

Russkii realizm XIX veka: Obshchestvo, znanie, povestvovanie. Sbornik statei.

Ed. Margarita Vaysman, Aleksei Vdovin, Ilya Kliger, and Kirill Ospovat. Moscow:

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In an exchange with Nikolai Strakhov, about a year before he began work on *Anna Karenina*, Lev Tolstoi contended that restrictions on artistic and intellectual freedom had only fueled the native inventiveness of Russian literature: “True, it would never occur to a Frenchman, German, or Englishman—unless he is a madman—to pause in my place and reflect: aren’t his devices false, isn’t the language in which we write and in which I too have been writing false?; but a Russian, unless he is insane, has to reflect and ask himself: should he go on writing. . . or search for other devices and another language?” (March 22/25, 1872; Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [1928–58], 61:277). This aesthetic and historical exceptionality has long been part of the myth that Russian realism tells about itself—enshrined by writers from early Vissarion Belinskii to late Fedor Dostoevskii, and reflected back in the basic terms of both Russian and western scholarship.

The pioneering edited volume *Russkii realizm XIX veka: Obshchestvo, znanie, povestvovanie* (Russian Realism of the 19th Century: Society, Knowledge, Narrative) questions this tenacious myth. Engaging Russian realist works on their own linguistic, historical, and cultural ground, the contributors also place them in an insistently comparative framework and—just as importantly—draw on theoretical methodologies developed in the context of other national realist traditions (especially the Victorian novel). The result is essential reading for anyone who studies or teaches nineteenth-century Russian prose.

The volume includes eighteen essays on a range of major and some lesser-known writers, concentrated in the 1840s–80s. The essays are divided into four categories—“The Social Imaginary and the Problem of Genres” (the largest), “Economics and Materiality,” “Realism and 19th-Century Scientific Epistemology,” and “Mimesis and the Meta/Intertextuality of Realism”—and preceded by a formidable editorial introduction. The volume emerges from an indispensable (and now bitterly endangered) collaboration among scholars of Russian realism based in Russia and those based in the west. While celebrating its publication in Russian, one hopes that it might also be released in English, in light of the comparative conversation about literary realisms that all the contributors invoke.

The volume’s scope and commitments are well reflected in the introduction, which frames the term *realism* as an entry point into a discursive field that sets literature, criticism, and a range of nineteenth-century philosophical, scientific, social, and political languages into symbiotic relationships (9–10). The editors propose cross-fertilization with contemporary Victorian studies as a way beyond some of the “methodological dead ends” in late- and post-Soviet scholarship on Russian realism—in particular, as a more flexible model for thinking about the formal, epistemological, and historical conditions under which realist texts arise and to which they contribute (19–20). At the same time, the introduction underlines the need to read realist works in conversation with nineteenth-century theories of mimesis, and to pay attention to how these works theorize their own acts of representation (an approach that yields rich rewards in the volume’s three final essays: on the metafictional dimensions of Aleksei Pisemskii’s *Vzbalamuchennoe more*, on juxtaposed models of truth as a mimetic technique in Nikolai Leskov’s “Tupeinyi khudozhnik,” and on the historical poetics of realist plotlines across time and language, in the footsteps of nineteenth-century literary theorist Aleksandr Veselovskii).

The volume's editorial program embraces well-documented developments in the transnational study of realism. These include the "economic turn" (represented here by two timely accounts of the problems of narrating capitalism in Dostoevskii and an essay tracing the evolving trope of the Russian forest as realist "resource"); the focus on material cultures of reading and writing (key to several illuminating essays, including Bella Grigoryan's on *Netochka Nezvanova* as a product of the 1840s commercial press and Gabriella Safran's on the paper factory in the background of Ivan Turgenev's *Zapiski okhotnika*); and the intertwining of literary and scientific "plots" (especially in Aleksei Vdovin's and Valeria Sobol's revelatory articles on Ivan Sechenov as a narrative force in Russian realism). However, the editors also note subtler theoretical resonances. They compare Kirill Zubkov's analysis of active models of reading in Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin's *Gubernskie ocherki* with Catherine Gallagher's new historicist studies of the rise of fictionality in eighteenth century English novels (28); similarly, Emma Lieber's essay on *Bratia Karamazovy* as anti-Oedipal novel and Ilya Kliger's on sociality and sovereignty in Goncharov's *Obyknovennaia istoriia* chime with Eve Sedgwick's concept of "reparative reading" (34). The point is not that these essays prominently invoke Gallagher or Sedgwick; rather, that they ask Shchedrin, Dostoevskii, and Goncharov to perform the same kind of theoretical work as Aphra Behn, Charlotte Lennox, or Henry James. One of the volume's strengths is that it draws concerted attention to how nineteenth-century Russian realist texts enrich the mainstream discourse of contemporary literary theory, and vice versa—another reason to hope for its eventual wider translation.

This brief summary cannot do justice to the volume's pleasures and discoveries: Kirill Ospovat's recasting of Makar Devushkin as a Spivakian "subaltern," Mikhail Dolbilov's meticulous reconstruction of Tolstoi's 1876 polemic with Pan-Slavism in *Anna Karenina*, Melissa Frazier's evocation of "dialogic science" in Tolstoi and Dostoevskii, and more. Perhaps most salutary are the reminders—in remarkable studies by Vadim Shkolnikov and Konstantine Kliouchkine—that our contemporary scholarship remains intertwined with the framework for reading Russian realism established in the 1840s–60s press: Belinskii's Hegelian conviction that literature's own internal logic will lead it beyond the bounds of art (97), and the "radical critics'" subsequent campaign to erase the problem of representation altogether, making print itself the arbiter of reality (378–79). The clearest source of exceptionality lies here: it is hard to think of another nineteenth-century literary tradition that so flagrantly asserted its own transcendence of aesthetic conventions and aesthetic bounds. This provocation is all the more reason to explore the correspondences between "literature" and "reality" from new theoretical standpoints, beginning to unearth the many surprises that Russian realism still has in store.

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Chloe Kitzinger's study is an ambitious project that in 160 pages discusses the major novels of Lev Tolstoi and Fedor Dostoevskii with their armies of characters, while