

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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RUSSIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY-Early Modern Period

In the 17th century, *The First Letter to Andrey Kurbsky* written by the Grand Prince of Muscovy, Ivan IV (the Terrible), was a message addressed to Prince Andrey Kurbsky, who defected to Lithuania during the Livonian War. The letter talks about Ivan's early years, his mistreatment and his abuse by Russian nobles.

The Story of My Life written by the monk Martiry Zelenetsky appeared in the same century. depicts his life in a monastery for few years, his journey to a place called 'Green Island' to establish a new monastery, the miracles he witnessed in Green Island, and his instructions addressed to the local monks.

The Tales of Anzersky Cloister (1636-1656) was written by Eleazar Anzersky, who founded the Trinity Monastery on Anzersky Island in the White Sea. The *Tales* includes stories about events that occurred in the course of founding the monastery and the miracles witnessed by Eleazar.

The Life Stories (1672–1675) written by Archpriest Avvakum was a self-testimony about his imprisonment in Pustozersk, his dramatic struggle for his religious convictions, and his inner struggles and emotions.

Following his close associate Avvakum, the monk Epiphany wrote his own life-story. In his autobiographical stories *The Life Stories* (1667–1671), Epiphany focused on his pain, his bad experiences and the miracles that he had witnessed in his lifetime.

Alexander Radishchev's work *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790) is considered an autobiographical narrative that contains a harsh criticism of Russia's social and political system under Catherine the Great, and his violent reaction to the abuses of Russian serfdom. As a result of this work he was immediately arrested, tried for treason, and condemned to death, but his sentence was later commuted to exile in Siberia.

Nikolay Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (1789-90) described the author's experiences during his travels through Germany, England, France and Switzerland. Karamzin also portrayed numerous sketches of literary figures he met.

Open Hearted Confession about My Deeds and Thoughts, written by Denis Fonvizin during the last years of his life was another autobiographical work that was left unfinished at his death in 1792. Fonvizin's *Confession* was an expression of his joy in all the diverse aspects of human and a response to the previously published pseudo-confession of Rousseau. Unlike Rousseau, he admitted to his sins and all the lawless deeds he had committed in his lifetime that was filled only with regret and repentance.

Fedor Glinka's eight volume *Letters from a Russian Officer* (1815-16) which described military events witnessed by the author and his experiences fighting in the campaigns of the Napoleonic Wars was considered on a par with Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*.

Women Writers: The first published autobiographies by women writers date from the last decade of the 18th century; public figures like Catherine the Great's and her friend Ekaterina Dashkova's autobiographical sketches were published only decades after their death. Catherine the Great, being a proponent of the Enlightenment, wanted to imprint the role of a woman's leadership on Europe.

Reading

1-Cooper, N.L., "A Chapter in the History of Russian Autobiography: Childhood, Youth, and Maturity in Fonvizin's A Sincere Avowal of My Deeds and Thoughts", *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Winter, 1996, pp. 609-622.

2- *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, Edited by Neil Cornwell, Routledge, 2013.

3- Terras, V., *A History of Russian Literature*, Yale University Press, 1991.

4- Mirsky, D.S., *A History of Russian Literature and Contemporary Russian Literature*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1949.

5- Greenleaf, M., "Performing Autobiography: The Multiple Memoirs of Catherine the Great (1756-96)", *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Jul., 2004), pp. 407-426