and “R—vu.”

2. Marcus Levitt, introduction to *Early Modern Writers, Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Marcus Levitt, vol. 150 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit, New York, and London: Brucoli Clark Layman, and Gale Research, Inc., 1995), ix.

3. *Ibid.*, xi.

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“the father of modern Russian literature,” Levitt argues that those authors who, like Krichevskaya, wrote outside of Pushkin’s influence and continued to develop sentimental forms belong still to the early modern age.⁴ Accepting the relatively recent dating of this period, readers may be all the more surprised at the dearth of women writers, at least in the scholarly literature. In fact, only two women are included in the above-mentioned volume: Catherine the Great and her friend Princess Ekaterina Dashkova. Moreover, their wealth and status make them hardly representative voices of the time. And so, the work of Krichevskaya, long unavailable in either English or Russian, promises to lend greater insight into the other voice in the literature of that turbulent and still understudied period known as early modern Russia.

Appearing on the Russian literary scene during the reign of Alexander I (1801–1825), Krichevskaya stands out in the history of Russian literature for a number of reasons. Not only did she manage to publish her work in the early nineteenth century, a time when there were very few successful women writers in Russia, but she did so in the provincial city of Kharkov, located in Little Russia, or present-day Ukraine, not in Russia’s “two capitals”—St. Petersburg and Moscow, the undisputed centers of Russian literary culture of the time. Moreover, she was one of only a small group of writers—male or female—who attempted to live off their literary earnings, in her case to support her widowed mother and unmarried younger sisters. Driven by financial need as well as writerly ambition, Krichevskaya was nonetheless constrained by the modesty and self-abnegation expected of women at the time, leading her to reflect in her literary work on the idea of woman’s agency, that is, how and to what extent women might control their lives and direct their destiny. Krichevskaya’s prose fiction alternately displays great confidence, desperate hope, and profound ambivalence that a woman’s exercise of selfless virtue will indeed be rewarded in this life with the financial security and domestic happiness she sought, while her poetry is also punctuated by moments of utter despair, as in the poem “Another Song,” where her lyric subject makes the abject declaration, “The poor of this world ought not to love!”

4. *Ibid.*, xiv.

In a literary tradition that has marginalized and obscured the contribution of its women writers, Krichevskaya has for too long now been “hidden from history.” Alessandra Tosi claims that the neglect of women writers like Krichevskaya was institutionalized by the Soviet scholarly establishment, whose teleological view of literary history privileged realism, relegating early nineteenth-century sentimentalism, for all practical purposes, to the dustbin of history.⁵ Such a dismissive evaluation of this mode of writing had very real consequences for the subsequent study of this literature. As Tosi explains, “[I]t not only swept away the complexity and richness characterising this age of Russian fiction, but also resulted in there being only a sparse number of both scholarly studies on the period and, crucially, new editions of early nineteenth-century works.”⁶ Due to the unavailability of Krichevskaya’s works, even scholars of Russian women’s literature make only the most cursory mention of her literary output, if they acknowledge it at all.⁷ However, as an unmarried provincial woman of modest means pursuing a professional career as a writer in the early nineteenth century, Krichevskaya occupies a unique place in Russian letters, and a comprehensive analysis of her work promises to shed new light on the development of early nineteenth-century Russian literature and on the role played in it by women writers.

The Historical Context

Liubov Krichevskaya lived through a rather turbulent time—politically, socially, and culturally—in Russian history, famously chronicled by Leo Tolstoy in the novel *War and Peace*. This era was marked by

5. Alessandra Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin: Russian Fiction in the Reign of Alexander I (1801–1825)*, *Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics*, 44 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 12. I follow Tosi in not capitalizing “sentimentalism,” “pre-romanticism,” and “romanticism” in recognition of the fact that the highly syncretic nature of Russian literature at the time makes it difficult to set chronological boundaries or to describe these modes of writing as discrete “schools” (*ibid.*, 207).

6. *Ibid.*

7. For example, the biographical sketch of Krichevskaya in Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith, eds., *A History of Women’s Writing in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 332, is incomplete, leaving out any mention of her major works, such as the epistolary novel *Count Gorsky (Graf Gorskii, 1837)*.

the accession to the Russian throne of the more liberal-minded Alexander I, the Napoleonic Wars with the burning of Moscow and the Russian occupation of Paris, the liberal Decembrist revolt of 1825, and the repressive reign of Nicholas I that followed. This was a time of intense social and cultural tumult in Russia. As Tosi notes, “The early nineteenth century is a momentous time for Russian cultural life. The new freedom enjoyed by Russians at the beginning of Alexander’s ‘liberal’ reign injected new life into artistic activities in general, and into the literary arena in particular. The number of Russians taking up the pen soared, and began to include non-aristocratic writers and female authors, whilst literary institutions such as societies and journals proliferated.”⁸

Despite the increasing number of women writers, the early nineteenth century was an age dominated by men, quite unlike the preceding century, during which four women occupied the Russian throne and Princess Dashkova served as the first president of the Russian Academy of Science. Krichevskaya was born less than a decade after the death of Catherine the Great and only three years after the latter’s son and heir, Paul I, issued the law of succession that instituted male primogeniture, which excluded women from inheriting the crown. The presence of women in politics was greatly reduced, and women’s influence was largely restricted to social venues, such as salons and artistic patronage. As Catriona Kelly notes, “the emergence of women’s writing in Russia was linked with a *decline* in women’s real political and economic powers.”⁹ Not surprisingly, the idea of woman’s power, or agency, is at the heart of Krichevskaya’s work.

Krichevskaya began her literary career in the second decade of the nineteenth century, during that flowering of Russian literature referred to as the Golden Age, when a pleiad of extremely talented—and almost exclusively male—lyric poets appeared. Among them was arguably Russia’s greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin, who made his literary debut in 1814, just two years before Krichevskaya did. However, the fact that Pushkin (1799–1837) and Krichevskaya were almost perfect contemporaries does more to highlight the differences

8. Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin*, 12–13.

9. Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women’s Writing, 1820–1992* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 8.

in male and female literature than to point out any similarities, and helps to explain the increasing marginalization of women's writing in Russia. The literary output of the cosmopolitan Pushkin was marked by a highly sophisticated use of romantic irony, something few women writers of the time were free to imitate, confined as they were to more naïve, sentimental modes.¹⁰ Only a generation before, one of Russia's most popular and respected authors, Nikolai Karamzin, had championed the sentimental tale, but by the 1820s male authors were largely abandoning sentimentalism or lampooning it. However, very few women authors were able to escape "the prescriptions of sentimentalism as *the* feminine trend."¹¹ And while sentimentalism exerted a similar influence on women writers in the West, the Russian case, Tosi argues, "is more extreme in terms of both the hold and the long-term effects sentimental views had on women writing."¹²

In order to give a better sense of the intensely hybrid cultural context in which Krichevskaya pursued her art, it is interesting to note that not all the female authors who took up the pen at that time in Russia wrote in Russian. French was then the first language of Russia's aristocratic elite, and while men were typically forced to learn Russian in their formal schooling in order to pursue careers in the civil service or the military, Russian women were under little compulsion to learn the national language, at least not until the Napoleonic Wars set off a wave of patriotism. And so, three of Krichevskaya's female near-contemporaries—Natalia Golovkina (1769–1849), Yulia Krüdener (1764–1825), and Zinaida Volkonskaya (1792–1862)—wrote almost entirely in French.¹³

The first decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed the establishment of Bible societies, which spread pietism through the educated classes of Russian society and, as Catriona Kelly notes, "encouraged women to express their spirituality in a way that the Or-

10. For a discussion of romantic irony in the works of Pushkin, see Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

11. Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin*, 134.

12. *Ibid.*, 213.

13. For more on these writers, see Juri Lotman, "Russkaia literatura na frantsuzskom iazyke," in Iu. M. Lotman, *Izbrannye stat'i: V trekh tomakh* (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1994), 3: 350–368.

thodox Church of Russia historically had not.”¹⁴ Such “enthusiastic religiosity” was perhaps a reaction to the restricted roles available to women in the public sphere; in any case, it is strongly evident throughout Krichevskaya’s oeuvre, but especially in her lyric poetry. In the late twenties and early thirties, however, the Russian reading public’s taste for poetry waned, and many authors, such as Krichevskaya and her more famous contemporary Pushkin, turned increasingly to prose.

The city of Kharkov, where Krichevskaya spent her entire life, may have been far from the cultural centers of St. Petersburg and Moscow, where the poets of Pushkin’s pleiad spent their time among Russia’s cosmopolitan elite, but it was no backwater. Although it was indeed provincial according to a number of indices—its population in 1802 was just over 10,000, while that of St. Petersburg in 1800 was close to 220,000, and “until the 1830s even the city’s main roads were not always passable by carriage”¹⁵—it underwent rapid expansion and development throughout Krichevskaya’s life. Located at the confluence of the Uda, Lopan, and Kharkov Rivers, it served as a major trading point between the north and south of the Russian Empire from the end of the eighteenth century. At that time it became known as a vibrant educational and cultural center, serving an enormous geographic region that included much of Ukraine, portions of the Caucasus, and some southern Russian provinces, as well as the Don region. In 1796 it was made a provincial capital, and in 1799 it became a Russian Orthodox archdiocese, whose Cathedral of the Dormition was adorned with an iconostasis designed by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, the architect who transformed the face of St. Petersburg under the Empresses Anna and Elizabeth II.

The most significant event in the evolution of Kharkov’s cultural life was undoubtedly the founding in 1804 of Kharkov University, one of four universities chartered by the reform-minded tsar Al-

14. Catriona Kelly, “Sappho, Corinna, and Niobe: Genres and Personae in Russian Women’s Writing, 1760–1820,” in *A History of Women’s Writings in Russia*, ed. Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 37–61, at 47.

15. L. Makedonov, s.v. “Khar’kov,” *Entsyklopediia*, ed. I. E. Andrevskii (St. Petersburg: F. A. Brokgauz-I. A. Efron, 1903), 74: 109–17, at 115.

exander I, and the second-oldest university in Ukraine.¹⁶ In 1824, the university press began publishing the *Ukrainian Journal* (Ukrainskii zhurnal), which, together with the Kharkov-based journal *Ukrainian Herald* (Ukrainskii vestnik), became an important publication venue for the young Krichevskaya. The city's cultural expansion was especially rapid during Krichevskaya's adolescence, following the Napoleonic Wars. For example, in 1812 the Kharkov nobility founded a beneficent society to educate the children of those with insufficient resources. In 1813 the Society of Sciences was established, in 1816 a section of the Bible Society, in 1817 the Student Society of Lovers of the Russian Word, in 1820 the Student Bible Community, and in 1823 the Bible Community of Gymnasium Students. Kharkov would become a center of Ukrainian romantic nationalism in the 1830s, something which seems to have had little effect on Krichevskaya, although it catapulted her cousin Grigory (Hrihorii) Kvitka-Osnovianenko to lasting fame as a Ukrainian writer.

Despite the founding of universities, each with its own press, and the emergence of new journals during the reign of Alexander I, it was still quite an achievement to be published in Russia, especially for a provincial woman writer. Consider the fact that in the first five years of the nineteenth century, "the average number of books published in Russia was 400 volumes per year and steadily increased to 585 in 1825."¹⁷ Moreover, in a society with an illiteracy rate of 96 percent, the reading public was fairly sophisticated, restricted as it was "to a small elite, mainly represented by the high society of Moscow and St. Petersburg."¹⁸ On top of all that, there was the issue of censorship. The fact that Krichevskaya managed to publish three volumes of her fiction and another volume of historical anecdotes, which she edited, is certainly testimony to her talent and drive.

16. The University of Lviv was founded in the seventeenth century when western Ukraine was under Polish rule.

17. Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin*, 34.

18. *Ibid.*, 35.

Biography and Works

Krichevskaya was born on the family estate near Kharkov in 1800, and her career as a writer was, in many respects, as much a necessity as it was a vocation. Her father died when the author was only twelve, leaving her and her four younger sisters without a dowry and, therefore, for all intents and purposes, unmarriedable. Moreover, as the eldest child, Krichevskaya became responsible for the welfare of her entire family, and so it would seem to be no coincidence that all of her heroines are fatherless, and in her novel *Count Gorsky* the heroine, whose name is also Liubov, experiences the death of her father at a very early age. And while mother-daughter relationships are portrayed with great warmth and sympathy in her work, providing for a widowed mother is nonetheless an agonizing burden for many of her heroines of modest means (in, e.g., *Blind Mother* and *No Good without Reward*), who must choose between the care of their mothers and their own happiness.

If her father's death necessitated that Krichevskaya pursue a literary career to support herself (and her family), her first cousin Kvitka-Osnovianenko made such a career a real possibility for the young girl. In an age when women writers "depended on the goodwill of the male writers who edited journals" to get published,¹⁹ Kvitka-Osnovianenko, as an editor of *Ukrainskii vestnik*, as well as an active supporter of Kharkhov theatricals, appears to have played an important role in Krichevskaya's professional life.²⁰ Kvitka-Osnovianenko no doubt helped his cousin to get published in the journal he edited and may have been responsible for the staging of Krichevskaya's play *No Good without Reward*. And while it seems from Krichevskaya's poetry and other writings that she and her cousin were very close, Kvitka-Osnovianenko's support for the young writer may have also been inspired by more abstract principles. A social progressive, Kvitka-Osnovianenko was, among other things, a founder of the Kharkhov Institute for Noble Girls (Institut blagorodnykh devits), reflecting a

19. Kelly, "Sappho, Corinna, and Niobe," 56.

20. It is interesting to note that while Kvitka-Osnovianenko wrote in Ukrainian, his cousin Liubov did not. Although fluent in at least French and Russian, Krichevskaya probably did not read and write in Ukrainian.

commitment to expanding educational opportunities for women.²¹ The proceeds from Krichevskaya's first book-length publication, the two-volume collection of selected works, *My Moments of Leisure* (*Moi svobodnye minuty*, 1817–18), went to support this school. In any case, it is clear that Kvitka-Osnovianenko encouraged his cousin to write, going so far as to praise her literary talent in verse, to which Krichevskaya responded in the poem “To Gr——ry F——ch Kv——ka. In Answer to His Verses of September 17,” thanking her cousin “for all you wished for me,” and chiding him for his compliments: “Dear friend! Why did you praise me so/And place me among the very good?”

Such a reaction may have been inspired at least in part by Krichevskaya's self-consciousness over her limited education, which she describes briefly in a footnote to the poem “To Rtishchev” and in the preface to *My Moments of Leisure*. The education she received was directed by her “gentle, good-hearted mother” (1: iv) and involved for the most part the study of religion, or catechism, as she describes it.²² Nevertheless, Krichevskaya insists that she was content with her modest education—“Thank God! I feel that this is enough for a truly Christian life” (1: iv)—although she does note that it was perhaps insufficient for one hoping to assume “the lofty title of writer” (1: iv), underscoring the challenges women faced in trying to accommodate Christian humility with writerly ambition.

Krichevskaya's description of her limited education was certainly exaggerated; her translations from French and the breadth of her reading suggest that her education extended a good deal beyond the study of the catechism—thanks to her intellectual curiosity and discipline. Her heroines also tend to take the improvement of their minds very seriously. The eponymous heroine of her novella *Emma*, for example, “would be practicing a difficult piece of music

21. S. Shakhovskii, introduction to *G. F. Kvitka-Osnov'ianenko. Povesti* (Kiev: Radians'kii Pis'mennik, 1954), 5.

22. However, one should not, perhaps, make too much of the gender implications of such an education. Kvitka-Osnovianenko, who belonged to the nobility and who, like Krichevskaya, spent his entire life in and around Kharkov, had a similar religion-based education. As he himself put it, “I lived in a time when education did not go very far” (Shakhovskii, introduction, 4).