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LUDMILA ULITSKAYA

AND THE ART OF TOLERANCE

1

REDEEMING THE BODY

ULITSKAYA AND CORPOREALITY

I got food poisoning from eating something ridiculous. I've been ill for a day and a half and experienced a whole gamut of emotions: first puzzlement—after all, I eat absolutely anything and never suffer any consequences—then irritation at myself—why on earth do I eat absolutely anything, after all, the tomato juice which I unreflectingly chucked into the dinner had been standing on the buffet for who knows how many days. [. . .] I realized that I was expelling all the nightmare I have been gulping down all these last months of reading, the painful reading of all those books about the destruction of the Jews during the Second World War, all the tomes of medieval history, the history of the Crusades and the earlier history of the Church councils, the fathers of the Church from St. Augustine to St. John Chrysostomos, all the anti-Semitic opuses written by highly enlightened and terribly holy men. I puked out all the Jewish and non-Jewish encyclopedias I have read over the last few months, the whole Jewish Question which had poisoned me more powerfully than any tomato juice.¹

Writing in the summer of 2006, the autobiographical narrator of *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* viscerally experiences the oneness of body and spirit that unites the works of Ludmila Ulitskaya. Researching the roots of anti-Semitism, she is overpowered by the toxic legacy of intolerance. Sickness of the flesh is inseparable from ailments of the soul, and the horror of religious and ethnic hatred contaminates both. Ulitskaya engages the physical form in three ways: attacking the ideal Soviet physique; depicting aspects of corporeality (*telesnost'*) shunned by society; and presenting new markers of gender identity. Her texts dismember

the Soviet body, laying bare an obvious yet overlooked truth: it is the physical form, in all its varied manifestations, that makes us human. The ethics of the spirit appear in the flesh, and *telesnost'* creates a sincerity that parallels the values Ulitskaya ascribes to the liberal intelligentsia. Her holistic approach insists that the erotic belongs equally to the intellectual and physiological spheres as she argues for a tolerance that encompasses both.²

By beginning our analysis with the body we acknowledge what Judith Butler famously theorized as its preeminent role in defining gender and meaning. *Telesnost'* supersedes dichotomies; Ulitskaya's vision of corporeality refuses to privilege mind over body and portrays the latter as central to understanding subjectivity. For Elizabeth Grosz, the body is "the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual, and intellectual struggles." In this vein Ulitskaya's writing illuminates the centrality of the physical entity by showing how it illustrates an individual's struggle to live a moral life despite the tragedies of the Soviet past. *Telesnost'* is a fundamental part of the author's unique combination of history and the personal.³

Depictions of the flesh also influence literary reception. As we note in the introduction, some critics have seen Ulitskaya's writing as "neoesentimentalism," a feminized depiction of body and emotion that privileges sympathy for characters. Ellen Rutten observes that emphasis on feelings (*chuvstvitel'nost'*) was a cornerstone of Sentimentalist authors; late eighteenth-century writers such as Nikolai Karamzin and Aleksandr Radishchev saw the body as honest, while the mind could be duplicitous. This characterization surfaces in Ulitskaya's works through her consistent linking of corporeality and sincerity. While early responses to her works focused on neoesentimentalism, this trope in criticism mainly disappeared as her later and longer works more explicitly addressed history, ethics, and the great ideas prized by Russian prose. Mikhail Zolotonosov claims that her novel *Sincerely Yours, Shurik* critiques the same sentimentalism Ulitskaya had previously inculcated in readers. The narrative, which details its sensitive protagonist's loveless sexual entanglements, departs from the union of body and emotion that Zolotonosov espies in classical Russian literature.⁴

Corporeality's contested presence in writing comes from its role in history. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux outline how the body in Russian culture has a multilayered mythology that obscures physical reality. Ulitskaya, a post-1991 author writing mostly about the Soviet era, responds to the earlier period's conceptions of *telesnost'*. Revolutionary

rhetoric ushered in the New Man. Molding and melding body and (secular) soul, this effort tried to erase the longstanding division between these two halves.⁵ Stalinism, the backdrop to the beginning of most of Ulitskaya's works, privileged the firm, youthful body in hypertrophied dimensions. Bared muscles and ample (covered) bosoms loomed on the screen as virile men and their buxom lovers enchanted moviegoers; the malnourished and deformed bodies of war, famine, and Gulag vanished behind the overly robust masculine and feminine forms.⁶

During the Thaw and the Brezhnev period physicality evoked a scarred, sagging, and imperfect world. Works such as Iurii Trifonov's *The Exchange* (*Obmen*) embody the muddled morality of middle age via dumpy matrons and their pudgy husbands.⁷ Perestroika subsequently revealed the human form as suffering from all that ailed the USSR. The film *Little Vera* (*Malen'kaia Vera*) scandalously co-opted corporeality to convey existence enlivened only by drunken brawls and sexual misadventures, while authors such as Liudmila Petrushevskaia yoked physicality to violence, poverty, and other formerly taboo subjects. This era, and particularly women's prose, demolished a tenet of earlier Russian culture: corporeal suffering strengthens the soul and connotes loyalty to the Great Family, the dominant metaphor of allegiance that Katerina Clark connects to the state. The perestroika body, exemplified in *chernukha* (literature of crime and slime), was above all a traumatized presence undermining previous assumptions that the flesh reflected the values of a healthy society.⁸

The collapse of the USSR tied *telesnost'* to a nation plummeting into despair and chaos. The hard bodies of gangsters on the big and small screen vied for popularity with the alcoholic idyll of the film *Peculiarities of the National Hunt* (*Osobennosti natsional'noi okhoty*). For women, the new status quo linked the flesh to homemaking, connubial bliss, and ending the precipitous decline in the ethnic Russian population. While concern over falling birthrates (versus large families in the non-European republics) had marked Soviet discourse, the intensified debate over national survival in the 1990s gave the reproductive body new urgency, especially in light of prostitution and mail-order marriage to foreigners. Corporeality became a striking symptom of the "patriotism of despair" that Serguei Oushakine ascribes to the Yeltsin years.⁹ The gay body added to post-Soviet anxieties. Even after the 1993 decriminalization of homosexuality, representations of queerness were more metaphorical than direct. These depictions envisioned homosexuality as both the cause and result of alienation, binding it to the decadent West and a

concomitant undermining of Russian masculinity. However, as we note in the introduction and chapter 4, Ulitskaya sharply deviates from this script: she depicts queerness through the intelligentsia value of forbearance, a connection that resonates uneasily in her writing.¹⁰

In the era of Vladimir Putin and his protégé Dmitrii Medvedev, supposedly only healthy, heterosexual *telesnost'* can redeem Russia. In this climate homosexuality has become increasingly marginalized and (re)criminalized, linked to anti-Western polemics as tensions with the United States and Europe rise. Clearly the body is at the forefront of Russia's reassertion of itself as superpower. The nationalist masculine revenge film *Brother 2* (*Brat 2*) and the impressive, frequently photographed physique of Putin himself promised security and a new respect after a decade of perceived national humiliation.¹¹ For women the mystery novels of Dar'ia Dontsova and the glamour literature of Oksana Robski implied that sexuality could lead to love and marriage with a New Russian; as Eliot Borenstein argues, the beginning of the new century devalued sex and violence (unless in the national interest) in favor of tranquil domesticity. In this restrictive context the imperfect body was an impediment to be hidden or corrected, much as it had been concealed in the USSR for more overtly ideological reasons.¹²

The Kukotskii Case:

Corporeality, Maternity, and Ways of Seeing

Ulitskaya's novel *The Kukotskii Case* is primarily concerned with corporeality as it describes the slow disintegration of the Kukotskii clan headed by gynecologist Pavel Alekseevich. Beginning during the Great Patriotic War, the novel's plot depicts first the expansion and then the collapse of Pavel Alekseevich's family over the next four decades. He marries Elena and adopts her daughter Tanya and then Toma, the child of their impoverished janitor (*dvornikha*). Husband and wife have a bitter argument over Pavel Alekseevich's attempts to legalize abortion in the postwar era, and their marriage never recovers. Family members drift apart, Tanya and Toma each marry, and the USSR itself fundamentally changes and eventually collapses. Throughout the plot, the work presents ways of seeing, perceiving, and experiencing the physical world, especially in connection with the female body. This focus is the basis of the narrative's broader concerns: preoccupation with *telesnost'* leads to the biologization of motherhood, the consideration of who may

raise questions about the maternal body, and a redrawing of familial relationships. By focusing on several depictions in the novel, in this chapter we introduce the reader to the complex revisions of corporeality throughout Ulitskaya's prose, plays, and nonfiction.

Pavel Alekseevich initially appears in *The Kukotskii Case* not only as a figure of authority, but as an almost saintly image endowed with a special capacity for bringing life into the world and arbitrating questions related to birth and pregnancy. When Elena, Pavel Alekseevich's future wife, regains consciousness after a hysterectomy, she experiences a strong sensation that someone will soon reveal to her a "definitive truth that is more important than life itself"; she then sees for the first time the man who has saved her. As we discuss later, this connection between Elena, intuition, and non-rational visions comes to dominate her life in the last part of *The Kukotskii Case*. Two brief clips from Iurii Grymov's 2005 miniseries based on the novel continue the doctor's veneration: as Elena first glimpses Pavel Alekseevich, the light around his head creates the effect of a nimbus; similarly, the deeply religious household servant Vasilisa believes she sees his face in an icon. This image resonates with the early portion of the novel's treatment of Pavel Alekseevich as emblemizing the intelligentsia, a class whose humane values contrast with the everyday brutality of first Leninism, then Stalinism and the Great Patriotic War.¹³

Part of Pavel Alekseevich's authority resides in a special gift he possesses: an "internal vision" (*vnutrividenie*) that links explicitly to his long fascination with the female (and particularly maternal) form. His ability to see into women's bodies—to perceive the illness that they themselves cannot—translates into his indisputable knowledge of what is best for them. It also compensates for a concern not offered by another authority: the Stalinist state, which through military blunders and indifference places Elena and millions like her in danger as they live in evacuation (or, even worse, under occupation). Pavel Alekseevich saves Elena's life but in the process removes her womb, thus excluding her from the procreation demanded of women. While she will survive, this character is now marginal to a society that mandates childbearing to compensate for population loss. However, precisely because her body no longer fits the norms of Soviet culture, Elena becomes more important to Ulitskaya's oeuvre, which attempts to rehumanize those neglected by society because of their *telesnost'*.¹⁴

Elena illustrates that what might initially appear to be a reduction of women to their reproductive organs is, in fact, a more complicated

question as *The Kukotskii Case* connects procreation, the state, autonomy, and *telesnost'*. In her key discussion of motherhood and the body, Marianne Hirsch asserts that "maternity, inasmuch as it is represented as biological, poses the question of the body as pointedly as is possible. [. . .] The perspective of the maternal makes it difficult simply to reject the notion of biology and forces us to engage both the meaning of the body and the risks of what has been characterized as essentialist." Motherhood (*materinstvo*) as physical process cannot be considered without the social implications embodied in Elena's altered role after her surgery. While the narrated experience of *materinstvo* is sometimes absent, incomplete, or unreliable, it is crucial to human experience and thus for Ulitskaya warrants readers' attention. To oversimplify or ignore it is to risk construing the mother as a mere childbearing vessel.¹⁵ This negative depiction is striking within a text that privileges issues of birth, reproduction, and fertility, not to mention the special position traditionally accorded to the mother in Russian literature and culture. Indeed, the reader witnesses the eventual inadequacy, disappearance, death, or madness of nearly every biological mother in Ulitskaya's novel; more often than not, another individual appears to be better suited to the maternal role.

It is ironic that the text's most authoritative voice on issues concerning the day-to-day lives of mothers and children is that of Kukotskii, whose work with embryology and gynecology involves examination of the fetus and little or no contact with children after they enter the world. This focus is foreshadowed by a gift Pavel Alekseevich receives as a youth: "His father gave Pavlik a small brass microscope with 50x magnification. All objects incapable of being spread on a microscope slide ceased to interest the boy. In the world that didn't fit into the microscope's field of vision, he noticed only what coincided with the amazing pictures observed through the binocular. For example, the design on a tablecloth caught his eye, since it reminded him of the structure of cross-striated musculature." The gift of the microscope symbolizes the Kukotskii family's longstanding connection between masculinity, intellect, and acquiring information about the world. What begins as the observations of a curious adolescent later becomes the scientist's myopic attention to the biological. Pavel Alekseevich's obsession with the female body renders it a purely medical object and reveals a restrictive focus that overlooks social relationships and human concerns. His proximity to issues of birth and maternity thus indicates that he is still removed from their quotidian reality. This constitutes an emphasis on theory

instead of practice, a scenario that Ulitskaya's texts criticize for leading to the subordination of individual lives to abstract principles.¹⁶

The novel shows how the doctor's attention to children signals a shift in his philosophy. Kukotskii's adoption of Tanya immediately after his marriage to Elena marks a turning point in his interaction with those he helps bring into the world. In saving Elena's life during the war, he enacts a trope inherited from women's prose: namely, a male controls the destiny of future mothers. His authority is reinforced by an abstract duty—Pavel Alekseevich's mission to reform the postwar Soviet health system as it relates to mothers and children. A dismal demographic situation frames Kukotskii's professional activity: a lack of men, low birth rate, high infant mortality, and poverty plague the USSR. Much of his work deals with the consequences and complications resulting from illegal abortions, an ironic result given that, as Gosילו and Lanoux assert, "[a]bortion became criminalized in 1936 so that women could expand the 'small family' according to the blueprint devised by the patriarch of the 'Big Family.'" Ulitskaya sees the prohibition on terminating pregnancies as invidious to women, restricting freedom even as it proved counterproductive to the Stalinist goal of increasing the population. Kukotskii advocates for repealing the ban, realizing that illegal terminations of pregnancy harm women's health and that decriminalization of abortion is necessary to preserve the well-being of the next generation.¹⁷

The Kukotskii Case binds the right to speak (*pravo golosa*) on this topic to dire familial consequences. In the argument that initiates the collapse of their marriage, Elena discovers a new, cold side of her husband. The couple argue about Toma's mother, who died because of a botched abortion. When Elena compares terminating pregnancy to murder, "Pavel Alekseevich's face hardened and Elena understood why his subordinates were so afraid of him. She had never seen him this way. 'You don't have the right to speak [*pravo golosa*]. You don't have that organ. You aren't a woman. Since you can't get pregnant, don't dare to judge,' he said angrily. All their family happiness, light and unconstrained, their chosenness, closeness, the unbounded nature of their trust—all was destroyed in a single moment. But he, it seemed, had not understood."¹⁸ Pavel Alekseevich, who removed Elena's womb to save her, now uses this fact to disqualify her from judging other potential mothers. He realizes neither the hurt he has caused nor that he has forever altered a previously harmonious marriage. Following this conversation, Kukotskii forbids Tanya to go to the funeral for Toma's mother

and Elena protests: "And why do you think you have the right to speak [*pravo golosa*]?" Meek and not vengeful, she dealt a crushing blow. And she herself did not know how it came about . . . 'After all, you are not Tanya's father.'" Kukotskii robs Elena of her right to speak; she uses the same phrase to verbally deprive him of his paternity. In initiating this fateful exchange, Pavel Alekseevich demonstrates an inability to look beyond restrictive semantic distinctions, and his powers of seeing are correspondingly limited in their reliance on the literal. This stems from his status as male medical authority, a power that Elena shows to be ultimately illusory: no man, however experienced in gynecology, can be a mother. The passage shows another problem in Pavel Alekseevich's thinking—he is fixated only on the corporeal, a mistake that ignores the union between body and soul in this novel.¹⁹

The Kukotskii Case implies that women as well as men must participate in discussions of reproductive health, or else both sides ultimately will suffer. This assertion is underscored by another parallel that unites husband and wife. Special sight is not unique to Pavel Alekseevich alone: Elena also possesses this gift. Their abilities are differentiated—Kukotskii's sight grants him a transparent view of "living matter," yet Elena acquires access to another type of existence. While her husband's ability relates to the physical and material, Elena's gift extends to the intangible and the ideal. Kukotskii sees conditions as they are; his wife envisions an alternate world of things as they might or should be. Elena's special sight figures in the second part of the novel, in an extended oneiric narrative in which she is "reborn" as the "New One" (*Noven'kaia*) and wanders through a desolate landscape. This portion of the narrative comes from her senility, which is the direct result of her traumatizing argument with Pavel Alekseevich. In the dream, Elena/the New One witnesses a woman giving birth to eight children. The most troubling aspect of this birth is that the children are born without umbilical cords—there is nothing anchoring them to the mother, and they fly away. The scene at once reflects Elena's anxiety over her collapsing marriage and her growing detachment from her own daughter. This part of the novel relies on allegorical images removed from everyday life; such portrayals are unusual in Ulitskaya's corpus and underscore the extent to which Elena's thoughts have diverged from those of Pavel Alekseevich.²⁰

The question of the right to speak is another reason for the shifts between the main part of the novel and segments from Elena's journals. Her entries present a maternal plot that contrasts with the male/medical one

articulated by Kukotskii. The trajectory that Elena voices, however, is incomplete and unstable. Though Elena is granted the textual “right” to express herself in the first person, she repeatedly undermines her own narrative ability and her maternal connection to Tanya. While the journal is initially lucid, it gradually becomes less cohesive and comprehensible, eventually exhibiting clear signs of Elena’s memory loss and linguistic deterioration. This depiction does not imply that Pavel Alekseevich’s more rational approach is correct; in fact, the latter portions of the novel show that his attempts to improve the lives of his family have failed.²¹

Tanya undergoes a less dramatic but intriguing change. Later in *The Kukotskii Case*, she moves from viewing herself primarily as a daughter to identifying herself as a mother—extensive description of her pregnancy expresses her maternal experience. It is the first such portrayal in a narrative that is devoted to the topic but previously dominated by Pavel Alekseevich’s scientific and detached commentary. Tanya’s detailed, cogent reflections on the physical and emotional changes she experiences also contrast sharply with Elena’s irrational narration about motherhood and her confused claim about her daughter’s birth: “Tanya will give birth to Tanechka.” This statement signals the claustrophobic chaos that increasingly marks the family’s life. Tanya for her part displays a mixture of the intuition and reason initially exhibited by Elena and Kukotskii respectively when she considers her pregnancy neither a joy nor an affliction, but simply an “interesting occurrence.” Ultimately, it is Tanya’s daughter, Zhenia, who achieves a balance of the characteristics and worldview she has inherited from Elena, Pavel Alekseevich, and her mother; she combines acceptance of the body with care for her family and a scientific perception of the world. Similarly, critic Lev Pirogov views Zhenia as a positive embodiment of the traits of her forebears. She proves that the corporeal and intellectual can coexist, a hope that runs throughout Ulitskaya’s writing.²²

Dismantling the Ideal, Redeeming the Irregular

As *The Kukotskii Case* shows, Ulitskaya’s treatment of *telesnost’* alternates between introducing new paradigms and reworking old patterns. One significant shift is her works’ suspicion of physical beauty, that hallmark of Stalinism. Questioning the relationship between appearance and essence has a long history in Russian literature, and during perestroika it contributed to women authors’ attack on culturally mandated feminine

allure. Ulitskaya deems both male and female beauty potentially problematic, if not a harbinger of outright disaster: the outwardly attractive form may conceal moral deficiencies or character flaws.

Beauty signals danger. In the story “Singing Masha” (“Pevchaia Masha”), it accompanies mistrust and a grave distortion of Christianity. When Orthodox Ivan and Masha marry, the groom is tall, dark-eyed, and handsome, yet his gaze becomes that of an angry icon after he mistakenly decides his wife is unfaithful. He beats their son, which Masha at first interprets as a sign of affection. Later rumors assert that Ivan has hanged himself—neither physical beauty nor a successful career in the Church can save him from groundless suspicions and sorrow. These problems are inseparable from the story’s treatment of gender relations; Ivan’s mistrust of his wife, like Pavel Alekseevich’s assertion of the right to speak for mothers, comes from a problematic male assertion of authority. Just as Kukotskii erroneously believes his medical insight justifies deciding the fates of women and their fetuses, Ivan’s religiosity is fundamentally flawed because it deems the husband morally pure and the wife susceptible to temptation. These two narratives show that the problem is not science or Orthodoxy, but how these two characters distort these systems. After a long absence from home, Ivan gives his wife a custom-made double icon depicting Ivan the Warrior and Mary Magdalene, emblemizing his retrograde notion of their respective identities. When Ivan’s return prompts a resurgence of sexual passion in Masha, he views her as an unrepentant sinner and claims the couple’s children are illegitimate. After their marriage is annulled at his request, Masha reregisters the children under her own name “as if no male had taken part in their birth.” Masha’s identity is bifurcated into supposed sexual promiscuity (Mary Magdalene) and sacred maternity (Mother of God). Negative characters such as Ivan insist on divisions that isolate individuals from one another, often reiterating rigid religious or political ideologies at the same time.²³

As “Singing Masha” suggests, beauty can conceal inner turmoil. The story “The Daughter of Bokhara” critiques handsome Dima, who resembles a Russian warrior. He brings his Uzbek bride Alya to postwar Moscow but abandons her after she gives birth to Mila, a girl with Down syndrome. For Dima, love is incompatible with the imperfection he sees when he looks at his child. Bokhara, as the neighbors derisively nickname Alya, is left to raise their daughter. As Ivan shows in “Singing Masha,” male beauty is misleading, accompanied by a pride and rigidity incompatible with family life and, in the case of Dima, a duplicity that

violates the intelligentsia's emphasis on sincerity. While Alya is attractive, it is her inner strength and Mila's childlike goodness that shape the narrative and prove more lasting than Dima's handsomeness. Indeed, the author uses him to reject the idea that appearance and character create a unified whole, an incorrect assumption that guided how the Soviet state envisioned its citizens.²⁴

There is a curious corollary to Ulitskaya's wary treatment of the attractive: the fine-tuned physicality of the trained performer. In the story "Lialia's Home," middle-aged mother Lialia has an affair with teenage neighbor Kazia, who is a born beauty from Central Asia: "The boy was magnificent. In him his father's crude darkness smoothed to a Persian brown, and his slightly swarthy skin was stretched so tightly on his forehead and cheekbones that there appeared to be not quite enough of it. He already had a man's height but his bones had not yet become coarse, and his hands with their long fingers were of a truly regal breeding."²⁵ Kazia, still a high school student, already performs with the circus. Like Alya, he is an exotic outsider in Moscow, but in contrast to her portrayal, we are never privy to his emotions. Kazia remains little more than a mute vehicle for satisfying Lialia's desire, a narrative strategy that implies the limitations of the well-trained body. He has a personal philosophy that subordinates the mental to *telesnost'*; this mindset proves to be correct, though not in the way he anticipates. Many years after his simultaneous affairs with Lialia and her daughter, the narrator mentions Kazia's service in a brutal Asian war (presumably Afghanistan) and his present work as a butcher. He now inhabits a purely physical realm devoted to destroying bodies instead of perfecting them. Kazia's fate reveals that corporeality, whether male or female, is subject to a distorting state ideology that renders physicality mute and subservient. Likewise, characters who ascribe too great an importance to *telesnost'* isolate the flesh from its spiritual and ethical dimensions.²⁶

Some portrayals of the acrobatic body are more ambivalent. In the novel *The Funeral Party*, friends, lovers, and acquaintances of the dying painter Alik gather at his New York loft. His first wife, Irina Pirozhkova, is a former acrobat who once worked as an exotic dancer to pay for law school in the United States. Like Alik, with whom she had a child, Irina moves between American culture and the Russophone diaspora, a role for which her tightrope training prepared her well. She initially envisions the talented body as a route to freedom, much as artist Alik sees creativity as an alternative to government control. Irina defects during a visit to Boston, despite appreciating that physical prowess grants her privileges

unthinkable for most Soviets during the Brezhnev years. In fleeing the USSR Irina acknowledges that liberty can only come with changing her country—otherwise, her *telesnost'* will be the property of the same state that distinguishes her and Kazia from the less talented. The novel is not a simplistic endorsement of American "freedom" over Soviet repression; instead, it shows that Irina and Alik are in control of their talents, whether these are physical or creative. In the USSR the acrobatic body, like its artistic and intellectual counterparts, is subject to coercion and appropriation by the government. For Ulitskaya, the physical beauty of the human form is destroyed when corporeality must serve the needs of the Soviet Union. Subordinating the body to a higher power creates a fissure between appearance and reality that threatens the *iskrennost'* prized by the intelligentsia; Ulitskaya's innovative images of how the state co-opts the talented body reveal that sincerity may be compromised on a corporeal as well as intellectual level.²⁷

Beauty is clearly problematic, yet a darker fate awaits characters whose physicality does not fit the government's needs and expectations. The handicapped or irregular body defies prescriptive Soviet norms. Pioneering disability studies theorist Simi Linton has noted the consequences of medicalizing the differently abled: instead of challenging the institutions that perpetuate their marginalization, such a perspective "casts human variation as deviance from the norm, as pathological condition, as deficit, and, significantly, as an individual burden and personal tragedy." Rolf Hellebust and Keith Livers maintain that the image of the ideal human form served as metaphor for a healthy collective, especially during the Stalinist period.²⁸ Departure from this norm, even if involuntary, evinced disharmony and otherness, traits that could signal the ultimate flaw: disloyalty. However, difference did not always lead to marginalization in the Soviet context; Lilya Kaganovsky addresses the fetishized damaged male body, which implies selfless sacrifice in Stalinist literature and film. Ulitskaya, however, eschews the heroically disfigured form and instead shows the humble power of the "ordinary" irregular body (not the state's secular saints or martyrs). The prominence of such physicality in her texts has elicited some negative critical reaction, such as Lev Kuklin's harsh dismissal of her characters as "magnets for tragedies and defects" and "biological losers."²⁹

Often the Soviet government itself has abused the body. In "The Foundling" ("Podkidysh"), the mannish janitor Bekerikha exemplifies this maltreatment. When little Victoria tells her twin sister that this frightening woman is Gayane's real mother, she scares Gayane into a

comatose state. The narrator, however, makes clear that Bekerikha is the real victim. At the end of the story she dies of a heart attack, having served a sentence in the Gulag because of her German ancestry and survived the deaths of her husband, mother, sister, and three-year-old daughter. Wartime repression turned this formerly gifted nurse into a terrifying creature whose body, like her mind, bears the marks of her suffering. The twinned evils of Stalinism and fascism deform Bekerikha, underscoring the many parallels Ulitskaya sees in these totalitarian systems.³⁰

Sincerely Yours, Shurik discusses how the state scorns the disabled. The novel highlights the treacherous nature of Soviet body myths as ill-starred Shurik, a sensitive intellectual raised exclusively by women, moves from one love affair to another during the 1960s to 1980s. After a childhood bout of polio, Valeriia, Shurik's supervisor at the Lenin Library, can walk only with the aid of a cane or brace. This condition dramatically worsens after she attempts to have a child with Shurik. Valeriia, presented to the reader as one of the protagonist's most sympathetic lovers, is well aware that she is not alone in her disability. For Ulitskaya, she is part of the "unfortunate tribe of Soviet people, a generation of the armless, legless, burnt and physically disfigured, completely crippled by the war, but dwelling in an environment of plaster and bronze workers with powerful arms and peasant women with strong legs." While Valeriia's handicap stems from debilitating illness, not abuse by the government, she and others like her are surrounded by representations of the bodies they should have but cannot. The result is a feeling of inadequacy—the handicapped individual cannot live up to the impossible standards the state sets for *telesnost'*. This awareness helps Valeriia formulate a theory about bodily disability, "which gradually cripples the soul. She observed unfortunate, suffering, embittered people, demanding of those around them, envying, and she couldn't bear this form of spiritual deformity. She wanted to be whole [*polnotsennoi*]." Valeriia realizes that the handicapped internalize the state's demand for "normal" bodies, a scenario that leads to strife and conflict instead of solidarity and compassion. As is sometimes the case with Ulitskaya's passages containing important social commentary, the idea that Valeriia voices borders on the didacticism the author eschews. Indeed, in this significant but heavy-handed formulation, the reader concludes that Soviet society's mandate for an ideal form leads to unreasonable expectations and subsequent self-loathing: the disabled become persecutors of one another and victims of rigid cultural expectations.³¹

Valeriia critiques an uncaring system that has created an irreconcilable rift between the ideal and the real. In contrast, the story "The Chosen People" more subtly argues that disabled bodies serve a higher purpose, precisely because they have been scorned by state and society. After the death of her mother, overweight Zinaida begs for alms outside a church, but her basic knowledge of Christianity is so limited that she describes the Mother of God as "Mother of her daughter." Indigent and lame Katia the Redhead befriends Zinaida and attempts to instruct her. Rather than begging without thought, Katia has developed a theory that distinguishes between scroungers and "real" beggars: "A true beggar is one of God's people and serves the Lord." These are the "chosen people" who manifest meekness, humility, and take only what they need to survive. All three virtues are rooted in *telesnost'* and a view of Christianity that stresses good deeds over dogma, a crucial tenet we explore in chapter 4.³²

For Ulitskaya, the beggars exemplify Christianity. Katia makes this clear with her belief that irregular bodies are the product of divine intent. After seeing the nun Evdokiia, with "no legs nor arms nor human voice," she "realize[s] why the Lord puts [. . .] the weak, the freaks, and the cripples on the earth . . . for comparison, as an example, or for consolation." The irregular body elicits a variety of reactions: reflection and self-examination, seeing the disabled person as virtuous, or gratitude for one's own (comparatively) comfortable existence. Even as this range of external viewpoints may involve the misreading of disability, the multiplicity of responses links the imperfections of the flesh to introspection and subtly threatens the monolithic certainty of Soviet corporeality. Considering others' problems promotes both compassion and the reexamination of our lives that Ulitskaya defines as key to development. The irregular body thus aids the contemplation and tolerance the author upholds as essential traits of the intelligentsia.³³

These two practices guide the portrayal of the title character in "The Daughter of Bokhara." Developmentally disabled Mila has empathy, sensitivity, and an appreciation for beauty that distinguishes her from the family's crude neighbors. She is, however, marked by otherness: she has a non-Russian mother; she is not male (as family tradition would prefer); and she suffers from Down syndrome and is described as a "defective" baby expected to die at an early age. The different responses of Mila's parents to her condition are telling. At first Dima, who is a doctor, attempts to understand his daughter's disease; however, he eventually leaves her and Alya. The emphasis on perfection and others'

opinions, Ulitskaya suggests, can lead the morally weak astray. Alya, by contrast, does not see her happy and placid daughter's "deficiency" and apparently is immune to the mockery they face. Knowing she will die soon, Alya teaches her daughter life skills and plans her marriage to developmentally disabled Grigory. Even though husband and wife are scorned and misunderstood, the narrator describes their union as a "good marriage" marked by tranquility and independence from the hostile world around them, which has been poisoned by the demand for physical perfection that Valeriia laments. Mila and Grigory, unaware of what the world expects from them, are untainted by envy or resentment. The couple's quiet existence is more harmonious than that of most families we examine in chapter 2.³⁴

Irregular bodies defy easy conceptualization. Idealized *telesnost'* shares certain characteristics, such as resemblance to stylized images (Dima looks like a warrior, while Ivan's face recalls an image from an icon). However, handicapped characters depart from the norm in a host of surprisingly dissimilar ways, evincing the combined individuality, plurality, and simplicity Ulitskaya valorizes. She foregrounds a particularly striking manifestation of these values via the holy fool, a woman who combines physical limitations with spiritual overtones and the mocking of established social patterns. In his seminal study of Russian folk culture, Andrei Siniavskii outlines how such figures evoked fear, laughter, and "acted on a profound religious assumption: that contempt for one's own person and dignity serves the glory of God."³⁵ Degradation of the flesh to serve the soul, a vital trope in Orthodoxy, also recalls Kaganovsky's discussion of those who mortified their bodies for the secular heavenly kingdom—however, Ulitskaya's characters do not serve any dominant ideology. The *iurodivaia* is new to neither Russian culture nor literature after 1991. For the holy fool the link between human and God occurs through *telesnost'* more than spirit, an assertion echoing the earthy theology that appears in "The Chosen People" and is key to Ulitskaya's writing.³⁶

Traits of the holy fool are present in a number of her characters, but not all of Ulitskaya's holy fools are equally sympathetic: scheming Toma in "A Gift Not Made by Hands" ("Dar nerukotvornyi") seems to lack the kindness and humility that mark Ulitskaya's *iurodivaia*. A group of enthusiastic new Young Pioneers comes to visit the armless protagonist, who gained fame for using her feet to sew a portrait of Stalin. This act literalizes the subordination of the body to the state, yet Toma cleverly exploits it to receive a private apartment. Shocking the girls with her

cynicism and obscenities, she orders them to leave and then gives the bottle purchased with their money to an elderly friend. Toma is capable of benevolence as well as cruelty, demonstrating an ambivalence that is characteristic of the holy fool, whose alternation between kindness and aggression critiques the hypocrisy of an immoral society. Her physical appearance solidifies this status: "By the window stood a trestle bed, and lying on it was what appeared to be a big little girl, covered up to the waist by a thick blanket. She sat up and put her big feet on the floor. It looked as if her dress had wings on the shoulders, but no arms could be seen under these empty wings. When she walked around the room it seemed that she was small, scrawny, and reminded you of a duck, because her stride was a little off-balance with her legs facing almost completely out; the arches of her feet were unusually wide, and her toes were large, fat, and placed far apart from each other."³⁷

Toma's physical handicap comes from a deformed body (missing arms, duck-like walk) but has hints of spirituality (the presence of wings). She elicits the unsettling, paradoxical feelings that are the essence of the *iurodivaia*: repugnance and respect. Toma inhabits the margins of the Great Family, which first rewarded her with the apartment and then abandoned her. Like crude Katia the Redhead, Toma is the victim of an uncaring society yet helps and pities those who are still less fortunate. Ulitskaya shies away from extolling such figures, but she ultimately characterizes them as more compassionate and righteous than many of the able-bodied. Likewise, the irregular body and its behaviors cause readers to reflect on—and perhaps improve—their own lives.

The holy fool is most explicit in Ulitskaya's play *Seven Saints from Briukbo*. Dusia and Mania Gorelia are *iurodivye* who have long despised each other. Dusia inspires Timosha, a deserter from the newly formed Red Army, to become a holy fool. Near the conclusion of the play, he realizes that Mania is none other than Dusia's long-lost runaway fiancé. The narrative contrasts the holy fool with the brutal first decade of the Soviet state: after the Bolsheviks shoot Dusia, Mania, and their disciples, Timosha sees seven crowns floating into heaven.³⁸ Ulitskaya notes that her play falls within a long literary tradition that begins with Aleksandr Pushkin and continues with the holy fools depicted by Fyodor Dostoevsky and Andrei Platonov. These predecessors contextualize a character type whose unusual physicality is the most striking feature; this depiction implies that the playwright sees no distinction between the literary, spiritual, and corporeal. In transforming Mania from Dusia's male lover into a woman, Ulitskaya creates one of the few positive transgendered

characters in Russian literature, a remarkable step given the nation's enduring distrust of "sexual minorities." She thus also adds a new dimension to the literal and textual body of the holy fool, blurring biological lines as well as destroying social conventions. At the level of history, Dusia and Mania, like Toma, critique the cruelty of the USSR; *Seven Saints* relates such malice to the conjoined perils of atheism and violence. The Red Army's executions occur after the villagers refuse to surrender their icon, which according to local legend saved a merchant wounded in the belly (*briukho*). The epilogue reveals that a different part of the body now gives the area its name—the village has been renamed Rogovsk, after the Red Army executioner whose name suggests the Satanic horns of the Soviet state.³⁹

Briukho and its martyrs wed the irregular body to holiness and the oppression of both by the Bolsheviks; their trauma challenges the ideal Soviet body and its gloriously mangled counterpart that Kaganovsky depicts. Characters show how *telesnost'* itself is a source of significance: virtues such as compassion and humility mean nothing without the body. The holy fool resists the secondary status accorded corporeality and its place in an unjust world, implying a need to look beyond the sacral image of the *iurodivaia* to discover its physical presence. As the author's handicapped characters demonstrate, the suffering flesh deserves recognition for its own pain in addition to religious and social significance.

Rehumanizing the Body: Illness and Aging

Ulitskaya's works highlight the theme of the ailing body—the normally healthy physical form altered by malady. Indeed, illness is one of Russian literature's favorite topics, yet its recent prominence in women's prose garnered acrimony for purportedly debasing flesh and soul, miring the didactic mission of writing in a cesspool of naturalism.⁴⁰ Such charges have also been leveled at Ulitskaya: one critic complains that she devotes too much detail to sickness, while another speculates that such emphases come from her background in biology. Both rely on the unfounded but prevalent assumption that writing is the realm of the ideational, not the corporeal. These opinions fail to consider the basic axiom that, as we argue below, for Ulitskaya the body needs no "higher" justification.⁴¹

Concern with the ailing body holds biographical significance for the author. In her memoir *Discarded Relics* Ulitskaya remarks on the new way she began to think of corporeality after being treated for breast cancer and having a mastectomy: "And why am I writing all this? The point is that I need to establish a new relationship with my body, first of all with my breasts. At the end of my seventh decade, having been feeling guilty for the most varied of reasons, I sharply sensed that I was guilty before my own body [*pered svoim telom*]. It is strange that, having all my life treated my blameless body with indifference, even brutality, I was so late in realizing this!"⁴² Ulitskaya has taken *telesnost'* for granted, ignoring its needs as she focused on those of the heart and mind. It is appropriate that she repents in written form, apologizing to her body and, in so doing, closing the gap between the mental and physical that has marked her life. As our discussion of physicality makes clear, *telesnost'* is not merely the corporeal shell of the soul—it has significance in its own right. Even as the narrator of *Discarded Relics* admits that she is guilty of exploiting *telesnost'*, it continues to aid her: accessing a trope common to narratives of illness and recovery, Ulitskaya credits her ailing body with giving her increased clarity. As she explains, recovering from breast cancer granted her the ability to enjoy life in its minor and grand manifestations and liberated her from approaching existence with a checklist mentality.⁴³

Illness—whether linked to self-transformation or not—influences Ulitskaya's characters. In *Medea and Her Children* the protagonist humanizes medicine through her work as a nurse, just as she brings together relatives and friends who spend the summer at her Crimean home. The novel depicts how a malady precipitates and then concludes a marriage: when Medea meets her future husband Samuel he shyly stutters that he is being treated for a "nervous i-illness"; he then ends up caring for his future wife when she comes down with the flu. Years later, attending to him after cancer surgery, she becomes a servant of his body as her husband slowly starves because of a disrupted digestive system: "Samuel at first turned away squeamishly, embarrassed at the exposing of this unpleasant physiology, but then he detected that Medea was not having to make the slightest effort to conceal revulsion, and that she was much more concerned about the inflamed edge of the wound or a delay in the outpouring of porridge which had only slightly changed its appearance than about the unpleasant smell coming from the wound."⁴⁴ The ailing body is natural, free from the material corruption and spiritual emptiness that cling to it in the works of authors such as Petrushevskiaia.

Telesnost' is no longer an indicator of *chernukha* or its antipode—the physical utopia of young, healthy bodies that Stalinism showcased. Instead, it signals virtue rooted in the individual: Medea regards her husband's pain as a sign of his Christian meekness, despite the fact that he has rediscovered the Judaism of his youth. As with Ulitskaya's image of the holy fool, corporeal suffering is not an impediment to spirituality but an expression of it, regardless of the faith one professes. Soul and body are bound by everyday life, in which positive characters live rightly despite an array of problems large and small.⁴⁵

The body in pain manifests sincerity. At times it points to emotional strife: in *The Kukotskii Case*, the hurt that Elena feels toward Pavel Alekseevich after their argument over abortion resembles a tumor—neither growing nor shrinking, its malevolent presence wounds flesh and soul. Pavel Alekseevich states that everyone in the family but Tanya has some sort of mental illness, a sign of the deepening divide between them. In reaching this conclusion, he as a doctor realizes that his plans to help women have succeeded (he helped legalize abortion), but his own family has suffered as a result. The rational male authority has been discredited, another legacy of *zhenskaia proza*. Though *telesnost'* in women's prose often manifests intractable social problems, its function is different here: corporeality hints at a solution, as Elena shows when she forgives Pavel Alekseevich from within her catatonic state. The body excuses what the mind cannot, evincing a fundamental human kindness that parallels the promulgation of tolerance we examine in chapter 4.⁴⁶

In Russian literature the flesh cannot lie. This imperative is one reason why Ulitskaya's corporeality continues the long tradition of using illness to critique the state. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* (*Rakovyi korpus*) famously describes the disease as a symbol and, in some cases, a direct result of Stalinism's corruption of the collective body.⁴⁷ What Ulitskaya contributes to this disturbing cavalcade of images is the depiction of totalitarianism as a sickness that particularly deforms the female body. Literature addressing this period previously focused on male characters, such as Solzhenitsyn's scientists and the denizens of Trifonov's *House on the Embankment*. Pavel Alekseevich, however, diagnoses the era with the necessarily specific gaze of the gynecologist. Pleading with a high-ranking functionary to decriminalize abortion, the doctor brings him a jar containing the deformed uterus of a woman who tried to terminate her pregnancy by inserting an onion into her womb. This image effectively conveys the dangers of illegal abortion

while showing how the state reductively considers women units for increasing the population. In the context of Stalin's pronatalist policies, Kukotskii's action is just as foolhardy as that of his friend Il'ia Gol'dberg, who is sent to the camps for reporting the Red Army's mass rapes of German women. Both Pavel Alekseevich and Gol'dberg risk their careers and freedom to decry the Great Family's victimization of the female body, a taboo topic that exposes brutality at the level of *telesnost'* and history.⁴⁸

At times the body revolts against the state. During the Civil War, Samuel in *Medea and Her Children* is in charge of requisitioning grain from the peasants and shooting those who resist. He describes how he avoids murdering a family: "We lined the three of them up, the Red Army soldiers facing them with their rifles. Well, then the women and little children raised such a shriek that something struck me in the head and I fell down. I'd had something like an epileptic seizure. After that, of course, I remember nothing. They put me in the cart, right there on top of the grain, and took me back to the city. I was told that I turned black, and my arms and legs were like sticks, completely rigid." Samuel's body becomes a parodic exaggeration of the unbending, obedient physicality the Bolsheviks demand from their soldiers. Fortunately, this literalized metaphor saves Medea's future husband from taking part in the execution that presumably occurs without him. As in *Seven Saints from Briukho*, Ulitskaya characterizes the Civil War in strikingly physical terms, linking the Soviet state to mass violence even before the rise of Stalinism.⁴⁹

Given the prominence of the body in pain, it is no surprise that doctors are important in these works. Ulitskaya links biology, one of medicine's foundations, with the writer's craft: both investigate the human condition. In *The Kukotskii Case* Pavel Alekseevich complicates the image of the physician as the novel depicts the gradual implosion of his family from the Stalin to the Yeltsin years. Modeled on the famous surgeon Sergei Spasokukotskii, as a gynecologist he constantly operates on the boundary between masculine (surgery) and feminine (midwifery). He is likewise part of the Stalinist medical elite in *The Kukotskii Case*, where the token woman bureaucrat is described in overwhelmingly masculine terms; as we discussed earlier, his gendered status is one reason for the disagreement over abortion that destroys his marriage.⁵⁰

Pavel Alekseevich reveals the moral limits of the doctor's power. Irina Zherebkina astutely observes that it is Elena who motivates the plot, though the gynecologist gives the novel its title—while he begins

the narrative, she survives him. Within her senile state she remains morally pure in a way that Kukotskii cannot be. As a doctor he is a *de facto* arbiter of life and death, yet the text questions his judgment on the central issue of abortion. The work clearly upholds his unstinting (and dangerous) efforts to decriminalize the procedure. Denying reproductive freedom, the narrator remarks, not only is oppressive but relegates women to the status of animals, for “isn’t this the essential boundary between human and animal, the ability and right to go beyond the bounds of biological law and create progeny because of one’s own wish and not the will of natural rhythms?” Ulitskaya’s omniscient narrator, appropriating the discourse used by Pavel Alekseevich, frames his argument using the irrefutable vocabulary of science. Likewise, the narrator opines, it is bitterly ironic how, after the (re)legalization of abortion in 1955, the government that has killed millions has given women the right to terminate their pregnancies. In this sense Pavel Alekseevich’s actions are clearly positive, granting female citizens a corporeal voice within the Great Family. This is the same *pravo golosa* he and Elena deny each other. It also has broader implications: Russian culture has long examined Stalinism by noting who could speak and who was silenced. Elena’s opposition to abortion, however, suggests a second and more disturbing view. This negative standpoint, shared by servant Vasilisa with her medieval theology, identifies Pavel Alekseevich as a murderer, a characterization reinforced by the aborted fetuses his wife sees in her catatonic state.⁵¹ The doctor cannot transform irreproachable public service into helping his family, and this failure undermines his authority to determine the fate of the unborn. Pavel Alekseevich’s ambiguity substantially expands the characterization of doctors, a prominent category that women’s prose earlier populated with extremes: either the devoted professionals of I. Grekova’s writing or the callous butchers depicted by Petrushevskaja and Marina Palei.⁵²

For Ulitskaya illness can create togetherness in addition to alienation, as *The Funeral Party* masterfully illustrates. One critic mistakenly (and unfavorably) compares this narrative to Tolstoy’s *Death of Ivan Ilyich* (*Smert’ Ivana Il’icha*). The works are diametrically opposed—while Tolstoy sees death as bringing about realization of a life wrongly lived, Ulitskaya’s novel envisions it as a celebration of memory. As the sociable painter Alik dies, friends, former and present lovers, and chance acquaintances gather in his Chelsea loft. His wake exemplifies the bond between sickness, friends, and a community that stretches across the globe:⁵³

People came and went from the table carrying plates and glasses, coming together in groups and moving away again. There had never been such a mixture of people. Alik’s musician friends came, along with several people whom no one had seen before; it wasn’t clear where he had picked them up or how they had learnt of his death. The Paraguayan [street musicians] stood in a phalanx, led by their leader with his dark-pink scar and craggy, handsome face. A Columbia University professor talked animatedly to the driver of the garbage-collection truck. Berman fancied Gioia, but pressures of work meant he hadn’t touched a woman for over two years and he wasn’t sure if he should let the genie out of the bottle now. If he had known what Alik knew he certainly wouldn’t have contemplated it, for not only was she a virgin, she was also the scion of a noble Roman family which was mentioned by Tacitus.⁵⁴

Alik’s wake, a variegated tableau at the heart of both the narrative and its film adaptation, is a motley celebration of the man illness has taken and the humanity that remains. It is a fitting recognition of an artist who refused to believe in boundaries between the spirit and the flesh. Accordingly, *telesnost’* plays a large role as the guests eat, drink, and in several cases make love. Music is central to this scene as the Paraguayans who have been performing outside the apartment join the wake; their rhythms underscore an eroticism that Alik’s former lover Valentina discovers to be like nothing she has experienced.⁵⁵

Death is placed at the center of life, pairing loss with new beginnings, whether they are the conception of children or simply friendships. Before he dies, Alik takes “pleasure in the half-naked women clinging to him from morning to night” and their life-affirming bodily presence, which comforts while quietly emphasizing the central place of sexuality in everyday life. The celebration following his funeral continues this logic. Flesh, mind, and spirit are inseparable for Ulitskaya, recalling Grosz’s call to recognize corporeality as more than a conduit to higher meaning. *Telesnost’* and spirituality are inviolably linked; the ailing body reaffirms the primacy of the physical in human existence, as *Discarded Relics* illustrates after the author’s mastectomy. Its humble needs and imperfect forms convey a sincerity rooted in the flesh. The body likewise has the potential to create communities of compassion and forgiveness, virtues central to Ulitskaya’s worldview.⁵⁶

The elderly also play an important role in Ulitskaya’s narratives. Often Soviet culture elided the aging as well as the ailing body; both were marginalized by a cult of (healthy) youth, meager disability pensions,

and lack of accessible public transportation. In a society presumably marching toward a brighter future, older citizens were dismissed as remnants of the past or presented as exemplars of how to suffer for the state, whether at the front or in the camps. When Ulitskaya began to publish in the 1990s, the aged were Russia's most vulnerable population, lacking the skills, energy, and mindset to adapt to the cataclysm following perestroika. The film *Brother* (*Brat*) depicts the elderly as weak and completely demoralized, capable only of carping at the society that discarded them. The Great Family's collapse humiliated the very members credited with its construction and defense.⁵⁷

As with her illustrations of illness, Ulitskaya humanizes the aging body, but with a stronger emphasis on history: these characters influence the present while preserving the past. Ulitskaya's autobiography illuminates one reason for this approach—the author recalls that her grandmother played a central role in holding the family together while she was alive.⁵⁸ The positive older personage is an established figure in Russian literature, as Solzhenitsyn's Matryona exemplifies. A basic attribute of these characters is their ability to survive. Given the litany of destroyed lives in works such as *The Big Green Tent* and *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, defying death is itself notable, especially when conjoined with preserving one's personal ethics. For Ulitskaya's religious elderly—be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim—transmitting the culture of the past is a moral imperative. In the story "March 1953," Aaron tells his great-granddaughter Lily about the heroes of ancient Judaism as a counterweight to the state's intolerance. Sitting next to him, she draws strength from his presence: "And Aaron would tell her of Daniel, or Gideon, of legendary heroes of the past and fair virgins, of wise men and czars with obscure names, all of them long-dead members of their tribe, until Lily was firmly persuaded that her great-grandfather, himself so ancient, must have known and personally remembered some of them at least."⁵⁹

Aaron is the physical and cultural link between the Jews' past and their uncertain present during the last year of Stalinism. Making Lily realize that she, like these figures from ancient Israel, is part of the same "tribe," he voices a crucial but subtle counterargument against state claims about rootless cosmopolitans who lack loyalty or homeland. Jewish culture, Judaism, and the elderly body are inseparably bound together. Esfir' in the play *My Grandson Veniamin* hopes to fulfill a function similar to Aaron's—she is one of the few Jews to escape the Nazi massacre in Bobruisk. It is no coincidence that Aaron and Esfir' have weathered the

calamities of Stalinism and fascism. At times Ulitskaya's narratives use elderly lives to compare these two systems; aged survivors form a kinship where suffering brings wisdom that opposes the brutal ignorance of the Great Family and similar regimes of intolerance.⁶⁰

Ulitskaya depicts aging as normal for both individual and culture, a significant assertion in light of the 1990s rhetoric that characterized Russia as a dying nation. *The Kukotskii Case* ends with the birth of Zhenia's son and Elena's interminable decline, while Aaron dies the same day as Lily's first period begins (and very shortly before Stalin's demise). As with *The Funeral Party's* image of Alik's wake and the new relationships that follow, death gives rise to new phases of life and is an integral part of existence.⁶¹

Social interactions that revolve around *telesnost'* and the aging body can also unite people, as *The Kukotskii Case* makes clear through several ritualized images of bathing that together comprise a corporeal narrative embedded within the novel. The first of these moments occurs early in the plot when Pavel Alekseevich, after the operation that has saved Elena, brings her, little Tanya, and Vasilisa warm water for washing. This seemingly simple gesture is a luxurious rarity amidst the grime and cold of wartime evacuation. Many years later, after the birth of her own daughter, Zhenia, Tanya bathes Elena: "Her mother's scrawniness was painful, and the issue was not her light weight—Tanya herself did not make it to the fifty kilo mark. From Elena's shoulders and forearms hung empty folds of skin, and it came to Tanya, in the face of her mother's nakedness, that the human skeleton is gloomy and sexless, and it is only the bits of interspersed fatty meat that create a woman's charm and a man's strength, and even the very difference between man and woman. . . . Of her mother's former femininity there remained only her pale breasts and the slight shadow of her almost hairless privates." This scene is a counterpart to the male gaze that is the province of Pavel Alekseevich as doctor. He first sees Elena's body on the operating table as he performs the surgery that saves her life but removes her uterus, a process that reiterates male agency and female powerlessness. In the passage above, however, one woman regards another; daughter Tanya sees her mother's difficult life inscribed on the body. Elena's almost sexless form evokes compassion, not repulsion.⁶²

Tanya makes an even more striking discovery when she accompanies Vasilisa to the *bania*. In this communal context of female nakedness, Tanya sees Vasilisa's distended womb, an organ that was unneeded

during a life of caring for others' children. Tanya's thoughts while looking at the bodies of Elena and Vasilisa qualify her attempts to escape their fate. Rebellion has been replaced by recognition of others' sacrifice, yet this realization still exists alongside gratitude that the daughter herself has avoided such a life. *The Kukotskii Case* embraces female physicality in all its imperfection, and the sadness that we see through Tanya's eyes comes from the suffering she perceives through *telesnost'*—the body does not cause sorrow, but speaks for those who cannot otherwise voice their pain. Corporeality becomes its own subject and, as Grosz asserts, helps the spirit express itself, effectively reversing the traditional mind/body dichotomy.⁶³

In the final bathing scene in the novel, Zhenia washes Elena, who has survived Pavel Alekseevich (and Tanya) and is living out her last years with Toma and her husband. It is only in the humid privacy of the bath that Elena speaks, pairing true communication with corporeal needs and the compassion they elicit. This consideration unites Zhenia, Tanya, and Elena herself, suggesting a positive history transmitted from one generation to the next via caring for the older body. *Telesnost'* evokes sincerity and tolerance, values opposing the ideals that deformed the literal and metaphorical flesh of Soviet citizens.⁶⁴

This contrast is even starker in *The Big Green Tent* as underground artist Muratov draws pictures of old women bathing in the village where he has taken refuge from the police. While he is used to their wrinkled faces, in the *bania* “[t]heir wrists and feet looked larger and even more deformed. Beaten by working with the land, gnarled like the roots of old trees, fingers and toes had taken on the color of the dirt they had dug in for decades.” The legacy of collectivization and neglect of the countryside is inscribed on the body, with the state more directly implicated than in *The Kukotskii Case*. Ulitskaya transforms the rhetoric of women's prose, which connected deformed female bodies with government indifference and brutality. In *The Big Green Tent*, the female form is simultaneously revealed and aestheticized—it is more than an index of societal problems. When Muratov's drawings are exhibited in Cologne, he is arrested in the USSR for pornography, a charge revealing that the Soviet government strives to control both *telesnost'* and its representation. *The Big Green Tent* engages in corporeal ekphrasis: the body is first depicted in visual form (Muratov's artwork), then takes on a second life through written depiction (the narrative in which he appears). Ulitskaya's images of the aging body are extraordinary. In portraying it in a vulnerable moment—naked, inspected by those younger and healthier—she

forces readers to acknowledge the *telesnost'* of the elderly as a testament to survival and sacrifices made for successive generations. As with Solzhenitsyn's Matryona, the elderly body acts as social commentary; however, for Ulitskaya it holds significance in its own right as well as indicating struggle and oppression.⁶⁵

Ulitskaya is unique in portraying the erotic aging female body, a theme Russian culture often elides with wizened widows and stern grandmothers. Such women use sexless corporeality to prove their long service to family and state. By contrast, Alexandra, Medea's carnally precocious sister, continues her favorite activity well into her fifties, challenging the dictum that female sexuality withers after middle age, if not childbirth. Her husband responds with gratitude: “What he most appreciated in intimate relations with his wife was the very fact that they occurred at all, and in the depths of his simple soul at first supposed that his demands could only be a source of vexation to his noble wife. It was some time before Alexandra succeeded in getting him more or less attuned to the extracting of modest and muted matrimonial joys.” Not only does Alexandra have sex, but it is she, with her rich experience, who takes on the role of teacher. Sexuality is normalized as a fact of life for all, not merely the virile and nubile figures who dominate Soviet and post-1991 conceptions of carnality.⁶⁶

The eponymous protagonist of the story “Gulia” shares Alexandra's appetites, but they play a less crucial role. Gulia's crafty seduction of middle-aged Shurik embodies the holiday spirit enlivening the winter of her years. Her erotic nature starkly contrasts with the staid grandmothers in the works of earlier authors such as Natal'ia Baranskaia, for whom lack of sex is yet another aspect of a life forfeited for others.⁶⁷ Gulia's liaison with a much younger man is deemphasized within a biography that includes arrest, exile, marriages, and numerous romantic escapades. Her brief affair signals that such events are, as with Alik's death in *The Funeral Party*, a natural component of existence that is important to old and young alike. Such nuanced images of the elderly are a welcome respite from the “patriotism of despair” Oushakine espies lurking beneath the rhetoric of post-Soviet Russia as infirm and helpless.⁶⁸

Telesnost' and sexuality are inseparable from the commentary on culture and history uniting Ulitskaya's oeuvre; this connection appears in characters' physiological and mental ways of apprehending the world. Some female personages experience catatonic states, displaying external indicators (muteness and aging) of internal suffering. In a trope borrowed

from women's prose, this group demonstrates the physical impact of psychological trauma.⁶⁹ The body ceases to interact with reality, recalling Julia Kristeva's discussion of the "depressive affect" that ensures survival by providing a buffer between the hostile world and psychic self-destruction. In Ulitskaya's corpus, however, the division comes from irreconcilable conflict between a woman's sense of self and how those in her family perceive this identity.⁷⁰

In the story "Someone Else's Children" ("Chuzhie deti"), Armenian Margarita gives birth to twins Gayane and Victoria after many years in a childless marriage with older Sergo. Her husband, away at the front, imagines himself a cuckold; he is unaware of the birthmark both he and the twins share. Drying the twins after their bath, "[h]e did not pay attention to the tea-colored birthmark emblazoned on their little buttocks. And the only person who could have poked him in his flat rear, in the very middle of the birthmark in the form of an overturned crown, was his poor wife Margarita, who continued to sit in her armchair and talk to the husband she so loved." As a result of his accusations, Margarita has fallen into depression, imagines conversations with her husband, ages dramatically, and must be cared for like a child. Only she could point out the birthmark that proves the children are his, a feature whose evident symbolism (the overturned crown) references both Sergo's fears of his wife's infidelity and the rupture of a previously solid marriage. Sergo is a poor reader of the body, overlooking the evidence of his paternity as he attempts to bring Margarita out of the helpless despondency his unfounded suspicions provoked. Kazarina notes that the shocks, insights, and revelations experienced by Ulitskaya's heroines are seen as "illness, eccentricity, and folly," yet catatonic states are "those moments when a person [has] direct contact with the unseen underpinnings of existence."⁷¹

As *The Funeral Party* and *The Kukotskii Case* demonstrate, often moments associated with death and dementia are the most significant in a work. Throughout Ulitskaya's oeuvre catatonic states are an extreme and destructive form of corporeal sincerity through which the body expresses with shocking honesty the soul's torment. In "Lialia's Home," the protagonist's horror at the sight of her daughter having sex with her own (much younger) lover Kazia induces a muteness that resembles Margarita's condition; Lialia's contemplation of a walled-in kitchen window visually recalls her now-vanished sexual freedom. After emerging from her state of shock, Lialia exhibits an extreme sympathy and sensitivity for all living things and even inanimate household objects.

This maudlin sensibility, markedly different from her previous self-interest and adultery, suggests a parody of the devoted and penitent woman.⁷²

For Lialia and Margarita shock provokes catatonia. By contrast, in *The Kukotskii Case* it is the argument about the ethics of abortion that eventually prompts Elena's mental deterioration. However, in all three cases women suffer a blow to a central and valorized part of their gendered identity. As noted above, Pavel Alekseevich and Elena disagree over who may speak on issues of maternity. Kukotskii initially advocates for mothers, enacting the scenario Hirsch depicts: "To speak for the mother [. . .] is at once to give voice to her discourse *and* to silence and marginalize her." Much earlier Pavel Alekseevich asserts his claim to debate such questions: he severs ties with his mother when he criticizes her for having another child at a relatively advanced age. Later in the novel, Elena neither fully emerges from her catatonic state nor forgives her husband in the primary narrative. Such transformations can occur only across generations, a situation conveyed by Zhenia's more balanced life and Elena's unifying vision of relatives before her death. As we explore in chapter 2, family for Ulitskaya is transhistorical, outlasting individuals and even the seemingly immutable Soviet state.⁷³

Beyond Shock and Scandal: Rewriting Sexuality

Catatonic characters are one way of addressing prescribed female behavior; innovative images of sexuality are another. Ulitskaya departs from the taboo-shattering epatage of women's prose and *chernukha*, despite certain critics' assertions to the contrary. Echoing charges earlier leveled at women's prose, some misread Ulitskaya's depiction of sexuality as bestializing human nature or catering to a mass readership.⁷⁴ Unlike Petrushevskaiia's lacerating narratives, Ulitskaya rejects the idea of eroticism as dangerous, dirty, and demeaning. Instead, she rehumanizes the female body by examining and presenting it at every stage, from newly born (the twins in "Someone Else's Children") to late in life ("Gulia"). Ulitskaya contextualizes female sexuality within a wide-ranging portrayal of corporeality that assumes less restrictive gender roles.

To this end Ulitskaya conjoins female sexuality and self-awareness; as one critic succinctly notes, knowing the body means knowing the world. "March 1953" depicts physical transitions as natural—while Lily's

ailing great-grandfather suffers from the tumor growing within him, she struggles with the bewildering signs of puberty. Aaron has accepted his illness and the inevitability of death, but the protagonist is much less comfortable: "She was eleven years old. Her armpits ached and her nipples itched incessantly. From time to time a wave of disgust would break over her at all the little changes taking place in her body, the swellings and the coarse dark hairs, the pustules on her forehead; her very soul protested blindly at all these disagreeable, impure things. [. . .] Only by snuggling up to her great-grandfather, who smelled of camphor and old paper, could she be delivered from the malaise that tormented her." The narrator lists with both compassion and mock horror the changes occurring to the protagonist as physicality renders Lily a stranger in her own body. Ulitskaya vividly portrays the end of childhood, a narrative moment that coincides chronologically with a similar point in her own life (both author and character were eleven in March 1953). For Lily the beginning of puberty is a time of corporeal chaos assuaged only by Aaron's presence, which offers reassuring smells, a sense of stability, and tales from the past. As is often the case with the older generation, Aaron is a bulwark against the hostile Soviet present. Adding to Lily's unease are the taunts she receives from the bully Bodrik, whom Lily beats when he attacks her. This frightening event, the onset of menstruation, and Aaron's decline all anticipate the death of Stalin. The last event will have implications for decades to come—Ulitskaya personalizes history by stressing its corporeal effects on individuals who respond to events beyond their control.⁷⁵

Another story in the same collection, "Chicken Pox" ("Vetrianaia ospa"), has a more limited scope. During late Stalinism Lily's friends engage in make-believe games (including a mock wedding) and tentative discussions of sex. Tanya Kolyvanova, the lone girl from a poor family and a relative of armless Toma in "A Gift Not Made by Hands," has more practical know-how than the others—her experience diverges from Soviet Victorianism and the "hygienically correct upbringing" of the others. In scenes new to Russian prose, the girls imitate coitus, instruct one another in masturbation, and simulate giving birth. Since no boys are present, some of the friends take on the role of groom and father, an understated reminder of the segregated world of childhood even as it tries to comprehend the rituals of adulthood. Later most of the girls come down with chicken pox, a physical manifestation of the knowledge gained. It is no coincidence that Tanya and Lily, who are not infected, are the only members of the group previously aware of the basics of

intercourse. The narrative emphasizes changes in friendship and new knowledge more than the actions themselves; for Ulitskaya, the erotic (or, in this case, its precursor) cannot be divorced from its social context.⁷⁶

Contradicting the foreboding accounts of women's prose, the author describes early sexual experience as multivalent. Though the author maintains that sex is "a gift from God" that warrants respect, her endorsement of good deeds over dogma extends to the erotic: restrictions on sex are less meaningful (and viable) than responsible action. "Bronka," Ulitskaya's first published story for adults, portrays a thirteen-year-old girl from Birobidzhan who after moving to Moscow mysteriously becomes pregnant and eventually bears four illegitimate children. Her humble nature and lack of shame underscore her innocence by evoking the Mother of God, and the reader once again realizes that for Ulitskaya a character's Jewishness does not preclude portrayal in Christian terms. These depictions run throughout the author's oeuvre, shaping in a much more explicit way works such as *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*. Decades later Bronka narrates her experience to childhood acquaintance Irina, and the transformation from object (of ridicule) to subject shocks her listener: "[y]esterday's little tart, the laughing stock of the whole neighbourhood, had no business having such deep, complicated feelings." This narrative provides a rare glimpse of the intelligentsia (Irina) reassessing its relations with the common people (Bronka and her impoverished mother). Bronka reveals the identity of her children's father—photographer-neighbor Viktor Popov—and explains that his cultured gentility provided her a refuge from the coarseness of postwar life. Indeed, he, like *Sonechka's* Robert Viktorovich, lessens the privation and tedium of Stalinism by hinting at a vibrant artistic tradition driven underground. In the montage photographs that Bronka shows Irina, she and Viktor are coevals, while in reality they were thirteen and sixty-nine. In addition, Bronka's claim that she seduced Viktor mitigates the taboo nature of their relationship.⁷⁷

There are no explicitly described erotic encounters in "Bronka," yet in Ulitskaya's works photography is often linked to what Laura Mulvey describes as (male) visual pleasure. Aside from Popov's photographs, his relationship with the protagonist is a disembodied one: we see the product (four sons) but not the process. Coitus is less important than the mysteries of a love that enlivens its drab Soviet backdrop. Likewise, eroticism is depicted via layers of representation that show it to be an inextricable part of culture. Bronka presents a more nuanced picture of teenage sexuality than antecedents in women's prose such as Mon'ka in

Palei's "Cabiria from the Bypass" ("Kabiriia s Obvodnogo kanala"), who suffers from uncontrolled eroticism and suicide attempts. Ulitskaya's protagonist, in contrast, derives meaning, stability, and lasting satisfaction from her affair with Popov: the author's images of sexuality are more closely connected with human relationships than the isolating despair that perestroika pairs with carnality.⁷⁶

The Kukotskii Case extends the depiction of nascent sexuality by connecting it with self-exploration suggestive of scientific inquiry. One critic thus errs in alleging the novel celebrates the flesh alone. While *telesnost'* is a central focus, erotic themes are inextricable from the depiction of the Kukotskii's decline as the USSR itself moves through its last decades.⁷⁹ Sexual discovery is the purview of Tanya; her first exposure to the aroused male body occurs in the office of womanizer Professor Gansovskii. She narrowly escapes rape, and though the situation horrifies her, seeing Gansovskii's penis "[makes] an impression" and spurs her interest. She calmly divests herself of her virginity on a nighttime walk when she interrupts a young man in the midst of an unsuccessful suicide attempt. After the event, when the post-coital conversation proves to be uninteresting, she simply leaves. This holistic view of a first sexual encounter is a welcome contrast to the violence, pregnancy, and hopelessness stemming from many such moments in women's prose. Tanya's subsequent carnal experiences display a similarly matter-of-fact detachment, but they lack the overtones of authoritative coldness attached to Pavel Alekseevich's use of science; Tanya is discovering the erotic on her own terms, not deciding the fates of others. After a few years of this new life, she begins a sexual relationship with Gena Gol'dberg and then his twin Vitalik, stating that for her there is no difference between them. Downplaying emotional affinity (and monogamy) meets with a negative male response: not surprisingly, the Gol'dberg brothers bristle when viewed as interchangeable. In Tanya's worldview, however, neither brother should be jealous, since such emotions have no place alongside what for her are the uncomplicated pleasures of sex. Her mindset as a teenager is almost utopian, as it divorces the physical act of love from its consequences.⁸⁰

Inventive images of heterosexuality are a mainstay of Ulitskaya's prose and drama. Her first novella, *Sonechka*, illustrates the relationship between an aging artist, his forbearing wife, and the young mistress who becomes an unlikely but central part of their family as they live together from late Stalinism through the Brezhnev years. The work presents contrasting approaches to the erotic that together suggest the

author's philosophy of the body. The first of these involves desire and books and echoes Ulitskaya's own readerly biography: in her memoir she describes reading as an intimate act and characterizes her adolescent discovery of Pasternak and other writers as "constructed according to the principles of a romance novel." Similarly, when Robert Viktorovich first sees his future wife, reading and erotic representation are inseparable. Serving out his exile in the Urals, he ventures into Sverdlovsk, where Sonechka is living in wartime evacuation. Already impressed by the provincial library's collection of French volumes, he observes Sonechka, "looking at her pure forehead and smiling inwardly at her marvelous resemblance to a patient, gentle young camel, and thinking, *She even has the coloring: that swarthy, sad, umber tint, and the pinkishness, the warmth.*"⁸¹ Establishing a key pattern, the former avant-garde painter recreates Sonechka according to his own image of her, a portrayal that reflects his travels earlier in life. She is a representation, but not only because of Robert Viktorovich. From childhood, reading habits have rendered her passive in both an intellectual and erotic sense. At fourteen she lost her virginity to a "brutal young Onegin," a classmate ironically likened to the more cultured hero of Pushkin's famous novel in verse. After she meets Robert Viktorovich, literature blinds her to the intent of the man who soon will propose to her: "Sonechka, meanwhile, placid soul that she was—cocooned by the thousand volumes of her reading, lulled by the hazy murmurings of the Greek myths, the hypnotically shrill recorder fluting of the Middle Ages, the misty windswept yearning of Ibsen, the minutely detailed tedium of Balzac, the astral music of Dante, the siren song of the piercing voices of Rilke and Novalis, seduced by the moralistic despair of the great Russian writers calling out to the heart of heaven itself—this placid soul had no awareness that her great moment was at hand, preoccupied as she was by the question of whether she was taking rather a risk in allowing a reader to borrow books that she was only allowed to issue for use in the reading room."⁸²

Sexuality is constructed by reading. This link has weighty cultural implications for a woman already tied to Pushkin's Tat'iana Larina because of her unfortunate first erotic experience: both heroines allow their initial expectations for romance to be shaped by the books they have read, and both are gravely mistaken. Familiarity with the great minds of Russia and the West has not empowered Sonechka. She is a submissive, suggestible reader who lacks the autonomy Robert Viktorovich has as a male artist who integrates literature into a wide-ranging knowledge of the world.

Only with the next generation does *Sonechka* privilege the connections between female eroticism and independence. As with her namesake in *The Kukotskii Case*, teenage Tanya's first sexual encounters with friends are positive experiments: "For Tanya the most interesting thing was a new awareness of her body. She discovered that every part of it, her fingers, her breasts, her stomach, her back, responded differently to touch and had the ability to allow all manner of delightful sensations to be elicited, and the shared experimentation gave [. . .] them no end of pleasure." Thanks to further practice, they "mastered every aspect of the physical side of love without in the process experiencing the least emotion beyond the bounds of a friendly and practical partnership." While this series of experiments also establishes a pattern that *The Kukotskii Case* follows, the narratives quickly diverge. In *Sonechka*, Tanya's "heart crie[s] out for some higher communion, a conjoining, a fusion, a reciprocity beyond all bounds," and she becomes platonically attached to Jasia, who has a disturbingly different outlook forged by her life in a Stalinist orphanage. Motivated by calculating pragmatism rather than honest interest, Jasia uses sex as currency with men, "having at an early age mastered an inexpensive technique for settling her debts to them." Her relationship with Robert Viktorovich means a stable home for the Polish waif but a crushing realization for Tanya; Jasia's corporeal insincerity reveals that sexuality can be a means to an end as well as manifesting the *iskrennost'* Ulitskaya prizes. This truth remains forever alien to Tanya, who has never been forced to barter with her body in order to survive.⁸³

Sincerely Yours, Shurik also foregrounds sex, but despite the dizzying number of couplings it contains, the novel is avowedly non-erotic. Shurik's role with women is described repeatedly as consoler; female desire and satisfaction elide male needs. Indeed, only coitus can ease the physical and moral suffering of characters such as handicapped Valeriia, who "felt completely free only in bed, when the damned crutches were completely unneeded, and there, she knew, her disability disappeared, and she became whole—oh, more than a whole woman! She flew, soared, levitated."⁸⁴ This clichéd metaphor illustrates the escape from ordinary physicality that lovemaking provides for Valeriia, who has been crippled by childhood polio. Here Ulitskaya appropriates the flight motif French feminists have long viewed as "the emblem of women's writing" (at least in the West); the liberation born of carnal fulfillment symbolizes transcendence of constraining roles and stresses the union of the material and spiritual. Valeriia's feeling is a positive alternative to the catatonia of Margarita, Lialia, and Elena.⁸⁵

Shurik is not so fortunate. In contrast to the usual representation of Don Juan, he strives not to debauch and destroy, but only to comfort and ease suffering. However, constant sublimation of his desires creates a false relationship with *telesnost'*. In this sense he resembles Jasia: his sexuality becomes a form of insincerity, leaving him the servant of others' bodies without admitting the wishes of his own. Jasia's experiences are more traumatic, just as her use of sexuality is calculated instead of reactive. For both characters, however, the erotic is a cumbersome duty instead of the pleasant discovery Tanya enjoys. One of Shurik's lovers, the manipulative and psychologically damaged Svetlana, sews him a coat; the narrator compares it with Nikolai Gogol's story "The Overcoat" ("Shinel"). The intertext suggests a loose parallel between Svetlana and the humble clerk Akaky Akakievich, yet it is clearly Shurik who is the victim in their relationship.⁸⁶

Ulitskaya's depictions of heterosexual males are not particularly innovative when compared with her other images of the body. A number of characters recall those found earlier in women's prose, for instance, the predacious misanthrope (Shurik the Spider in "Poor, Happy Kolyvanova" ["Bednaia, schastlivaia Kolyvanova"]), the self-destructive genius (Tanya's would-be boyfriend in "The Body of a Beauty" ["Telo krasavitsy"]), or the brutal drunk (Vas'ka in "The Ladder" ["Pristavnaia lestnitsa"]).⁸⁷ However, the precedent of *zhenskaia proza* allows Ulitskaya to move beyond dismantling Soviet male sexuality and produce a more complex examination of men and the erotic. In the autobiographical "A Terrifying Story on the Road" ("Strashnaia dorozhnaia istoriia"), the narrator must take the train back to Moscow from the Caucasus after a plane is hijacked. When the Georgian men who have helped the narrator board the train lead her to their compartment, she knows they will assault her if she falls asleep. Like Scheherazade, she tells story after story, distracting them as the group drinks. Considering her situation, she notes: "They were not rapists, just normal Georgian men, who from childhood know that there is one way to relate to Georgian women and to Russian women a different one. We have, alas, a bad reputation!" Ulitskaya's fictionalized counterpart realizes that her present crisis is the result of ethnic and gendered stereotypes perpetuated by both sexes. She does not justify the men's (potential) actions, but contextualizes them in a history of misunderstanding between Russians and Georgians. Her seemingly banal analysis is in fact quite insightful; it considers the age-old mythologies of gender that Goswami and Lanoux outline and, in doing so, transcends the offensive national stereotypes that dominate Soviet and post-1991 culture. The Georgian men later reveal that they

knew she was lying about many of her stories, but give her children some of the tangerines they are smuggling. The narrator's role thus oscillates between two extremes: potential sexual victim and maternal figure, a simplistic schema anomalous for this author.⁸⁸

Several more unusual images of the male heterosexual appear in Ulitskaya's works. The first is the reluctant seducer, who tries to resist but then has an affair with a much younger female character. In "Bronka" and *Sonechka* men have sex with women at least thirty years younger, yet the narrative does not censure them. Viktor Popov bears a striking resemblance to Robert Viktorovich in *Sonechka*, who sleeps with his daughter's closest friend. Jasia does not bear a child as a result, yet she becomes a permanent part of Robert Viktorovich's family, just as Popov and Bronka are able to continue having sex unnoticed despite the communal apartment's close quarters. The actions of Popov and Robert Viktorovich recall Petrushevskaya's rapists and seducers, yet "Bronka" and *Sonechka* treat their misdeeds not as a crime but as a mystery of the body. In the first work, we only learn the details from Bronka's viewpoint, since Popov died many decades ago. Robert Viktorovich's guilt before his wife, the narrator of *Sonechka* hints, is less important than the other relationship destroyed by the affair: the passionate friendship between Jasia and his daughter. The male heterosexual in Ulitskaya's works is more nuanced than his predecessor in women's prose—the multifaceted treatment of often immoral characters suggests a search for comprehension instead of invective. While the author does not applaud her male miscreants, she shows that recognition of all aspects of sexuality is crucial to understanding life.⁸⁹

Ulitskaya humanizes *telesnost'*; it is more than the loyal servant of the state (as Stalinism would have had it) or a metonym of the abused populace (the body in *chernukha*). The physical form, these narratives imply, is not merely a springboard to loftier plans or an indication of how such ideas have failed. Ulitskaya's works avoid the post-Soviet corporeality of despair. Instead, they assess the body as a dynamic part of the human experience, in particular as a source of the sincerity and tolerance the author extols. Her writing redirects attention to the fundamental role of the flesh, the raw material that both supports and delimits higher aspirations. That the body makes us human is an obvious statement nonetheless neglected by idea-oriented Russian literature. Ulitskaya implies that harnessing *telesnost'* as the engine of ideology is at times almost as invidious as ideology itself. Indeed, her narratives are populated by those who have been physically and morally misshapen by fascism

and Communism, two systems that view corporeality as a human resource for the state.

Interactions between bodies are also important. Such relations transcend the sexual or physiological brutality Eliot Borenstein decries in the *telesnost'* of "overkill." Ulitskaya guides the reader to recognize how deteriorating, imperfect, or sexually "deviant" corporeality forges ties between people as it elicits compassion and models humility. Physical needs and failings, her narratives imply, connect individuals in a positive and meaningful manner that opposes the ersatz affinities of the Great Family. The body is a natural part of life; ignoring it is both futile and self-destructive.

80. The mention of New York evokes Sergei Dovlatov's prose about Soviet exiles; on Ulitskaia and Dovlatov, see Nina Malygina, "Zdes' i seichas: Poetika ischeznoventiia," *Oktiabr'*, no. 9 (2000): 156; Adrian Wanner, *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New Translingual Diaspora* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 10.

81. On Ulitskaia as traitorous emigrant, see, for example, Ol'ga Nadezhkina, "Naviazannaia subkul'tura," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 19 (2008): 10. Shcheglova, "Nesbyvshaiasia mechta," 219–20, 218.

82. Liberals are only a subset of the heterogeneous post-1991 intelligentsia: see Masha Gessen, *Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism* (London: Verso, 1997), 18. The comments on the similarities between readers in different countries come from Ulitskaia, reading and talk at Columbia University; Ulitskaia, interview with Skomp.

83. Ulitskaia distinguishes honesty from falsehood in *Sviashchennyi musor*, 166. On Men', Solzhenitsyn, and Sakharov, see Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Krizis—pravil'noe sostoianie," 34, 35, 44. On Iulii Daniel', see Ulitskaia, "My v zerkale iskusstva: Vash Iu," *Obshchaia gazeta*, no. 47 (2000): 10; on Men', Sakharov, and Solzhenitsyn, see Ulitskaia, "Tri avtora," 5.

84. The *narod* is as much a cultural construct as the intelligentsia. In late Soviet culture this became evident when both of these groups shaped village prose, whose sometimes retrograde values Ulitskaia eschews. For an overview of these authors, see Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

85. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Ia ne khochu golosovat' za men'shee zlo," *Russkii kur'er*, 10 March 2004, 1; on the intelligentsia's presumptions about the *narod*, see Masha Gessen, *Dead Again*, 7. For a discussion of the intelligentsia's perception of values and survival, see Paperno, "Personal Accounts," 610. On the shared emphasis on writing, common dislike of free trade, and other similarities between *intelligent* and the state, see Clark, "The King Is Dead."

86. Ulitskaia, "Krizis—pravil'noe sostoianie," 20.

87. For a recent (if slanted) discussion of Stalinism and public debate, see David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

88. "Liudmila Ulitskaia: Obshchestvo podrostkov." On commercializing the Soviet past, see Ulitskaia, "Predislovie: Trudnyi podrostok protiv Velikogo mifa," in *Khochu zhit! Dnevnik sovetskoi shkol'nitsy*, by Nina Lugovskaia (Moscow: RIPOL-klassik, 2010), 3.

89. Ulitskaia frequently expresses concern about the common people and the future of the nation. For a fuller discussion of the "society of adolescents," see Ulitskaia, "Lichinki, deti lichinok," interview with Anastasiia Gosteva, *Gazeta.ru*, http://www.gazeta.ru/culture/2010/12/21/a_3472805.shtml.

90. For an overview of xenophobic fears over birthrates and the gene pool, see Serguei Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 100–105.

91. On her disavowal of literature as instruction, see Ulitskaia, "Liudmila Ulitskaia: Kak dlia vzroslykh, tol'ko luchshe," interview with A. Onoprienko, *Trud*, 14 September 2004, 6.

92. Concerning Ulitskaia's work with hospitals, see her foreword to *Chelovek popal v bol'nitsu*, comp. Liudmila Ulitskaia (Moscow: Eksmo, 2009). For one of Ulitskaia's

first commentaries on the tolerance series, see "Pisatel' Liudmila Ulitskaia: 'Nashi knigi o cheloveke, kotoryi ne takov, kak vy,'" *Izvestiia*, 19 June 2006, 12.

93. Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair*.

94. For an image of Ulitskaia's novels as a unified text, see Radostina Veleva, "Romanite na Liudmila Ulitskaia — mezhdru traditsiata i novata slovesnost," *Bol'garskaia rusistika*, nos. 1–2 (2010): 155. On Ulitskaia's own description of her works as continuations of their predecessors, see the article discussing the author's visit to Vologda, "Liudmila Ulitskaia: Pishu to, o chem znaiu," <http://www.cultinfo.ru/home/0975/15.htm>.

Chapter 1. Redeeming the Body

1. Ulitskaia, *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, 294–95.

2. Ulitskaia, *Sviashchennyi musor*, 210.

3. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 2; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, *Theories of Representation and Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 19.

4. On sentiment and sentimentalism, see Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism*; Mikhail Zolotonosov, "Chitatei'," 25.

5. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux, "Introduction: Lost in the Myths," in *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 20. On the mind/body binary, see Rolf Hellebust, *Flesh to Metal: Soviet Literature and the Alchemy of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 149.

6. One key example of Stalinist physique appears in the film *Circus (Tirk)*, which depicts an American circus star who finds refuge in the USSR with her mixed-race son; Grigorii Aleksandrov, director (Moscow: Mosfil'm, 1936). Lilya Kaganovsky depicts its opposite: the male body sacrificed for the glory of the state. See Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

7. Yury Trifonov, *The Exchange and Other Stories*, trans. Ellendea Proffer et al. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002). For an even more influential view of middle age, see *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (Moskva slezam ne verit)*; Vladimir Men'shov, director (Moscow: Mosfil'm, 1979).

8. Vasilii Pichul, director, *Malen'kaia Vera* (Moscow: Kinostudiia im. M. Gor'kogo, 1988). For the classic discussion of the Great Family, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 114, 115. This translation of *chernukha* comes from Helena Goscilo. On perestroika and bodily trauma, see Goscilo, "Perestroika and Post-Soviet Prose," 309.

9. Aleksandr Rogozhkin, director, *Ovobemosti natsional'noi okhoty* (St. Petersburg: Lenfil'm, 1995). For an overview of 1990s fears of population decline, see Michele Rivkin-Fish, "From 'Demographic Crisis' to 'Dying Nation': The Politics of Language and Reproduction in Russia," in Goscilo and Lanoux, *Gender and National Identity*, 151–73. On the sexualized female body, see Eliot Borenstein, *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

10. For an overview of homosexuality after 1991, a discussion of selective tolerance, and a nuanced reading of Ulitskaia's "Golubchik," see Brian James Baer, *Other Russias:*

Homosexuality and the Crisis of Post-Soviet Identity (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Baer discusses the relationship between Yeltsin-era homophobia and literature in "Engendering Suspicion: Homosexual Panic in the Post-Soviet *Detektiv*," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (2005): 24–42.

11. Aleksei Balabanov, director, *Brat 2* (Moscow: STV, 2000). On Putin as physical image and ideological brand, see Helena Goscilo, "Russia's Ultimate Celebrity: VVP as VIP *Objet d'art*," in *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*, ed. Helena Goscilo (London: Routledge, 2012), 6–36.

12. For a discussion of Dontsova and Robski, see Olga Mesropova, "Crime, Byt, and Fairy-Tales: Daria Dontsova and Post-Soviet Ironic Detective Fiction," *Slavic and East European Journal*, no. 1 (2008): 113–28; Mesropova, "The Discreet Charm of the Russian Bourgeoisie," *Russian Review*, no. 1 (2009): 89–101; Borenstein, *Overkill*, 18.

13. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 19; Grymov, *Kazus Kukotskogo*.

14. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 18.

15. Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 12.

16. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 11–12, 14.

17. *Ibid.*, 31; Goscilo and Lanoux, "Introduction," 13.

18. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 73.

19. *Ibid.*, 76.

20. *Ibid.*, 238.

21. *Ibid.*, 306.

22. *Ibid.*, 347, 344; Lev Pirogov, "Kipiatok ne dlia chainikov: Ulitskaia, Tolstaia i natsional'nyi vopros," *Nezavisimaia gazeta, Ex Libris*, 12 January 2006, 5.

23. Ulitskaia, "Pevchaia Masha," in *Liudi nashego tsaria*, 126, 130, 131, 132, 135.

24. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Doch' Bukhary," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2002), 50, 57.

25. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Lialin dom," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 71. The description of Kazia exemplifies the female gaze Yelena Furman discusses. See Furman, "Writing the Body in New Women's Prose: Sexuality and Textuality in Contemporary Russian Fiction" (PhD diss., University of California–Los Angeles, 2004).

26. Ulitskaia, "Doch' Bukhary," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 53–54; Ulitskaia, "Lialin dom," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 73, 75, 71.

27. Ulitskaia, *Veselye pokhorony*, 55, 63–64, 234.

28. Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 11. Keith Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

29. On the damaged male body, see Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade*, 11; Kuklin, "Kazus Ulitskoi," 179.

30. Ulitskaia, "Podkidysh," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 155, 161–62, 152.

31. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Iskrenne Vash Shurik* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005), 208, 178. On disability and marginalization, see Linton, *Claiming Disability*, 12.

32. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "The Chosen People," trans. Isabel Heaman, in *Lives in Transit: A Collection of Recent Russian Women's Writing*, ed. Helena Goscilo (Dana Point, CA: Ardis, 1995), 90, 92.

33. *Ibid.*, 91. On the importance of contemplation, see Ulitskaia and Khodorkovskii, "Dialogi: Liudmila Ulitskaia—Mikhail Khodorkovskii," in *Star'i, dialogi, inter'iu*, by Mikhail Khodorkovskii (Moscow: Eksmo, 2010), 132.

34. Ulitskaia, "Doch' Bukhary," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 56, 58, 59, 50, 52, 55. Tat'iana Kazarina observes Ulitskaia's women employing seemingly superhuman strength. Ailing Alya, for example, manages to prolong her life so that her daughter will be old enough to marry before Alya dies. See Kazarina, "Bednye rodstvenniki," 170.

35. Andrei Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool: Russian Folk Beliefs, A Cultural History*, trans. Joanne Turnbull and Nikolai Formozov (Moscow: Glas, 2007), 260. The *iurodivvaia* (female holy fool) in Ulitskaia's works manifests humility more than other behaviors typical of the holy fool.

36. Svetlana Vasilenko's *Little Fool (Durochka)* contains the best-developed example of the *iurodivvaia*, who travels through time to mitigate suffering. On Vasilenko, see Svitlana Kobets, "From Fool to Mother to Savior: The Poetics of Orthodox Christianity and Folklore in Svetlana Vasilenko's Novel-Vita *Little Fool* (Durochka)," *Slavic and East European Journal*, no. 1 (2007): 87–110.

37. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Dar nerukotvornyi," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 114, 124–25, 120, 121.

38. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Semero sviatykh iz derevni Briukho*, in *Russkoe varen'e i drugoe* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008), 9, 36, 69, 66, 68, 7, 71.

39. On the literary pedigree of the holy fool, see Ulitskaia, "Iskrenne vasha," 25. Vasilenko's novella *Shamara* offers another positive image of a transgendered character: the mercurial but ultimately kind hermaphrodite Lera. See Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life*, 89.

40. For a scandalous critique of women's prose and the body, see Pavel Basinskii, "Pozabyvshie dobro? Zametki na poliakh 'novoï zhenskoi prozy,'" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 7 (1991): 10.

41. See, for example, the acerbic comments by Vladimir Rudinskii, "Liudmila Ulitskaia, 'Liudi nashego tsaria,'" *Nasha strana* (Buenos Aires), 24 September 2005, 3. On the link between biology and the physiological, see Kuklin, "Kazus Ulitskoi," 177–83.

42. Ulitskaia, *Sviashchennyi musor*, 427.

43. *Ibid.*, 462.

44. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Medea and Her Children*, trans. Arch Tait (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 65, 69, 187.

45. Ulitskaia, *Medeia i ee deti*, 154, 153.

46. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 95, 169, 269.

47. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward*, trans. Rebecca Frank (New York: Dial, 1968). Petrushevskia likewise links totalitarianism and illness in her grim novella *Little Terrible (Malen'kaia Groznaia)*: Liudmila Petrushevskia, *Malen'kaia Groznaia*, in *Dom devushkek*. On the relationship between Stalinism and illness in this novella, see Tat'iana Rovenskaia, "Opyt novogo zhenskogo mifotvorchestva: 'Medeia i ee deti' L. Ulitskoi i 'Malen'kaia Groznaia' L. Petrushevskoi," *Adam i Eva: Al'manakh gendernoi istorii*, ed. L. P. Repina (Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii RAN, 2001), 156–57.

48. On men and the *sbarashka*, see Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 35, 54. Predecessors focused less on assault of the body and more on domesticity; the first major work to do so—Lidiia Chukovskaia's terrifying *Sof'ia Petrovna*—was penned

during the Stalin period itself. Given Anglophone Slavists' fascination with this era, it is all the more unfortunate that *The Kukotskii Case* has not yet been translated into English.

49. Ulitskaia, *Medea and Her Children*, 67.

50. For the connections between biology and medicine, see Ulitskaia, "Liudmila Ulitskaia: I Accept Everything," 74. On Pavel Alekseevich and Spasokukotskii, see Ulitskaia, "Ia ne khochu," 1; Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 32.

51. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 165, 140, 73–75, 77–78, 211, 31.

52. See I. Grekova, *Perelom*, in *Na ispytaniakh* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990); Marina Palei, "The Bloody Women's Ward," trans. Arch Tait, in *Women's View*, ed. Natasha Perova and Andrew Bromfield (Moscow: Glas, 1992). One critic notes that uncaring doctors contributed to women's persistent feeling of shame connected with the body, yet another instance of ideology manifested through corporeality: Tat'iana Rovenskaia, "Vinovata li ia . . . ? Ili fenomen gendernoi viny (na materiale zhenskoi prozy 80-kh–nachalo 90-kh godov)," *Gendernye issledovaniia*, no. 3 (1999): 218.

53. On *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, see Mariia Remizova, "Grandes dames prshedshego sezona: Zametki o literaturnykh premiakh," *Kontinent*, no. 112 (2002): 396–405.

54. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *The Funeral Party*, trans. Cathy Porter (New York: Schocken Books, 1999), 145.

55. Ulitskaia, *Veselye pokhorony*, 283.

56. Ol'ga Slavnikova posits that female nakedness in the novel denotes community and lack of competition among the women rather than eroticism. See Slavnikova, "Nedoleit ukazyvaet na tsel'," *Ural*, no. 2 (1999): 184. The film adaptation of this work is striking and supports Slavnikova's argument: Vladimir Fokin, director, *Niotkuda s liubov'iu ili Veselye pokhorony* (Moscow: Fora-fil'm, 2007). On the significance of the body, see Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, vii.

57. Aleksei Balabanov, director, *Brat* (Moscow: STV, 1997). For a discussion of the economic and social crises facing the elderly in the 1990s, see, for example, Victoria Velkoff and Kevin Kinsella, "Russia's Aging Population," in *Russia's Torn Safety Nets: Health and Social Welfare during the Transition*, ed. Mark Field and Judy Twigg (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 231–50.

58. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Pisatel' Liudmila Ulitskaia: 'Vsekh interesuet tol'ko—kakoe imenno bel'e nosila Knipper-Chekhova,'" interview with Natal'ia Kochetkova, *Izvestiia*, 27 July 2005, 12. On the author's admiration of the older generation, see Ulitskaia, *Sviashchennyi musor*, 67.

59. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's House," *Stories and Prose Poems*, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 3–52; Liudmila Ulitskaia, "March 1953," trans. Arch Tait, in *Present Imperfect: Stories by Russian Women*, ed. Ayesha Kagal and Natasha Perova (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 12.

60. Ulitskaia, *Moi vnuk Veniamin*, in *Russkoe varen'e i drugoe*.

61. For analysis of this discourse, see Rivkin-Fish, "From 'Demographic Crisis' to 'Dying Nation.'" Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 444; Ulitskaia, "Vtorogo marta togo zhe goda," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 176. See Ulitskaia's comments about Russians accepting death while Americans are unwilling to discuss the subject: "Liudmila Ulitskaia: I Accept Everything," 81–82.

62. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 21–22, 395.

63. For the description of Vasilisa in the bathhouse, see *ibid.*, 410. On the need for feminists to reconsider corporeality, see Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xi, xiii.

64. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 442. The discussion of bathing in *The Kukotskii Case* is based on Benjamin Sutcliffe, "Mother, Daughter, History: Embodying the Past in Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Sonechka* and *The Case of Kukotskii*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, no. 4 (2009): 606–22.

65. Ulitskaia, *Zelenyi sbater*, 335, 340.

66. On the role of the widow, see Helena Goscolo, "Widowhood as Genre and Profession à la Russe: Nation, Shadow, Curator, and Publicity Agent," in Goscolo and Lanoux, *Gender and National Identity*, 55–74; Ulitskaia, *Medea and Her Children*, 149.

67. Ulitskaia, "Gulia," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 93, 86, 91. On Ulitskaia versus Baranskaia, see Helena Goscolo, "Introduction: Squaring the Circle," in *Lives in Transit*, xv.

68. Ulitskaia notes that Shurik was the prototype for the protagonist in *Sincerely Yours, Shurik*; perhaps compassion as well as attraction motivates Gulia's latest admirer (Ulitskaia et al., "Roman li to, chto ia pishu? Otchet o Bukerovskoi konferentsii," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 2 [2005]: 28). On Russia as a weak nation, see Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair*, 5.

69. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Logika erosa," interview with Natal'ia Dardykina, *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 24 December 2001, 6. On women's prose and the visibly traumatized female body, see Goscolo, "Perestroika and Post-Soviet Prose," and Goscolo, *Debexing Sex*, 87–116.

70. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 48.

71. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Chuzhie deti," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 132, 137; Kazarina, "Bednye rodstvenniki," 171.

72. Ulitskaia, "Lialin dom," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 78, 80.

73. Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, 16, emphasis in original; Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 13–14, 445. On the function of dreams in *The Kukotskii Case*, see Iuliia Semikina, "Khudozhestvennaia fenomenologiiia izobrazheniia bytiia i inobytiia v romane L. Ulitskoi 'Kazus Kukotskogo,'" *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Philologia*, no. 1 (2008): 123–30.

74. Ulitskaia's screenplay for *The Liberty Sisters* is her work most shaped by *chernukha*. For a critique of how Ulitskaia depicts sexuality, see Ol'ga Ryzhova, "Kumiriia: Koitus Kukotskogo, ili Samaia intelligentnaia domokhoziaika," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 37 (2004): 11.

75. Ostrenko, "Subkultura detstva," 60; Ulitskaia, "March 1953," 11, 12, 20.

76. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Vetrianaia ospa," in *Sonechka* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008), 369, 391. Kazarina views the sexualized elements in "Chicken Pox" as a principally non-erotic rite of passage rooted in biology. See Kazarina, "Bednye rodstvenniki," 172.

77. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Liudmila Ulitskaia: Rugat' intelligentiiu — uzhasnaia poshlost'," interview with Ol'ga Mozgovaia, *Vecherniiaia Moskva*, 29 May 2005, 5; Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Bronka," in *Sonechka and Other Stories*, trans. Arch Tait (Moscow: Glas, 1998), 125, 126, 127.

78. On the male gaze and the pleasures of looking, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Susan Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 58–69. See Palei, *Kabiriia s obvodnogo kunala*, in *Long Distance, ili Slavianskii aktsent* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000).

79. Evgeniia Shcheglova discusses the novel's supposed emphasis on sexuality in

"O spokojnom dostoinstve—i ne tol'ko o nem: Liudmila Ulitskaia i ee mir," *Neva*, no. 7 (2003): 184.

80. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 286, 291, 328, 334, 337–38.

81. On reading as romance, see Ulitskaia, *Sviashchennyi musor*, 33–34. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Sonechka*, in *Sonechka: A Novella and Other Stories*, trans. Arch Tait (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 7, 11, emphasis in original.

82. Ulitskaia, *Sonechka*, 9.

83. *Ibid.*, 33–34, 43–44, 39, 52.

84. Nina Voronel, "Sekret Don Zhuana," *Novoe vremia*, no. 40 (2006): 35; Ulitskaia, *Iskrenne Vash Shurik*, 168.

85. Ulitskaia ascribes the sensation of weightlessness, suspension, or flight to several other characters, usually during sex, including Valentina in *The Funeral Party*, Masha in *Medea and Her Children*, and Kazia in "Lialia's Home." Ulitskaia, *Veselye pokhorony*, 283; Ulitskaia, *Medeia i ee deti*, 238–39; Ulitskaia, "Lialin dom," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 262; Susan Rubin Suleiman, "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 10.

86. Ulitskaia, *Iskrenne Vash Shurik*, 337.

87. Ulitskaia, "Bednaia, schastlivaia Kolyvanova," in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 213–14; Ulitskaia, "Telo krasavitsy" and "Pristavnaia lestnitsa," in *Liudi nashego tsaria*, 79–89 and 26–31.

88. Ulitskaia, "Strashnaia dorozhnaia istoriia," in *Liudi nashego tsaria*, 261, 265.

89. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Sonechka*, in *Bednye, zlye, liubimye*, 256–57, 267. On the need for understanding instead of dogma, see Ulitskaia, "Rezultat uvidim ne srazu," interview with Maia Kucherskaia, *Vedomosti piatnitsa*, 11 July 2008, <http://friday.vedomosti.ru/article.shtml?2008/07/11/13071>.

Chapter 2. Ideas That Bind

1. Liudmila Ulitskaia, "Subbotnee inter'viu: Liudmila Ulitskaia," interview with Arslan Saidov, *Radio Svoboda*, 3 May 2003, <http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/article/24188014.html>.

2. Ulitskaia, *Sviashchennyi musor*, 210. For a sense of Russia's claims to Crimea, see, for example, Viktor Martynok, "Rossiia ne imeet prava predat' russkikh v Krymu," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 27 February 2014, <http://www.km.ru/world/2014/02/27/protivo-stoyanie-na-ukraine-2013-14/733415-rossiya-ne-imeet-prava-predat-russkikh-v->

3. On family as a structuring metaphor in Ulitskaia's work, see, among others, Andrei Arkhangel'skii, "Zhizn' ulitskaia," *Ogonek*, no. 9 (2008), <http://ogoniok.com/5036/27/>. Several interviews discuss the centrality of the family in her work: see, for example, Ulitskaia, "Liudmila Ulitskaia: I Accept Everything," and Ulitskaia, "Zapretnykh tem net," interview with Andrei Zaitsev, *Nezavisimaia gazeta, Religii*, 17 December 2003, 8.

4. On *Daniel Stein*, Akseiov, and history, see Larisa Romanovskaia, "Apokrif ot dobrogo diadi," *Kul'tura*, no. 44 (2006): 2.

5. Concerning the shift from public to private, see, among others, Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), xiii; Sergei Ushakin, "Mesto-imeni-ia: Sem'ia kak sposob organizatsii zhizni," in *Semeinye uzy*:

Modeli dlia sborki, comp. and ed. Sergei Ushakin (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2004), 110.

6. Irina Savkina, "Rod/dom: Semeinaia khronika Liudmily Ulitskoi i Vasiliia Akseiova," in Ushakin, *Semeinye uzy*, 1157; on the Great Family, see Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 114, 115.

7. Mikhail Chiaureli, director, *Padenie Berlina* (Moscow: Mosfil'm, 1949). For an important discussion of state, kinship, and intimacy, see Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

8. I. Grekova, "Letom v gorode," in *Na ispytaniakh*, 486–87, 492; for a discussion of "Summer in the City," see Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life*, 44. On the relationship between ideology and national shifts in intimacy, see Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 30.

9. Helena Goscilo and Yana Hashamova, "Cinepaternity: The Psyche and Its Heritage," in *Cinepaternity: Fathers and Sons in Soviet and Post-Soviet Film*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Yana Hashamova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 10; Georgii Danelliia, director, *Osenii marafon* (Moscow: Mosfil'm, 1979); Vladimir Men'shov, director, *Moskva slezam ne verit* (Moscow: Mosfil'm, 1979).

10. Petrushevskaiia, *Svoi krug*, in *Dom devushek*, 347–48; Seth Graham, "Models of Male Kinship in Perestroika Cinema," in Goscilo and Hashamova, *Cinepaternity*, 73–75. On the breakdown of the Great Family, see Goscilo and Hashamova, "Cinepaternity," 14.

11. On the symbolism of prostitution, see Eliot Borenstein, "Selling Russia: Prostitution, Masculinity, and Metaphors of Nationalism after Perestroika," in Goscilo and Lanoux, *Gender and National Identity*, 186. On the family's shifting image, see Alexander Prokhorov, "From Family Reintegration to Carnivalesque Degradation: Dis-mantling Soviet Communal Myths in Russian Cinema of the Mid-1990s," *Slavic and East European Journal*, no. 2 (2007): 272; Balabanov, *Brat and Brat* 2.

12. Andrei Zviagintsev, director, *Vozvrashchenie* (Moscow: REN TV, 2003). On Putin as father figure, see Goscilo and Hashamova, "Cinepaternity," 10; Ushakin, "Mesto-imeni-ia," 10.

13. One perceptive critic argues in an early article that Ulitskaia's strong focus on kinship explains her emphasis on Jewish and Eastern ethnicities. Kazarina, "Bednye rodstvenniki," 169; for a similar discussion that focuses on Russian Orthodoxy, see E. V. Larieva, "Sviatye i greshnye: Dva rasskaza L. Ulitskoi o sem'e ('Oni zhili dolgo,' '... i umerli v odin den')," *Filologiya i chelovek* (Barnaul), no. 3 (2008): 190.

14. On Solzhenitsyn and Ulitskaia, see Powers, "Novel Histories," 154.

15. Ulitskaia, *Medea and Her Children*, 18.

16. *Ibid.*

17. The comparison of Medea with the elderly women of *derevenskaia proza* comes from Shcheglova, "O spokojnom dostoinstve," 187. For a sense of conservative mores in village prose, see Valentin Rasputin, "Cherchez la femme," *Nash sovremennik*, no. 3 (1990): 168–72.

18. Ulitskaia, "Ustanovlenie ottsovtsva," in *Liudi nashego tsaria*, 111, 115, 119.

19. Ulitskaia discusses scientific study of the family in "Korzina, kartina," 3.

20. Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 92, 96. In her Lacanian reading of *The Kukotskii Case*, Irina Zherebkina underscores that Pavel Alekseevich is a stepfather and not a father per se (Zherebkina, *Gendernye 90-e, ili Fallosa ne sushchestvuet* [St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2003], 183–84). Ulitskaia, *Kazus Kukotskogo*, 169; Savkina, "Rod/dom," 179–80;