

Women in Russian Literature after Glasnost

Female Alternatives



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LEGENDA

Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing
2005

CHAPTER 6



Conclusion: Identifying a New Tradition of Women Writers

In readership and critical response, Valeriia Narbikova, Nina Sadur, and Liudmila Petrushevskaja were amongst the most prominent writers of the decade from the mid-1980s onwards. Their prominence can be explained by various factors, including the fact that each appeared to articulate the social anxieties of the transition to post-communist Russia of the end of the 1990s, particularly in their shared preoccupations with interrogating prescribed boundaries of identity. They also exemplified a revived sense of aesthetic liberation in the manifestly varied modes in which they wrote. In particular, all three adopted an interrogative stance with regard to the dominant naturalist mode of Soviet-era literature. In the case of Narbikova the naturalist mode was attacked by comprehensive structural and linguistic unorthodoxy, while in Sadur, the westernized, scientific rationalist base of the naturalist mode was presented alongside a parallel system of the fantastic-grotesque, itself articulated through various non-Christian and ethnically non-Russian belief systems suppressed by the emergence of the modern Russian state. Narbikova and Sadur therefore provided, respectively, replacements of and alternatives to the conventions of the naturalist tradition. Petrushevskaja, however, undertook a task of a different order altogether. By formally working within the tradition she revealed its epistemological foundations from within, and demonstrated both thematically and structurally the ways in which naturalism creates a contract based upon the expectation of revelation of truth and knowledge between reader and text.

This displacement of the non-reflective naturalist mode that had been characteristic of much Soviet Russian fiction at times led to these writers being associated with the practitioners of the 'alternative'. But as I have discussed in the first chapter, this so-called movement's explicit claims to innovation and rejection of all previous tradition were made on the basis of a derogation of women and the female. While none of the writers discussed in this book would claim that women are a central concern in their writings, in all of them their central narrative voices are predominantly female. In addition, they do not merely address the physiological aspects of their gender; instead, they all demonstrate the significance of gender as an affect in the world around them. In this respect, these women writers suggest a 'new' tradition beyond the alternative, in which a range of modes of writing, including naturalism, are open to question, and in which, importantly, female subjectivity — in all its variety — is central to

this questioning. It is this questioning, and the centrality of the representation of the constitution and stability of identity, which are the fundamental elements of the 'new', consciously reflective (if not always explicitly interrogative), body of Russian women writers in the last years of the twentieth century.

This grouping was comprised of many more women writers than the three discussed at length in this book, including those mentioned in chapter 2. Petrushevskaja, Sadur, and Narbikova were unusual in many features of their writing, and achieved particular attention in the critical field, but in many respects they were typical of the scores of writers of both sexes who benefited, initially at least, from the liberation of the literary scene from censorship and government regulation. It must be noted, however, that glasnost did not, however, bring about any sort of comprehensive, gender-inclusive 'liberation' in the publishing field. The gender-discourse of the glasnost era, rather, continued to reinforce the naturalization of women's procreative and domestic duty, as summarized by Gorbachev's public exhortation for women to 'return to the hearth'. This meant that women writers not only had to contend with the economic exigencies of a deregulated marketplace, but also with the effects of social disapprobation of their participation in the creative field.¹ As Helena Goscilo has noted, for example, access to the traditional publication outlets was still largely male-dominated, and many editors demonstrated resistance to the notion of women in the literary field by publishing such articles as Pavel Basinskii's clearly provocative response to the publication of *She Who Bears No Grudge*, entitled 'Those Who Have Forgotten Virtue'.² Nevertheless, a significant number of women authors were published during this period, with a notably diverse range of styles and thematic approaches.

In what sense might such diverse women writers constitute a 'tradition', still less a 'tradition of infringement'? If we privilege authorial interpretation, or the issue of acknowledged mutual influence above all, then the answer is in no sense: many of these authors reject outright any attempts to categorize their works — whether with other women writers in general, with those associated with 'new women's prose' in particular, or even with the movement of 'alternative literature'. As a matter of literary history, however, a somewhat different answer presents itself. In quantitative terms alone, the rise in the number of publications by women throughout the glasnost period and beyond indicates a significant literary phenomenon. In addition, on a more specific level a certain commonality of practice (which I have identified as a questioning of naturalism and an emphasis on the constitution of identity), together with an orientation towards a submerged modernist heritage, may in itself be sufficient to constitute a 'tradition'. Similarly, the quality of 'infringement' works first and foremost on a generalist, historical level: many women writers have had to overcome, or to greater or lesser extent 'infringe', social and attitudinal obstacles that presume in favour of male creative authority. Secondly, it functions on an explicit, conscious level: many of these writers, along with their male peers, have taken 'infringement' as a fundamental functional principle of their writing, thematizing it by challenging the parameters of 'decency' in representation, for instance, or embedding it in structural or linguistic 'deviations' from formal narrative conventions.

In this sense, two outlines of this 'tradition of infringement' emerge. The first is a generalist and negative one, whereby it might be said that all women writers

published at this point are united by the circumstances in which they were published. These circumstances allowed women to publish in sufficient numbers for them to be considered an identifiable cohort with a discrete literary lineage, at the same as the act of publication infringed the prevalent social norms of sex-role stereotyping. From this point of view women writers may be said to participate *a priori* in a 'tradition of infringement'.

Alternatively, this 'tradition' may be distinguished more specifically by the presence or otherwise of textual 'transgressions', as described above. In this sense this secondary, more specific 'tradition' would appear to be simply another name for those groups of women writers who were published explicitly under the sign of conscious innovation and experimentalism, such as the 'new amazons' and the 'new abstinentes' (*novye abstinentki*). However, the issue of discerning a 'tradition' not only presupposes the desirability of shared ground, whether in terms of influence or thematic similarity, for instance, but also artificially separates (and provides a relative evaluation of) some writers from others on the grounds of the characteristics ascribed to that tradition. Thus, an identification of a tradition of 'transgressive' women writers establishes two exclusion zones, by gender and mode of writing. To use overt textual transgression as a defining parameter of post-glasnost women's writing therefore runs the risk of privileging non-naturalist over naturalist writing modes. This, in its turn, merely inverts the values of the Soviet era, bypassing an entire, and vitally important, heritage of realist and naturalist writing. As the example of Petrushevskia's excessive neo-realism, termed '*chernukha*' by its detractors, has demonstrated, an ostensibly traditionalist mode may be used to conduct a sophisticated interrogation of prevailing systems of both thought and representation; conversely, such systems may be reinforced by more explicitly 'transgressive' or experimental thematics and structures, as the examples of both Narbikova and Sadur have shown.

It is clear from this that prose fiction which addresses the underlying assumptions and processes of naturalist writing, and which reveals the socially constructed bases of normative identity constitution, is not necessarily formally 'experimental' or explicitly 'transgressive'. The aim of this concluding chapter, then, is to examine a selection of works by other women writers from this period in order to test the hypothesis of an expanded concept of a recent interrogative 'tradition' which may include, but is not necessarily restricted to, writers whose work is necessarily experimental. With this in mind, what follows is a summary examination of a selection of works by the following half-dozen women writers from this period, in order of seniority: Nina Gorlanova (1947–), Liudmila Ulitskaia (1942–), Nina Gabrielian (1953–), Irina Polianskaia (1952–), Svetlana Vasilenko (1956–), and Margarita Sharapova (1962–). This will also place the works of Petrushevskia, Sadur, and Narbikova in the context of their peers.

Nina Gorlanova is the oldest of these writers and the only one whose publications pre-date the glasnost era to any significant degree. Similarly, her work is also characterized by naturalist narrative devices and structural orthodoxy. Gorlanova's 'Penitential Days', which has already been discussed in the earlier chapter on Sadur, is a late example of her work which actively engages with current events, in so far as it described the growth of anti-Semitism in the days before the coup of August

1991. Much of Gorlanova's pre-glasnost era work was reprinted in 2000 by Vagrius in the 'Zhenskii pocherk' series, in a collection entitled *A House with All Inconveniences* (*Dom so vseimi neudobstvami*). This collection demonstrates Gorlanova's preference for detailed micro-description of social realities, through which larger political events may be felt. 'Something Good' ('Chto-to khoroshee') exemplifies this technique of perceiving major external events through their effects on the micro-level of the lives of Gorlanova's protagonists: this story describes the domestic routine of those living in Perm in conditions of uncertainty.³ The chief focus of concern is the fact that the air-raid siren goes off frequently, and the citizens are told it is a false alarm. In the knowledge of Chernobyl and the fact that only the bosses evacuated their children, this cannot be taken at face value. Gorlanova's lengthy 1980 novella 'Philological Amour' ('Filologicheskii amur') is also contained in this collection. This novella exemplifies her earlier, non-politically engaged writing in its focus on the insular concerns of a group of university students.⁴ Each of these stories bears typical features of 'women's prose' from this era. There is a preference for detailed micro-observation (*byt'*), the narrative structure and conventions of representation are entirely orthodox, and there is no sense of reflection on the text itself. Although Gorlanova does occasionally engage with political events, her writings exemplify a traditionalist, transparently naturalist writing mode, directed towards female experience and domestic concerns, which came to be associated with '*byt'* prose' or 'women's literature' from the late 1960s onwards.

At first glance there are many similarities between Gorlanova and Liudmila Ulitskaia, who was acclaimed for such works as 'Little Sonia' ('Sonechka'), and 'Medea and her Children' ('Medeia i ee deti'), and has to date won the Russian Booker Prize twice. Both are of the same generation, and both write reassuringly naturalist, female-focused '*byt'* prose'.⁵ However, Ulitskaia must be distinguished from Gorlanova in several ways. First, unlike Gorlanova, she began writing only in the 1990s after having led a full career as a biologist. In addition, she is unusual in openly inviting her work to be categorized as 'old-fashioned and sentimental' 'women's prose'. For Ulitskaia this previously belittled category demands reassessment as a positive and affirming phenomenon in comparison with the programmatically transgressive literature of the period, which Ulitskaia describes as 'dehumanizing literature' (*literatura raschelovechivaniia*), or 'literature of dismemberment' (*literatura 'raschlenka'*). As Ulitskaia has written:

I am prepared to take the risk of being considered an old-fashioned and sentimental representative of *zhenskaia proza*. [For] when a writer soberly and coldly declares that his task lies in the 'destruction of taboo' [...] we must realize that before us is a person who is working towards the destruction of the world.⁶

Ulitskaia's own characteristic writing mode follows the conventions of realist narration, with reliable omniscient narrative voices and the comfort of explicable plot trajectories, but unlike Gorlanova's, her writing also interrogates prevailing gender-based norms and boundaries. In particular her representations of female sexual desire are unconventionally explicit, revealing such desire in adolescents and the elderly. Her short story 'Gulia' (1990) illustrates the dangers of confusing conventional narrative technique with compliance with and acquiescence in norms, since it

provides examples of the representation of precisely gender-based excesses within a narrative which is entirely orthodox in technique.⁷ In a tale reminiscent of Colette's *Chéri*, the eponymous Gulia, a 'pure-bred, slim-legged borzoi of an old woman' (p. 99), successfully engineers the seduction of the knowingly named Shurik, whose puppy-dog-like affection for her arises from his boyhood fascination with her as his mother's oldest friend. Unlike Léa, who struggles to conceal the effects of ageing from the much younger Chéri, Gulia attempts no such concealment and experiences no inevitable sense of abandonment. Her breasts, freed from their corset, appear like 'two thin-skinned melons' (p. 106), and his departure from the narrative after their encounter is described in terms which signal their physical similarity ('they were the same height: long-legged Gulia and stocky San Sanych', p. 107). Gulia, in fact, ensures his departure once his workmanlike-functionality (his sealing the windows is a witty, punning scene which suggests and models the elliptical sexual encounter) has been exhausted, as the prelude to her further, and far more delectable, pleasure in drawing attention to her sexual success to visitors for days afterwards.

Gulia therefore tropes powerful forms of excess of various kinds: not only in the obvious sense of exhibiting sexual pleasure, but in the fact that her awareness of the unorthodoxy of her action is compounded by her desire to be a spectator of its effects on others. This is a double transgression that is conflated in the final description of her voyeurism from the site of an ageing body as she props up a drooping, ageing eyelid to ensure the best possible view of the effects of her narrative on her interlocutors. The last line of the story, as she holds her eyelid 'so as not to miss this, the final morsel of the red-letter day that had so unexpectedly taken place' (p. 107), contains all the shades of meaning of Gulia's embodiment and enactment of the potency of excess. Gulia's unorthodox diminutive name (unusually taken from Evgeniia) is reminiscent of the verb '*guliai*', with its connotations of unconstrained wanderings and of festive celebrations. Gulia's prolonged savouring of this 'unexpected holiday' (so as not to 'waste' any of it) is in stark contrast to the regulated and repetitive celebrations at the beginning of the story — the products not of her own autonomous desire, but of external regulation. This holiday is the 'pay-off', the reward, rather than the anticipated punishment for the transgressive behaviour Gulia exhibits at the interstices of external repressions. We learn that 'Gulia contrived to live like a bird; instantly marrying anew, she celebrated her tumultuous love feast, laughed unrestrainedly, visited people non-stop, a "gadfly"' (p. 103). Gulia's 'constant movement', her refusal to change 'the colours of her frivolous apparel' (p. 103), or to be inhibited by the incestuous contours of her *de facto* familial relations with Shurik, whom she has known since his birth, all enact excess, and a refusal to be commensurate with any one of the categories in which he fumbles to place her ('he gazed with shy admiration at these shabby, fragrant, frail, Herculean ladies, old maids, old maenads, angels and witches' (p. 99); 'you're *ewig weiblich!* Helen, Margarita, and Beatrice all rolled into one!' (p. 105)). Gulia's farewell to him is deliberately intoned 'in a tragic note' which is distanced by her 'radiance' (p. 107), and by the lingering narrative focus on her spectacular enjoyment of her excess.

Ulitskaia provides an example of the way in which various norms can be interrogated in contemporary women's literature, showing that these need not be

axiomatically aligned with 'alternative literature'. To concentrate only on formal, proto-modernist devices effaces such writers as Ulitskaia whose techniques are not innovative, yet whose work is boldly transgressive; it is to ignore those whose work does not fall into that category (a feat which repeats, of course, alternative literature's refusal to engage with the immediate, or pre-Revolutionary, literary past).

The four remaining writers to be examined in this chapter share, to a greater or lesser degree, an orientation away from such naturalist conventions as those seen in Gorlanova and Ulitskaia, preferring modes of writing which focus on the representation of non-linear interior subjectivity, and which are thematically concerned with liminality and the hybridism of categories. It is perhaps no coincidence that the oldest of these four, Nina Gabrielian, was also the founder of a feminist journal entitled *Transformation (Preobrazhenie)*, and that her work shows a constant concern with psychic border zones and transformations of identity. The short stories collected in *Grass Master (Khoziain travy)*, for instance, demonstrate this preoccupation with the concept of liminality and metamorphoses in a variety of ways.⁸ The opening story, 'Grass Master', has a male narrator who is drawn to a female artist. She is fascinated with insects and believes that humans are projections of insects' imaginings, and her paintings of human-insect hybrids reflect this breakdown of stable boundaries. Throughout 'Grass Master' empirical, rationalist 'reality' is interrupted by dream states and physical transpositions, the most striking of which is when the narrator walks through picture frames and enters 'mirror zones'. As the emphasis on the artist-figure and on conscious transposition into artificial worlds suggest, Gabrielian's texts are also pointedly metafictional, apparently identifying transposition as the fundamental principle of artistic creation. In 'The House in Metekhsii Alley' ('Dom v metekhskom pereulke') this metafictional orientation is made explicit as the narrator views a set of paintings by a Georgian artist and identifies 'isomorphism' as their chief feature:⁹

Isomorphism. Mutual likeness. There's a concept like this in eastern philosophy. That everything in the universe is like something else: trees, and humans, and stars. Only few can see it, for objects are all so varied on the outside. But you've seen it. Or perhaps you've got a special mirror? It seems to me that normal mirrors distort the essence of things. Sometimes it's even frightening to look at them — they try to instil the idea that 'you' is just you, the one and only, and 'you' can be separated off, torn away from yourself, divided in two, dismembered. [But] there is the possibility of endless transformations and transpositions concealed in you — and from that it follows that you are immortal, you'll simply move from one state to another, like ice does to water, water to steam, steam to water, water into roots, and roots into fruit, and thus without end. For your mirror is the mirror of Eternity. (p. 204)

This pantheistic credo is in many ways similar to Narbikova's apparent quest to describe a prelapsarian unity in all things, but unlike Narbikova, Gabrielian is unapologetic about representing artistic activity as the key to accessing this, and in further elaborating on the consciously active relationship between audience and art work that is necessary for this underlying principle to be accessed. Conditional interpretative authority is given not to the work of art itself, but to the viewer, whose singularity of perception alters the work at any given moment. The narrator explains this with reference to artistic self-

portraits, expressing amazement and some horror at the fact that artists are capable of leaving an image of themselves outside their own material presence, so that:

You're busy with some sort of domestic activity, let's say you're repairing a broken lock, and at that time other people many miles away are doing something with you — they're coming up really close, feeling you with their eyes, and then returning your face again to the canvas in a form which has been transformed by their thoughts and feelings. And then, there in the gallery, your face changes imperceptibly changes — it is covered by a crust of others' associations, on it lie the shadows of others' experience. (p. 226)

Here the basic principle of the vanity of the self-portrait is inverted. The artist is instead presented as astonishingly free of egotistical care when he or she creates a representation of the self which is without defence. In this instance the permeability of boundaries is presented with ambivalence. It is a fundamental principle of existence which few can dare to face since it collapses the notion of stable, impermeable boundaries. This ambivalence is also present in several other stories by Gabrielian, including 'Hide and Seek' ('Igra v priatki'), in which the narrative voice is that of an elderly man who is psychically transported, by a trauma which becomes clear only at the end of the tale, to a point in his childhood.¹⁰ The terror of this transformation is clear at the end when the 'hide and seek' the old man is reliving is shown as the moment at which his family were murdered all around him and he hid from their killers.

Another writer who engages in a systematic fashion with different categories of identity in the narrative voice is Irina Polianskaia, author of *The Origin of Shadow* (*Proiskhozhdenie temi*), the first novel to be published in the 'Zhenskii pocherk' series.¹¹ Polianskaia is unusual in having engaged at length with the issue of women's writing, having distinguished the woman writer (*zhenshchina-pisatel' nitsa*) from the woman prosaist (*zhenshchina-prosaik*) by the fact that the latter 'experiments with language and form, and tries to express her female vision and her naturalness (*estetstvo*)'.¹² Polianskaia's work is characterized by experiment with narrative identity in particular, in so far as many of her works represent unusual experiential points of view: in 'The Square' ('Ploshchad'), the shifting viewpoints of a multifaceted crowd are voiced in the first person, while in 'The Life of a Tree' ('Zhizn' dereva') the interiority represented is that of the tree itself. Other stories represent the liminal zone of the hospital and the experience of women therein: in 'The Pure Zone' ('Chistaia zona') the operating theatre represents the site of possible transformation, and the narrative is that of a woman who is 'freed' by its possibilities, as well as its terrors, from the fear of everyday life.¹³

Svetlana Vasilenko attracted the reading public's attention with her graduation story 'Hunting Saga' ('Za saigakami'), after which 'Little Fool' ('Durochka') was nominated for the Booker Prize.¹⁴ Vasilenko was also the chief editor of the collection *Novye amazonki*, in which she published her own 'Foolish Tales' ('Duratskie rasskazy').¹⁵ These were absurdist texts of sometimes no more than several lines, characterized by an absence of any traditionalist devices of characterization, description or narrative trajectory, and by a focus on play with conventions of orthographic and syntactic representation (e.g. through the use of inconsistent and emphatic capitalization), order,

and even layout. Her novella 'Shamara' was published in *She Who Bears no Grudge*, and also emphatically rejects realist conventions in its non-rationalist, hallucinogenic plot trajectory, reinforced, as Helena Goscilo has observed, by persistent reference to Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* as intertext.¹⁶ 'Shamara' plays repeatedly with the concept of stable categories or identity classifications: the text itself is labelled as generically hybrid, a 'video-piece' (*videopovest'*), and many of the protagonists themselves are represented as indeterminate in classification, or exist in a liminal zone between usually set classifications. This indeterminacy is marked in the representation of the police officer Maksim, for instance, as an albino; similarly the character Lera, who proposes to Shamara, is intersexual, with both male and female pronouns applied to him/her. The plot trajectory itself is blurred and non-linear, and fails to provide clear explanation for the series of events that take place. Finally, the thematics of 'Shamara' strongly emphasize female physiology as vulnerable and exploitable, since the main protagonist Shamara undergoes the following ordeals: she is gang-raped by a group of men, apparently including her lover Utkin; she is persuaded to sleep with Maksim, a police officer who is hunting Utkin, on the understanding that Maksim will then cease hunting Utkin; and finally, she miscarries the child she has conceived by one of them when she is violently beaten by Utkin for having slept with Maksim. In this respect Vasilenko's apparently absurdist, experimental form utterly conforms with the precepts of 'alternative literature', reinforcing dispiriting and deeply misogynist gender norms under the sign of a putative experimentation with representation of identity and form.

The youngest writer of this selection is Margarita Sharapova, who was born in 1962 and whose experience working as an animal-trainer in a circus has apparently informed her writings, which frequently feature a young female protagonist with literary inclinations and no stability of identity or background other than that offered by the circus. Two of her early stories 'Double Tram-track' ('Tramvainyi raz'ezd') and 'Clown' ('Kovernyi') situate identity as a central theme, and investigate boundaries of gender identity, family identity, and social role through the predominantly liminal zone of the circus.¹⁷ The circus functions as a space in which transformations take place in identity, and in which deviations from social norms are the rule rather than exception. For the unnamed, first-person narrator of 'Double Tram-track', for instance, the circus represents her 'lost' family and apparently irrecoverable security: having been outcast from this society she is arrested on charges of prostitution, is adrift in a world of drug-takers and addicts of various sorts. Her departure from hospital at the end of this story offers something of promise, but overall 'Double Tram-track' describes the instability of the world beyond the circus.

The longer novella 'Clown' follows the fortunes of the eighteen-year-old narrator Nina Galdena (known as 'the Merry Pencil' ('Veselyi karandash')) because her trade in the circus is to draw lightning-fast caricatures), as she is transferred from one section of the circus system to another. Nina is fascinated by the 'double faces' of clowns, and is particularly drawn to the famous clown Iakov Iakshin, with whom she forms a romantic attachment based at least in part on incestuous desires: Iakshin says Nina reminds him of her son, while she later meets Iakshin's son Petia and has an affair with him. The function of this group as surrogate family for Nina becomes even clearer

when she unknowingly works with Iakshin's acrobat daughter Iuliia, and witnesses her accidental death:

all the time one and the same image came to my mind: now she steps onto the foregang, now she raises her face and our eyes meet — and it's all over. She reaches out to the floor and lies on her side, curled into a little ball, in the embryonic pose that comes naturally to human foetuses alone and to acrobats who arrange themselves thus for performing a somersault: thus she was born, thus she lived her life, and thus she left it, having curled herself into the true somersault of death. (p. 52)

The connection between Nina and Iuliia is powerfully illustrated by their eyes meeting in the moment before Iuliia's death, and is repeated in the mutual and apparently inexplicable attraction between the other members of this surrogate family, including Iakshin. The story describes the series of losses Nina suffers as she is removed from or let down by this putative family grouping, but closes with a description of the circus itself, with its unchanging performative space, as the ultimate source of succour. As Julia searches for Iakshin she watches the performances of two other clowns, Bim and Bom, as follows:

And where was Iashka? He wasn't there. I drooped, but those two in the ring cried out all the more stupidly, 'Hello, Bim!', 'Hello, Bom!', missing each other's palms every time. Biff, baff, oopsy-whoopsy! I burst out laughing... And it became unimportant what sort of circus people we were behind the scenes. And it is not important how we get on there. For real life is in the ring. The audience never sees tears and does not feel the suffering of the artist, for the circus exists from time immemorial so that everyone who comes to it can cry out from happiness alone: 'God, but that's me — a man! — I can fly like that, I can be special like that! I can do everything!'

'Hello, Bim!', 'Hello, Bom!' That's how it was in this ring a hundred years ago. That's how it is now. And how it always will be. (p. 66)

The powerful sense of ethics and continuity in this scene, firmly located in the circus itself and its allocation of reassuringly stable roles to those otherwise outcast, functions more broadly to counterbalance the instability and anarchy represented elsewhere in the text in the social lives of the circus performers. The circus is therefore represented in Sharapova's works as the site in which stability of identity is achieved, but only because it is part of a shared, performative act offered for communal consumption rather than an isolated, individualist notion.

In a range of ways each of the writers discussed here challenges the conventions of unreflective, universalist naturalist prose writing, whether to a small extent through limited politically engaged commentary, as in the case of Gorlanova, by articulating alternative visions of identity categories, as in the case of Gabrielian and Sharapova, or by dismantling them altogether, as in the case of Vasilenko. In each case the concept of identity is crucial as well, and takes us back to a consideration of this in the case of the three writers discussed at length in this study.

For all the talk of 'new' conceptual paradigms in the literatures to emerge out of the post-Soviet period, many of the texts examined in this study demonstrate that the traditional ways of conceiving identity as either *sobornost'* and *narodnost'* (collective identification and primary affiliation to community or state, respectively) still very

much obtain. Individualized identity for Narbikova is shown as a state that is a deformation of an undifferentiated, powerful, ultimately desirable unity in multiplicity, as it is in Sharapova, for whom community recognition subsumes individual misery. For Sadur, individualization is also undesirable, since it should be subsumed under expressions of ethnic kinship affiliation. These writers therefore implicitly reject individualized concepts of identity as *lichnost'*, but differ in their representations of other forms of identity. Perhaps only Petrushevskaja comes closest to dramatizing an individualist concept of identity in her intense, primary preoccupation with her protagonists' inner, experiential content.

Viewed through the prism of identity, then, each writer examined in this study occupies very different positions. They are united, however, in their broader exploration of identity as a whole, as a concept that might be susceptible of interrogation and possible reconceptualization. Each of these writers, in markedly distinct ways, transgresses an imperative to accept the reification of concepts of identity that are as present in the post-Soviet cultural symbology as they ever were in the Soviet, however transformed their form, instead revealing them as contingent, permeable, and changeable. It is in this way that these writers represent a true 'tradition of infringement'.

Notes to Chapter 6

1. Nadezhda Azhgikhina, 'Woman as Object and Subject in Contemporary Russian Literature', *We/My*, 13.29 (2000) <<http://www.we-myi.org/issues/29/object.html>> [accessed 2 December 2004].
2. Pavel Basinskii, 'Those Who Have Forgotten Virtue: Notes in the Margins of the "New Women's Prose"', *Russian Studies in Literature: A Journal of Translations*, 28.2 (1992), 86–91. Other examples of relative 'neglect' towards women writers include evident gender differentials in lists of contemporary prose writers. See, for example, Mikhail Epstein and Alexander Genis, 'Who's Who in Russian Postmodernism', in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, ed. by Mikhail Epstein, Alexander A. Genis, and Slobodanka M. Vladiv-Glover (Oxford; New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 469–504. Here 11 women are listed in a total of 172 entries (Olga Denisova, Tatiana Goricheva, Faina Grimberg, Nina Iskrenko, Valeriia Narbikova, Liudmila Petrushevskaja, Nina Sadur, Olga Sedakova, Elena Shvartz, and Bella Ulanovskaia).
3. Nina Gorlanova, 'Chto-to khoroshee', in *Dom so vsemi neudobstvami* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), pp. 232–57.
4. Gorlanova, 'Filologicheskii amur', in *Dom so vsemi neudobstvami*, pp. 9–99.
5. Liudmila Ulitskaia, 'Sonechka', *Novyi mir*, 7 (1992), 61–88; 'Medeia i ee deti', *Novyi mir*, 3 (1996), 3–47.
6. Ulitskaia and others, 'Sovremennaia proza glazami prozaikov', *Voprosy literatury*, 1 (1996), 3–50 (p. 25).
7. 'Gulia', in Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Bednye rodstvenniki* (Moscow: Slovo, 1994), pp. 96–107. Citations are indicated by page numbers in the text.
8. Nina Gabrielian, *Khoziain travy* (Moscow: EKSMO, 2001).
9. Gabrielian, 'Dom v metekhskom pereulke', in *Khoziain travy*, pp. 203–30. Citations are indicated by page numbers in the text.
10. Gabrielian, 'Igra v priatki', in *Khoziain travy*, pp. 191–202.
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