

Dehexing Sex

Russian Womanhood
During and After
Glasnost

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Perestroika or Domostroika? The Construction of Womanhood under Glasnost

To see ourselves as others see us!

—Robert Burns, "To a Louse"

So many representations, so many appearances separate us
from each other.

—Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together"

Messages from Russia:

A woman should primarily love, care [for], and cherish her own family.¹

Women by nature are destined to be weaker. . . . Men are women's major game. . . . A woman without a family is without a master, like a stray animal.²

Women in the West [who] always ask why so few women in our country hold government and other leading posts don't imagine how many women tyrants have made themselves comfortable in these posts and are tormenting both sexes. Female bureaucracy is more horrible than its male counterpart—a male bureaucrat can still be moved to pity by one's belonging to the fair sex [*sic*], whereas a female bureaucrat can't be moved by anything. I feel sorry for our embittered women, running wild and tortured by the burdens of life. But I pity the men just as much. In the West it is

now fashionable to fight men to the death. Nothing has been heard about this yet in our country. Thank God. If women enter the lists, they will win. For they are more cunning, wily and tenacious. And I would very much resent living in a land of conquered men.³

Western women feminists have teeth like sharks.⁴

Clearly, from Russia without love.

These opinionated pronouncements emanate not from men but, rather, from educated Russian women of the intelligentsia, whose reflex response to the very terms *woman writer* and *feminist* recalls Dracula recoiling from a cross. That seismic reaction symptomatizes the fundamental discrepancies in assumptions and orientation between Russian female authors and the majority of their Western readers. The two operate by different, often antithetical, codes. Witness the case of Natal'ia Baranskaia, whose story "Nedelia kak nedelia" (A Week Like Any Other, 1969) impressed Western feminists by its purported exposé of patriarchal oppression. Some have even dubbed this piece, which chronicles the dehumanizing effects of women's double duty on the professional and home fronts, the angriest feminist cry to emerge from the Soviet Union.⁵ Yet during an interview with me in spring 1988 Baranskaia (not having read Roland Barthes and learned of the author's death) asserted that her story, far from exposing the heroine's husband as a chauvinistic exploiter, actually portrays the power of love. Although she intended to document the hardships endured by today's women in Russia, Baranskaia protested, she deemed it unjust to hold men responsible for conditions that she imputes exclusively if hazily to the "system." What Baranskaia *did* criticize was Western women's efforts to displace men from their "natural" position of superiority and the "unfeminine" tactics deployed in that campaign. Why, for instance, did the British publishing house adopt the name Virago—which Baranskaia understood only in its secondary meaning, as a termagant, a loud, overbearing woman, and not in its primary dictionary definition, as a woman of great stature, strength, and courage?⁶ As Baranskaia's indignant bafflement evidences, a Western audience reads according to a set of presuppositions and assimilated imperatives that Russians manifestly do not embrace—indeed, even find alien and repugnant.

As a result of the radical self-assessment by the educated segment of society in the West during the last two decades, feminism has fundamentally transformed people's way of perceiving and thinking about women. That transformation in turn has influenced the norms guiding the production and consumption of culture. For the reconceived image of woman (womanhood "with a human face") has infiltrated not only the process of reading texts, watching films, viewing paintings, and decoding advertisements and commercials, but also the very environment that incubates these artistic and media forms. In the United States, Germany, France, and England, where awareness of gender problems inflects the sensibilities of readers, viewers, writers, and directors alike, a more or less shared set of cultural experiences allies authorial choices with audience expectations and reactions. Recent fiction and film in the United States and England, for example, draw on a cultural context informed by the issues, if not necessarily the values, of the twenty-year-old feminist movement. Examples range from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Erica Jong's series of unzipped novels, and Fay Weldon's mordant shockers to Alison Lurie's *The Truth About Lorin Jones*, David Lodge's best-seller *Nice Work* (1989), such films as *Working Girl*, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1989), and *Switch* (1991), and various media messages (e.g., the commercial for Virginia Slims claiming "You've come a long way, baby!") that subliminally or overtly promote a more self-conscious version of gender.

Recent Soviet films and prose authored by men or women lack a comparable context and, consequently, the fund of referents available to Western artists and their public. Since discourses and artistic codes and conventions partially derive from specific sociocultural circumstances, it is critical to contextualize contemporary Russian inscriptions of womanhood in order to grasp what underlies the failure at communication, let alone agreement. Accordingly, my discussion offers a selective commentary that falls into four unequal segments: (1) a summary of institutionalized concepts of gender in Soviet society, with a glance at the status of feminism within that structure; (2) an assessment of the impact glasnost has had on the Soviet concept of womanhood; (3) an examination of how orthodox Soviet views are reflected, challenged, or subverted in late Soviet women's writing in general; and (4) a necessarily brief, closer look at three women writers whose heterodox authorial practices discomfited Soviet readers in the late 1980s and provoked heated debate.⁷

Context

Formally, Russian women in the Soviet Union enjoyed rights that their Western counterparts might have envied. In the classic Marxist conviction that women's emancipation depends upon their integration into productive labor, the egalitarian Soviet Constitution guaranteed women not only full political and civil rights but also access to most trades and professions, in addition to fixed equal pay for equal work.⁸ Because an ongoing need for an expanding labor force intensified the government's efforts to retain female workers, until de-Sovietization 90 percent of Russian women were employed (the highest percentage in the world)⁹ in areas ranging from engineering and law to sanitation and construction. Women, in fact, accounted for 52 percent of the labor force.¹⁰ Moreover, thanks to the legislation written in 1988 by the Soviet Women's Committee under Zoia Pukhova, the state vouchsafed women two years of maternity leave and job security for three years after parturition. It also provided free public child care facilities and legal abortion and divorce for a nominal fee.

As no less a figure than the once omniscient and now roundly discredited Lenin declared, however, "Equality before the law does not automatically guarantee equality in everyday life." The disjunction between the paper rights conferred upon women and the bleak reality of their empirical experience dimmed the glow of the pseudo-utopian picture implied by the Constitution. Ever since the Stalin period, when the official culture joined women's economic role to the glorification of maternity and the reaffirmation of women's traditional familial duties, the Soviet state and the society exhorted women to be both producers and reproducers. As a consequence, they bore the double load of full-time work and all domestic responsibilities. One might say that Russian women were in labor wherever they turned. Men's unwillingness to assume any household or parental obligations left the woman alone to cope with rearing children and cleaning house, cooking, laundering, shopping, etc. Over a million women suffered the stress of single parenting while holding down regular jobs.¹¹ In a country in which perpetual shortages of goods, shoddy products, lack of appliances, poor medicine, deplorable services, and inefficiently run institutions made everyday life a trial, women with a family had insufficient time and energy for career advancement. Hence, in spheres considered suitable

for women, they disproportionately clustered on the lowest rungs of the personnel hierarchy, even though employers readily acknowledged that female employees were more reliable and quick (not to mention sober) than their male counterparts. According to a free-lance journalist in Moscow, few women harbored ambitions to assume top positions, knowing that prestigious establishments, especially, strictly observed a quota system, based on the unofficial but widespread formula: "We already have one Jew, two non-Party members, and two women."¹² The writer Tatyana Tolstaya and others deploring the so-called recent feminization of Russian society pointed out that women account for over 80 percent of the country's doctors and teachers, but she overlooked the low prestige of these specializations in the USSR as well as their links with nurturing and child raising. Women constituted 90 percent of pediatricians but only 6 percent of surgeons; in the late 1970s the powerful USSR Academy of Sciences boasted 14 women among its 749 members (Lapidus 188); in 1986 men made up over 84 percent of the influential Soviet Writers' Union. Of the approximately 15 percent of women, none held key executive posts. Editorial boards typically consisted of 7 to 8 men, with one token woman, at best.

Under Soviet rule most Russian women concurred that they felt crushed by emancipation. They complained that the average woman underwent twelve abortions during her lifetime (abortion was the chief mode of contraception, and some women had as many as thirty);¹³ that she received no help from her husband with the children or the housework yet was forced to work for economic reasons, often under hazardous physical conditions, and so lived in a state of unrelieved tension and exhaustion.¹⁴ Although women writers and sundry commentators repeatedly lamented the arduousness of women's lives in the USSR, few appeared to make connections between official policy and women's situation. In that connection an article by the American journalist Robert Scheer entitled "Where Is She, the New Soviet Woman?" expressed outraged bemusement:

Many of my Soviet male friends tended to be primitive oppressors as regards women, viewing them as a mixture of beast of burden and sexual toy. More depressing, they seemed to find some moral confirmation in the laws of nature for clearly supremacist and exploitative views that would be abhorrent [to them] in any other

arena of life. It seems never to have occurred to anyone here that if women had political power in the Soviet Union one result might have been the greater efficiency of shopping and a vast increase in the production of labor-saving devices for the household. Why has there been such scant improvement, after decades of socialist organization, in the objective conditions that women now find themselves in? The answer is that women in the Soviet Union lack political power even to the degree experienced in the capitalist West. The disenfranchisement of more than half of the population is no minor discrepancy in a society struggling with questions of freedom and representation.¹⁵

Gender disposition in the Soviet Union corroborated Simone de Beauvoir's aperçu that men have found more complicity in women than the oppressor usually finds in the oppressed. Russian women internalized official propaganda and the traditional male system of prerogatives so thoroughly that they themselves propagated the very inequities that marginalized them. Even among the tiny minority of self-proclaimed feminists, some believed that a woman completely realized her essence and her destiny only through motherhood; that domestic tasks were "unfitting for a man"; that nature endowed women with the traits of nurturing, softness, compliance, and patience.¹⁶ In short, they essentialized, by mistaking social constructs (femininity) for biology (femaleness).¹⁷

In the springs of 1988 and 1990, while conducting interviews in Moscow and Leningrad with some thirty female authors encompassing the full spectrum of background, age, and worldview, I repeatedly (and often in unexpected contexts) encountered the refrain: "A woman shouldn't lose her femininity." When asked what constitutes femininity, most cited gentleness, sensitivity, maternal instincts, and the capacity to love. When I suggested that these were not necessarily inborn traits, virtually all of the women resisted the very concept of a constructed identity.¹⁸ Ironically, in a country ruled by ideological impositions women did not grasp the politics of gender formation. In irrationally hoping that general improvements in living conditions would ease their lot, without agitating for a fundamental reassessment of entrenched female-male roles, Russian women unwittingly reinforced

gender stereotypes. Whereas Western women sought a "room of their own," years of officially promoted self-sacrifice habituated Russian women to "burdens of their own"—which they seemed reluctant to jettison on the grounds (or, rather, quicksands) of a biologically ordained self.

Russian women frankly admitted that the majority of Russian men scorned domestic tasks as an inherently female province, proved often unsatisfying sexual partners (given to "premature congratulations"), and were conspicuously absent parents (*paternity* had virtually disappeared from the vocabulary); they likewise recognized that conditions of employment invariably favored men, even though they were less reliable workers. Yet, when exhorted to seek redress through political action on their own behalf, Russian women not only shied away from feminism but violently denounced it. As Nina Beliaeva, a feminist lawyer, observed, the very word "smacks of the indecent, the shameful," and for many was associated with masculinization or lesbianism (universally despised).¹⁹ Feminism conjured up the specter of "bright, slovenly, raucous [women] with blunt gestures, bugging eyes, and cigarette smoke, [in] a small but vociferous procession of women declaring war on the opposite sex."²⁰ Indeed, even otherwise enlightened Russians conceived of feminists as vengeful, mustached hags or harri-dans thirsting for the wholesale metaphorical (if not literal) castration of men, intent on crushing or replacing them so as to gratify their lust for power, compensate for their self-doubts, or enact their lesbian inclinations.

In addition to equating feminism with the masculinization or perversion of women, Soviets also stigmatized it on two counts: for decades it had been discredited as springing from bourgeois values. Many Westerners puzzled by Soviets' uncompromising rejection of it failed to realize that Russians entertained a reduced and uninformed, or historically overmarked, concept of feminism.²¹ Second, given its manifestly political nature, feminism during glasnost had little chance of taking root in a country that had suddenly lost faith in *any* political engagement as an activity. Many women, in fact, maintained that they preferred to leave the "dirty business" of politics to men, confining their energies to the more "authentic" spheres of family and intimate circles of friends, in a replay of Western Victorian scenarios.

Glasnost

Glasnost witnessed a growing receptivity on Soviets' part to Western tendencies and a readiness to assimilate what earlier would have been dismissed as quintessentially Western phenomena incompatible with Soviet principles. Indeed, one might reasonably attribute to Western influence the influx in the then USSR of what in the West could signal a burgeoning feminist awareness: (1) surveys of popular responses to questionnaires designed to highlight possible gender differences, such as the opinion polls reflecting attitudes to sexual practices, marriage, and divorce;²² (2) articles in various publications devoted to women's issues and exhorting increased attention to them;²³ (3) the opening in 1990 of a Center for Gender Studies within the Academy of Sciences;²⁴ (4) the formation of a separate women's section within the Writers' Union, headed in Moscow by Larisa Vasil'eva;²⁵ (5) a sudden spate of publications of neglected women's literature from the past (Ekaterina Dashkova, Nadezhda Durova, Karolina Pavlova, Evdokiia Rostopchina) and various collections of contemporary women's prose that materialized in the late 1980s and early 1990s (*Zhenskaia logika*, *Chisten'kaia zhizn'*, *Ne pomniashchaia zla*, *Novye Amazonki*);²⁶ (6) the emergence (and prominence in the media) of individuals who committed themselves, despite formidable odds, to the dissemination of feminist ideas, for example, the independent Leningrader Ol'ga Lipovskaia, editor of *Zhenskoe chtenie*, founded in 1988 and consisting of articles, original poetry and prose by women, and translations of texts pertinent to characteristic feminist concerns; and (7) the proliferation of women's organizations, including Preobrazhenie, LOTOS (an acronym for the League for Society's Liberation from Stereotypes), the club SAFO, a network of women's councils,²⁷ and an international women's press club called 33 Women and One Man, the man being the rotating elected "hero of the month," ironically dubbed the "Knight of Perestroika," whom the thirty-three women interviewed collectively in an effort to enhance mutual understanding between the sexes.

Parenthetically, it is worth noting that the reaction of a prominent male political analyst on Soviet TV to the formation of this club drove home the dire need for consciousness-raising in Soviet society. According to his "professional" judgment, women could be reporters and good interviewers, "especially if they are young and attractive, but

never political commentators or serious analysts because the latter are at variance not only with tradition, but with the very makeup of women, their physiology [sic] and way of thinking."²⁸ In a similar vein a lawyer deploring the morals of prostitutes branched out into the following startling generalization:

I respect the emancipation of women, but one perhaps ought to think of restoring the old rule banning women from restaurants in the evening unless accompanied by men. The woman who hangs outside a restaurant waiting to be let in, who sits at a table without a man, a glass of cognac in her hand, does not give others any reason to have a flattering opinion of her.²⁹

Items appearing in such publications as *Moscow News* in the late 1980s testified to a strong division of opinion among Soviets regarding woman's "proper niche" in life. That such issues were being debated at all awakened moderate optimism among some Soviets.³⁰

These, however, were miniature pockets of revolutionary change, more cosmetic than systemic. Isolated developments on a modest scale, they virtually drowned in countercurrents, some new and imported from the West, others of immemorial domestic origins. After years of essentially denying that sex and the body exist, the Soviets discovered both—as a source of pleasure and economic gain. Especially the exploitation of women's bodies as marketable commodities and objects of displaced male violence, which Western feminists (notably Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, and Susan Brownmiller)³¹ have combated, suddenly found unsavory expression in diverse aspects of late Soviet culture: (1) the highly publicized beauty contests that secured the then sixteen-year-old Mariia Kalinina (Miss Moscow 1988) and seventeen-year-old Iuliia Sukhanova (Miss USSR 1989) dubious fame; (2) a relentless barrage of films onanistically relying on female nudity, explicit sexual acts, and prolonged or repeated rape as a means of attracting viewers so as to amass profits (e.g., Kh. Kaiziev's *Shakaly* [Jackals, 1990], A. Eidamdzhan's *Za prekrasnykh dam!* [To Beautiful Ladies, 1990]); (3) a wave of video parlors (*videosalony* and *videokluby*) trafficking principally in sadomasochism and pornography—artistic milestones with such subtle titles as *Devushki, Razdevaites!* (Take It Off, Girls!), *Obnazhennaia sredi kannibalov* (Naked Among the Cannibals), *Ty*

ne oboidesh'sia bez nebol'shogo rasputstva (You Can't Do Without a Little Sluttishness), and *Biust i taz—vot chto samoe glavnoe* (The Bust and Pelvis Are What's Most Important);³² (4) heavy metal concerts during which female performers bared all (apart from musical talent); (5) display of female bodies au naturel on covers of any and all publications, ranging from fashion magazines to scholarly economic journals (e.g., *Eko*), on dashboards of taxis, on posters peddled in subway stations, and so forth; (6) the Soviet issue of *Playboy* photographed by Sasha Borodanin, which raised hopes of a profitable career abroad in many a pneumatic Soviet breast; and (7) a dramatic increase in, and a cynical respect for, prostitution as a ticket to material well-being and social prestige. In a 1990 survey, Soviet women ranked prostitution eighth in a list of twenty top professions; over one-third of high school girls freely admitted that they would exchange sex for hard currency (Koppel).

The significance of these novelties in the Soviet Union could not be compared to that in the West, given the primitive level of knowledge among Russians then about anything pertaining to sex. Virtually no sex education existed in the USSR; condoms were in disastrously short supply, and 70 percent of high school students who engaged in sexual intercourse did not use contraceptives the first time; owing to Russians' fundamental ignorance of biology, some women reached the fifth month of pregnancy before realizing their condition; and, finally, every fourth abortion that occurred in the world was performed in the USSR (Koppel). These were not ideal circumstances for the radical sexual revolution of the type that took place under glasnost.³³ After decades of puritanism Russian males flocked in thousands to inspect, and to parade their appreciation for, what the society had denied them for so long. Within one social category, at least, the politics of erogenous commitment ousted earlier political idols: truck drivers quickly replaced the portraits of Stalin decorated with medals, which they used to display routinely on their windshields, with coyly pouting pinups free of any and all decoration.

One might argue that such regressive sexist innovations pervaded only popular culture, and a minority within it, without impinging on "high culture," the intelligentsia's arena of significant activity. Such arguments, however, do not withstand close scrutiny. While pornogra-

phy may be purchased by the proletariat, it is produced by writers—not necessarily talented ones but members of the intelligentsia, nonetheless. Surveys canvassing opinions regarding sexual, marital, and familial issues during the late 1980s unambiguously confirmed that *both* sexes across a broad social spectrum upheld the double standard.³⁴ Women's organizations, while affording members platforms for self-expression, not only failed to be taken seriously by those empowered to change women's lot but also lacked the political weight to effect improvements in women's social and political status. And scholarly feminist publications sparked enthusiasm in the West but left the educated Russian public largely skeptical and indifferent.³⁵

If beauty contests and pornographic videos propagated a degrading and reductionist image of womanhood, the titles of recent prose collections, such as those mentioned, likewise enforced hoary gender stereotypes through their code-affirming implications: for example, *Zhenskaia logika* (Female Logic, 1989) relied on the tiresome and tireless fantasy of women as irrational, unpredictable creatures ruled by emotion and whim; *Chisten'kaia zhizn'* (A Clean/Pure Life, 1990) evoked the hackneyed pseudo-ideal of woman as virgin or sterile/sterilized housekeeper, and so forth. Editors continued not only to exclude or drastically underrepresent women in anthologies of prose and poetry but also to withhold their birthdates while supplying that information for all the male contributors, on the understanding that women, unlike men, wish to hide their age (according to the cliché that women grow old, while men become distinguished).³⁶ To the perceptive reader the markedly different treatment of these authors, who, moreover, served as isolated representatives of their gender, set them apart—outside the "malestream"—and betrayed the deep-rooted gender bias that for decades prevailed in all spheres of Soviet cultural life and continued to do so during glasnost. Yet the majority of Russians, including those trained in deciphering the values and political allegiances attaching to ostensibly innocuous discourse, seemed impervious to sexist language or strategies. Though sensitized to the encoded sociopolitical connotations of literary and journalistic statement, they could not detect the articulation of gender politics in verbal formulations that any educated Westerner would find crudely chauvinistic.

Women Writers

How do women born and raised in such a culture perceive and inscribe themselves in their texts? The answer is—problematically. Russian women's reluctance to explore the liberating political and psychological potential of feminism³⁷ paralleled Soviet female authors' categorical disavowal of themselves as specifically women writers, even though they and their society at every turn underscored their Otherness. Whenever gender issues were raised, irreconcilable self-contradictions riddled the impassioned reactions of both. Asked by an American scholar how she felt as a *woman* writer, Viktoriia Tokareva replied:

It is no disadvantage that I am a woman. I am different because I write with humor. Humor is rare, even [*sic*] with male writers. I prefer male prose, though often women's prose is overloaded with attention to detail. If the woman is talented this is delightful. But I like terse literature, not *babskaya* [broads' or typical women's] literature. (McLaughlin 75)

Liudmila Petrushevskiaia claimed to write in a "male mode," focusing on the essentials of plot and character, as opposed to wallowing in the ornateness that she, like many others, associated with women's style.³⁸ For Tatyana Tolstaya, women's writing was synonymous with superficiality and a philistine outlook, with a saccharine air and a mercantile psychology. But her revealing comment that men also write such "women's prose" left unanswered the question why hack work of this sort merits a gendered label.³⁹

Although the highly successful critic-journalist Natal'ia Ivanova doubted the validity and usefulness of a gendered literary category, she nonetheless proceeded to define "women's prose"—in purely derogatory terms. For her it denoted a parochial outlook, an exclusive preoccupation with women's emotional life and a concomitant glut of weddings, infidelities, and divorces; its stylistic earmarks were triviality, coquettishness, and empty decoration.⁴⁰ Her contentious model recalled an earlier article (1963) by the writer Natal'ia Il'ina, who summed up what she ironically dubbed "ladies' literature" as a stultifying succession of narcissistic self-contemplations in mirrors, breathless declarations of improbable desires and aspirations, littered with

pretentious references to pseudolegitimating sources from Heraclitus to Kant, and unintentionally hilarious stereotypes of incarnated masculine and feminine ideals that flourish in Harlequin Romances today.⁴¹ In its derisive antipathy toward its subject the critique rivaled Nabokov's dismissal of Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* as a book about bells, bulls, and balls. In fact, when Petrushevskiaia, Tolstaya, and Ivanova went on to assert that there is really only good and bad prose, it became evident that the negative epithet, for reasons suggested by the gender disposition in Russian society, was interchangeable with *women's*. Female authors vehemently dissociated themselves from "women's" writing, then, chiefly because the seemingly innocent terms did duty for evaluative (or, rather, devaluative) modifiers.

In their works, which favored the genre of the short story or novella, Russian women authors under glasnost, not surprisingly, tended to focus on what they knew best and what interested them most: human interaction, often heterosexual relations, family dynamics, generational conflicts, problems of self-fulfillment, and the conflicting claims of job and home. Hallmarks of Soviet women's prose during the last two decades include a subordination of plot to a preponderance of description; psychological exploration; a style that eschews modernist technique; and a fairly stable perspective, usually a female center of consciousness, conveyed through quasidirect discourse (*erlebte Rede*)—a limited viewpoint in which boundaries between author, narrator, and protagonist often become blurred.⁴²

How have women's narratives differed from men's? Or, to cast the query in terms of the classic Freudian penal/penile test, one could ask: "What quintessential trait of male prose has women's fiction lacked?" Above all, a direct, focal treatment of political issues and an immanent impulse to universalize. A nakedly politicized system such as the Soviet Union's appreciated all too well that the personal *is* political, but not in the sense theorized by feminists and other Western intellectuals. According to orthodox Soviet principles, "retreat" into the private sphere signaled a repudiation of the obligatory participation in collective endeavors and thought mandated by a monolithic ideology. In effect, then, the personal was treasonable. But because of the a priori separation of masculine and feminine arenas of activity—public for men, domestic for women—male apostasy became female propriety. Women's literary forays into the private world followed so-called laws

of nature (were a desideratum), whereas literary evidence of men's withdrawal from political involvement carried serious implications.

The discrimination paralleled official supervision of sexuality, with male "deviance" (i.e., homosexuality) punished by a law that left lesbianism unmentioned, for lesbianism was, presumably, inconceivable or socially unidentifiable. In other words, the exclusion of manifestly political matters from women's fiction and its emphasis on personal or familial aspirations coincided with establishment expectations. In that regard women's fiction could be considered conformist. Its place in the culture paralleled women's time, from a masculinist viewpoint, as a pause in the day's occupations when serious business was set aside for a lighter entertainment.⁴³ Moreover, the cult of maternity and self-sacrifice, the recurrent motif of guilt for striving to realize the self at the expense of the family (when the two proved incompatible), and the avoidance of formal experimentation all strengthened the impression that women's fiction was conservative, devoid of risk and color.

The Subversive Trio

The critical reception during the late 1980s of three women writers belonging to three different generations indicated that some readers might have felt more comfortable had their texts conformed to the bland dictates of the hypothetical genre of ladies' literature gleefully denigrated by one and all. These were Liudmila Petrushevskaja, Tatyana Tolstaya, and Valeriia Narbikova.

A playwright and prosaist in her fifties who, finally, after a quarter-century of professional struggles, has achieved public recognition, Liudmila Petrushevskaja ignites impassioned controversy. Her gritty plays and short stories, permeated with morbid humor and shocking grotesquerie, deal with the underbelly of adult relations—the nasty traffic in human desires and fears whereby everything carries a literal and metaphorical price. Suicide, alcoholism, child abuse, fictitious marriages, one-night stands, part-time prostitution to augment a miserable income, unwanted pregnancies, homelessness, abject crushing poverty, and physical and psychological violence constitute the stuff of her fiction and drama (and did so long before such concerns received the official stamp of approval under glasnost). This nightmarish world on the

brink of existence testifies to Petrushevskaja's infallible instinct for instantly lighting on the darkest and most lacerating element in any situation. Life for her is the penalty we all pay for having been born. Although Petrushevskaja views children, pregnant women, the sick and the old as instantiations of the most vulnerable moments in human life, and tends to favor female narrators and protagonists, her writing is relatively free of gendered binarism.⁴⁴ It shows both sexes inflicting and experiencing pain in an unbroken chain of mutual abuse.

Devoid of nature and character description, sparse in dialogue and stripped of imagery, Petrushevskaja's prose relies for its effects on the distinctive language of its ambiguous narrators. Like the lives it expresses, that language is a triumph of incongruities, condensing urban slang, cultural clichés, malapropisms, racy colloquialisms, and solecisms, which stream forth in an effort to camouflage or to deter confrontation with what is most crucial and, usually, most painful. Petrushevskaja's familiarity with and enthusiasm for Freud is no accident. For her stratagems of deflection, transference, and avoidance Petrushevskaja early elaborated a highly individual style that disturbs readers almost as much as the seamy catastrophes in which her plots abound. Alienated by the monstrosities that quietly but implacably multiply in Petrushevskaja's fiction, few respond to the gnarled poetry of her language. Yet the gaps and collisions in that language are Petrushevskaja's chief means of destabilizing conventional perceptions and precepts that have congealed into coercive truths. Her resistance to accommodation and the unsentimental mordant tone—accentuated rather than relieved by flashes of grisly comedy—in which Petrushevskaja's narrators recount horrors explain why several commentators and Petrushevskaja herself have insisted that she writes "like a man" (optimism and passive resignation being women's obligatory province). Liberated from sexist prejudice, the phrase translates into "writes good prose" that bears a distinctive signature.

Particularly Petrushevskaja's longest story, "Our Crowd" ("Svoi krug," 1988), immediately after publication drew opprobrium on two counts.⁴⁵ Its unflinching, cynical dissection of an amoral coterie from the intelligentsia challenges the institutionalized image of that milieu as the stronghold of its society's conscience. Similarly, the female protagonist's physical violence against her son, though ostensibly exercised in his interests, overturns the enduring ideal of uncomplicated,

nurturing maternity entrenched in Soviet ideology and sedimented in the nation's psyche. In other words, Petrushevskaiia's morose emphasis on (self-)destructive human drives and intolerable external pressures, as well as her explicit references to sexual and physiological realia, violates the decorum of two gendered Soviet myths: the euphemistically couched personal concerns supposedly exemplified in ladies' literature; and the emotional affirmation of family life that official policy imposed upon women and cemented into the spurious national paradigm of femininity that for decades continued to stifle them.

Petrushevskaiia's texts offer neither reassurance nor occasion for paternalistic condescension. Their aggressive and transgressive negation unsettles even the minority capable of appreciating their stylistic sophistication. According to Petrushevskaiia, after the publication of "Our Crowd" acquaintances snubbed her on the street, while others upbraided her for "wallowing in filth" and questioned the "usefulness" of "maligning" the technically oriented branch of the intelligentsia that the story depicts. Such reactions expose the drawbacks of an enforced univocal critical tradition ruled by what Mary Jacobus calls the "flight toward empiricism," which naively assumes "an unbroken continuity between 'life' and 'text.'"⁴⁶ It allows scant room for imagination, ludic activity, and aesthetic transformation. And it reduces Petrushevskaiia, a poetic talent with a tragic view of life, into a querulous journalist intent on degrading the (hypothetical but culturally promoted and inculcated) norms of her sex.

Most remarkable of all, neither Petrushevskaiia, who considers her writing "masculine," nor the readers disquieted by her tough "unfeminine" literary manner perceive the flagrant contradiction between their sweeping claim that gender is irrelevant to literature, on the one hand, and the gendered terminology they apply to Petrushevskaiia's specific case, on the other. If one accedes to the untenable logic operative in educated Soviet society, which customarily invokes "femininity" in discussions of all but the creative aspects of women's lives, one would have to conclude that as soon as a woman picks up a pen or sits at a keyboard she miraculously sheds the gender she apparently displays everywhere else. In other words, the woman writer is a Lady Macbeth, "unsexed" the moment she seizes her dagger/pen and prepares for action. According to the gendered binarism that has acquired the fraudulent status of objective truth through decades of systematic cod-

ification, Petrushevskaiia *as a woman* betrays and/or jettisons her inherently feminine traits of emotion, compliance, nurturing, and pathos once she *as author* assumes the purportedly masculine desiderata of intellect, aggression, power, and Logos. Were one to credit such an unpersuasive scenario, the problem would still remain: how to reconcile the a priori essentialization of such a position with its simultaneous unproblematic endorsement of constructed or acquired gender-specific characteristics? No rhetoric can disguise the arbitrary premises or incongruous conclusions of the yoked syllogisms:

- A. Woman is intrinsically feminine
Petrushevskaiia is a woman
Petrushevskaiia is inherently feminine;
- B. Forceful prose is masculine
Petrushevskaiia writes forceful prose
Petrushevskaiia's prose is masculine.

Logic compels the inference that the very process of writing (well?) mysteriously metamorphoses the feminine principle into the masculine and reverses the transmutation the moment creativity ceases. Any Westerner versed in feminist theory recognizes this brand of "reasoning" as the "pen = penis" syndrome that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assailed in their study *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and effectively laid to rest.

Tatyana Tolstaya's prose has little in common with Petrushevskaiia's yet has similarly elicited unease for generally analogous reasons: complexity, stylistic distinctiveness, and self-assurance; and independence of dominant cultural trends as well as of expectations regarding women's writing. Although Tolstaya from the start enjoyed tremendous popularity in the West, where modernism had not been strangled by political conservativeness, during glasnost she provoked discomfort among both Soviet critics and readers, who not only confused her fiction with her journalism but also overlooked the primacy of poetry, metaphysics, and verbal play in her stories. Tolstaya relies on the transforming powers of the imagination to explode and construct worlds through the language into which, she maintains, we are all born. Her fiction celebrates the poetic possibilities of that language through a densely intertextualized, multivocal prose.

Tolstaya's apodictic pronouncements in articles and interviews ill prepare one for the quicksilver oscillation of her narrative among constant allusions, multiple unidentified voices, staggeringly bold tropes, and unresolved contrasting moods that revive the authorial practices of the 1920s and present a daunting challenge to the hermeneut. Few Russian writers of either sex breach realistic conventions more colorfully and creatively than Tolstaya, who withholds unequivocal guideposts from readers who comb her texts for meaning. Irony, decentering through a steady clash of synchronic perspectives and tones, the poetic devices of anaphora, rhyme, assonance, and developed metaphor, an amalgam of grotesquely comic and elegiacally lyrical—all make for an infinitely rich verbal play in which language ultimately displaces character as protagonist.

Tolstaya's acute sensitivity to the power of language enables her to pinpoint stock images and concepts neatly encapsulated in clichés. These include cultural myths about love, romance, and other ritualized aspects of heterosexual relations that she deconstructs in at least three of her stories: "Okhota na mamonta" (Hunting the Woolly Mammoth, 1985), "Poet i muza" (The Poet and the Muse, 1986), and "Ogon' i pyl'" (Fire and Dust, 1986).⁴⁷ Although in conversation, interviews, and articles Tolstaya adopts an impassioned antifeminist position, her skepticism of systems and classifications leads her to dismantle all manner of constructs, including gender stereotypes. In two successive interviews Tolstaya confided that she conceives of the writer as ideally an androgynous being.⁴⁸ If one agrees with Carolyn Heilbrun that "androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate,"⁴⁹ Tolstaya's ironic, allusive manner amply testifies to the creative androgyny that enables her to reproduce narratively the autonomy of a subversive subjectivity. Ambiguity, parody, and the incessant unresolved interplay among the competing discourses of diverse subjectivities invite readers to distance themselves from a single monological viewpoint and to recognize its limitations. Tolstaya's dethroning of authority, her awareness of the precariousness of a subject position, her mediating techniques of authorial self-elimination, and her subversive use of humor free her from the strictures of essentialist binarism that have corseted Russian women's fiction. One could profitably apply to Tolstaya what Susan Friedman has argued on H.D.'s behalf: that "[her] writing itself constituted her action against the dominant culture."⁵⁰

Yet published and private responses to Tolstaya's fiction have tended to downplay its profundity, stylistic boldness, and originality by faulting it on "human" grounds or squeezing it into a domestic pigeonhole with a single subsuming voice of (s)mothering compassion. Just as Tolstaya's unusually outspoken refusal to genuflect before the sacred cows (bulls?) of the patriarchal literary establishment unleashed a flood of abuse and delayed her acceptance into the Writers' Union, so her unorthodox authorial practices incurred disapproval on the shaky grounds of "artificiality" or excessive "artistry," "aristocracy," and "flight from reality" or "from adulthood." Uncomfortable with Tolstaya's emphatic syncretism, critics and fellow literati have repeatedly addressed the ingenuous (and, strictly speaking, nonliterary) question of whether Tolstaya "likes" her characters and handles them "kindly"⁵¹—an issue of nurture, of metaphorical diapering and breast-feeding. Others have impugned the "appropriateness" of her ironic tonalities or found her prose overladen with "superfluous" tropes (echoing the rebuke of "too many notes" in Miloš Forman's film *Amadeus*). These reproaches register the vast expanses separating her prose from the ultimately conformist formulations of universally scorned ladies' literature. Instead of a steady flow of emotional self-revelation in a generic vein, consistent authorial identification with *porte parole* characters, and a monotonous language of vapid pastels or unabated hyperbole, Tolstaya's texts tackle metaphysical questions, favor flamboyant juxtapositions, and engage in linguistic imperialism. They demand not lachrymose empathy but, rather, intellectual effort, a ready command of cultural history, and an alertness to poetic strategies. In brief, the traditional masculine traits of undisguised voraciousness and freedom from external constraints, combined with disciplined organizing powers, distinguish Tolstaya's writing from *any* convention-bound prose.

Valeriia Narbikova, a young writer aged "thirty something" who since her debut in 1988 has published only a half-dozen narratives, won a reputation overnight as the "bad girl" of current fiction. (Inaccurately) dubbed the first Soviet woman author of erotica on the basis of her first publication, "The Equilibrium of Light in Diurnal and Nocturnal Stars" (*Ravnovesie sveta dnevnykh i nochnykh zvezd*, 1988), Narbikova conflates sexual with textual in narratives in which bodies, literary citations, and paronomastic elements copulate indefatigably.

Narbikova's blithe treatment of intercourse, her narrative sophistication, and her humorous debunking of authoritative male culture through, so to speak, the deflationary devices of inverted syllogisms, impudent inversion of intertexts, and cross-pollination of low and high culture have outraged a number of Soviet establishment critics.⁵² Above all, Narbikova exposes the formidable power of language to construct systems that subsequently lay claim to reality and thereby murder authenticity, obstruct perception, and anesthetize mental processes. Her verbal play aims to defamiliarize a world congealed in inert formulas that have accreted unchallenged over time. "Equilibrium" operates on a matrix analogy between sexual and textual: just as the third member of a "love triangle" reconfigures the relationship of the original couple, so does the introduction of a new, illicit ingredient into a formulation numbing in its familiarity reanimate it, transforming one's perspective and awakening a fresh response or giving birth to an original concept. Drawing on cultural myths, fairy tales, and citations from literature and philosophy, Narbikova postulates language as the site of struggle, of co-optation, of seduction, of impotence and renovative power—to the extent that discourse becomes the ultimate intercourse. In a world of disjunction, in which language has drifted loose from lived experience but has contaminated it through imposition, the pursuit of an Edenic mode of expression, whereby phenomena are named anew, denotes a search for lost innocence. Hence the disrobings, the flights to nature, and the dismantling or restructuring of available configurations that proliferate in Narbikova's prose.

On the basis of the "theft" enacted in Genesis, Mary Daly has accused men of having stolen language from women.⁵³ Indeed, throughout Russia's history males have been the producers of language, especially of official discourse and its oppositional Aesopian code. It is therefore no coincidence that Petrushevskaja, Tolstaya, and Narbikova—three of the most challenging and original Russian writers during glasnost—heightened blood pressure among conservative Soviet critics and readers by their bold, unapologetic encroachment on that traditionally masculine terrain through their *sui generis*, irreverent use of language. If, to revise de Buffon's maxim, "Le style est la femme même," then their impenitently liberated authorial manner not only overturns Soviet pre-

conceptions about women's fiction but potentially challenges the foundations on which Soviet culture has constructed womanhood. In the realm of gender, then, it is not via direct political agitation nor via the inauguration of new heroic or antiheroic models but, rather, through a linguistic coup d'état—a self-confident seizure of language—that Petrushevskaja, Tolstaya, and Narbikova became the (possibly unwitting) subversive "troika of perestroika" during the spectacularly self-contradictory period known as glasnost.

Notes

1. Liliya Nikolayeva, "To Love, Care and Cherish" (response to a questionnaire circulated on International Woman's Day), *Moscow News*, 1987, 16.
2. Sigrid McLaughlin, "An Interview With Viktoriya Tokareva," *Canadian Woman Studies* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 76.
3. Tatyana Tolstaya, "In a Land of Conquered Men," *Moscow News*, 24 September–1 October 1989, 13.
4. Opinion of Viktoriia Tokareva, reported by Beatrix Campbell, "Writer's Room With a View," *Guardian*, 21 February 1989, 35.
5. For a discussion of this story from such a viewpoint, see the competent survey of Baranskaia's oeuvre by Susan Kay, "A Woman's Work," *Irish Slavonic Studies* 8 (1987): 115–26.
6. Interview with Natal'ia Baranskaia in Moscow, conducted and taped by Helena Goscilo (13 May 1988).
7. See particularly the famous dialogue between Sergei Chuprinin ("Drugaiia proza") and Dmitrii Urnov ("Plokhiaia proza"), *Literaturnaia gazeta* 6 (8 February 1989): 4–5; Evgeniia Shcheglova, "V svoem krugu," *Literaturnoe obozrenie* 3 (1990): 19–26.
8. Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).
9. Figures vary, depending on source. In 1990 one of the most frequently cited statistics was 86 percent of women were working outside the home. Broadcast by Ted Koppel, "Sex in the Soviet Union" (January 1991).
10. Statistics drawn from *Moscow News* (November 1988). For more specific data, broken down by specialization, see Helena Goscilo, "Russian Women Under Glasnost," *New Outlook* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 45–50.
11. Kerry McCuaig, "Effects of Perestroika and Glasnost on Women," *Canadian Woman Studies* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 12.
12. *Index on Censorship* 3 (1989).
13. Here, as elsewhere, discrepancies in statistics reflect different sources. The variously reported averages seem to range from twelve to fifteen. The highest figure I have encountered for abortions undergone by a woman is thirty. Ol'ga Lipovskaia, the founder and editor of the unofficial publica-

- tion *Zhenskoe chtenie*, considers fourteen the national average (pers. comm., Moscow, 1990; also quoted in Francine du Plessix Gray, *Soviet Women: Walking the Tightrope* [New York: Doubleday, 1989], 19).
14. Nearly half of Russia's female workers engaged in unskilled labor. In agriculture manual labor remained women's province, for machinery tended overwhelmingly to be entrusted to men.
 15. *Moscow News*, 30 April–7 May 1989.
 16. Official government policy institutionalized gender identities in the Soviet Union through systematic campaigns. On this process, see Lynne Attwood, *The New Soviet Man and Woman* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); and Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).
 17. I take femaleness to be a matter of biology, of possessing a body potentially capable of bearing and sustaining children. Femininity, by contrast, is understood here as a set of externally defined characteristics, a construct whereby cultural and social norms impose patterns of sexuality and behavior on women (hence de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952] that "one isn't born a woman, one becomes one"). Hélène Cixous has illustrated how tradition has determined that identity as a symmetrical antithesis to the normative male paradigm, generating the familiar binary oppositions imbricated with the patriarchal value system, whereby *masculine* denotes culture, activity, intellect, aggression, power, and Logos while *feminine* denotes nature, passivity, emotion, gentleness, and pathos ("Sorties," *La Jeune née* (1975), trans. as Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* [1986; reprint, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], 63–132). In the 1990s most Russians of both sexes subscribe, with minimal modifications, to this binary paradigm.
 18. While Russians fully appreciate how overt forms of political propaganda can brainwash even educated members of a society, their general conservatism discourages them from interrogating more subtle, less visible, forms of mass manipulation. For instance, the cult of maternity, despite its complicity with official demographic campaigns and the heritage of Stalinist coercion, persists as an ineradicable fixture of Russian thinking.
 19. The few lesbians whom I have encountered in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, plus several gay men, would represent exceptions. I have yet to meet straight Russians who do not consider same-sex love abnormal.
 20. Nina Belyaeva, "Feminism in the USSR," *Canadian Woman Studies* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 17.
 21. As the historian David Ransel astutely observes:

"Feminism" is a thoroughly discredited notion in Soviet thought; the socialists of revolutionary Russia bound that signifier so tightly to bourgeois class interest that it has been virtually impossible to pry it loose and use it more creatively. Then the Stalinists destroyed the

- socialist program for women's rights [Zhenotdel, established in 1920 and headed by Inessa Armand and Aleksandra Kollontai, was disbanded in 1930], declared that the "woman problem" had been solved, and reimposed patriarchal authority with a vengeance. The resulting confusion of discourse and action left Soviet women without a language to discuss their grievances.
- (David Ransel, review of Tatyana Mamonova, *Russian Women's Studies: Essays on Sexism in Soviet Culture*, in *Women's Studies in Indiana* [1990])
22. Many of these were published in *Moscow News*, a flagship of glasnost.
 23. In 1988 *Moscow News* introduced a regular column entitled "She and We," dealing specifically with women's issues and featuring diverse items ranging from letter and opinion polls to editorials and "think pieces."
 24. The center (Tsentr Gendernykh Issledovani), attached to the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute for Socio-Economic Studies of Population, under the directorship of N. Rimashevskaya, had as its deputy the economist Anastasiia Posadskaia, one of the four founders of the League for Society's Liberation from Stereotypes (LOTOS) (and one of the few Russians with a thorough understanding of Western feminism). In 1994 the philosopher Ol'ga Voronina unofficially assumed the directorship of the Gender Center.
 25. Members of the Moscow branch of the Soviet Women Writers' Association, constituted on the initiative of the poet Larisa Vasil'eva, met on a semi-regular basis to discuss professional issues, read from works in progress, and organize seminars, conferences, and other forums for women's creativity.
 26. Such recent collections as *Ne pomniashchaia zla* (1990), compiled by Larisa Vaneeva, and *Novye Amazonki* (1991), organized by Svetlana Vasilenko, contain fiction of mainly younger-generation women writers (e.g., Svetlana Vasilenko, Nina Sadur, Valeriia Narbikova, Marina Palei, and Irina Polianskaia), who are more venturesome stylistically and sufficiently unidealizing in their vision of the world to have prompted unease among critics (see, e.g., the tirade masquerading as a review of *Ne pomniashchaia zla* by Pavel Basinskii, "Pozabyvshie dobro?" *Literaturnaia gazeta* [10 February 1991]; 10). For an analysis of the negative reception of this literature, see chapter 3.
 27. The women's councils represented a revival of the Zhenotdel of the 1920s. While the campaigns for female candidates in the political arena on the part of the council headed by Ol'ga Bessolova proved unsuccessful, the efforts reflected a healthy recognition that political representation could lead to improved conditions for women.
 28. *Moscow News*, 1–8 January 1988, 12. According to several feminists in Moscow, the press club smacked of frivolity and "coquetry," had no serious platform, and contributed little to the betterment of women's social status. Interview with Natal'ia Filippova, former member of Preobrazhenie (Moscow, May 1990), recorded by Helena Goscilo.

29. Elizabeth Waters, "Reading Between the Novosti Lines," *Canadian Woman Studies* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 34.
30. Although women's issues received extensive coverage in the Soviet press during the late 1980s, and surveys and essays advocated a more liberal approach to gender issues, literary reviews tended to iterate precisely the kind of sexist formulas that Cixous's essay derides. See, for example, Basin-skii, "Pozabylishie dobro?"; Shcheglova, "V svoem krugu"; and my discussion of them in chapter 3.
31. See, for instance, Susan Brownmiller, *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975); Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Putnam, 1981), and Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). For more extensive bibliographical data, see MacKinnon (231–36).
32. See the letter of protest by a fifteen-year-old male student in *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 25 April 1990, 2. Regarding film, see the review by Irina Pavlova, "Zachem svoboda?" *Ekran i stsena*, 26 April 1990, 4. Pavlova queries the value of an artistic and political freedom that yields such cheap results, for the absence of prohibitions in contemporary Soviet cinema does not vouchsafe improved quality and, in the specific cases of the films cited, merely breeds vulgarity. The views expressed in Igor' Dedkov's contribution to the Working Group on Contemporary Soviet Culture Conference (Moscow 1990) coincide in several respects with Pavlova's.
33. Pornography, violence in film and TV, etc., arose gradually out of the Western capitalist system that continues to sustain conditions hospitable to their development and in that sense may be called an "organic" part of Western society. The eruption of such phenomena in Soviet Russia after a lengthy tradition of puritanical suppression gave cause for unease, particularly because of the country's volatile atmosphere during the late 1980s. On the lively market in Soviet pornography, see Dmitry Sidorov and Dmitry Demidov, "Pillow Talk," *Moscow News*, 30 September–7 October 1990, 16. For a glance at pornography in Russia, see chapter 6.
34. A survey of attitudes toward sexual practices administered in 1988 reported that 15 percent of the males and 10 percent of the females canvassed by pollsters found premarital sex with any likable man acceptable for women, while 42 percent of males and 19 percent of females deemed premarital sex with any likable woman acceptable for men. Thirty-five percent of men and 43 percent of women considered premarital sex for women acceptable only with the "one she loved," but only 24 percent of men and 40 percent of women judged the criterion of love applicable to men. While respondents had mixed views on adultery, both sexes consistently condemned adultery more vigorously in women than in men. Figures indicated that women's views were more evenhanded than men's, the gap between what they allowed themselves and what they thought permissible for the other sex much narrower than in the case of male respondents

- ("What You Think about the Bedroom Revolution," *Moscow News*, September 1988, 11).
35. Such, at least, was the judgment of Posadskaia regarding her own research, fellow LOTOS member Ol'ga Voronina's, and such items as Tat'iana Klimenkova's survey of key aspects of Western feminism (T. S. Klimenkova, "Filosofskie problemy neofeminizma 70-kh godov," *Voprosy filosofii* 5 [1988]: 148–57). Members of LOTOS and of the new Center for Gender Studies actively pursued contacts with the West in the interests of strengthening their grasp on feminist principles and in the hopes of avoiding some of the pitfalls that American feminists have not circumvented. They therefore forged links with, for example, the Women's Dialogue USA/USSR, headed by Colette Shulman.
 36. The editors of the otherwise liberal collection *Vest'* (News [1989]) and of the four-volume series *The Contemporary Moscow Novella* (Sovremennaia moskovskaia povest') supply the birthdates of all contributors except the female authors: Tat'iana Vrubel', Larisa Miller, Galina Pogozheva, and Anna Nal', as well as Nina Katerli (the sole female prosaist), in *Vest'*; and Irina Raksha and Viktoriia Tokareva, represented in volumes 3 and 4 of the *povest'* series, respectively. The latter two are the only women among the almost forty writers whose tales constitute the anthologies.
 37. This is not to imply that Russian women should unthinkingly adopt Western feminism wholesale, but acquaintance with its basic principles and the history of its political endeavors would enable them to elaborate a version of feminism tailored to their specific circumstances. Westerners who impose irrelevant paradigms on Russian women, on the one hand, and Russians who protest that feminism might have been necessary in the West but has no application to their markedly different situation, on the other, both ignore what American feminists have increasingly stressed in recent years: the need to take into account the specifics of individual cases instead of embracing a universal model of womanhood. For a lucid and balanced overview of the fundamental conflict between American partisans of pragmatic progressiveness and French proponents of idealist radicalism (what Catharine Stimpson has called the "false ahistorical overuniversalizing of 'woman'"), see Betsy Draine, "Refusing the Wisdom of Solomon: Some Recent Feminist Literary Theory," *Signs* (Autumn 1989): 144–70.
 38. Sigrid McLaughlin, "Contemporary Soviet Women Writers," *Canadian Woman Studies* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 77.
 39. Tatyana Tolstaya, "A Little Man Is a Normal Man," *Moscow News*, 1987, 10.
 40. Natal'ia Ivanova, "'Kogda by zhizn' domashnim krugom . . .,'" *Literaturnaia gazeta* 4 (1986): 72–74.
 41. Natal'ia Il'ina, "K voprosu o traditsii i novatorstve v zhanre 'damskoi povesti,'" *Novyi mir* 3 (1963): 224–30.
 42. Fairly well-known representatives of this fiction include I. Grekova, N. Baranskaia, M. Ganina, N. Kozhevnikova, G. Shcherbakova, and

- L. Uvarova. For a sampling of their fiction, see *Balancing Acts*, ed. Helena Goscilo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also the fine anthology entitled *Soviet Women Writing*, ed. Jacqueline Decter (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990).
43. Elaine Showalter, "Women's Time, Women's Space," in *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, ed. Shari Benstock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 31.
 44. On gendered binarism, see Gillian Beer, "Representing Women: Re-presenting the Past," in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 63-80.
 45. Conversations with Petrushevskaia in May 1988 and with Liudmila Ulitskaia in May 1990 in Moscow.
 46. Mary Jacobus, "Is There a Woman in This Text?" *New Literary History* 14 (Autumn 1982): 138.
 47. On this, see Helena Goscilo, "Monsters Monomaniacal, Marital, and Medical: Tolstaia's Regenerative Use of Gender Stereotypes," in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, ed. Jane Costlow, Stephanie Sandler, and Judith Vowles (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
 48. Both during my visit to her at the University of Richmond in November 1989 and in Peter I. Barta, "The Author, the Cultural Tradition and Glasnost: An Interview with Tatyana Tolstaya," *RLJ* 147-49 (1990): 282.
 49. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1964; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1982).
 50. Susan Friedman, "Modernism of the 'Scattered Remnant,'" *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, 210.
 51. For a selected bibliography of Russian critical responses to Tolstaya's work, see Barta, "The Author," 283.
 52. See Urnov; for an assessment contrary to Urnov's, see Nadezhda Azhgikhina, "Razrushiteli v poiskakh very," *Znamia* 9 (1990): 223-24.
 53. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); and *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

2

The Gendered Trinity of Russian Cultural Rhetoric

Alas! poor country;
Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
Be call'd our mother, but our grave.

—Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Their history, their stories, constitute
the locus of our displacement.

—Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together"

Now here, you see, it takes all the running
you can do, to keep in the same place.

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

Indifference to Difference

Anyone examining virtually any process or comparing two phenomena or stages may read for sameness or for difference. Journalists and scholars, under the pressure of what Alexander Solzhenitsyn peevishly diagnosed as a fatal attraction to novelty, predictably favor difference (3, 17). Perhaps revelation seems intrinsically to possess more allure than affirmation partly because it intimates change or progress, the presumed desiderata of the modern technological age. Hence, when people encounter each other again after any temporal lapse, human instinct (trained by social habit and seduced by the promise of narrative) prompts the query "What's new?" rather than "Hello, what's the same?"

Reading contemporary Russian culture against the current, I contend that, notwithstanding the cataclysmic displacements effected by