

A Woman's Lot: Realism and Gendered Narration in Russian Women's Writing of the 1860s

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In March 1862 the first part of a novel titled *A Woman's Lot* (*Zhenskaia dolia*) appeared in the leading Russian literary journal *Sovremennik*. The publication was signed “N. Stanitskii,” and loyal readers would have recognized a name that had appeared in nearly every issue of the journal for the last fifteen years. Like the rest of “Stanitskii’s” fiction, *A Woman's Lot* offered a contribution to the debate on “the woman question,” that is, “a public discussion of social and economic changes in women’s lives.”¹ Not many of *Sovremennik*’s subscribers knew, however, that “N. Stanitskii” was in fact Avdot’ia Panaeva (1819–93), a writer for whom the issues addressed in *A Woman's Lot* were a matter not merely of rhetoric but of personal experience.

A hostess of the *Sovremennik*’s influential literary salon, and Nikolai Nekrasov’s co-author and common-law wife, Panaeva was a successful writer in her own right, who had by 1862 already published ten popular short novels. Although publishing under a male pseudonym was an established practice among mid-nineteenth-century women writers, Panaeva’s use of the ostensibly male narrative persona in *A Woman's Lot* was not just a marketing strategy.² As the novel’s plot unfolded, the subject of realist narration as gendered emerged as one of its main concerns, alongside the more common ruminations on the issues of female emancipation, tying the two inextricably together. Reflecting on the most pressing issues of the day, such as the utilitarian uses of literature and the political power of fictional narratives, Panaeva also addressed the problems contemporary critics specifically identified

¹Jane Costlow, “Love, Work, and the Woman Question in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing,” in *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, ed. Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene (Westport, 1994), 61. For a comprehensive bibliography on the subject see *ibid.*, 72–73. On the place of the “woman question” in mid-nineteenth-century Russian literature see Arja Rosenholm, “The ‘Woman Question’ of the 1860s and the Ambiguity of the ‘Learned Woman,’” in *Gender and Russian Literature: New Perspectives*, ed. Rosalind J. Marsh (Cambridge, UK, 1996), 112–29.

²Mary Fleming Zirin, “Women’s Prose Fiction in the Age of Realism,” in *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, 78–79.

with women's writing, such as excessive attention to detail, sketchy character description, and weak plotting.³

Instead of assuming the straightforwardly male "voice of authority," Panaeva uses a self-consciously transgressive narrative voice to negotiate the novel's problematic status as a realist narrative created by a woman writer.⁴ Throughout the novel, Panaeva's narrator takes advantage of the division of readers into those aware of Stanitskii's female identity and those who were not, oscillating between male and female narrative personae.⁵ First one, and then the other, are performed through complex rhetorical strategies of merging the identity of the narrator with that of his addressees. This double identification undermines the established narratorial voice of an objective male observer, borrowing the voice of authority while indirectly exposing its limitations.

Panaeva's narratorial strategies do not just single her out as a woman writer self-consciously questioning the nature of her literary work. They also raise a number of questions that illuminate the importance of her texts for ongoing research on the gendered history and aesthetics of European realism.⁶ How did the narrative voice in *A Woman's Lot* relate a story composed by a woman but narrated by a man? How did it negotiate the literary and political status of a text at odds with the masculine aesthetics of Russian realism?⁷ In this article, I employ feminist narrative theory's concepts of the feminine social novel and narrative transvestism to demonstrate how Panaeva's transgressive narrative voice questioned gendered conventions of literary realism at the time.⁸

³D. I. Pisarev, "Kukul'naia tragediia s buketom grazhdanskoi skorbi," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 6 vols (St. Petersburg, 1894–1907), 4 (1894), 148, first published in *Russkoe slovo*, 8 (1864): 1–58.

⁴Following Susan S. Lanser's theory of gendered narration, I use terms such as "male voice" and "female voice" to "designate the narrator's grammatical gender" and mark the female voice "as site of ideological tension made visible in textual practices." See Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca, 1992), 6. Lanser's theory echoes Elaine Showalter's reading of women's fiction as an inherently multiple/double-voiced discourse integrating dominant and "muted" voices (Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter [London, 1986], 243–70). For a discussion of this theory in Slavic studies see Arja Rosenholm and Irina Savkina, "How Women Should Write: Russian Women's Writing in the Nineteenth Century," in *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture*, ed. Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi (Cambridge, UK, 2012), 161–208.

⁵For a revealing, if not necessarily reliable, account of Vissarion Belinskii's reaction to finding out about Panaeva's authorship of her first novel, see her *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1956), 171.

⁶Naomi Schor, *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* (New York, 1985); Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change* (New York, 1988); Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton, 1999); idem, "Preface: Reconfiguring Realism," in *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis, 1995), vii–xiii; Joan Douglas Peters, *Feminist Metafiction and the Evolution of the British Novel* (Gainesville, 2002); Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Love, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton, 2006). For the gendered history of narrative voices in realism's literary precursors see Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, 1989).

⁷For illuminating applications of Cohen and Schor's methodologies in studies of Russian realist writing in general see Hilde Hoogenboom, "Sentimental Novels and Pushkin: European Literary Markets and Russian Readers," *Slavic Review* 74:3 (2015): 553–74; as well as Hilde Hoogenboom, *Noble Sentiments and the Rise of Russian Novels* (Toronto, forthcoming 2020); and Jehanne M. Gheith, *Finding the Middle Ground: Krestovskii, Tur, and the Power of Ambivalence in Nineteenth-Century Russian Women's Prose* (Evanston, 2004). For masculine vs feminine aesthetics specifically, see footnote 12 below.

⁸Margaret Cohen, "In Lieu of a Chapter on Some French Women Realist Novelists," in *Spectacles of Realism*, 93. The term "narrative transvestism," introduced by Madeleine Kahn in *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Ithaca, 1991), relates to a specific literary strategy of

Although obvious instances of intentional narrative transvestism in mid-nineteenth century Russian literature are rare, the historical practice of Russian women writers adopting male pseudonyms is a topic productively explored by scholars.⁹ Feminist historiography, in particular, has contributed much to our understanding of complex cultural mechanisms behind this literary and publishing practice.¹⁰ Drawing on this rich body of work, I argue that Panaeva's transgressive narrative voice revealed to her readers the gendered nature of one of the fundamental narrative techniques of literary realism—focalization.¹¹ Multiple switches from male to female narrator throughout the novel expose the privileged position of a male point of view. A male narrator is placed higher in both social and aesthetic hierarchies, is more reliable as a witness, and is not hindered by aesthetic setbacks of feminine literary styles. Gendered focalization is used at structurally significant points in

"use by a male author of a first-person female narrator" (p. 2). Kahn's study was initially criticized for operating within a binary gender model and defining transvestism exclusively as a male to female transformation (see Dianne Dugaw, "Review," *Comparative Literature* 47:3 [1995]: 271–73). Since then, the concept had been developed further in the framework of cultural studies of transvestism and is now widely used in feminist and queer narratology. See, for example, Samantha Allan, "Whither the Transvestite? Theorizing Male-to-Female Transvestism in Feminist and Queer Theory," *Feminist Theory* 15:1 (2014): 51–72; Nicola Gilmour, "Mothers, Muses and Male Narrators: Narrative Transvestism and Metafiction in Cristina Peri Rossi's *Solitario de amor*," *Confluencia* 15:2 (2000): 122–36; Zsuzsa Török, "'Notorious Beyond Any Other European Woman of Her Generation': The Case of Count(ess) Sarolta/Sándor Vay," *Slavonica* 23:1 (2018): 53–68; Medha Karmarkar, "Narrative Transvestism and Male/Female Friendship in Adelaide de Souza's *Adèle de Sénanges*," *Women in French Studies* 4 (1996): 40–49; and more widely in Hispanic, German, and Japanese studies in Beth Wietelmann Bauer, "Narrative Cross-Dressing: Emilia Pardo Bazán in *Memorias de un solterón*," *Hispania* 77:1 (1994): 23–30; Todd Kontje, "Gender-Bending in the Biedermeier," *Women in German Yearbook* 12 (1996): 53–69; and Rika Saito, "Writing in Female Drag: Gendered Literature and a Woman's Voice," *Japanese Language and Literature* 44:2 (2010): 149–77.

⁹Additional examples can be found in *Masquerade and Femininity: Essays on Russian and Polish Women Writers*, ed. Urszula Chowanec et al. (Newcastle, 2008). Aiming to "challenge stable divisions, binaries, boundaries and categories" (ibid., 6), the editors brought together Slavists working on performativity, gender representations and authorship, united in their reliance on methods of feminist narratology, as developed by Terry Castle, Susan S. Lanser, and Madeleine Kahn, as well as theories of gender and sexuality by Jacques Lacan, Joan Riviere, Judith Butler, and Luce Irigaray (ibid., 2–8). *Masquerade*, in the context of Russian and Polish women's writing, is explored as a "functional metaphor for being socially successful," "explored ... as motifs, strategies, forms, parodies, and rituals in women's lives" (ibid., 1). Other examples of recognizable instances of narrative transvestism in the Russian literary tradition include N. A. Durova's famous *Zapiski* (1836), as well as literary criticism that N. D. Khvoshchinskaia published as V. Porechnikov. For a comprehensive theoretical discussion of gendered voices in nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition see Joe Andrew, *Narrative Space and Gender in Russian Fiction: 1846–1903* (New York, 2007); Irina Savkina, *Razgovory s zerkalom i zazerkal'em* (Moscow, 2007), 76–87, 193–225; and Catriona Kelly, "The First-Person 'Other': Sof'ia Soboleva's 1863 Story 'Pros and Cons' (I Pro, i Contra)," *Slavonic and East European Review* 73 (1995), 61–81. For a modernist example in this tradition see Christa Binswanger, *Seraph, Careviè, Narr: Männliche Maskerade und weibliches Ideal bei Poliksena Solov'eva (Allegro)* (Bern, 2002); and Colleen McQuillen, *The Modernist Masquerade: Stylizing Life, Literature, and Costumes in Russia* (Madison, 2013).

¹⁰Arja Rosenholm, "Writing as Space of Pain and Refuge: *Vera* by Nadezhda Dmitrievna Khvoshchinskaia," in *Masquerade and Femininity*, 55–72; Barbara Heldt, "Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones and Robin Feuer Miller (Cambridge, UK, 1998), 251–70; Joe Andrew, *Narrative and Desire in Russian Literature, 1822–49: The Feminine and the Masculine* (Basingstoke, 1993), 85–184; Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing, 1820–1992* (Oxford, 1994), 49; and Wendy Rosslyn, "Conflicts over Gender and Status in Early Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: the Case of Anna Bunina and her Poem *Padenie Faetona*," in *Gender and Russian Literature*, 55–75.

¹¹Susan S. Lanser, "Sexing the Narrative: Propriety, Desire, and the Engendering of Narratology," *Narrative* 3:1 (1995), 85–94, 86.

the novel to, for example, legitimize first-hand accounts of female suffering through a male perspective on the issue, narrate experiences of marginalized social groups, and challenge prescriptive discourses of femininity. Realist narration, a fashionable and politically approved style of writing in Panaeva's milieu, is presented as a part of a wider framework of male privilege in society and the arts.

Following the impetus of recent investigations of women writers' role in the development of Russian aesthetic theory, I examine a range of sources—letters, diaries, and *Sovremennik's* business documentation—to reconstruct Panaeva's contribution to contemporary debates on realist aesthetics.¹² The first part of this article reevaluates historical accounts of Panaeva's work in *Sovremennik*, focusing on her role as an in-house writer producing literary texts on the women's question. My second section discusses *A Woman's Lot* as a Russian example of the feminine social novel—a genre described by Margaret Cohen as women writers' counterpart to the masculine version of the classic realist nineteenth-century novel.¹³ What emerges from this analysis is a deep connection between the specifics of the genre and Panaeva's use of narrative voice: utilizing the full potential of a transgressive gender identity, her narrator performs the function of “narrative overcoding” typical for this genre.¹⁴ In the final section, I use the theory of narrative transvestism to demonstrate how, through the use of gendered focalization, Panaeva frames realist narration as male privilege, focusing on three main points: the relationship between the novel's addressees and focalizers, overlaps between gender and social privilege, and the marking of certain techniques of characterization, plotting, and imagery as feminine in mid-nineteenth century Russian discourse on literary realism.

A WOMAN'S ANSWER: PANAeva AT *SOVREMENNİK*

Avdot'ia Panaeva's literary career officially began in 1848 with the publication of a short story, “A Careless Word,” in *Sovremennik*, already as “N. Stanitskii.”¹⁵ Unofficially, she had been contributing to the same journal ever since its radical revival in 1847: its January 1847 volume featured a fashion column, “Mody,” that Panaeva wrote together with her husband, Ivan Panaev.¹⁶ From 1847 to 1864, Panaeva worked as an in-house writer and, in practice, an editorial assistant at *Sovremennik*.¹⁷ In the course of her career she published

¹²Hilde Hoogenboom, “‘Ya rab deistvitel'nosti’: Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia, Realism, and the Detail,” in *Vieldeutiges nicht-zu-ende-sprechen: Thesen und Momentaufnahmen aus der Geschichte russischer Dichterinnen*, ed. Arja Rosenholm and Frank Göpfert (Fichtenwalde, 2002), 129–49; Barbara T. Norton and Jehanne M. Gheith, eds., *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia* (Durham, NC, 2001); Mariia Mikhailova, “Kniga E. A. Koltonovskoi ‘Zhenskie siluety’ – teoreticheskoe obosnovanie zhenskogo tvorchestva,” *Gendernye issledovaniia* 4 (2000): 127–35.

¹³Cohen, “In Lieu of a Chapter,” 90.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 97–98.

¹⁵“Neostorozhnoe slovo,” *Sovremennik* 3 (1848): 65–76.

¹⁶“Mody” was published anonymously, but the Panaevs have been identified as its authors by V. E. Bograd in *Zhurnal “Sovremennik,” 1847–1866: Ukazatel' soderzhaniia* (Moscow, 1959), 515. Pisarev's negative review of *A Woman's Lot* also referred to Panaeva as *Sovremennik's* “staryi i postoiannyi spodvizhnik” (Pisarev, “Kukol'naia tragediia,” 148).

¹⁷Jehanne M. Gheith, “Redefining the Perceptible: The Journalism(s) of Evgeniia Tur and Avdot'ia Panaeva,” in *An Improper Profession*, 51–73; Beth Holmgren and Jehanne M. Gheith, “Art and Prostokvasha: Avdot'ia

reviews, short stories, novellas, and novels, two of which, *Three Countries of the World* (1848) and *Dead Lake* (1851) were co-authored with Nekrasov.¹⁸ From the very beginning of her career as a published author, Panaeva adopted a male pen name: reviews and articles were published anonymously, but most literary texts, including co-authored novels, were signed either N. or N. N. Stanitskii. This meant, among other things, that she was a female writer whose narrators had an almost exclusively male voice. The stories this male voice narrated, however, were predominantly about women, their everyday experiences, family lives, and struggles for emancipation. The publication of “A Careless Word” was soon followed by *Ugly Husband: An Epistolary Novella* (1848), and more texts with thematically indicative titles, such as *Domestic Hell* (1857), appeared over the next two decades.

FIG. 1 Portrait of Avdot'ia Panaeva, watercolor, unknown artist, ca. 1850s, in A. Panaeva, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1956).



Reflecting their readers' concerns, Russian journals of the 1860s offered an array of non-fictional texts about women's rights as well as fiction on the same topic, and Panaeva's fiction was precisely the kind of politically engaged literary text *Sovremennik* usually published after its 1847 overhaul.¹⁹ Under the new management of writers and literary entrepreneurs Ivan Panaev and Nikolai Nekrasov, and, later on, radical critic Nikolai Chernyshevskii, the journal declared itself ready to “tackle social questions not with sleep-inducing pedantry but with electrifying fire.”²⁰ It was understood that the fictional narratives that were published in *Sovremennik* would align themselves with the general radically progressive ideology of the editorial team. As a result, Panaeva's prose, regularly appearing in *Sovremennik* alongside its major publishing coups such as Ivan Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* (1849) or Leo Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Sketches* (1855), had to be relevant to the

Panaeva's Work,” in *The Russian Memoir: History and Literature*, ed. Beth Holmgren (Evanston, 2007), 128–44; Marina Ledkovsky, “Avdotya Panaeva: Her Salon and Her Life,” *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 9 (1974): 429. See also her own *Vospominaniia*, 186, 89–90, 252–56, 294, 350.

¹⁸B. L. Bessonov, “Ob avtorskoi prindelzhnosti romana ‘Tri strany sveta,’” *Nekrasovskii sbornik* 6 (1978): 111–30; M. A. Marusenko, “Atributsiia romanov ‘Tri strany sveta’ i ‘Mertvoe ozero,’” *Vestnik SPbGU* 1 (1997): 37–52; B. V. Mel'gunov, “O novykh atributsiikh romanov ‘Tri strany sveta’ i ‘Mertvoe ozero,’” *Russkaia literatura* 3 (1998): 98–103.

¹⁹Kelly offers a comprehensive overview of this cross-pollination process in “The First-Person ‘Other,’” 62.

²⁰Panaeva, *Vospominaniia*, 153. For a detailed discussion of the journal's first months under Panaev and Nekrasov's management see V. E. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, “*Sovremennik*” v 40–50 gg.: *Ot Belinskogo do Chernyshevskogo* (Leningrad, 1934), 29–41. For Panaeva's first-hand account of the journal's founding see Panaeva, *Vospominaniia*, 151–60.

issues covered in the “serious” departments of the journal, to use the critic Dmitrii Pisarev’s definition.²¹ Addressing burning questions of female emancipation, Panaeva’s texts would have attracted the readers’ attention on account of their topic, but her engaging style was a distinct advantage. Although ridiculed by contemporary critics as “heart-rending” (*razdiratel'nyi*) or “crude” (*grubyi*), most of her fiction was popular enough with readers to be reissued in stand-alone editions.²² Panaeva’s success with her contemporaries was not surprising: her novels and shorter pieces were written in a lively, accessible language, dealt with topical and sensationalist themes, and touched upon subjects of sex, incest, and madness. Since the Russian reading public was already receptive to ideas and arguments about the situation of contemporary women from their readings of George Sand—a novelist much admired in Russia in the 1840s and 1860s—Panaeva’s popularity followed an established trend.²³ Even though her views on emancipation were less radical than Sand’s, the general public’s appetite for fiction about the “woman question” (reflected also in the popularity of another woman writer, Charlotte Brontë, in the 1840s and 1850s) would have guaranteed Panaeva the reader’s interest.²⁴

As an in-house writer rather than just a contributing author, Panaeva had particular responsibilities to please not just the readers but also the censors. Censorship regulations required that every issue of the journal be submitted to a censor for preliminary examination before publication.²⁵ As a result, editorial boards of popular thick journals had to maintain in-house staff of “little literary brothers” who could supply fail-safe texts on short notice in case a substantial part of the issue was ordered to be withdrawn.²⁶ The in-house writers officially pledged to write suitable works: for example, in order to be able to publish *Three Countries of the World*, Panaeva and Nekrasov had to submit a written promise to the censorship committee, stating that there would be no “victory of vice” in their “generally cheerful and uplifting novel.”²⁷ A ripping Gothic yarn, this serialized novel went through three separate editions (1849, 1851 and 1872) and taught Panaeva valuable lessons not just

²¹Pisarev, “Kukol'naia tragediia,” 151.

²²Ibid., 147; V. Porechnikov [N. D. Khvoshchinskaia], “Provintsial'nye pis'ma o nashei literature. Pis'mo tret'e. ‘Zhenskaia dolia,’ roman Stanitskogo (Sovremennik, № 3), ‘Otstalaia,’ povest' g-zhi Zhadovskoi (Vremia, № 12),” *Otechestvennye zapiski* 5 (1862): 37–38. For a very brief overview of the novel’s reception see also O. A. Kuantseva, “Interpretatsiia romana A. Ia. Panaevoi ‘Zhenskaia dolia’ v kritike i literaturovedenii,” *Visnik LNU im. Tarasa Shevchenka* 3:214 (2011): 148–52.

²³On Sand in Russia see Lesley Herrmann, “Jacques in Russia: A Program of Domestic Reform for Husbands,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 12 (1979): 61–72; Carole Karp, “George Sand and Turgenev: A Literary Relationship,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 12 (1979): 73–81; and Olga Demidova, “Russian Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Gender and Russian Literature: New Perspectives*, 96–100.

²⁴For more on Charlotte Brontë in Russia and the general interest in women writers see O. R. Demidova, “The Reception of Charlotte Brontë’s Work in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *The Modern Language Review* 89 (1994): 689–96.

²⁵For regulations specifically in the 1860s see Robert L. Belnap, “Survey of Russian Journals, 1840–80,” in *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia*, ed. Deborah A. Martinsen (Cambridge, UK, 1997), 101–4, 113–14; M. K. Lemke, *Epokha tsenzurnykh reform 1859–1865 godov* (St. Petersburg, 1904); A. M. Skabichevskii, *Ocherkii istorii russkoi tsenzury, 1700–1863 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1892), 445–71; Charles Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804–1906* (Toronto, 1982), 97–137; and G. V. Zhirkov, *Istoriia tsenzury v Rossii XIX–XX vv.* (Moscow, 2001).

²⁶On the division of roles between “little brothers” and “literary generals” see V. E. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, “Sovremennik” pri Chernyshevskom i Dobroliubove (Leningrad, 1936), 5.

²⁷Evgen'ev-Maksimov, “Sovremennik” v 40–50 gg.: *Ot Belinskogo do Chernyshevskogo*, 254–55.

about the enforced ideological boundaries of popular fiction, but also about the narrative mechanics behind them. Panaeva and Nekrasov's pledge to the censors included not only the general descriptions of the kind of novel they were going to produce, but also an outline of the plot, a list of "positive" (*luchshie*) and "negative" (*durnye*) characters, detailing how many of each would be portrayed.²⁸

By contrast, her first full-length novel, the autobiographical *The Talnikov Family* (1848), was banned for "undermining parental authority" and general "cynicism, improbability, and immorality," and was not published until 1928.²⁹ Subsequently, Panaeva's fiction continued to address problems of domestic and social violence against women but shied away from the graphic descriptions of the victim's sufferings that made *The Talnikov Family* such a powerful work.³⁰ As Barbara Heldt has pointed out, the problem was not just the subversion of parental authority, but a subversion of parental authority from a female point of view.³¹ This was a criticism that Panaeva took on board: in the future, most of her literary texts would rely, instead of a first person female narrator, on an ostensibly male narrative voice or on a combination of the two. It is impossible to tell how Panaeva's style would have developed, had it not been constrained by the need to appease the censors and create large quantities of printable, but not necessary highly literary, material. However, Panaeva's career illustrates the importance of gender-specific aspects of literary work in mid-nineteenth-century Russia for contextualizing aesthetic "success" or "failure" of realist texts produced by women.

In terms of contemporary reception, her success among readers did not guarantee Panaeva the critics' favor. A fellow woman writer, Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia, commended the author for her "passion" and her almost "painful feeling of empathy," but characterized the style of *A Woman's Lot* as "rude," "abrupt," and "full of caricatures."³² One of the most scathing reviews was published by Dmitrii Pisarev in *Russkoe slovo* in 1864, titled "A Puppet Tragedy with a Bouquet of Civic Concerns." Pisarev criticized the absence of logic in Panaeva's political arguments, but his most vicious attack was directed at her style: she was too effusive, too concerned with inconsequential details, and too fiery.³³ Pisarev and Panaeva were personally acquainted and he was fully aware who Stanitskii really was. Pisarev's attack on the in-house writer of a leading radical journal reflects the uneasy relationship between *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo*, further complicated by Pisarev's personal ambition to be considered the critic Nikolai Dobroliubov's intellectual heir. However, Pisarev was questioning more than Panaeva's literary skills and radical credentials. His objection was more fundamental—it was the fact that Panaeva was a woman and, as such, unable to offer a worthy contribution to either realist fiction or to the ongoing debates

²⁸N. A. Nekrasov and A. Ia. Panaeva, "Primechanie dlia g. tsenzorov 'Sovremennika' k romanu 'Tri strany sveta,'" in N. A. Nekrasov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 15 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1977), 13(2):137–38.

²⁹Panaeva, *Vospominaniia*, 171.

³⁰For a recent contextualization of *The Talnikov Family* in the history of literary subjectivities in Russian literature see Andrew Kahn et al., *A History of Russian Literature* (Oxford, 2018), 399. Holmgren and Gheith echoed Heldt's view that this novel is Panaeva's best work ("Art and Prostokvasha," 130–31).

³¹For more on her reading of *The Talnikov Family* see Barbara Heldt, "Gender," 259.

³²Porechnikov [Khvoshchinskaia], "Provintsial'nye pis'ma o nashei literature," 37–38. See also Kuiantseva, "Interpretatsiia romana A. Ia. Panaevoi 'Zhenskaia dolia' v kritike i literaturovedenii," 148–52.

³³Kuiantseva, "Interpretatsiia romana A. Ia. Panaevoi," 147, 150.

on the woman question. Pisarev's review was representative of the general reaction of the male critics. Ironically, they maintained that women did not contribute as much as they should to the discussion of the woman question, and when they did, they did not do it properly. Pisarev's and other critics' problem with women writers was that none of them had created a character as vocal or liberated as Vera Pavlovna, the protagonist of Chernyshevskii's *What Is To Be Done?* (1863).³⁴ One of the reasons why women writers did not succeed in this undertaking was the style of their prose, which differed from the narrative modes chosen by their male counterparts. In his article, Pisarev essentially accused Panaeva of writing a wrong kind of realist fiction: overwrought, "oversalted realism" and therefore not successful.³⁵

As Jane Costlow noted, even if Pisarev's judgment was fair in terms of aesthetics, it was still "suspiciously gendered": throughout the article his criticism of Panaeva was couched in derogative terms traditionally used to denigrate feminine writing as irrational and too concerned with details of everyday life. Moreover, "the metaphors he uses to describe the 'debasement' of lofty ideas are all associated either with domestic realm or with (purported) feminine aesthetics: '[second-rate authors'] novels are usually sewn with living threads according to the latest fashionable patterns"; people and events are reflected in a "cheap mirror"; Dobroliubov's ideas are distorted with "innocent gossip."³⁶ Among Panaeva's supposed transgressions, according to Pisarev, was that she debased the serious arguments of her male colleagues. Even the title of his review pointed out Panaeva's unsuitability to discussions of serious matters: the tragedy of Panaeva's characters is "doll-like" and her political arguments are referred to as a "bouquet of civic concerns." The critic compared Panaeva's writing to works by "actually intelligent and worthwhile individuals" and declared it unworthy of *Sovremennik*.

"OVERSALTED" REALISM OF A FEMININE NOVEL

Panaeva's most polemical novel, *A Woman's Lot* tells the story of the equally unhappy fates of several women of different ages, classes, backgrounds, and dispositions. What unites these women are the tragedies inflicted on them by the men in their lives: treacherous and abusive lovers, husbands, fathers, grandfathers, employers, and even evil travel companions. Panaeva's title immediately lets readers know that this is a text about the tragedy of a Russian woman's lot. "Dolia" in Russian is rarely used to describe a happy fate, and mostly refers to "heavy lots" (*tiazhelaia dolia*). The expression also presupposes a certain fatalism—"dolia" cannot be chosen, it is meted out and has to be borne. Most of Panaeva's fiction tells stories of victims: of parental tyranny in *The Talnikov Family*, and then the tyranny of men in *A Careless Word*, *Reckless Step* (1850), *Lady of the Steppes* (1855), *Domestic Hell*, and other novellas. *A Woman's Lot* is no exception.

³⁴Ibid., 176. For similar observations see N. V. Shelgunov, "Zhenskoe bezdushie: Po povodu sochinenii V. Krestovskogo-pseudonima," *Delo* 9 (1870): 1–34. Pisarev also discussed the woman question in D. I. Pisarev, "Zhenskie tipy v romanakh i povestyakh Pisemskogo, Turgeneva i Goncharova," in his *Sochineniia*, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1866–69), 1 (1866):80–125.

³⁵Pisarev, "Kukol'naia tragediia s buketom grazhdanskoi skorbi," 184.

³⁶Jane Costlow, "Love, Work, and the Woman Question," 64.

The first chapter introduces the lead character, young Sofiia, whose world is about to be shattered by a disastrous marriage. Sofiia's father marries her off to Petr, a young man with progressive pretensions, who praises female emancipation and promises Sofiia a life of enlightened happiness. But not long after their marriage and a move to Petr's estate, Sofiia realizes his progressiveness was just a fad. Petr's tyrannical grandfather runs the estate with an iron hand and is determined to break up the two lovers. As Sofiia gets to know her new family, new victims of the traditional women's lot appear: young "prizhivalka" [a dependent female relative] Olimpiada is gradually revealed to be the grandfather's illegitimate daughter, and the old house servant turns out to be his former lover. Petr's sometime serf mistress, who has born him an illegitimate son, also resides on the estate. Sofiia tries to keep her faith in her young husband and make a life for herself in these new circumstances. But, when Petr moves to the city to be with his new mistresses and abandons her in the country with his mentally ill nephew as her only friend, Sofiia gives up all hope. Later, in the second part of the novel, we learn that she has left her husband for a wealthy landowner Lakotnikov. At the beginning of Part Two, she has born Lakotnikov illegitimate children and lives with him in the country as his mistress.

As *A Woman's Lot* posits, female emancipation is necessary but essentially useless until it is fully acknowledged by society and codified in law. The ensuing tragic stories of women whose lives are ruined by uncritically accepting false emancipation illustrate this thesis—the problem with the type of emancipation that makes victims out of the novel's characters is that it is defined by men. After Sofiia's marriage, she becomes a member of an "enlightened" household that is run according to ideas of progress and emancipation that, instead of liberating women, create another set of criteria by which to judge them. Costlow maintains that *A Woman's Lot* is concerned with "women's victimization in upper-class marriage," but the array of victimized female characters, including peasant women and house servants, as well as urban female professionals, suggests that the novel's spectrum of victimhood is wider than that.³⁷

The second part of the novel offers an urban parallel to Sofiia's nightmarish rural existence, introducing another set of characters. Anna, the second part's leading character, is the illegitimate daughter of a woman seduced and abandoned by her treacherous lover. The readers meet Anna *in medias res*, in a travelling carriage: Anna, returning from abroad where she had been working as a lady's companion, is going to the country to join her godfather. At the coaching inn, an old lusty general is offering her unwanted attentions, but Anna is saved by the novel's single positive male hero, Aleksandr Snegov. Panaeva's plotting is not sophisticated, but her eye for psychological detail helps her to create complex and compelling characters, demonstrating her expertise as an author of popular novellas. The Anna and Sofiia plots soon merge: the young woman's destination is Lakotnikov's estate, where her godfather is employed as a manager. The two women become friends, but Lakotnikov soon starts pursuing Anna and casts Sofiia out. After that, both plot lines resolve swiftly: Sofiia, abandoned both by her husband and Lakotnikov, dies in poverty,

³⁷Ibid., 64.

while Anna follows Snegov to Siberia, where he has been exiled for opposing Lakotnikov and the old general. They open a school in Irkutsk and live an “active life.”³⁸

The novel’s setting falls into two parts, rural and urban. Sofiia inhabits the world of country estates, whereas Anna comes from a world of urban poverty. The contrast between the two showcases Panaeva’s skill in creating atmospheric backdrops for rural society tales, as well as her ability to follow the period’s fashion for naturalist descriptions of city life. Petr’s estate is described as a locus of novelistic gothic, where the house, run by the villainous grandfather, is juxtaposed with the estate’s gardens—the only place of calm. The daunting, menacing atmosphere of this secluded space is created through the use of narrative ellipses: sexual deviations and violence, such as incest and rape, are hinted at but never confirmed; the nature of the horrific events at a distant farm where Petr’s serf mistress dies in exile is never described. The description of Anna’s dwellings in St. Petersburg emphasizes other boundaries: not just those that divide the rich from the poor, but those that women cross when they behave in a way that society does not condone. When Anna’s mother falls pregnant, she becomes a stranger in the world she had previously inhabited. Later on, Anna, her illegitimate daughter, also struggles to fit in, finding peace only at the end of the novel in Siberia, alongside other outcasts. The issue of illegitimacy is a constant concern voiced by the novel’s narrator, and it serves as a metaphoric manifestation of a woman writer’s unease about venturing onto her male colleagues’ territory.³⁹

Indeed, the constrained social experience of mid-nineteenth-century Russian women writers limited the number of topics they could comfortably address in their work. It affected the choice of subjects, characters, setting, and style that often emphasized the need to escape from confined surroundings.⁴⁰ As Mary Zirin noted, this “intimate focus was increasingly regarded by prescriptive critics as a retrograde clinging to Romantic egocentrism when the times called for scientifically based, objective—‘masculine,’ ‘realistic’—depictions of broad cross-sections of life.”⁴¹ This challenge was not specific to the Russian literary scene of the 1860s. In her study *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (1999), Margaret Cohen convincingly argued that realism as a style, and the realist novel as a genre, had been intentionally “masculinized” in the French debates of the 1840s–1850s over the validity of various literary methods. In these debates, realism was opposed to sentimentalism and the sentimental novel that had been reframed as a feminine genre. When attacked, Cohen claimed, “realist works assert their claims to literary importance by identifying the novel with men, by forging a poetics associated with masculine forms of knowledge, and by undercutting the authority of the woman writer along with sentimental codes.”⁴² In a later study, Cohen “excavated,” as she put it, a particular novelistic form that flourished in France

³⁸N. Stanitskii [A. Ia. Panaeva], “Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' vtoraiia. Okonchanie,” *Sovremennik* 5 (1862): 249.

³⁹These metaphors arise from actual experiences: Panaeva’s memoirs contain descriptions of rooms, separated by drapes, that functioned as literally divided “female” (her room) and “male” (drawing room) spaces at Panaev’s salons during the first years of her marriage. She would not “venture out” of her room during these nights, but would listen to the guests’ discussions from behind the drapes (*Vospominaniia*, 85–86).

⁴⁰Kelly identifies two main varieties of Russian women’s writing of the 1840–1860s as “the provincial tale” and “the escape plot” (*History of Russian Women’s Writing*, 59–79).

⁴¹Zirin, “Women’s Prose Fiction in the Age of Realism,” 78.

⁴²Cohen, *Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 195.

during the July Monarchy but was not recognized as a part of the French realist canon alongside the texts by Balzac and Stendhal. Cohen identified this form as a “feminine social novel,” not necessarily written by women but thematically concerned with socially induced female suffering. Counteracting the masculine realist tradition, novels by George Sand, Louise Maigaud, Camille Bodin, and others relied on a different narrative dynamic and introduced a particular plot structure. A few of the Russian novels that, like *A Woman's Lot*, dealt with the woman question at that time—Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia's *The Boarding-School Girl* (1861), Sofia Soboleva's *An Impossible Situation* (1864), Marko Vovchok's [Maria Vilinska's] *Sasha* (1859) and *Living Soul* (1868)—closely resemble Cohen's “feminine social novels” in their narrative dynamic and plot structure.

The victimization of the novel's heroines, and, through the tricks of Panaeva's self-conscious narrator, also of the addressees, has “determining value” for the plot. The proclamation of the socio-moral truth (there is no hope for those bearing “a woman's lot”) at the very beginning of the novel determines the narrative dynamic that tests the boundaries of the “classic” realist narrative. Cohen, following Barthes, defines “classic narrative” as a text where the hermeneutic and proairetic codes are “in opposition, creating a tense forcefield where readerly suspense is produced and maintained,” “interpellat[ing] the reader through suspense and seduction.” In the feminine social novel, instead of contrasting, the two codes reinforce each other. This change significantly affects the novel's plot structure: “rather than delays, jamming, and revelation, the privileged hermeneutic gestures in the feminine social novel are annunciation, emphasis, and repetition, sometimes with variation. Instantiating hermeneutic truth, the proairetic code is ruled by gesture of emphasis as well.”⁴³

Indeed, the stories of suffering women all resemble each other so much that the repetition is sometimes almost comical: most women are seduced/betrayed by the same man: Sofiia, Olimpiada, and the young serf woman by Petr, Sofiia and Anna by Lakotnikov, and so on. The emphasis is achieved both through symbolic imagery and the narrator's emphatic rhetoric. The narrative suspense in the generic feminine social novel, and in *A Woman's Lot* in particular, is created through the heroines' attempts to escape their predetermined women's lot. Sofiia's attempt to find “enlightened love” and Anna's stubborn defense of her independence are precisely the type of “resistant actions” that propel the plot. The stories of Sofiia, Anna and the other victims, following the model identified by Cohen, serve as examples of the novel's declared “narrative truth.” The effect these stories have on the reader is both emphatic and didactic.

This type of “emphatic narrative overcoding” requires the author to construct a particular type of narrator, who assumes the function of a “hermeneutic guide.” Typically for the feminine social novel, it is an “omniscient, sentimental, voluble, moralizing, and exclamatory third-person narrator who ... is above all occupied with reiterating the content and the significance of the actions depicted, employing a variety of tropes of hyperbole, emphasis, and foreshadowing. ... Such foreshadowing helps generate the weak suspense previously described. How, the reader wonders, can the action to come possibly justify the hermeneutic build up it has received?”⁴⁴ Remarkably, this type of narrator was already

⁴³Cohen, “In Lieu of a Chapter,” 94, 96.

⁴⁴Ibid., 97.

formed in Panaeva's earlier texts, particularly in her 1848 debut *The Talnikov Family*. Natasha, the young protagonist of the novel, which relates the horrors of growing up in a physically and psychologically abusive household, has a fluid individual identity. As Costlow notes, this identity freely merges with that of her siblings and "anyone ... who suffers neglect and abuse in their household. The self Natasha intimates ... is fused with an abused, resourceful collective and keenly attuned to power relations and survival skills, not individual ambition and moral development."⁴⁵ As Panaeva's writing matured, so did this strategy: finally, playing off the ambiguity about the gender of *A Woman's Lot's* author, the "I" of the narrator merged with "we" of the oppressed women it addressed. "Poor and honest women" are identified as the novel's primary addressees in the very first chapters of *A Woman's Lot*. Soon after the opening scenes, the narrator proclaims the novel's projected topic, or, to use Cohen's term, its "sociomoral truth":⁴⁶

What can you expect from life, **poor, honest women**? ... Do not expect anything to come from the emancipation of women for now! ... **Believe me**, it's the debauchery in society that allows **you** so much freedom so that with no sacrifice on the men's part **you** could serve their smallest whim, and so that after—also with no sacrifices—it was easy for them to abandon **you**.⁴⁷

As the novel progresses, its array of addressees expands:

Believe me! ... But for a long time would **you, loving and honest women**, have to pour your tears of despair. ... For a long time would **you, poor babies**, die in your thousands. ... And what kind of life do **you** have! How many insults do **you** have to suffer! And will these **suffering creatures** never be handed a better fate from civilized society? ... And **you**, so proud of progress in humanity! When will **you** stop branding innocent babies with the shame of their parents!⁴⁸

In this passage, the addressee changes as the speech progresses: first, the narrator appeals to the loving, honest and, necessarily, weepy women, who need to see and believe his arguments (the invective "Trust me!" features four times in one passage). Then, it is their illegitimate children, condemned to a life of misery because of the notional character of the emancipation that gave women freedom but no protection. These "poor babies" are warned that they will have to wait for a long time before civilized society will accept them. Then the narrator addresses society itself, which mistakenly identifies progress with exhibitions of well-fed pets and artificial mushrooms. In a rhetorical circle, the full passage ends with a final appeal to the victims of society: vulnerable women and children. The presumed reader's gender identity is equally fluid and inclusive: the text proclaims itself to be intended for the moral improvement of young men, yet addresses all victims of life's unfair lot irrespective of their gender. This ambivalence generates instances of narratorial self-reflection, questioning established principles of realist narration and the constraints

⁴⁵Holmgren and Gheith, "Art and Prostokvasha," 132.

⁴⁶Cohen, "In Lieu of a Chapter," 95.

⁴⁷Stanitskii, "Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' pervaiia," 50–51 (emphasis added).

⁴⁸Ibid., 51–52. A similar lament will be repeated later on, in part three of the novel in Stanitskii, "Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' vtoraiia," 529.

they place on the writer depending on their gender. The structural and stylistic elements of narrative which are traditionally associated with women's writing, such as characterization, plotting, imagery, and the rhetoric of empathy, in *A Woman's Lot* are transformed "into subversive and interactive forms that contest ... historical convention."⁴⁹

HER MASTER'S VOICE: RECLAIMING GENDERED NARRATION

Up to a point, Panaeva's narrator does not give any indications of their gender: grammatically, a first-person omniscient manner is used, to convey reflections on the characters' fates:

All three women were equally unhappy ... Why were they humiliated to this degree, while hypocrisy and crime enjoyed respect and calm acceptance? Such cases boggle my mind.⁵⁰

But as the novel progresses, the persona of the narrator becomes more defined: he is himself male, as Panaeva's chosen pen name "N. Stanitskii" suggests, but very concerned with the issue of female emancipation. Grammatically, the author remains male and addresses male readers (as the gendered verb flexes indicate in the original Russian), but rhetorically he is aligning himself with the women whose cause he is arguing for. At the same time, the narrator wants to make sure he is not perceived as someone who "sees all men as villains." His text is intended for the "young men":

And so that you do not ascribe to me the same views, I need to (*dolzhen*) make clear, that I am writing this novel for the **young men**, who are only entering society, and so, because of their lack of experience, they often get carried away with routine, harmful ideas about many things, and even more harmful because these ideas are assimilated by a majority. ... In order to finally protect myself from the accusations of being a *biased protector of women*, I need to (*dolzhen*) say, that I also *know* too many horrible family dramas, where the fathers suffer in the name of their love for their children. ... And all of them are honest people, and you, poor people, have to bear this weight on your shoulders, to ensure an easy life for those dirty, lascivious *egoists*, who are ready to throw stones at any father who wants to bring his daughter up not as a doll but as a mother of future citizens.⁵¹

Panaeva's narrator occupies an ambivalent transgressive position and, oscillating between the male voice of authority and female voice of empathy, utilizes the narrative potential of both. But, at the same time, Panaeva's choice of a male pen name and a male narrative voice put her in a vulnerable position as a realist narrator. On the one hand, adopting a male narratorial voice, she, as a woman, was "borrowing the voice of authority."⁵² As Zirin noted, "the identity of these authors might be an open secret in literary circles, but the names gave them an official male viewpoint from which to treat the broader society

⁴⁹Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism*, 37.

⁵⁰Stanitskii, "Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' pervaiia," 130.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism*, 2.

without being accused of infringing on a sphere beyond their ken.”⁵³ On the other, if the narrator was authenticating the events of the narrative by claiming first-hand knowledge of same events, then the non-gendered narrative voice could invalidate this strategy. The unavoidable division of readers into those who know the writer was a woman and those who do not created a space of gender ambivalence, in which the same statements could be interpreted in at least two different ways. Are we to trust the narrator because, as a woman, she has herself experienced the kind of suffering she portrays, or are we to respect the narrator’s opinion because he is a man and, therefore, an objective distanced observer? In the passage quoted above, men and women (appealed to as a collective entity of “poor, honest people”) both suffer from a common enemy: “dirty lascivious egoists.” The appeals to the egoists’ victims, both male and female, will continue throughout the novel as will the narrator’s need to constantly clarify what he is saying (“I need to explain myself”; “So that the reader does not form a prematurely negative view ... I hasten to warn him”). The same gender ambivalence that defines the persona of the narrator is extrapolated onto the image of the implied reader. The ostensibly male narrator addresses ostensibly male readers: “the young men.” At the same time, the addressee of the rhetorical appeals in the novel is often “a poor woman” or a combined male/female victim. This raises the question of why the narrator opts not to address the female reader directly.

In Russian realist writing, the female reader is often disparaged as emotional rather than rational, not interested in the serious implications of the text and, on the contrary, excited by cheap thrills. Mid-nineteenth-century Russian novels that deal with the woman question specifically reinforce this stereotype of the female reader as inferior. Women writers “happily reproduced patronizing stereotypes,” and exposing female readers as inadequate became a commonplace in Russian women’s writing in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Emphasizing the maleness of his intended audience, Panaeva’s narrator constructed an ideal reader: a young, impressionable man for whom this story can serve as a revelation and a call to action.

This supposed power of fictional narrative is a constant concern of Panaeva’s narrator, who often addresses its influence on “real life” (*deistvitel'naia zhizn'*). Together with the inadequate education, it is literary fiction that is responsible for propagating harmful illusions: “We only have novels and knights in our heads!,” the narrator accuses his readers. The contrast between the “novels” and “actual life” is constantly emphasized: “In the novel you can reason like that, but not in real life”; Sofiia, though well-read, “did not yet understand many things in this real, dirty life.”⁵⁵ Instead, we are told, she loved “fairytale” (*volshebnye skazki*), so much so that it was very difficult to persuade her that her nanny’s stories were not real. But why tell children that “magic oddities don’t exist in real life,” if they could explain the ills of contemporary society, asks the narrator? He then reimagines social evils as something that could be explained by evil magic: money functioning as a magic wand,

⁵³Zirin, “Women’s Prose Fiction in the Age of Realism,” 79.

⁵⁴For an array of examples from the works by mid- and late nineteenth-century women writers see, Dmitrii Ravinskii, “Pisatel'nitsy o chitatel'nitsakh: Zhenskoe chtenie na stranitsakh russkoi zhenskoi prozy XIX veka,” in *Zhenskii vyzov: Russkie pisatel'nitsy XIX–nachala XX veka*, ed. Elisabeth Cheauré and E. N. Stroganova (Tver', 2006), 51–54.

⁵⁵“Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' pervaiia,” 104, 116.

vanity having the same effect as “dead” and “alive” water, people becoming as mute and dumb as fishes in the face of unfairness and the pain of others, and so on.

Later on in the novel, the explanatory potential of fairytales is put to use in the scene of Anna's sojourn at a coaching inn:

The innkeeper led the female traveler into a room with a carpet, silk-covered furniture, and warm and clean air. When the innkeeper left, the traveler sat on the sofa and looked around the room, thinking that now she resembled a fairy tale character, who, by the order of a magic pike was transferred from a hut to a palace. Well, in real life, at coaching inns, only the general's order makes such miracles happen.⁵⁶

In this scene, Anna as a focalizer is interpreting reality in terms of “magic oddities,” recalling modes of narrative that are not reliant on credibility and authentication. The narratorial voice, however, reconceptualizes the same events in the framework of “real life,” governed by issues of class, power, and social order, as behooves a realist narrative. This contrast creates a particular type of narrative tension, emphasizing the masculine privilege needed for creating a “legitimate” realist narrative.

Panaeva's narrator reflects on several aspects of realist narratives that have been specifically criticized as typical defects of women's writing. One of them is character description, and her focus on this particular feature is not arbitrary. The nature of realist description, including the description of characters, is a problematic aspect of women's writing: for instance, it forms a basis of N. D. Khvoshchinskaia's reflections on realism as well as featuring in Cohen's examination of the problem of a “light touch” characterization.⁵⁷ When discussing characterization, the narrator in *A Woman's Lot* often uses a particular rhetorical strategy. First, he admits to not having done something that should be accomplished in a realist narrative, but then, as if pressured by readers, does it in the end:

I have, however, not said anything about what Grigorii Andreevich and his guest look like. I confess, I am not a master of copying passport-like portraits of my heroes and heroines. I can, I guess, describe every wrinkle on Grigorii Andreevich's face—but what would be the point if for the readers he will remain a faded daguerreotype portrait? But fine, I will say something very briefly about their appearance.⁵⁸

Or, later on: “In regard to Lakotnikov's appearance, the only definitive thing that I can say is that he was a handsome man.”⁵⁹ This “descriptive restraint,” featured in *A Woman's Lot*, serves a particular function in the feminine social novel: it directs the reader's attention from the character's outer appearance to the workings of his/her heart. In this passage, the issue of over-doing or under-doing detailed descriptions—often featured in discussions and value judgments on women's prose—is debated.

⁵⁶“Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' vtoraiia,” 526.

⁵⁷Cohen, “In Lieu of a Chapter,” 112–16.

⁵⁸“Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' pervaiia,” 61.

⁵⁹“Zhenskaia dolia. Chast' vtoraiia,” 211.

The privileged position of “legitimate” realist author is attacked through Gogolesque satire, in direct references: for example, a direct mention of Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* (1836): “All of this is so nice, so touching, that while I am writing these lines, I don’t know why, but my tears flow freely, like a river ... like the innkeeper’s wife in *The Government Inspector*.” Equally, the narrator’s self-consciousness often manifests in satirical asides, indicating the narrator’s anxiety about the task he has undertaken: “But what am I doing! – I am passing on an angry servant’s opinion about the lives of the most noble people!”⁶⁰

In another example, the satirical narrator styles himself as a voice of reason and a speaker for the underprivileged, in a parodic reference to Pushkin’s poetic descriptions of Russian winter:

The cold (*moroz*) was getting visibly stronger. Our poets in general have often sung the beauty of the Russian winter; and our patriots, living in Italy and Paris for the most part of their lives, admire the crackling cold, to which the wise man ascribes the strength of the body and spirit of a Russian person. I agree that the cold gives energy to those, who, having sat down for an entire night to have dinner, next morning get up with a foggy head. He, of course, having gone for a walk in the cold, would be refreshed so much that he would feel enough strength to spend the next night in the same way. I can also believe that the Russian winter is also pleasant for those who, enveloped in sable and bear furs, would dash to the opera by fast horse after a long dinner. I agree there is poetry in the cold also for those who are racing back in a fast carriage from their hundredth picnic. But I doubt that the cold gives any energy to the coachman, outside on his seat.⁶¹

Here, the narrator wants his readers to visualize a specific coachman (“look, how he shivers in his coat, full of holes”). The miserable working conditions of the coachman were shocking, but the only passenger who is appalled is a young woman, and the narrator sarcastically notes that “it was only because of her female sensibility that she did not share that quietly wise opinion that a Russian muzhik can take anything.”⁶² Here, in a rhetorical trick, privileged appreciation of the Russian winter, gentle to the rich and cruel to the poor, is contrasted with female sensibility, thus equating male sensibility with cruelty. Panaeva’s satire is aimed at multiple targets: on the one hand, it attacks the narrative of social privilege. On the other, through equating privilege with masculinity, it highlights the similarities between victims of social and gender discrimination.

The boundaries of realist discourse and the structure of narrative are finally debated in the concluding chapter of the novel: “If it is common for an author to end his novel with a detailed report about what has happened to the main characters,” reflects the narrator of Panaeva’s novel, “then I am obliged to do this, too.”⁶³ In a final reflection on the accepted structures of realistic narrative, the narrator, now resolutely male, once again conceives of

⁶⁰“Zhenskaia dolia. Chast’ pervaiia,” 89–90, 94.

⁶¹“Zhenskaia dolia. Chast’ vtoraiia. Okonchanie,” 503–4.

⁶²Ibid., 504, 507.

⁶³Ibid., 249.

himself as a rhetorical entity capable of objectively evaluating his own narrative. Carrying on with the rhetorical strategy he initiated earlier in the novel, he first questions but then ultimately follows the realist tradition of narrative closure, providing the account of Anna's, Snegov's, Sofiia's, and Lakotnikov's lives.

Panaeva's narrator is reflecting on his own struggles to accommodate his style to the demands of contemporary realist prose. As a result, the reader is often offered a running commentary on the issue the narrator is trying to solve: over/under descriptions of characters, the constraints of gendered narrative voices, realistic authentication of the events of the plot, the creation of narrative suspense, and the dialogue with ideologically divided audiences. *A Woman's Lot* keeps up with the realist tradition, but exposes its limitations by bringing to the fore the issue of gendered focalization: the difference in how the story is perceived depending on whether it is told by a man or a woman. The struggle against the dominant literary aesthetics is manifested on the structural and discursive levels of the text, and as a subject of discussion it mirrors the novel's ideological preoccupation with the woman question and the problems of female emancipation.

The narrative voice in *A Woman's Lot* is challenging the constraints of dominant contemporary aesthetic and political narratives, testing their boundaries and looking for opportunities for those brave enough to explore them. Similarly to Khvoshchinskaia and other women writers of the period, Panaeva was "finding a way as a woman to negotiate the particular nature of the Russian literary political scene."⁶⁴ The comparison with the French feminist social novel exposes the basic narrative structure of *A Woman's Lot*, which shines through the novel's ostensibly realist poetics. What seems unusual in the context of the Russian literary scene of the 1860s appears as a shared narrative strategy of a particular type of women's writing. Similar across European national literary traditions, it appears in women's novelistic fiction when the debates on realist aesthetics become fused with the discourse of gender dominance and submission. By following the rhetorical thrusts of the novel's transgressive narrative voice, we can retrace Panaeva's strategy of negotiating a style of literary realism that, while acknowledging the limitations of gendered narration, makes full use of its advantages.

⁶⁴Hoogenboom, "'Ya rab deistvitel'nosti,'"134.