

Title: Writing Access to Peasant Reality: Nikolai Uspensky's Documentary Fiction
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Abstract:

The short stories of Nikolai Uspensky, published the same years as the emancipation of the serfs, are distinct from more familiar depictions of peasants in the works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy or Turgenev, and in some key ways anticipate what is remarkable about Chekhov's peasant stories decades later. They highlight the blurred line between ethnography and fiction characteristic of a number of writers' work in the 1860s and 70s, including Fyodor Reshyotnikov and Nikolai Blagoveshchensky. In an essay on his collected stories by Nikolai Chernyshevsky, the real encounters that Uspensky's tales attest to are what make this literature historically important. Taking Uspensky's stories in the context of Chernyshevsky's theorizing and in contrast to other more famous depictions of peasants, this paper starts with the prevalence of ethnography as a conceptual and formal foundation for a range of 1860s and 70s literary works and uses the larger question of what was at stake in the line between fact and fiction in this work to inform an understanding of documentary fiction's special status as a social tool.