

SOCIALIST IN FORM, HUMANIST IN CONTENT¹: Vera Panova's Artistic Method in Prose and in Film

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1.

The method of socialist realism, as adopted officially by the first Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934, has been for long regarded, both in Russia and in the West, as a restrictive and restricted artistic practise. The limitations imposed on writers during the period of socialist realism are well known, especially as, since the fall of the Soviet Union, KGB documents have become accessible and used to show how writers were repressed in the name of a unified literary-political goal². Yet the openness following perestroika should also lead to a re-evaluation of critical approaches to the phenomenon of Soviet socialist realism itself. This is indeed being done by several critics: Boris Groys who suggests a relationship between

¹ I wish to thank Wojciech Tomasik (Casimir the Great Academy of Bydgoszcz, Poland) for sharing with me his insights about socialist realism, encouraging me and expanding the context of my study. I am grateful to Stephen Hutchings (University of Surrey, UK) for commenting extensively and invaluable on earlier drafts of this paper, and helping me to consolidate my argument. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 2001 BASEES Annual Conference (University of Cambridge, UK) and I have benefited greatly from the discussion following my paper, especially the detailed and wide ranging comments of our discussant, David Shepherd (University of Sheffield, UK). I acknowledge with thanks AHRB funding during my work on the paper.

² See for example V. S h e n t a l i n s k y, *The KGB Literary Archive*, trans. J. Crowfoot, London 1997.

socialist realism and the avant-garde³, Hans Günther who treats socialist realism in the light of utopian theories⁴ and Robin Regine who analyses socialist realism as a failed attempt at an original aesthetics⁵, to name just a few.

What is common to much contemporary writing about socialist realism is the wish to look beyond genre definitions and study the practise of specific writers. Socialist realism, like any other literary style, cannot be judged only by the intentions of its theorists. In investigating literary methods we must remember that the formulation of the genre's intentions, be it by Coleridge, Mandelshtam, Virginia Woolf or Fadeev, is in itself a specific artistic expression. It may shed light on the literary practise of other writers who belong to a specific artistic group, but first and foremost it represents the views of the writer-theorist himself/herself. The fact that socialist realism was additionally enforced by an ideological governing power does indeed influence the lives and works of Soviet writers, yet it is not a magic wand which transformed Soviet literary practise into a production line. Within the boundaries of socialist realism one may find writers whose works exhibit a uniqueness of personal style and thematics.

Vera Panova is such a writer. This article sets out to examine one of Panova's major works, the novel *Sputniki*⁶ (*The Train*, 1946), as a case study of the way Panova introduces, within the established line of socialist realism, concerns and forms usually not associated with the movement. For this purpose I start with a contextualisation of the novel as a socialist realist work (including considerations of the reasons why it was awarded a Stalin Prize), with special emphasis on the themes of heroism and of the individual. This thematic emphasis is required because, as a wartime novel, *Sputniki* is bound to engage with the question of heroism. It is the role of the individual, I argue, which sets this novel apart from the socialist realist canon. This general introduction is followed by a detailed analysis of the

³ B. G r o y s, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. C. Rogle, Princeton 1992.

⁴ H. G ü n t h e r, *Socialist Realism and Utopianism*, in: *Socialist Realism Revisited. Selected Papers from The McMaster Conference*, eds. N. Kolesnikoff and W. Smyrniw, Ontario 1994; and H. G ü n t h e r, *Zhanrovye problemy utopii i "Chevengur" A. Platonova*, in: i d., *Utopija i utopiceskoje myshlenije*, Moskva 1991.

⁵ R. R e g i n e, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. C. Porter, Stanford (CA) 1992.

⁶ All references are to V. P a n o v a, *Sputniki*, Moskva 1980.

novel itself, in which I set out to show its deviations from the socialist realist canon. I concentrate on the role of personal lives in the structure of the plot, and on the discrepancy between the ideological claims of the novel and its practise regarding 'rewards' and 'punishments' of the various characters. The novel is compared to its 1964 film *Poezd miloserdiia* (*The Train of Mercy*). In my study of the film I focus on the unexpected way in which Panova's deviations from the socialist realist norm in the novel are 'normalised' in this later version (in which Panova herself took part in writing the scenario). This is a case of a socialist realist text which is more challenging to the official ideological framework than its thaw counterpart. This comparison may serve as an illustration of my initial statements regarding the diversity in socialist realist works and the need to continue to re-assess socialist realism as an artistic method rather than a 'master plot'.

Even the early formulations of socialist realism acknowledge the variety found in the works of different authors, despite the fact they all adhere to a single ideology. This is especially true because this method was initially proclaimed to be the result of literary works previously written (Gorky's *Mat'* [*Mother*, 1906] or Gladkov's *Tsement* [*Cement*, 1925]) are famous examples of such models). These works become the measuring rod for future socialist realist literary works. Instead of deciding on artistic-ideological principles and then (or at the same time) formulating them in a literary form, as usually happens with other literary styles, socialist realist theory distilled existing literary production, which by definition could not be written to order as such orders still did not exist. Thus, when Fadeev defines socialist realism as 'an accurate artistic portrayal of reality in the process of development'⁷ he does not see this principle as one which results in a uniformity of the works written with this principle in mind. First, this definition is general enough to allow for various interpretations. Second, Fadeev adds that '(s)ome people think that the method of socialist realism is necessary to make writers as like as two peas. But such standardisation and uniformity makes a mockery of both socialism and realism'⁸. Of course, the fact that Fadeev has to refute such claims means that they appeared

⁷ A. F a d e e v, *Socialist Realism*, in: *Socialist Realism in Literature and Art: A Collection of Articles*, eds. M. Parkhamenko and A. Miasnikov, Moskva 1971, p. 62.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

for a reason, and a reason known to all who are interested in Russian literature of the twentieth century. Yet, although true unlimited diversity could not exist in socialist realism, there were, especially in the later stages of the development of this method, writers who interpreted the call for historical accuracy on the one hand and for revolutionary tendentialism on the other hand in ways which allowed for a complexity of human interests.

In her article *Little Heroes and Big Deeds: Literature Responds to the First Five-year Plan*⁹, Katerina Clark expands on her initial analysis of socialist realism as constructed from a 'master plot' (see her *The Soviet Novel*) to show how different trends in socialist realism result in the method being divided into various stages of development and exhibiting various concerns. Her emphasis is on the move from early socialist realism depicting a machine-like view of society, in which all characters are equally important, to a renewed interest in the individual hero or heroine. Before the first five-year plan the ideological approach emphasised co-operation between the various elements in society and the importance of the collective. Accordingly, there was a flourishing of novels about a large number of characters, each described sketchingly. This literary style was a real challenge to the conventions of nineteenth century realism and, as Groys has noted extensively, is indebted to the avant-garde movement, both in its radicalism as well as in its interest in technology and the mechanisation of society.

By the time of the first five-year plan the cultural atmosphere changed and writers began to return to more 'conventional' literary methods. This, in the tradition of the Russian nineteenth-century novel, meant a return to being concerned about the writer's talent, rather than an equality of talented and non-talented writers. It also meant that novels began to return to the mode of concentrating on a few remarkable characters rather than depicting a large number of ordinary ones. In this context Clark remarks that '... it was precisely in the aftermath of the first five-year plan that writers and literary critics showed a renewed concern about literary quality. In literature, as in so many other spheres, the first five-year plan period represented the high point of a radical utopianism that threatened tradi-

⁹ K. Clark, *Little Heroes and Big Deeds: Literature Responds to the First Five-Year Plan*, in: *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, London 1978, pp. 189-206.

tional literary values.¹⁰ Another reason for the return of the individuals rather than the collective was the growing realisation that readers find it difficult to concentrate on the destinies of a large number of characters, none of whom have anything special to recommend them. The imagination of the reader is much more excited by remarkable examples, out of which it is possible to make generalisations regarding society at large. In this way, socialist realist literature and criticism returned to the basic elements of dramatic action outlined in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Clark notes that the changes in socialist realism in the 1930s indicate a natural return to established literary values, abandoned in the experimental age of the 1920s. Thus it is important to remember that '(t)hey (the writers) were not, whatever else was the case, following a 'Party Line' on literature, since the Party never gave any explicit instructions for writers to follow.'¹¹ It was rather, as noted earlier, literary considerations, as well as the atmosphere of the period, that accounts for this shift in emphasis. It is not surprising, therefore, that heroism becomes a major theme in Soviet literature in the years to come, culminating in the literature of the Second World War, to which Panova's *Sputniki* belongs. This late phenomenon is due to the specific requirements of writing about the experiences of war. What is significant in Panova's novel is that heroism is not depicted so much in the actual fighting, which would be an obvious choice for war literature, but in the much less conventionally glorified everyday work of doctors and nurses. Furthermore, the characters of Panova's novel are not depicted only at work, but are shown in their personal lives as well, both before and during the war. Later analysis will show that the relationship between heroism and personal lives in this novel is far from conventional.

The introduction to one of the English translations of the novel (published in the Soviet Union in 1980) notes that '(e)very character in the work is capable of heroism. This is in keeping with the epic tradition of Soviet Art, in which the heroism is always bound up with social reality.'¹² This formulation echoes the above-mentioned shift in socialist realism towards both heroism and individual characters. Panova is recognised in

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 189.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 193.

¹² A. A. K u b a r e v a, *Introduction*, in: V. Panova, *Sputniki*, pp. 6-7.

Soviet criticism as a writer with humanistic tendencies, who at the same time is loyal to the ideological norms of socialist writing. With hindsight, though, we may discern a tension between these two aspects in her writing, to show that rather than existing in harmony, heroism and the individual destiny are juxtaposed in a play of forces not to be resolved in the course of the novel.

Sputniki was the first of Panova's novels to be awarded a Stalin Prize (1st degree), which in post Stalinist editions of the novel is referred to as *gosudarstvennaia prem'ia*¹³ ('State Prize'). Such an award leads to a common belief that the novel conforms to authoritarian structures. Yet in her article 'The Stalin Prize for Literature as the Quintessence of Socialist Realism', Alla Latynina shows how the choice of novels in this group is surprisingly varied. Moreover, she explains that the works which were awarded Stalin Prizes range between now-forgotten novels or poems of which the only merit is their glorification of Stalin and his time, to literary texts which outlive Stalin's time and are now considered important, as artistic achievements and not only from a political point of view. For example, Stalin Prizes of the 1st degree were awarded in 1941, the first round of these prizes, to Alexei Tolstoi's *Piotr Pervyi* (*Peter the First*, 1934), Sholokhov's *Tikhii Don* (*And Quiet Flows the Don*, 1940) and Sergei Sergeev-Tsenski's *Sevastopol'skaia strada* (*The Martyrdom of Sevastopol*, 1943), all of which are still considered important novels. Latynina illustrates her point with the reference to the general acknowledgement of *Tikhii Don* beyond Stalin's Russia, as well as to the fact that *Piotr Pervyi* was admired not only by Stalin but also by Bunin, who is not to be suspected of supporting Soviet propaganda. Moreover, Latynina notes that these prizes were awarded after a decade of calls for producing literature, which depicts 'the New Man in his struggle with all manner of foes bent on thwarting the task of Socialist construction'. Yet none of the novels chosen deal with 'building factories in record time, over-fulfilling the plan

¹³ This is common practise regarding literary works awarded the prize when they were re-printed. Latynina even notes that references to Stalin Prizes were eliminated from the *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia* after the Twentieth Party Congress, and that no literature about the Prizes can be found in the Library of the Central Writers' House. See A. L a t y n i n a, *The Stalin Prize for Literature as the Quintessence of Socialist Realism*, in: *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practise in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*, H. Chung (ed.), Amsterdam 1996, p. 106.

for coal extraction and cement production'¹⁴. While openly dissident novels could not be awarded such honours, it is clear that the complexity of issues involved in the ideology of the Stalinist period allowed for a variety of themes to be introduced into officially recognised discourse. Thus Latynina notes that '(s)umming up the first round of Stalin Prize awards, we can see that, while their aim was to consolidate the canon of Socialist Realism, this was not in fact their only aim.'¹⁵

As to Panova's *Sputniki*, Latynina explains its being awarded a Stalin Prize by pointing out that the novel 'appealed to Stalin with its story of daily routine on a wartime hospital train.'¹⁶ Yet no explanation is given as to why Stalin would pay special attention to a novel depicting daily routine rather than heroic deeds during the war. There seems to be no special ideological reason to mark out the work of a hospital train as more worthy of attention than other war practices. One can only venture, as unpopular as such an idea may be, that a Stalin Prize was awarded in this case, as in the cases of other novels discussed above, due to the novel's literary merit as well as its adherence to the basic requirements of official Soviet literature. Of course, open criticism of the ideology of socialist realism would have surely prevented such a prize from being awarded, yet there remains the possibility of between-the-lines criticism of the established values of Soviet literature, as will be seen in the analysis of Panova's novel.

2.

Vera Panova (1905-73) worked as a journalist from the age of fifteen, began to write plays in 1933 and wrote her first narrative *Sem'ia Pirozhkovykh* (*The Pirozhkov Family*) in 1944 (later reworked in 1959 into the story *Evdokia*). Her first novel, *Sputniki*, published in 1946¹⁷, marked the beginning of her literary success and brought her the first award. This novel was written as a result of a journalistic assignment by the Perm Branch of the Union of Soviet Writers, which sent Panova to write a brochure about the hospital train no. 312. Out of this brochure grew a novel, which, as Panova explains in her autobiography, is loosely based on some of the people and

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 110.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 112.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 117.

¹⁷ Published initially in the journal „Znamia” nos. 1, 2 and 3.

events she encountered on the train. The novel's enthusiastic welcome included an article in „Pravda”¹⁸.

Soviet criticism always noted Panova for 'showing life as it really is' (there is no detailed treatment of Panova's work in Western criticism). Some Soviet critics even accused Panova of realism without socialist realism, that is of lack of ideological tendentiousness¹⁹. Panova herself supported this emphasis on the realism of her works in interviews and in her autobiography²⁰. Here we may see an interesting paradox in the way Panova's image was created. It seems that although Panova's work sometimes met with a certain amount of ideological criticism, this never resulted in an open confrontation. Panova's position as a Soviet writer within the official framework seems to have been unshaken, even when her work would be criticised. It seems probable that a larger degree of freedom from official discourse would have eliminated Panova's status as an official writer, yet it is not quite clear where the boundaries lie. The question may be asked whether similar practise may be encountered regarding other socialist realist writers, in which case our critical appreciation of the politics of literature in the Soviet period may undergo a serious change. This certainly should be a theme for further investigation.

Panova is presented as an loyal Soviet writer. Yet a recent memoir of Panova's last year proposes a radically different view of her personality and ideas. In her *Vera Panova: Stranitsy zhizni (k biografii pisatel'nitsy)* Serafima Iur'eva, who was Panova's literary secretary in the last year of the writer's life, concentrates on this specific period, yet gives details of

¹⁸ „Pravda” 7 April 1946, quoted in L. Plotkin, *Tvorchestvo Very Panovy*, Leningrad 1962.

¹⁹ Starting with Kochetov's article in „Pravda”, in which he complains that Panova's novel *Vremena goda* (*Seasons of the Year*) in its first published form (in „Novyi mir”) is 'naturalistic', that is portraying without commenting on the socio-moral aspect of events and acts. Kochetov objects to what he sees as the author's too forgiving attitude towards her failing characters (V. Kochetov, *Kakie eto vremena? Popovodu romana V. Panovoi „Vremena goda”*, „Pravda”, 27 May 1954, 147 (13080), p. 2). Other examples of criticism of Panova's work, although generally more positive in tone than the article mentioned above, are Plotkin's book mentioned above, as well as Z. Baguskaiia, *Vera Panova: Ocherk tvorchestva*, Moskva 1963.

²⁰ See for example her interview with Chernov in which she give real-life sources to the characters in *Sputniki* (Y. Chernov, *Zhazhda sversheniia: k 70-letiiu Very Panovy*, „Oktiabr”, 1975, 3, p. 205, and Panova's autobiography: *O moei zhizni, knigakh i chitateliakh*, Leningrad 1975.

conversations with Panova in which past events, as well as the writer's ideas and feelings, are discussed²¹. For example, in her autobiography Panova explains the death of her second husband, Vakhtin, as occurring in the war. Nevertheless, Iur'eva claims that Panova told her that Vakhtin was repressed. A particularly striking detail is Iur'eva's declaration that Panova's published autobiography is a second and censored version of an original text, which the writer composed in 1973. According to Iur'eva, this original manuscript contains the truth about Vakhtin, and it was rejected on political grounds by the publishers. Panova's life and work, therefore, deserves a renewed consideration, free of ideological constraints. I propose to start this process by looking at *Sputniki* and later at the film based on this novel.

In the following paragraphs I suggest an analysis of the novel, concentrating on the depiction of relationships between the characters. The theme of personal happiness will provide the key to tracing the link between ideological approval on the part of the narrator and the actual destiny of each character. We are used to the idea that in socialist realist literature optimism prevails, as this method claims to depict reality 'in its revolutionary development', that is in a progressive mode. If progress is not illustrated in a socialist realist novel, then the revolutionary development may seem dubious. Progress is supposed to be presented as a unity, in which both public and private lives become better in the spirit of Stalin's famous pronouncement: 'Жить стало лучше, жить стало веселее' ('Life became better, life became happier'). I intend to show that in Panova's *Sputniki* there is a discrepancy between public and private lives. Using this discrepancy, Panova is able to allow humanist concerns within a socialist realist structure and this, it seems to me, is the reason for her popularity with Soviet readers.

Sputniki describes four years in the life of a hospital train during the Great Patriotic War (World War II), concentrating on the experiences of staff and wounded soldiers on the train. The main characters are the head doctor Belov, the political commissar Danilov, the surgeon Suprugov, the surgical nurse Iulia and the medical attendant Lena. The structure of the novel emphasises the fact that it is private lives, rather than ideology, which governs the novel, as the chapters of the first and third parts of the

²¹ S. Iur'eva, *Vera Panova: Stranitsy zhizni (k biografii pisatel'nitsy)*, New Jersey 1993.

novel are called by the names of the main characters (except Suprugov, who is a negative character). A striking feature of the novel is its use of multiple points of view. This is emphasised by the fact that most of the chapters of the novel are named after the characters, and each gives an account of the events from the point of view of that character (with additional glimpses of the point of view of other, more minor characters). Even Suprugov, who is presented as a personally and ideologically flawed character, gets his point of view represented when events are narrated through his thoughts on several occasions. The critic Galia Belaia comments that the abandonment of the omniscient storyteller for the use of independent characters who give their individual points of view is a feature of 1960s and 1970s Soviet prose, in contrast to its Stalinist past²². Yet here we may see this practise in a novel not only written during the Stalinist period but even recognised very favourably by the literary and political authorities. This again may serve as proof of the fact that the established criticism of socialist realism tends to indulge in generalisations which are sometimes reminiscent of these used in second rate socialist realist works. It is true that the novel was published in 1946, a year characterised by several months of relaxation in the ideological grip on political and cultural life in the Soviet Union (up to Zhdanov's famous attacks on Zoshchenko and Akhmatova). This may account for the use of this narrative technique, which allows for a multiplicity of points of view unusual in the context of socialist realism. Yet the fact that the novel was re-printed numerous times in the years to come testified to its being accepted also after this short period in 1946. New editions of *Sputniki* were published up until perestroika, as well as translations of the novel (authorised by the Soviet authorities) into a large number of languages ranging from English to Hebrew.

The order of the chapters in this novel is circular, opening and closing with the figure of Danilov. As we shall see later, Danilov is central not only in his role in the train but also since his life serves as a metonymy for the whole novel. The chapters in the first and third parts of the novel are named, as mentioned before, after various characters. The central part of the novel comprises two parts. The first one describes the movement of

²² G. B e l a i a, *Literatura v zerkale kritiki*, Moskva, p. 34, quoted in I. M a r y n i a k, *Spirit of the Totem: Religion and Myth in Soviet Fiction 1964 - 1988*, London 1995.

the war effort, from pursuing the Germans (and called 'East to West') to returning home ('West to East'). The other two chapters hint at a conclusive view of personal experience, the two ways private lives can cope with the destructiveness of war ('Letters' and 'Memories').

The train itself is described as 'добро́тное ... долговечное' (p. 15) ['of good quality ... durable']. Later the narrator notes that 'поезд оброс бы́том, он стал жильем, домком, хозяйством' (p. 182) ['the train gained in domesticity, it became a living space, a home, a household']. Throughout the novel the train is seen as a centre of stability within the constantly changing world outside. This is surprising, as we usually associate trains with movement and technological progress rather than stability. While the war brings about the separation of families and a threat to normality in the public and private spheres, within the train the core staff does not change and they live in the same place throughout the war. Although the train moves in space and time, its interior remains in place. Each character has his/her own space that does not change, and relationships between the characters can develop at a natural pace. This tension between the interior and the exterior of the train accounts for the emphasis on the personal in this novel. Such an emphasis is unexpected from a novel that belongs to the genre of war literature, which by its nature deals with the public output of individuals. Thus already in the description of the characters' surroundings there is a sense of deviation from the constraints of the socialist realist war novel in a search for a more personal mode of expression.

Danilov is hailed by the narrator as a positive character. He represents official ideology, being the political commissar of the train, and it is stressed by all the characters that he is highly effective both in dealing with practical matters as well as in organising people. Yet in his personal life he is far from positive. Danilov marries his wife, Dusia, who had loved him for a long time, without any feeling of love for her. This he does after the woman who fascinates him in his youth, Faina, rejects him. The marriage is later criticised from an outside point of view by the nurse Lena. Lena is newly wed and much in love with her husband, Danila (the similarity between the two names is noted and commented upon by Lena). When Lena thinks about the Danilov marriage she compares it unfavourably to her own, thinking that her happiness is secure. This thought is later ironised, when Lena later learns that her husband has left her and married another. Lena's story is one of the clearest examples in the novel that the

end of war, which should signify a new and happy life, brings with it a personal tragedy. Ironically, the Danilov marriage in comparison appears by the end of the novel to be better than hers, as the couple stays together.

Even the unrealised possibility of a happy union between Danilov and Faina is deconstructed in the course of the novel. Towards the end of the novel when Danilov meets Faina again, now an old-looking war widow who is brought to the train heavily pregnant to have her leg amputated. Danilov does not recognise her until she is already taken away to a permanent hospital, although we are given to understand that she does recognise him. His reaction to having finally met Faina is in sad thoughts about the time that had passed resulting in both of them becoming aged and disillusioned. The victory, described shortly after this meeting, is therefore constructed as a continuation of disillusionment, rather than a possibility for renewed hope. Throughout the novel Danilov is seen as being cold towards his wife because of this secret love for Faina which had used up all his capacity for emotions. Yet the fact he does not recognise Faina when talking to her shows that his love for her is also an illusion. Danilov is denied his possible redemption: to help the only person he had loved in her moment of need. Instead, we are reminded of the pain he had inflicted on her in his youth, when he recognises her by a scar on her cheek, a result of his throwing a stone in her window in a moment of jealousy. Because Faina is associated in the novel with political activity (she was a teacher and komsomol activist), one may see the failure of this encounter as a comment on the fact that ideological compatibility does not necessarily bring personal happiness. Such a conclusion is in sharp contrast to the canonical socialist realist approach. Furthermore, the failure of both Danilov's married life and of his inner emotional life seem to comment negatively on the result of a person's dedication to Party work. This uneasiness was felt by Soviet critics who criticised Panova for creating in Danilov a figure lacking in warmth, and therefore undermining his position as a role model.

The case of Iulia Dmitrievna, the surgical nurse, is somewhat similar to that of Danilov. Both of them represent positive ideological traits that are not rewarded in the novel by personal happiness. In each of them Panova shows us that life is not organised according to ideological principles, and in this she deviates seriously from the socialist realist canon, which tends to simplify personal relationships as a mirror of the political agenda. Iulia Dmitrievna is a professional woman, admired for her abili-

ties and responsibilities. She is single, middle aged and not attractive, and when she initially falls in love with Suprugov, the second surgeon, it is on a fantasy basis only. Yet Iulia Dmitrievna's love causes the ideological structure of the novel to be put under pressure. On the one hand there is a need to reward her, as a positive character, with personal happiness. Yet a marriage between them is impossible to portray as desirable, since Suprugov, who is depicted as selfish and eschewing his responsibilities, is ideologically flawed. When Suprugov does not propose to her, Iulia's disappointment is channelled when she is offered an outlet to her feelings by caring for a young orphan. Yet the disillusionment experienced by Suprugov's lack of initiative remains the more acute impression of Iulia's return home. Suprugov's name itself expresses his hypocritical nature, as it offers Iulia hope of his becoming her *suprug* (husband) or of her becoming his *supruga* (wife). It seems that this false promise in Suprugov's name symbolises not only his dubious personality but also an ironic hint at Iulia's desires.

In general, one may notice that while the public world of the novel moves from disaster to victory, from the outbreak of war to the day of peace, the personal lives of the characters do not match. While the victory should have denoted a positive move towards a new lease of life, most of the characters are left more miserable than they initially were. This does not only contradict the happiness of the successful ending of the war, but also jars with the optimism usually associated with socialist realism. In socialist realism, as the feminist saying goes, the personal is the political. Such an approach assumes a reward to the positive characters as well as a happy ending. A happy ending is supposed to match the progress denoted in the socialist-revolutionary aspect of the method, which should not describe what is but rather what should be. In *Sputniki*, however, this parallel is seriously challenged. Lena, who was happily married before the war is deserted by her husband. Iulia Dmitrievna remains single despite her hopes throughout the war. Belov's beloved wife and daughter are killed, and only the hope of a renewed relationship with his son may count as a glimpse of hope. Danilov remains married without love after his love for Faina is debunked in the scene of their meeting. All these personal disappointments become central to the novel.

It is the personal - Danilov's return home - rather than the political - the victory and the new life it will bring - that ends the novel. This is a meeting

between Danilov and his wife, Dusia, not an emotional moment but rather a curious combination of reserve and regret. Danilov realises for the first time her suffering and hardships during the war years, while previously he seemed to assume that the home front is not touched by the difficulties he encounters at the front. The novel ends with Danilov's first full sentence to his wife at that meeting: 'И Данилов сказал – ласково, раскаянно и устало: - Ну, рассказывай, как жила...' (p. 308) ['And Danilov said – affectionately, penitently, tiredly: - Tell me, how have you been living...']. In this ending Panova gives the last word of the novel to a person who was the least represented in the novel: Dusia, Danilov's wife. Her unrecorded answer is, in fact, the whole of life after the war. This is the new period that is to follow the one in which Danilov was central. In this peacetime period the personal and the domestic become more important than the public and the political (we should remember that Danilov serves as the train's political commissar, representing the public domain). As to Danilov, he experiences a sense of guilt in his attitude towards his wife, and this guilt, rather than his achievements which were detailed and hailed throughout the novel, serves as the focal point of the ending.

There is even a moment of open criticism against the established Soviet order in the novel. One of the wounded soldiers treated on the train, Kramin, is being treated in hospital before arriving on the train. There he writes parodies on the poems that are being read on the radio. The narrator explains this clearly anti-Soviet act as a result of Kramin's love for good poetry, thus reinforcing his dissident stance. It is important to note that Kramin is presented as a positive (though minor) character in the novel. He volunteers to go to battle with his soldiers, although another officer is assigned to do so, and is wounded in this battle (p. 150). Such a scene appears repeatedly in socialist realist war novels, and always denotes both courage and loyalty to one's subordinates as well as to one's homeland. Furthermore, in a conversation with other wounded soldiers on the train, Kramin talks convincingly about their luck in being alive, even if badly wounded. This theme is also common in socialist realist war literature, notably Boris Polevoi's *Povest' o nastoiashchim chekloveke* (*Tale of a Real Person*, 1946), which also concentrates on the recuperation of wounded soldiers in a hospital. Thus Kramin's criticism of Soviet official discourse, expressed through patriotic poetry on the radio, seems to be supported by the narrator. Interestingly, such bold criticism was ignored

by Soviet criticism, which either fully accepted Panova's novel, or offered as the only criticism her depiction of Danilov as lacking in human warmth. This example shows that the openness of Panova's text leaves the door open for more direct criticism, at least as a potential. Kramin's criticism of war poetry may again be seen as a sign of the time, for after the war there was official criticism of an ideological relaxation in Soviet public life during the war. Yet the novel does not hint at ideological flaws in the poems Kramin hears on the radio. The only criticism mentioned is Kramin's artistic criteria, which pronounce the poems as bad poems. Such criticism is untypical of socialist realism, which tends to link the ideologically approved to the artistically approved.

Sputniki is a socialist realist novel, yet one which deviates from the socialist realist canon. It operates within the system of socialist realist themes and concerns, yet it exposes the problematics in them. The incongruity of personal destinies with the professed political agenda of the novel is not a mistake on Panova's part, but rather a way to present the complexity of human concerns within the context of Soviet cultural paradigms.

2.

Panova's novel *Sputniki* is later revisited in cinematic adaptation as the 1964 film *Poezd miloserdiia*, directed by Iskander Khamraev. The scenario to this film was written by Panova. It is interesting to observe not only what happens to a literary text when it becomes visual, but also the changes that occur between a socialist realist context to a thaw one. The practise of adapting literature into film is in itself one suffused with tensions. If in the early days of cinema literature was used in order to reinforce the status of the new art form and give it legitimacy, later developments saw a more equal dialogue between literature and cinema. The Formalists were keen on defining the specificity of cinema in the same way that it was done regarding literature, and this started a process of emphasis on the autonomy of cinema. Lotman's studies in film expand this line of investigation. Thus when the Soviet film director Andrei Tarkovskii talks about film adaptations in 1990, he claims that when literature is adapted into film the only element that is carried directly from one medium to the other is dialogue. As Tarkovskii notes, dialogue is only one element in the

making of a film²³. This is an example of the complexity and fertility of the film adaptation process. In many cases one may observe that a film adaptation says more about the filmmaker's artistic vision and the period in which the film was made than about the source text itself.

The practice of adapting literature into film is a long standing one in Russian and Soviet cinema, starting with a 1909 film adaptation of a Lermontov poem (*Pesn' pro kuptsa Kalashnikova*). Throughout the Soviet period most of the literary works chosen to be adapted to the screen represent the Soviet canon of both Soviet and foreign literature. An adaptation into film could serve, therefore, as a reinforcement of the canon. During the Second World War and immediately afterwards many Soviet war novels were adapted into films. These include famous works such as Boris Polevoi *Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* or Sholokhov's *Sud'ba cheloveka* (*The Fate of a Person*, 1957), as well as many less known war novels. By the time Panova's first novel was made into a film she was a famous writer and the novel firmly established within the socialist canon. Surprisingly, one may see that the film does not exhibit openness in the way ideology and private lives are discussed, and sometimes the earlier text is more controversial than its later adaptation.

This seems surprising in view of the fact that the novel was written in Stalin's time, while the film made during the thaw period, which we associate with more openness. More specifically, during the thaw there were discussions regarding 'a new "de-stalinized" treatment of the Second World War', which resulted in films such as Bondarchuk's *Sud'ba cheloveka* and Chukhrai's *Ballada o soldate* (*Ballad of a Soldier*) in 1959²⁴. In the light of such films one would expect Panova's novel to be adapted in a spirit of openness, yet this is not the case. Yet one should remember that the period of the thaw is far from being homogenous. In her study of the cinema of the thaw Josephine Woll notes that 'the thaw was marked by hesitations and reversals as much as by liberalization and greater candour. Skittish compromises and dogmatic retrenchments hobbled

²³ A. T a r k o v s k i i, *Lektsii po kinorezhissyre*, „Iskusstvo Kino” 1990 (9), quoted in V. M i k h a l k o v i c h, *Evolutsiia kinoiazzyka: novyi etap*, in: *Ekrannye iskusstva i literatura: Sovremennyi etap*, Moskva 1994, p. 4.

²⁴ Cf. J. G r a f f y, *Cinema*, in: *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, eds. C. Kelly and D. Shepherd, Oxford 1998, p. 183.

each step forward.²⁵ It is significant that in her analysis of the new kind of cinema emerging during the thaw Woll discuss the film *Seriozha*, based on Panova's novella of the same name and regarded as innovative in its presentation of the world from the point of view of a child, yet she does not mention *Poezd miloserdiia*. *Poezd miloserdiia* is a film that witnesses the complexity of the divisions between Stalinist and post-Stalinist art. While *Sputniki* was published when Panova was still relatively little known as a writer, *Poezd miloserdiia* was filmed when she was at the high point of her career. There is a possibility that when adapting her novel into film the filmmakers, including Panova herself, felt that she is now too much of an established Soviet writer to deal with ambiguous material of the sort the novel touches upon. One may suggest, therefore, that the film adaptation adapts not only the particular literary work it refers to, but rather is an adaptation of the writer's oeuvre and image. *Poezd miloserdiia* represents, thus, not so much the text of the novel *Sputniki*, but rather the figure of Panova as established by the mid 1960s: an established Soviet writer with humanistic tendencies yet operating within the boundaries of socialist realist art.

In a monograph dedicated to Panova's life and work, published in the Soviet Union in 1980, A. Ninov criticises the film *Poezd miloserdiia* for depicting only external events without delivering the spirit of the literary original²⁶. While open criticism of the political dogmatism of the film would still not be possible in such a monograph, it seems that this criticism hints at the discrepancy between the novel and the film on all levels. Interestingly, Ninov quotes a letter written to Panova by I. A. Porokhin, the real life commissar of the hospital train no. 312, on whom Panova based the figure of the commissar Danilov. In his letter Porokhin criticises the film for not illustrating the collective work done in the train as well as the educational role of the commissar. He also notes that in the film the train itself does not look as clean and efficient as it was in reality (significantly, in the novel the importance of keeping hygiene in the hospital train is much emphasised). But the most significant part of the letter is Porokhin's hint that if all the scenes described in the scenario were shown in the film, the

²⁵ J. W o l l, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, London 2000, p. xi.

²⁶ A. N i n o v, *Vera Panova: Zhizn', tvorchestvo, sovremenniki*, Leningrad 1980, p. 383.

film would have been much more interesting²⁷. This sentence seems to suggest that the scenario written by Panova was closer to the novel than the film is, and that censorship considerations most probably caused the elimination of such aspects of the scenario which allow for ideological ambiguity. It is a well known fact that Soviet film adaptations were usually directed from two stages of scenarios: first a "literary scenario" would be written, and published in thick journals, representing a writer's view of the adaptation of the literary work into film, then a "director's scenario" would be produced on the basis of the writer's scenario yet already suited for cinematic work. It seems that the process of turning the writer's scenario into the director's scenario incurred in this case a change in focus. Further research into Panova's archives may result in a clearer understanding of the nature of this change.

A major difference between the film and the novel is the use of the voice of the narrator. The film includes several instances of a voice-over commentary, representing the narrator. This is read by a female voice, which the spectator is to associate with the author of the novel, Vera Panova. Thus any possible distance between the narrator and author collapses, leaving the spectator in a position of associating the novel with Panova's own journalistic experience of writing about the hospital train during the war. What is especially interesting about this voice-over is the fact that the narrator keeps emphasising the fact that the events described happened a long time ago. This suggests a distance between the spectator and the characters, a distance that does not exist in the novel, published immediately after the war. This distance is even used for a self-reflective moment, when Lena meets her husband Danila, who is to tell her he had married another. The scene starts with Lena walking in the street in a summer's day, and in the background we hear the voice of the narrator who comments that she must have mixed up the events, as this happened a long time ago, and in fact it was a winter's day. Immediately after that, the scene changes to a winter's day. Such a self-reflexive remark emphasises the film's distance from the novel as well as from the events it depicts, raising questions about the way experience is modified through time.

The use of the voice of the narrator presupposes, furthermore, identification between Panova as a writer and public figure and the narrator of

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 385.

the tale told in the film. Panova's role as a model Soviet writer is a constructed image, based to a large extent on her writing, plays and screenplays, yet, as Iur'eva's biography of Panova suggests, does not give a full picture of the writer's identity. The writer's image operates as a factor while one watches the film, because the female figure commenting on the events described is identified not only by her gender but also by the fact she is looking back at events which happened about 20 years before. One may suggest, therefore, that *Poezd miloserdiia* is not only an adaptation of the specific text of the novel, but is also an adaptation of Panova's image as a writer. Such practise seems to be common in Soviet film adaptations, which tend to amalgamate several literary works of a writer into one film²⁸, and also sometimes include a narrator figure who is acted by an actor physically similar to the writer²⁹. Although *Poezd miloserdiia* is confined to one work by Panova, it does seem to contain traces of the context beyond the specific text. This results in a more conventional treatment of the subject of the war than that which is found in the novel on which it is based.

The film emphasises the physical existence of the train. In the novel the fact that events happen in a train can at times be forgotten, when emphasis is put on the characters and the relationship between them, or on the actual work they perform. Yet the concrete nature of a film means that the train, as a context for all of these activities keeps accompanying them like a musical tune. Film by its nature has to present concrete images, and this means that some aspects of the narrative, which can be ignored for parts of a novel, must always be present in a film, because the screen assumes the existence of visual objects. The same is true of sound in talking films, when even the lack of sound would be perceived as a conscious statement. The sound of the clacking of the wheels is a constant reminder of the train, as well as frequent views of it from the outside. The film actually starts with a vision of the train from the outside, which follows the whistle of the locomotive. The train becomes, then, from the start a symbolic entity, rather than only a background to the events. The next shot

²⁸ Examples of this practise are too numerous to be listed here, and include films based on works by Gogol, Lermontov, Chekhov and Bazhov.

²⁹ This happens in several films based on Gogol's tales and in the film based on Sholokhov's *Sud'ba cheloveka*, to name a few examples.

shows Belov and Danilov crossing the railway, a scene which in the novel occurs only in the second chapter. Belov is seen remarking to Danilov that he guessed that that was him, implying that this is the first meeting between the two. Thus the figure of Danilov, who in both the novel and the film has a central role, is presented here from the start as important: he is the one the other characters, and thus the spectator, are waiting for. The fact that he is shown on the background of the train, still stationary and ready for movement, renders him inseparable from the train, and thus by implication from the main action of the film. Belov, who is the commander of the train, is given a secondary position to that of Danilov, the commissar. Belov's waiting for Danilov to act assumes that the political commissar is more important than the professional commander of the train, who is a doctor and thus would have more knowledge of the work to be conducted in the train. The struggle of power between the commander and the political commissar, and by implication between the army and the Party, is a common motif in socialist realist literature and film: a famous example of such tension is its presentation in Furmanov's novel *Chapaev* (1924) and in the film based on this novel³⁰. *Poezd miloserdiia* fits therefore into this tradition, reinforcing the motif already existing in Panova's novel, yet without the complications attached to it in the novel.

The film supports with visual images the depiction of the relationships between the characters. For example, when in the first chapter of the novel Danilov goes around the train at night and meets Suprugov, it is only mentioned that Suprugov went into the corridor in his dressing gown, a fact which stressed the difference in attitude between him and Danilov, who is always in army uniform. In the film Danilov walks through Suprugov's cabin, where the door is open and Suprugov is in the action of cleaning his teeth. The whole conversation between them, which shows the opposition between Suprugov's hysterical fear of the future with Danilov's calm self-command, is conducted while Suprugov cleans his teeth, serving as extra support to his image as a petty and ridiculous person: a person cleaning his teeth is always a comic figure.

³⁰ A detailed discussion of the Chapaev novel and film may be found in S. Hutchings' *Chapaev: Man For All Seasons, Man For All Media* (Talk at 2000 Annual BASEES Conference, Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, UK).

Some of the more daring aspects of the novel are abandoned in its film adaptation. For example, Kramin's criticism of war poetry is not included. More importantly, the whole plot line concerning Danilov's relationship with his wife and his love for and later meeting with Faina are omitted. Danilov's relationship with Faina and the place she has in his imagination are central aspects of the novel, and its omission must constitute a conscious decision on the part of Panova and Khamraev. This idea is supported by the fact, mentioned above, that this aspect of the novel was previously criticised.

It seems that, contrary to expectation, the novel that was written in the period of high socialist realism offers a bolder view of human relationships and ideological considerations than its film adaptation that was made well after Stalin's death. None of the problematic aspects of the novel are reproduced in the film, which becomes thus a more conservative product than its literary source. Panova's writing remains one of the freshest and most interesting examples of socialist realist literature, adhering to the framework of the genre yet striving beyond it for an individual artistic expression. The failure of the film adaptation to recapture the controversial nature of the novel testifies to the fragility of such literary experiments within official discourse. Yet it also encourages a re-vision of the dividing lines between socialist realist art and thaw art, going beyond basic definitions to look at the whole tapestry of non-dissident Soviet literature and film.

**Socjalistyczna w formie, humanistyczna w treści:
Very Panovej artystyczna metoda w prozie i filmie**

Autorka artykułu zajmuje się pytaniem o granice między oficjalną socrealistyczną literaturą radziecką a bardziej humanistycznymi i otwartymi tendencjami literatury nieoficjalnej. Zagadnienie to rozpatrywane na przykładzie pierwszej powieści Very Panovej *Sputniki* i jej filmowej adaptacji *Pojezd miloserdija*. Analiza tekstowa zarówno powieści i filmu została przeprowadzona w kontekście dyskusji nad socrealizmem, radziecką literaturą wojenną i kulturą kina „odwilży”. Artykuł pokazuje, że – odwrotnie do oczekiwań – powieść doby stalinizmu przejawia mniej ograniczeń niż filmy „odwilży” w wyniku czego pojawiają się pytania o zachodnią, krytyczną ocenę radzieckiej literatury i kultury.