Hiding and Using Sexuality: the Artist's Controversial Subject in Modern Russian Women's Literature

> "I had, of course, lovers. ... They shocked me with their crude sensuality ... I felt very unpleasant, because I can at most suffer kisses, but all the other drives me mad."[1]

In a society like the Soviet one which derived its identity from uniformity in thinking and feeling and which attached Otherness only to (suppressed) ideological opposites, sexuality may have been the only private place and the sole possibility for conquering the world by sensuous activity.[2] In Russia, recent psychological studies suggest, however, that, to this day, a woman's sexual orientation is fixed on male needs only. Her own pleasure in sexual activity allegedly menaces male potency impaired by Soviet ideology.[3] Using the Orthodox Church's myth of chastity and the shocking experience of the sexual permissiveness of the 1920s,[4] puritan Soviet ideology rejected independent sexual relationships as an embodiment of an alternative life. My analysis will thus examine sexual behaviour in relation to the internalization of totalitarianism and with the concurrent striving for inner independence. Both the internalization of totalitarian thinking and the striving for intellectual independence are characteristic features of the late Soviet system, which can be considered equally as a specific post-Soviet issue linking up with modern and post-modern discussions of identity. This problem is illustrated by Russian women writers, whose protagonists' gender identity is engaged or disengaged according to the characters' varying approaches to female sexuality. While Liudmilla Ulitskaia brings gender-specific difference back into the reader's consciousness through her very powerful and very feminine protagonists, those of Nina Sadur reject feminine qualities or connect them with dictatorial power claims. Obviously, the atrophy of their sexuality leads to a lack of identity. Ulitskaia, however, creates a link between fulfilled sexuality and personal stability and, amazingly for a Russian writer, there is hardly any taboo topic in her world of pleasures. Thus, I am going to focus on how these two writers, each in her own way, react significantly to the pressure of totalitarianism on sexual life.

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[1] Sadur, N.: Almaznaja dolina. In: Ved'miny slezki. Moskva 1994, p. 18.
All the quotations in this paper are translated into English by the author unless otherwise noted.

[2] Dark, O.: Ženskie antinomii. In: Družba narodov (1991) 4, p. 269.

[3] Lipovskaja, O.: Der Mythos der Frau in der heutigen sowjetischen Kultur. In: Feministische Studien (1992) 2, p. 69.

[4] Kollontaj, A.: The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman, ed. by I. Fetscher. New York 1971, p. 7.

"Since my childhood I have had an alarming distance from our society", Ulitskaia explained in an interview.[5] Thus human relationships in her writings are based on the belief that the values of private life, with the family at their centre, are of greater existential importance than those of the outer world. Ulitskaia's protagonists retreat into the private sphere in order to resist ideological influence. This gives them the chance to focus on subjective relationships, and most importantly, on the individual Self. In Ulitskaia, the question of identity is always closely connected with sexuality. As a former geneticist, she emphasizes that "a person's disposition and physiology have an influence on his/her way of thinking, his/her reaction and his/her creativity".[6] Birth and death, blood, sperm and milk – Ulitskaia does not omit the physical side of life, which she wants considered as natural. In the context of Russian (and Soviet) prudery, the bodily functions have a significance different from that in Western European discourse. Exploring the sexual side of human nature will turn one's eyes first towards individual differences and not towards social or ideological fields which, during Soviet times, represented fundamental differences in human relationships. Secondly, bringing sexuality into the foreground gives the author the possibility for approaching the physical side, which, compared with the intellectual side, was of secondary importance in the discourse of modernity. Accordingly, in this connection, Ulitskaia's interest in female characters and female sexuality is refreshing as it expresses the "Other" in all its complexity. The physical discoveries of eleven-year-old girls who are playing with their genitals to imitate the sexual act or the act of birth,[7] the sexual activity of the old Gulia who seduces the son of her friend for her so called last time[8] and the fruitful passion of the fourteen-year old Bronka for her old neighbour whom she elevated to the status of a prince,[9] emphasize the importance of sensuality. Ulitskaia continuously challenges social conventions of female sexuality such as chastity and devotion by discussing the seductive and sensual opposites of these traditional female roles. Ignoring the traditional concepts of femininity and rehabilitating carnal lust as a prominent part of female desire, she sees a woman in a new light, which was confirmed to her by a reader to whom she had disclosed previously unknown features of woman's nature.[10]

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[5] Ulitskaia, Liudmilla: Mne interesna zhizn serykh liudei. In: Literaturnaia gazeta (1995) 38, p. 3; Ulitskaia, Liudmilla: Moi dom - moia krepost'. In: Moskovskie novosti (1996) 8, p. 36.

[6] Parnell, Christina: Interview with Liudmilla Ulitskaia (Feldafing/Germany, 26. September 1998, unpublished).

[7] Ulitskaia, Liudmilla: Vetrianaia ospa. In: Bednye rodstvenniki. Moscow, p. 189-212.

[8] Ulitskaia, Liudmilla: Gulia. In: Ibid, p. 96-107.

[9] Ulitskaia, Liudmilla: Bronka. In: Ibid, p. 16-34 .

[10] Parnell, Christina: Interview with Liudmilla Ulitskaia. Ibid.

That physical and cultural experiences cannot be viewed separatedly becomes apparent when she examines the phenomenon of femininity in her protagonists. In Russia, the short story “Sonechka” (1992)[11] gained recognition for the author only after she had received a French literature prize in 1993. This work will be at the centre of my analysis because it exemplifies Ulitskaia's views of the gender debate more comprehensively than any other text. It describes different forms of female identity which, at varying levels, unite female and male qualities being shown as products of both biological and social factors. The story does not turn away from the discussion of male identity in all its ambivalence. Femininity is humorously pictured as peacefully existing within patriarchal models (mother, courtesan, emancipated woman), which signifies both social and personal constructs. But the protagonist's satisfaction in a traditional woman's life has been misunderstood by literary critics in the West who take it as a conservative message conveyed by the text. An example is Drubek-Meyer’s essay on the feminine eros where she takes Sonechka’s 'sexual pleasure in giving' out of context and concludes that the female body “vegetates away”[12].

However, “Sonechka” describes significant differences in the process of female maturation. This is the point which should be made with regard to individual female experience in Russian women's literature. In order to support these observations, the “Sonechka” text will be discussed from four different points of view.

First, the young Jewish girl Sonia, still a virgin, marries a poor, inspired artist, gives him a child, and lives according to the charity principle, ie the myth of the female principle of life which is fulfilled in love for the Other excluding thoughts of one's own Self.[13] Hence, even when Sonia loses her husband's devotion to a younger woman, she supports his choice and, later, as a widow, finds a substitute for real life in literature and in caring for her husband's grave. This can stand as a classic example for the ambivalence of the “charity function” where feminine devotion leads to self-sacrifice by using the other person as a means for self-maintenance.[14] But this is also meant to provoke the

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[11] See Ulitskaia 1992, 61-88. The following quotations are taken from the book edition (Ulitskaia 1994d, 231-287).

[12] See Drubek-Meyer 1996, 62: “We can not find any public female erotic discourse. ... The women gloss over their social and emotional situation. The female body vegetates away”.

[13] With the charity principle I refer to Gilligan, who established in her analysis the female adolescents' preference for solicitude, devotion and responsibility in comparison with the male's preference for justice. Recent feminist publications call into question this female preference because of a lack of awareness for their self-realization (Gilligan 1982, 18 et seq., Benhabib/Cornell 1987, Rommelspacher 1992, Lindhoff, 1995, 158).

[14] In her attachment to family, house, stove and in her poetic renderings of feminine allure, she is parroting patriarchal theories of "supplementation" by women (See Bovenschen 1979).

reader into questioning his or her own position. If wide-reaching plurality is to be taken seriously as an attribute of the postmodern way of thinking, we shall also accept a vision of life based on maternal solicitude.

Secondly, in discussing Sonechka's devotion, Ulitskaia refers to the traditional "Sonechka discourse" in Russian literature and unfolds her version which, in its self-sacrifice, follows Dostoevskii's model. Equally, her heroine's bonds to the earth can be seen as a re-interpretation of Tsvetaeva's version.[15] The aesthetic aura of both Ulitskaia and Tsvetaeva refers to an existence transformed into a stream of love which is close to Mariolatry. Fantasy and enthusiasm as the dominating characteristics in Tsvetaeva's Sonechka and selflessness as the most conspicuous feature in Ulitskaia's Sonechka provoke a reflection about the different qualities of love and the differences in female desire. Plot, as well as the portrait of characters and colour symbolism, relates the protagonist to the Maternal in the sense of the body as a house and of the home as a working-place. The tone of her skin ("dark, saddish umber and rose-coloured, warm"[16]), the breasts and the stream of milk, the belly and the back appear in the function of feeding the child and warming the husband. Her body finds pleasure in giving: "[…] and she died from this insufferable double burden of fortune."[17] Reading her satisfied comment on Robert's "restless matrimonial assiduity"[18] we assume that sexual enjoyment is a matter of course. Her physical desire seems to coincide with a patriarchal understanding of femininity: to react but not to act. But by refusing her the physical prerequisites, ie continued fertility, the author alienates Sonechka's fulfilment of maternity, telling us that "Sonechka's uterus was under-developed"[19]. In addition, the heroine's bonds to the earth are complemented with a passion of another kind which seeks fulfilment not in uniting with another but in writing. The motif of plunging into words, into the harmony and truth inherent in classical Russian literature, functions as a metaphor for a flight from reality. The passion of this escape is ironized by the narrator as a diversion from the body by "swoon[ing] away" and "narcotizing". This motif is always significant in connection with a "feminine defeat" in Sonechka. So her shame at her clumsy body as a young girl and the derision from her class-mate with whom she fell in love lead to her immersion in books. There is a long break connected with her marriage, but passion re-emerges after her husband's infidelity.

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[15] Compare the almost identical scene when Tsvetaeva's Sonia and Ulitskaia's Sonia are sitting in the chair, mending socks (Tsvetaeva 1994, 318 and Ulitskaia 1994, 255).
[16] Ulitskaia 1994d, 236
[17] ibid., 249.
[18] ibid., 253. Matrimonial sexuality includes the right for sexual pleasure. This conforms to the Tora. See for example Levinson (1985, 125): Levinson quotes the Talmud: "It's the husband's obligation to give his wife sexual pleasure."
[19] (ibid.).

A third area of my reading is opened up by the relation to name symbolism (Sonia is the diminutive of Sofiia, ie wisdom). Solov'ev's Sofiian philosophy sees the Sofiia figure as a "twofold unity", distinguishing between, first, the "creative", presented as the "unity of the divinely originated word", logos, and second, the "created", understood as the unity realized within the body. But Solov'ev sees Sofiia not only as a receptacle but as the actively ennobling part of the idea of creation, the connection of logos and eros.[20] In her solicitude, Sonechka lives strictly by the first value in Russian classical literature, compassion, and by the Christian command of charity. Beyond that, her background appears to have influenced her in some way by the Jewish tradition of respect for the Word. If this confirms Sonechka's passivity, her caring for her family and friends can be seen as activity because she understands and supports the most valuable traits of their characters. In living up to the principle of support, she transforms the concept of God. But when others no longer require her solicitousness, all activity ceases.

Apart from the husband's lover, Iasia, there is a third female figure in the novel: Sonia and Robert's daughter, Tania. Several marriages, emigration and a job with the United Nations make her the representative of a masculine career. On the other side, under the obligation for reproduction in Jewish identity, she gives birth to a son. In the specific quality of the father-daughter relationship, a post-Freudian psychoanalysis of this figure might further disclose the ambivalence of both the fatherly (masculine) and the artistic (heterogeneous). Imprinted by her father's anti-authoritarian and artistic view of the world and, thanks to his attention, free of an identity of loss,[21] the girl is emancipated into the centre of a circle of young men dominated by her mind and body. "Power", "absurdity",[22] "fearlessness" and "curiosity"[23] stand for the masculine deficits and virtues within herself which are piquantly demonstrated by her playing on the symbolic flute[24]. Devotion is difficult for her, as the narrator speaks of mechanical and passionless love-making (257) while her physical pleasure remains self-centered. Tania's only erotic (but not sexual) relationship is the one with Iasia. The provocative and allegorical character of the situation comprises the father's and daughter's projection of love onto one and the same object. Even more clearly than her father's sexually motivated desire for Iasia, the daughter's passion displays the fascination with the Other. In the imaginary unity Tania sees herself and her friend "on white horses" and "on a yacht on the sea" (265). The significance of white as feminine cannot be missed. Yet her desire is less sensual as it is directed at the boundless: "[…] her soul was longing for noble

[20] (Solov'ev 1966, 103-114).
[21] (Benjamin 1991, 277-299),
[22] (Ulitskaia 1994d, 265),
[23] (ibid, 282)
[24] (ibid, 258

communication, unity, fusion, community which has neither border nor banks" (265). In this context, her permissive sexual escapades, her excursion into science-fiction away from moralizing Russian classical literature and the moral code of her mother pertaining to faithfulness, devotion or solicitude, can be read as an escape from the polarities created by her mother and late Soviet society.

The Sonechka figure is, for the most part, positively evaluated from a one-sided point of view in Russian literary criticism.[25] However, the discourse about ambivalent femininity and female desire is ignored. We can, of course, ask whether any deconstruction of myths was intended by the author in the way discussed in this paper. That the white flowers Sonechka planted on Robert's grave do not take root seems to support this interpretation. Does earth, the embodiment of fertility, no longer accept the androgynous being Sonia has become (represented by the light mustache of the ageing woman[26]) or does the lost partner refuse her state of solicitude?

In the fourth area of my reading, the significance of the colour symbolism becomes evident. Read in the context of symbolism, the relationship between Sonia and Iasia refers to the white colour of the Anima-Sofiia in its cult both in Russian symbolism and in Jung's works on archetypes.[27] "White as the colour of church, White as the synthesis of gold and azure", we read in Florenskii's "Eschatological Mosaic" on Belyi[28], "Gold is Christ's gold and azure is Sophia's intoxicating drink. Belyj/White is the colour of the Coming, is the colour of the marriage, the Lamb of God's and Sofiia's marriage. The white colour is the colour of the illuminated femininity, the colour of the God-mankind, the colour of the church."
If we consider the thought about White as the Feminine we detect in this novel an interesting ambivalence of Self and Other within the female characters. The colour of Iasia's skin, "albumen-white"[29], contrasted against Sonia's tone of pink, rose-coloured and umber, turns out to be only another appearance of the "prime origin of life" which Robert understands as the feminine: "[…] wonder of the white, warm and living", we read, "where everything came from, grew, played and sang".[30] In this regard, Sonia's and Iasia's physical closeness while

[25] (Prusakova 1993, 236).
[26] See Ulitskaia 1994d: "... tender mustache on the upper lip changed into a slovenly sexless brush" (253).
[27] (Jung 1993, 27-37 and 1972, 49-51).
[28] See Mierau 1994: Mierau gives a comment on Florenskij's "Eschatological Mosaic", where this is interpreting Andrej Belyj as the personification of the "White" (12).
[29] (Ulitskaia 1994d, 275
[30] Ulitskaia 1994d: "... he thought about the young form's preciousness, about this form of perfection, about whom the one and only Russian genius said: 'She does not deserve to be intelligent'" (283).

sharing their grief during Robert's funeral service would have to be understood as an allegory of feminine differences. This allegory reaches beyond the myth of Lea and Rachel[31] which is mentioned explicitly in the text: "Beautiful in some way [...] Lea and Rachel [...] I never knew how beautiful Lea can be [...]."[32] Lea and Rachel (here: Sonia and Iasia) could be read as symbols of the active and the contemplative ways of life respectively, which are equally accepted in the reformed Jews' philosophy of life.[33] In Ulitskaiia, Lea and Rachel are symbols of the Mother- and the Muse-figures, which she understands as differences but not as opposites among women.

There are different kinds of the feminine under discussion: Iasia's appearance is associated with all the characteristic features of beautiful womanhood; not the womb but the perfect grace of the eyebrows, legs, hips, knees; the dazzling whiteness of the body, the golden lustre of the hair;[34]not bread but wine. Her body is a potion to the lover ("he virtually sucked her into himself"[35]) and comfort to the friend ("Iasia took the band off the thick plait on parting and they entirely calmed down stroking each other's hair" (ibid, 279)). Giving her body as a selfless gift, she again refers to the Sonechka motif. Trading her body for survival, she appears as a courtesan. Iasia is the prototype of feminine desire which fulfills itself in being desired.[36] As she is satisfied in being an object of art and love, her sexuality does not know an independent desire.

If it were not for the irony in the narrator's phrasing, Robert's final days could be read as a confirmation of traditional male fantasies about the deadly danger of female seduction and the unreliability of women. Robert's Jewish childhood and youth and his years as an artist in Paris have a significant influence on his sexual identity. As an artist he thinks and works independently yet he proves to be dependent in his everyday life. He marries to find rest and safety but not to offer these qualities. His imagination turns his passion into pictures. There is an interesting parable in the spatial-metaphoric relationship between the man and the three women. In Sonia's mother figure and Iasia's ideal beauty, Robert loves the two prototypes of the patriarchally determined model of womanhood. Tania

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[31] (Moses1, 29-35)

[32] (Ulitskaia 1994d, 286).

[33] (Quinzio 1995, 79).

[34] This image is also discussed in Postoutenko's paper on colour-symbolism in Andrei Belyi's work (Postoutenko 1996, 165). Ulitskaia takes up this idea almost identically: "... and the heavy dark-blond hair was just as of one piece, just as if flowing out of light pitch and it was lying on the shoulder as if cut ..."; "He had never seen such a body in its moonlit, metallic luminous power."(Ulitskaia 1994d, 267, 269)

[35] (Ulitskaia 1994d, 275)

[36] Irigaray criticises imagined female desire as a longing of being desired by a subject as an object (Irigaray 1993).

has grown out of Robert. She is “him” in the sexual activity of his younger years and remains at the same time “she” in her physical appearance. Tania understands herself as a subject requiring sexuality in order to realize her own creativity. Hence, she is the Self and the Other within her father. She is the red tongue of Cybele,[37] a personification of active femininity which he tried to escape all his life. His failure in discovering the secret of white on the canvas may stand as the proof of femininity which he did not understand in its own sovereignity.
In her later works, Ulitskaia pursued active female sexuality further, although this rarely resulted in the portrait of a harmonic relationship.[38] In the light of the sensual factor ignored in the Soviet context, she understands sexuality as a process. Ulitskaia's novels are based on the fundamental opposition involving exclusion and inclusion especially if they are intellectually or ethically dogmatic. Not surprisingly, in an interview[39] she was to repeat the words of the apostle Peter that God will accept any person and nation.[40] However Ulitskaia, who converted to Russian Orthodoxy, interprets the biblical saying in her own way, because God’s tolerance towards any person and any nation assumes, in Peter’s words, the conversion to Christianity, ie one (monolithic) religion.

Ulitskaia allows her protagonists to experience openness to an alternative way of life, which broadens the range of possibilities for the Self. Sadur, on the contrary, sees the exclusion and inclusion of sexuality not so much as emotional or psychological but as an artistic issue. Sexuality is presented as an expression of suppressed sensuality, something strange, bad, out of control and therefore dangerous.
To illustrate this perspective, I have selected Sadur's novel *Almaznaia dolina* (Diamond Valley) for analysis.[41] The distance between repression or

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[37] See Ulitskaia 1994d: "Kybele showed him her red tongue. Everything got lost ..." (238) and: "Kybele irritated him again with her red tongue, and her merry followers, composed by women appearing obscene, terrible but nevertheless without exception familiar, made faces in purple reflection" (241) or: "This, which happened around Tanja, so Robert Viktorovich guessed, was the same thing, which also occupied his youth, but under the sign of another element, the feminine so much hostile to him , but in the correction of the impoverished degenerated generation ..."(260). In Aagen A. Hansen-Loeve's work on Gogol' the 'Red' symbolizes “the fascinating telluric-erotic reverse of femininity, the vitality, the flushed - love and death at once” (Hansen-Loeve 1997, 183-303)
[38] See Ulitskaia's novel "Medeia", where the sexually active women Aleksandra and Nika find harmonic marriages only in their riper age, and Masha, the intellectual, commits suicide after experiencing lust (Ulitskaia 1996b).
[39] (Parnell 1998a)
[40] (Apg 10, 34,35); See the "King James Bible", Acts 10, 34-35: "34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."
[41] Sadur 1994a, 7-81.

suppression of the sexual drive and aggression is shown in this novel to be especially short. Furthermore, the emergence of subjectivity, symbolized by a prosthetic corset, shows “normality” as a straitjacket which prevents any formation of individuality. Sadur also discusses body awareness and sexuality in the context of Jungian archetypes. Vera, the protagonist in this novel, first impresses us by refusing to associate with the Soviet pseudo-collective[42], which presents itself as a petit-bourgeois and mendacious community. It is interesting to see the protagonist's hesitation between refusing and adopting collective Soviet values. She uses the conception of the subject current in modernism for her self-understanding and, as she has experienced social-utopian messianism, raises it to the level of a dictatorial demand. Along with that, her behaviour promotes prometheian pretensions.

On a first level, a discussion of utopia is revealed that serves all the parameters related to the heroic type: the idea of improving the world and humanity and a messianic claim to truth. The heroine's criticism appears progressive in demanding changes, but her messianism includes the continuation of Soviet dichotomic ways of thinking. According to the socialist realist models, she requires both a leader in the form of a strong man who shows the objective and a constant ideal. Happiness and satisfaction occur only in connection with the heroic. The psychological patterns of adoration and subjugation, connected with the need for a leader, are coupled to sexual narcissism.[43] Vera desires her brother, but in him she loves herself: her blood, her roots, her social identity. The motif of kinship and equal class status in a totalitarian system are shown to be related when examined within the social context: “We swam with you in the dark lakes of our common blood, we agreed to step into life and make it beautiful. That's it,”[44] so Vera dreams. “People of our blood” were “people of our class” in the Soviet Union's dichotomic society. By referring to narcissism in her novel, Sadur manages to expose structural parallels between social and psychological orders which go as far as incest. Excluding the heterogeneous, the incestuous appears as the foundation for monologic models, which, indeed, are emerging, as Consciousness wants to direct Being. In Bakhtin’s terms, idealism only knows the pedagogical dialogue. European rationalism as enlightenment and utopian socialism are based only on the one position representing the very truth.[45] What Bakhtin did not say but had in mind was, of course, the monologic system of Soviet socialism: the one and only consciousness, which excludes dialogue and displaces other words and thoughts in the subconscious. Plot,

[42] Ibid.: "... I wanted to know who all the same these people are with whom I worked for so many years and who, finally, forced me to leave the job, organizing this witch-hunt against me" (7) and: "... she said, that in such a big team there has to be someone who is the 'one who'" (11).

[43] (Freud 1989b, 545-575).

[44] (Sadur 1994, 80),

[45] (Bakhtin 1994, 60-61)

dream symbolism and sexual motifs of the novel show the violent power of the taboo.[46] Thus, the protagonist's dream of an ejaculating phallic poplar,[47] when seen in connection with a preceding passage that hints at the erotic character of the relationship between brother and sister, can be read as a revelation. The repression of sexuality follows the taboo set by the super-ego. The brother appears as the totem-possession the ego is dancing around. The fear that seizes the protagonist when, during a fortune-telling, an "A" appears on her palm is of significance. The letter "A" is her brother's initial: but also is to be interpreted as standing for the lover's name.

Here, finally, we have to refer to name symbolism thanks to which the idea of incest undermines the discourse of the heroic. Vera, which means "faith" in Russian, signifies a permanent reference to faith. "Andrei", when traced back to Andreas, the crucified brother of Peter, stands for martyrdom. Magnitude and sublimity are always connected with him. First of all, the Andrei of the novel seems to translate these demands into reality by saving a child, thereby qualifying as a love object for his sister. This serves, in Freud's words, "to make up for what she is not".[48] He behaves perfectly to her and she is longing for his body. Vera's physical imperfection is often referred to as her "big head and a thin body. A body like an arrow".[49] Her longing for perfect measure is embodied in her posture: "She holds herself up suspiciously straight." (19) If we read the arrow as a symbol of virility and the prosthetic corset worn during childhood to straighten the refrectory vertebra as a social corset, Vera appears as a person forced and shaped into the role of a "utilitarian male character".[50] Literally and figuratively she is forced to a more upright life and is, in a sense, deformed among those whom she considers deformed: the only people in the novel able to live through their fantasies and senses.

All this points to the debate about the Other in its outward appearances. Insights into Vera's fight between desire and renunciation in her subconscious becomes evident by voicing images of her childhood dream of flying into infinity: "But I only remember how we literally rocketed up from this place, and the wind literally fell upon us immediately, [...]."[51] This dream could be seen as manifestation of unconscious joy about being embraced by the force of the wind and, at the same time, an example of continuous self-control. Such a holistic sensation evoked by "masculine" elements of nature is sometimes described in the literature as a variant of female rape fantasies, as a feared, but wanted,

[46] (Freud 1989a, 318-514).
[47] (Sadur 1994, 21)
[48] Freud 1989b, 563
[49] Sadur 1994, 19
[50] (Horkheimer/Adorno 1989, 48).
[51] Sadur 1994, 17

subjugation to the stronger one.[52] Here we find the protagonist's dilemma: on the one hand, fear of losing oneself to love, on the other hand, the desire of eternal fulfilment. The fact that fulfilment is connected with a whole range of masculine values such as “feat”, “victory”, “to understand everything”[53] leads back to the central conflict between desire for, and separation from, the other being. If we look at some of Sadur's thoughts disclosed in a recent interview concerning love, passion and the disillusioning reference of the latter to something white, sticky and animalistic, we see a relationship between author and protagonist which is quite in contrast to the distance between artistic and the aesthetic in the novel itself. “Passion is short”, we read, “this is not love and not essential for human nature, this is an anomaly, but where does this vibration in your soul come from, why is it actually good for a human being, why is this given to us and why does it discard us, devastatingly and carelessly? I think I have it: passion – that is the dog's nose, dipped into milk.”[54] Cixous' streaming love, a femininity that is open to the Other,[55] is not included in this concept. On the contrary, the woman appears as the dictator of perfection who separates everything unheroic, weak and ordinary, including the strange and heterogeneous. Farida, the Tatar neighbour, personifies this hatred (“Tatar-slut, dirty slut, debauched and unwashed [...] Like an animal. [...] wickedness all over her pink-yellow nothingness.”[56]), especially because she had carried out only what the protagonist longed for. Farida was being close to Vera's brother, who has, therefore, known the Other in a biblical sense and rejected his sister's dictatorial traits. While Farida and Andrei's oriental friends with their “sweet, veiled eyes” (70) embody flesh and voluptuousness, the Georgian wine, labelled “Alazanskaia dolina”, is a metonymy for Otherness. The “Almaznaia dolina” of the title, *Diamond Valley*, in its original state, colourless, hard, cold and in its etymological context, even invincible, is the very opposite of “Alazanskaia dolina”. The colorful red and sweet Georgian wine is connected with the warm South, ie sensual and female in its symbolism. But it is also connected with something sick, deviating from the norm, because of its “humpbacked letters” (78). This could well be understood as the Dionysian in its eternal opposite to the Apollonian. In his early work *The Birth of the Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* Nietzsche concentrates on the oriental as a strange figure for occidental antiquity and discusses the impact on the structured world of another force of will.[57] Sadur's affinity for Nietzsche should not be left unmentioned, because Nietzsche, she said, “preaches the rebellious hero, tragedy's hero”. Whimsically,

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[52] (Moi 1989, 18).
[53] Sadur 1994, 17
[54] (Sadur 1995, 5).
[55] (Cixous 1976, 137 and Cixous 1991)
[56] Sadur 1994, 38
[57] (Nietzsche 1972, 5-125).

she recognizes her own protagonists as heroic individualists standing out in their environment.[58]

There is no self-confidence in this novel but, conversely, fanaticism, and the demand for changing the world are based on a tyrannical personality. The final picture shows the revengeful protagonist asleep. Devoid of the magical power she used to halt the course of the seasons,[59] the room which has been dirty grey until now is covered with glittering new snow. Snow is a metaphor widely used in Sadur's work, which produces a specific symbolic subtext. She sees it as a special condition of air, which is capable of making a person live in the clouds, losing him/herself in fusion with the elements.[60] In this way snow also stands as an erotic metaphor for coming close to one another. So the final picture could be understood as a varied repetition of the protagonist's erotic childhood dream requiring Vera's disengagement from close relationships. The dictator is deprived of her power, worn-out between longing for and defending closeness. But there is no argument among the opponents and, hence, no change. Thirst for glory reproduces itself again. In a white night, a new human being is raised to victory: the little pioneer Olia. She is happy to meet the cultural norm of a healthy body, because her foot's instep promises athletic fame, and Sadur lets her sing:
"'You have to live honestly in this world. You have to aspire fearlessly to your objective!/[...]/ And then, / and then/ they will sing our names!'"[61]

Hence, we see a circle. And, with this in mind, the personal incompetence in defining pleasure and achieving human closeness becomes evident as a social problem. Sadur disputes in an interview that she might have consciously underpinned the novel's plot with an ideological concept but still articulates an idea: "You cannot press human characteristics into some kind of frame because nature will always take revenge. In this very fact rests the tragedy of civilisation."[62] This reminds us of Ulitskaia's remark on the everlasting battle between flesh and spirit.[63] Sadur speaks about her desire to capture the human being's sensual, undefeatable passion not present in nature which is centred on reproduction.[64] We can expect to be confronted with this message in a provocative, polarized text-structure. Here, sensual pleasures and sexuality are either unliveable, suppressed or fatally damaged in social chaos. The

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[58] (Parnell 1998b
[59] The witch's power to spellbind is an often used motif by Sadur to question dichotomatic moral rules (Sadur 1994a, 230-235).
[60] (Parnell 1998b
[61] Sadur 1994, 81)
[62] (Parnell 1998b).
[63] (Parnell 1998a
[64] (Parnell 1998b

protagonist's solution is rebellion. This moment is missing in Ulitskaia's work because, for her, the social macroworld stays outside. Ulitskaia shows that sensuality is palpable and does not lead to a diminished quality of life. Her concept of female sensuality comes close to the concept of female lust described by Irigaray, who understands it above all tactually,[65] as expansion and overflowing without the objective of acquisition[66].

Where Ulitskaia stands for affirmation, Sadur speaks in favour of negation. Contrary to most reviews of Russian women's literature, these two writers break the stereotypes of, first, body-representation opposed to sexuality and second, the triviality of its artistic realization. Sadur twists the sexual roles creating the woman as a dictator whose identity is organized by elimination of the Other. She, the woman, is the one, who exorcizes both sensuality and femininity. In opposition to the human inability to lead a sensual life, Sadur asribes sensual power to the elements (snow, wind etc.). Longing is for physical contact. Ulitskaia offers her message through her protagonists and plots. Both writers testify to the development of Russian women's literature both in its aesthetic and philosophical demands. With all their differences in style and perspective they are equally original in their provocative relation to sexuality, which in the light of Russian history, seems to be one of the most disconcerting experiences of modern Russia.

[65] (Irigaray 1993),
[66] (Irigaray 1983).