Noble Farmers:
The Provincial Landowner in the Russian Cultural Imagination

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines a selectively multi-generic set of texts (mainstream periodicals, advice literature and fiction) that responded to a cultural need to provide normative models for the Russian nobleman’s domestic life and self, following the 1762 Manifesto that freed the gentry from obligatory state service. The material suggests that a prominent strain in the Russian novelistic tradition that took the provincial landowner as a central object of representation developed in the course of a series of encounters between prescriptive and creative literatures.

In chapter one, the cross-pollination between generically diverse segments of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century print culture (namely, Andrei Bolotov’s agricultural advice and Nikolai Novikov’s satirical and Nikolai Karamzin’s mainstream journalism) is read as crucial for the formation of a proto-novelistic prose idiom for the representation of the nobleman in the provinces. In chapter two, the growing professionalization and concomitant commercialization of Russian letters is treated as a prominent factor in the polemical relations between Faddei Bulgarin and Nikolai Gogol. I suggest that prescriptive literature about farming and journalistic responses to it are a significant component in the intertextual links between Bulgarin’s Ivan Vyzhigin and Gogol’s Dead Souls. In chapter three, Ivan Goncharov’s oeuvre is read as a self-conscious attempt to arrive at the novelistic representation of a successful province-bound nobleman. His novelistic trilogy—A Common Story (Obyknovennaia istoriia),
*Oblomov* and *The Precipice (Obryv)*—is situated vis-à-vis a growing corpus of Russian domestic advice literature to suggest that Goncharov’s prose re-works the extra-literary material.

In broad terms, the study may be viewed in two, mutually supplementary, ways as (1) a “thick description” of three moments in the formation of novelistic gentry selves understood to be always in dialogue with prescriptive texts that sought to provide a normative discourse about a productive noble private life in the provinces and (2) a re-appraisal of writers long considered central to the establishment of the Russian novelistic tradition, with especially close attention paid to how these foundational figures navigated a multi-generic field of cultural production.
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Throughout the text of the dissertation and in all discursive parts of footnotes, I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration with one exception: when listing last names of well-known Russian writers and monarchs, I use the commonly accepted spelling. Hence, in the body of the text, I transliterate Sergei, but write Tolstoy, rather than Tolstoi. When providing bibliographic information, I use the Library of Congress system without diacritics.
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INTRODUCTION

Noble Subjects at Home

The Russian Country House Poem

Блажен, кто менее зависит от людей,
Свободен от долгов и от хлопот приказных,
Не ищет при дворе ни злата, ни честей
И чужд сует разнообразных!¹

Blessed is he who is less dependent on others,
Free from obligations and work-related troubles
Who seeks neither gold, nor honors at the court,
And is free from varied bustle!²

Gavrila Derzhavin’s “To Eugene. Life at Zvanka” (“Evgeniuiu. Zhizn’ Zvanskaia,” 1807) opens with an almost studied, distinctly Horatian proclamation about the virtues of a private life in the country.³ This positive vision of rural domesticity entered the Russian

² Unless marked otherwise, all translations from Russian are my own.
³ Horace’s poem begins by celebrating country life and the speaker’s purported return to till his paternal fields. Horace’s lyric subject, Alfius the usurer, abandons the pastoral fantasy by poem’s end. Stephen Baehr has noted that “[s]o important was this epode and its locus amoenus commonplaces to the conception of a rural paradise in Russian literature of the second half of the eighteenth century that its ironic last lines, which call this paradise into doubt as a daydream of an urban usurer, were sometimes omitted in translation.” Stephen Lessing Baehr, The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-century Russia (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991), 69. In free adaptations of the poem, these last lines were always omitted. N.N. Popovskii was the first to translate Horace’s second epode. His 1751 translation was published in 1757 alongside Vasilii Trediakovskii’s more creative verse transposition and prose treatise “On the irreproachability and pleasure of country life” (“О besporochnosti i priatnosti derevenskiiia zhizni”). Popovskii’s translation kept
literary imagination in the form of poetry, and an imitative brand of poetry at that: transpositions of Horace’s Second Epode. 4 “To Eugene” may be read as a culmination point in the sizable set of eighteenth-century Russian adaptations of the Roman poem. 5

Derzhavin’s opening lines look as “borrowed,” as the rest of the poem is absolutely unique. If the first stanza admits and asserts genetic links with a poetic intertext comprised of decades’ worth of Russian variations on Horace’s original, the text that follows, much as it may re-work the Horatian structure at times, treats the distinctive particulars of one gentry-man’s life (the lyrical subject’s/Derzhavin’s) 6 at his country estate (Zvanka). Derzhavin’s originality lies in his willingness to endow with meaning the private pursuits of a province-bound nobleman in a manner virtually unseen in the tradition that precedes it. 7 In the pages that follow I will outline the aims and terms of my inquiry: to examine a multi-generic selection of texts that attempted variously to

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4 Horace’s second epode proved an especially productive intertext in Russian literary representations of country life. Other important classical sources include Virgil’s “Georgics” and Hesiod’s Works and Days.

5 Derzhavin himself produced more than one poem inspired by Horace’s Second Epode. “To Eugene” is the most famous of the set.

6 The conflation of the lyrical subject and Derzhavin in this poem has become a critical commonplace.

7 For a discussion of the innovative nature of Derzhavin’s accomplishment in the representation of the poet as both “a private person” (chastnyi chelovek) and man of letters see G. P. Makogonenko, G.R. Derzhavin. Anakreonicheskie pesni (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), especially pages 286-287.
imagine the Russian gentry-man as a productive inhabitant of the provinces. First, a brief treatment of Derzhavin’s “To Eugene” will be in order.

The lyrical subject who enters in stanza three and all but dominates the rest of the poem proclaims, “Pokoi mne nuzhen—dnei v ostanke” (“I need rest for the remainder of my days”). This gesture announces the poem's main object of representation: the provincial everyday life of a retired gentry-man. In stanzas four to fifty, detailed descriptions of Derzhavin’s estate life and grounds, his activities and pastimes take center stage. With what John Randolph has called “an almost fetishistic relish,” Derzhavin describes and discusses the minutiae of life at Zvanka. Be it a postprandial nap or the poet’s habit of treating the local peasant children to some baked goods, every aspect of the gentry-man’s quotidian life accrues enough significance to warrant extensive representation.

In his attempt to account for the poem’s capacity to render in detail the private life of a retired noble, Makogonenko has called “To Eugene. Life at Zvanka” “generically free” (zhanrovo svobodnoe) for its flexible incorporation of varied representational perspectives. And indeed, the poem has been understood to belong to multiple genres.

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8 Derzhavin, 326.

9 The emphasis on the self comes in many forms, not least of which is the prominence of verbs given in the first person singular and plural.


11 Specifically, Makogonenko finds a mixture of odic (reformirovannaia oda) and Anacreontic sensibilities, underscoring especially that while Derzhavin makes extensive use of the Russian Anacreontic poetry’s capacities for the representation of the individual, “To Eugene. Life at Zvanka” cannot be considered simply to belong to this genetic line; hence, its “generic freedom” or openness. Makogonenko, 286.
More recently, Tatiana Smoliarova has shown convincingly that Derzhavin’s attempt to “transform domestic life into creativity” may be productively considered the “first example of a full-fledged Russian country house poem,” a genre to which the poet turns for reasons that have to do with the autobiographical character of the work, a point to which I will return shortly.  

Another scholar who sees “To Eugene” as part of the country house poem genre in Russian letters, Ekaterina Zykova, highlights the ties between socio-cultural history and literature that attempts to depict private, domestic life. She suggests that “the development of the country house poem” should be studied vis-à-vis “shifts in the relationship to estate life and estate culture” in a given polity. Zykova links cultural production with the gradual emancipation of the nobility from obligatory state service (by the Manifesto of 1762 and the Charter of 1785, about which more in the pages that follow), finding that the gentry’s acquisition of legal rights to an increasingly legitimate private life resulted in the growing prominence of domestic culture in the literary tradition. By the concluding decades of the eighteenth century, particularly in the friendly epistles produced by some of the leading poets of the period, estate life began to be represented in a way that departed from straightforward imitation of classical models.

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(Horace’s second epode prime among them) and began to tend towards a relatively more mimetic portrayal of rural lives and selves.¹⁴

Very much in the spirit of the late eighteenth century’s turn to private life, prior to “To Eugene,” Derzhavin had authored a number of poems that may be grouped under the rubric “Village Life” or “Praise for Country Life,” to borrow the titles of the poet’s own works (“Derevenskaia zhizn’,” 1802 and “Pokhvala sel’skoi zhizni,” 1798). This nexus of poetic texts that depict specific aspects of the nobleman’s private domestic life also includes Derzhavin’s friendly epistles (to one of the period’s foremost architects, Nikolai L’vov, for example) and such other poems as “Invitation to Dinner” (“Priglasheniie k obedu,” 1795). As Zykova’s observes, however, Derzhavin’s “To Eugene” differs from his earlier poetry about the estate: in such poems as “Village Life” (1802), the rural residence was figured as a totally private space, an escape from public duties; the lyrical subject of the later poem seems to espouse a more civic-minded ideal with himself as “the center of the estate world, responsible for everything that takes place in that world.”¹⁵ Derzhavin’s poetry that treats gentry private life moves gradually towards

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¹⁴ Zykova’s findings here recall and, to some degree, echo Grigorii Gukovskii’s thesis about the Catherine-era decomposition of the neo-classical generic system which dominated Russian literary production in the first half of the eighteenth century and the breakdown of which the pre-eminent scholar of the age attributes partly to such historical events as the tumultuous Pugachev uprisings (1773-75) and, later, the French Revolution of 1789. In Gukovskii’s classic treatment, the gentry retreated into an increasingly private world defined by the individual’s introspective searchings, a shift that in essence announced the primacy of the cultivation of the self in this epoch. Hence, for instance, the widespread popularity of Masonic mysticism and self-inquiry in the concluding decades of the 18th century. See Grigorii Gukovskii, Ocherki po istorii russkoi literatury i obschestvennoi mysli XVIII veka (Leningrad: Gosudarstvenoe izdatel’stvo Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1938).

¹⁵ Zykova, 65.
imagining the estate as a place that allows the gentry-man resident and lyric subject to embark on potentially productive pursuits.

The autobiographical dimension of “To Eugene” sheds further light on its place in the Russian literary and cultural tradition. By 1803, Derzhavin had fallen into disfavor with the monarch (Alexander I) and retired from service. As Smoliarova demonstrates, aspects of Derzhavin’s biography are of immense import for understanding “To Eugene”: the poet who had been a career statesman (and a prominent one at that) had retreated from public life and “turned from an active participant in history into an onlooker,” and he was visited at this time by “an intolerable feeling of total uselessness.”

Calling the poem “a lesson in the art of memory,” Smoliarova provides a brilliant reading of “To Eugene” as ultimately a contemplation of an encroaching modernity that remains for the poet at once “nebulous” and “enticing.” If this modernity arrives with the reign of Alexander I, the retired statesman’s domestic life and self seem, in my view, to replay a Catherine-era vision.

In the extensive description of the country nobleman’s average day, the “singer of Felitsa” may have been putting into verse a somewhat belated take on what John Randolph has shown to be “the most positive vision of noble private life in Russia …— the Catherinean ideal—…in essence a life of retirement after years of diligent service, not instead of it.”

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16 Smoliarova, 386, 382.
17 Smoliarova, 390.
18 Randolph, 53.
home life as a legitimate feature of male gentry experience. The historian shows that the Bakunins were very much the product of Catherine-era changes to provincial administration and the attendant reformulation of the available modes for conceiving and carrying out noble life in the country.

Poetic genres, quite prominent among them the friendly epistle, dominated the literary production of the so-called “L’vov circle,” the group of cultural producers who congregated around Nikolai L’vov and worked in various media, not all of them literary, and in which Bakunin, too, played not a marginal role. As I mentioned earlier, “To Eugene”—although it certainly bears markers of the friendly epistle—has been understood to display features of multiple genres. Makogonenko even suggests that Derzhavin’s poem be considered “the first attempt at a Russian novel in verse.”¹⁹ I find both Smoliarova’s and Zykova’s classification of the piece as a country house poem convincing. I mention Makogonenko’s identification of a novelistic sensibility in “To Eugene” because it responds to an important, if retrospectively glimpsed, lacuna in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Russian literary culture: namely, the absence of a novelistic tradition.²⁰ What, then, might it mean to consider more closely the implications of the presence of (proto)novelistic tendencies in Derzhavin’s poem about the country life of a retired nobleman?

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¹⁹ Makogonenko, 287.

Ian Watt’s classic account of the rise of the English novel posits the primacy of a middle class among other sociological conditions deemed necessary for the emergence of the genre.\textsuperscript{21} Since Watt, both the French and English novelistic traditions have been regarded in various kinds of relation to a sociopolitical reality marked by the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie or the middle class. Russia has historically lacked such a demographic category—at least until late in the nineteenth century. William Mills Todd has written about the inadvisability of turning to such terms as “middle class” and “bourgeois” in treatments of this period in Russian letters.\textsuperscript{22}

Indeed, the Russian novels I examine in this dissertation took the \textit{gentry} as a prime object of representation. Novelistic discourse developed in its cultural origins, formal features and sociological dimensions alongside shifting visions about the nobleman’s productive domestic existence as they were articulated in multiple genres. To illustrate my point, I would like to offer next a brief excursus into the history of the private life of the Russian gentry.

\textbf{Служилые люди, }\textsuperscript{23} a very brief history

Subject formation, possibilities for imagining this or that kind of self, relies heavily on permissible behavioral models, some of which arise from custom, while others are made available via printed text (legislation\textsuperscript{24}, literature, the press) in a given culture.

\begin{flushright}


\textsuperscript{23} “People who serve”

\textsuperscript{24} Beginning especially with the reign of Peter I, and particularly with his \textit{General’nyi reglament} of 1720, which Paul Bushkovitch examines among the emperor’s “best-known
In Russia, the province-bound landowner came to be seen as a legitimate member of society rather gradually. The tension in Russian gentry experience between service to the state and a private life outside of the framework of service was central to the estate’s somewhat vexed self-definition. So strong was the link between gentry identity and state service that the formation of a coherent self for a nobleman who does with his life something other than state service was gradual and should be studied rather cautiously for fear of overstating the pace and nature of such developments.

“The land had to serve,” writes Iurii Lotman about the Muscovite gentry’s rights to occupy (not own) immovable property. These Pre-Petrine “conditional landowners,” as Richard Wortman calls them, were a somewhat motley group of servitors who contributed to the state primarily in a military capacity. In exchange for their service, the polity “placed” (pomeshchali) them on a piece of land; the family’s right to use this land was contingent on having at least one male kin active in the armed forces.

Compared to its Western European counterparts, the Russian nobility was a relatively recent phenomenon. The gentry did not exist as a specific, homogeneous estate and long-lasting alterations in the state apparatus,” monarchical legislation sought increasingly to structure and to “reform Russian society.” See Paul Bushkovitch, Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 427.


27 Lotman contrasts this pomeshchennyi with the votchinnik to whom land was granted for a relatively more permanent sort of ownership. However, this land, too could be taken away if the owner fell into disfavor. See below for a discussion of the Russian gentry’s gradual acquisition of property rights.
prior to the reign of Peter I. The Petrine attempts to reform what had been various kinds of *sluzhilye liudi*, or “people who serve,” into a more organized corporate body amplified the link between gentry identity and service: the emperor “enforced a requirement of lifetime service for the landowning classes” in the course of a series of transformations that “helped to consolidate and strengthen the service state structure that had taken form in the previous two centuries.” Peter’s introduction of the Table of Ranks in 1722 sought to impose order onto the social world of the Russian state servant. This piece of legislation made gentry status heavily reliant on service, allowing enterprising individuals to gain hereditary nobility through advancement in the ranks. While subsequent reigns raised the standards for the conferral of hereditary nobility, this aspect of Peter’s reorganization of the state both re-articulated an existing connection between gentry identity and service and gave it renewed official expression.

The strong link between gentry identity and state service persisted throughout the Russian imperial period, following multiple legal measures that granted the nobility (1) freedom from obligatory service and (2) what eventually came to approach inalienable rights to property. Effectively, this meant that the possibilities for meaningful existence outside of direct participation in the administration of state affairs were limited. For almost the entire period covered by this study (that is to say, well into the nineteenth

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28 In fact, the Russian nobility would remain a highly heterogeneous estate throughout the imperial period. See pages below for a brief discussion of this topic.

29 Wortman, *Scenarios*, 27.

30 Originally, attaining the 8th rank in the civil service or merely the 14th in military service conferred hereditary nobility. Later reigns saw stricter requirements for the same.
century), an adult man of noble birth could scarcely maintain respectability without ever serving.\(^{31}\)

The process by which private gentry life gained legitimacy (in the legal sense of the term) was gradual. Beginning in 1727, the state could allow some gentry-men to leave service in order to bring domestic affairs into order. In 1736, one son per noble household gained the right not to serve in the army so that he might devote himself to estate administration. Retirement following twenty-five years of service became available in the same year. In 1746, the gentry gained a monopoly on the right to own populated land and serfs. Finally, on February 18, 1762, Peter III, during his very short reign, issued a Manifesto giving every Russian nobleman the legal right to abstain from previously obligatory service.\(^{32}\) Peter III’s Manifesto would be received somewhat equivocally by Catherine II who would wait until 1785 to issue her own Charter to the Nobility, which finally affirmed her predecessor’s measure and granted a host of additional rights to the gentry. Some historians maintain that it was not until Catherine’s Charter of 1785 that Russian nobles’ property rights found relatively full expression in legal discourse.\(^{33}\) The empress’ legislation between the years 1762 and 1785 was, 

\(^{31}\) See Lotman’s commentary to *Eugene Onegin* for a description of the treatment of non-serving or nobles who were judged to have retired too early during the reign of Catherine II, and as late as in Nicholas I’s times.

\(^{32}\) My discussion above comes from E.N. Marasinova *Psikhologiya elity rossiiskogo dvorianstva poslednei treti XVII veka* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999), 9.

\(^{33}\) For a survey of gentry property rights, see Michelle Lamarche Marrese, *A Woman’s Kingdom. Noblewomen and the Control of Property in Russia, 1700-1861* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2002), especially pages 7-9; and David Griffiths, George Munro, eds., *Catherine II’s Charters of 1785 to the Nobility and the Towns* (Charles Schlacks Jr., 1991).
nevertheless, focused on granting the gentry more rights as well as more duties in the province.  

The consequences of the 1762 Manifesto—whether and to what extent these measures compelled the nobility to retire—have been debated. In his influential study, *The Origins of the Russian Intelligensia*, Marc Raeff argued that state service remained a significant source of identity for the Russian nobility, “the normal path to status, greater prosperity and full participation in the cultural life of Russia.”  

Michel Confino, in his critical response to this book, took issue with Raeff’s methodology, and perhaps most important of all, made the point repeatedly that a great deal remains understudied when it comes to the diversity of gentry life and sensibilities in the second half of the eighteenth century.  

Much as debates regarding the effects of 1762 persist, Carol Leonard’s findings shed some light on the matter of the gentry’s retreat to the countryside following the Manifesto. She provides a detailed numerical account of nobles residing in specific provinces in order to show that both immediately after Peter III’s measure and in the

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34 For a discussion of Catherine II’s legislation that sought to reorganize the administration of the Russian province, see Randolph, chapter 1, pp. 19-48.


36 Michel Confino, “Histoire et psychologie: A propos de la noblesse russe au xviiie siècle” in *Annales. Économies. Sociétés. Civilisations*, 6 (1967): 1163-1205. See especially pages 1193-1199 for Confino’s discussion of the diversity among the noble estate understood in financial terms, and the implication that Raeff’s findings would apply to a rather small elite (Confino puts it at 3%, or the “high nobility,” or *haute noblesse*).
aftermath of Catherine II’s provincial reforms during the 1770s “more and more [nobles] lived on their estates after a brief period in service.”

A discussion of noble life and identity following Peter’s and Catherine’s measures ought not omit the moral dimension indicated by the late-nineteenth-century historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii, in whose seminal treatment, the liberation of the gentry resulted in an important imbalance. If previously, the “service nobility” (he uses the Petrine *sluzhilye liudi*) had paid for its privileges—including the right to own serfs—with “considerable service obligations,” the waning significance of such responsibilities during Catherine II’s reign resulted in the decreasing legitimacy of the gentry’s status, power and life style. In Kliuchevskii’s account, the newly retired nobleman became, in essence, a superfluous person who enjoyed an undeserved position of power, without himself realizing that this was so. The gentry had gained privilege through service; now they retained these rights without compensating the polity for them.

Of these privileges, the non-serving nobleman’s right to own serfs was the most problematic from a moral standpoint. Aleksandr Sumarokov’s 1771 satire “On the Nobility” (“O blagorodstve”) phrased the problem nicely: “Are we gentry-men so that the serfs work, / While we gobble up their labor due to our status?,” suggesting that once service had ceased to be obligatory, noble extraction alone did not provide sufficient

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37 Carol Leonard, *Reform and Regicide. The Reign of Peter III in Russia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 65. See pages 54-72 for this discussion. Leonard shows that, inasmuch as can be deduced from the specific examples she gives, the gentry not only lived in the country, but also participated quite willingly in local institutions of self-government such as noble assemblies that Catherine encouraged by 1785.

justification for the institution of serfdom. Sumarokov’s poem made a rather anxious and urgent case for the nobleman’s productivity and service as a necessary condition for an otherwise flawed arrangement. The right to benefit from serf labor should, in the lyric subject’s view, be earned through work. The poem is framed by references to the etymologically related concepts of noble “duty” (dolg) and “vocation” (dolzhnost’), the former of these containing the suggestion of debt. After emphasizing repeatedly that one ought to be “a gentry-man not in title, but in activity,” the lyric subject concludes that “if I am not fit for any vocation,” then he is not a legitimate member of his estate (“My ancestor is a gentry-man, but I am not a noble”), thus suggesting strongly that noble identity remains contingent on work, still understood as akin to service obligations.

Modulating Lotman’s formulation that “the land had to serve,” beginning with the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Muscovite servitor’s heir, the gentry-man, “had to serve” or at least be of service to the larger polity, now more from a cultural imperative than a basic need to maintain rights over property.

My dissertation explores the tension between the gentry’s rights (land and serf ownership) and state service as it is expressed in a multi-generic selection of cultural artifacts that took the provincial landowner as a central object of representation. In broad terms, I will argue throughout this study that even the Russian landowner, by definition a gentry-man who opted not to serve, choosing instead the administration of his property, was understood in and by the texts that gave his life expression as someone who “had to serve.”

The Landowner's Work

It should be mentioned from the start that such terms as “the Russian nobility” or “the Russian gentry,” admittedly difficult to avoid in a study such as my own, do not refer to a fixed, homogeneous class. In part due to the history of this estate in Russia, the gentry comprised a demographic category marked by a great deal of diversity when it came to the economic, cultural and socio-political characteristics of its members. In my use of language pertaining to the landowning gentry, I follow Michelle Marrese who, finding that “the single characteristic that distinguished the nobility from other social estates (sosloviia) was the right to own land and serfs,” asserts that “although the Russian nobility was by no means a class in an economic sense, it was unified as an estate by a common use of property that distinguished it from other property-holding estates.”

The study in which Marrese makes this observation, called A Woman’s Kingdom: Noblewomen and the Control of Property in Russia, 1700-1861, documents the high degree to which Russian gentry-women both possessed and exercised rights over provincial property. The author points out that women in the Russian Empire took an active part in estate administration (which, the historian shows, was seen as an extension of the care for the home), in some part due to the habitual absence of men from the provinces.

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40 In my own choice of terminology, I remain mindful of the fact that there is no direct correspondence between such Russian terms as shliahtich or dvorianin and the English “gentry-man” or “nobleman.” Additionally, the terms were not stable in Russian eighteenth-century usage.

41 See Marrese, A Woman’s Kingdom, 9.

42 Marrese, 11-12.
In fact, the long-standing link between gentry identity and state service meant effectively that Russian country estates, whether they belonged to men or to women, were quite likely to be left to the care of a noblewoman. Yet this state of affairs found little expression in the non-fiction produced about the estate during the imperial period. Surveying the texts most overtly concerned with estate administration, farming manuals, Maresse notes in passing that “the historian will search in vain for advice aimed at women on managing their estates.”\textsuperscript{43} In spite of the fact that, as Marrese demonstrates, women were just as likely to be charged with estate administration as men, both the mainstream press and advice literature about farming insisted on the primacy of a male proprietor. Alison K. Smith, in her \textit{Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars}, confirms Maresse’s claim about the tendency to imagine the gentry-man as the ideal manager of the estate. Drawing on a rich set of texts concerned with agriculture in the Russian Empire, Smith shows that the Russian nobleman was viewed as the natural steward of rural property in the province.\textsuperscript{44} Smith concludes, nonetheless, that decades’ worth of attempts to compel the nobleman to return to the province met with little success.

Both Smith’s and Maresse’s findings on this point are underwritten by the primacy of service to the male noble’s identity. Once freed officially from state service, the gentry-man still had to have a productive occupation. The texts I examine tend to take

\textsuperscript{43} Marrese does list one woman author on the subject as an exception, 180.

\textsuperscript{44} Smith also notes in passing that when Katerina Avdeeva, a very prolific and popular author of advice literature about home life, tried her hand at a book about farming, the manual did not sell largely because a woman’s voice was not to be trusted, in Smith’s view. Given Avdeeva’s popularity the failure of her venture would be surprising were it not the case that the culture insisted on imagining men as the perfect landowners.
for granted that minding the estate is the nobleman’s job, a pursuit often described explicitly as “service.” The idea that estate administration is a form of state service would have been incomprehensible if applied to women who never had service obligations to begin with. The insistence on seeing men as the natural managers of rural property may have arisen from an anxiety about the possibility that the newly liberated nobility might, to borrow the language of the 1762 Manifesto, “pass their time in laziness and idleness” (v lenosti i prazdnosti). The royal decree had urged that the non-serving gentry-man be “held in contempt and exterminated” (prezirat’ i unichtozhat’), attesting to an early concern that the male nobility retain a role as productive citizens of the empire.

As I show throughout the dissertation (most explicitly in chapter 1), a host of prescriptive texts appeared following the Manifesto and, beginning with 1765, sought actively to formulate estate administration as a form of service. The tendency to see the male landowner as the careful steward of his provincial property may have been a kind of hypertrophied discursive outgrowth of a cultural anxiety regarding the utility of the non-serving noble. Relatedly, throughout the dissertation, I trace the presence of what is best described as a cultural fantasy about the landowning noble engaged in manual labor at his estate: a nobleman performing farm work. The cultural origins of this vision are many; they include the particular social and economic conditions that obtained in Russia beginning especially with the second half of the eighteenth century as well as a roughly contemporaneous and concomitant rise in the production of literary texts (for example, transpositions of Horace’s second epode) equipped to give artistic expression to the nobleman’s life in the provinces.

Aims and Methods
I do not endeavor to offer specific, empirical findings about the “real” landowning nobility and their experience, understood in strictly documentary or historical terms. Rather, I have written a diachronic survey of available modes of representing a particular brand of gentry life and subjectivity (the pomeshchik’s) at three distinct moments in Russian culture and history, which I define below. While I examine a selectively multi-generic set of texts at each juncture, my emphasis is on the novelistic representation of noble life in the province and on the genesis of novelistic forms for rendering gentry domesticity.

A host of studies have explored the multiple ways in which aesthetic discourse can be understood in relation to a sociopolitical and cultural reality. On the broadest level, after Stephen Greenblatt, I treat what he terms the “social discourse” comprised of “official documents, private papers, newspaper clippings, and so forth” as always in the process of multi-directional transference with what he calls the “aesthetic discourse.” In fact, especially in the case of pre-novelistic Russian cultural artifacts, Greenblatt’s formulation (although he makes it in an entirely different context) offers a particularly apt vision, because the relatively small, familiar sphere of Catherine-era periodicals made possible a host of such exchanges “from one discursive sphere to another,” resulting in a process by which a small set of generically diverse publications cross-pollinated to produce together a particular vision of the provincial landowner in print.

My choice of specific texts and historical moments in this diachronic study that may, admittedly, appear to cover a relatively vast period, has been motivated by the fact

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that I am particularly interested in relatively direct and documentable encounters between creative and prescriptive works.

After Mikhail Bakhtin, I view novelistic discourse as defined by its capacity to stage encounters between varied, often conflicting cultural and generic sensibilities, taking the novel to be a generic hybrid characterized by its tendency towards both absorbing and evaluating critically cultural and generic paradigms.⁴⁶ Thus, quite often I identify a novelization of prescriptive visions of gentry domesticity; this phenomenon tends, predictably, to refract the ideal presented in how-to books. Here, I borrow aspects of Toni Bowers’ methodology: namely, her introduction of the term “novelized conduct book” in her study of motherhood as a cultural construct variously imagined in a multi-generic set of texts (including manuals and fiction) in Augustan England.⁴⁷

Moreover, the kinds of direct encounters between prescriptive and creative works I examine, verging as they do on intertextuality, are far from necessary for a Bakhtinian treatment of novelistic discourse. My understanding of the novel as an aesthetic and aestheticizing apparatus that refracts the extra-literary material is Bakhtinian. In the zones of contact between novelistic and extra-literary texts I analyze, the latter—inasmuch as they shape aspects of literary production—come to resemble the “literary

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“literaturnyi fakt” as the term was understood by Iurii Tynianov and Boris Eikhenbaum.48

Moreover, my material suggests that the very boundaries between these segments of Russian print culture (segments that may be understood in Bourdieu’s terms – applicable to my study would be “middle” and “high” literary culture) were quite porous. Part of what I hope to accomplish is a reading of such mainstays of the Russian canon as Dead Souls and Oblomov within a broadened field of cultural production, one that includes middlebrow how-to literature.49 I contemplate the degree to which varied constituents of the Russian print market of the time (a set of texts that would include and juxtapose, for example, Dead Souls with prescriptive works about farming) constitute together a cultural discourse about the landowner. In this sense, I treat the novelistic alongside and on somewhat equal terms with the extra-literary.

In broad terms, the study may be viewed in two, mutually supplementary, ways as (1) a “thick description” of three moments in the formation of novelistic gentry selves understood to be always in dialogue with prescriptive texts that sought to provide a normative discourse about a productive noble private life in the province and (2) a re-

48 For the seminal treatments of the “literary fact,” see Iurii Tynianov, “Literaturnyi fakt” in Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 255-269. See Boris Eikhenbaum, “Literaturnyi byt” in O literature (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1987), 428-436. Specifically, Eikhenbaum defined the “literary fact” as that aspect of the extra-literary context (understood as cultural, socio-economic, as well as discursive) that determines the course of artistic production.

49 In a somewhat different context, Anne Lounsbery has shown that, in the case of Gogol’s attempts to negotiate for a place for himself amidst an increasingly commercial system of mainstream publishing, the frameworks established in Bourdieu’s celebrated essay “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed” illuminate aspects of Russian mid-nineteenth-century literary activity.
appraisal of writers long considered central to the establishment of the Russian novelistic tradition, with especially close attention paid to how these foundational figures navigated a multi-generic field of cultural production.

In Chapter 1, “Letters from Home: The Genesis of the Provincial Landowner in the Russian Novelistic Imagination,” I examine a multi-generic selection of texts produced in the aftermath of the 1762 Manifesto. Reading Nikolai Novikov’s satirical and Nikolai Karamzin’s mainstream journals alongside instructional literature about estate management, I observe that all of these texts, their relative generic diversity notwithstanding, give discursive expression to gentry identity outside of service and attempt to render meaningful the private domestic life of the provincial landowner. Moreover, the fictional works (produced by Novikov and Karamzin) perform what I would call a kind of pre-novelization of extra-literary discourses about model gentry domesticity insofar as these fictions (a) betray a keen awareness of prescriptive literature as an enterprise that structures exemplary gentry domesticity and (b) refract this ideal. Ultimately, I argue that it is out of this interplay between distinct parts of Catherine-era print culture (specifically, prescriptive and creative literature) that a pre- and proto-novelistic conception of provincial noble life arises, a vision that anticipates strongly the direction to be taken in the nineteenth-century novel’s rendering of the Russian landowner. A significant consequence of the rather strong presence of instructional literature in the formation of a novelistic idiom for gentry domesticity and subjectivity is that, in the course of the nineteenth century, some of the foundational figures in Russian prose fiction seem as if unable to escape this “official” version of gentry private life. (Throughout this chapter, I treat Alexander Pushkin’s unfinished The Novel in Letters as
a lens through which to examine my material. A work that self-consciously investigates
the available routes that the Russian novel—then still virtually non-existent—might take
in the representation of a meaningful and productive private noble life, The Novel in
Letters invites the reader to situate its sources in the eighteenth-century.)

In the second chapter, “How to Write a Model Landowner: Faddei Bulgarin,
Nikolai Gogol and the Search for the Perfect Pomeshchik,” I work with two authors who
were both instrumental in and affected by the professionalization of the writer’s vocation
that took place in Russia during the early-mid decades of the nineteenth century.50 This
phenomenon coincided with a set of related developments in extra-literary Russian print
culture; the commercialization of Russian letters that accompanied its professionalization,
the so-called age of the bookseller Smirdin, saw a veritable boom in the production of
affordable advice literature. Faddei Bulgarin, long known for writing for profit, became
eventually a producer of instructional literature about the estate.

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, producing advice literature
that aimed to structure gentry life in the province would be marked, on the one hand, as a
middlebrow enterprise. On the other hand, major writers took an active and creative
interest in this newly robust (that is, more robust than in previous periods) part of the
book market.51 This resulted in the active multi-directional transfer of discursive idioms
and representational sensibilities between the “middlebrow” and “highbrow” institutions

50 See William Mills Todd, Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin: Ideology,

51 Such writers as Vladimir Odoevsky and such critics as Vissarion Belinsky reviewed
prescriptive literature.
of Russian print culture. In this chapter I focus on a particular set of texts that, in my view, illustrates this process. In my treatment of two novels long known to have intertextual links—Bulgarin’s Ivan Vyzhigin and both volumes of Gogol’s Dead Souls—I identify another moment of cross-pollination between prescriptive and novelistic texts. I attribute Gogol’s failure to complete Volume Two of Dead Souls to two things: (1) the appeal that the model provincial landowner (produced discursively by prescriptive literature in the long aftermath of 1762) held for this writer who attempted to re-conceptualize this model citizen in both his poema and elsewhere and (2) an incompatibility between this novelist’s aesthetic sensibilities and the “source material” (which I identify as the “odious” Bulgarin’s how-to literature) from which he drew. I argue that Gogol tried actively to “novelize” the perfect pomeshchik and failed. However, as generations of scholars have shown, the writer’s achievements set the stage for much of the novelistic production of the next generation.

I begin to suggest in Chapter 2 and continue to argue in Chapter 3 that Russia’s lack of a middle class readership and of the bourgeois culture that figures so prominently in accounts of the rise of the novel in Western Europe may have been partially, if only slightly, remedied by the presence, especially beginning with the Smirdin era, of robust middle-brow institutions of print culture whose participants imported a great deal in the way of English and French prescriptive literature aimed at the middle class. Writers affiliated with Bulgarin and Senkovsky essentially “russified” West European middle class advice literature for their Russian audience. In the novelistic output of Ivan Goncharov, to whom I turn in chapter three, I glimpse trace elements of this how-to literature. I suggest that the zones of contact between the Russian novel and these
translated prescriptive works may supplement aspects of the history of the Russian novelistic tradition.

Goncharov conceived all three of his novels in the 1840s, when Gogol was working on Volume Two of *Dead Souls*. As is well known, it would take Goncharov until 1869 to publish the three texts he considered a trilogy. In chapter three, “‘Figura blednaia, neiasnaia’: The Provincial Landowner in Goncharov’s Novelistic Imagination,” I read *A Common Story, Oblomov, The Ravine*, and a handful of short prose works by the same author to show that advice literature in the widest sense of the term occupied a prominent position in the novelist’s artistic imagination. I identify ways in which the compositional history of his most famous novel shows a heavy reliance on prescriptive literature. Moreover, all three novels display a keen awareness of instructional texts as a discursive enterprise that governs model gentry domesticity. I argue that the trilogy as a whole dramatizes in a variety of ways a resistance to prescriptive models of gentry domesticity.

All of the texts I examine respond to a cultural need to give coherent shape and structure to noble identity outside of service. All of the fiction I study exhibits an awareness of extra-literary, prescriptive discourses about noble life in the country, texts in which estate life in general and estate administration in particular approximate state service. I argue that the Russian novel’s vision of a productive gentry private life in the province relies both intertextually and genetically on prescriptive literature about estate life. I believe that this can be interpreted to mean at least two things: (1) the generic origins of the Russian Realist novel lie partly in prescriptive literature and (2) this relatively sustained reliance on prescriptive literature affects the genre’s characterization
of the landowner. Specifically, I show how a range of authors (from Novikov to Tolstoy) re-work variously what began, in my view, as a Catherine-era conception of the landowner not as a private autonomous creature, but as an individual with a job, a patriotic citizen who serves the polity through the administration of his provincial property.
CHAPTER 1

Letters from Home: The Genesis of the Provincial Landowner in the Russian

Novelistic Imagination

But what impressed the numerous campaigners for agricultural improvement, who multiplied their societies, government reports and propagandist publications from Spain to Russia, was the size of the obstacle to agrarian advance rather than its progress. E. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution: Europe. 1789-1848.

«Звание помещика есть та же служба»

Boris Eikhenbaum’s authoritative essay about Alexander Pushkin’s “route” to prose (“Put’ Pushkina k proze,” 1923) begins with the following statement: “Russian literature of the eighteenth century was mainly busy with the organization of poetry.”

Treating the poet as heir to the aesthetic sensibilities (especially, the literary language) of the famously “long” preceding century, Eikhenbaum attributes Pushkin’s turn to prose partly to the need to develop what was then still a relatively unwieldy prose idiom.

Prose fiction began to gain special ascendancy in Russian letters beginning with the 1820s. Iurii Lotman has called this decade a “transitional period” in Pushkin’s

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52 The title of landowner is the same service as any other. The title of this section comes from Pushkin’s Novel in Letters (Roman v pis’makh, 1829).


54 Eikhenbaum writes about Pushkin’s appraisal of the decreasing possibilities for the development of the Russian poetic language as a significant factor in his interest in prose genres. Elsewhere, Eikhenbaum examines the increasing professionalization of Russian letters and the concomitant rise of journalism as that which precipitated Pushkin’s turn to prose. See Boris Eikhenbaum, “Literaturnyi byt” in O literature (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1987), 428-436.

55 As I mentioned briefly in the Introduction, a treatment of Russian eighteenth-century prose fiction, and especially of the novel, falls outside of this inquiry. In large part due to the relative dominance throughout the eighteenth century of the neo-classical generic system, which relegated prose fiction to a low position in its hierarchic view of literary
Considering the author’s attempt at the construction of a coherent writerly self alongside the high number of unfinished prose texts Pushkin produced at this time, Lotman explains: “The transitional time did not allow for wholeness.” As Irina Reyfman points out in a recent treatment of Pushkin’s forays into a variety of prose narratives, “[e]xperimentation remained the watchword as Pushkin attempted to work in longer forms.” His works of fiction (finished as well as incomplete) “proved crucial for the subsequent development of Russian prose.”

Pushkin’s A Novel in Letters (Roman v pis’makh, 1829) is one such text that reads as a lively contemplation of the tasks awaiting the nineteenth-century novel, especially when it comes to the representation of provincial gentry domesticity. Structured around a juxtaposition of city and country, it is a series of epistolary exchanges between four young nobles, two men and two women. One in each pair—a woman, Liza, and a man, Vladimir—has returned to the country, while Liza’s friend Sasha and Vladimir’s unnamed correspondent remain in the capital. Replete with thoughts about the nature of literary production, this text evinces an active interest in juxtaposing the outdated with the current, specifically, in addressing meta-literary concerns with an emphasis on production, the novels of this time are seen as marginal to the tradition. For an attempt to theorize the eighteenth-century novel and to view aspects of its accomplishments vis-à-vis the subsequent development of Russian prose fiction, see David Gasperetti, The Rise of the Russian Novel: Carnival, Stylization and Mockery of the West. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998).

56 Iurii Lotman, Pushkin. Biografiia pisatel’ia. Stat’i i zametki. (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo, 1995), 126. For the full treatment of this “transitional moment” in Pushkin’s career, see pp.112-127.

literary evolution, all in a rather explicit search for an aesthetically sophisticated prose narrative that would render meaningful the provincial life of the gentry.

The text contains a fairly sustained (for a short, unfinished work) treatment of questions that have to do chiefly with novelistic representation. One of the four correspondents, young Liza who admits that she “reads a very great deal,” muses about the depiction of men and women in the novels she has been reading (Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Benjamin Constant’s *Adolphe*), placing an emphasis on aspects of novelistic representation that become outdated with time.58 Pushkin’s choice of the epistolary mode in 1829, and especially his reference to Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747-1748), might prompt an association with the eighteenth-century Western European literary heritage. In fact, Pushkin is working quite actively with this text, at times re-writing the eighteenth-century English classic. Much of Clarissa’s turmoil comes as the result of her wealthy family’s desire to advance socially, gain aristocratic status. Pushkin reverses this situation: his heroine, Liza, comes from the old, but impoverished gentry and is in love with Vladimir, a wealthy but upstart nobleman. Liza’s statement regarding the difference in backgrounds between herself and the young man comes in the form of another reference to novelistic representation, as she hastens “to note proudly, like a real heroine of a novel, that [she] comes from the most ancient Russian nobility.”59 As Liza and her friend Sasha discuss the former’s fears about the romantic alliance she worries will come to no good end, Sasha jokingly

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59 Ibid.
remarks: “Have you become some sort of provincial heroine [of a novel]” (Uzh ne sdelalas’ li ty uezdnoi geroinoi [sic – no question mark]) 60 Both women’s statements attest to a keen, if characteristically for Pushkin, light-hearted, awareness of literature as that which can structure behavior in “real” life. 61 Specifically, Sasha’s suggestion that Liza is acting according to a generically specific set of literary conventions both underscores and amplifies the degree to which the text is concerned with an investigation of the available modes for the novelistic representation of the gentry. A Novel in Letters is at least partly about writing a novel about the gentry.

Pushkin explores various possibilities for plot development. For example, there is Liza’s early forecast of her plot line: “If I should ever get married, then I will choose here some kind of forty-year-old landowner (kakogo-nibud’ sorokaletnego pomeshchika). He will be busy with his sugar factory, I with the housekeeping—and I will be happy.” 62 The forty-year-old landowner who would make such an end possible never appears. When read in the context of the young women’s lively exchanges, it is quite clear that Liza, accustomed as she is to Petersburg society culture, would find such a mate less than agreeable. Why, then, does the novel suggest him? Why does Pushkin’s text approach

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60 Pushkin, Roman v pis’mak, 53.

61 For a foundational study of the interplay between literature and real life behavior in a specific segment of Russian society of roughly this time, see Lotman’s essay “Dekabrist v povsednevnoi zhizni” in his Besedy o russkoi kul’ture. Byt i traditsii russkogo dvorianstva (XVIII-nachalo XIX veka. (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1994), 331-385. On the degree to which Pushkin’s own behavior was informed by literary models drawn from the French tradition, see Larisa Vol’pert, Pushkin v roli Pushkina: tvorcheskaia igra po modeliam frantsuzskoi literatury, (Moscow, lazyki russkoi kul’tury, 1998). Vol’pert identifies Benjamin Constant’s Adolphe (which young Liza reads in Roman v pis’mak) as one of the texts to which Pushkin turns.

62 Pushkin, Roman v pis’mak, 50.
without ever achieving the representation of a prosaic country domesticity: the older practically minded landowner, young Liza turned into a provincial lady of the house.⁶³

*A Novel in Letters* offers, if not a “finished,” then a suggestively *potential* landowner. Upon spending two weeks in the country, Liza’s genuine love interest, the young Vladimir, finds that, having grown tired of life in Petersburg, he enjoys village life a great deal. In a letter addressed to his friend, Vladimir produces a rather pointed and surprisingly programmatic vision of the nobleman’s role in the province:

To not love the country is forgivable for a young Smolny [institute] graduate, who has been recently let out of her cage, or an eighteen-year-old kammerjunker. Petersburg is our lobby, Moscow our maids’ room, whereas the country is our study. A decent man passes through the lobby as it is necessary and rarely goes into the maids’ room; he spends most of his time in the study. And this is just how I will end up. [*Tem i ia konchu.*] I will retire from service, get married and go off to my Saratov village. The title of landowner [*pomeshchik*] is the same service as any other. To be busy with the administration of three thousand serfs, whose entire well-being is completely dependent on us is more important, than leading a platoon or copying diplomatic dispatches…⁶⁴

The development is sudden; there is scarcely anything in the text to prepare the reader for Vladimir’s decision to embrace his duties as a provincial landowner.⁶⁵ It is known that he was recently part of Petersburg high society, that his family has a home in a very good

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⁶³ Pushkin followed such a plot pattern in his representation of Tatiana Larina’s mother in *Eugene Onegin*, 1825-1832.

⁶⁴ Pushkin, 54.

⁶⁵ Here, Sam Driver’s suggestion that when read in the context of the rest of the writer’s output at this time, Vladimir’s pronouncements are programmatic, that he serves here as “Pushkin’s *raisonneur*, expressing the ideas Pushkin was setting forth in his nonliterary works of the period” might explain why the evolution is not more gradual in the text itself. Driver further suggests that Pushkin’s interest in countering absentee landlordism had its roots in the writer’s awareness of Western European unrest, which, as he saw it, arose partly as a result of the deficient management of estates. For a full discussion, see Sam Driver, *Pushkin: Literature and Social Ideas* (New York, Columbia UP, 1989), 59.
part of town. The information given suggests that the decision to devote himself to life in the country and to the well-being of his serfs is a rather dramatic change in his sense of self. Still, Vladimir’s thoughts about his identity are quite well-developed. He knows who he is and the text makes clear that the young man’s assertion that a nobleman should engage actively in estate administration is the result of some reflection. Vladimir says, “[w]hen I speak in favor of the aristocracy, I do not contort myself into some awkward English lord; my own pedigree, although I am not ashamed of it, does not give me any right to do so”; this statement belongs to a man who has considered both the demographic characteristics of his ancestry and his place in the broader, both Russian and global, social world he inhabits. Pushkin’s text shows a nobleman engaged in the contemplation and articulation of his own place in contemporary society. And it is a decidedly modern self that his hero produces, all the more so, because it is set among eighteenth-century landowners. Vladimir admits that he “has been doing all of this thinking” while living in the province, observing the estate life of small-time landowners who are described as follows, “These gentlemen do not serve and manage their little villages themselves, but, I’ll say it, may God grant that they squander away their property, as the likes of us have. What savagery! for them, the times of Fonvizin have not yet passed. Among them still flourish Prostakovs and Skotinins!” Pushkin contrasts what ought to be current (the young Vladimir) with the degenerate gentry domestic culture in Denis Fonvizin’s *The Minor* (*Nedorosl’*, written in 1781, performed in 1782 and published in 1783). Lotman, who calls this piece a “novel about contemporary life,”

66 Pushkin, *Roman v pis’makh*, 54.

67 Ibid.
suggests that Pushkin’s interest in the representation of his own day is quite palpable throughout the text.\(^{68}\) Also discernible are the roots of this text in the literary and cultural heritage of the past. On the one hand, Pushkin’s Vladimir is more than “current,” because he makes statements that would become a veritable mainstay of the nineteenth-century literary tradition’s attempts to depict the provincial landowner.\(^{69}\) On the other hand, having placed his Vladimir among Prostakovs and Skotinins, Pushkin all but invites his reader to look to the preceding tradition.

Consequently, it seems legitimate to ask whether there are any ways in which developments in Russian literary culture that precede \textit{A Novel in Letters} help us gain a fuller understanding of Pushkin’s unfinished text, which, as I argue above, amounts to a contemplation about the novelistic representation of the provincial gentry. In “Pushkin’s Route to Prose,” Eikhenbaum emphasizes the low status of prose fiction in the eighteenth century as one condition that defined the terms at which Pushkin and his contemporaries would embark on the production of prose narratives in the 1820s. The tradition was dominated for much of the eighteenth century by poetic genres. Moreover, such were the aesthetic conventions that dictated literary production especially in the beginning and middle of the century, that relatively few texts were equipped to give artistic expression to the subject Pushkin’s \textit{A Novel in Letters} attempts to represent: the private, domestic existence of the gentry in the province. At this juncture, I would suggest that it may be productive to treat Pushkin’s text as an artifact of the preceding tradition’s long route to

\(^{68}\) Lotman, \textit{Pushkin}, 124.

\(^{69}\) See chapters 2 and 3 for a discussion of the nineteenth-century novelistic representation of the provincial landowner.
the literary rendering of provincial gentry domesticity.

Before returning to *A Novel in Letters* at the end of this chapter, I will conduct a survey of some specific moments in Russian literary and cultural history that predate Pushkin’s *A Novel in Letters* and that coalesce into a set of ur-texts for the novelistic representation of provincial gentry domesticity. These works were published in the second half of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century. In many ways, they set the stage for the early novelistic production of which *A Novel in Letters* is a prime example.

In the pages that follow, I will read a multi-generic selection of texts produced by such entities and individuals as the Free Economic Society, Nikolai Novikov, Andrei Bolotov and Nikolai Karamzin. I will show that each of these texts attempts to arrive at a coherent articulation of the gentry-man’s role in the province and is, in its own way, pre-novelistic inasmuch as it contributes to the development of a prose idiom fit for the rendering of the Russian provincial everyday. I will show that the novelistic representation of rural gentry has some of its roots in the lively crosspollination between specific segments of Russian print culture: instructional literature about estate administration and the mainstream (in one case, satirical) periodical press. Ultimately, I would contend that the subsequent era’s (most immediately, Pushkin’s) vision of a productive noble life in the province originates in this interplay between various strands of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century print output.

An additional concern that will remain palpable throughout the period under study has to do with a task faced by all of these authors and publications: the cultivation of active and competent provincial readers and capable participants in the newly robust
cultural sphere afforded by the greater prominence of print. During this time period, the (sometimes model) provincial landowner was conceived as someone able and willing to render his private life in the country accessible and meaningful by communicating it to a larger reading public. The discursive space for the expression of the landowner’s domestic self was constituted by texts that purported to be personal documents, most often letters circulated for public consumption.

«И что коллегия сельского домостроительства всего нужнее» (Ломоносов)

The reign of Catherine II saw a gradual, and, in its own way, dramatic, re-articulation of gentry identity. Marc Raeff writes about the nobility’s interest in the “extension of the meaning of ‘service’” at an early point during Catherine’s reign, the increasing appeal of the idea that “by virtue of his being a landowner the nobleman […] served the country and justified his membership in the privileged elite.” Possibilities for imagining a home-bound nobleman who does not engage in state service, opting instead to embark on a useful life in the provinces, came about partly as the result of Catherine-era developments in print culture. Some of the texts I am about to consider were quite well equipped to render meaningful what was not yet a widespread documentary reality: a nobleman who stayed at home and minded his property. As I will show in what follows, the relative robustness of Catherine-era publishing contributed a great deal to the ability of the Russian literary language to render private, domestic life and led to the

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71 “And that a collegium on rural home economics is needed more than anything else.” (Lomonosov)

72 Raeff, Origins, 91.
formation of a literary tradition with a capacity for the representation of the gentry-man farmer.

The very appearance of some of the publications devoted to the representation of gentry domesticity was predicated heavily on the creation of institutions that dealt with estate administration as a task in need of serious attention. Plans to found an organization that would oversee the administration of Russia’s vast rural territories go as far back as the 1750s when, as Joseph Bradley suggests, agricultural improvements became connected to “an ethic of usefulness among the nobility,” as well as “a curtailment of the abuses of serfdom, and a more efficient and humane economic and political system.”73 In the early 1760s, what Bradley calls three “institutional strategies” to deal with the management of the Russian province were offered to the empress. One was “to create an agricultural division within the Academy of Sciences.” Another was suggested by the poet Mikhail Lomonosov, who strongly opposed the first idea and in a document produced in 1763 and called “An Opinion about the Establishment of a State Collegium on Rural Domestic Culture” (Mnenie o uchrezhdenii gosudarstvennoi kollegii zemskogo domostroistva) argued for the creation of a government department, “a prototype of a ‘ministry of agriculture.’”74 Although Catherine preferred the idea of Jacob Johann Sievers to found a private agricultural society, it is worthwhile to take a short detour here

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73 Joseph Bradley, Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia. Science, Patriotism and Civil Society (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard UP, 2009). Bradley also points out that “in the 1750s and 1760s a few government officials, such as Nikita Panin, began to realize the benefits of improvements in Russian agriculture and estate management,” 46.

74 Bradley, 47.
to consider Lomonosov’s plans—largely due to the prominent role Russian print culture plays in them.

One of the chief concerns articulated repeatedly in his plans for this organization is that as much as possible be published in Russian. Given the underdeveloped state of Russian prose at this time, the production of a less cumbersome idiom would be one result of Lomonosov’s suggestion. Furthermore, it looks very much as though Lomonosov wanted this department to be linked to the newspaper he had hoped since 1759 to start, the *Internal Russian Gazette* (*Vnutrennie rossiiske vedomosti*). The poet opined that Russian nobles could act as correspondents, writing in with information about local conditions, reporting on such topics as climate and harvests. Lomonosov had even planned to devote a special section of the newspaper to information about estate life and administration. Again, Lomonosov’s plans were rejected. Nevertheless, the notion that provincial nobles should become active participants in the periodical press would accrue greater urgency in coming decades.

The agency that Catherine decided to support in 1765, the Free Economic Society (hereafter, FES), bore some resemblance to what Lomonosov had envisioned. A chief difference was that the FES was not a governmental, but a nominally private organization. The founding members of the FES were men of various pursuits. Very highly positioned Russian noblemen were joined by scientists, doctors and professional agriculturalists (for example, the court gardener). Articles written or translated by the

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75 For a discussion of Lomonosov’s plans, and especially the link between the newspaper and the organization he envisioned, see A.V. Zapadov, *Russkaia zhurnalistika XVIII veka* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka”, 1964), 42-45.
latter group filled the pages of the early issues of the journal produced by this organization and titled *Works of the Free Economic Society.*

Russia’s first periodical devoted to agriculture and estate administration printed information about a variety of topics from types of soil to peasants’ living conditions. The information and advice this publication dispensed was not always applicable to the Russian province. In addition, Michal Confino has shown that at times, the material was rather old news for the experienced landowner. Writing about both the Free Economic Society and the Moscow Agricultural Society, Bradley finds that the organizations failed to transform life in the countryside. He examines a number of voluntary associations and judges that such organizations “although always under the watchful, nurturing, but often suspicious eye of autocracy, became the institutional core of an emerging civil society,” thus locating their achievement in the cultivation of a particular kind of citizen. Calling the FES “a radical departure from current practice in that the Russian government did not control it,” Bradley argues that participation in this society contributed to the “the creation of a new sense of identity, self-worth, and mission for the patriotic noble.”

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77 Bradley, 81. He also points out that the first twenty-first-century Russian historian of agriculture, Sergei Kozlov, finds that some improvement in agriculture of that time is to be noted and that the Soviet view of the eighteenth century’s achievements was far too pessimistic, see p. 82.

78 Bradley, 44-45.

79 Bradley, 48-49 and 83. For a contrasting view, see Colum Leckey’s article “Patronage and Public Culture in the Russian Free Economic Society, 1765-1796” in *Slavic Review*, vol. 64, No. 2, Summer, 2005, 355-379. Leckey places a far greater emphasis on
But how did the members themselves define the tasks of the Free Economic Society? How did they see themselves and their role in this enterprise? The inaugural issue of the *Works* contains a fairly protracted description of the project these men were about to undertake. First of all, their work was conceived as thoroughly patriotic, an activity whose aim was the betterment of the nation via the improvement of the province. The chief utility of the organization, as they saw it, was the publication of various kinds of information about the Russian province, information that, they hoped, would be useful for the target audience of the periodical: the landowning gentry-man interested in the administration of his property.

Who should be a properly authoritative voice in these matters? The members themselves seem a little anxious about this topic. They note that “some might object” to their enterprise by pointing out that “very few of the Members have any experience in rural estate administration” (the last phrase is the most precise translation of the Russian *domostroitel’stvo* as the word was then used).\(^{80}\) They go on to offer that a well-educated person knowledgeable in the natural sciences has a greater capacity for making “useful observations than he, who simply performs daily and with his own hands agricultural tasks, carrying them out like a machine.” Finally, they conclude that they “may comfort [themselves] with the hope that many of [their] members will toil in this venture with great utility, even though not one of them is capable of wielding the plough (*sokha*).”\(^{81}\)

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\(^{80}\) *Trudy vol’nogo ekonomicheskogo obshchestva*, 1765, issue 1, pagination irregular.

\(^{81}\) Ibid.
In a relatively short space, the members refer twice to performing manual labor in the fields, participating directly in estate work. It would have been quite unthinkable for any educated Russian of the time period to “wield the plough.” And at first sight, it may seem that their reference to the farming instrument serves largely to distance themselves from actual agricultural enterprise, maintaining instead that theirs is the work of literate, enlightened individuals. However, as I will show in the pages that follow, later developments in the understanding and representation of the role of educated members of Russian imperial society in the province shows that this may well be the first instance at which manual labor enters into the available (albeit here, only to be negated) ways of imagining the nobleman in the country. For the moment, what remains palpable in this text is the degree to which their role is presented as active and useful participation in provincial affairs, work that was to be carried out largely on paper, and, sometimes, as experimentation in the field.

At the inception of the Works of the FES, readers of every rank and station were invited to take part in the periodical enterprise as local correspondents. Both in face-to-face meetings and via a print-generated zone of contact, the Free Economic Society attempted to provide a place where interested parties could discuss the administration of Russia’s provinces. The inaugural issue of the publication included a lengthy questionnaire of sixty-five queries. The authors requested that every knowledgeable person complete answers to all or any number of the questions posed and send responses
to the group’s address in Petersburg. Thus, anyone willing to supply information about the provinces was recruited to participate.  

Especially during the early years of its existence (and to a degree throughout), the *Works* shared the fate of many other contemporary periodical publications in that it had a difficult time achieving good circulation figures. Colum Leckey judges that the “poorly developed state of the empire’s administrative, educational, and communications infrastructure in the eighteenth century” precluded the society from “building a provincial base of support,” limited its ability to connect with educated persons in the provinces. Therefore, to argue that the *Works* functioned as a highly effective medium that enabled landowners to communicate with one another and take part in a shared enterprise would be inaccurate. In fact, as both this and the next chapter will demonstrate, the problem of reaching an interested provincial subscriber would plague nearly every part of the Russian periodical press for several decades to come. And it is partly for this reason that I find focusing on what may be deemed a circulation “failure” less productive than examining the contents of these periodicals, including attempts to deal discursively with the lack of interested readers. To a significant degree, all of the publications I am about to examine provide models of the capable reader in an attempt to build an audience, which would be comprised, in large part, of provincial nobles.

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82 Throughout its existence, the Free Economic Society sought to collect knowledge about rural domestic culture in the Russian Empire.


84 This development may be viewed profitably alongside the phenomenon described in Jeffrey Brooks’ foundational study, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003).
Landowning Readers and the Refraction of New Service Ideals in Novikov’s Gallery of Provincials

Soon after ascending the throne, Catherine II initiated what Gary Marker, a historian of Russian print culture, has called “the first major period in Russian journalism.”

Edited by the self-styled “grandmother” of the press, Catherine’s All Sorts of Everything (Vsiakaia vsiachina) was the first among a comparatively sizable group of periodical publications that sprouted in 1769. As Jones points out, the periodical culture Catherine promoted owed a great deal to “the most significant literary discovery of the eighteenth century, the moral-satirical journal modeled on the Spectator of Addison and Steele.”

Treating the implications of this event in the context of Russian social and political developments, Andrzej Walicki maintains that Catherine’s project sought to form public opinion and to “stimulate social initiatives that could be exploited

published in 1985.) Brooks’ study traces the appearance of a relatively large-scale reading public among persons of common origins by examining the role of commercial media in the production of works that appealed to this late-nineteenth-century “mass” reader. In this chapter, I borrow from his methodology in reading carefully some texts that “[lack] the profundity and originality of belles lettres” in my attempt to document the birth of a relatively numerous noble readership in the second half of the eighteenth century. Brooks, xx.


Of course, the journal was not “officially” Catherine’s. However, the empress’ literary pursuits both as a journalist and dramatist, although carried out under nominal anonymity, were quite well-known to the educated public.

in support of the policies of the government."^{88} The empress’s encouragement of the periodical press followed closely after the (somewhat prematurely halted) proceedings of the Legislative Commission, which were concerned primarily with Russia’s social organization and included debates about the social estates in general, and the status of the nobility in particular.

Of all the prominent Russian intellectuals active at this time, it is likely Nikolai Novikov, a person of many pursuits—journalist, publisher, philanthropist—who has been seen as most shaped by this moment in Russian political and cultural history. The sensibilities and direction especially of the early years of his career have been understood by many as profoundly affected by his role as one of four secretaries of the Legislative Commission.\(^{89}\)

During the period that interests me (1769-1775), Novikov edited a handful of satirical journals on the pages of which he produced a gallery of social types. The province-bound gentry-man was one such “type,” created at a time when the status and duties of the rural nobility were being worked out. The gentry-man in the province was a

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[^89]: Novikov was working with the part of the Commission that dealt with the so-called “middle estate.” In Soviet scholarship, it was maintained that this experience “allowed [Novikov] to gain wide insight into the social problems of the time, especially as they affected the ‘middle estate’ and the peasants. It seems likely that this experience influenced all of his future activity.” (Blagoi, 230) Makogonenko has suggested that in *The Drone*, Novikov was replaying the debates of the Legislative Commission, creating caricatures of such (from a Soviet perspective) reactionary figures as Count Mikhail Shcherbatov and giving full expression to the difficult situation of the peasantry, as it may have been described by more reform-minded participants. W. Gareth Jones notes that Novikov “must have sharpened his political wits and social observation in such an assembly.” See Jones, *Nikolai Novikov*, 17.
rather flexible figure, his duties debated, his social identity in the process of being formed, and this formation taking place on the pages of the multi-generic publications of the epoch. Whereas the Works of the Free Economic Society gave relatively straightforward (if often prescriptive) shape to the role of the nobleman in the province, Novikov’s texts grant aesthetically textured expression to this cultural problem: the search for ways of attaching meaning to a nobleman’s life outside of what had been obligatory state service. At times, Novikov’s writings are in quite close contact with extra-literary developments in the discursive construction of model gentry domesticity; that is, they imagine a meaningful life for the provincial noble in a way that refracts the official line. Finally, as I will show in a moment, Novikov’s articles rehearse particular directions that would be taken by the novel of the next century.

The first issue of The Drone opened with the image of the lazy publisher, Mr. Drone, who, having mentioned the paralyzing effects of his affliction multiple times (he is so lazy that he cannot read, cannot engage in correspondence, cannot get dressed so as to leave the house) and having explained that he has been unable to choose a vocation, exclaims: “How then may I be useful in society?”

Seeking to “do at least the most trifling sort of service to [his] fatherland,” this fellow opines that he may be of use if not

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90 N. I. Novikov, Izbrannye proizvedeniia (Moscow-Leningrad, 1951), 4. The common Soviet interpretation of this line as well as the epigraph (“They work, while you eat [the fruits of] their labor” (Oni rabotaiut, a vy ikh trud edite)), taken from Sumarokov, casts Novikov as the first Russian intellectual to question the utility of the gentry, to suggest cautiously that the estate as a whole may be parasitic and useless. However, Jones argues convincingly that the line and the title were meant as homage to Sumarokov, the title especially referring to the latter’s periodical, Busy Bee. In contrast to the ideologically inflected Soviet interpretations, Jones shows rather more soberly that Novikov sought primarily to establish continuity in Russian periodical production, worked to frame the enterprise as a tradition. See Jones, 20-21.
by writing (since for this, too, he lacks the capacity), then by “the publication of other people’s works.” First of all, the characterization of Mr. Drone owes much to Johnson’s *Idler*, whose anonymous editor similarly “made a virtue of his lazy nature.” Simultaneously, Novikov’s choice to begin a journal in 1769 with the image of a middling nobleman who asserts both his decision not to engage in state service and his desire to be useful announces an interest in post-liberation gentry lives and selves. Mr. Drone (gospodin Truten’) embodies a playful response to an anxiety about the potential idleness in which the nobleman may pass his days following the 1762 Manifesto.

A later piece called “A Historical Adventure” (Istoricheskoe prikliuchenie, 1770) published in another of Novikov’s journals, *The Chatterbox* (Pustomelia, 1770), dramatizes the possibilities for gentry life at a time when service appears to still be compulsory; the story focuses on the limited availability of a private life and a fulfilling domestic existence to the patriotically minded noble. Meant to take place at some rather vaguely defined moment in the historical past, the text gives concrete shape to the inherited character of the problem of noble identity.

In the representation of the positive gentry nest—the father Dobronrav (One of Good Character) and his son Dobroserd (One of Good Heart)—the text rehearses a good deal of what would become stock features of the nineteenth-century novel about the landowning gentry. First of all, quite a bit of the plot of the relatively extended story

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91 Novikov, 5.

92 Jones identifies the *Idler* as an influence on Novikov’s *The Drone*. See Jones, 21.

93 It is not entirely clear when the story is supposed to take place; it is said, for example, that printed history books did not exist yet. I should add though that Jones reads the text as motivated by events current for Novikov’s historical moment.
treats the young nobleman’s departure from the country, his time in Petersburg, then his return to the family home, a plot structure commonly found in the nineteenth-century novel. Novikov’s description of young Dobroserd’s difficulties becoming accustomed to the frivolous ways of the city, and especially his frequent trips to the theater, followed by a thorough inspection of his own person in search of shortcomings reads as a precursor to the psychologism of the novel that found perhaps its strongest expression in the works of Tolstoy. Once back in the country, Dobroserd reconnects with his sweetheart Milovida (Good Looking). They become engaged. The young man proudly asserts that he has found happiness with his betrothed. However, some months later, Dobroserd gets word that he must leave the province in order to fight in a war. Service obligations, which, we are told, he could have avoided since the family is well connected, pull him away from a personally fulfilling life in the country. Thus, Novikov’s piece both rehearses aspects of the plot of the nineteenth-century novel and dramatizes a recent problem: the situation of the service-bound nobleman, unable to commit to a domestic life in the face of obligations to the state.

More generally, the private life of the non-serving gentry occupies a position of considerable prominence in Novikov’s satiric oeuvre. In the course of his journalistic activity, Novikov authored and published a great deal in the way of texts that purport to be artifacts of noble private life in the province. Due, in part, to the relative abundance of Soviet scholarship on Novikov, the journalist has become associated with the representation of monstrous Prostakovs and Skotinins in embryo. For the moment, it will serve the purposes of my inquiry to urge the reader to suspend temporarily the temptation to judge the texts I am about to discuss for their content and according to such criteria as
“positive” or “negative” types. Whether these texts comprise an ideological statement about noble provincial life is not central to my inquiry. Be they “positive” or “negative” representations of the pomeshchik, these articles give sustained prose expression to noble life outside of service. To a degree, then, they may be called pre-novelistic for this reason alone. Zapadov, who identifies as “the main genre of Novikov’s journals” “letters and readerly correspondence, both sent in and composed by the editor, most of them likely in the latter category,” calls the journals “a sort of laboratory in which the genres and devices of Russian prose were being developed.”

It is at least partly out of this rather extensive use of the epistolary mode that novelistic representation gradually develops.

Such creative works as the correspondence between a landowner and his village elder (starosta) published in parts XXVI and XXX of The Drone, aided in the development of a prose idiom for the representation of noble life in the country, regardless of what the reader may make of the domestic ideology promoted in them. (The gentry-man in question is, of course, an absentee and a monstrously merciless landlord.) In fact, Novikov’s articles have been seen as an intertext for the novelistic representation of the same sort of correspondence in Goncharov’s Oblomov. Novikov’s texts contributed—in this case, quite directly—to the novelistic representation of the landowning gentry.

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94 Zapadov, 140-41, 134.

Still more interesting are texts in which Novikov’s gentry attempt actively to make sense of their place and duties (or lack thereof) in the country. These instances are quite many and varied. At times, Novikov’s fictions seem to participate in the larger official discourse about the nobleman’s role as a figure of authority in the province. In the June 9, 1769 issue of The Drone, Novikov published (a fictitious) letter from a landowner who has come to the country for the summer and found among his neighbors “many good-thinking and honest people, who are busy with estate administration” (uprazhniaiushchikhsia v domostroitel’stve). The gentry-man correspondent concludes his missive with what amounts to a kind of praise of country life, “in my opinion, when it comes to pleasantness, nothing can compare to life in the country,” where people wake up early in order to “use the pleasant morning hours to look after their estate administration (prizmatrivat’ za svoim domostroitel’stvom) and with their example encourage their servants to labor” (sluzhitelei svoikh pooshchriat’ k trudam). Given the date of publication, only four years after the founding of the Free Economic Society, the letter seems to echo the positive vision of a productive nobleman in the province promoted by the agency. The assertion that the nobleman’s good example as a careful manager of his estate will compel the peasant farmer to work harder echoes the Free Economic Society’s call that landowners take on a more active role in agriculture. Finally, this correspondent promises to write in to The Drone again, with more news about life in the country, as the affairs of the province are deemed an interesting and important enough topic to warrant publication in a major journal. This gesture, when

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96 Novikov, 65.

97 Novikov, 66.
viewed in the wider context of increased official interest in gentry domesticity reads as a reflection of the cultural climate of the time.

A later set of texts that also deals actively with the role of the gentry in the province, “Letters to Falalei” (lauded by Soviet critics for their denunciatory treatment of the ills of serfdom) comprises perhaps the most famous example of “landowners’” correspondence published in Novikov’s journal. In these purportedly personal documents produced by fictional country nobles (father, uncle and the son Falalei) and printed for public consumption, Novikov first shows an aging province-bound gentry-man’s attempt to make sense of his life. Speaking for his entire estate, the father Trifon Pankrat’ich judges that “nowadays our gentry living has become very bad.” The very fact that the old man is compelled to write about “our gentry living” shows Novikov’s interest in exploring gentry subjectivity and self-understanding at a transitional time.

About one of the most important pieces of legislation regarding the nobleman to date (that is, the early 1770s), the 1762 Manifesto, Trifon Pankrat’ich has the following sentiments to share: “They say that the gentry have been given freedom: the devil knows what they’re talking about, God forgive me, what sort of freedom? They gave us freedom, but there’s not a thing one can do with it.” Tragi-comical though it may be that he finds his freedom curtailed because he can no longer “take away a neighbor’s property” or distill as much vodka as he might like to, the letter still shows a landowner

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98 Novikov, 123.

99 There is a similarity here to Prostakova’s sentiments; Makogonenko has suggested that Fonvizin may have authored these letters.
making sense of his life in the province and insisting on what I would suggest is an extreme, vehement independence.

In their own ways, both Trifon and Falalei’s uncle are adamant about a brand of gentry autonomy that, while it goes counter the officially sanctioned program for nobles in the province, gives evidence of their remarkably strong and long-standing interest in living precisely as they wish. As it turns out, Falalei’s father is quite familiar with ways to get out of service prior to 1762 and has been a staunch advocate of an admittedly crooked “freedom” since long before the Manifesto. Both Trifon and Falalei’s uncle Ermolai ask the young man repeatedly to retire from service and return to the province. Trifon does this, because he wants his son to avoid military service during military conflicts. Asserting the nobility’s rights to a completely useless existence, Trifon imagines a provocatively inactive life for his son as he optimistically predicts that at home, Falalei can sleep, eat and have nothing at all to do.

When it comes to Novikov’s re-working of contemporary cultural problems in artistic form, most revealing of all are both father’s and uncle’s descriptions of their estates. Trifon admits that his serfs are extremely poor and do not seem to grow any more productive no matter how often one beats them. He follows his admissions regarding the condition of his serfs with the fact that his neighbor, who happens to be Grigorii Grigorievich Orlov (!), has serfs who look as wealthy as gentry-men. Trifon cannot understand why Count Orlov is so kind to his peasants and offers that in his place, he would raise the quitrent dramatically.

Grigorii Orlov was a founding member of the Free Economic Society. In the first issue of the Works, his name is listed second, after the Count Roman Vorontsov. Trifon’s
neighbor, then, is one of the most prominent participants in the construction of the official discourse about model gentry domesticity. Dates will be of some help here. The last letter sent to the journal, Ermolai’s missive, is dated 1772; in 1770, Grigorii Orlov was president of the Free Economic Society, the chief agency in charge of producing prescriptive norms for gentry behavior in the province. That Novikov chooses to place Falalei’s family next door to the Orlov estate, a property run by one of the most exemplary landowners in the nation, creates a spatial arrangement that makes it possible to examine the representation of Falalei’s family vis-à-vis contemporary trends in imagining model domesticity.

Both Trifon and Ermolai are readers; even if this is expressed via their disdain at Novikov’s periodical publication, they are shown, nevertheless, as provincial consumers of printed matter. One statement by Ermolai shows that the family may have even been exposed to the *Works of the Free Economic Society*. Falalei’s uncle asks, “What should a retired person do while living in the country? Must make a living somehow. Many of these clever showoffs say that it is possible, while living in the country, to become wealthy simply by means of estate administration (*domostroitels’tvo*) and good care for the cultivation of crops; but I don’t believe such liars; this nonsense about bread which will, after all, always be bread and cattle will always be cattle, but honest

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100 In fact, Gary Marker points out that Novikov’s actual readership was quite geographically diverse, finding the relative frequency with which provincials subscribed to his publications rather impressive for the time. See Gary Marker, “Novikov’s Readers,” *The Modern Language Review* Vol. 77, No.4 (Oct., 1982), 894-905 as well as Marker’s “The Creation of Journals and the Profession of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” in Martinsen, ed., 11-37.
management will not make you rich.”¹⁰¹ The reference to these clever showoffs who advocate careful estate management as the appropriate vocation of the gentry, as well as the family’s proximity to the Orlov estate, make it possible to consider these provincials as unwilling consumers not only of Novikov’s periodical, but also a quarterly produced for the explicit purpose of reforming the province, the Works. To the extent that there may have been something coercive about the speed with which private noble life was imagined as service, Trifon’s and the uncle’s insistence on a useless life reads as resistance to the state’s interference in their private, domestic affairs. In the figures both of Trifon and Falalei’s uncle, Novikov shows provincial nobles who reject the epoch’s reevaluation of their role in the country, react to developments in the discursive generation of new ideals for gentry behavior and, ultimately, are all the more remarkable for insisting on an autonomy, a private life that takes place against the norms proposed at the time.¹⁰²

These fictional nobles are ventriloquized in such fashion that they become active, and in their own way not entirely incompetent, producers and consumers of print culture. Again – from a perspective that would demote the content of these pieces to a secondary importance, the very terms of engagement with the matter, the form of the epistolary

¹⁰¹ Novikov, 131.

¹⁰² A close look at “The Fragment of a Journey” and “English promenade” falls outside of the narrow limits of my inquiry here, because these texts are not presented as documents directly issuing from provincial nobles wishing to describe their own private lives. Still, in Jones’ view, Novikov shows here resistance among the nobility to the new ideals of gentry behavior in the province produced during Catherine’s reign. Novikov’s journalism of this time period may be viewed as giving aesthetically refracted expression to the task undertaken in a more straightforward fashion by the Works of the Free Economic Society: to reform the countryside.
exchanges with a major organ of the press, makes for a scenario in which the gentry are shown attempting to render legitimate whatever (and however ill-conceived) program of behavior they espouse. This self-creation may well be taking place in response to such publications as *Works* of the Free Economic Society.

**Country Dwellers: Genre, Identity and Community in Bolotov’s Agricultural Advice**

Historians of the Free Economic Society allude rather frequently to the response of one retired middling landowner to the first volumes of the society’s proceedings. Andrei Bolotov recorded in his autobiographical work *Life and Adventures of Andrei Bolotov, Described by Himself for His Descendants* (*Zhizn’ i prikliuchenii Andreia Bolotova, opisannyia samim im dlia svoikh potomkov*; hereafter, *Life and Adventures*) how he “nearly jumped with joy” upon discovering the first tome of the *Works* and read it cover to cover.103 That such a publication should interest someone like Bolotov can be explained by the fact that he, atypically for his generation, opted to retire from service early (as quickly as he could, following the 1762 Manifesto) and was actively interested in the cultivation of a variety of private pursuits, agriculture and estate life very prominent among them.

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103 Andrei Bolotov, *Zhizn’ i prikliuchenii Andreia Bolotova, opisannyia samim im dlia svoikh potomkov*. 4 volumes, supplement to *Russkaia starina*. (St. Petersburg: 1870-73), 2: 616. Bolotov’s *Life and Adventures* did not become available to the reading public until the 1870s. On the other hand, his agricultural advice enjoyed considerable popularity among landowners. A. Butkovskaia recalls that as late as in the 1820s, Bolotov’s *Economic Magazine* was a necessary resource for any landowner genuinely interested in agricultural improvement. See *Rasskazy babushki* as published in *Istoricheskii vestnik* in 1884.
Bolotov soon began to collaborate with the journal. His first contribution to the *Works* came in the form of an answer to the 1765 query that sought to collect information about nearly every aspect of the Russian province. As I mentioned earlier, sixty-five questions had been posed treating a wide range of subjects: from fishing and the cultivation of the potato crop to peasant health and local holidays. Bolotov’s reply was very lengthy and detailed, something that attests to Thomas Newlin’s suggestion that this gentry-man’s participation in the *Works* of the Free Economic Society afforded him the “real-life correspondent he had heretofore lacked.”\(^{104}\) Newlin’s judgment accords with what Bradley observes about one of the chief appeals of agricultural societies both in Russia and abroad: the opportunity for social interaction with other like-minded men.\(^{105}\) The findings of E N Marasinova, who has studied a rich set of eighteenth-century gentry correspondence, show that the nobleman of this time period had an intense need for relationships with like-minded individuals.\(^{106}\)

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\(^{105}\) In addition to minding the province, Bradley identifies an important shared tendency in Russian and European (notably, English) agricultural societies – that “perhaps above all” the chief motivating factor among the membership was the “desire for the ‘company and fellowship of like-minded men’.” He goes on to call these societies “[b]astions of masculinity and privilege,” 52. Indeed, the Free Economic Society from its very inception looks to have been interested in promoting this kind of contact among the membership, which—though it was not exclusively male, was primarily so. Therefore, its function as a social club should not be ignored. The society was to meet once weekly, usually on Wednesdays, from 4–6 pm. Members were allowed to have tea and coffee as they pleased. For members at a greater geographic remove, the society offered and actively encouraged participation as correspondents.

\(^{106}\) Marasinova, passim.
Described by Newlin as a “voracious consumer of periodical publications (both newspapers and journals), as well as an enthusiastic participant in the new serial print culture,” Bolotov attempted to take full advantage of the available avenues for communication.\textsuperscript{107} While the Works provided the first medium for Bolotov’s attempts to connect with other landowners in a publically circulated text, it was far from ideal. Finding that submitting his writings to the Works of the Free Economic Society was too expensive (due to the cost of mail) and too cumbersome (it took the editors too long to publish and Bolotov seems rather impatient in this regard), finding also that the Works had a far too low circulation rate, in 1778, Bolotov began publishing the Country Dweller (Sel’skoi Zhitel’), a periodical devoted entirely to domestic culture.\textsuperscript{108} Both the Country Dweller and the Economic Magazine (Ekonomicheskoi magazin, essentially, a continuation of his first periodical venture in that especially in the initial years of its existence the latter publication looks virtually identical to the former) offer still more dramatic examples of the same drive: the provincial noble’s desire to communicate with an audience of like-minded peers, his wish to become part of a network of nobles scattered around the province.\textsuperscript{109}

The landowner now turned journalist seems to have been keenly aware of the vagaries of the trade he was entering. In his memoirs he records that he understood his

\textsuperscript{107} Newlin, 157.

\textsuperscript{108} Bolotov, Zhizn’ i prikliucheniiia, 2:754-755.

\textsuperscript{109} It bears noting here that this, too, is strikingly similar to what Lomonosov had envisioned in 1763. The kinds of capable correspondents the poet wished to see in the province were sought both by the Free Economic Society and by at least one middling landowner.
task as one of making domestic culture, and especially the work of estate administration, so interesting and entertaining as to “appeal to our strange and not yet very literate public” (strannoi nashei i malogramotnoi eshche publike). His anxieties about the new project find ample expression on the pages of the publication. Bolotov began the first issue of *The Country Dweller* with an introduction in which he described a conversation he claimed to have overheard about his own periodical. Here, he imagined his audience and expressed many of the fears he had about communicating successfully with an active provincial public. Bolotov writes, “I do not doubt that many, seeing this first issue of my weekly compositions […] will think the same thing that was said recently by a certain personage at a big gathering […] ‘What sort of weekly compositions are these!’ he cried, “and will there ever be an end to these weekly compositions? There is not a single year in which the public isn’t burdened by [periodicals], sometimes—when one doesn’t seem to suffice—there are two or three of them. We have seen quite enough of these weekly compositions in the past few years!” Listing such Catherine-era journals as *All Sorts of Everything, Day-Labor, This and That, Hell’s Mail, The Drone, The Painter, The Purse* (Vsiakaia vsiachina, Podenshchina, I to i sio, Adskaia pochta, Truten’, Zhivopisets, Koshelek) and “God knows what other sorts of publications,” and noting that not one of them was able to survive for more than a year, “while some died in infancy” this personage (Bolotov reports) marvels at the misplaced optimism of the new enterprise and predicts that, in all likelihood, Bolotov’s *Country Dweller* will “wilt in accordance with

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111 Sel’skoi zhitel’, issue 1, pagination unclear.
the example set by the others.”\textsuperscript{112} Bolotov’s rather cautious optimism contained in his characteristically timid view of the public aside, striking here is the way the author-editor effectively inscribes his own periodical into the ranks of much more mainstream publications. Listing his \textit{Country Dweller} alongside other journals was akin to laying a claim to a place among the press establishment of the time: although nearly ten years had passed since the beginning of the small boom, it is known that the journals turned (that is, bound into) books still circulated among the reading public.\textsuperscript{113}

Yet this is not to say that Bolotov did not conceive of his own publication as a particular, subject-specific affair that would likely appeal to a unique segment of the population. The full title of the first of Bolotov’s two domestic advice periodicals, \textit{The Country Dweller, an Economic Publication Serving to Benefit Village Dwellers (Sel’ckoi zhitel’, ekonomicheskoe v pol’zu derevenskih zhitelei sluzhashchee izdanie)}, emphasized the provincial character of its target audience by alluding to the countryside twice. In the course of the imagined conversation among members of the reading public included in the first issue, Bolotov establishes a direct link between his \textit{The Country Dweller} and the \textit{Works of the Free Economic Society}. The interlocutors note that the periodical published by the Free Economic Society (as unpopular as it was) has already demonstrated just how few readers would be interested in such a text. About the \textit{Works}, they say specifically that “The majority of village dwellers does not even know that it exists, even though it is written for their benefit; and no better fate will meet this mister [the Country Dweller] It looks like he has placed his hopes on the village dwellers: what eager readers he has

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} See Marker, \textit{Publishing}, passim.
found!" The juxtaposition with the *Works* both bares Bolotov’s authentic fears about not reaching the province *and* serves to characterize his publication as an improvement on its predecessor: if the *Works* did not reach the provincial reader, *The Country Dweller* will try harder to accomplish the task.

As Bolotov continues to recount the conversation, the participants judge the contents of the periodical to be too boring to merit publication. Consequently, the potential readership for the *listki* (leaflets) is expected to be meager at best: “Please won’t you tell me who is going to read and who is going to buy such boring little leaflets [*listochki]*?” Some more pronouncements follow about the provincials’ disregard for printed publications and their unwillingness to pay money to be taught how to administer an estate, because many of them “think of themselves as already perfect oikonomoses [*sovershennye ekonomy*] and have no need for any advice and instructions.” Similarly, Bolotov’s suggestion that readers aid him in his enterprise by writing to the editor is judged to be doomed to failure since even the rate of response to the *Works*’ somewhat analogous gesture is found to have been catastrophically low. Bolotov expresses some of the most daunting fears anyone in his position may have had. Simultaneously, as he

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114 *Sel’skoi zhitel’,* issue 1, pagination unclear.

115 Ibid.

116 The Russian word *ekonom* corresponded quite closely to the Greek *oikonomos*, steward or manager of immovable property. However, the term proves tricky to translate to English, because such single-word possibilities as “housekeeper” do not convey accurately the degree to which the word could and did refer to the manager of the country estate.

117 To be fair, it should be noted here that the *Works* did print responses from provincials for many years. They may not have been great in number, but they did fill the pages of many issues.
transcribes this imagined conversation, he manages also to write into being a group of people who, while their predictions are, for the most part, far from optimistic, are still competent enough consumers of printed materials to discuss Bolotov’s endeavor at some length and with some understanding of the nature of the market. Bolotov creates an audience by writing about it.

Claiming that the discussion he witnessed led him to think seriously about the potential readership of his publication and the degree to which the readers may be unwilling to accept his advice, Bolotov decides to organize the entire enterprise in the form of letters, adding that he will only speak about a specific subject pertaining to rural housekeeping when asked to do so. He urges readers (both urban and rural) to write him, promising to publish their letters and lists the subjects in which he has some expertise. In addition to such topics as crops, gardens and home remedies, Bolotov offers that “those persons for whom regular economic business is boring” may write him to ask for a discussion of “the pleasures of village life” and ways to avoid boredom in the country. In addition to such topics as crops, gardens and home remedies, Bolotov offers that “those persons for whom regular economic business is boring” may write him to ask for a discussion of “the pleasures of village life” and ways to avoid boredom in the country. Here, as at several points in the publication, most striking is the number of times Bolotov mentions communication, both written and especially oral. In the introductory issue, Bolotov starts by recounting a conversation he overheard about himself; then casts the whole enterprise as a series of verbal exchanges between himself and the public, using words related to speaking quite liberally. The desire for interlocutors and his relative ease at writing them into existence is discernible throughout. Bolotov even creates for himself a kind of potential friend in the figure of the man who, throughout the conversation recounted by Bolotov, speaks positively about The Country Dweller and

\[\text{Sel'skoi zhitel'},\] issue 1, no page numbers.
whom Bolotov calls rather affectionately his “defender” (moi zashchititel’). In the next issue, Bolotov prints a letter from his “defender.” The letter was authored by Bolotov himself, who in Life and Adventures admits that “since the main goal of the publication was to engage the readership in real correspondence with [him],” in order to compel his audience by example, Bolotov “in the second issue and the next ones placed a few letters [he] had composed, pretending that [he] had received them, so as to encourage readers [to correspond with him], offering even various kinds of examples of letters [they might send in.]” He considered that with this “permissible ploy” (pozvolitel’noiu ulovkoi), he could, taking the European journals as example, render his own publication more lively and interesting.\textsuperscript{119}

This made-up reader began with outright praise of the publication: “Dear sir! Bravo! Mr. country dweller, bravo! Your leaflet (listok) is good, and I and many others like it.”\textsuperscript{120} This reader is a superbly supportive (if fictitious) member of Bolotov’s audience, which is shown to grow rather rapidly. In his response to the defender, Bolotov claims that he must stop writing his reply to the first letter, because he has just received another one, which must also be printed. In this second letter, the author reports that Bolotov’s periodical was being read by a group of people and was judged to be of good quality. Given the admission about the inauthentic nature of these missives, it becomes clear that on the pages of The Country Dweller, Bolotov fashions ex nihilo a lively, responsive audience and is intent on showcasing just how avidly his leaflet is being read. As in the previous issues, words related to speaking occur with some frequency in these

\textsuperscript{119} Bolotov, Zhizn’ i prikliucheniiia, 2:766

\textsuperscript{120} Sel’skoi zhitel’, issue 2.
pages, showing the extent to which Bolotov sought communication and connection. This is certainly in agreement with Newlin’s findings about the more general features of Bolotov’s personality and writings.\textsuperscript{121}

Scholars (as well as Bolotov himself) maintain that he was the primary, likely the sole, person responsible for the publication. Why then did he choose to frame the advice he dispensed as an epistolary conversation between various nobles? And did any “real” landowners ever respond? Bolotov’s \textit{Life and Adventures} offers a few hints on both subjects. First, as I mentioned earlier, the periodical was conceived by the editor as a venue for connecting with other gentry-men. Bolotov claims that soon after starting the periodical, he began to correspond with many people throughout the empire.\textsuperscript{122} Second, in his recollections, he identifies at least one frequent pseudonymous contributor: he wrote as Chistoserdov (Sincere) and was in fact an older landowner, Aleksei Alekseevich Vladykin, who turned out to be one of his most friendly readers and, in the end, an actual friend.\textsuperscript{123} Bolotov also admits receiving letters from persons who mocked the enterprise,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Newlin writes about a broad cultural phenomenon, the eighteenth-century nobleman’s tendency to perform a kind of splitting of the self for conversation, as so common that it had become almost a cliché by the late 1750s. Newlin, 55. While discussing Bolotov’s own poetry, Newlin calls him “the most relentlessly and massively apostrophic poet in all of Russian literature”, pointing out another manifestation of this gentry-man’s need for communication. Newlin, 136.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Bolotov, \textit{Zhizn’ i prikliucheniiia}, 2:771. At the same time, Bolotov also notes that upon his meeting with the journal’s publisher, the Moscow bookseller Ridger, the two of them marveled at the fact that the number of subscribers to the journal “did not exceed 80 persons” (\textit{Zhizn’ i prikliucheniiia}, 803). Iurii Lotman points out that in the 1790s, the reading public was to be counted in hundreds. See Iu. M. Lotman, \textit{Sotvorenie Karamzina} (Moscow: Kniga, 1987), 270. Somewhat paradoxically, it would appear that eighty is not such a small number even if Bolotov himself, along with his publisher Ridger, seem to have considered it lamentable.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Bolotov, \textit{Zhizn’ i prikliucheniiia}, 2: 779.
\end{itemize}
then claims that all of the correspondence was lost in a fire. The information Bolotov volunteers in his *Life and Adventures* sheds some light on the make-up of his readership; however, a full documentary reconstruction of it remains rather difficult. It then seems that we are left with the pages of his periodicals, *The Country Dweller* and the *Economic Magazine*, as he put them together.

On the pages of the *Country Dweller*, we find an encyclopedic treatment of every aspect of estate life given in the form of epistles exchanged between dear friends. Newlin explains Bolotov’s tendency to address his works to a “Dear Friend” as the product of his “fear of a hostile readership,” adding that “[Bolotov] may actually have believed, on a subconscious level, that he could preempt any sort of negative reaction by positing his readers’ friendliness from the very onset.”\(^{124}\) One may also evaluate this practice from another perspective, situating Bolotov’s periodicals in the context of late-eighteenth-century journalistic practices. In his attempt to give rise discursively to a provincial reading public, Bolotov initially performs an operation that may be regarded either as a splitting or a multiplication of the self, populating a vast Russian provincial landscape with his likes: concerned landowners who wish to participate in the newly robust print culture. One may, taking into account the conditions for periodical publishing in Russia at this time, consider this as an almost necessary creation of an audience. In a different context, Gary Marker has remarked that Russian intellectuals were ready to write for a large-scale readership at least a decade or two before such a readership existed, and his estimate seems a cautious one. Given the apparent lack of a competent readership,

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\(^{124}\) Newlin, 90.
Bolotov may be training his audience by modeling the behavior of an able consumer of text.

That he would repeat the same gesture in his next periodical, the *Economic Magazine* (*Ekonomicheskii magazin*) is also striking. In the rather lengthy (for the genre) introductory article to this publication, Bolotov would again use language that placed an emphasis on the building of rather intimate ties between himself and his readership. Addressing those readers who are unfamiliar with his earlier periodical venture, Bolotov describes them as people “with whom I have not had the fortune to become at all acquainted through my previous publication,” using the Russian *ni maleishego znakomstva*.

Hoping that this new venture will share some of the success of the previous one, he invites the new readership to correspond with him and adds that he “will consider it an especially great fortune and a source of pleasure if, [the readers] deign to grant him their acquaintance (again, *znakomstvo*)” and then, as had the readers of *The Country Dweller*, “having gotten to know him better, turn their acquaintance into friendship” (*obrativshikh, potom uznav menia koroche, znakomstvo svoe v samoe ko mne druzhestvo*), thus hoping to replicate exactly the communicative and discursive codes that governed the *Country Dweller*. Following some pages devoted to his desire to get to know his new readers, Bolotov addresses his old audience, whom he calls “acquaintances” (*znakomtsy*) and

125 In his *Life and Adventures*, Bolotov recounts meeting with Novikov in 1779 and agreeing on the terms according to which he would produce an addition to *Moscow News* under the title of *Economic Magazine*, a periodical venture in which he would continue the work begun in *The Country Dweller*.

126 *Ekonomicheskii magazin*, issue 1.

127 Ibid.
eventually admits that he considers some of his more active correspondents, friends. He assures the general readership that he, a compatriot (*ia es’m’ vash sograzhdanin*) with whom they share an upbringing, and, by conjunction, a cultural background, has nothing but their best interests and a love for the Fatherland in mind. Thus, he frames the entire enterprise as a patriotic gesture meant for the edification of like-minded individuals. The *Economic Magazine* becomes a textually constituted meeting place for provincial landowners.

Bolotov asks his readership repeatedly for letters and any other kind of useful correspondence that might come in the form of various “economic items” (*ekonomicheskie veshchitsy*) or notes on subjects of potential interest to a wider public. Even though his new periodical has a new title, Bolotov retains his old *nom de plume*: for those to whom his identity is unknown, he remains the Country Dweller.\(^{128}\) The editor also mentions repeatedly that he has become engaged in “private correspondence” (*privatnaia perepiska*)—outside of or in addition to the journalistic missives—with some of his most active collaborators, especially with those appearing under names of Uedinen, Chistoserdtsov, Dobrozhelatelev and Sostradatelev. (The names mean the following: Isolated, Sincere, Well-Wisher, Compassionate.) Given that Chistoserdtsov existed as a real nobleman, it is not implausible that the rest of the names refer to actual landowners as well.

Much like *The Country Dweller*, the second issue of *Economic Magazine* is comprised entirely of correspondence, in this case, between Bolotov and Uedinen, each addressing the other as a dear friend (*liubeznyi priiatel’*). First, the Country Dweller

\(^{128}\) Ibid., 1: 12-13.
contemplates the merits of a new method for producing fertilizer. Uedinen writes back with some ideas about how to preserve fresh cherries. Material pertaining to the everyday humdrum existence of the provincial gentry is published as a conversation between two rural residents. Generally, a great deal of the content of the publication comes in the form of letters exchanged by the group of correspondents mentioned above, who often write as if speaking: that is, they write about having been visited by the desire to speak about a given subject. Even when Bolotov writes to no one in particular, as when composing a short note about a given subject (for example, “On the ways of recognizing plants that contain blue dye”), he often signs the piece as “Your friend, the Country Dweller,” thus asserting friendly relations with the anonymous subscriber.

What remains quite palpable throughout the *Country Dweller* and the early years of the *Economic Magazine* is that good gentry housekeeping is just as important as the friendliness of the exchanges, the purely communicative function of the periodical. It is then tempting to suggest that at a time when the duties of the rural landlord were still flexible, not entirely formed, Bolotov and his correspondents (and the active ones seem rather few in number: about four, just as the editor admitted), are just as interested in rehearsing exemplary modes of private life in the province as they are in affirming the

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129 For reasons that are unknown to me, Bolotov eventually stopped composing letters and, as early as 1784, presented his readers primarily excerpts from a variety of publications (many of them foreign) on subjects relevant to life at the estate. Still, we may recall here that his *Life and Adventures* are also written in the form of letters to a “dear friend,” which is to say that the practice of writing to a dear friend remained quite prominent throughout this gentry-man’s career. Bolotov worked on his memoir from 1789 to 1816.

130 The four contributors Bolotov identified in his memoir appear under their pseudonyms in the periodical. Again, the degree to which this corresponded to a documentary reality is relatively marginal to my project.
legitimacy of their undertaking as *pomeshchiki* by entering into conversation about the particulars of estate administration.

Finally, the shape of these publications is interesting for the motley character of the contents. To a considerable degree, Bolotov’s writings have a kind of self-directed ethnographic dimension insofar that he not only gives advice, but also provides copious information about both Russian and non-Russian habits pertaining to a dizzying array of domestic matters. Be it the debatable health benefits of coffee and tobacco, methods for producing good fertilizer, the latest fashions in landscape architecture (a favorite topic), or ways of combating common vermin, Bolotov and company write at length. Their graphomania and desire for communication from which it likely springs aide in the formation of a Russian prose idiom capable of rendering the very ordinary. Bolotov’s textual output is “pre-novelistic” not only in the sense that Newlin finds him to be the perfect *pomeshchik* as he would later be imagined by Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy, but also because his remarkably copious, even prolix, writings on domestic culture likely made this province of life more accessible to literary representation.

If Novikov’s texts contributed to the development of an artistically refracting prose idiom for the depiction of rural nobility, Bolotov’s prescriptive (as opposed to creative) prose develops the textual space and language for the same object. Moreover, in his attempts to deal with low circulation figures, Bolotov borrows techniques developed at earlier stages of Russian periodical publishing by creating fictional and encouraging real provincials who are eager to participate in his journals as producers and consumers of agricultural advice. His periodical ventures amount to what seems, especially given the long-term popularity of his advice, like a very successful mixture of
two important Catherinean enterprises: (1) the Free Economic Society, which sought to reform the province in large part by re-thinking the place of educated persons (and especially the nobility) in it, but could not manage to reach the village reader and (2) relatively (for the time period in question) robust mainstream periodical publishing.

Again, the FES was not able to reach a readership; in contrast, there is evidence that Bolotov’s *Economic Magazine*, certainly not unaided by Novikov’s expertise and experience, was.\(^{131}\) Bolotov’s periodicals constitute an important milestone in the history of the discursive production of model domestic culture: the creation of a relatively well circulated printed weekly that seeks to structure provincial gentry domesticity.

**Karamzin’s Country Dwellers**

Karamzin made his professional debut in Russian literary culture (to the extent that professionalism was possible at this time) as one of Novikov’s young collaborators, joining the Friendly Literary Society in Moscow in 1785. Beginning in 1787, Karamzin became “to all intents and purposes the sole editor of *Children’s Reading for Heart and Reason*” (*Detskoe chtenie dlia serdtsa i razuma*), a periodical appended to *Moscow News* contemporaneous with Bolotov’s *Economic Magazine*.\(^{132}\) Novikov himself edited

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\(^{131}\) Year after year, the *Moscow News* would print announcements about the continuation of Bolotov’s enterprise, claiming it was performing its function well. An example from 1787 might provide an illustration here: “this periodical composition perfectly performs that task for which it is circulated among the public, that is, [it] brings significant benefits to the rural estate administrators, who care about their own and their subordinates’ well-being; and it is this very state of affairs that compels us to promise our readers the continuation of this publication next year according on the same terms as previously.”

Children's Reading in 1785 and 1786, eventually passing it on to Karamzin and Andrei Petrov.

One set of works authored by Novikov and published in this journal while he was still editor deserves to be mentioned here, because it contains a vision of noble life in the province that Karamzin would re-articulate later in his own career. “Correspondence between a Father and Son about Country Life” (“Perepiska otsa s synom o derevenskoi zhizni,” 1785) begins when a wealthy gentry-man has sent his spoiled offspring to the province with the hope that the youth might have a transformative experience there. In an angry letter documenting his distaste for life in the village, the boy describes how every morning his male cousins “take their rakes and go to the vegetable garden” where “one plants beans, the other chickpeas, the third weeds the beds, while the fourth pulls aside the unsuitable grasses.”¹³³ When invited to participate in this work, the young man refuses disdainfully, expecting, among other things, the mockery of his urban friends should he return to town with a tanned face and calloused hands. The country boys’ education consists of such activities as lengthy (multiple hours long) discussions about the uses of the potato crop. To the considerable chagrin of the young correspondent, even his cousins’ games amount to a useful activity related to life in the province: they play “cards” (karty) by taking local maps (karty) and reviewing information about provincial townships. Nearly every activity these young noblemen undertake at the estate seems a slightly refracted version of the Free Economic Society’s vision of model noble life in the province: from the emphasis on learning about the local geography, culture and

crops to insisting that the educated landowner be a useful worker in the province. This last idea—that the boys engage in manual labor—goes beyond the official discourse about exemplary country life, which, as far as I know, did not prescribe such direct participation in farm work.

In response to his son’s horror at his cousins’ rural lives, the young man’s father writes about the pleasure and utility of “garden and field work,” urging the boy to “Imagine, how pleasant it is to see in one place a tree that you’ve planted, in another place beds with beans, chickpeas or cucumbers that you’ve cultivated yourself!” Eventually, the young man is reformed and begins to work enthusiastically in the common garden. He ends his last letter with the excited expectation that, although the season has passed for the planting of beans, he may still plant a variety of other crops. The final letter in the correspondence ends with the following expectation expressed by the father about his son’s newfound appreciation for labor: “In this way you will become useful to your compatriots and will acquire their love and respect…” I should make clear that, in the father’s view, his son’s manual labor might transfer to other pursuits (specifically, academic ones), yet farm work must still be the route by which the young nobleman matures. Overall, this piece of edifying fiction is meant to offer the young readership the prospect of manual labor as a restorative exercise for a nobleman. As I will show in the pages that follow, Karamzin’s own writings about the role, duties, and life of the gentry-man in the province show him to be an heir both to Novikov and another of the latter’s collaborators, Bolotov.

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134 Ibid., 218.
135 Ibid., 224.
Lotman divides Karamzin’s career into two major periods, finding the beginning of the new (nineteenth) century to be the start of a distinct stage in the author’s creative evolution. Reasons for this are to be found in the conditions for literary production during Paul I’s reign. Once a follower and collaborator of Novikov, Karamzin could scarcely find full expression for the robust role he envisioned for literary culture in Russian society. Nevertheless, Lotman warns against seeing this divide as a complete break with the past.\textsuperscript{136} In fact, an examination of Karamzin’s nineteenth-century oeuvre for pre-novelistic renderings of noble life in the province shows some rather close links with the Novikovian heritage of the preceding epoch.

There is nothing new in considering Karamzin’s textual output as a body of works that prefigured developments in the subsequent period of literary production. When it comes to texts that may be deemed pre-novelistic, there is a great deal of well-known short prose works one might consider (prose fiction such as “My Confession,” “Poor Liza,” “The Island Borngol’m” or “The Knight of Our Time”) as well as such milestones in the Russian literary tradition as \textit{Letters of a Russian Traveler} (Pis’ma russkogo puteshestvennika) and \textit{History of the Russian State} (Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo).\textsuperscript{137} Yet to my mind, one of the most explicitly pre-novelistic of Karamzin’s “texts” is one that, as far as we know, was never written. Citing Karamzin’s letter to I.I. Dmitriev from 1798, Lotman points out that Karamzin seems to have been planning a novel— one that

\textsuperscript{136} Lotman, \textit{Sotvorenie}, passim.

\textsuperscript{137} That Karamzin’s \textit{History of the Russia State} was understood by much of the nineteenth-century literary establishment as, to paraphrase Pushkin, the sole work of Russian literature that showed a considerable range of expressiveness in the prose idiom should be noted, even though an analysis of this text falls outside of my project.
the author judged would be impossible to publish in Russian, perhaps due to the regrettable lack of possibility for unhindered cultural production during Paul I’s reign.\textsuperscript{138} Since the writer’s archive has been lost, we will never know whether Karamzin ever began to work on it. Still, in the letter to Dmitriev, he does provide a title of sorts “A Picture of Life” (“Kartina zhizni”).\textsuperscript{139} Without speculating about the contents of this, as far as is known, unwritten novel, I would emphasize simply that to consider the pre-novelistic characteristics of Karamzin’s textual output in the years following 1798 might be especially productive. Moreover, the title (“Kartina zhizni”) suggests—and again, I offer this cautiously given the unavailability of textual evidence—a plan for a text that might have shared its aims with the mimetic sensibilities of the novelistic tradition that dominated the next century.

Karamzin’s \textit{The Herald of Europe} (Vestnik Evropy), called “the patriarch of Russian journals” by Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, was seen by the next generation of writers as the beginning of a tradition they could recognize as their own.\textsuperscript{140} Anthony Glenn Cross suggests that the journal Karamzin founded and edited for the first two years of its existence be seen as the first of the so-called “thick journals” that would, in many ways, set the terms for literary production for most of the century.\textsuperscript{141} As I will argue below, under Karamzin’s editorship, \textit{The Herald of Europe} cultivated tastes for the novel, the

\textsuperscript{138} For a discussion of Karamzin’s initial optimism at the start of Paul I’s reign and the subsequent loss of such sentiments following Paul’s establishment of what Lotman calls “a veritable censorial terror,” see Lotman, \textit{Sotvorenie}, 256-258.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} A. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, “Vzgliad na russkuiu slovesnost’ v techenie 1823 goda.” in \textit{Sobranie stikhotvorenii} (Leningrad: 1948), 174.

\textsuperscript{141} Cross, 121.
genre that would come to take center stage by the middle of the nineteenth century. Karamzin’s journalistic output in the early years of the nineteenth century (1802-4) builds on aspects of Novikov’s and Bolotov’s journalistic activity and reads as preparation for the novelistic representation of gentry domestic culture. Interesting in this regard may be the following parallel: as I have observed in the preceding pages, the Catherine era periodicals had as their aim the shaping of “public opinion”; Karamzin’s journal, founded in the first years of Alexander’s reign, seems to have shared this goal.\footnote{Lotman writes that the editor wished to “foster public opinion.” He also notes that unlike any of its predecessors, Karamzin’s periodical loudly announced itself as a political publication produced by an individual, heretofore an unheard of thing in Russia. \textit{Sotvorenie}, 280.}

If Novikov’s \textit{The Drone} began with the stand-in for editor prompting an equally fictitious readership to submit their compositions for publication, Karamzin’s \textit{The Herald of Europe} opened with a letter to the editor (authored, of course, by Karamzin himself). This programmatic piece, the political dimensions of which, many though they are, fall outside of the bounds of this inquiry, begins with the following: “I will tell you (\textit{tebe}) in all sincerity that I became very glad upon seeing that you intend to publish a journal for Russia,” going on to announce that the time when reading was the prerogative of the few has passed and emphatically claiming the presence of a voracious and diverse readership. Karamzin emphasizes that this “reader” lives far away from the imperial centers, “on the border with Asia,” and yet regularly purchases reading material from itinerant vendors who, in his words, sell printed goods to “our country nobles” (\textit{sel’skim nashim dvorianam}).\footnote{\textit{Vestnik Evropy}, 1802, issue 1.} That the demographic character of the readership is emphasized (not
simply the nobility, but the landowning gentry who live at the peripheries of the empire) is important. The gesture recalls, recapitulates and gives new expression to the decades’ worth of attempts made by that the pre-Karamzin journalistic establishment in cultivating readerly habits among the provincial gentry. Karamzin’s emphasis on the fact that these readers are spread out across the vast landscape reads as the culmination of previous journalists’ efforts (especially Novikov’s, Bolotov’s and to a lesser degree the Free Economic Society’s publishing activities) to establish and maintain the lively transmission of information to and between rural nobles.

Lotman observes that, when it comes to the cultivation of a reading public capable of sustaining a relatively mature literary tradition, “a miracle” (chudo) took place between the 1780s and 1800s; Lotman credits Karamzin, among others, with this accomplishment.¹⁴⁴ At the end of Karamzin’s “reader’s” survey of the audience for printed matter, we find that “the family of the provincial gentry-man shortens long autumn evenings by reading some kind of new novel.”¹⁴⁵ The gentry reader, implicitly a likely subscriber to Karamzin’s periodical, is described first of all as a consumer of a novelistic tradition. Disparaging such representatives of the eighteenth century’s attempts at the genre of the novel as Milord Georg, which he calls “a stupid book” (glupaia kniga), this provincial hopes that, with encouragement, the current state of affairs (“We have so few Authors”) may be improved. Striking here is the following: (1) novelistic production occupies a relatively prominent position in this reader’s musings.

¹⁴⁴ For a wonderfully illuminating discussion of how in the 1770s, the very word “novel” could be unknown by members of polite society, see Sotvorenie, 231-232.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
about the current literary scene and (2) these musings seem rather similar to the views of a real provincial landowner, Andrei Bolotov, about the need, specifically, for a “home-grown” novelistic tradition.146

The subject of reading novels found expanded expression in Karamzin’s oft-cited piece entitled “About the Book Trade and Love for Reading in Russia” (“O knizhnoi torgovle i liubvi ko chteniu v Rossii,” 1802). Here, Karamzin famously claimed that the most vibrant segment of the Russian reading public is comprised, not of the gentry, many of whom, “even those who are wealthy, do not purchase newspapers,” but of the merchantry and city dwellers of modest means. (As with Novikov’s analogous formulations, Gary Marker has shown that it is very hard to find documentary evidence that would support, rather than refute, Karamzin’s claim.147) Still, this article also contains the assertion that many gentry-men are collecting what they themselves call “little libraries” (bibliotechki). These gentry are contrasted with “us” in a way that suggests strongly that they are provincials. And what is the favorite genre of this segment of the reading public? The novel, which the article claims, fosters identification between reader and text (specifically, hero) in a way that surpasses the capacity of any other genre. That the novel is the work of literature in which the provincial gentry see themselves brings to the fore Karamzin’s interest in the novelistic representation of the landowner. As in the piece discussed above, the lack of a home-grown novelistic tradition is stressed, so much that even the reading of Nikanor, the Ill-Fated Gentry-man (Nikanor, zloshchastnyi dvorianin) is found not wholly objectionable since it may train

146 See Newlin for a thorough discussion of Bolotov’s survey of literary production.
147 Martinsen, 11-33.
the readership for the consumption of more sophisticated texts. Judging by these two examples, Karamzin’s journal was actively interested in two things central to my inquiry: the provincial gentry as readers and novelistic texts in which they might, for lack of a better way to put it, recognize their own selves and lives.

Karamzin’s journal (although its content was more diverse than that of its predecessors) published a fair amount in the way of texts that purported to be letters sent in to the journal by private persons. For example, in the second issue for 1802, Karamzin publishes an article whose author (one O.O.—commonly assumed to be Karamzin himself) begins by claiming that he lives “in isolation” (в уединении) and, thus, likely in the provinces. It becomes tempting to imagine him as a representative of the next generation, coming at the heels of Bolotov’s Uedinen, writing now not about domestic culture per se, but a topic still very much central to gentry private life: the inadvisability of entrusting the education of young noblemen to foreigners. That this piece about the properly patriotic ways of educating the young is made to look like the opinion of a common, otherwise unremarkable nobleman, and a provincial at that, is striking for the extent to which even within the rather varied contents of the Herald of Europe, a place was allowed for the voice of the Russian landowner (admittedly, fabricated and then ventriloquised).

Karamzin cultivates with some consistency a veritable program for the behavior of the nobleman at home. In issue 12, 1802 in an article called “The Pleasant Prospects, Hopes and Wishes of Our Time” (“Приятные виды, надежды и желания нынешнего времени”), which Lotman calls “one of the programmatic articles of the journal,” the author first outlines succinctly the duties of the Russian nobleman: to support, represent
and protect the peasantry. Then, he goes on to consider the virtues of, and pleasure afforded by, life at home: “I would send all luxurious persons to the country for some time, so that they may witness the difficult agricultural labors” from which they profit, in the hopes that these gentry-men will be less likely to spend “one hundred rubles on pineapple for dessert.” Instead of careless consumption, he advocates careful, thrifty management and the betterment of the peasants’ living conditions by the founding of schools and hospitals, encouragement of better agricultural methods and the like, calling all such activities a way to “leave a monument to oneself.”148 Good gentry housekeeping becomes a route toward the most lasting sort of self-creation for the nobility. The building of roads and bridges which, he hopes, will “bear the names of [the gentry who financed the projects]” is encouraged in part, because an individual landowner’s name, marker of self and identity, will be inscribed onto a relatively immutable part of the landscape, thus giving very concrete expression to the nobleman’s useful presence in the countryside. When Karamzin suggests that the nobles become more responsible managers of the province, he does so in such terms that underscore that this will contribute not only to the betterment of the nation (though it perhaps bears repeating that this is presented as a thoroughly patriotic proposition) but will also give permanent expression to both individual and group gentry identity. “The gentry is the soul and noble image of the entire nation” (Dvorianstvo est’ dusha i blagorodnyi obraz vsego naroda) the piece continues, and while “Not all people can be fighters or judges …

148 Vestnik Evropy, issue 12.
everyone can serve the fatherland.” 149 After listing ways in which various people can be useful to the state, Karamzin ends with a sentiment close to Vladimir’s remark in Pushkin’s Novel in Letters that “the title of the landowner is also a kind of service,” identifying estate administration as service that is “equally useful for the state” (gospodin pechetsia o svoikh poddanykh, vladelets sposobstvuet uspekham zemledeliia: vse ravno polezny gosudarstvu). 150

In 1803 Karamzin would author a response to his own programmatic writings, again producing a text written by a fictitious reader, this time, a subscriber who appears to be shaped by the journal. It would be another fabricated personage, one Luka Eremeev, from whose perspective Karamzin penned the “Letter of a Country Dweller” (Pis’mo sel’skago zhitelia), in which a vision of exemplary gentry behavior in the province would find still more thorough expression, now almost entirely in terms having to do with domestic culture. There are several ways in which Luka, when it comes to his basic understanding that the gentry-man’s work in the province is as useful as any other kind of service, repeats Karamzin’s earlier formulations discussed above.

It is, to my mind, important that Luka was, from the start (even before returning to the province) attempting earnestly to manage his property as well as he knew how. He is, in this sense, an enlightened landlord and heir to the preceding century’s ethos of humane behavior toward others (or, in his own words, he is “infused with the spirit of the philanthropic Authors” [napitan dukhom filantropicheskikh Avtorov] – and it is later made clear that these are foreigners: English, French and Germans). He required a very

149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
low quitrent from his serfs, wished to have neither a steward (upravitel’) nor a bailiff (prikashchik) and had invited his peasants to elect their own leader. The gentry-man had been estranged from his patrimony for many years, managing it from afar and, as it turns out, poorly. Deciding to return, he expects to find his village “in a flourishing state” (v tsvetushchem sostoianii), but instead finds it in complete disarray. The “back story” Eremeev provides renders the pomeshchik an absolutely necessary presence in the province, since even a highly enlightened absentee landowner is shown incapable of taking proper care of the estate to ensure the well-being of his subjects.

Also important is the fact that in the “Letter” Karamzin provides a fairly developed narrative about Luka’s transformation as Eremeev himself understands it, “You know that I once was ablaze with the zeal to have a vast sphere of activity, in my immodest reliance on my own love for goodness and humanity. But a lengthy education in the school of experience and hard knocks, this cruel master, has curbed my pride—curbed it to such an extent that I, having abandoned all further demands for the lustrous lot of glorious persons, have taken up—the plough and the wooden plough (plug i sokha).”¹⁵¹ Just what does it mean for this nobleman to have “taken up the plough,” something the founding members of the Free Economic Society vaguely lamented not doing in 1765 (sokhoiu deistvovat’), an act quite analogous to Novikov’s fictional gentry’s use of rakes in 1785? Are we to take the phrase literally, understand that Luka is performing peasant labor? I would posit that probably we are not. Then why use this particular language? After all, one might well imagine the use of another kind of

formulation that would convey the idea of having gotten more involved in the administration of one’s own estate. Having found that “the good agriculturalist is the first benefactor of humankind and the most useful citizen in society,” Luka has become the model farmer, if not via direct participation in agricultural projects (this fantasy about the gentry-man’s manual labor would find its fullest expression in the 1870s in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina), but by becoming “the most hard-working estate manager,” taking an avid interest in every aspect of estate life and work: from peasant huts and fertilizer to peasant schools and medicine. He even begins, if not to participate, then certainly, to witness their labor by spending the day in the fields.\textsuperscript{152} The proper management of his property becomes articulated as the gentry-man’s foremost obligation and an exemplary pursuit. The allusion to farm work, then, although meant to be taken as figurative, rather than literal, emphatically underscores the absolute necessity that the gentry-man’s (observing, if not working) body be present on the estate.

Although in my view Luka never turns to farming, he does participate directly in some manual labor, which he describes as follows, “Thus, for example, with great pleasure, I dug up with my own hands a source of fresh water near the biggest road, I surrounded it with unpolished rocks, made a turf canapé, and often sit there and happily look at the passers-by, who quench their thirst with my water…”\textsuperscript{153} The landowner here follows Karamzin’s suggestion (articulated in a previous article) that the nobleman ought to mark the landscape by his work, alter it and, in a sense, make it all the more his own: hence, the emphasis on the water being his.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
The letter ends with a statement that both recapitulates the preceding century’s attempts at writing about the landowner in the province and looks forward to developments that would take place in the coming decades. Luka, rather close to Pushkin’s Vladimir here, writes,

… No, I cannot doubt their love for me! This certainty, dear friend, is pleasant for my soul; but much more pleasant, more sweet is the certainty that I am living in such a way that really benefits five hundred people who have been entrusted to me by fate. It is deplorable to live with people who do not wish to love us: but it is most intolerable to live a useless life. The main right of the Russian gentry-man is to be a landowner, the main duty (dolzhnost’) is to be a kind landowner; he who fulfils it serves the fatherland as a faithful son, he serves the monarch as a faithful subject: because Alexander wishes the happiness of the peasants.¹⁵⁴

Both here and throughout “Letter of the Country Dweller,” the text contains many features of what would become the archetype for the plot, to be developed throughout the nineteenth century, of the gentry-man’s return to and desired or imagined role on his ancestral estate. From the initial return to a mismanaged piece of property in urgent need of proper administration, to the relatively detailed survey of the landowner’s duties to his subjects, Karamzin’s 1803 text gives greater coherence to a particular vision of noble life in the province that would become quite commonplace in and be variously re-worked by a variety of texts (many of them novels) produced in the course of the century.

A few more words are in order about the genesis of this conception of gentry life. Karamzin’s “Letter of a Country Dweller” can be better understood by situating it not only among Karamzin’s own writings, but also vis-à-vis those of his predecessors Andrei Bolotov and Nikolai Novikov. The title of the piece coincides with the title of Bolotov’s

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 295.
Sel'skoi zhitel’, which Karamzin was likely to know at least by name. The letter is addressed to a “dear friend” who “wishes to know all the details about my [Luka’s] isolation” (vse podrobnosti moego uedineniia). Both the friendly address and the reference to isolation (uedinenie) are Bolotovian, if we recall that Uedinen was one of the pseudonymous contributors to the latter’s The Country Dweller. That Karamzin’s Luka Eremeev begins his missive with “we, country people” (my, derevenskie liudi) and then goes on first to lament how uninteresting country life may seem compared to life in the city, then to explain that he has become able to lead a highly fulfilling existence upon his return to the province, recapitulates a prominent aspect of Bolotov’s publication: extensive musings about how lively and interesting life in the country can be. Luka’s statement that “the elderly and country dwellers” like to speak at great length (as a way of explaining and almost apologizing for what he judges to be the prolix dimensions of the letter) and his reference to the subject matter of his missive as “rural heroic feats” (sel’skie podvigi) recall both the loquaciousness of Bolotov’s landowners and the subject matter of their missives. Luka’s discursive turn to manual labor echoes Novikov’s 1785 nobles’ farm work. Ultimately, Karamzin’s text reads as a part of a development taking place within various segments of the periodical press, a development in the course of which the “country dweller” gains an increasingly textured representation and self.

The two chapters that follow provide ample evidence of this rural resident’s longevity in the Russian literary imagination – particularly, though not exclusively, in the novelistic output. Specifically, the ways in which Luka takes care to abolish drinking in his territories (except on very special occasions) and to become good friends with his local priest all but prefigures what Gogol would write some forty-five years later in his
prescriptive essay “The Russian Landowner” ("Russkoi pomeshchik"). Eremeev’s interest in peasant health and in the minutiae of estate life in general will be replayed by the much younger prince Nekhliudov of Tolstoy’s “A Landowner’s Morning.” Thus, Karamzin’s text at once makes active use of much that came before it and looks forward to the nineteenth century’s attempts to render artistically the private life and work of the provincial landlord who wishes earnestly to live well. Intertextuality is not what is at stake here; rather, it is that Karamzin’s text articulates quite clearly the parameters within which a prominent topic in the subsequent prose tradition ought to and will be examined.

Pushkin’s Novel in Letters

“It is no accident that the eighteenth century became the century of the letter: through letter writing the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity,” writes Jurgen Habermas.155 According to the German philosopher, out of this epistolarity would come the Western European novelistic tradition (Richardon, Rousseau), a tradition that would create a fictional world of subjects easily accessible for the identification of the bourgeois reader. The particular demographic characteristics of Habermas’ subject (the bourgeoisie) do not match the parts of the Russian literary establishment and reading public that have been at the center of my inquiry. Moreover, the wider political implications of the Habermassian public sphere do not apply to the Russian case (and fall outside the aims of this inquiry). Instead, I suggest that the transpositions of Western European literary culture, beginning with Catherine’s 1769 encouragement of a periodical press modeled after the Spectator, produced if not a political, then a discursive

and literary consequence: the gradual development of a novelistic idiom that took the nobleman as central object of representation.

Throughout the texts examined in this chapter, the epistolary genre remains prominent in attempts to produce discursively a relatively new type: the provincial landowner who communicates with like-minded individuals, members of his social estate. Taking into account the necessary modification that we are not dealing with a Russian “bourgeoisie,” it is still tempting to suggest that Habermas’ point about both the epistolary and the novelistic texts serving as a medium for subject-formation applies, albeit in a limited way, to the texts studied here.

A persistent feature shared by all the works I’ve considered (the works of Novikov, Bolotov, Karamzin and, finally, Pushkin) is the choice of the letter as the textual space that affords the greatest possibilities for the rendering of the provincial landowner. The last work, Pushkin’s Novel in Letters, shows the shift from the epistolary to the novelistic. Pushkin’s choice of the epistolary novel as a genre may be motivated partly by the degree to which Vladimir is the embodiment of a long evolution of the social program for the behavior of the gentry-man in the province; that this program was developed largely in the space of the letter (in its many manifestations described in the preceding pages) finds expression in Pushkin’s contemplations about writing a novel about the pomeshchik.

Of the various sets of notes Pushkin produced during his transitional period (the turn to prose), one of the shortest, most loosely schematic pieces happens also to be, in some ways, the most revealing. I cite these short notes, entitled “What does the Russian gentry mean now?..” (Russkoe dvorianstvo chto nyne znachit?.., 1834) in full, “What
does the *Russian gentry* mean now?—by what means is the gentry-man made?—what follows from this. Deep disdain for this title. The gentry-man-landowner. His influence and significance—recruitment—his rights. **The gentry-man in service—****the gentry-man in the province.** The provenance of the gentry. The gentry-man at court.”¹⁵⁶ (bold emphasis mine) Granted, these notes are sketchy and abrupt. (It is thought that Pushkin took them following a conversation with the Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich.) Still, the sparseness of the words on the page brings to the fore what persisted as a central tension in gentry experience. The succinct, if somewhat enigmatic formulation, “*The gentry-man in service—*the gentry-man in the province,” contains the kernel of the problem. Are the two being juxtaposed here as separate routes available for the nobleman of the time? Or is Pushkin suggesting, like young Vladimir in his *Novel in Letters*, that a productive private life in the country can amount to something analogous to state service? It is, of course, impossible to tell. What is quite clear in these notes, however, is that an examination of available modes for gentry existence continues to occupy this very prominent participant in the Russian cultural production of the time. Even the urgency with which the notes begin, re-articulating a question that began to accrue significance at least as early as 1762, indicates that defining the Russian gentry-man remained a cultural problem for many decades following the piece of legislation that granted the nobleman the legal right to a private, domestic existence.

In 1829, Pushkin had young Vladimir confidently proclaim his intention to pursue a life of estate administration and personal fulfillment in the country. Still, he was not able to publish a finished text that would endow such a choice and life with legitimacy.

¹⁵⁶ Pushkin, *PSS*, XII, 206.
Much as I hope to have shown Novel in Letters to be a product of eighteenth-century developments in the discursive construction of noble life in the province, it is not an end product in the sense that it is unfinished, in a way unsuccessful, although perhaps deliberately so. Novel in Letters prompts its audience to conduct a retrospective survey of the pomeshchik in the preceding literary tradition. It bares its own construction as an attempt to re-write Karamzin who was re-writing of Novikov and Bolotov. As such, the novel cannot and should not be finished, because it is an exercise in thinking about writing a novel, not writing one.

It is also a piece interested in other, still more practical aspects of novelistic production. Pushkin’s Liza asserts that in the provinces people “are more engaged in literary culture than in Petersburg.” She describes a lively, competent, incredibly interested readership comprised entirely of rural residents, readers who are capable of defending Pushkin's own “Count Nulin” (Graf Nulin, 1827) against Nadezhdin's critiques published in 1829 in the Herald of Europe. Much like his predecessors, Pushkin seems intent on the cultivation of a discerning provincial reading public, one that he describes as comprised of some of the empire’s best, most careful readers. In this text, as in the works I’ve discussed as part of its pedigree, the Russian provinces are rendered as a space inhabited by a significant audience whose existence and attention might sustain a market for a novelistic tradition.

In the same year Pushkin produced his Novel in Letters (1829), an unpublished and, from the looks of it, unfinished text, Faddei Bulgarin penned what has been called the first Russian “bestseller.” In his novel Ivan Vyzhigin, Bulgarin articulated the role and duties of the provincial landowner with some (largely commercial) success. I turn to this
text in the next chapter to consider ways in which the novel would become one of the chief vehicles for the cultivation of programmatic directives for gentry behavior in the provinces. And the periodical press, having bloomed in the decades following Pushkin’s “Novel in Verse,” would remain a major force in the formation and transmission of the rural landowner’s domestic ideology. As I will show in the next chapter, both the mainstream press and specialized publications aimed at the rural gentry would play a crucial role in the literary polemics between Faddei Bulgarin and Nikolai Gogol, both of whom attempted, with varying degrees of success, to produce a palatable vision of the ideal landowning citizen in the provinces.
CHAPTER 2

How to Write a Model Landowner: Faddei Bulgarin, Nikolai Gogol and the Search for the Perfect Pomeshchik

Беда, что скучен твой роман,—*
Alexander Pushkin, 1831.

У нас теперь многие пишут по части сельского хозяйства.*
Moscow News, 1840.

The Gentry-man in the Province

On July 24, 1829, Nikolai Gogol wrote the following in a letter to his mother:

It would be different if a man groveled somewhere where not a single minute of life was lost in futility, where every minute was a storing of rich experience and knowledge; but to fritter away one’s entire existence in a place where absolutely nothing looms ahead, where years and years are spent in petty occupations, this would resound in one’s soul as a very heavy indictment—this would be death. What happiness is there in attaining at fifty, say, the position of a State Counsellor

* The trouble is that your novel is boring.

This oft-quoted epigram was published anonymously in the 1831 almanac *Dawn (Dennitsa)*. The full text reads as follows:

Не то беда, Авдей Флюгарин, The trouble is, Avdei Fliugarin, not that
Что родом ты не русский барин, You’re not a Russian *barin*,
Что на Пarnass ты цыган, That on Parnass you’re a gypsy,
Что в свете ты Vidocq Figliarin: That in polite society you’re Vidocq Figliarin:
Беда, что скучен твой роман. The trouble is that your novel is boring.

The epigram alludes to the most famous pejorative nickname the so-called “literary aristocrats” gave Bulgarin. The last name “Figliarin” was first used by Peter Viazemsky in the idiomatically titled 1825 poem “Seven Fridays in a Week” (“*Sem’ piatnits na nedele*)” to suggest that the target of his attack was a *figliar*, literally a circus acrobat, and, by extension, someone willing to do nearly anything in order to please the less-than-discerning public. Vidocq refers to the surname of Eugène-François Vidocq, former criminal and eventual founder and first chief of the French National Police (then, *La Sûreté Nationale*). In the Russian context, the name Vidocq reflected primarily the literati’s awareness of Bulgarin’s collaboration with the Third Section. Avdei Fliugarin is Pushkin’s own rather felicitous invention, a nickname meant to recall the phonetic characteristics of Faddei Bulgarin’s name.

For a nuanced discussion of Bulgarin’s literary reputation, see A.I. Reitblat, *Vidok Figliarin (Istoryia odnoi literaturnoi reputatsii)*, *Voprosy literatury* 3 (1990): 73-114.

* Nowadays, many people are writing about farming.
with wages hardly sufficient for a decent living and without the power to bring mankind a pennyworth of good? The young people of St. Petersburg seem to me very absurd: they keep on shouting that they serve not for the sake of grades, not in order to be rewarded by their superiors—but ask them why they serve at all, and they will not be able to answer; the only apparent reason is that otherwise they would remain at home and twirl their thumbs. Still sillier are those who leave the remote provinces where they own land and where they might have become excellent farmers—instead of the useless people they are. *Why, if a person of gentle birth must serve the state, let him serve it in his own manor;* but what he does is to dilly-dally in the capital where not only does he not find an office but squanders an incredible amount of money which he gets from home. (emphases added)\(^{157}\)

A few paragraphs later in the same letter, Gogol would apologize for having kept for himself the money sent by his mother and meant to be paid to the Custody Board. As compensation for his transgression, the young writer offered that his mother become “the lawful and absolute owner” of his patrimony.\(^{158}\) Vladimir Nabokov, who calls Gogol’s correspondence “dreary reading” but quotes the above letter in full, writes that “the part about the futility or even sinfulness of striving to become a pen-scratching official in an abstract town instead of cultivating the ‘real’ land given by God to the Russian gentry, foretells the ideas Gogol later expounded in his *Selected Passages from Letters to Friends,* that he himself was quite eager to dispose of that land in any fashion also

\(^{157}\) Quoted in Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 15-16. For reasons discussed in the pages that follow, I have opted to use Nabokov’s translation here. All subsequent allusions to Gogol’s texts will be from Nikolai Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 14-i tomakh* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1937-1952); documentation will be provided parenthetically within the body of the text with volume followed by page number. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian are my own. The Russian original of this letter can be found in X:146.

\(^{158}\) Ibid., 19.
explains some of their contradictions.”

It is worth emphasizing Nabokov’s point about this early glimpse of what would become one of Gogol’s chief preoccupations in the concluding years of his career: the domestic duties of the Russian provincial landowner. In the pages that follow, I will examine some of the texts in which Gogol tackles this topic (both volumes of *Dead Souls* and a portion of *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*) with an emphasis on the novelistic representation of rural gentry domesticity.

First, a closer look at Nabokov’s translation of the 1829 missive is in order. Where his English text reads “Why, if a person of gentle birth must serve the state, let him serve it in his own manor,” Gogol had written, “esli uzhe dvorianinu nepremenno nuzhno posluzhit’, sluzhili by v svoikh provintsiiakh.” Nabokov’s choice of “serve in his own manor” clarifies and, to a degree, interprets the Russian original, because to “serve in their own provinces” (a more literal translation) could also mean taking a civil service position in the local provincial town, potentially still leaving one’s “manor” nearly as mismanaged as it would have been had the owner taken up residence in the capital. Which does Gogol mean: province or manor, a job outside the home or estate administration? This seemingly trivial potential for a dual translation of *provintsii* points to a topic that surpasses the simple matter of what the young author meant to convey to his mother. By the time at which Gogol made the rather impatient formulation (esli uzhe dvorianinu nepremenno nuzhno posluzhit’), the nobility had been freed from obligatory

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159 Nabokov, 21-22.

160 Furthermore, Nabokov’s “manor” contains a pun on “manner,” suggesting perhaps the relative multiplicity of possibilities for a potentially useful life in the province.
service for some sixty-seven years. In the aftermath of the previous century’s attempt to arrive at a palatable identity for the landowner as a home-bound creature, there arose gradually a widely held conception of the provincial gentry-man as possibly the most perfect servant to the state. Nabokov’s translation conveys this idea: working in one’s “manor,” becoming “a good farmer” is service to the state.

The particular cultural and economic conditions that prompted this shift in the public’s conception of the gentry-man’s position in Imperial Russia are best described by historians. In her study of food and agriculture in tsarist Russia, Alison K. Smith writes that: “[d]uring the 1820s, in particular, agricultural writers developed the idea that Russia’s nobles had a duty to the state and to its citizens to pursue an active role in improving local agriculture—to become authorities on the subject, and authoritative on their estates”\(^{161}\) (emphasis mine). Increasingly, the gentry-man’s estate administration took on the characteristics of an important contribution to the nation, a vocation akin to state service. As Smith shows, this was due both to Nicholas-era economic conditions and a long-standing (dating back at least to the 1760s) view that Russian agricultural practices lagged decades behind their Western counterpart and were in urgent need of active reconsideration and improvement. That Russia would remain a predominantly agrarian society well into the next century made the problem all the more pressing.

Using instructional literature as her source, Smith goes on to suggest that “Russian agricultural writers” came to view the transformation of the provinces as “a moral duty for Russia’s landlords—its nobles—and not simply as an economic or political job.” She quotes from the inaugural 1821 issue of the Farming Journal

\(^{161}\) Smith, Recipes for Russia, 123.
(Zemledel’cheskii zhurnal), where “improving agriculture was described as a ‘holy duty’ of Russia’s landlords,” then adds that “soon other authors further developed a religious metaphor for agricultural improvement.”162 I will treat Gogol’s attempts to write the model landowner towards the end of this chapter; for the moment, I would only underscore that what Smith calls a “religious metaphor for agricultural improvement” (certainly a formulation that would be applicable to some of Gogol’s late writings) was first developed by writers of instructional non-fiction. Although Gogol’s ideological position differed sharply from the Westernizing agriculturalists about whom Smith writes, that they shared any aspect of an idiom used for the characterization of a landowner’s position in society is quite remarkable.

Just who were the writers charged with formulating the gentry-man’s domestic ideology? Some were knowledgeable, serious scientists, others were earnest landowners wishing to share their experience and findings. Still others, to paraphrase Vladimir Burnashev, an exceedingly prolific author of domestic advice literature aimed at the rural gentry, had little real knowledge of the matter.163 During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, due to the increasing availability of printed texts as the vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, the task of writing about the duties of “the gentry-man in the province” could potentially be undertaken by writers as different from each other as Alexander Pushkin, from whose schematic notes the title of this section derives, to

162 Ibid., 125.

163 In his reminiscences published serially in the Russian Herald (Russkii vestnik) and a handful of other periodicals, Burnashev intimated that both he, during the early years of his career, and some of his colleagues had scant knowledge of agriculture. See for example, Vladimir Burnashev, “Vospominaniia peterburgskogo starozhila,” Russkii vestnik 12 (1872): 670-704, passim.
Vladimir Burnashev, whose poor command of the Russian language was lampooned in the periodical press of his time.164

Between the late 1820s and early 1850s, a good number of authors of domestic advice literature had close ties to such leading figures in the commercially minded, middlebrow institutions of Russian print culture as Faddei Bulgarin, Nikolai Grech, Osip Senkovsky and Nikolai Polevoi. Bulgarin wrote instructional literature himself. He also had professional connections with Burnashev. Nikolai Polevoi’s brother Ksenofont helped their sister Ekaterina Avdeeva (née Polevaia) to become one of the most popular authors of instructional non-fiction on a vast variety of subjects from cooking to establishing farms. Burnashev and Avdeeva were some of the most prolific authors on their subjects during these years. Osip Senkovsky’s Library for Reading (Biblioteka dlia chteniia) catered to the provincial reader’s tastes by publishing a good deal of information about gentry domestic culture. Senkovsky’s journal had a famously high circulation rate. Even though claiming that these writers had a monopoly on the discursive construction of model gentry domesticity would perhaps push the point too far, it certainly would not be an exaggeration to suggest that a strong contingent of the Russian how-to book market during the 1830s and 1840s was held by these representatives of the middlebrow institutions of Russian print culture. It follows that producing prescriptive models for the gentry home was a task marked, to some degree, as a middlebrow, aesthetically unsophisticated enterprise.

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164 The title, “The gentry-man in the province” (dvorianin v derevne) comes from Pushkin’s notes “Russkoe dvorianstvo chto nyne znachit.” PSS, XII, 206. For a treatment of Pushkin’s writings on the gentry, see Driver, Pushkin, 21-52.
Alexander Zholkovsky characterizes Gogol as a writer with a “dual orientation toward the literary aristocrats and the lower-brow public,” an orientation that though “mostly successful” was “always fraught with the potential for rift.” It is well known that writers of a markedly commercial orientation often misunderstood or otherwise disparaged Gogol’s prose from the beginning of his career, beginning with Nikolai Polevoi’s reviews of Evenings on a Farm near Dikan’ka onward. Yet it is perhaps the “dual orientation” noted by Zholkovsky (among others) that accounts for both Gogol’s interest in model Russian provincial domestic culture and his difficulties in writing about it. To what extent can Gogol’s challenges in the representation of the model landowner be explained by the fact that the very business of producing such figures was often the work of writers of a more commercial orientation, whose sensibility he found mostly repellent, if also attractive in the limited sense that these writers were able to reach a wide audience? To answer this question as fully as the scope of this inquiry permits will be one of my tasks in this chapter.

Publishing chiefly during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, both Faddei Bulgarin and Nikolai Gogol wrote at a time characterized by major shifts in the

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166 I would emphasize the qualifier “Russian” here, since, in my view, a treatment of Ukraine in Gogol’s oeuvre would require a separate study. For work on this subject, see for example, Roman Koropeckyi and Robert Romanchuk’s “Ukraine in Blackface: Performance and Representation in Gogol’s Dikan’ka Tales, 1” Slavic Review 62, Vol. 3 (Autumn, 2003): 525-547.
formation of the Russian literary establishment. A number of scholars have shown that
for a good deal of this time, Bulgarin and Gogol were “perceived by much of the reading
public as genuine literary rivals,” to borrow Anne Lounsbery’s formulation.\textsuperscript{167} Abram
Reitblat has long suggested that considering relatively understudied aspects of Bulgarin’s
prolific and multi-generic career can yield a great deal when it comes to understanding
the process of literary production at his time, noting particularly the need for more studies
that juxtapose Bulgarin with Gogol.\textsuperscript{168}

Both Bulgarin and Gogol sought actively to participate in the discourse about the
model Russian provincial gentry-man, writing about this topic in multiple genres. In
addition to the novelistic portrayal of the country nobility, both writers also produced
visions of the gentry home in texts with a primarily instructional tenor. To date, few
studies have examined advice literature as a genre that offers a significant supplement to
our understanding of the novelistic representation of the rural nobility in Nicholas-era
Russia.\textsuperscript{169} As I will show in the pages that follow, tracing closely the function of how-to
texts in the nexus of works produced by Bulgarin, Gogol and some contemporaries

\textsuperscript{167} Anne Lounsbery, \textit{Thin Culture, High Art: Gogol, Hawthorne, and Authorship in
Nineteenth-Century Russia and America} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,
2007), 133. See also, N.N. Akimova, “Bulgarin i Gogol” and A.I. Reitblat, “Bulgarin i
ego chitateli,” in A.I. Reitblat, ed., \textit{Chtenie v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii: sbornik
nauchnykh trudov} (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia biblioteka SSSR im. V.I. Lenina, Otdel
issledovaniia chteniaia, propagandy knigi i rekomendatel'noi bibliografii, 1992), 55-66.

\textsuperscript{168} For the first point, see Abram Reitblat, “Tartuskii fenomen” in \textit{NLO}, 88 (2007) :161;
for the second point: Abram Reitblat. “Gogol’ i Bulgarin: K istorii literaturnykh
vzaimootnoshenii” in \textit{Gogol: Materialy i issledovaniia}. (Moscow: “Nasledie,” 1995),
82-98.

\textsuperscript{169} A notable exception is Catriona Kelly’s \textit{Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite
Conduct and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin} (New York, NY: Oxford University Press,
2001) where she briefly (pp.131-132) considers Volume One of \textit{Dead Souls} as a
novelized conduct book.
reveals rather close links between the novelistic and extra-literary representation of the gentry home.

“A Landowner of Whose Sort May God Grant More to Russia”

Bulgarián’s novel Ivan Vyzhigin (1829), a transposition of Alain René Lesage’s early-eighteenth-century picaresque Gil Blas de Santillane (1715-1735), responded to the reading public’s need for long prose fiction that would depict familiar, Russian life.170 In the words of the authors of one influential study of Russian Imperial print culture, Ivan Vyzhigin was “greeted by the contemporary reading public as the first ‘Russian’ novel.”171 It sold exceedingly well. Specific figures tend to be given as approximately seven thousand copies in 1829 alone, with the first print run of three or four thousand selling out within weeks of publication. Ronald LeBlanc, who has called the novel “penitential reading” on more than one occasion, attributes its commercial success largely to the advertising campaign that preceded and accompanied its publication, and was carried out on the pages of periodicals edited by Bulgarián himself, his long-time collaborator Nikolai Grech and such colleagues as Nikolai Polevoi. LeBlanc treats Vyzhigin as an aesthetically uncomplicated work that asks for very little from the reader familiar with Lesage’s original, which had been popular in Russia until as late as the

170 For a thorough treatment of Russian transpositions of Gil Blas, see Ronald LeBlanc, The Russianization of Gil Blas: A Study in Literary Appropriation (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1986).

1810s. In his view, prime among the qualities that make *Vyzhigin* a simple text are its “high degree of predictability” and didacticism. The latter of these characteristics becomes especially palpable in portions of the novel that depict such “types” as an enlightened landowner and his wastrel neighbor. Its aesthetic shortcomings aside, Bulgarin’s novel is noteworthy for its reasonably successful attempt to transmit a particular vision of a productive noble life in the provinces.

Bulgarin presents his model landowner in a chapter rather predictably entitled, “A landowner of whose sort may God grant more to Russia. As goes the clergyman, so the parish.” The title of this chapter as well as the landowner’s name, Rossianinov, combine to frame this figure as more universal than particular; an all-Russian *pomeshchik*, who embodies the domestic ideology put forth by the novel. Likely in order to amplify the edifying effect of the exemplary gentry-man farmer, Rossianinov is followed in the text by the landlord Glazdurin, a squanderer, who serves as didactic counter-example.

The chapter is a protracted description of the provincial landowner’s exemplary domesticity, punctuated occasionally by the visitors’ admiring commentary. Even the lengthier conversations do little more than describe the estate and its landlord. As soon as the title hero and his companions approach Rossianinov’s property, the reader is provided a view of the landscape: canals, properly tilled and fertilized fields, neat and well-tended meadows, tree-lined roads, well-maintained bridges. In keeping with the

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172 This point grows especially in LeBlanc’s juxtaposition of Bulgarin’s text with Vasili Narezhny’s *Russian Gil Blas* (*Rossiiskii Zhil’ Blaz*, 1814).

173 LeBlanc, 166.

idea that a perfect landowner “makes” perfect serfs (*kakov pop, takov i prikhod*), the peasants’ excellent dwellings and lifestyle are also given ample narrative space. Bulgarin provides still more information about this exemplary place, which has such institutions as an almshouse, a hospital, a smithy, a village supply store and even a schoolhouse. There is relatively little that is judged too prosaic to mention: from the simple, but tasty dinner of only four dishes accompanied by a limited but first-rate selection of beverages to the superior cattle, harnesses and agricultural instruments used by the serfs. Everything, down to the choice of the serfs’ footwear, is significant, because it is worthy of imitation. Why else would the author pause to explain the practical benefits of wearing *lapti*, or, *shmony*, as Bulgarin opted to render the term using a regional dialect? As if the succession of perfectly crafted elements of an estate were not enough to direct the reader’s response, the visitors make such comments as: “Do you notice, […] that we have arrived at the property of a decent person?,” “This is what all of Russia can and ought to be like!” and “This Mr. Rossianinov certainly is good at what he does.” By offering these laudatory appraisals, Bulgarin attempts to condition the reader’s evaluation of both the estate and the landowner as exemplary.

The model landowner himself is given a chance to speak about what he does and why. He tells the story of becoming disenchanted with service, of how his “zeal for

175 Certainly, there is an ethnographic dimension to this statement. However, as I discussed in the previous chapter and will show in the rest of this one, a kind of “self-ethnography” of the Russian provinces was undertaken by authors of instructional treatises on gentry domestic culture. Information about the peasant was then viewed as knowledge needed by the nobility in order to perform its obligation to the serfs and, in a larger sense, to the state.

being useful to society” “cooled,” leading him to retire while still a young man. In this, he follows the advice of one of his father's old friends, from whose lips comes the novel's take on the landowner's duty: “What are you looking for? To be useful to the tsar and to the fatherland, yes? The means are in your hands. You have five hundred peasant souls. Devote yourself to their happiness.” Rossianinov does just this and, as his family’s and peasants’ responses testify, he does it well. Moreover, the idea that a provincial gentry-man can and should serve the state as a figure of authority in the country, immersed in his private domestic pursuits, is not limited to the exemplary Rossianinov. The title hero Vyzhigin’s lengthy peregrinations culminate in retirement at his own country estate, where, at novel’s end, he and his family “work in their fields.” Thus, the shape and structure of the novel as a whole re-articulate and affirm this formulation regarding the utility of the provincial noble.

It may well be that Bulgarin’s interest in and relative ease with producing models for gentry life has to do with a broader investment in the capacity of literature to provide a vision of exemplary behavior and to reform the reader—what Abram Reitblat has called the author’s trust in the “edifying effect” of a work of prose fiction. In this sense, Bulgarin’s fiction would seem to approach the sensibility of advice literature.

177 Ibid., 205.
178 Ibid., 365.
180 Here, a brief excursion to the Polish contemporary reception of the novel’s rendering of gentry domestic culture may be in order. Ronald LeBlanc writes about the extent to which Bulgarin’s Rossianinov has his origins in Polish author Ignacy Krasicki’s novel Pan Podstoli, a work devoted in large part to the depiction of a model landowner. LeBlanc continues to note that “soon after the appearance of Ivan Vyzhigin, there
Bulgarin’s rendering of his model landowner as a man who understands his estate administration as service to the nation echoes closely similar formulations found largely on the pages of instructional non-fiction aimed at the gentry. A little more than a decade after the publication of Vyzhigin, Bulgarin would add advice literature to the multiple genres in which he worked throughout his highly prolific career.

**How to Write Like a Landowner**

“How now that is enough, Faddei, stop beating a dead horse. You’ve talked everyone’s ears off with your agronomy, about which you can reason about as well as a pig about oranges.” This is a fragment from a conversation between long-time collaborators Nicholai Grech and Faddei Bulgarin.181 It is recounted by Vladimir Burnashev, their younger colleague, who produced a great deal in the way of reminiscences towards the

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appeared in Wilno the first two parts of a novel written by the Polish writer Tomasz Massalski and entitled Pan Podstoli, or What We Are and What We Might Be. *An Administrative Novel,* a work that “sought to provide the reader with practical methods for improving the management of rural estates. It is significant that the author recognized Bulgarin’s *Ivan Vyzhigin* as a kindred work.” (emphasis added) The perceived kinship between the Polish novel and Bulgarin’s Russian picaresque must have centered on the representation of Rossianinov’s exemplary domesticity since Bulgarin’s depiction of the enlightened landlord is the primary and strongest intertextual link between the two texts. What I would emphasize here is that Massalski’s was a novel with an explicitly instructional aim, almost domestic advice literature. That in the Polish writer’s view, Bulgarin’s *Vyzhigin* looked to have an affinity to his own text is noteworthy, though perhaps not surprising, given the latter’s considerable connections to Polish literary culture in the context of which his own career began. While in Wilno in the second half of the 1810’s, Bulgarin collaborated for a few years with the so-called *Shubravtsy* (Idlers) group; upon arrival in St Petersburg, his first publications were in Polish. For a discussion of Bulgarin’s Polish connections, see N.N. Akimova, *F.V. Bulgarin: literaturnaia reputatsiia i kul’turnyi mif* (Khabarovsk, Izdatel’stvo KhGPU: 2002), 7-33.

end of his life. Burnashev recollects how Bulgarin, who reportedly had a particularly high opinion of his own knowledge in the field of agronomy and hence had long been wishing to edit a domestic advice periodical, in 1841 finally founded *Ekonom, a Universally Useful Domestic Library* (*Ekonom, khoziaistvennasia obshchepoleznai biblioteka*, 1841-1853). The weekly how-to contained information on a wide range of subjects. Topics under regular discussion included estate administration (animal husbandry, crop cultivation and sales), as well as housekeeping on a smaller scale (recipes, interior decoration, cleaning).

Initially, Bulgarin’s presence all but dominated the journal. In order to inspire trust among *Ekonom’s* readership, the author alluded to the fact that the subscribers “[had] known the Editor for over twenty years.” In the early 1840s, Bulgarin often contributed two to three long articles to each issue, producing at least a third of each

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182 For an excellent discussion of Burnashev’s reminiscences see A. I. Reitblat, ed. “Anecdotica. Letopisets sluhov. (Nepublikovanye vospominaniia V. P. Burnasheva),” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 4 (1993): 162-177. In addition to publishing some of Burnashev’s previously unpublished recollections, Reitblat provides a reasonable view regarding the utility of Burnashev’s rich collection of (both published and unpublished) memoirs. Although Burnashev has been considered for a very long time to have been a highly suspect source of information, Reitblat, in a sense, rehabilitates him as he points out that generally Burnashev makes the sorts of factual mistakes that look to be the product of a likely earnest desire to recall and tell a story that took place long ago; thus, while he may mix and err with well-known dates and information, on the whole, there is little to suggest deliberate misinformation.

183 Because, as I mention in chapter 1, the word *ekonom* is difficult to translate to Russian, I follow Alison K. Smith in leaving the title of Bulgarin’s periodical untranslated.

184 While the majority of *Ekonom* contained advice aimed at the rural gentry-man, the information about such subjects as recipes and interior decoration was meant for an audience comprised of both men and women.

installment and often the majority of signed articles. He wrote on such varied subjects as growing potatoes and “forcing the Russian person to like” this crop and the need to establish trade relations between Russia and the Middle East in order to sell domestic products (puzzlingly enough: fur). Smith suggests that the editor of the *Northern Bee* likely had a hand in the gastronomical section of the periodical, contributing relatively highbrow recipes and what we might now call food writing.186

One of the chief tasks undertaken by Bulgarin on the pages of *Ekonom* was to offer a program for the proper administration of the Russian country estate. He treated the subject matter explicitly as a business venture, and the estate as a space that presented ample opportunities for profit. In the inaugural issue of *Ekonom* (January, 1841), Bulgarin outlined the aims of the publication: to make estate keeping a more lucrative enterprise, promising to increase the income of his landowning readers. In one of the editor’s most substantial contributions to *Ekonom*, “A Practical Home Course on Agriculture for Beginning Landowners” (“Prakticheskii domashnii kurs sel’skogo khoziastva, dla nachinaushchikh khoziainichat’”), Bulgarin refers to agricultural enterprises undertaken at his estate of Karlovo near Derpt, which he purchased in April, 1828.187 Much like in Chapter Twenty of *Vyzhigin*, Bulgarin provides a detailed and lengthy account of the model estate life. However, the estate life in question is no longer fictional, no longer novelistic: it is instead on the one hand abstractly exemplary and, on

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186 In this respect, Bulgarin’s writings can be effectively considered alongside Odoevsky’s contemporaneously produced loquacious gastronome, Dr. Puf. Both wrote about culinary culture during the 1840s. This juxtaposition will become more relevant in the coming pages.

the other hand, purportedly the author’s own. Bulgarin becomes a figure akin to his novelistic creation—the model landowner, Rossianinov—rendered in a genre with a higher capacity for the detail as a formal feature of narrative. He writes for pages about choosing the right sort of cattle in accordance with the quality of pastures; he offers meticulous recipes for cattle feed during various seasons; he appends charts that explain the relationships between a given animal’s weight, the amount of food required to feed the beast and the costs and revenues associated with this aspect of estate management. He discusses at length when and in what order he planted specific crops.

I have been unable to determine whether Bulgarin actually planted these crops and in this order. It is known that he lived on his estate from 1831 to 1837, leaving it only rarely for visits to Petersburg. There is at least one piece of epistolary evidence (from Nikolai Grech) that the Derpt land-owner admitted that he once had a bad harvest in 1832. Regardless of the rootedness of Bulgarin’s formulations in any sort of documentary reality, what remains readily discernible is the degree to which, on the pages of Ekonom, the well-known man of letters fashions himself as an all-Russian landowner, whose specific experiences and experiments at his private estate will benefit the Russian public at large. Bulgarin rigorously cultivates for himself the persona of an

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190 And it is worth reminding the reader that Bulgarin, ever since the beginning of his career, was very keen on fashioning himself as an author read not just all over Russia, but universally. That the same man was also interested in creating this image of himself as a model Russian landlord attests to the allure this figure (the good pomeschchik) had in Nicholas’ Russia.
exemplary *pomeshchik* and an authoritative voice in the growing market of how-to literature about home life. Ultimately, the editor’s name became nearly synonymous with *Ekonom*, in part because he reported proudly on the pages of his periodical that upon meeting him at a bookshop, the provincial reader, “a clever landowner” on a visit to the city to purchase books, addresses him as “Mr. Ekonom.”

Tatiana Golovina uses the rich archival materials left by the Chikhachev family as she considers Andrei Ivanovich Chikhachev as an average provincial reader of the time. As part of her account regarding how such a reader responded to Bulgarin, Golovina observes that Chikhachev, a life-long fan of Faddei Venediktovich, “dreamed of purchasing a portrait of Bulgarin” and cites the following from the landowner’s personal writings about his wish to “place [the portrait] in my most favorite place (*v samom liubimeishem meste*), so as to look at him more frequently, so as to admire him more frequently.” Katherine Antonova has found additional documents about this landowner’s desire to acquire the item; Chikhachev also wrote: (1) “I am so stingy when it comes to money, and still, for a good likeness of him I would truly not spare the blue paper [assignat rubles] [sic]. – He is such a joy for me! Such a little berry” and (2) “as soon as I will find his portrait on sale somewhere, I will make sure to order it. This is a favorite writer of mine, and of [my favorites] the greatest.” As if responding to the

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191 *Ekonom* 57 (1842): 33.


193 Quoted in Katherine Antonova, “‘The Importance of the Woman of the House’: Gender, Property and Ideas in a Russian Provincial Gentry Family, 1820-1875” (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2007), 245. The value of the “blue paper” (*sinen’kaia*) should read as five assignat. rubles.
Figure 1. An advertisement from Faddei Bulgarin’s *Ekonom* (March, 1841)
provincial reader’s wish to display his likeness in a “most favorite place,” Bulgarin all but inserted himself into one living room displayed in Ekonom’s advertisement for home furnishings. It consists of various pieces of furniture, among which hangs a portrait that bears a likeness to Bulgarin, surveying happily the home of the provincial subscriber.

(Figure 1)

The Landowner as Critic

The very close association between Bulgarin and his weekly how-to soon turned problematic. During the early 1840s, Ekonom earned for itself a rather odious reputation. Between 1841 and 1846 (corresponding partly with Bulgarin’s tenure as editor), Notes of the Fatherland published a series of exceedingly negative reviews of Bulgarin’s latest project. As will soon become clear, the Notes of the Fatherland’s attack on Ekonom was part of the long-standing rivalry between Kraevsky’s journal and Bulgarin’s and Grech’s periodical enterprises. The particular shape this attack took will be more interesting to consider.

The first among these negative reviews of Ekonom begins with some biting commentary from an anonymous critic who then introduces a notebook appended to a letter received by the editors from “one very learned and experienced Russian landowner.”¹⁹⁴ The rest of reviews are also from this and other landowners. Precise authorship has not been established. Here’s how the editors of Notes of the Fatherland explain their decision to publish one of these missives:

The editorial staff cannot refuse to publish this letter from a learned and experienced Russian landowner, who seems to have been offended by the agronomical heresies published in Ekonom and the Northern Bee; and after all,

¹⁹⁴ Otechestvennye zapiski 14 (February 1841): Russkaia literatura, 73.
This passage makes clear that the attack on Bulgarin’s periodical is essentially a continuation of the journal’s quarrel with the *Northern Bee*. The phrase that “a mistake in planting potatoes” is “more important than a departure from taste and logic in so-called literary publications” represents (and thoroughly satirizes) the inflection of instructional literature, where often just these sorts of claims to the importance of agricultural pursuits are made. In addition to a basic complaint about the quality of Bulgarin’s domestic how-to, the *Notes of the Fatherland*’s editors also assert that an instructional periodical is just as liable to be criticized on the grounds of improper use of language as any other work. In fact, the very definition of a “literary” or “scientific” text becomes compromised – likely in a move that is made in order to allow the editorship to address Bulgarin’s growing oeuvre (multi-generic as it was) in detail and critically.

Since works of instructional literature were usually reviewed by critics (sometimes as famous as Belinsky and Vladimir Odoevsky), it is entirely possible that the provincial authors of the letters to the editor are an invention of Kraevsky and company, who, during the years in question (1839ff) frequently criticized the *Northern Bee* and Bulgarin. To determine this positively, however, is likely impossible.196

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195 *Otechestvennye zapiski* 15 (March 1841): Bibliograficheskaia khronika, 28.

196 The *Notes of the Fatherland* published articles signed by anonymous provincial gentry-men in other contexts as well. For example, A. P. Zabolotskii-Desiatovskii’s critical response to a piece by Aleksei Khomiakov in *Moskvitianin* was published anonymously, signed by a “Russian Landowner.” See “Zamechaniia na stat’iu g.
pages that follow, I will refer to the reviewers as provincials, because this is the information that was provided in the articles that appeared in Kraevsky’s journal. Again, it seems nearly impossible to say with absolute certainty whether these correspondents were genuine or not.) What I would highlight is the journal’s eagerness to print these rather lengthy letters and the recognition of the utility of the rural landlord as the perfect critic of Bulgarin’s domestic how-to.

The offended provincial had become, in Melissa Frazer’s words “a well-known trope” in Russian periodicals by the mid-1830s.197 George Gutsche writes about one of the most famous examples of writing pseudonymously from the point of view of a provincial reader: Pushkin’s 1836 letter to the editor of the Contemporary (Sovremennik) (himself) in response to Gogol’s article “On the Movement of Journalistic Literature in 1834 and 1835” (O dvizhenii zhurnal’noi literatury v 1834 i 1835 godu).198 In Gutsche’s view, “[o]bviously someone from the provinces would be an ideal defender of the taste and judgment of provincials and, as a persona, he could serve polemical purposes relating to Pushkin’s taste as well. These purposes included openly criticizing the infamous Bulgarin, and laying before the public reasonable views about language.”199 Pushkin’s A.B. “showed himself to be an indefatigable reader, very much concerned about recent

Khomiakova v # 6 ‘Moskvitianina’ na 1842 god” in Otechestvennye zapiski 25 (November, 1842): Domovodtsvo, 1-12.


198 Of course, this was not the first time Pushkin wrote as a provincial: his alter ego Feofilakt Kosichkin’s articles about Faddei Bulgarin came earlier.

199 George Gutsche, “Pushkin and Belinsky: The Role of the Offended Provincial” in New Perspectives on Nineteenth-century Russian Prose (Columbus, Oh: Slavica, 1982), 48-49.
developments in journalism.‖ The provincial landowners who wrote to *Notes of the Fatherland* “subscribe to every periodical about domestic advice literature” and show an analogous interest in this part of Russian print culture.

The particular local origins of these landowners may also shed some light on *Notes of the Fatherland’s* tactics. The first two letters (published in 1841) are sent in by a person who is identified only as “a Tver province landowner.” Pushkin’s 1836 A.B. had also hailed from Tver, as did Osip Senkovsky’s 1837 fictional trio of Tver province landowners, whose letter the editor both authored and published in his *Library for Reading*. Here’s how Senkovsky characterizes the Tver province while writing from the point of view of his three landowners: “When we say—Tver province, we mean by that all intelligent provinces, all of Russia.” Melissa Frazier explains that “as the landowners themselves acknowledge, their quintessentially average address suggests that Tver may be nothing more than an abstraction, the imaginary home of a Russian Everyman who does not really exist.”

It may then be that *Notes of the Fatherland* deployed their own Everyman-landowners (1) as part of a larger quarrel with Bulgarin and (2) to establish quality control over the production of instructional literature aimed at the rural gentry. Although the set of reviews is said to come from multiple sources, the pieces share a great deal both with each other and with the editorial remarks that introduce them: from favorite turns of phrase to the specific charges they bring against Bulgarin’s publication. Given

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200 Ibid., 49.

201 Senkovsky’s article “Pervoe pis’mo tverskih pomeshchikov Baronu Brambeusu” is quoted in Frazier’s *Romantic Encounters*, 181.

202 Ibid.
Bulgarin’s investment in the cultivation of his own persona as a model landowner whose efforts are appreciated by provincial subscribers, the reviewers of Notes of the Fatherland may be subtly employing their own exemplary pomeshchik, a well-informed and, to a degree, representative reader.

In her study of the average provincial reader of the period, Golovina concludes that even though “from time to time” Chikhachev “read” publications that “were engaged in polemics with Bulgarin,” among them Notes of the Fatherland, in her view he likely remained either unaware of or uninterested in the unsavory reputation of one of his favorite writers. Unlike Golovina’s “average reader” (and real landowner), the purportedly genuine rural landowners who deliver their criticism on the pages of Notes of the Fatherland show themselves to be privy to the details of the quarrel between Bulgarin’s and Kraevsky’s mainstream periodicals. They keep close track of and respond to the hostile pieces published in the Northern Bee (Severnaia pchela) about Notes of the Fatherland. Their appraisal of the Northern Bee and its provincial readership is far closer in its sensibility to Pushkin’s A.B. than to Chikhachev. And they are particularly interested in the quality of publications aimed explicitly at them, instructional literature about estate keeping. For example, one (again, likely fictitious) rural subscriber urges the editors of Notes of the Fatherland to respond more aggressively to the Northern Bee’s announcement that few people read Kraevsky’s journal, which publishes “awful nonsense.” The editors distance themselves from the provincial’s idea in a footnote


204 Bulgarin had, indeed, made this accusation in Severnaia pchela 39 (1841): 154. See the pages that follow for more about Bulgarin’s role in the quarrel.
about their habit of “not saying anything about publications about which there’s nothing good to say.” Their tactics here again recall Pushkin’s use of AB. Given all this, it becomes increasingly likely that due to Bulgarin’s close ties to the Third Section and multiple attempts to have Kraevsky’s journal shut down, the editorial staff is responding to Bulgarin in a highly cautious way via the landowner.

When it comes to the specific charges brought against Ekonom, the reviews criticized the following aspects of the weekly how-to: faulty advice about specific agricultural undertakings, incompetence in the natural sciences, poor command of the Russian language, and rampant plagiarism. A chief source of concern for the provincial reviewers is the fact that Bulgarin’s Ekonom, while more expensive than such publications as the Farming Gazette and Notes of the Free Economic Society, often reprints articles from these and other rival periodicals without naming the source. Whatever is not “borrowed” by Ekonom is judged to be lacking in quality and substance: very often, the information it provides is found misleading and potentially harmful. For instance, after the detailed critique of a treatise on planting potatoes, the reviewer exclaims, “Isn’t it the case that just these sorts of articles bring landowners to financial ruin?” The language of Ekonom is also scrutinized throughout all the reviews. Thus, in 1845, a reviewer excerpts generously some of the most awkward passages in Ekonom,

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206 The Third Section was Nicholas I’s “secret police,” charged with monitoring a wide range of activities deemed potentially dangerous to the political status quo.

207 Having checked the reviewers’ accusations on this last count, I am able to confirm that (to take one year) in 1844 Ekonom reprinted, on average, roughly two articles per month from Works of the Free Economic Society without attribution of the source.

208 Otechestvennye zapisky 14 (February, 1841): Russkaia literatura, 73.
then comments: “Here’s a labyrinth of chemistry and grammar” or “In what language one may say ‘an economic true story,’ I really do not know.”

Initially Bulgarin tried to retaliate against these accusations. In response to the first negative reviews, the editor of the *Northern Bee* penned a lengthy retort in which he—among other things—provided a comprehensive point-by-point rebuttal of the criticism that his methods for planting potatoes had received. More importantly, Bulgarin, himself uncertain about the authenticity of the reviewers employed by *Notes of the Fatherland*, somewhat skirts the issue of whether the unhappy subscribers of *Ekonom* are genuine landowners and instead casts Kraevsky’s journal’s attack as part of a personal quarrel. For this reason, it is the editorial staff of *Notes of the Fatherland* (and not the offended provincials) whom Bulgarin bitterly invites to come see “how well [his] grains are growing, how good [his] potato harvest is.” It seems to me that at this stage in the polemics, Bulgarin—a shrewd, experienced journalist—engages the critiques of *Ekonom* so thoroughly in order to capitalize on something akin to the idea that with the sales of merchandise (in this case, his publications), no publicity is bad publicity. Why else would he spend nearly a third of an issue of *The Northern Bee* on a detailed response to the hostile review in *Notes of the Fatherland* if not to draw attention to *Ekonom* and thereby enlarge the subscription base of his then (in 1841) new periodical venture?

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210 To determine whose methods were superior is likely impossible, because of the state of Russian agricultural science at the time. Nor would such a task be entirely appropriate for a study such as my own to undertake. See Smith, *Recipes for Russia*, passim.

211 *Severnaia pchela* 39 (1841): 155.
By 1844, following the appearance of still more negative reviews, Bulgarin passed on the editorship of Ekonom to V.P. Burnashev, then asked (publicly on the pages of the Northern Bee) that all inquiries about Ekonom be directed to the new editor. While as far as I know, Bulgarin did not speak again on behalf of Ekonom until he resumed its editorship (about which more below), in his notes to the Third Section written after 1844, he persisted in urging that Notes of the Fatherland be shut down, because the journal spreads dangerous, revolutionary ideas among the readership.

Following Bulgarin’s clarification about the identity of Ekonom’s new editor, the Notes of the Fatherland published another review, this time taking on Burnashev as well. The chief complaints about the publication were reiterated with examples of still more faulty grammar and plagiarism. The reviewer also noted Burnashev’s tendency to produce works on topics judged to be all too specific. The reviewer suggested that having published a plagiarized translation of a book entitled A Complete Practical Guide to Bovine Husbandry, the indeed very prolific Burnashev might now go on to supplement this work with such titles as “Complete Bull Husbandry, Complete Ox Husbandry, Complete Calf Husbandry, Complete Heifer Husbandry, and so on with various other husbandries.” This caustic remark brings to the fore the perceived danger of flooding

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212 Severnaia pchela, 280 (1844): 477. I should add that Bulgarin continued to advertise Ekonom on the last page of the Northern Bee after 1844, which is to say that he did not entirely abandon the periodical he had founded.

213 See his note to the Third Section entitled “Sotsialism, kommunnism i panteism v Rossii v poslednee 25-letie” in A.I. Reitblat ed., Vidok Figliarin, 490-505. See also, Reitblat’s commentary about the ineffectiveness of Bulgarin’s attempts to have Kraevsky’s journal shut down.

214 The original title is Prakticheskoe polnoe korovovodstvo. The ironically suggested titles are “Polnoe bykovodstvo, Polnoe volovodstvo, Polnoe telenkovodstvo, Polnoe
the market with too many specialized (and purportedly low-quality) books about how to run an estate and is a reflection of a larger phenomenon described by Smith, who writes that during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, “worry about the true value of agricultural improvement texts began to crescendo,” as the market for such works continued to grow. Finally, the play with language (somewhat more discernible in the original, provided in footnote) also highlights the way in which vocabulary characteristic of instructional publications lends itself to creative reworking, even to being taken *ad absurdum*.

Odoevsky's Dr. Puf as a Caricature of Faddei Bulgarin

In the course of their reviews, the purportedly real offended provincials deployed by *Notes of the Fatherland* express their criticism of the plagiaristic practices of *Ekonom* repeatedly; eventually, they come to suggest bitterly that *Ekonom* is not so much a housekeeping manual as a work that instructs the reader about how to publish a lucrative periodical, even threatening (albeit in a tongue-in-cheek way) to start their own analogous enterprise. Some pieces produced by Vladimir Odoevsky shortly after these reviews may well be a kind of indirect fulfillment of the landowners’ wishes. Published in the normally serious Domestic Advice (*Domovodstvo*) section of Kraevsky’s journal, these five articles (only two of which I will treat below in detail) immediately stand out from the rest of the contents. This section was devoted to serious and, from the looks of them, quasi-scientific treatments of subjects pertaining mostly to farming. Odoevsky’s

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articles, which bear such strange (given the context of their publication) titles as “The Reading of the Little Notebook, Which Did Not Please Auntie” (Chtenie tetradki, kotorai ne ponravilas’ tetushke), immediately strike the reader as farcical and humorous.\textsuperscript{217} As I will show in the pages that follow, the first two of these five pieces were perhaps the most creative criticism of Ekonom published in Notes of the Fatherland.\textsuperscript{218}

Odoevsky signs these 1846 articles with the pseudonym Doktor Puf, his gastronomically fixated alter ego, that would have been known to the Russian reading public from the pages of the “Notes for Landlords” (Zapiski dlia khoziaev) which were appended to the Literary Gazette (Literaturnaia gazeta) during the early 1840s. For the Literary Gazette, Dr. Puf wrote light-hearted, humorous and rather erudite sketches that were primarily about cooking and shopping for food. Writing about Odoevsky’s contributions to “Notes for Landlords,” Alison K. Smith observes that “the voice of Dr. Puf—often mocking, occasionally overblown and self-satisfied—could easily be read as a parody of Bulgarin’s style” in the gastronomical articles published in Ekonom.\textsuperscript{219}

Throughout the 1840s, Odoevsky is known to have reviewed domestic advice literature for Notes of the Fatherland, and it is certainly plausible that he may have had a hand in the anonymous reviews of Bulgarin’s Ekonom. It is generally thought that by

\textsuperscript{217} Otechestvennye zapiski 45 (March, 1846): Domovodstvo, 23-28.

\textsuperscript{218} For the set of five pieces, see Otechestvennye zapiski 44 (January, 1846): Domovodstvo, 12-16; Otechestvennye zapiski 44 (February, 1846): Domovodstvo, 13-28; Otechestvennye zapiski 45 (March, 1846): Domovodstvo, 23-28; Otechestvennye zapiski 46 (May, 1846): Domovodstvo, 17-24; Otechestvennye zapiski 46 (June, 1846): Domovodstvo, 41-44.

\textsuperscript{219} Alison K. Smith, “National Cuisine and Nationalist Politics. V.F. Odoevsky and Dr. Puf, 1844-1845” Kritika 10 (Spring 2009): 242.
1846 Odoevsky had “cooled to his persona,” a fact brought up to explain why he left the *Notes of the Fatherland* cycle unfinished.\(^{220}\) While the later articles (third, fourth and fifth) do seem a little scattered, perhaps attesting to the verity of the suggestion that Odoevsky’s Dr. Puf was running out of steam, in the first two of his *Notes of the Fatherland* articles, Puf appears energetic, all too ready to deliver a clever and hilarious spoof on mid-nineteenth-century Russian domestic advice literature in general and a delightfully creative continuation of the periodical’s polemics with *Ekonom* in particular.

Puf’s first article begins with a title that takes up an entire page. Much of this title page satirizes general trends in the production of domestic advice literature, especially the taste such works displayed for an excessively detailed treatment of the prosaic. The repetitive title “Estate Management and Home Economics” (*Domostroitel’stvo i domovodstvo*) grows increasingly tautological in the subtitle “Theory of estate management from the ethical, physical, speculative and practical points of view,” which, it is announced, has been “expounded by Dr. Puf, professor of all sciences and many others.” (see Figure 2)\(^{221}\) The tone set by the title is only amplified by the following list of subdivisions of the enterprise as they appear on the first page: “Book One: Estate management in general,” “Part One: Estate management as such,” “Chapter One: Estate Management on Its Own,” “Section One: Estate Management as It Is,” “Subdivision One: Estate Management as a Science,” the list concluded finally by “Subsection One: About

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\(^{221}\) *Otechestvennye zapiski* 44 (January, 1846): Domovodstvo, 12.
ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО И ДОМОВОДСТВО.

ТЕОРИЯ ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВА В ЕЯ НРАВСТВЕННОМ, ФИЗИЧЕСКОМ, УМОЗРЕНИТЕЛЬНОМ И ПРАКТИЧЕСКОМ ОТНОШЕНИИ,

ИЗЛОЖЕНАЯ

ДОКТОРОМ ИФФОМ, ПРОФЕССОРОМ ВЕСЬ ЛУЧШИЯ И МНОГИХ ДРУГИХ.

Эпиграф: Эго...
Ич...
Ю...
Мои...
Я сам...

(Экскаркт из всех книг писаных и напечатанных.)

ТЕОРИЯ ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВА.

КНИГА 1.

ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО ВООБЩЕ.

ЧАСТЬ 1.

ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО СОБСТВЕННО.

ГЛАВА 1.

ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО САМО-ПО-СЕБЕ.

Отд. 1.

ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО, КАКЪ ОНО ЕСТЬ.

Подразделение 1.

ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО, КАКЪ НАУКА.

Подотделение 1.

О ДОМОСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВѢ В ВѢ ФИЛОЛОГИЧЕСКОМЪ ОТНОШѢНИѢ.

Figure 2. The title page of Vladimir Odoevsky’s Domostroitel’stvo i domovodstvo from Notes of the Fatherland (January, 1846)

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Ibid.
This practice of splitting the enterprise into sections with titles each more ridiculous than the last amounts to an absurd reenactment of the tendency of how-to publications to treat their subject in a far too detailed fashion, portioning it off into potentially confounding categories. In the sub-section heading “estate management as a science” (domostroitel’stvo kak nauka) Odoevsky parodies the genre’s penchant for treating a given subject as scientific.

A similar sort of attitude to domestic advice literature is to be found in Odoevsky’s copious footnotes that refer to fictitious titles given in a funny mixture of Russian and Latin. For instance, the third note names as source a treatise entitled Concerning the serving of mustard after lunch. Fourteen books with commentary (De moustarda post prandium servienda lib. Quatuordecim, cum adnot.), while the fourth refers to Volume Three of a book about sausage and salami production. The other footnotes have such titles as Concerning the art of making money in a greedy and appropriate way (De pecuniandis modo vorino commodoque), as well as The art of cheating honestly in society (Ars honeste naduvandi in societate), with the word naduvandi containing a strong suggestion for the Russian naduvatel’stvo (hoax). A review of the footnotes as a collection reveals that the fictitious titles to which Puf alludes can be broadly classified as belonging to two subjects: domestic instructional literature on absurdly specific topics and didactic treatises on how to live in an unscrupulous, unapologetically profit-driven manner. These subjects embody two of the reasons for which Bulgarin’s Ekonom was criticized. The third reason—that Ekonom was little more than a compendium of other people’s works—is alluded to (via hyperbole) in the

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223 Ibid.
parenthetical definition of Puf’s endeavor as an “Extracted from all written and printed books” (Ekstrakt iz vsekh knig pisannykh i napechatannykh).

The so-called “corollary” that follows the opening sentence of the article makes it obvious that Odoevsky’s previously lovable (as he appeared in “Notes for Landlords”) Puf has become a parody of Bulgarin. Puf begins “in the manner of all experienced and learned persons” with a circumstance that, while “in no way related to the undertaking,” is “very important.” He writes: “I am a most honest and truthful person—my rules are well-known, and I can say, as says the well-known writer Mr. Bulgarin: ‘I am the brother of every honest, noble and gifted person!’” Even without the mention of Bulgarin, this passage recalls the rhetorical tactics of the well-known journalist. Throughout the piece, Puf’s playful repetition of various forms of the word “well-intentioned” (blagonamerennyi) makes the association with Bulgarin quite pronounced, as the latter was infamous for his tendency to overuse this word and related formulations. Tatiana Kuzovkina traces the use of a parodically refracted version of Bulgarin’s concept of blagonamerennyi as she outlines a mocking “Bulgarin subtext” in the works of such authors as Gogol and Odoevsky himself.225

Soon, the reader learns that Puf has been attacked by the editors of Notes of the Fatherland, a statement that works to establish a stronger case for Puf as an explicit caricature of Faddei Bulgarin. In retaliation, Puf has decided to somewhat revise the


225 See Kuzovkina, Fenomen Bulgarina, 113-120, 120-121. Odoevsky’s own short story “A Living Dead Man” (Zhivoi mertvets) had been published in Kraevsky’s journal in 1844, only two years prior to the articles I am discussing; in this text, too, the word blagonamerennyi was deployed in a lampoon of Bulgarin’s journalistic style.
terms of his contract with the editor. Had it not been for the attack, Puf claims that he would have published “entire treatises regarding Potology, Spoonology, Casserolism, Chandelierism, Lamposophy, Stainology, Carpetology, Parquetism, Table Management and Chair Management, Bedology, Cellar Studies, Sideboardosophy” (tselye traktaty otnositel’no Gorshkologii, Lozhkologii, Kastriulizma, Shandalizma, Lampomudriaia, Piatnoslovia, Kovrologii, Parketisma, Stolovodstva i Stulovodstva, Posteleslovia, Pogreboznaniia, Bufetomudriaia).\textsuperscript{226} In this absurd list of highly specific subjects pertaining to housekeeping, Odoevsky employs the same device used by the reviewers of Notes of the Fatherland to criticize Burnashev's tendency to produce works on rural domestic culture (recall the list of many husbandries). Puf’s assertion that all of these “dissertations” would have contained ample references “not only to the European literatures, but also to the Sanskrit, Chinese and Persepolitan and so on and so forth literatures” is a hyperbolic rendition of Bulgarin's repeated promise to his readership that Ekonom is the first among domestic instructional periodicals because the editors consult a formidable body of foreign-language works on the subject.\textsuperscript{227} That Notes of the Fatherland twice called Ekonom’s Russian a kind of “Chinese” adds still another dimension to the caustic quality of Puf’s statement here. Odoevsky's Puf concludes his introduction by saying that, due to the Notes of the Fatherland's attack on his person, he will fill the Domovodstvo section not with these “serious” articles, but will instead replace them with whatever he pleases.

\textsuperscript{226} Otechestvennye zapiski 44 (January, 1846): Domovodstvo, 13.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
In what reads as fulfillment of the promise to fill *Notes of the Fatherland* with nonsense, the second installment in the series is entitled “A Conversation about the mining of industry and the tilling of factory ventures in general, and about pickled cucumbers in particular” (*Razgovor ob izyskanii promyshlennosti i vozdeyvanii fabrichnostei voobshche, i o solenykh ogurtsakh v-osobennosti*).\(^{228}\) The awkward and nearly nonsensical expression reads as a hyperbolic version of the sort of ill-formed phrasing (“an economic true story”) that the reviewers of *Notes of the Fatherland* had, by 1846, repeatedly found and criticized in *Ekonom*. Moreover, often the passages treated in the reviews of *Ekonom* were on these same subjects – the founding and maintenance of factories, for example. The article itself is an extended conversation between Puf’s friends, one of whom is very likely a caricature of the new editor of *Ekonom*, Vladimir Burnashev. Puf mentions that one of his friends, Pospeshkin, is a “young man, who is not without talent.”\(^{229}\) At the time of his collaboration with Bulgarin, Burnashev was a young man whose talents Bulgarin often praised (both in *Ekonom* and the *Northern Bee*) and who wrote under the pseudonym Bystropishev. Odoevsky seems to have reworked the pseudonym Bystropishev (meaning “one who writes quickly”) into Pospeshkin (meaning “one who hurries and perhaps completes a task poorly as a result”), thus aiming his parody at both Bulgarin and his successor. Given that Burnashev published much and very quickly, the moniker Pospeshkin is likely to be a snide comment about his very fertile pen. Finally, while Bulgarin’s *Ekonom* published some articles written in the form

\(^{228}\) *Otechestvennye zapiski* 44 (February, 1846): Domovodstvo, 13-28.

\(^{229}\) Ibid., 14.
of a conversation, Puf’s version deflates the value such an article may have by presenting it as a frivolous exercise, given that much of the conversation is a less than coherent discussion about whether it is advisable to pickle cucumbers. As if the absurdity of its subject (manufactures and pickled cucumbers) weren’t sufficient, the conversation breaks off before any conclusion can be reached, because, as Puf informs the reader, the scribe had fallen asleep and was unable to produce a full transcript.

As these examples make clear, Odoevsky’s articles contained a thinly veiled attack at many aspects of Ekonom. This may help explain why they were published in the otherwise serious domestic advice section of Notes of the Fatherland. In somewhat refracted form (mock domestic manual as opposed to review article), these pieces continue the journal’s sustained criticism of Bulgarin’s and Burnashev’s periodical how-to.230 Finally, Odoevsky’s creative use of domestic advice literature shows the degree to which instructional texts could be transposed to other genres; Puf’s caricature of Bulgarin

230 Whether the attack would have been accessible to an “average” reader of the publication is quite another question. Susan Smith-Peter’s work on provincial reading practices would seem to suggest that the rural subscriber did not have the readerly arsenal necessary to discern the mocking portrayal of Bulgarin via the use of some of his favorite expressions. For example, while such words as blagonamerennyi became clichés in texts produced in the 1840s in the capitals, such provincials as Chikhachev continued to use them in earnest (paper delivered at AAASS, 2009). Smith-Peter’s paper shows the Vladimir province gentry-man building an ideology of local, rural community and social organization with heavy reliance on such terms (blagonamerennyi especially) that were no longer liable to be taken “seriously” in works by such writers as Odoevsky and Goncharov. To put the matter more directly, in his own journalistic and personal texts, Chikhachev continues to write in “Bulgarianese.” The reader may consult Golovina’s article “Golos iz publiki” for an account of how Bulgarin’s example in many ways prompted Chickachev to embark on a journalistic career. Ultimately, what is so striking Antonova’s, Smith-Peter’s and Golovina’s studies of the Chikhachev family is the extent to which this rural reader, though an enthusiastic subscriber and an author in his own right, remained outside and unaware of the journalistic quarrels waged in the context of the urban publications’ drive to acquire a larger provincial audience.
reads as an initial step in the novelization of prescriptive literature about farming, a point that will resurface in the coming pages.

The Reader’s Humble Servant

In 1849, Vladimir Burnashev left Ekonom to edit the more reputable Works of the Free Economic Society, taking up a post he would hold from 1850 to 1856. At this time, the founder of Ekonom was asked to resume his editorial duties.²³¹ An announcement for the upcoming year’s installment was printed; Bulgarin’s name appeared in large letters likely to attract the provincial reader. What sort of self did Bulgarin project to his readership upon his return in 1850, following the embarrassing developments of the early-to-mid 1840s examined above? On the cover page of the first issue of 1850, Bulgarin greets his reader with the following passage: “Two mountains will not come together, but a man will meet another man again. I did not think that I would ever converse with the gracious readers of Ekonom, and yet fate has united us again!”²³² In the distinctive way of the editor and chief feuilleton-writer of the Northern Bee, Bulgarin manages once again to forge a familiar, casual rapport with his provincial reader, casting the periodical as the textual space that fosters a kind of conversational tenor, a friendly

²³¹ According to Burnashev’s own rather colorful account, in 1849 the journal’s publisher Ivan Petrovich Pesotsky (the author’s memory fails him here: Pesotsky died in 1848; thereafter Ekonom was published by Jungmeister) summoned Bulgarin from his estate of Karlovo, asking him to resume his duties as the editor of the journal he had founded; the two quarreled in short order, the publisher “beat up Bulgarin so badly that Faddei spent six weeks recovering.” See A. I. Reitblat’s publication in NLO 4 (1993): 172-174 for the full piece, which includes a similar anecdote about how another publisher, Lisenkov, gave Bulgarin a thorough beating with a chair. Regarding the Pesotsky affair, Reitblat reasonably suggests that while one such fight very likely took place between Bulgarin and the publisher as early as May 15, 1843, he judges that it is possible that the two quarreled multiple times, though certainly not in 1849.

²³² “Fel’eton Ekonoma,” Ekonom 1 (1850): 1.
intimacy between himself and the subscriber. The close contact with the readership grows in the next sentence as Bulgarin enthusiastically predicts, “Again, we will walk around the fields and the forests, look after the gardens and the vegetables, tend to the *orangeries* and the greenhouses, [tend to] cattle husbandry and stud farming, working to fill up the granaries and the pantry with various supplies, [working towards] the establishment of rural crafts and manufacturing, we will be building and rebuilding, and finally, we will begin to dine together, since neither a landlord nor a non-landlord cannot do without that.”

Inviting the readership to join him on an excursion across a markedly provincial landscape (that could also be read as a list of subjects comparable to the table of contents of his periodical), Bulgarin writes from the position of a very accessible, well-wishing neighbor and an excellent steward of his own property. He writes himself into the rural space inhabited by the provincial subscriber, presenting himself as the sort of neighbor a landowning gentry-man may well benefit from having. The owner of Karlovo proudly reports that, while his neighbors have suffered from poor harvests and epidemics of cattle disease, Bulgarin’s own estate has always fared better: the granaries remain full of provisions, while the cattle has been free of epidemic disease for the last twenty years. He stops to explain the specific ways in which he has tended to cattle (mentioning, for example, how he “takes care to isolate a beast as soon as it appears sickly”) in a way that shows a remarkable drive to fashion himself as a provincial landlord who participates directly in every enterprise undertaken at his estate.

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233 Ibid.

234 Ibid., 2.
In a more general sense, Bulgarin repeats many of the formulations he had made in the 1841 inaugural issue. That much of this information had been criticized bitterly by *Notes of the Fatherland* seems not to deter the editor, who adds that he would “always have enemies for publishing *Ekonom*” precisely because he would continue to “insist on the same points.”\(^{235}\) Once again, he alludes to the *Northern Bee*, this time to remind readers that even during his absence from *Ekonom*, he has been publishing articles on the topic of rural domestic affairs in his newspaper. He concludes the introductory piece with the promise that *Ekonom* will remain a high-quality periodical, offering as a guarantee the “many years’ experience of your humble servant Faddei Bulgarin” (emphasis in the original).\(^{236}\) In a way that confirms Golovina’s findings about the provincial reader’s disinterestedness in Bulgarin’s odious reputation, the editor of *Ekonom* returned to once again capitalize on every aspect of writing domestic advice literature for the rural landowner by presenting himself as at once model farmer and well-known and (in his view) respected man of letters.

**Re-Writing Vyzhigin (1)**

\(^{235}\) Ibid.

\(^{236}\) Many have noted Bulgarin’s mode of understanding the reader as a kind of consumer or even customer, who is always right. This 1850 statement is not unique as an articulation of such a view. See for example, Bulgarin’s formulation from the 1838 “Writers and Readers.” He writes: “It is not the writer, but the *reader*, who rules, legislates and judges in literature […] verdicts uttered by the reader […] strike the haughty writer in the most sensitive place—the pocket!” Faddei Bulgarin. *Durnye vremena. Ocherki russkikh nravov* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2007), 309.
Both Faddei Bulgarin and Nikolai Gogol took an avid interest in the reading public throughout their careers. Readers, both imagined and real, figure prominently in the literary polemics between them. Igor Zolotusskii provides a detailed treatment of Gogol’s re-working of Bulgarin’s commercially successful newspaper in the “Diary of a Madman.” Zolotusskii identifies Bulgarin’s sketches (published in the Northern Bee and signed by one Chukhonskii pomeshchik) as the source for Poprishchin’s naïve evaluation that “Kursk landowners write well.” Valeria Belonogova observes that throughout the 1830s, “Gogol often parodies Bulgarin and his Northern Bee” as he populates the Petersburg Tales with characters who act and evaluate their surroundings according to principles gleaned from Bulgarin’s newspaper. Kuzovkina argues (if rather hastily, though not unconvincingly) that in 1842, Gogol “introduces Bulgarin’s persona” into the reworked version of “The Portrait,” as well as “Theatrical Departure after the Presentation of a New Comedy.” Similarly, she reads portions of Volume One of Dead Souls as a response to Bulgarin’s criticism of Gogol’s literary and linguistic sensibilities.

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237 Both produced texts about this subject: for example, Bulgarin’s oft-quoted note “About Censorship and Book Publishing in General” (1826) as well as his 1838 “Writers and Readers” and Gogol’s Sovremennik article “On the Development of Periodical Literature in 1834 and 1835.”

238 Bulgarin’s habit of signing articles in the Northern Bee as an anonymous landowner may well be another factor in Notes of the Fatherland’s interest in offering critical reviews of his works from the perspective of anonymous landowners, who are identified by region.


240 Kuzovkina, Fenomen Bulgarina, 113-120.
Abram Reitblat calls the polemics between Faddei Bulgarin and Nikolai Gogol a “collision of two [mutually opposing] aesthetic systems.” Reitblat arrives at this formulation by examining thoroughly Bulgarin’s evaluation of Gogol’s works during the 1830s, 40s and 50s. Reitblat documents Gogol’s interest in Bulgarin’s responses. One of Bulgarin’s chief complaints when it came to Gogol’s fiction was that the latter had not created any positive characters. In 1845, from the pages of the Northern Bee, Bulgarin offered his own Ivan Vyzhigin as an exemplary novel as he urged writers to juxtapose positive characters with negative ones, noting, among other things, that in Vyzhigin, “you meet a good landowner next to a bad one.” In the pages that follow, I will examine a possible fulfillment of Bulgarin’s wish: Gogol’s attempt to produce a model provincial gentry-man in a novel.

As I observed earlier, in Bulgarin’s Ivan Vyzhigin the representation of the model landowner is not limited to the figure of Rossianinov; the edifying capacities of estate work are reaffirmed by the novel as a whole in the fact that the title hero ultimately becomes an exemplary pomeshchik. LeBlanc writes that Volume One of Dead Souls “was designed, at least in part, to provide a counter-example to Ivan Vyzhigin.” Both Iurii Mann and Simon Karlinksy point out that Gogol must have initially conceived the novel as a picaresque and was working against the expectations of the reader of Russian “Gil Blas novels” who would have been waiting to find Chichikov a reformed and

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241 A.I. Reitblat, “Gogol i Bulgarin,” 94.

242 Severnaia pchela 261 (1845): 843.

243 LeBlanc, Russianization of Gil Blas, 224.
virtuous landowner by novel’s end. However, in LeBlanc’s words, “Chichikov’s dream of acquiring his own estate is doomed to remain more a social ideal to parody than one to entertain seriously and in a positive way.”

Indeed, in Dead Souls proper (Volume One), the expected “happy ending” is presented in the form of the ruse that Chichikov will move his “peasants” to the Kherson province, a notion that gives rise to the townspeople’s repeated characterization of him as a Kherson province landowner, khersonskii pomeshchik. The phrase itself (repeated six times in this portion of the text) has a kind of hypnotic effect on the hero. In the wake of the townspeople’s mirthful toasts to the health of their “Kherson province landlord” (as well as to his peasants’ well-being, their safe journey to the new home, the health of the landowner’s lovely wife—as yet, unknown and nonexistent), Chichikov takes on the role. The newly minted landlord even begins to perform the role of the happy pomeshchik, to discuss the three-field crop rotation system, until finally, as the characteristically sarcastic narrator reports, at the end of the day the hero falls asleep “decidedly a Kherson province landowner” (VI, 152). Yet certainly the ending of Volume One, which has the hero famously galloping off and away from any possibility of becoming a Kherson province

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244 In his V poiskakh zhivoi dushi, Iurii Mann writes that Gogol set out to write a novel approaching the picaresque in its form. See Iurii Mann, V poiskakh zhivoi dushi: Mertvye dushi—pisatel’, kritika, chitatel’ (Moscow: Kniga, 1984), 12. Simon Karlinsky judges that “the structure of Dead Souls utilizes and puts to its own purposes the familiar and widespread genre of the traditional picaresque novel,” thus also placing it in dialogue with the Gil Blas trend in Russian novelistic production. See Simon Karlinsky, The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 225. Ronald LeBlanc discusses Gogol’s manipulation of the picaresque at length. See LeBlanc, Russianization of Gil Blas, passim.

245 LeBlanc, 253.
landlord, sabotages the restorative potential such a title would have held for a picaresque written in adherence to Bulgarin's edifying model.

If Volume One reads as an explicitly articulated departure from the values of Vyzhigin, Volume Two shows a more active interest in the representation of model gentry domestic culture and all its potentially restorative capacities and is much closer to Bulgarin’s 1829 novel. In Volume Two, as Chichikov is in the process of purchasing an estate, he “feels pleased, pleased, because he had now become a landowner—not a fantastic, but a real landowner, who now even had lands, territories, and peasants. Not dreamed up peasants who reside in his imagination, but real ones.” (VII, 89) As the novel taunts the reader with a Vyzhigin ending, such is Chichikov's excitement at finding himself almost a real landowner that he begins to “jump up a bit, rub his hands together and to wink at himself” (VII, 89). Still, the enterprising hero soon turns to consider such courses of action as selling off the best parts of the property, then mortgaging the rest along with his dead souls—a prospect especially worthy of our attention, because it would absolutely preclude any possibility of the hero becoming a landlord on his newly acquired property. Once again, Gogol’s text slips away from the structure of Bulgarin’s novel. When it comes to making a model landowner out of Chichikov, judging from surviving drafts, the novel is quite unable to sustain a Vyzhigin-type “happy ending,” featuring a Russian picaro turned perfect pomeshchik.

Gogol’s difficulty in following Bulgarin’s Vyzhigin is all the more jarring if we consider that Volume Two begins with a landowner who looks to be a re-working of Rossianinov. The first provincial Chichikov meets in Volume Two, Tentetnikov, is described as someone who could have been and wished to become a good steward of his
property. Tentetnikov’s self-characterization marks the start of Volume Two’s search for the model landowner. His take on the distinction between service and landownership is particularly illuminating and looks like it has been taken directly from Ivan Vyzhigin. Explaining to his uncle his decision to abandon a career in the city, Tentetnikov says: “I have another job (sluzhba): three hundred peasant souls, an estate that is in disarray, an overseer who is an idiot. ... I—who do you think?—am a landowner [this title is also not a trifling matter]. If I attend to the keeping, the preservation and the betterment of the lot of the people who have been entrusted to me and if I present to the nation three hundred of the most sound, sober, hard-working lieges—in what way will my job (sluzhba) be worse than the job (sluzhba) of some head of division Lenitsyn?” (VII, 18).

Just as it was for the retired gentry-man Rossianinov, being a landowner is described explicitly as a job, a kind of service that, if performed well, can rival the work of the city bureaucrat when it comes to the utility and value of the vocation. The countryside promises to be “the only station for useful activity” for Tentetnikov (VII, 18). In fact, the idea that being a good landowner is the most useful sort of activity available to the gentry-man grows at the expense of Tentetnikov’s understanding of other forms of service, which he now imagines as a “paper, fantastic management of provinces situated thousands of verst[sa] away, where I have never set foot and where I can only do many inane and preposterous things!” contrasted with the “real management” of his estate (VII, 19). The juxtaposition between the “real” and “fantastic” estate administration (especially if contrasted with the analogous idea in Volume One) again marks Volume Two as a text that seeks actively to produce an authentically positive character, a successful landowner. Even if Tentetnikov does not ever make a model landowner (in
the surviving parts of the text), the values Gogol’s novel attaches to such a station are articulated via this character.

But why must Tentetnikov fail? Before returning to the province, he procures “the newest books on the subject of rural domestic culture,” texts designed to transform the country estate (VII, 18). More importantly, the narrative devoted to Tentetnikov shares a good deal with a piece of didactic literature authored by Gogol himself: the “Russian Landowner” letter of Gogol’s Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends. To begin with, both Tentetnikov’s and the Landowner’s domestic duties are described as “service” (sluzhba). Gogol had begun the Letter with the following promise: “the most important thing is that you have arrived in the countryside and decided to become a landowner no matter what; everything else will come on its own” (VIII, 321). He went on to advise his audience with confidence, noting even that the same counsel has worked well for other landowners. To a considerable degree, Tentetnikov seems to be following Gogol’s advice to the Russian Landowner: he goes out to the fields, supervises the various agricultural enterprises, even gives the peasants a shot of vodka for their hard work. Yet in the novel, the set of behaviors prescribed in Gogol’s own brand of advice literature (direct participation in or at least observation of labor) still leaves the hero with a disorderly piece of property. Gogol’s novel cannot contain even the author’s own model landowner; the fictional genre resists the straightforward didacticism the representation of such a figure would require.

Still, the characterization of Tentetnikov includes still more trace elements of instructional non-fiction about rural domestic culture. Upon first seeing Chichikov, Tentetnikov anxiously takes him for a government official who has come to inquire about
the latter’s brief participation in a politically questionable sort of circle. The landowner’s fears dissipate when Chichikov introduces himself and explains that “he has been traveling around Russia for a long time, compelled both by needs and curiosity; that our nation is rich in remarkable items, not to speak of the plethora of crafts and the diversity of soils” (VII, 27). The last two subjects were most often treated in non-fiction about the provinces. To the reader of agricultural treatises from this time period, it begins to appear here that Chichkov is masquerading as a scientist who travels around the empire gathering information. Reports from such itinerant correspondents were printed in such mainstream periodicals as Notes of the Fatherland and subject-specific domestic advice journals such as Works of the Free Economic Society. And this is more or less the conclusion Tentetnikov reaches as he judges that Chichikov “must be some sort of inquisitive learned professor, who travels around Russia, perhaps, in order to collect some sort of plants, or perhaps, minerals.” Both Tentetnikov and Chichikov are, for a moment, inscribed into the intellectual sphere of non-fiction about the provinces.

Tentetnikov’s ultimate occupation (if one may call it that) continues this trend and will also prove illuminating when it comes to understanding Gogol’s artistic project in Volume Two. After becoming disenchanted with the business of running his estate, the landowner has embarked on the composition of a book that would “embrace Russia from all points of view—civic, political, religious, philosophical” (VII, 11). To start with, this could be a jab at Bulgarin’s Russia from a Historical, Statistical, Geographic and Literary Perspective of which Gogol was well aware. To treat the matter a little more

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246 A famous example produced during the 1840s is V. P. Burnashev’s Opyt terminologicheskogo slovaria. I will return to this text in the coming pages.
fully, though, we would have to recognize that Tentetnikov’s book project reflects
Gogol’s own artistic aspirations towards the end of his career.

It is known that in the course of the 1840s and early 1850s, while working on
Volume Two of *Dead Souls*, Gogol attempted what Edyta Bojanowska has called “an
epistolary course on Russia,” asking several of his correspondents for information about
the Russian provinces: descriptions of local provincial types, peasants’ crafts and
trades.²⁴⁷ While abroad, Gogol requested a number of books on related subjects. Among
these books were such titles as Bulgarin’s *Russia from a Historical, Statistical,
Geographic and Literary Perspective*,²⁴⁸ *Domestic Botany*, as well as the 1844 and 1846
issues of *Notes of the Fatherland*. Moreover, Gogol’s notebooks contain observations
and book titles on the subject of rural domestic culture. A particular set of Gogol’s notes
that are usually dated (with some difficulty) at 1849—notes that are considered to have
been preparation for Volume Two of *Dead Souls*—reveals still more about what the
author may have been reading during this decade. Gogol writes on such subjects as the
relationship between types of soil, climate and crops appropriate for a given region. The
specific details of these notes, as well as references to agriculturalists, show that by the
late 1840s, Gogol had become quite familiar with instructional non-fiction about the
country estate.

²⁴⁷ The phrase is from Edyta Bojanowska’s *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and
Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 318. She likens
this exercise to his earlier interest in Ukrainian life and byt.

²⁴⁸ Long considered to have been plagiarized, this book has since been convincingly re-
attributed to Bulgarin. See Malle Salupere’s “Bulgarin kak istorik. (K voprosu ob
avtorstve Rossii)” in *NLO* 40 (1999): 142-158.
At times, it is possible to identify Gogol’s sources. For instance, in his notes “About Black Earth,” he refers to the findings of one penzenskii pomeshchik (a Penza landowner), Ivan Vasilyevich Saburov (1788-1873), whose long treatises were published serially in the domestic culture section of Notes of the Fatherland in 1842 and 1843 under the title “Notes of a Penza Agriculturalist About the Theory and Practice of Rural Home Economics.”

Gogol records that “black earth, in the opinion of the Penza landowner, is not humus, but is rather soil with a high concentration of clay” (IX, 437). The Penza landowner Saburov begins one of his articles by asking that the readership forgive him for pausing to explain the difference between black earth and humus, but that such an explanation is necessary because the agricultural writers employed by Library for Reading have been mixing the two up. In this article, he goes on to present his views couched in a critique of Senkovsky’s journal’s articles on the subject of rural domestic culture, offering his own experience as an authentic landowner and not one of “our armchair agronomists (kabinetnye nashi agronomy).” In this and other articles, Saburov continually dismisses the utility of the “theory” put forth by professional agriculturalists, offering instead the “practice” of the “thinking landlord” (mysliashchii khozian). In his notes about the fertility of black earth, Gogol repeats Saburov’s formulations, calling the particular qualities of this soil a “fact known to all experienced

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249 Unlike the anonymous provincial reviewers of Ekonom, Saburov signed his articles with his name.


251 Ibid., 2.
and thinking landlords (inflected form of mysliashchii khoziain)” (IX, 437). I cite the Russian original to show that Gogol appears to be quoting directly from Saburov.

Gogol’s notes “About Soil,” re-state (almost verbatim) Saburov’s views in still another of his Notes of the Fatherland articles. Finally, a section of Gogol’s notes usually published under the heading “About Peasant Dwellings” (IX, 434-435) contains what should perhaps be considered a separate entry, because the final paragraph that deals with the inutility of “theory” in obtaining a proper understanding of agriculture repeats word-for-word much of a passage from Saburov’s inaugural article, where he had begun his critique of agricultural advice literature.

From all of this it follows that (1) Gogol’s preparations for the composition of Volume Two included articles printed in the domestic culture section of Notes of the Fatherland (advice literature) and (2) the particular advice literature he consulted was a critique of the over-production of low-quality instructional texts aimed at the rural gentry. Given Gogol’s likely access to Kraevsky’s journal throughout the 1840s, his notes that attest to an avid interest in works about estate keeping, and his long-standing attention to the figure of Faddei Bulgarin, it makes sense to ask whether the poor reviews of Ekonom had caught the author’s attention. Some passages in the drafts of Volume Two make this possibility quite likely.

Re-Writing Vyzhigin (2)


Even though Saburov wishes to dismiss the usefulness of such texts, the very detailed critique he offers is cast as better advice to the landowning readership.
Overt intertextual links between Faddei Bulgarin’s model landowner Rossianinov and Nikolai Gogol’s exemplary landowner Kostanzhoglo (from Volume Two of Dead Souls) have been noted. Gilman Alkire, who has catalogued an impressive number of correspondences between Bulgarin’s novel and several of Gogol’s works, calls “the ideal landowner” Kostanzhoglo “the clearest single borrowing from Vyzhigin.”255 Chichikov’s visit to Kostanzhoglo’s estate contains scenes that parallel portions of Bulgarin’s novel: specifically, the descriptions of impeccable (and strikingly so) estate grounds observed upon reaching the property of both Rossianinov and Kostanzhoglo are a good example of this. Alkire also points out that Gogol’s use of Bulgarin’s Rossianinov results in a “bifurcation” of the single character into two. Elements of Rossianinov are to be found in both Kostanzhoglo and another landowner, Koshkarev. In both versions of the surviving chapters of Volume Two, Chichikov’s visit to Kostanzhoglo’s estate is interrupted by a day trip to Koshkarev’s. Readers of Volume Two will likely remember this figure for the excessive bureaucracy that is the dominant feature of his estate. Like Bulgarin’s Rossianinov, Koshkarev is a modernizer. Alkire suggests that Koshkarev is a parody of Rossianinov: Gogol satirizes the modern and useful institutions of Rossianinov’s estate (the drugstore, almshouse, general store, village school) in Koshkarev’s Depot for Agricultural Equipment, Main Bureau of Audits, Committee on Rural Affairs, and School for the Normal Education of Villagers.

My purpose here is to add a third element into the intertextual links that have been established between the two writers. Broadly speaking, this third element is the genre

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that is most fit for the representation of model domestic culture: instructional literature about estate-keeping. (In a more narrow sense, the additional intertext amounts to trace elements of Bulgarin’s awful reputation as the editor of *Ekonom.*)

The landowner Koshkarev’s readerly activities are the best illustration of this. Instructional literature has a prominent place in Koshkarev’s library, a “huge hall, filled from top to bottom with books” (VII, 65). Whereas Rossianinov’s analogous study had new journals and newspapers, as well as books in Latin, Greek, French, English, Italian and finally Russian, the first mention of the contents of Koshkarev’s library reads as follows, “[b]ooks on all subjects – on the subject of forestry, animal husbandry, swine husbandry, gardening, thousands of various journals, containing the latest developments and improvements in stud farming and the natural sciences. There were also such titles as *Swine Husbandry as a Science*” (VII, 195). Since these are the first books Chichikov discovers in the library, the list creates the initial and temporary impression that Koshkarev is reading exclusively domestic advice literature. Gogol’s treatment of this subject recalls the tactics of *Notes of the Fatherland*’s criticism of *Ekonom*. The title *Swine Husbandry as a Science*, arguably more absurd than Odoevsky’s *Housekeeping as a Science*, can be read as an indication of Gogol’s awareness of the tendency to produce purportedly scientific accounts of animal husbandry, a tendency also satirized in the

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256 Here, it will help to have the Russian original:

Книги по всем частям: по части лесоводства, скотоводства, свиноводства, садоводства, тысячи всяких журналов, руководств и множество журналов, представлявших самые позднейшие развития и усовершенствования и по коннозаводству и естественным наукам. Были и такие названия: «Свиноводство, как наука».
reviews of *Ekonom* discussed earlier in this chapter. The list of such subjects as forestry, cattle breeding, swine breeding, gardening (lesovodstvo, skotovodstvo, svinovodstvo, sadovodstvo) evinces a sensibility about the overproduction of instructional literature that again recalls the tactics of both Odoevsky, whose Dr. Puf offered dissertations on a list of topics derived via a similar manipulation of language characteristic of instructional publications, and the reviewers of *Ekonom*, who suggested that Burnashev author a series of animal husbandry books on exceedingly specific topics. From another perspective, since *Ekonom* was marketed as a “generally useful domestic library” (khoziaistvennaia obshchepeleznaiia biblioteka), the contents of this part of Koshkarev’s library can be taken to be analogous to Bulgarin’s periodical publication. Interesting here is the otherwise rather odd juxtaposition of “horse-breeding” and natural sciences. Bulgarin, whose incompetence in the natural sciences *Notes of the Fatherland* ridiculed repeatedly, was a member of a special commission on horse-breeding from 1844 to 1857. Furthermore, the fear that relying on untrustworthy publications about housekeeping may bring a landowner to financial ruin is materialized in the figure of Koshkarev, whose serfs have “not only been mortgaged, but even re-mortgaged for the second time” (VIII, 66).

The very verbosity characteristic of every pursuit undertaken at Koshkarev’s estate is mirrored suggestively in the contents of the library. The bureaucratic chaos that has engulfed Koshkarev’s property may have an explanation here. Readers of Volume Two will likely recall that at Koshkarev’s, Chichikov’s standard request for dead souls results in a long paper trail, portions of which are reproduced as Gogol displays the awkward uses to which language is put by the landowner’s scribe. Koshkarev’s
statement that Chichikov gave the landowner the opportunity to “see the course of the bureaucratic process” reveals that paper is the main thing produced by Koshkarev’s serfs (VII, 197). The worst tendencies of the market for instructional literature find a hyperbolized and refracted representation on Koshkarev’s estate. If the how-to book market is too prolific, too verbose, Koshkarev’s estate is a direct representation of this trend, itself producing little more than a great deal of paper.

Here we should again recall that Koshkarev is a direct “descendant” of Bulgarin’s Rossianinov. While a juxtaposition of Ivan Vyzhigin with the drafts of Volume Two shows that Koshkarev is a satire on Rossianinov, a close look at Gogol’s references to instructional literature reveals that his satire also alludes to Bulgarin’s odious reputation as the editor of Ekonom. Koshkarev, then, is still another permutation of the gentry-man-farmer and avid reader of domestic advice literature—in this case a grotesque vision of the earnest rural landowner ruined, in part, by faulty instructional texts. Produced as part of Gogol’s response to Bulgarin’s call for positive heroes, the characterization of Koshkarev extends the long-standing literary polemics between the two writers to an additional branch of Russian print culture.

While Koshkarev can be read as a representation of the worst trends in contemporary constructions of model domestic culture, Kostanzhoglo would seem to offer a didactic counter-example. Most readers who discuss Kostanzhoglo as Gogol’s attempt at the perfect pomeshchik usually qualify this statement with something approaching the idea that the character is not quite what he should be: convincing, believable, a properly “positive” hero. In a rare instance of producing a statement with which few would disagree today, Valerian Pereverzev calls Kostanzhoglo “the most
unsuccessful and lifeless” character in all of Gogol’s art.\textsuperscript{257} Robert Maguire considers the landowner “a caricature,” and “an unlikely role model.”\textsuperscript{258} What makes Kostanzhoglo elicit such a response? At this stage, I would begin by positing that in the characterization of his ideal landowner, Gogol is unable to find an aesthetically tenable compromise between didacticism and novelistic discourse. Much as he may strive to, he is unable to produce a “role model.” In part, this is due to the fact that Kostanzhoglo’s representation relies too heavily on trends observed in advice literature of the time. This is discernible on the level of both form and content.

For example, Kostanzhoglo’s famous “poem in prose” about the virtues of the rural landlord’s domestic pursuits—the long speech he delivers, himself becoming as enraptured as his audience, while he lists the order in which agricultural projects are to be carried out in the course of the calendar year—is largely derived from Gogol’s notes about provincial life, some of which I described earlier. Thus, one of the hero’s most important statements is a re-working of extra-literary, instructional discourses about domestic culture into what purported to be a novelistic text.\textsuperscript{259} This shows an engagement with how-to texts on the micro-level of the textural characteristics of this part of Volume Two.


\textsuperscript{259} I refer to Gogol’s text as “novelistic,” recognizing the generically hybrid character of Gogol’s \textit{poema}. Aspects of Gogol’s experimentation with genre in Volume Two of \textit{Dead Souls} and the significance of this text for the development of the Russian Realist novel will be discussed in the pages that follow.
Kostanzhoglo’s views about rural domestic culture similarly echo contemporary extra-literary discourses on the subject. Gogol uses Kostanzhoglo as a vehicle through which to express a thoroughly critical view of “bad” advice literature: mid-nineteenth-century works about farming, Bulgari’s own periodical prime among these. Effectively, Gogol tries his hand at a caustic review of domestic advice literature on the pages of Volume Two of *Dead Souls*. He is unable to incorporate this gesture into the form of the novel.

Upon Chichikov’s return from Koshkarev, Kostanzhoglo shares with him his perspective on estate keeping. The discussion begins with Koshkarev about whom Kostanzhoglo says: “He is needed, because the follies of all our clever eggheads are reflected in him in a caricaturish way and are more discernible” (VII, 67). Kostanzhoglo criticism of modern farming here again recalls the reviews of Bulgari’s periodical. Both Kostanzhoglo and the reviewers of *Ekonom* warn against the premature founding of factories, the turning of landowners into factory-owners and manufacturers. Thus, it is the modernization of the estate (advocated by *Ekonom*, where all manner of machinery useful for the founding of factories was discussed at length and with potentially enticing illustrations) that Kostanzhoglo criticizes. In the course of this conversation about the likes of Koshkarev, those easily swayed onto a path of hyper-modernization, Kostanzhoglo says “Hmm! Those political economists!” then continues “They’re a good bunch, these political economists! One idiot sits upon another and drives him on. He cannot see further than his own stupid nose. Never mind that he’s an ass, he’ll get up to the podium, put on his glasses … Idiots!” (VII, 69). The exact phrase Kostanzhoglo uses is “*politicheskii ekonom*”; and yet I would not claim that Gogol’s character is referring
only to Gospodin Ekonom, or Bulgarkin, even though one of the *Notes of the Fatherland’s* bitter reviews of the latter’s works called him a well-known *politicheskii ekonom*.

Kostanzhoglo is likely complaining about a larger tendency in the overproduction of faulty instructional literature by less than reputable figures, as well as the growing popularity of public courses on provincial domestic affairs offered to the aspiring landowner beginning with the 1830s. The particular inflection the word *ekonom* would have held for the reading public at this time (the middle decades of the nineteenth century) will be clarified if we return, for a moment, to a review of Bulgarkin’s periodical, where it is noted that “the word *ekonom* and etymologically related variants are so loud, so enticing and currently so fashionable.”

This shows, again, that Gogol’s creation of his model landowner echoes sentiments found in the reviews of Bulgarkin’s domestic how-to. Additionally, in a more general way, Kostanzhoglo’s sensibility is a kind of hyperbolic rendition of the critical treatment of authorities on rural domestic culture found in the writings of the provincial landowner and agronomist, Saburov whose works, as I mentioned earlier, Gogol clearly knew. Thus, specific aspects of Gogol’s characterization of Kostanzhoglo (both his abilities as a farmer and his views on authorities on the same subject) are in direct dialogue with contemporary discourses about model domestic culture.

Kostanzhoglo is presented from the start as a source of information about successful estate administration. Chichikov’s first words upon meeting him are a plea for help, a

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260 Again, it will serve to remember here that V. P. Burnashev would recall during the 1870s that many writers of instructional domestic literature had far from expert knowledge of the field.

261 *Otechestvennye zapiski* 14 (February, 1841): Russkaia literatura, 71.
request (“teach me, teach me”) for “wisdom about the difficult task of standing at the helm of rural housekeeping, the wisdom to derive profits, to acquire property that is not fantastic, but real, thereby fulfilling one’s obligation as a citizen, and gaining the respect of one’s countrymen” (VII, 62). Kostanzhoglo is cast as the “mouthpiece” for the text’s prescriptive message in a way that parallels Bulgarin’s use of Rossianinov. Earlier in the text, as Platonov (Kostanzhoglo’s brother-in-law) and Chichikov approach his grounds, the description of Kostanzhoglo’s property as distinctly better than the neighboring estates again recalls Bulgarin’s depiction of Rossianinov’s exemplary home. Platonov’s comment that “when everyone else has a bad harvest,” Kostanzhoglo is unaffected sounds similar to Bulgarin’s self-fashioning as a landowner immune from even climatically caused difficulties (VII, 58). The first issue of Ekonom had opened with the promise that the reader’s income, estimated at 20,000, would grow to 40,000 if he followed the advice of the periodical.\(^{262}\) The review in Notes of the Fatherland treats this assurance with skepticism. Gogol’s Kostanzhoglo has turned his 20,000 (or, in another version, 30,000) into 200,000. As such, his success may be read as a hyperbolized rendition of Bulgarin’s pledge to his readership. In his representation of Kostanzhoglo, Gogol combines what look to be the tactics employed by Bulgarin in both his novel and advice texts as well as the sensibility and strategies of the latter’s critics. This makes for an amplified level of contact between a novelistic text and instructional literature. In fact, as I will suggest below, what I have identified in Volume Two of Dead Souls as an expanded Bulgarin intertext (specifically, the presence of an additional intertext

\(^{262}\) I use the male pronoun advisedly, because the imagined reader of agricultural advice dispensed by Ekonom is always male.
comprised of contemporary appraisals of farming manuals, including *Ekonom*) marks a
turn in Gogol’s prose production away from the novelistic and towards the prescriptive
mode of contemporary advice literature.

**Genre and the Role of the Reader**

In the new preface that introduced the 1846 re-publication of *Dead Souls*, Gogol
famously invited the reading public to send him suggestions on how to improve the
novel: members of every estate and vocation were asked to advise the author, to “correct”
his rendering of Russia. What looks like a genuine desire for information of this sort is
also discernible in both *Selected Passages* and his personal correspondence. Anne
Lounsbery interprets Gogol's 1846 preface as follows: as Gogol asks for “raw data,”
which will “yield its true meaning only to the penetrating understanding of the true
artist”; the audience’s “acts of interpretation are to be replaced by contributions of data,
from which the author himself will extract a meaning.” While seeming to engage his
readers in a kind of dialogue, Gogol effectively “gains exclusive control over the
meaning of his art.”  

But just what sort of art is Gogol producing at this time? Considering the preface
as a text created by a writer of fiction, Donald Fanger has called this “bizarre document”
an “eloquent testimony to Gogol’s creative crisis,” finding that the introduction reveals a
writer’s “drama that is vocational and literary.”  

However, insofar as the drama is vocational, it may even mark a departure from the purely literary. Here my suggestion

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264 Donald Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge, MA and London,
draws on Lounsbery’s reading of the preface as a text that impedes and limits interpretation and thus would seem to severely curtail the meaning-making capacities of the novel. Because Gogol's invitation to readers has few, if any, analogues in prose fiction, it may help to consider it in a larger context provided by the Russian print output of the decade.

For authors of advice literature, the invitation that readers aid them in the enterprise is so common it is possible to call it a feature of the genre. Such authors very often asked their audience to help improve the volume for its subsequent printing; they also often incorporated the new material and even thanked the readership for their help. And since there could be factual errors in a book about, say, bovine husbandry, the collaboration between author and reader made sense. Vladimir Burnashev’s 1843-44 Attempt at a Terminological Dictionary of Rural Domestic Culture, Manufacturing, Crafts and Peasant Byt (Opyt terminologicheskogo slovaria sel’skogo khoziastva, fabrichnosti, promyslov i byta narodnogo) provides a good illustration of how such writers worked. Contemporaries saw Attempt as an excellent reference tool for landowners. The rather hefty encyclopedia had a practical purpose quite close to the utility of how-to literature. The multi-volume enterprise includes information on nearly every topic of relevance to the province imaginable: hunting, botany, architecture, peasants’ habits and much more. By definition, such a survey of provincial life continues to aspire to, without ever claiming, absolute completeness and accuracy. Recognizing this even prior to publishing the book, Burnashev offered the readership some forty-three entries as a sample in Notes of the Fatherland, where he also asked for both the public’s appraisal of and assistance in his work. It was later reported that he received such
assistance. He also thanked a long list of specific contributors in the introduction to his book. Both in his introduction and in various editorial reviews, Burnashev and the periodical press continued to encourage the readership’s participation in the enterprise.\(^{265}\) Throughout the publication history of his book, the reading public was summoned to correct the author’s mistakes, contribute their own raw data so as to improve the dictionary.

To the reader of Burnashev’s *Attempt at a Terminological Dictionary*, parts of Gogol’s notebooks from the 1840s (his records regarding local dialects as well as his definitions of farming tools, for example) bear a resemblance to the former’s published text. That these notes are preparations for Volume Two makes all the more interesting the juxtaposition of Gogol’s concern that the first part of his book contains “a great number of various mistakes and blunders” with similar formulations made by Burnashev and other writers in his genre\(^{266}\) (VI, 587). Gogol’s drive to document the province as preparation for Volume Two of *Dead Souls*, when read against the context of extra-literary discourses about domestic culture, begins to appear as an internalization of the perceived necessity to learn about the countryside before transforming it. This idea comes from advice literature about rural gentry domestic culture. I am aware of the long-

\(^{265}\) For example, in 1843 the *Journal of State Properties (Zhurnal gosudarstvennykh imushchestv)* wrote: “We invite all enlightened landlords to not leave without attention any local word, any expression related to rural domestic culture, housekeeping, peasant crafts and byt and to send them to the publisher,” who will relay the information to Burnashev.

\(^{266}\) Had Gogol published the non-fiction he worked on (a dictionary and a children’s geography book, for example), he would have become Burnashev’s colleague, as the latter, in addition to a plethora of advice books, the *Attempt* and various ethnographic books on Russia, also wrote children’s literature (for instance, a guide to St. Petersburg).
standing contention that Gogol didn’t really know Russia. Nor do I wish to counter it. However, that Gogol should fashion himself as someone who wishes to know Russia is significant. It is, in a sense, irrelevant whether Gogol’s information was “accurate.” Much more interesting is the drive to gather it and to incorporate it into the sequels to *Dead Souls*, a work the compositional history of which shared an aspect of methodology with authors of instructional non-fiction about the province.

The 1846 invitation then signals a shift toward the instructional mode. Soon, Gogol would publish *Selected Passages*, certainly a text that sought to transform its reader. Faddei Bulgarin, the first to review Gogol’s book of epistles, considers it a veritable turning point in Gogol’s career, expecting the author of *Dead Souls* to go on to produce works of a markedly different and, in his view, improved quality.267 If, as many readers have maintained, Volume Two was to function as art that, in Susanne Fusso’s formulation, can “present an accessible, unambiguous, and unmistakable message to the greatest possible number of people,” then this art is approaching something of the sensibility of the manual.268

Taking all of this into account, we might posit another sort of relationship between Volumes One and Two: not one of continuation, but a re-writing. Peace has observed that a number of characters in Volume Two are refracted, revised versions of

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267 Bulgarin’s well-known praise for Gogol’s *Selected Passages* was, of course, also programmatic inasmuch as he used Gogol’s own statements about Bulgarin’s criticism to place himself on the winning side of a lengthy quarrel with the Kraevsky-Belinsky camp.

268 Susanne Fusso, *Designing Dead Souls* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 120.
landowners encountered in Volume One. Volume Two seeks to “correct” the blunders of Volume One. This is a compositional tactic that looks borrowed from authors of advice literature.

The unfinished text of Volume Two, authored after the vocational crisis that led Gogol toward the sensibility of the extra-literary discourses about domestic culture, exhibits tendencies of the novelistic tradition that would be developed by the next generation of Russian writers. Finding the “didacticism” of Volume Two “disappointingly trite,” Peace, nevertheless, concedes that the text is “pregnant with the future,” identifying particular features of Gogol’s drafts for the novel that “[look] forward to the future development of Russian prose fiction.” A careful consideration of the compositional history of Volume Two of *Dead Souls* reveals that Gogol’s novelistic imagination relies on and re-works creatively a variety of trends observed in the popular non-fiction about gentry domestic culture as it presages the development of Russian Realist fiction. What this means is that still another significant milestone in the history of the Russian novelistic tradition lies in the interplay between prescriptive and creative texts that attempt to imagine a productive noble life in the province. Although Gogol himself departed from novelistic form in his attempts to incorporate extra-literary

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270 Ibid., 245-246. The critic identifies the characterization of Tentetnikov as the prime example of this tendency. He also finds that Goncharov’s Oblomov is Tentetnikov’s most direct successor. Elena Krasnoshchekova reaches similar conclusions. See Elena Krasnoshchekova, *I. A. Goncharov: Mir tvorchestva* (St. Petersburg: “Pushkinskii fond,” 1997), 227-234. Given that the intertextual links between the two landowners have been documented quite thoroughly, a treatment of these links as such occupies a marginal position in my own project. It still bears noting that the next chapter of this dissertation will examine Goncharov’s novelistic trilogy.
segments of Russian print culture into Volume Two of *Dead Souls*, the particular representational strategies he developed contained the seeds of the prose tradition that would flourish in the novel-dominated decades that famously followed.

**Gogol’s Domestic Advice Literatures**

In letters written while he summered at his ancestral estate of Vasil’evka in 1848, Gogol relates a host of complaints: a near-epidemic of cholera, his own ever-failing health and the resulting difficulty of work, the unbearable heat and the rather grim expectations for a bad harvest. While in the country, largely unable to work on Volume Two of *Dead Souls*, Gogol authored another document, one he likely never intended for publication: “The Distribution of Garden Works for the Autumn of 1848 and the Spring of 1849” (*Raspredelenie sadovykh rabot na osen’ 1848 goda i vesnu 1849*), a set of instructions to be carried out by his mother and sisters. These notes begin:

**AUTUMN WORKS.**

*September.*

Start of September: digging of ditches and garden-beds, beginning with the last days of August and until September 10th.
Middle of September: collection of acorns and seeds in the forest.
End of September: sowing of seeds, sending for trees from Iareski.

*October.*

Continuation of sowing and planting of trees in all such places where ditches and small trenches have been made.

*Digging.*

On this side, a ditch for the planting of poplars, through the cabbage beds [upon the harvesting of cabbage] past the apiary to the cherry trees that have been marked.
On the other side, small trenches at the marked places.
A ditch along that side in the direction of the pond to the brick factory, for the planting of poplars.
Small garden-beds for the planting of acorns in a row, along the edges of the soil that has been ploughed for the vegetable gardens: on this side—along the big alley, on that—behind the Sumakov grove, behind the small trenches for the birch
grove, along both sides of the alley along the garden-beds. In the event that there is time, see article: “Subsequent works.”

Written in a familiar, conversational tone, these instructions assume the reader’s familiarity with the landscape. Meant for a very small audience, this is a decidedly private, domestic kind of text that will only be fully understood by someone who knows well the spatial organization of the estate, as well as the markings made by the author prior to his departure from Vasil’evka. By the time of its composition, Gogol had already retracted his most recent book: in epistolary correspondence, he had admitted that the publication of *Selected Passages* may have been premature, finding that he had spoken too soon and with an authority he now found misplaced. Nor would Gogol be able to finish another text (Volume Two of *Dead Souls*) that would render the provincial nobleman’s domestic pursuits. Here, he turned to manage Vasil’evka—if from a distance. At the risk of trying the reader’s patience, I have opted to quote this lengthy passage so as to illustrate that in this most private of his attempts at a text about estate administration, Gogol’s attention to detail is remarkable. Be it dates, locations or methodology, Gogol’s instructions address every aspect of the undertaking at hand. In the months that followed (after the author had left Vasil’evka), the family’s correspondence contains brief snippets about this project, harvests and cattle disease.

Was Gogol attempting to become the model landowner, following through on an idea

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271 The portion entitled “Subsequent works” contains a list of detailed explanations for other labor that might be performed, time permitting: for example, Gogol gives specific measurements for the ditch that is to be dug for the planting of still more acorns. He also notes that these tasks may be left for 1849. These notes are published in P. O. Kulish, *Zapiski o zhizni Nikolaia Vasil’evicha Gogolia, sostavlennye iz vospominanii ego druzei i znakomykh i iz ego sobstvennykh pisem v dvukh tomakh*. Т. 2 (St. Petersburg: V tipografii Aleksandra Iakobsona, 1856), 278-281.
articulated in *Selected Passages*: that before writing Volume Two of *Dead Souls*, he had to become that about which he wished to write?

Parts of the instructions sound notes similar to the ethos of “The Russian Landowner” from *Selected Passages*: specifically, the insistence that the province-bound gentry-man must be present during the peasants’ labor. Gogol writes to his mother and sisters, “[d]uring the planting, it is necessary to be present yourself [samomu], so as to see whether all has indeed been planted correctly. During the planting of trees, it is again necessary that you be present, not having neglected to have with you at all times a small kit of water, into which the root of the tree that’s to be planted must be dipped, so as to ensure that the soil adheres to it.”

Gogol, of course, could not be present “himself” at the planting. That while writing to his female relatives, he uses the masculine *samomu* highlights the author’s own absence. Even though Gogol’s isn’t instructional literature in the book market’s sense of the word (it wasn’t meant for publication and sale), Michelle Maresse’s point that “[the] historian will search in vain for advice aimed at women on managing their estates” still comes to mind. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Maresse observes that, while most advice literature imagined gentry-men as the stewards of their rural property, women were just as (not to say more) liable to be charged with estate administration. Certainly, the Gogol family is a case that—although not treated in the historian’s stellar account—confirms Marrese’s findings about women’s prominent role in estate administration.

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272 Ibid.

From still another perspective, Gogol’s attention to such details as the necessity of bringing to the works a “small kit of water” begins to recall the work of another writer who not only wrote about but also cast himself as the model manager of the Russian country estate. It is rather hard not to think of Faddei Bulgarin’s advice literature when one encounters Gogol’s suggestion that “When planting trees that are particularly sensitive to the cold, it is necessary to dilute in water a little fresh one-day-old bovine fertilizer.”274 (On the pages of Ekonom Bulgarin treated a variety of subjects related to fertilizer at length.) The chief and crucial difference between the two authors’ texts is that while Gogol’s instructions were meant for private, family use, Bulgarin wrote on similar topics for the perusal of every willing member of his paying, anonymous audience. There is plenty of evidence that suggests that neither writer was a professional agronomist with anything approaching an ability to provide a scholarly account of the subject. Still, both tried their hand at the task. Gogol’s inability to provide an unproblematic and publically circulated depiction of the successful Russian gentry-man in the provinces shows that, during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the discursive construction of model gentry domestic culture came more easily to such authors of a commercial orientation as Bulgarin.

To be clear, my task in this chapter is neither to continue to vilify nor to rehabilitate Bulgarin and the so-called Smirdin “camp” of writers with whom he both collaborated and competed. Rather, I attempt here to document an important stage in the development of the novelistic representation of the Russian provincial gentry, paying close attention to both literary and extra-literary depictions of the figure, as well as

274 Kulish, 281.
moments from the history of the Russian book market at the time. I hope that my query, which focuses on a particular selection of texts taken from the multi-generic discourse that sought to give shape and structure to the identity of the Nicholas-era country noble, has shown that during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, novelistic and extra-literary (especially instructional) texts not only coexisted in the readerly practices of the provincial gentry, but also fed on each other in the novelistic imagination of at least two authors.

Gogol’s creative process as well as his achievements in the composition of Volume Two of *Dead Souls*, both of which proved crucial for the subsequent development of the Russian novelistic tradition, may be viewed with some profit as part of a broader narrative about the continued attempts to imagine the provincial landowner as a productive citizen of the empire, attempts carried out on the pages of a multi-generic selection of texts, some of which I’ve examined in this chapter. In the next chapter, as I turn to Goncharov’s novelistic trilogy, I will suggest that prescriptive non-fiction continued to cross-pollinate with the Russian novel, especially when it comes to the genre’s capacity and particular strategies for rendering gentry domesticity.
CHAPTER 3

«Фигура бледная, неясная»*: The Provincial Landowner in Goncharov’s Novelistic Imagination

“The gentry-men-poets ought to sing about the virtues of the seven-field crop rotation system!”


“Everything can be classified as somehow prosaic,” wrote Ivan Goncharov in his 1858 travelogue *The Frigate Pallas*, “an account of a cultivated Russian’s impressions of England and once exotic places like the west coast of Africa, Java, the Philippines, China, Japan, Siberia.” Alexander Herzen, who in 1857 penned a rather unflattering article called “The Uncommon Story of the Censor Gon-cha-ro from Shi-Pan-Khu,” the title here referring pointedly to Goncharov’s professional identity and recent travels in Asia, was noted for saying that the author of the travelogue had gone on a journey around the world in order to describe a long series of dinners. And while Herzen’s critical pronouncements were likely fueled by political and ideological differences, it is difficult

* “A Pale, Unclear Figure”

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276 Goncharov’s assumption of the post of censor (in March, 1856) was greeted with a good deal of skepticism by some of his more radically-minded contemporaries. For Herzen’s remark, see “Neobyknovennaia istoriia tsenzora Gon-cha-ro iz Shi-Pan-Khu” in A.I. Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow, Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), XIII: 104. For more on the reception of Goncharov’s activities as a censor, see E.A. Liatskii, *Roman i zhizn’. Rasvitie tvorcheskoi lichnosti I.A. Goncharova*. (Prague: Izdatel’stvo Plamia, 1925).
not to agree with his appraisal that *The Frigate Pallas* is a text replete with such prosy subjects as what Admiral Putiatin’s secretary ate for dessert on Madeira or how he dined at the Cape of Good Hope.  

Much more recently, V. A. Nedzvetsky has suggested that Goncharov’s formulation regarding the prosaic quality of “everything” reads as “one of the foundational statements about the author’s own poetics.” What one may call “the prose of everyday life” figures prominently in critical responses to Goncharov’s oeuvre. In his 1860 review of *Oblomov*, Alexander Miliukov started something of a trend in seeing Goncharov as little more than a *bytopisatel’*, a writer who excels in descriptions of everyday and, especially, domestic life. The author of one of the earliest monographs on the novelist, E.A. Liatskii, calls Goncharov “the great master of Russian everyday life,” assessing his skill for descriptions of “lackeys’ quarters, kitchens, the back stairs.” Yulii Aikhenval’d finds Goncharov to be most artistically successful when describing simple, “elementary” things—often objects or practices related to home life. In what has come to be one of the most often-cited pronouncements on the author of

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277 Goncharov was appointed to serve as secretary during Admiral Putiatin’s voyage in 1852. For a detailed treatment of the travelogue’s composition, see Goncharov, *PSS*, II: 391-830.


Oblomov, Aikhenva’ld calls the novelist “a poet of the room, a bard of the household, … a troubadour of everyday life.”

That the domestic detail should be a dominant formal feature of works produced by one of the founding figures in the Russian Realist tradition is not surprising, given the genre’s high capacity for the representation of the ordinary. While the prominence of the detail in Goncharov’s prose has received a good deal of critical attention, in the pages that follow I will offer some hypotheses about the generic and cultural origins of Goncharov’s extensive rendering of gentry domesticity. Part of my task in this chapter will be to undertake a survey of the several ways in which Goncharov’s novelistic output can be examined productively alongside advice literature in the widest sense of the term. Goncharov’s texts (both novels and a handful of short prose works) display quite robustly an awareness of this segment of the book market during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. For most advice literature, the detail is necessarily a prominent formal feature of narrative: a text that seeks to instruct the readership in such matters as the preparation of cattle feed or mayonnaise must represent its object quite extensively and minutely in order to be effective. It will be part of my contention that the discursive texture of Goncharov’s novelistic presentation of the gentry home bears a formal resemblance to domestic advice literature. The particular form the novelistic refraction of instructional texts takes will also be considered.

Gentry domestic culture persists as an object of representation in all three of Goncharov’s novels. Each volume of what the author considered a novelistic trilogy features a gentry-man protagonist whose capacities for estate management constitute one

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281 Yulii Aikhenva’ld, Siluety russkich pisatelei (Berlin: Slovo, 1923), 134.
of the central preoccupations of the texts in question. To put the matter very simply, all three of Goncharov’s novels ask: Who should manage the Russian country estate?

Although during Goncharov’s career, the novel was able to function as a vehicle for the transmission of ideological content (including domestic ideology), the genre most fit to answer this question remained instructional. As Mary Cavender and Alison K. Smith have shown and as my own discussion has attempted to illustrate, by the 1840s, Russia had a lively textual industry (comprised of periodicals, pamphlets and book-length publications) devoted to estate administration. Noblemen were the target audience of these texts. While Smith finds that the majority of the Russian gentry remained uninterested and uninvolved in the management of their property, Cavender judges that the objects of her inquiry (Tver province landowners) did take an earnest interest in estate administration specifically, and local life more generally and participated in the extra-literary discourse about the exemplary landowner by writing instructional texts.

Advice literature about estate administration is mentioned in all three of Goncharov’s novels. The trilogy is populated by participants in this part of the Russian print market: the young Aduev of A Common Story (Obyknovennaia istoriia, 1847) is a producer of instructional literature about the estate, while the eponymous hero of Oblomov (Oblomov, 1859) and the landowner Tushin of The Ravine (Obryv, 1869) are said to be consumers of treatises about rural domestic culture. Much as each novel expresses a keen awareness of domestic advice literature as a discursive enterprise that seeks actively to imagine on the page and encourage in life the ideal landowner as a

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282 See Mary Cavender, Nests of the Gentry. Family, Estate and Local Loyalties in Provincial Russia (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007) and Smith, Recipes for Russia.
responsible steward of his rural property, though Goncharov’s novels dramatize, each in its own way, the reluctance to incorporate a hero written according to the paradigms set forth in instructional literature about the landowner’s role in the province. Still, even if the novel cannot absorb fully this social type as a hero, there is what I would call a formal consequence to the attempt: the prominence of the domestic detail in Goncharov’s fiction.

«По части сельского хозяйства»

A Common Story is one of the few successful Russian bildungsromans. Goncharov’s first novel charts the evolution of Alexander Aduev from a young provincial with naïvely misplaced hopes for writerly fame to a practically minded denizen of the northern capital. Boris Maslov finds that the young protagonist’s gradual abandonment of dilettantish artistic activity “reads as a sub-textual (podspudnyi) plotline of the bildungroman.” Of central import to Maslov is that Aduev’s amateurish creativity is an important attribute of gentry behavior. I would add to this that Alexander’s rather protracted realization of the futility of his artistic aspirations coincides with a turn to a kind of professional journalistic activity that is closely related to a more prosaic part of gentry culture: articles about farming.

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283 On the subject of Rural Domestic Culture


Aduev’s uncle, upon learning of the young man’s interest in literature, offers him a “literary pursuit”—a characterization probably not lacking in sarcasm—to translate from German an article called “About Fertilizer” (I, 225; I, 229). Meant for the rural domestic culture section of a journal, the article is, of course, not at all what young Alexander has in mind when he dreams of the poet’s life. With the mention of “About Fertilizer” begins a set of allusions to this segment of Russian print culture that accompany the plot concerned with Aduev’s unsuccessful attempts to write literature for much of the novel. After the article about fertilizer, he translates another piece entitled “About Potato Syrup.” Aduev’s work, first as the translator, then as the author of works on the subject of agriculture is mentioned at least fifteen times in a relatively short text.286 Given the sustained attention the young man’s part time vocation receives, it seems fitting to ask just what sorts of meanings accrue to this work.

From one perspective, Alexander’s participation in the periodical amounts to a gradual shift away from amateurish artistic activity, a professionalization of his writerly (albeit, no longer creative) pursuits. Eventually, the young man becomes “an important personage” in the fictional journal, a rather prolific contributor who “chooses, translates as well as re-works others’ articles, himself writes various theoretical treatises on the subject of estate work” (I, 234). The editor’s remark that “everything shows […] the work of] an educated producer, not a craftsman” underscores the hero’s gradual abandonment

286 N. G. Evstratov has pointed out that both titles were taken by Goncharov from the rural domestic culture section of the Journal of the Ministry of State Properties (Zhurnal Ministerstva gosudarstvennykh imushchestv), a publication with which the novelist was familiar. See N. G. Evstratov, “Goncharov na putiakh k romanu:(K kharakteristike rannego tvorchestva),” in Uchenye zapisky Ural’skogo ped. Instituta, Tom 2, Vypusk 6, 171-215.
of his purely literary and amateurish undertakings for the work of a specialist (I, 335).

That Aduev is to be compensated for his labors (one hundred rubles a month for three print-size pages) is more proof of the same (I, 230).

Aduev’s ability to become a productive member of the relatively new institutions of Russian print culture is expected to mark a shift in both his professional and emotional selves. Specifically, his work as a journalist who writes prescriptive texts about model gentry domestic culture is meant to coincide with his turn away from the foggy dreams of an enraptured dilettante-writer towards the more sober-minded sensibility of the Positive Age. The elder Aduev’s surprise that his nephew who has been “writing for two years … about fertilizer, about the potato crop, and other serious subjects, where the style is strict, concise” still speaks “in a savage fashion” (like a young man with misplaced aspirations towards writerly fame) confirms this reading (I, 245).

Finally, the hero’s letter to his Petersburg relatives (written towards the end of the novel) showcases the degree to which his work with instructional literature about estate administration has produced the projected effect. Having announced that he has just completed an original treatise on farming, Alexander draws his readers’ attention to the changes in his epistolary style: “lines, written in a calm, uncharacteristic [for the protagonist] tone” (I, 449). In this reading, Goncharov deploys instructional literature about estate administration as the prosaic segment of Russian print culture; the novelist stages a situation in which the hero’s feverish desire for the life of the poet is tempered by work with the most prosy of subjects such as dung and potato syrup specifically and farm work generally.
The above discussion provides a sufficient interpretation of the most readily apparent function of advice literature in *A Common Story*. However, a closer look at Goncharov’s choice of subject matter (why, after all, farming and not some other, equally prosy topic?) illuminates the chief tendency in the trilogy’s capacity to produce the Russian landowner as an object of novelistic representation—the simultaneous incorporation of, and marked resistance to, extra-literary discourses that imagine the perfect *pomeshchik*.

Readers will recall that upon his return to his ancestral estate, Aduiev observes farm work to find that his advice as a Petersburg journalist was often erroneous, admitting “how often we [the journalists] lied there [on the pages of Petersburg journal]” (I, 446). He begins to take what looks to be a more authentic interest in farming, to “become immersed in the matter more deeply and attentively” (I, 446). Ultimately, Alexander resolves to author an original work on the subject of estate administration. He researches the topic, ordering literature from the capital, becoming now a provincial consumer of instructional literature about the estate. After a year’s work, he produces a treatise, which he offers to share with his uncle upon his return to St. Petersburg. To a significant degree, the near-completion of Alexander’s *Bildung* is conveyed via this work of instructional literature about farming. By becoming a producer of the programmatic discourse about the model *pomeshchik*, Alexander matures. Why is this stage of his formation so closely linked to the activity of observing and writing about farm work? As we have seen, by the 1840s provincial landowners participated quite actively in the discourse about the model landowner. Alexander’s time and work in the provinces brings him quite close to becoming this sort of person—just another rural producer of how-to
literature about farming, a gentleman farmer who writes in order to disprove the works of urban agronomists.\textsuperscript{287}

Paradoxically, even though Aduev inherits his mother’s estate and marries a woman in possession of rural property of her own, at the end of the novel, Alexander—turned, one imagines, an expert farmer—eschews estate-keeping for a “career and a fortune” in the capital. The fact that \textit{A Common Story} puts instructional literature about farming to such extensive use in the rendering of the hero’s \textit{Bildung}, that Aduev becomes a producer of programmatic discourses about exemplary noble life in the provinces, but fails himself to embody this ideal calls attention to the fact that the novel cannot sustain a depiction of a productive gentry-man farmer. Because it includes this sub-plot about Aduev’s part time employment as an author of advice literature that imagines the perfect landowner, Goncharov’s first novel simultaneously evinces an awareness of the prescriptive models that govern model gentry life in the provinces and resists a straightforward incorporation of this life into a novelistic text.

\textbf{How to Live Before \textit{Oblomov}}

Goncharov began planning \textit{Oblomov} during the late 1840s, while a fairly active contributor to \textit{The Contemporary (Sovremennik)}, where he had published his first novel, \textit{A Common Story}, in 1847. A few months later, in the ninth issue of \textit{The Contemporary} for the same year, Nikolai Nekrasov announced that “the author of \textit{A Common Story} is preparing a \textit{new novel} which the editors also hope to publish.”\textsuperscript{288} For a number of

\textsuperscript{287} See for example, chapter 2 for my discussion of I.V. Saburov—Aduev’s contemporary and a provincial landowner turned professional published agronomist.

\textsuperscript{288} Quoted in Goncharov, \textit{PSS}, VI, 13.
reasons, including tougher censorship as well as Goncharov’s notoriously slow artistic method, it would take the novelist twelve more years to begin publishing Oblomov serially in Notes of the Fatherland (Otechestvennye zapiski).

Yet if we take Nekrasov’s 1847 announcement about the novel as a serious expectation, then we might consider closely the relationship between Oblomov and the short pieces Goncharov was able to finish and publish in The Contemporary, while slowly writing small portions of Volume One of the novel. \(^{289}\) Aside from A Common Story, Goncharov contributed the following pieces to Nekrasov’s journal: an unsigned review of a popular conduct manual by Dmitry Sokolov, a feuilleton entitled “Letters from a Dweller of the Capital to His Friend, a Provincial Groom” (Pis’ma stolichnogo druga k provintsial’nomu zhenikhu) and the sketch “Ivan Savich Podzhabrin.” \(^{290}\) Together, these three works illustrate Goncharov’s creative engagement with advice literature, as well as the growing centrality of home life in his artistic output during the late 1840s. \(^{291}\)

Conversational and light-hearted in tenor, Goncharov’s review of Sokolov’s conduct book, A Man of the World, Or a Guide to Social Rules (Svetskii chelovek, ili Rukovodstvo k poznaniiu pravil obshchezhitiiia, 1847) is unusually long for a

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\(^{289}\) Goncharov repeatedly recalled that he would use small pieces of paper to write short pieces of the novel during the dozen or so years during which he worked on the piece.

\(^{290}\) Goncharov also published an obituary for the young Maikov. However, I omit this piece from my discussion, because it is not relevant to the subject.

\(^{291}\) For more on the attribution and discussion of these short pieces and their ties to all three of Goncharov’s novels, see Yu. G. Oksman, “Neizvestnye fel’etony I. A. Goncharova” in Felyetony sorokovykh godov (Moscow: 1930), as well as A. G. Tseitlin, I. A. Goncharov (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1950) and A.D. Alekseev, Letopis’ zhizni i tvorchestva Goncharova (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1960).
bibliographic feuilleton, an assessment that testifies to Goncharov’s lively interest in instructional non-fiction. There are potential echoes between Sokolov’s book, Goncharov’s review and Oblomov: from the title hero’s socially inappropriate attachment to his housecoat (Sokolov advises against wearing this garment while receiving guests) to not quite knowing what to do with oneself when visiting with respectable company (Oblomov chez Ilyinskie). While Sokolov’s book addressed a readership demographically below the Oblomov of the final redaction of the text, Ilya Ilyich of the early drafts of the novel is quite a bit closer to the target audience of this conduct book. The fact that Goncharov reviewed a book that prescribes behavioral models (albeit not for the landowner, but the urban “middling man”), coupled with the prominence of farming literature in A Common Story, shows a rather multi-faceted engagement with advice literature in the broad sense of the term. Finally, a pronouncement Goncharov makes about the book’s organization betrays both a familiarity and a playful interest in how-to publications. He writes, “[a] demanding reader will say, perhaps, that he would have liked from the author a more accurate view or … how should I say this? … well, at least, a smarter view of the science of social intercourse, a more collective system than this division, in the manner of cookery books, into chapters on main courses, roasts, sauces, treatment of the servants and so on” (I, 501). Goncharov compares Sokolov’s manual to the common cookbook. The passage attests to the degree to which Goncharov

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292 This appraisal is made in the critical commentary to the review. See Goncharov, PSS, I:798.

293 The editors of the latest PSS show that Goncharov “ennobled” Oblomov in the course of his revisions, taking out such details as the relatively déclassé furniture items the hero had procured at Gostinyi dvor, for example. This, again, shows that the novel grew out of the review of the conduct book.
was conversant with the whole corpus of instructional literature and able to juxtapose various sub-genres within it (cookbook vis-à-vis conduct book) in order to make his point. That Goncharov should take an interest in the how-to book market is far from unusual for a member of his generation. As the previous chapter documents, such writers as Odoevsky and Gogol both reviewed instructional literature and re-worked it artistically.

Published over a year after the review of Sokolov's manual, “Letters from a Dweller of the Capital to His Friend, a Provincial Groom” (henceforth referred to simply as “Letters”) shows a no less interested engagement with how-to literature and builds on the playful inflection of the previous piece. “Letters” is an epistolary enterprise comprised of three missives from the dweller of the capital, A. Chelsky, to his provincial correspondent, Vasily Vasil’ich. The former advises the latter about participating properly in polite society. There are extended discussions about various aspects of “how to live,” including such topics as the proper ways to decorate one’s home, where to purchase what sort of dishware, how to obtain appropriate clothing.

Goncharov’s relationship to genre is a bit complicated here. It has been pointed out that in “Letters” Goncharov treats parodically the genre of the feuilleton. Thus, Chelsky’s phrase “I am just waiting for someone to write some humorous little article about you and your china and your carriage” reads as an admission of the ultimately parodic relationship of the author to his own text, which is exactly this sort of humorous little article (I, 489). Yet since the alleged purpose of the letters is for Chelsky to instruct Vasily Vasil’ich in matters ranging from polite conduct to interior decoration, it seems fair to also consider advice literature as a genre that is present throughout the epistles.
Chelsky’s hope that their letters will one day constitute “a complete *theory of how to live*” and will be “published” for the public’s edification is an additional allusion to instructional non-fiction (italics in the original, I, 492). The phrase “a complete *theory of how to live*” reads like a parody of the common title of a “how to” book, as such titles very often claimed to be “complete” treatments of their subject and made excessive use of scientific vocabulary (offering the reading public a “theory” or “science”) to lend gravity to what might otherwise be judged a trivial undertaking.294 Thus, in “Letters,” Goncharov is manipulating both the genre of *feuilleton* and the generic-cultural register of popular advice literature about conduct and home life. “Letters” is, among other things, a mock instructional manual.

Yulii Oksman has pointed out that, like the review of Sokolov’s book, the “Letters” contain specific correspondences with Goncharov’s novels, *Oblomov* chief among them. One may discern in Vasily Vasil’ich certain features of Ilya Ilyich. To begin with, there is a physical resemblance: like Oblomov, the addressee of the letters is said to be in the habit of wearing his housecoat, has a “swollen face” and a belly. The woman he is to marry resembles Olga Ilyinskaya. Chelsky expects that she will perform works by composers such as Rossini, Verdi and Bellini. The mention of Bellini in particular calls for a comparison with the role the aria “Casta Diva” (from *Norma*) plays in Goncharov’s novel. Oblomov mentions “Casta Diva” as he describes his dream (*mechta*) of the perfect estate life to Stolz. Soon thereafter, he falls in love with Olga when she performs

294 See chapter two for a treatment of the artistic utility of how-to literature for Goncharov’s contemporary, Odoevsky.
the aria. Finally, the Country Groom of the feuilleton even has his own Agafya Matveevna, in embryonic form, as the “girl Agashka.” It has been suggested that the Capital City Dweller’s advice to the Country Groom to get rid of this Agashka (as she has taken too large a role in the household) is replayed directly in Oblomov with Stolz’s suggestion that Oblomov get rid of Agafya Matveevna.

The above summary reveals that many aspects of the novel Oblomov can be traced to Goncharov’s creative engagement with popular extra-literary discourses about conduct and domestic culture. Several aspects of the novel come from a feuilleton that is, among other things, a parody of advice literature.

The third of Goncharov’s intervening works, the sketch “Ivan Savich Podzhabrin,” has long been considered a pre-cursor to Oblomov. Such elements of this text as the protagonist’s relationship with his manservant are usually cited as material that Goncharov would later re-work in his novel. Of the various aspects of the sketch that Goncharov may have put to use in Oblomov, most important to my inquiry is that the piece begins when Podzhabrin must move to a new apartment and ends with the same situation. The same trope (looking for home both as apartment hunting and in a more general sense) is palpable in much of the novel Oblomov.

Where is Oblomovka?

Some three years prior to the serial publication of Oblomov (1859) in Notes of the Fatherland, Lev Tolstoy published his novella, “A Landowner’s Morning” (1856) in the same journal. Both Tolstoy’s novella and Goncharov’s novel document the attempts of a gentry-man protagonist to manage his estate. Tolstoy’s young prince Nekhliudov retires

295 Otradin, Proza, 5-24.
early and takes up residence at his rural property, where he intends to “devote [him]self to life in the country” and “the seven hundred souls” whose guardianship he calls a “sacred and direct responsibility.”

Nekhliudov’s decision echoes closely contemporary extra-literary, often instructional, discourses about the duties of the rural landlord as the divinely sanctioned steward of both land and peasant. Earnest in his aspirations, Nekhliudov consults works of instructional literature, specifically, a French manual, Jacques Alexandre Bixio’s five-volume treatise on rural domestic affairs *The Country Home of the xix Century* (*Maison rustique du XIX siècle*, 1837). The gentry-man’s study is littered with stacks of books and papers related to estate management. He keeps track of all his activities in a little notebook.

Goncharov’s *Oblomov* opens with another sort of a “landowner’s morning.” A juxtaposition of Ilya Ilyich with Tolstoy’s Nekhliudov shows Oblomov to be a caricature of the model landowner. Easily one of the most incurable homebodies in Russian fiction, Oblomov wakes up at an apartment from which he is being evicted. A host of other domestic mishaps follows: money owed to vendors, general untidiness that manifests itself on every surface of the hero’s study, and finally, the letter from the village elder about the mismanagement of his country estate. Goncharov’s text reverses the spatial organization of Tolstoy’s novella. Whereas the latter takes place at Nekhliudov’s rural property, strictly speaking, none of the waking action of *Oblomov* transpires at

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298 The earliest drafts of this scene are dated at the late 1840s. To be clear, this is not a study of influences.
Oblomovka. The estate serves as a setting only for a rather fantastic (as opposed to realistic) narrative, “Oblomov’s Dream,” throughout the duration of which the “action” of the novel remains limited spatially to the couch on which the hero is sleeping. Aside from its representation in the Dream, Oblomovka is only spoken about. Readers are informed about the state of affairs at the estate via letters and hearsay.

Yet all of the major characters are tied to Oblomovka. The title hero spends much of the novel agonizing over the mismanagement of his country estate. His manservant Zakhar sees himself as an “item of decoration,” a fancy fixture of the ancient noble home (IV, 72). Oblomov’s friend Stolz, whose father was the manager at the estate of Verkhliovo, which had belonged to the Oblomov family in the past, ultimately inherits some of his father’s work as he takes over Oblomovka completely by the end of the novel. Ilya Ilyich repeatedly imagines Olga as the mistress of the estate and offers to take Pshenitsyna as his housekeeper (ekonomka) in the country. The novel’s villains, Tarantyev and Mukhoyarov, plot (initially, with success) to fraudulently appropriate the profits received from the estate. Moreover, Oblomovka as a space is systematically transposed onto two locations in St. Petersburg: Stolz refers both to Oblomov’s Gorokhovaia street apartment and to the house on the Vyborg side as “Oblomovkas.” The novel is all but fixated on a piece of property the text never represents directly.

Absent though it is from the direct representational frame of the text, Oblomovka creeps into some of the most unlikely portions of the novel, a tendency that is best revealed in a passage from Goncharov’s drafts. In an attempt to describe the hero’s profound inability to negotiate between state service and private domestic existence, Goncharov writes, “his main station in life—his employment [in state service]—at first
proved perplexing in the most unpleasant way. … [H]is future employment seemed to him some sort of a family [business] activity, like [cooking] [pickling cucumbers], the yield of thrashed grain, the pickling of cucumbers, the making of preserves, or the [transcription] transcribing into a notebook the revenues and expenses [associated with estate keeping] 299 (V, 83). Gentry-men of Oblomov’s generation could choose to pursue a career in military or civil service, or, they could devote their time to the management of the estate. That Oblomov completely mixes the two realms of activity is noteworthy. The appearance of the “pickling of cucumbers” and an estate manager’s credit-debit record keeping in the context (and Oblomov’s understanding) of the world of the government official (where these things do not properly belong) points to what I would diagnose as a kind of pathological attachment to country housekeeping. A notoriously poor steward of his property, Oblomov nevertheless approaches even service in the capital, the part of his life most removed from the country estate, as akin to rural domestic pursuits. The spatial organization of the novel (that Oblomovka is both nowhere and everywhere) reflects the title hero’s unhealthy preoccupation with his property.

**Oblomov’s estate “work”**

If in *A Common Story*, the young Aduev’s work as a journalist who writes about farming accompanies the hero for much of the text, the hero of Goncharov’s next novel spends almost the entire book thinking about the reorganization of his rural property. Oblomov stops “dreaming about the arrangement of the estate and the trip there” only in the concluding pages of the novel (IV, 474). Oblomov’s drawn-out attempt to become a

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299 Brackets mark text crossed out by the author.
good manager of his property could easily be said to be the novel’s prime preoccupation. Whereas in *A Common Story*, the word *pomeshchik* is used only once and even then not to describe any of the major figures, Oblomov is called a landowner repeatedly. His inability to fulfill this role successfully constitutes one of the novel’s central preoccupations.

The pathological dimension in Oblomov’s relationship to his estate has to do with an inability to tap into the “correct”—historically and culturally appropriate—mode (and genre) that would allow him to produce a coherent sense of self as a provincial landowner. I will argue below that the hero has absorbed multiple competing discourses about the role of the landowner in the province and is able neither to choose one, nor to create a viable hybrid. *Oblomov*, then, dramatizes an encounter between the behavioral models put forth by distinct discursive formations regarding gentry domesticity.

Ekaterina Liapushkina identifies Oblomov as a “carrier of a lyrical consciousness” informed, above all, by the genre of the friendly epistle, a form that is particularly suited for the representation of the prosaic in poetry. As Liapushkina demonstrates, Oblomov’s understanding of gentry domestic culture is built in adherence to the principles of the friendly epistle. Chief among the characteristics of Oblomov’s worldview that originate in this genre is the hero’s desire to return to the secure space of his ancestral estate, Oblomovka. Focusing on the novel’s capacity to underscore the difference between art and life, and the difficulty of building a life according to the

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aesthetic precepts of a particular poetic tradition, Liapushkina’s analysis confirms that the
generic imperatives of the friendly epistle cannot, by definition, function fully in a novel.
Goncharov’s novel as a whole is structured in such a way as to highlight the degree to
which the friendly epistle’s conception of both the gentry-man and the gentry home has
become unavailable. I would add that Goncharov deploys this outdated literary paradigm
alongside and in relation to another discursive formation that imagined the gentry-man in
the province: contemporary advice literature about noble private life in the country.

Especially in the early parts of the novel (most strongly in volume one, less and
less so later in the text), Oblomov manages to process his inactivity as the work of a
provincial landowner. In Part I, while at home at his Gorokhovaia street apartment, the
couch-bound hero is said to get “to work on the development of the plan for the estate.”
While this scene is often read for its comical rendering of Oblomov the pomeshchik, I
would suggest that we suspend this response for a moment. That Oblomov “quickly
reviewed in his mind some serious, seminal articles about quitrent, about ploughing”
suggests that Ilya Ilyich has some awareness of treatises on estate administration (IV, 75).
Oblomov’s ostensible ability to think up a “new, stricter measure against the peasants’
idleness and vagrancy” also seems in keeping with the landowner’s occupation. Next,
Oblomov turns to the layout of rooms in the house he plans to build. In a matter of a few
paragraphs, Oblomov sees “himself several years later living permanently in the country
after all his plans for the estate had been accomplished” and transitions swiftly to “his
favorite fantasy”: a life with “the small circle of friends who” “visit each other every day
for dinner, for supper,” and sees “nothing but sun-filled days, beaming faces, free of cares
and wrinkles, round smiling faces, cheeks rosy with health, double chins, and healthy
appetites,” an “endless summer, unflagging good humor and high spirits, and the food as delectable as the leisure to enjoy it” (IV, 76). Liapushkina convincingly demonstrates that this vision derives from the friendly epistle. The friendly epistle’s gentry domesticity is offered as an escape from contemporary prescriptive discourses about noble life and work in the province. Soon after recollecting the contents of texts that seek to prescribe a program for noble life in the province, Oblomov retreats into a poetic genre that imagined the noble home as an escape from the cares of the world. The very close proximity of the articles about quitrent and ploughing to Oblomov’s poetically conceived domesticity reveals an inability to stay within one genre, within one discursive formation that structures the noble provincial home. The loose boundaries between the two kinds of “texts” attest to a consciousness that is unable to negotiate between competing conceptions of the landowner in the province. All too aware of contemporary discursive constructions of exemplary gentry domesticity, Oblomov is shown to resist them by choosing instead to inhabit an outmoded literary form (the friendly epistle).

Ultimately, both the final redaction and the compositional history of Volume One reveal a mutli-faceted interest in gentry housekeeping, discernible both in the hero’s behavior and in the author’s creative process. Given the near-catastrophic condition of all of Oblomov’s homes, Volume One reads as an invitation to good housekeeping, which, as I will argue in the pages that follow, Volumes Three and Four deliver in the image of the widow Pshenitsyna.

**How the Oblomovka on the Vyborg Side is Made**

The first time Oblomov’s future Vyborg Side landlady is mentioned in Volume One of the novel, Tarantyev describes her as a woman who keeps a clean, orderly home.
Later in the novel, when Oblomov (and the reader) finally meet Pshenitsyna for the first time, Goncharov inserts a short episode that all but “screams” housekeeping: when Oblomov and the widow have sat down for their first conversation, Pshenitsyna’s servant, Akulina, runs into the living room, holding an unruly, live, cackling rooster, asking whether this bird is the one meant for sale. Although embarrassed to be seen in the midst of such a task, Pshenitsyna advises Akulina about the sale of poultry. Immediately thereafter, Oblomov exclaims “Housekeeping!” We learn a few times in the course of the novel that housekeeping is Pshenitsyna’s major source of income: she sells various products (such as eggs and poultry) to gentry households.

Much as he may utter an admiring “housekeeping!” in response to the bird episode, Oblomov is initially set on not staying at Pshenitsyna’s home. Yet he proves all but powerless in the face of her exemplary domesticity. Especially the first stages of the romance (if one may call it that) between Oblomov and Pshenitsyna read quite like an extended rendition of the proverbial notion that “the way to a man’s heart is via his stomach,” although, it is not only Pshenitsyna’s culinary prowess that Oblomov admires. If in his affair with Olga, Oblomov’s faulty housekeeping continually threatened to and finally did corrode the relationship, his second romantic alliance is inspired and fueled by Pshenitsyna’s faultless domesticity (her pies, home-made vodka infusion and superb coffee; how well she makes his bed and repairs his stockings). Ultimately, much of this prose of everyday life comes to serve as a sort of barometer for their relationship.

The first time Oblomov kisses Pshenitsyna (“lightly on the neck”) reveals the degree to which Oblomov essentially lusts after a good housekeeper. First, the hero
observes that “the elbows are working away with incredible agility.” Oblomov begins his advances with the following remark that refers to Agafya’s ample housework:

“Always so busy!” he said, walking up to her. “What’s that?”
“I’m grinding cinnamon,” she replied, looking down into the mortar as if it were a deep pit, pounding relentlessly with the pestle.
“And what if I bother you a bit?” he asked, cupping her elbows and stopping her.
“Let go! I still have to grind the sugar and pour out the wine for the pudding.”
He kept holding her by the elbows and brought his face up close to the nape of her neck. “What would you say if … I came to love you?” She giggled.
“Would you love me back?” he persisted.
“Why wouldn’t I, God tells us to love everyone.”
“And what if I kissed you?” he whispered, lowering his head so that his breath burnt her cheek.
“This isn’t Holy Week,” she said with another giggle.
“Come now, give me a kiss!”
“Let’s wait for Easter, then if Lord grants it, we can kiss,” she said without surprise, not at all embarrassed, unabashed, and standing up straight and still as a horse having its collar put on. He kissed her lightly on the neck.
“Look now! If I spill the cinnamon, there’ll be nothing to put in your pastries!” she responded.
“I don’t care!” he said.
“How did you get another stain on your dressing gown?” she asked caringly, taking the hem of his dressing gown into her hand, “Seems like it may be oil” she sniffed the stain, “where did you get it? Could it have dripped from the lamp?”
“I don’t know how I acquired it.”
“I bet you got it from the door,” she said, suddenly realizing what must have happened, “yesterday they greased the hinges—they were creaking. Take it off and give it to me right away, I’ll take it and wash it and tomorrow the stain will be gone.”
“You’re so good to me, Agafya Matveevna!” said Oblomov, lazily taking the dressing gown off his shoulders, “you know what, why don’t we go and live in the country, on my estate; that would really be the place for you to keep house, it has everything: our own mushrooms, berries, preserves, poultry, cattle…”

Here, as elsewhere in portions of the novel that take place on the Vyborg Side, Oblomov is attracted to Pshenitsyna’s working body; he is attracted to the sight of good
housekeeping. Just before the cited text, Pshenitsyna is shown sewing so vigorously that Oblomov jokes that she might sew her nose to her skirt. Later, they discuss dinner. The kiss is embedded in a long list of specific activities associated with housekeeping.

E.A. Liatskii has noted that Olga appears very early in Goncharov’s manuscripts for the novel.\textsuperscript{301} The same cannot be said of Pshenitsyna, who is never directly represented in surviving published drafts.\textsuperscript{302} This feature of the novel’s compositional history prompts me to return to tracing aspects of Goncharov’s artistic process that are relevant for considering his representation of domestic culture.

During an 1857 trip to Mariendbad, where Goncharov would write much of Parts Three and Four of the novel, the novelist met a fairly prominent author of domestic manuals, Ignaty Radetsky, who produced a number of titles on the subject of gentry domestic culture during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. In a letter written while the novelist was en route to Marienbad, Goncharov recounts in some detail how he shared a stage-coach with this Radetsky: “he [Radetsky] thought to engage me, starting up conversations about trade, about politics and then suddenly, oh horrors, about literature. He is very clever and has read some things, by the way, he wrote the book \textit{The Gastronome’s Almanac}, which was censored by Elagin, who all but found much ‘free spirit’ in it.”\textsuperscript{303} Goncharov clearly considers Radetsky to be socially inferior to himself—he gently pokes fun at the Polish inflection of Radetsky’s Russian and generally finds the

\textsuperscript{301} Liatskii, \textit{Roman i zhizn’}, 245-246.

\textsuperscript{302} Of course, one may count her appearance as the “girl Agashka” in the feuilleton as a kind of draft for her later, novelistic representation.

\textsuperscript{303} I. A. Goncharov, \textit{Sobranie sochinenii v vos’mi tomakh} (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaja literatura, 1980), VIII: 229. I refer to this edition for Goncharov’s correspondence, because the most recent edition of his complete works has not been published in full.
man amusing. Although Goncharov did not wish to speak with the Radetsky, this passage demonstrates that the novelist was quite aware of the existence and, to a limited degree, even the contents of the manual in question. This much ought not be surprising given that Goncharov’s interest in gastronomical matters is well-documented and *The Gastronomes’ Almanac* (Goncharov gives a slightly inaccurate title)\(^{304}\) is, among other things, a collection of menus.

Two sentences after the passage above, Goncharov muses about the way in which travel affords one the possibility to engage in introspection. He records, “nowhere can one become so excruciatingly immersed in oneself and sort out all sorts of trash, rubbish, with which a person becomes filled in the course of many, many years. Some [female] housekeepers (*inye domovodki*) collect rubbish in old chests from youth and then like to sort it out; perhaps she’ll find a worm-eaten little piece of fur, a discolored piece of fabric from a wedding dress, a needle-case and then suddenly, she’ll stumble upon some sort of old garment, now turned black and yellow, but with a diamond.”\(^{305}\) That these musings and the mention of Radetsky (to whom Goncharov returns a bit later) are separated by a single sentence suggests that the presence of the author of domestic manuals results in the introduction of the figure of the housekeeper. From a formal point of view, Radetsky’s company also inspires the accumulation of details pertaining to material objects in the text of the letter. Again, this missive comes about a month before Goncharov wrote the

\(^{304}\) The full, if awkward, title of this work is: *The Gastronomes’ Almanac, containing thirty complete dinners, with supplementary notes in Russian and French, rules of setting the table, serving at table, the order of wine, that is, which wine is to be served with which meal, and a practical manual for the kitchen.* Goncharov’s mistake is writing “gastronome” in the singular, calling the book *The Gastronome’s Almanac.*

\(^{305}\) Ibid., 229-230.
series of oft-quoted letters regarding his creative rebirth and speedy composition of much of the text of Oblomov. Given the temporal proximity of this letter to the “miracle at Marienbad,” it becomes tempting to ask whether any of Goncharov’s introspective musings had to do with his artistic self, even the novel Oblomov.

A passage from Oblomov makes this possibility quite likely as it is basically a reworked version of the text from the 1857 letter cited above. In Part Three of Oblomov, “Agafya Matveevna sat on the floor and sorted out junk in an old chest; heaps of rags, cotton, old dresses, buttons and pieces of fur lay near her” (IV, 355). Thus, an aspect of the representation of Agafya Matveevna can be linked with Goncharov’s encounter with and epistolary writings about Ignaty Radetsky. This passage from Oblomov is immediately followed by news that the house at Oblomovka has become uninhabitable—it has nearly fallen apart and had to be vacated. In other words, just as the house at Oblomovka-the-actual-estate has become completely broken, Goncharov embarks on the task of “building” the new Oblomovka on the Vyborg Side and he “builds” it in a way that can be tied to middlebrow popular instructional non-fiction.

Further evidence of this may be found in a passage often read for its Homeric poeticization of domestic culture. Exalting the happy relationship between two model housekeepers, Agafya Matveevna Pshenitsyna and Anisya, Goncharov’s narrator exclaims, “[a]nd my God, what knowledge they exchanged about housekeeping, not only in the culinary affairs, but also regarding canvas, thread, sewing, the washing of linens, dresses, the cleaning of white silk lace, and common lace, gloves, the removal of stains from various fabrics, as well as the use of various home remedies, herbs—all that, which was introduced into that certain sphere of life by the observing mind and centuries’ worth
of experience!” (IV, 313-314). A reader familiar with domestic manuals published in Russia during the middle decades of the nineteenth century might take the list of topics above as comparable to the table of contents of a typical work of this genre. Many of them contained information about sewing, culinary matters, laundry and home remedies. What is a bit puzzling, however, is the author’s particular fixation on laundry in this passage. It might be of some help to know that on the 21st of February, 1858 Ivan Goncharov signed off as censor for a subject-specific domestic manual entitled An Instructional Manual About How to Wash, Clean and Generally Keep Linen and Other Objects of the Feminine Wardrobe and Dress.

This tome, penned by one Glafira Shchigrovskiaia (pseudonym for Sofya Burnasheva306), would be published during the same year as Goncharov’s masterpiece. The instructional manual is divided into four major sections that treat the subjects of “the renewal and keeping of linens,” “the cleaning and washing of various things and fabrics,” “the removal of stains and the keeping of linens and other fabrics” and “miscellany.” Upon a closer examination of the table of contents, we find that, where in Oblomov we have “the washing of linens, dresses, the cleaning of white silk lace, and common lace, gloves, the removal of stains from various fabrics,” Burnasheva’s book contains the following chapter headings: “the washing of linens,” “on dresses,” “the washing of white silk lace and common lace,” “the cleaning and washing of gloves,” as well as a lengthy section on “the removal of stains.”

It is well known that Goncharov published “Oblomov’s Dream” separately, in

306 Sister of V. Burnashev, an exceedingly prolific author in the genre of popular non-fiction about both urban and rural domestic culture.
March of 1849 in a *Literary Collection with Illustrations* produced by the editorial staff of *The Contemporary*. Less well known is that he also published a small portion of Chapter Two of Part Three in the January 1858 issue of *Atheneum*. The passage from *Oblomov* compared above with Burnasheva’s manual comes from Chapter Four of Part Three. The dates are of some import here. Goncharov may well have been re-reading the first few chapters of Part Three during the months when he approved Burnasheva’s manual for publication. Questions of any deliberate intertextuality aside, a juxtaposition of the passage from *Oblomov* with a domestic manual to which Goncharov had direct access reveals that the discursive texture of the passage is such that the poetic tenor of the description is achieved in phrases that look identical to the manual’s table of contents. That such seemingly divergent sensibilities coexist on the same page is a feature of Goncharov’s novelistic imagination. There are, then, at least two ways (via Radetsky and Burnasheva/Shchigrovskaya) in which the characterization of Agafya Matveevna can be linked with instructional literature.

If Goncharov was familiar enough (partly thanks to his activities as a censor) with the instructional literature market to recognize Ignaty Radetsky as a fairly well-known author in that genre, he may have been familiar with a still more prolific and prominent

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307 It would, of course, be quite absurd to suggest that Goncharov “alludes to” Burnasheva’s manual. By way of a side note, it may interest the reader to know that Burnasheva’s book was reviewed in the 1859 issue of *Notes of the Fatherland* where the first two volumes of Goncharov’s novel appeared. The reviewer, writing in the tongue-in-cheek style characteristic of the bibliographic feuilleton (especially one about a relatively low-brow book on a prosaic subject), though offering a largely positive review, noted that the author had perhaps been too quick to call her book an original composition given that much of the material is borrowed from a French source, *Manuel complet du blanchiment et du blanchissage*, Paris, 1834. Such “borrowings” were not uncommon in this part of the Russian book market. Goncharov himself (along with V. Beketov) censored this issue of Kraevsky’s journal.
figure on this market, Ekaterina Avdeeva, whom Russian culinary historian Joyce Toomre calls “the first author of really popular cookbooks in Russia.” A comparison of Avdeeva’s model housekeeper with Pshenitsyna confirms that in the portrayal of Agafya Matveevna, Goncharov participates in the discursive construction of model domestic culture found chiefly in instructional literature. In the introduction to the fourth edition of her *The Handbook of the Russian Experienced Housewife*, Avdeeva writes, “I am not requiring that every lady of the house should bake and cook herself, herself go to purchase provisions (although to tell the truth, I see nothing loathsome or worthy of scorn in this), but I insist that to know all this, to know the price and the quality of provisions, to know what provisions are stored in her own cellar, her own basement, to know how to cook *shchi*, bake *pirogi* and to direct the cook in her activities, is the duty of every good housewife” (emphases in the original). Pshenitsyna fits this description to a tee, even surpassing Avdeeva's minimal requirements since she both supervises and famously cooks herself. Zakhar notes that without Pshenitsyna, her servant Akulina would not be able to bake a *pirog*, given that she “does not know how to start the dough” (IV, 305). In adherence to Avdeeva's formulations, Pshenitsyna “thunders with orders to take out, to place, to heat up, to salt,” the succession of infinitives resembling formally the language

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308 Joyce Toomre, *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets’ A Gift to Young Housewives* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 9. Ekaterina Avdeeva, née Polevaia, was the sister of Nikolai and Ksenofont Polevoi. She published a variety of works ranging from *belles lettres* to ethnographic accounts, collections of songs and children’s folk tales, but became famous as a writer on housekeeping. Her popularity was such that *The Handbook of the Russian Experienced Housewife* saw eleven editions, as well as countless forgeries, between 1841 and 1877.

of a recipe (of which Avdeeva's books contain many), where strings of these and related verbs, either in the infinitive or imperative, are commonly found (IV, 313). When Oblomov dines at home, Pshenitsyna supervises his cook, tells her “whether it is time to take out the roast, whether it is necessary to add some red wine or sour cream to the sauce.” And finally, Pshenitsyna frequently visits the market, where “she unerringly decides with one look or at most with a touch of the finger how old the chicken is, when the fish was caught, when the parsley or lettuce was harvested from the garden,” thus fulfilling Avdeeva’s edict that a good housekeeper should be able to recognize the quality of provisions (IV, 313).

What does it mean that the eponymous hero of Goncharov's novel ends his days cohabitating with Pshenitsyna, a character, who looks to be composed according to extra-literary discourses about model domestic culture? To begin with, the contrast between Olga and Pshenitsyna as housekeepers is amply apparent to the title hero of the novel. For instance, he tells Zakhar about a way of life he finds wholly objectionable for himself and Olga: “only one woman serves the entire household. The lady of the house herself goes to the market! But will Olga Sergeevna ever go to the market?” (IV, 323). Of course, she won’t. In fact, such direct engagement in domestic activity was something of a social taboo in the sorts of circles to which Olga and, for much of the novel, Oblomov belong. Thus, in one reading, Oblomov's cohabitation with Pshenitsyna amounts to the hero's fall from the gentry.

310 For an example of Goncharov’s awareness of the incongruity between being part of educated, polite society and direct participation in domestic affairs, see the novelist’s 1855 letter to Elizaveta Tolstaya:
On the other hand, if one takes the matter in terms of the textual fabric (as opposed to the plot) of the novel, then the gradual and systematic incorporation of a variety of middlebrow texts renders Oblomov's fall from the gentry less dramatic in that from this perspective, both Oblomov and *Oblomov* have a rather more hybrid character. Here, a closer consideration of the instructional texts discussed thus far is in order. Dmitry Sokolov, the author of *Man of the World, or a Guide to Social Rules*, addresses his book to the “middle circles of society,” adding that the book would be useless for the aristocratic reader. Radetsky writes for his colleagues, literate head chefs of gentry households. Burnasheva’s audience is “rural housewives of limited means and urban dwellers with little money.” Avdeeva insists forcefully that her readership is comprised of “persons of the middling estate.” 311 What then might it mean for how we think about *Oblomov* that the novel can be connected in a variety of ways to books that purport to be middle class literature? I would like to answer this question by returning to the quality of the novel that initially propelled my interest in its representation of home life: the prominence of details.

Goncharov’s «фламандской школы пестрый сор» 312

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311 Sokolov, 12; Burnasheva, iv, Avdeeva, ii.

312 Alexander Pushkin’s “The variegated detritus of the Flemish school” from *Excerpts from Onegin’s Journey* (*Otryvki iz puteshestviia Onegina*).
The function of the detail as an aesthetic category in Goncharov’s art has received a good deal of critical attention. This trend was, in many ways, started by the novelist’s contemporary, Alexander Druzhinin, who famously compared Goncharov’s prose technique to Flemish genre painting, labeling it *flamandstvo*. Writing in 1992, Piotr Bukharkin noted that the word *flamandstvo* had since become “almost a term” and a kind of fixture of Goncharov studies.³¹³ Ruth Bernard Yeazell’s *Art of the Everyday: Dutch Painting and the Realist Novel* explores the role of Flemish genre painting in the aesthetic sensibilities and contemporary critical reception of the Western European Realist novel. She notes that the prose of such novelists as Jane Austen, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert and George Eliot was compared to Flemish genre painting by contemporary critics. Yeazell accounts for this trend in part by what she calls “the common origins” of Dutch painting and the Western European novel in “bourgeois culture.” She contemplates the degree to which Dutch art served as a descriptive idiom for artists who worked to render “the particulars of middle class life.”³¹⁴

Yeazell also writes about another kind of correspondence between Dutch genre painting and, now, specifically, the British novel. She points out that “[l]ike British novels after them, Dutch paintings were particularly influenced by the ideals of household virtue and marital companionship that began to circulate in the domestic conduct books of seventeenth-century Europe—many of which, as it happened, first

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traveled to Holland from England.” In Yeazell’s discussion of Western European literature, three generic-cultural registers converge: Dutch genre painting, domestic conduct books and the Realist novel. All of them are identified as bourgeois.

The observation that Goncharov’s novels resemble their Western European counterparts has been made by a number of scholars. However, one must be careful not to overstate this suggestion, especially in dealing with the task of situating Oblomov in a socio-economic context. The kinds of “middle class texts” (instructional literature) I identify as material re-worked in Oblomov have been used extensively in treatments of the Western European novel as an important condition for the very appearance of the genre. Such historians of the novel as Nancy Armstrong and Toni Bowers have linked novelistic form and subjectivity with popular instructional literature. Yet, as we have seen, the Russian case is quite different. As I mentioned in the Introduction, William Mills Todd demonstrates that in Russia, the novel arose without the socio-historical and socio-economic conditions and prerequisites usually associated with the rise of the genre in Western societies. Todd warns that “the terms bourgeois and middle class must be used with extreme caution, as Russia remained a predominantly rural society.” What remains a bit curious (and, taken in the strictest sense, is the domain of historians) is that

315 Ibid., 16.

316 In “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” M.M. Bakhtin singles out Goncharov as a Russian analogue to Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert. See M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, Michael Holquist, ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 234. Elena Krasnoshchekova isolates A Common Story as “the only work of Russian literature written according to the chief conventions of the [European] Bildungsroman.” See Krasnoshchekova, Bildungsroman, 180. For a study of Goncharov’s oeuvre vis-à-vis the Western European tradition, see V.A. Nedzvetskii, I.A. Goncharov Romanist i khoduzhnik.

so much of the Russian popular advice literature is addressed explicitly to people of middling means. This is a category that does not neatly correspond with the Western concept of the *bourgeoisie*. Nor would I go so far as to insist that these writers’ formulations refer to a documentary reality, an actual Russian middle class readership. The “middling” reader of Russian “how to” literature may be a primarily discursive phenomenon, perhaps the result of the genre’s strong tendency to translate or otherwise borrow from Western European sources. The very fact that Russian authors of domestic manuals offer a variety of conceptions of their readership as people of “middling estate,” “average means,” “limited or modest means” or members of “middling circles of society” may be read as a series of attempts to approximate a demographic category, a collective search for a word to call a readership that itself is a discursive construction.

As I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, instructional literature about domestic affairs comes up in every one of Goncharov’s three novels. Domestic culture figures prominently in his last novel, *The Ravine*. Originally called *The Artist*, the text

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318 In this I follow Melissa Frazier’s exemplary study *Romantic Encounters: Writers, Readers, and the Library for Reading*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007). While treating the Romantic-era book market, Frazier makes some formulations that remain applicable to what I have been discussing. Specifically, she writes that “[w]hat is nonetheless remarkable is the extent to which, in their writing in and about the literary marketplace, Russians still sound the same notes as their European counterparts, and they do so because while literature can directly reflect reality, it does not have to.” While I recognize that Frazier deals with a different time period and genre, I should highlight here that many producers of Russian “how to” books (including Avdeeva) had fairly direct links to the object of her study, Osip Senkovsky. The near-monopoly that writers of a commercial orientation enjoyed in the production of domestic advice literature is treated in more detail in the preceding chapter.

319 Catriona Kelly points out that even the title of Avdeeva’s manual, *Ruchnaia kniga russkoi opytnoi khoziaki* looks imported, as the “ruchnaia kniga” is likely related to the English “handbook.”
examines the relationship between art and life, especially in scenes where the young landowner Raisky contemplates various artistic projects (from sculpture to novels). Through the representation of Raisky’s creative pursuits, Goncharov introduces a distinctly meta-literary dimension into the novel: he includes his own artistic process as an “object of literary representation,” incorporating “his long-drawn-out work on the novel as an aesthetic fact, an element of the work’s structure.”

Much like *A Common Story* and *Oblomov*, *The Ravine* contains many pairs of characters who are opposites of each other, quite often, good and bad housekeepers. The landowner Raisky is juxtaposed with his more practically-minded neighbor, Tushin. Raisky continually reveals his ineptitude and lack of interest in running his own estate, an activity he leaves largely to the care of his grandmother, Tatiana Markovna. He ultimately all but gives up on his own property. In contrast to Raisky, Tushin is described as a model estate keeper whose property is very well-managed and under his constant and close supervision. In one instance, Goncharov calls Tushin a *bourgeois-gentilhomme* as he, in a very explicit allusion to Molière’s M. Jourdain, “spoke in prose without knowing it” (VII, 735). Goncharov reverses the French play’s plot: Molière’s M. Jourdain is, in fact, a bourgeois, the comedic aspect of whose situation boils down precisely to the fact that he has endeavored to assume a gentlemanly life style. Tushin,

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321 For a detailed treatment of Goncharov’s artistic proclivity toward the representation of opposites, see Milton Ehre’s seminal study, *Oblomov and His Creator*.

322 Much earlier in his career, in the sketch “Ivan Savich Podzhabin,” Goncharov adapted Molière’s *Le Bourgeois-gentilhomme* in a more straightforward way.
of course, is a gentleman. What, then, does it mean that he speaks in prose? He certainly reads prose, and it is prose of the most “prosaic” variety that this young landowner consumes: “works about agronomy and housekeeping in general”\(^{323}\) (VII, 352). As I noted earlier, the same cultural register of domestic advice literature served to mark the prose of life for young Aduév’s Romantic illusions in *A Common Story* when the hero found useful employment in the translation of articles about fertilizer. It seems likely, then, that Tushin’s prose (juxtaposed as it is to Raisky’s artistic projects) refers, at least in part, to the prosaic business of running an estate.

A similar phenomenon is to be observed in another coupling of characters, another pair of good and bad housekeepers, Marfin’ka and Sofya Belovodova. Both are gentry-women, though the former has grown up in the country, immersed in domestic affairs, while the latter is a society woman in St. Petersburg. The central hero, Raisky, contemplates what sort of novel one might write about these two women: “‘Yes, they will make for a novel,’ he thought, ‘perhaps a real novel, but a flaccid, minor one, with aristocratic details for one woman and bourgeois ones for the other’” (VII, 183). The Russian for “bourgeois details” is *meshchanskie podrobnosti*. Yet throughout the novel, Goncharov’s narrator is quite fond of noting that both Marfin’ka and her grandmother Tatiana Markovna are *stolbovye dvorianki*, women who belong to a long-established Russian gentry family. Likely the only thing that could be “bourgeois” about them is that

they are excellent housekeepers. Given that the passage above is explicitly about the composition of a novelistic text, it reveals the function of the phrase “bourgeois details” as a formal component of a novel. The adjective “bourgeois” in Goncharov’s novelistic imagination may be treated as shorthand for a representational register that is centered around and thoroughly consumed with the details of everyday, most often, domestic life. It is his Flemish genre painting.

In a curious and likely unexpected way, Goncharov’s novelistic imagination reveals, most notably in the function of the domestic detail as an aesthetic category, a largely formal overlap with some of the representational sensibilities of the Western European bourgeois Realist novel. Although Goncharov himself has been called a bourgeois, in part due to his merchant origins and in part on account of his life-long career as a civil servant, my task is not to posit a relationship between the socio-economic conditions of the author and his works of art. However, I do think that the conflation of stylistic registers (Flemish genre painting and instructional literature in a Realist novel) is to be noted as a distinguishing feature of Goncharov’s prose. I bring up the function of the word *bourgeois* to suggest that Goncharov may have left traces not only of his awareness of popular advice literature as a genre but also of the purported class origins of this part of the Russian print market.

**Goncharov's model landowner**

In *The Ravine*, when the landowner-artist Raisky visits the country, Tatiana Markovna calls him a *pomeshchik* repeatedly. Given Raisky’s marked lack of interest in

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324 Catriona Kelly counts Goncharov among a group she describes as “educated people who were similar to the Western bourgeoisie in its more conventional manifestations”; see Kelly, 110.
his rural property, the grandmother’s insistence on this title underscores that Raisky is anything but an enterprising steward of his property. This gesture also brings to the fore the degree to which Goncharov’s last novel is no less invested in the provincial landowner than the first two. Indeed, at first sight, it may appear that The Ravine offers Tushin as the consummate responsible gentry-man in the province. Tushin is the first and only representative of Goncharov’s gallery of provincial gentry-men to engage actively and systematically in the work undertaken at his estate. However, certain aspects of the representation of this figure in the novel and Goncharov's subsequent appraisal of Tushin read as evidence for the novel's resistance to the incorporation of the model landowner.

Employing Raisky as the novel's stand-in for the creative mind, the hero who consistently approaches his surroundings as potential objects of artistic representation, Goncharov devotes passages of considerable length to the difficulty experienced by the artist in his attempt to apprehend and to capture Tushin fully. During his visit to the landowner, Raisky “wished to understand thoroughly the order of Tushin’s estate keeping mechanism” (vniknut’ v poriadok khoziastvennogo mekhanizma Tushina) (VII, 732). Given the prominence of Raisky’s meta-artistic searching in the novel, this statement inaugurates the novel’s rather self-conscious examination of the novelistic representation of the landowner. In a series of narratorial assertions regarding Raisky’s attempts to understand Tushin, Goncharov underscores the incompleteness of the former’s view of the latter. Raisky “had just enough time to notice the superficial order, to see the striking

As I discuss in preceding pages, observing and contemplating estate work for Alexander Aduev is a transitional phase which he outgrows.
results of [Tushin’s] estate management, but did not have the time to understand thoroughly (\textit{vniknut’}) the process by which it was accomplished” (VII, 732). Moreover, “Raisky’s eye, given that it was not the eye of a landowner (\textit{nekhoziaiskii glaz}), was unable to appreciate fully all the good management (\textit{vsei khoziaistvennosti}) established at Tushin’s estate” (VII, 732). The emphasis on Raisky’s failure to obtain a thorough understanding so as to produce a complete picture of Tushin is significant. The perfect landowner eludes the artist’s gaze.

A similar insufficiency in the artist’s perception is discernible in Goncharov’s more extended description of Tushin’s property as it appears to Raisky. Here, both the landowner and the estate consistently “surprise” Raisky: both Tushin and his surroundings look unreal in a passage that highlights the “unreal” (\textit{nebyvalyi}) aspects of the landowner’s work and life:

The view of the forest really did strike Raisky. The forest was maintained as well as a park, where at each turn one sees the traces of movement, work, care and science. The artel looked like some sort of brigade. The \textit{muzhiks} resembled masters, as if they were busy with their own work (\textit{khoziaistvo}).

“They are both my own and from others [other landowners], whom I pay,” replied Tushin to Raisky’s question “Why is it thus?” The sawing factory seemed to Raisky to be something unreal, due to its vastness, the almost luxuriousness of the buildings, where comfort and refinement made it resemble an exemplary English establishment. Machines made of shiny steel and metal were exemplary creations of their kind.

Tushin himself appeared to be the first worker when he got into his technology, into all the minutia, details, crawling into the machine, inspecting it, touching the wheels with his hand.

Raisky gazed with surprise, especially when they came to the factory office and when about fifty workers burst into the room with their requests, explanations, and surrounded Tushin. (VII, 737)

References to Raisky’s inadequacy as a careful observer of Tushin’s home abound. As a result, Goncharov’s own attempt to represent novelistically a piece of well-managed
property is accompanied at every step by commentary about the difficulty of rendering both this space and the model landowner in a work of art.

Years later, Goncharov would identify the shortcomings of his portrayal of Tushin in terms that resemble the description of Raisky’s incomplete grasp. In the article “Better Late Than Never,” Goncharov wrote about Tushin as an almost, but not quite, successful creation, noting that “[a]fter all, in my book there is a pale, unclear figure—a weak suggestion (namek), so to speak, but a suggestion about the real new generation, about its best majority (luchsee ee bol’shinstvo): Tushin and Tushins, from the top of the Russian ladder [of social organization] to its bottom!”

Explaining that he was writing about a new and current phenomenon, Goncharov finds that “having drawn Tushin’s figure, inasmuch as I was able to observe new serious people, I admit that as an artist I did not complete this image.” The admission that Tushin is incomplete certainly bears a resemblance to the descriptions of Raisky’s inability to obtain a full understanding of the landowner and attests to the difficulty of representing novelistically the successful pomeshchik. That Tushin is one of the so-called “new serious people” reveals that, in fact, he both is and is not a landowner: he is called one in the novel, but Goncharov’s appraisal of him in the article suggests that the closest thing to a successful landowner produced by the novelist is a representative of a new epoch who perhaps ought not be aligned with the pre-Emancipation landowners who had been objects of Goncharov’s novels previously.

326 Goncharov, Sobraniie, 8: 94.
327 Ibid., 102.
It then becomes all the more significant that Goncharov casts a retrospective glance in his response to the criticism that he had not provided a positive counter-example to Mark Volokhov. He alludes to Gogol’s failure in Volume Two of *Dead Souls*, where, in Goncharov’s words, the former had “attempted … to describe a positive type and was unsuccessful.” Goncharov conceived all three of his novels precisely when Gogol was at work on Volume Two of his *poema*, during the late 1840s. The reference to Gogol provides a strong hint about the kernel of the problem. (One of Gogol’s chief contenders for the title of “positive character” was the landowner Kostanzhoglo whose depiction I treated in chapter 2.) Gogol was unable to produce a publishable version of Volume Two of *Dead Souls*. In fact, his model landowner could be contained within the pages not of a novelistic text, but a straightforwardly didactic one, *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*. Catriona Kelly reads Gogol’s “Russian Landowner” (*Russkoi pomeshchik*) as an extreme version of the model estate-bound nobleman found in contemporary advice literature. Unable to produce a novelistic gentleman farmer, Gogol turns to the genre that is more suited to the representation of the exemplary, becoming (in Kelly’s view) something akin to a producer of how-to literature.

In the same year (1847) during which Gogol’s *Selected Passages* were published, Goncharov was publishing *A Common Story*, whose protagonist is, in a limited sense, Gogol’s “colleague” inasmuch as Aduev’s writings also imagine the exemplary gentry-man in the province. Otradin reads Aduev’s shifting choices of genres throughout *A

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328 Ibid., 8: 102-103

329 Kelly, 124.
*Common Story* as the representation of a creative process that leads to the novel.\(^{330}\)

Although the critic does not discuss the young man’s composition of works about estate management, the ultimate turn to this genre likely ought to be included in his artistic evolution as one that also leads to novelistic discourse. Where Gogol clearly departs from the novelistic in his frustrated attempts to “novelize” a prescriptive message, both Goncharov’s *A Common Story* and his trilogy as a whole approach it. Ultimately, as I have shown in the course of this chapter, Goncharov’s encounters with advice literature (here again in the widest sense of the term) were artistically productive and can be said to both “lead to” the novel and to affect aspects of the novelist’s prose, both in terms of its formal features and thematic preoccupations.

\(^{330}\) Otradin, *Proza*, passim.
CONCLUSION

1. A few notes on Sergei Aksakov

“We do not know what the future historian of our literature will glean from the fact that S.T. Aksakov and his friends ate freshly churned butter, radish that had just been extracted from the hothouse, sour cream, farmer’s cheese and so on,” wrote Nikolai Dobroliubov in a polemical review of Sergei Aksakov’s (1791-1759) Various Works (Raznye sochineniya).\(^3\) The radically minded critic seeks to undermine all that is valued positively in Aksakov’s comprehensive representation of a country morning. Next, Dobroliubov acerbically compares Aksakov’s impulse to document and find meaning in an ordinary breakfast to the graphomania of Ivan Ivanovich, the rural landlord in Gogol’s “The Story of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikoforovich,” who produced a formidable record of his gastronomic practices pertaining to the consumption of melons, along with the ridiculous melon seed collection—a discursive tendency Cathy Popkin diagnoses as both the author’s and hero’s “fanatical alimentary retentiveness.”\(^4\) In Dobrolyubov’s caustic commentary, Aksakov’s measured celebration of a simple meal turns pathological.

The radical finds little value in the Slavophile’s encyclopedic treatment of the everyday that, with its emphasis on simple, native sustenance, paid homage to a long tradition of Russian writing in celebration of gentry private life. Aksakov’s particular

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\(^3\) Dobroliubov was referring specifically to Aksakov’s Literary and Theatrical Memoirs here. See N.A. Dobroliubov, Sochineniiia N.A. Dobroliubova. Tom pervyi (St. Petersburg: v tipografii Bezobrazova i Komp., 1885), 321.

mention of “freshly churned butter,” along with the emphasis on the local origin of the produce, activates the long-lived Horatian intertext that had dominated the largely poetic renditions of provincial noble domesticity. From the “not-purchased dinner” *(nekuplennyi obed)* prepared by the lyric subject’s wife in Vasily Trediakovsky’s transposition of Horace’s Second Epode (“Verses in Praise of Country Life,” “Stikhi pokhval’nye poselianskomu zhitiyu,” 1752) to the “home-grown, fresh, healthy fare” *(pripas domashnii, svezhii, zdravyi)* enjoyed by the speaker of Gavrila Derzhavin’s most famous re-working of the Roman intertext, “To Eugene. Life at Zvanka,” the careful rendering of the provincial everyday attained an increasingly ideological function.

By the time of Derzhavin’s 1807 poem, attention to such details as the gastronomic aided in the discursive cultivation of a meaningful private life for the gentry-man in the provinces. As I show in chapter one, Karamzin’s 1803 “Letter of a Country Dweller,” published—like Derzhavin’s poem—in *The Herald of Europe*, provided a comprehensive manifesto regarding the utility of the nobleman’s active presence at the estate, gesturing cautiously towards manual labor as the primary way to a genuinely productive life for the non-serving noble. If Derzhavin’s “To Eugene” lauded the nobleman’s retired inactivity via the Horatian intertext, Karamzin’s “Letter” sounded more anxious notes and looked forward to the Russian novel’s difficulties in the representation of the province-bound noble farmer.

Aksakov participates in a different, if closely related, tradition. Andrew Durkin treats Aksakov’s prose as a laboratory for subsequent stages in Russian novelistic production, especially when it comes to the genre’s representation of gentry households. In his study of Aksakov’s *oeuvre*, Durkin writes about a tendency towards what he calls a
“canonization of ordinary life,” which “[i]n keeping with the empirical, even statistical tendency underlying realism” aided in the “affirmation of the coherent society of … the gentry family.”

333 Describing the everyday with an eye to the radish on the table (as well as its provenance) amounts to a brand of self-writing that insists on the values of gentry private life that was, by Aksakov’s time, reaching its vanishing point. 334 Aksakov’s decision to describe the breakfast in detail, especially given the Horatian origins of the gesture, both resists the passing of old style gentry domesticity by recycling one of the major genres deployed to describe it in plainly positive terms and anticipates in form Tolstoy’s rather more ambivalent, if no less emphatic, prose in praise of country life (about which more below).

I have opted against including a comprehensive treatment of Aksakov’s works in this dissertation, because to examine his output in a systematic way would mark something of a departure from the specific tendencies I have observed in the Russian novel’s multi-perspectival representation of noble private life. The novelistic discourse and idiom I have been tracing always approaches its object through more than one generic lens. It is partly because these novels stage encounters between multiple generic perspectives that they fail to represent an unequivocally positive and productive private gentry life in the country. Gogol’s Kostanzhoglo is an unsuccessful attempt to render in fiction the ideal landowner imagined by a variety of prescriptive texts. In a similarly


334 Durkin is sensitive to the “nostalgic” notes struck by Aksakov in his rendering of an eighteenth-century gentry life. Aksakov’s *Literary and Theatrical Memoirs* take as their object the 1820s, but retain the wistful tenor for the past discernible throughout his more often-read works.
novelistic gesture, Oblomov’s attraction to the quiet, unproblematic noble domesticity of
the friendly epistle is subjected to systematic, not to say merciless, critique as a vision no
longer accessible due to the outdatedness of both its generic and its cultural characteristics.

Sergei Aksakov worked fairly extensively in the genre of the friendly epistle throughout his life. In other words, he was able to turn to forms that by their very generic definition tended largely towards an unequivocally positive evaluation of noble private life in the provinces. While certainly a product of the same circumstances that gave rise to the more generically complex and (perhaps hence) problematic depictions of novelistic gentry selves I have examined thus far, Aksakov’s writings are distinguished by the prominence of retrospective moves: both in his tendency to turn to older literary paradigms and in the choice of subject matter in his most celebrated works (Family Chronicle, The Childhood Years of Bagrov Grandson). Writing about Sergei Aksakov’s son, Konstantin, Andrzej Walicki calls the latter’s Slavophile vision and sensibility “a retrospective … utopia—a timeless moral ideal by which concrete historical reality was to be judged.” In broad terms, Walicki attributes Konstantin’s Slavophilism as well as the genesis of this “retrospective” ideal to what he calls “a family tradition among the

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335 It bears adding here that in Pushkin’s mature attempts at the friendly epistle, country life is described as anything but ideal. In this sense, a comparison of Pushkin’s grim view of the province in his 1830 “Rumianyi kritik moi, nasmeshnik tolstopuzyi” with Aksakov’s encomiastic “Poslanie v derevniu” produced in the same year is striking for the former’s disappointed reappraisal of the rustic haven praised by the previous century’s friendly epistle and the latter’s insistence on the positive vision.

Aksakovs." Catriona Kelly writes briefly about the ways in which by the middle of the nineteenth century such Slavophile intellectuals as Konstantin’s brother, Ivan Aksakov, generated a particular vision of noble private life in the provinces, “[valuing domestic space as the precious vessel in which the essence of ideal patriarchy might be preserved.” In my view, to examine in detail the ways in which Slavophile thinkers offered a distinct discourse about the ideal Russian landowner would require a separate study.

2. A Few Notes on *Anna Karenina*

In the eyes of [Kitty’s] relatives, he had no regular, defined activity or position in society, whereas now that he was thirty-two years old, one of his friends was already a colonel and imperial aide-de-camp, another a professor, still another the director of a bank and the railroads or in charge of an office like Oblonsky; he, on the other hand (he knew very well what he must seem like to others), was a landowner, occupied with breeding cows, shooting snipe, and building things, that is, an untalented fellow who had amounted to nothing and was doing, in society’s view, the very thing that good-for-nothing people do (emphases added).

This is how Konstantin Lyovin understands his social identity in Lev Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878), a novel whose action transpires during the 1870s. I do not wish to conflate novelistic representation with historical reality for fear of drawing conclusions

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337 Ibid., 239. Walicki is appropriately cautious about drawing connections between father and son too neatly. He calls Aksakov père a “Slavophile sympathizer” and provides a nuanced history of the son’s intellectual and ideological formation, a process that relied only partly on a “family tradition” of Slavophile thinking.

338 Kelly, *Refining Russia*, 130.

too hastily. Lyovin’s fears may be simply the self-consciousness of a man in love, a product of Tolstoy’s idiosyncratic take on contemporary social reality, or they may display a larger cultural preoccupation in artistically refracted form. Still, it is worth noting that over one hundred years after the beginning of a gradual formulation of a public discourse about what was in the eighteenth century a new social type—the Russian gentry-man who opts to mind his estate instead of serving—Tolstoy’s novel includes a landowner-protagonist who inhabits a social world that refuses to view his pursuits as meaningful. The rather daunting centrality of service to noble identity persists in this description. The chief source of Lyovin’s insecurity lies in the contrast between his comrades’ vocations—military and civil service positions, work in the new “private sector” represented here by the banks and the railroads—and his own choice to live and work on his provincial estate.

Much as Lyovin may experience self-doubt about his social position as a landowner, Anna Karenina is unapologetic about its, by most standards, extensive depiction of how the landowner goes about “breeding cows, shooting snipe and building things.” Lyovin’s country housekeeping is easily one of the novel’s chief preoccupations; the text provides an encyclopedic treatment of provincial gentry domesticity generally and the gentry-man’s farm work in particular. It is the odd reader who does not find Tolstoy’s representation of agriculture imposing for its almost prolix dimensions.

In a book-length study of Anna Karenina, Gary Saul Morson invites his readership to “[p]ause for a moment on the strangeness of Tolstoy’s decision to devote so
much of his novel to ideas about agriculture.”\textsuperscript{340} Mindful of the ways in which “Russian novels stand out as peculiar enough for including long speeches on God, death, immortality, determinism, fatalism, moral relativism, political nihilism, and many other topics,” the so-called “accursed questions,” Morson asks, “Accursed questions may be tolerable, but agriculture? What possible reason could there be to include digressions on a topic so obviously unpoeitic or unnovelistic, even by the prevailing standards of the Russian novel?”\textsuperscript{341} He offers two answers: the first has to do with Tolstoy’s interest in philosophical inquiry, the second amounts to a contemplation of reform as a cultural and politico-economic phenomenon, understood in broad terms.\textsuperscript{342} Morson’s readings of Tolstoy’s choice to include lengthy discourses on agriculture are both original and compelling (particularly so for the teacher of the novel) in that they place Tolstoy in dialogue with contemporary treatments of these big questions: modern attempts at various brands of social reform, for example.

My own inquiry into the representation of the provincial landowner and such “unpoeitic” subjects as agriculture in the Russian novel, although prompted in part by observations not unlike Morson’s (why does Tolstoy represent the gentry home so extensively?), casts a retrospective glance on three sets of texts (treated in chapters 1, 2 and 3) that may be read as a genesis for the crowning accomplishment of the Russian


\textsuperscript{341} Morson, 150.

\textsuperscript{342} Morson writes: “Tolstoy uses Lyovin’s evolving ideas about agricultural reform as exemplary in two ways. First, they show the process of honestly thinking through a difficult question with no pat answers.” The second way has to do with “the applicability of Lyovin’s ideas not only to agricultural improvement but also, and much more broadly, to all modernization and reform.” Morson, 150. I should add that Morson’s book is meant for both the specialist and perhaps even more so for the general reader since it is, among other things, an attempt to make the classic speak to the less than expert reader, the twenty-first century university student, for example.
nineteenth-century novelistic tradition. As peripheral as treatises on agriculture are to most accounts of Russian literary genres, in the context of my inquiry they prove central. As I demonstrate throughout this study, a Russian prose idiom and a novelistic form capable of rendering the everyday in detail developed in the course of multiple encounters between creative and prescriptive literatures. I have attempted to show throughout this project that the zones of contact between fiction and how-to literature provide for significant milestones in the history of the Russian novel. As a result, the novelistic tradition I examine (the works of Gogol and Goncharov) betrays an awareness of the corpus of prescriptive works as a discursive enterprise that seeks to provide normative models for noble life in the province. Anna Karenina may be counted among these novels.

After all, what does it mean that throughout Anna Karenina Lyovin attempts to produce an original composition about farming? First of all, it means that Tolstoy’s gentry-man protagonist inhabits a texts that is (like Gogol’s poema and Goncharov’s trilogy) aware of the growing discursive field devoted to estate administration and, more specifically, to contemplating the role of the landowner in the (post-Reforms) provinces. But Lyovin does not write about the landowner as such. Why does he focus, specifically, on the Russian peasant as a worker? And might this be related to his own forays into manual labor in the fields, the memorable “work cure” he takes by mowing alongside peasants?

Richard Peace has observed that, following Gogol’s treatment of the salvific capacities of manual labor for the gentry-man hero in Volume Two of Dead Souls, both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky include and re-work the topic in their novels. I would extend Peace’s genealogical line as far back as at least Novikov’s young nobleman-farmers who, we recall, mind vegetable gardens and discuss the potato crop at great length and with

343 Peace, Enigma, 249.
good cheer in “Correspondence between Father and Son” (1785). In a broader sense, I would suggest that the vision put forth by the nexus of texts examined in chapter 1, texts I treated as an outgrowth of the 1762 Manifesto and Catherine-era formulations about the utility of the nobleman as a working, responsible figure of authority in the province, finds its fullest expression in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*.

Said otherwise, Tolstoy’s representation of his “ideal” landowner may be linked to over one hundred years’ worth of attempts to negotiate a coherent vision of the gentry-man’s role and status in the provinces. Lyovin’s farm work then reads as a kind of culmination of a cultural fantasy borne out of an anxiety about the utility of the non-serving noble, a cultural preoccupation the novel acknowledges in the passage cited above and attempts to resolve throughout.


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