THE FEMININE EROS AS THE MOTIVE FORCE OF RUSSIAN HISTORY: ALEKSANDR
SOLZHENITSYN’S INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGUE WITH MARINA TSVETAEVA

BY

ANNA YEVGENYEVNA ARKATOVA

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Richard Tempest, Chair
Associate Professor David Cooper
Dr. Judith Pintar, Visiting Assistant Professor
Professor Aleksandr Urmanov, Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University
Professor Alexis Klimoff, Vassar College
ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s historicized poetics of femininity, that is, his representation of women from a diversity of social classes and demographic groups, in specific oppressive or traumatic historical contexts, and the literary strategies he employs to that end. In Solzhenitsyn, World War I, the Russian revolution of 1917, and the Stalinist tyranny of the 1930s-1950s are treated as catastrophes not only for the country as a whole or particular social and cultural strata, but more specifically, for women in a variety of life and personal situations. Solzhenitsyn’s female characters invariably face a political and social environment that impels them to self-identify as survivors, victims, witnesses, or resisters, and in some cases even victors over the forces of historical chaos. The project focuses on the manner in which Solzhenitsyn’s narratives, most of which depict revolutionary collapse or state terror, catastrophic events that take place in the public realm, configure the Feminine Eros, that is, the agglomeration of romantic, sexual, and family-related drives and behaviors, as represented in works of verse and prose, that constitutes part of a woman’s core identity and manifests itself in both the private and public sphere through her relationships, behaviors, and communication practices. The dissertation demonstrates how the various manifestations of the Feminine Eros function as textual and conceptual elements in Solzhenitsyn’s highly influential reconsideration of Russian history; and reconceptualizes the feminine characters and themes in his novels, stories, and historical/polemical writings by demonstrating their many connections on the level of themes, imagery, and formal devices to the poetry of the Russian Silver Age (1910–1923) and, especially, to the verse of the lyrical modernist poet Marina Tsvetaeva (poems dating from 1910–1923). As in the case of Solzhenitsyn’s narratives, in Tsvetaeva’s productions, the poetic subject’s erotic longings and her desire for fulfillment as a wife, lover, and mother are brutally thwarted by the events of the Russian revolution, civil war and ensuing decades of oppression. The tragic female experience in history, which was poeticized by Tsvetaeva as the events of the 1917-1922 unfolded, continued to escalate and took yet more extreme and traumatic forms in the period of Stalinist terror, as recorded in Solzhenitsyn’s texts and the memoirs of female survivors of the gulag.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER WITH THEORETICAL PLATFORM. EROS OF LIGHT AND DARK EROS HISTORICALLY AND CULTURALLY CONCEPTUALIZED AND FRAMED. THE RUSSIAN TRADITION OF IMAGINATIVE INVESTIGATIONS OF THE EROTIC AND ITS PLACE IN THE NATIONAL CULTURE: VASILY ROZANOV, BORIS VYSHESLAVTSEV, GEORGI GACHEV.

SOLZHENITSYN’S DIALOGUE WITH THE SILVER AGE

One of the most striking passages in *The Gulag Archipelago* (1964-1968), that sprawling yet tightly structured tour de force that combines elements of the polemic, historical narrative, autobiography, and topical journalism, fused together into a towering, rhetorically powerful denunciation of twentieth-century evil, occurs in Part III, Chapter 8, which is entitled “Women in Camp.” This section of the work describes how male and female prisoners were rigidly segregated, lest they engage in unauthorized romantic or sexual relationships, or even simply tried to communicate with each other: “One has to picture to oneself the well-reasoned methodology of these employers who thought it entirely natural to divide the slave men from the slave women with barbed wire but would have been astonished if anyone had proposed that the same be done to themselves and their families. The *walls* grew – and *Eros* dashed back and forth” (Solzhenitsyn 1975, 248; *my emphasis*). To the starkest extent, inside these Soviet camps Eros becomes contingent on — the victim of — historical circumstance. In the original, the last sentence in this passage reads: “Стены росли — и *Эрос* метался” (5: 195; *my emphasis*). The Russian verbal form *рос* (grew) is homonymically present in the Greek-derived noun *Эрос*, so that by means of this second-order semantic transfer Solzhenitsyn’s formula acquires a doubly denunciatory force. In addition, the sentence almost scans: if we were to read it as a line of poetry, we would have a pair of dactyls joined together by a semi-elided *и*.

The passage in question carries considerable conceptual and stylistic weight. The history of twentieth-century communism is, in a sense, one of walls and barriers, both actual and metaphorical, with

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1 Further references to Solzhenitsyn’s original works are to the same 30-volume edition and are identified by volume and page number only. Unless otherwise noted, translations of *The Red Wheel* are mine throughout. *August 1914* and *November 1916* are available in English translation by H. T. Willetts (Solzhenitsyn 1989; 1999). *March 1917* and *April 1917* have not yet been translated.
the highest and longest among them being the Iron Curtain. This stretch of political, social, and cultural
time was inhabited by people who built these walls and people who lived behind them. The above-quoted
excerpt from *The Gulag Archipelago* is a powerful illustration of this truth.

Of course, the word *Eros* itself in a passage describing the carceral separation of men and women
jumps out at the reader. After all, Solzhenitsyn, the chronicler of Russia’s tragic twentieth century, is not
normally associated with erotic characters, images or themes, although it is the purpose of my dissertation
to show that such elements are central both to this writer’s conception of history and his manner of
textualizing the events of the past in his works of imaginative prose. According to traditional narratives of
Ancient Greece, which continue to be current in our culture and which the sentence we are discussing
obliquely references, the notion of Eros is associated with a healthy joy in the pleasures of the flesh, bodily
harmony, and the plasticity of the human body as represented in classical sculpture and art. The male and
female “slaves” separated by the barbed wire of the gulag, on the contrary, are bodies of work, not bodies
of love. Their lot is hard labor, hunger, disease, abuse and, all too often, death. They live or, rather, survive,
in a realm of ideologically decreed suffering where they are denied the chance to take pleasure in their own
physical selves, let alone to freely connect with each other romantically or sexually.

On the same plane of classical allusion, the camp barrier preventing the joining together of the male
and female counteractively evokes Plato’s myth of the androgens. According to the Greek philosopher, the
androgens were primordial agamic beings that combined in themselves the two sexes and had multiple body
parts, until Zeus decided to split them in half:

[…] I have a plan which will enfeeble their strength and so extinguish their turbulence; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. […] After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one, they began to die from hunger and self-neglect, because they did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate, man or woman as we call them, - being the sections of entire men or women, - and clung to that. […] Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the tally-half of a man, and he is always looking for his other half. (Plato)
The leaders of the terror state and the camp chiefs who answered to them appropriated to themselves similar god-like powers. As Solzhenitsyn’s plots often show, husbands and wives or couples in love became separated, either by the metaphorical wall that surrounds the gulag and isolates it from the rest of society, or by actual walls and fences within the camp system itself. In his novel *In the First Circle* (1955-1968), this topos of separation recurs in the case of several character pairs such as Nadya and Gleb Nerzhin, and Natalia and Illarion Gerasimovich, while *The Gulag Archipelago* incorporates several stories of couples who were kept apart by the carceral institutions in which they were held.

Yet as Russian literature has shown us time and time again, human beings will look for love, for their proverbial, Platonic missing half even under the most brutal and tragic circumstances. As we saw, in the above-mentioned section of *The Gulag Archipelago*, which is dedicated to the female experience in the camps, Solzhenitsyn follows the imaginative logic of Plato’s myth. To quote Plato once again: “The women who are a section of the woman do not care for men, but have female attachments […]” In the gulag, the human imperative to love produced unisexual couples when contact with members of the opposite sex was made impossible. And so Solzhenitsyn writes: “Finding no other sphere, he [Eros] either flew too high – into platonic correspondence – or else too low – into homosexual love.”

*my emphasis*/ (1975, 248; 5: 195). Now, we must recognize that the author was a traditionalist in matters of sex and considered same-sex unions a divergence from the norm, hence the characterization of such prison relationships as “low.” The larger truth, however, is that he understood and honored the human need for a physical connection, as well as an emotional one, with a loving partner, even if that partner happened to be another woman or another man.

This dissertation seeks to trace the violent imposition of history on the erotic selves of women and women’s disposition of their own erotic selves as they attempt to survive, modify, or even change the historical process, as *metonymically and figuratively recorded in certain literary texts that depict the upheaval of Russian history during the revolution of 1917 and the consequent period of the gulag*. Since the focus is on the female traumatic experience, the term Eros is narrowed to *Feminine Eros*, that is, the
agglomeration of romantic, sexual, and family-oriented drives, represented in works of verse and prose, that constitutes part of a woman’s core identity and manifests itself in both the private and public sphere through her relationships, behaviors, and communication practices. This complex of topics and themes was given a fictive or poetic form by authors who either belonged to the historical periods in question and acted as literary witnesses to it, or inhabited the same cultural and national space, though at a later time, and textualized it from a historical distance.

The question may arise as to why the dissertation is organized around the concept of Eros rather than sexual identity. The answer lies in the broader possibilities for an analytical discussion of literary texts allowed by this term, which for the purposes of this study is defined as covering every kind of sexual or romantic, heterosexual or homosexual, contact. Eros relates to the entire spectrum of human behaviors and relations that involves the sexual sphere and gendered personhood, but also extends into the realm of the family, the conception, birthing, and raising of children, and a variety of female-male (Solzhenitsyn, Tsvetaeva) or, on occasion, female-female (Tsvetaeva) physical and emotional interactions that do not always involve physical intimacy.

My analysis explicitly concerns the interactions, again within and across prosaic and poetic texts, of the Feminine and the Masculine modalities of the erotic and the sexual in a historical context. The Masculine Eros, from this perspective, will be treated as a composite textual unit of meaning (similar in this regard to its gendered counterpart) that interacts with the Feminine Eros and its various nuances and manifestations, and shapes it or is shaped by it. In particular, the Dark Feminine Eros, which is discussed in Chapter 3, shows a direct correlation to the aggressive, unrestrained, and sexually exploitive masculinity of the initial revolutionary period, as recorded in Tsvetaeva’s, Blok’s, and Solzhenitsyn’s literary productions. Whether in their dark, light or combinative forms, the Feminine Eros and the Masculine Eros are always complementary.

There exists a range of theoretical approaches that connect the sphere of the bodily and the erotic to historical and cultural situations. Michel Foucault famously explored the manner in which in “the history of sexuality” treatments of the human body changed along with the rise of capitalism. He posits that the
notion of sex is grounded in a combination of socially-economic factors: “And the sexual cause [...] becomes legitimately associated with the honor of a political cause: sex too is placed on the agenda for the future. [...] one also sees it [sexuality] becoming the theme of political operations, economic interventions [...] and ideological campaigns [...]” (Foucault 1990, 6; 146). The French post-structuralist acknowledges the tendency of human physiology to serve historical needs and identifies what he calls “the political technology of the body,” that is the manner in which the state uses the bodies of its human subjects and benefits from them in a concrete socio-economic fashion: “[...] the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use” (Foucault 1977, 25-26).

As is shown in *The Gulag Archipelago*, the totalizing reach of the terror state claims maximum ownership not only over the identities and minds of its subjects, but their very physical selves: “Your body is, first and foremost, the property of the Fatherland [Твоё тело есть прежде всего достояние Отечества]” (Solzhenitsyn 1978, 11; 6: 13).

Herbert Marcuse, while reconsidering Sigmund Freud’s concept of Eros, defines culture as “the methodical sacrifice of libido, its rigidly enforced deflection to socially useful activities and expressions” and states that “civilization is based on the permanent subjugation of the human instincts” (Marcuse 3). Throughout his treatise *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse tries to answer the question of whether this post-Freudian notion of the libido that is suppressed or “sacrificed” for cultural and social ends, is relevant in the modern world and applicable to twentieth-century “new forms” of “oppressive civilizations” (4). These are societies in which, in contrast to the ancient concept of the civilized, human beings dispose of more power but have less freedom, due to “the domination of man by man” which “is growing in scope and efficiency [...] concentration camps, mass exterminations, world wars, and atom bombs” (4).

Mikhail Epstein has proposed the concept of the erotosphere, which he defines as “the complex of all civilized processes and artifacts in their relation to desire” (Epstein 109). The erotosphere embraces “cultural values, means of communication, sign systems, and the tools and objects of labor and
consumption” (109-10). This scholar applies the notion of the erotic to the structures and workings of political movements and explores the connection between the operation of sexual desire and the political methods of the utopian (communist) state:

Liberalism gives desires their freedom, whereas conservatism constrains them and defers their satisfaction. These are the two main forces of history, which alternate with one another, thereby determining its discontinuously progressive movement, the ebb and flow of its libido. Both liberalism and conservatism may manifest themselves in their extreme or radical forms as a revolution or a reaction… One cannot feed desire with abstract images and ideological… fantasies for too long… Desire becomes convulsively saturated and immediately dies. In the same manner, utopia, which artificially accelerates the march of history and brings desire to the agonizing closeness of a joyful release, suddenly afflicts the totalitarian state, that enraged Titan, with a revolting impotence. (112; 117).

The period of Russian history in question (1914-1956) is, to a large degree, marked by violence, sexual oppression, and rape. Sabin Sielke, who “reads” and interprets rape in American literature and culture, observes that “talk about rape” in each particular country/culture “has its history, its ideology, and its dominant narratives […] that […] are nationally specific […]” (2). She argues that every nation goes through the experience of a certain and significant historical event and privileges certain historical “discourses” that “determine” that nation’s literary narratives of sexual violence: “American rape narratives are overdetermined by a distinct history of racial conflict and a discourse on race […] historically acted out in the destruction of the Indians and the subjugation of African slaves” (2).

As far as Russian culture is concerned, as I show in my analysis of Solzhenitsyn’s literary texts, the starting point of its national “rape narratives” lies in the revolutionary (1917) reality, which according to this writer’s historical conception, inevitably engendered the subsequent punitive sexual practices of the gulag. The violence against women during the revolution and the civil war, as depicted in his epic The Red Wheel (1965-1990) and the stories “Ego” (1994) and “Nastenka” (1993-1995), assumes even more extreme and varied forms in the loci of the gulag and the urban and rural spaces of the terror state, as recorded in The Gulag Archipelago and the narrative poem The Road (1948-1952). In turn, while the chronological scope of the dissertation is confined to the years 1914-1956, in keeping with the span of historical events depicted in Tsvetaeva’s poetry and Solzhenitsyn’s prose, the gulag reality of sexual oppression and violence
continued to shape post-Stalinist literary treatments of sexual abuse and rape such as Yulia Voznesenskaya’s novel *The Women’s Decameron* (1987) and Viktor Astafiev’s story “Luidochka” (1987).

The concept of the erotic, as employed in this dissertation, is binary in character. I distinguish the Dark Eros from its direct opposition – the Eros of Light (or Luminous Eros). This binary corresponds, to a certain degree, to the distinction between the celebrated concepts of the Apollonian and Dionysian formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). As mentioned above, Renaissance and post-Renaissance cultural narratives of classical Greece emphasized the elements of plasticity, harmony, and light, but Nietzsche rewrote these narratives, introducing the notion of the Dionysian, which is orgiastic, unrestrained, and pleasure-affirming, and separated it from the Apollonian, which is balanced and luminous: “Only inasmuch as he [Apollo] is the god of dream-representations. He is ‘the luminous one’ through and through; at his deepest root he is a god of the sun and light […]. Dionysiac art, by contrast, is based on play with intoxication, with the state of ecstasy” (120). Though Nietzsche’s conceptualization of the Apollonian and Dionysian is primarily aesthetic, it certainly has relevance to the realities of twentieth-century Russian history and the manner in which the artists of that period represented them in their works. At the same time, the Luminous vs. Dark Eros binary is related not only to the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy, but also to the specifically erotological researches carried out by Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919), Boris Vysheslavtsev (1877-1954), and Georgii Gachev (1929-2008). All three were highly original exponents of the Russian tradition of imaginatively analyzing topics and phenomena that in the West are the subject of study for differentiated, dedicated academic disciplines such as philosophy, biology, psychology, political science, and culturology.

As shown by Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn, the Dark Eros ecstatically, orgiastically responds to the intrusion of the ideological state or the social movements that engender it into the private sphere of love, desire, and procreation. It coopts or enslaves erotic longings and relationships and private sexual behaviour, takes them out of the world of two loving individuals and places them at the disposal of military, political, or economic priorities. This process, as the two artists show, involves coercion against those who refuse to give up their private erotic selves. Those of Tsvetaeva’s and Solzhenitsyn’s literary personalities who are
in thrall to the Dark Eros become the enablers, facilitators, and collaborators of the oppressive state and the violence it propagates. At the same time, Solzhenitsyn in particular demonstrates that the multitude of women who are abused or sexually enslaved in the gulag or are forced into unwanted relations with men of power in the world beyond its walls are the victims of the Dark Eros and not its helpers. The Luminous Eros, therefore, covers those individual behaviors and attitudes in the sexual realm, as depicted in contemporary or subsequent literary texts, which resist encroachment by the violent forces of history, war, and politics into the relationships between (or within) the sexes. Sometimes this resistance may be effective and preserve the erotic and moral autonomy of the individual, her sovereignty over her body and her private self, and sometimes, it may be defeated. Solzhenitsyn’s and Tsvetaeva’s texts give examples of both outcomes.

The concept of the Luminous Eros is based on three culturological interpretations, which are applied to the analysis of Solzhenitsyn’s and Tsvetaeva’s texts. The first one belongs to Vasily Rozanov, who in his treatise *People of the Lunar Light* [*Люди лунного света*] (1911) connected the phenomenon of the erotically “luminous” with categories of the hetero-, homo-, and asexual, and the gradations between them. Rozanov’s “people of the light” come in two groups. To begin with, there is the love between a male and a female who are not yet married and live in anticipation of their future sexual experience and the process of procreation:

We know that in antiquity they spoke of a deity of lunar aspect, a deity with a lunar character, who radiates light but does not birth, who is sad, enticing, and tender, who makes one fall in love with him and seems to caress those who are in love with each other, but only those who are in love, before they have reached the moment of intimacy. All brides and grooms for some reason “gaze at the moon,” which is something that would never even occur to a married couple, even a supremely loving, passionately loving couple... The sun is marriage (coitus)... The moon is an eternal “promise”... languor, anticipation, and hope, it is entirely opposite to the real and is very spiritualistic! (9).

We encounter just such a young couple of lovers, bathed in a Rozanovian “lunar light,” in *The Red Wheel*. They are Ksenia Tomchak, a student in Moscow who originally comes from Kuban in the south of Russia, and Sanya Lazhenitsyn, an army officer. These two characters possess a highly autobiographical dimension, for they are fictionalized representations of the author’s own parents. They meet in April 1917
in the immediate aftermath of the February revolution of that year. Filled with happiness, Ksenia and Sanya wander the ancient capital at night: “They took a cab [...]. When the cabman would make a turn, the full moon high above would shed generous light upon them, sometimes from the left, sometimes facing them directly as if in greeting, then again from the left, hiding occasionally behind the tall buildings nearby, and sometimes shining from across the river, and all of this felt like a single, smooth, and happy voyage under the moon, just as the first little leaves were appearing on the trees [...]. After paying off the cab they stood for a while in the lunar semi-darkness [Поехали на извозчике [...] И при поворотах извозчика полная луна с большой высоты щедро светила им то слева, то приветственно спереди, то снова слева, иногда скрываясь за близкими высокими зданиями, а то через реку напротив, - и всё это осталось как единое плавное счастливое проплытие под луной, при первеньких листочках на деревьях [...]. Сошли с извозчика у ворот, постояли в лунной полутени...)] (15: 606-7).

Ksenia and Sanya are full of “anticipations” and “hopes” for a happy future. However, their desire to enter into the “solar” (cf. Rozanov), conjugal stage of the relationship is thwarted by historical circumstances: Sanya, who is on leave, must return to the battlefields of World War I, while the post-revolutionary situation in Moscow and in the country as a whole is increasingly unstable and causes the two lovers anxiety. Their eventual sexual intimacy, which is not described in the text, remains suspended in an extra-textual dimension of the epic’s plot and story time, yet it is implied and anticipated, since the two young people passionately dream of having a son, picture what he looks like and what he will be like, and discuss his future upbringing. However, what brings this couple’s experience even closer to Rozanov’s conception of the erotic is that in the epic, Sanya’s and Ksenia’s love and their future sexual union are given a highly religious and mystical context.

Anna Lisa Crone observes: “For Rozanov sex is not only a potential process (a possible act), but something created by God as a bond, a fusion. Sex is divine spirit [...]” (74). In similar terms, Ksenia and Sanya perceive their love for each other and longed-for bodily union as a way of accepting and perceiving the divine presence in themselves as well as the world around them. Aleksandr Urmanov characterizes their relationship as “Eros in its highest manifestation, which is based on a synthesis of three complementary
elements: the naturally sensual, socially moral, and spiritually mystical” (2014, 90). He goes on to say that the two characters “strive not only for possession of each other, but for an ideal that is expressed in Christian thought through the notion of divinization [богоподобие], that is, for a recovery of the perfection that was lost by the First Man” (90). The young people feel a constant need to have their feelings blessed by God and consequently visit the sacred spaces of Moscow. Through one of epic’s artfully arranged plot twists, they meet its most mystical and mysterious character, Pavel Varsonofiev, a Christian seer and prophet who is periodically visited by sinister visions in which the revolution appears as a demonic triumph of the forces of evil. Varsonofiev advises Ksenia and Sanya that the love that has grown between them is destined to face great challenges in the tragic historical setting of 1917 and beyond.

Rozanov’s interpretations of the erotic also shed light on Ksenia’s maternal instinct, which although it is narratively unrealized in *The Red Wheel*, she exhibits to a higher degree than any other female character in Solzhenitsyn. “A ‘blessed birth’ in the sense that it ‘finds favor in the eyes of God’ will result only from this fusion of the religious and the sexual […] Then, the turbulence of parturition may be understood as a realization of the will of *The All-Powerful and The All-Willing*” (Rozanov 71). In the midst of war and as revolutionary violence begins to erupt in the streets of Moscow, Ksenia cherishes the thought of giving life. In a sense, she is pregnant with the expectation of her future pregnancy. Thus in the epic’s fictive scheme, the anticipated arrival of her son, a representation, albeit untextualized, of the empirical author in the form of an infant, is configured as the realization of God’s will.

To return to Rozanov’s taxonomy of the “people of the lunar light.” His second category comprises individuals of an ascetic nature: “The moon places a prohibition on ‘strong loving’ […] Hers is a monastic love, when infatuated, sad, and silent nuns wander the fields […] The moon and the night are solitary: again, this is a *call to monasticism!*” (Rozanov 10).

To sum up, the bearers of the Luminous Eros are those who do not separate the *bodily* from the *spiritual*, but through their love and sexual joining with another, apprehend these two elements as an inseparable unity. As a result, they reach the state that Vysheslavtsev defines as “the transfiguration and the spiritual enlightenment of the flesh [преображение и просветление плоти]” *my emphasis* (86), a
formula which, in turn, agrees with Ksenia’s explicitly literary definition of love, one that she borrows from the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun: “Love is the golden luminance of blood [любовь – это золотое свечение крови]” /my emphasis/ (15: 607). As a rule, the exponents of the Eros of Light in Solzhenitsyn’s works are Russian Orthodox believers and churchgoers (Sanya, who enters the epic as a Tolstoyan and a skeptic about organized religion, returns to the Church during his time at the front). They may not always be strict about performing the rituals of faith (Ksenia, for example, does not observe the Great Fast), but they pray regularly, attend church, and feel a strong attachment to the sacred locations of Moscow. The bearers of the Luminous Eros include characters who are exceedingly devout and pure in spirit and recoil from the life of the flesh such as Agnia in The First Circle, the only monastic female character in Solzhenitsyn, and Nina in Love the Revolution (1948-1958), his early and unfinished novel, who is the daughter of an Orthodox priest and although married (to a much older man), is chaste and “luminous” in her very appearance (she is a blonde with a slender and frail build).

Solzhenitsyn’s fictions are set in historical periods that witness the government-decreed suppression of religious faith and religious practices and the regimentation of the bodies of men, women and children in the service of an ideological project. As a rule, these novels and stories center on characters who find a way to keep the autonomy of their moral and bodily selves in opposition to the totalizing encroachments of the state. Agnia, who is shown against the backdrop of the 1920’s, when the revolutionary regime had entered the stage of consolidation, rejects the Bolshevik reality that surrounds her and chooses to withdraw to a convent.

Mention should be made of the fact that, as will be shown in Chapter 4, those of Solzhenitsyn’s female-male character pairs whose “solar” marital ties are under threat from, or have been severed by, the terror state, may find themselves relapsing into a “lunar” state of solitude in which they dream and long for a renewed union with the missing partner, very much along the lines described by Rozanov. Nadya and Gleb Nerzhin in The First Circle are an example of one such couple, even though neither of them is a believer in any conventional sense. Gleb’s continuing spiritual journey has led him to develop an interest in the Vedas, but is already moving away from his largely intellectual preoccupation with Hinduism toward
faith in (a Christian) God, while Nadya is at best an agnostic. Since the time of Gleb’s arrest four years earlier, they have not had a physical relationship, but the spiritual connection between them remains strong. Gleb is sexually drawn to Simochka, a young MGB officer who has fallen in love with him at the Marfino science prison, but refuses to start an affair with her, while Nadya is pursued by the manly, and attractive, Captain Shchagov, whose interest in her is entirely sexual (as he openly tells her), yet she decides to reject his advances and remains loyal to her husband, and, as my analysis of the novel will show, is imaginatively framed with reference to the paramount symbol of Christianity, the Cross.

The concept of the Luminous Eros proposed in this dissertation is also based on the metaphorical and highly literary interpretations of the erotic by Georgii Gachev, as formulated in his study The Russian Eros: The Love Affair between Thought and Life (Русский Эрос. Роман Мысли с Жизнью, 1994). Although this inventor of an original and imaginative post-structuralist system does not relate Eros to lunar or solar Light directly, similarly to Rozanov he identifies a correlation between the body and the spirit in the vertical dimension of physical space as well as in the love experiences of a multitude of Russian literary characters, female ones in particular (e. g., Tatiana Larina in Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, Nastasia Philippovna in Dostoevsky’s The Idiot). Gachev argues that the created worlds of Russian writers and poets favor the spirit (or soul) over the body (or sex) — hence, the privileging of the Light in their works — and defines the Russian Eros as the “Eros of the heart and spirit” (16): “In Russia, instead of remaining locally concentrated at the point of the body’s lower regions, sex flowed into a tremendous pullulation of people-clouds in the expanses of the spirit” (22). In a like fashion, Ksenia and Sanya recognize that they are fated to be together not in the sensual and sexual sphere centered on their bodies’ “lower regions” but in the exalted realm of the spirit: “…They recognized each other as if from across some tall and distant summit [они узнали друг друга через какой-то высокий далёкий верх]” (16:364).

My analysis benefits from Gachev’s approach in a variety of ways. First, the bodies of many of Solzhenitsyn’s characters are historically, politically, or physically constrained or damaged. They face oppression by the terror state or find themselves confined in the carceral spaces of the gulag. The fictive logic of this writer’s narratives demonstrates that the men and women they depict must rely on an intensified
sense of the spiritual in order to overcome the state’s malevolent intrusion into their lives or the physical trials by hunger, cold, and hard labor that they experience. They fall back on their spiritual resources, which enable them to survive separation from their partners, remain faithful to them, and in a broader sense, to preserve their true identity and values under such extreme and dehumanizing conditions. Second, Gachev’s interpretations of the erotic focus on its national aspects and take into account the cityscapes, landscapes, and culture-scapes of a given country (e.g., Russia, the United States, France) as well as its historical and religious particularities. In *The Russian Eros*, as in his other books, the frame of reference is the country’s Cosmo-Psycho-Logos (Психо-Космо-Логос), a tri-partite unity of a nation’s physical and natural world (Cosmos), the character of its people (Psyche), and its mentality (Logos), which according to Gachev’s conception corresponds to the tri-partite nature of man, that is, body, soul, and spirit.

Where Logos is concerned, Gachev links Eros to language, as in his notion of “Love through the word” (120). The speech patterns of some of Solzhenitsyn’s characters, notably Likonya in *The Red Wheel*, fit nicely into this conceptual frame. Likonya’s Silver Age-inflected idiolect, which she carefully constructs and employs, is expressly/expressively a-political and overtly opposed to the dictates, discursive and political, of revolutionary ideology. Her private language is an important element in the representation of this heroine’s sexual identity in the text. In Gachev, “the corporeality (телесность) of each ethnic/religious community consists of different combinations of the ‘four Hellenic proto-elements’, earth, water, air and fire” (Tempest 40). By the same token, in Solzhenitsyn the “corporeality” and worldview of many of his female personalities is imaginatively textualized with reference to the same four “proto-elements,” which function as fictive markers of the female character’s sexuality as well as her religious, philosophical, and ideological (or anti-ideological) stance. Likonya’s preeminent textual marker is water, which is reflective of her fluent body movements and fondness for aquatic spaces; throughout the epic, she is surrounded by images of, and references to, water. In the epic’s imaginative schema, the water element connects her to one of the work’s organizing metaphors, that of the World Well. Another character in *The Red Wheel*, Zinaida, who seeks and finds redemption after falling into sexual sin, is associated with fire, which accompanies her at different points in the text as a symbol of death and infernal punishment on the
one hand, and a symbol of life’s energy and its reproductive force on the other. The retired female terrorists Adalia and Agnessa Lenartovich, who cultivate an agamic appearance and rail against “reactionary” notions of romantic love, are heavy smokers and therefore also linked to images of fire. In an almost Turgenevian sense, this couple of de-sexed revolutionaries exist inside a fog of nihilistic ideas, polluting the air of Russia in both a literal and a figurative sense. The young peasant wife and mother Katyona Blagodaryova lives on the land and together with her husband, the grounded Arseny, tills the earth and like Ksenia, is conscious and proud of her maternal instinct.

Vysheslvtsev’s term for what this dissertation posits as the Eros of Light is “the Transfigured Eros [Преображенный Эрос]”. The Russian word преображенный is a cognate of образ, which means “image” or “icon.” Vysheslvtsev’s investigations focus on a type of Eros that is refracted through a believer’s contemplation and veneration of icons and engenders within him or her an apprehension of the divine: “Imagination […] has […] a peculiar organic affinity with Eros” (50). In his study of the sublimation of the erotic through the practice of faith, Vysheslvtsev quotes the words of St. Paul in Romans 13:12: “The night is almost gone and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Vysheslvtsev 191). Some of Solzhenitsyn’s female personalities, such as Ksenia, Agnia, and Zinaida, as well as Tsvetaeva’s poetic I, experience the kind of erotic sublimation described by Vysheslvtsev as they submit to a spiritual cleansing while visiting sacred spaces and praying before the images of the saints.

Vysheslvtsev’s definition of Eros emphasizes the element of the divine within it.

So what is Eros […]? Of course, it cannot be identified with sensual attraction, because this is the function of Eros only at the initial level. […] The essence of Eros lies in the miraculous fact that any true “feeling of love” extends beyond the confines of sexuality […]. Furthermore, true love extends beyond the actual object of love, it embraces the moon, the sun, the stars, the entire universe […] raises one up to new levels of being, where new ideas, meanings, and values will find their incarnation. (201-202)

In The Red Wheel, Ksenia and Sanya go beyond the “confines of sexuality” and succeed in transcending their sexual instincts, thereby reaching a new, highly moral, “level of being.” Urmanov’s comments on the bond between them correlates with Vysheslvtsev’s idea of “true love”: “In his treatment
of the relationship between Sanya and Ksenia, Solzhenitsyn shows the path whereby one achieves fusion not only with one’s beloved, but with the entire world. This is the path to the acceptance of God’s world, its original beauty and perfection” (2014, 90). Despite the revolutionary reality that looms ever more threateningly over them, Ksenia and Sanya partake of the joy of life, which according to Vysheslavtsev is an indispensable component of the “transfigured Eros”: “The human Eros […] is the thirst for the fullness of life, and thereby acts as a guarantee of man’s original orientation toward Christ, Who represents completeness, that is […] victory over death” (Vysheslavtsev 54).

Throughout this dissertation, reference will be made to the Ksenia and Sanya character pair. These two personalities are of central importance to my analysis because they represent Solzhenitsyn’s vision of what is most desirable in a relationship between a woman and a man, that is, a balance of the erotic and the divine. At the same time, their love for each other is meticulously contextualized against the backdrop of history. They are the most vivid and luminous bearers of the Eros of Light in any of this writer’s fictions.

As for the Dark Eros, its manifestations in Solzhenitsyn are textualized in a variety of historically specific or intricately imaginative ways. Take, for example, its color coding. Those characters and situations that are erotically violent, dangerous, aggressive, or generally unsympathetic tend to be black or dark in color. In “Matryona’s Home” (1959), Fadei, the eponymous character’s former fiancé, who even after decades have passed is still full of rage over the fact that she married his younger brother, is saturnine in appearance, and whenever he appears in the text he is accompanied by references to the color black, as in “черный старик [dark man]” (1: 131; 2006, 39). In August 1914, the sinister anarchist Zhora, who sexually exploits the naïve and romantic Varya Matveeva, is surrounded by references to the same color black, from his dark hair and dark stubble to his rubberized work apron. Urmanov has this to say about the monochrome part of the spectrum of colors in the text of The First Circle: “The use of the symbolic images of Light and Darkness […] allows the transposition of the fundamental conflict in the novel to the plane of the ‘cosmic’ opposition of Good and Evil” (2009, 170). In the same imaginative key, Solzhenitsyn’s contrastingly color-coded representations of Eros throughout his oeuvre figuratively adumbrate their authorially assigned moral valuations.
The term Dark Eros is partially based on the writings of Georges Bataille, whose analysis of the erotic identifies a dichotomy between “sensuality” and “death.” In Bataille, both elements are active factors in shaping the way in which men and women relate to each other sexually, while the relationships themselves are conceptualized in meta-cultural terms: “Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death. […] there does remain a connection between death and sexual excitement” (Bataille 11). While the physiological, psychological, and imaginative connection between Eros and death is a common constituent in all cultures, in Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn this linkage, which operates both on the plane of metonymy and on the plane of metaphoricality, acquires a very specific, historically contextualized valuation. In their worlds, many female personalities end up in situations where sexual abuse or depraved sensuality on the part of men of power (camp chiefs, revolutionary soldiers) violates their bodies directly, through acts of rape and (sexualized) murder, or figuratively, by causing the death of their autonomous moral selves.

One of the terms that this dissertation borrows from Bataille and employs in its analysis of sexual violence in the gulag or in the streets of Russia’s cities is “taboo.” Bataille writes: “Violence is what the world of work excludes with its taboos; in my field of inquiry this implies at the same time sexual reproduction and death. […] there is a basic truth: taboos founded on terror are not only there to be obeyed. There is always another side to the matter. It is always a temptation to knock down a barrier […] . Nothing can set bounds to licentiousness…or rather, generally speaking, there is nothing that can conquer violence” (42, 48). In the reality of the revolution and the gulag, as shown by Solzhenitsyn and Tsvetaeva, the prohibitions implicit in societal taboos are neglected: they write of a world in which there is a complete detaboozation of violence, rape, and sexual abuse, as well as torture and murder. The revolutionary soldiers and gulag chiefs ignore such taboos and exult, often erotically, in their transgressions against the norms of an earlier age.

As some of the above-mentioned theorists and culturologists, all of whom were influenced by Freudian psychoanalytical theory (particularly Vysheslavtsev and Marcuse), have noted, Eros does not function in the historical, religious or cultural sphere directly, but in a sublimated form. The notion of
sublimation, and female sublimation in particular, and its place in history is brought to the fore in my analysis of Solzhenitsyn’s and Tsvetaeva’s texts where they depict the destructive or constructive forms of the erotic. This means that both of these artists, as well as some other writers examined in the analysis who explore the intersection of Eros, history, society, and culture, textualize specific moments of sexual sublimation when a man or a woman, of any type of masculinity or femininity, manifests their erotic drive or their response to someone else’s erotic drive in a variety of different forms of discourse and action and in pursuit of a variety of public or private goals.

Crone offers the following comment on Vysheslavtsev’s notions of sublimation and its manifestations:

Sublimation was originally a religious concept; it was a term from Christian theology and Christian alchemy, sublimatio (“the raising”), a deverbal noun from the Latin verb sublimate (“to raise”, “exalt”). Freud’s concept of sublimation, which has attained such popularity in modern parlance is a limited secularization of the religious concept. It is therefore of cardinal importance that sublimation in the work of […] Vysheslavtsev is not a return to Platonic, pre-existing Christian, Neo-Platonist or alchemical formulations, but rather an attempt to Christianize secular Freudian sublimation and make it consonant with Christian values and a Christian worldview. It insists, as Freud does, on the sexual, libidinal nature of the energy that is transformed, or even transfigured, in the creative process. (3)

Agnia in The First Circle is a bearer of this type of “Christianized” sublimation in Solzhenitsyn. Instead of offering her body as tribute to the terror state, incarnated in the person of her fiancé, the careerist and proto-communist Yakonov, she wholly sublimates it in the sphere of faith. Thereby, she not only preserves her religious identity as a Christian, but also makes a personal (though ultimately, probably unsuccessful) attempt to constructively “transfigure” the historical process in the direction of retrieving the sacred values that are being denied and destroyed in this new Bolshevik society. As Vysheslavtsev himself notes, “all religion is a ‘sublimation’ […] your Eros is where your highest value resides” (47). Agnia’s “highest values” are her faith and the sacred spaces where she can express and practice it, and that is where the young woman places her body when she decides to become a nun.

Marcuse refers to “an inherent trend in the libido itself toward ‘cultural’ expression” (208). His approach is relevant in the case of Solzhenitsyn’s Likonya, who, in the historical setting of the revolution, remains very much in charge of her “libido”: she is conducting a secret and passionate affair with a married
man and insists on prioritizing this relationship over the riots and shootings in the streets outside. She refuses to sublimate her private self to the demands of politics or ideology, but immerses herself in the pleasure of making love, seeking and finding validation for her amatory experiences in poetry, specifically, the love poems of Tsvetaeva, whose conception of the erotic she assimilates and re-textualizes through her interior monologues as well as in the letters she writes to her lover. Likonya offers a counter-example to Marcuse’s concept. Ever since she first made an appearance in *The Red Wheel*, she has been engaged in her own cultural project, the beginnings of which date back to the period in her life before she met her lover, when she first appropriated the poetic discourses of the Silver Age and used them to give expression to her emphatically feminized and eroticized persona, before her libido had ever encountered its object of desire. To use Marcuse’s term, Likonya’s Eros is a “builder of culture” (83), but not in sublimated, but heightened and explicitly realized form, while (contemporary) culture is, in turn, the “builder” of Likonya’s sexuality.

Marcuse also introduces the concept of the “desexualized Eros,” which has a negative or even destructive impact on civilization. His notion is uniquely applicable to Solzhenitsyn’s texts: “Culture demands continuous sublimation; it thereby weakens Eros […]. And desexualization, by weakening Eros, unbinds the destructive impulses. Civilization is thus threatened by an instinctual de-fusion, in which the death instinct strives to gain ascendancy over the life instincts. Originating in renunciation and developing under progressive renunciation, civilization tends towards self-destruction” (Marcuse 83). Some of the female personalities in *The Red Wheel*, the revolutionary Lenartovich sisters in particular, sublimate their erotic potential into a variety of socially destructive goals while renouncing their femininity and even — for they are true radicals — their femaleness, in other words, “de-sexualizing” themselves. As part of this nihilistic death-affirming endeavor, which stands in intra-textual contrast to Likonya’s life-affirming and Eros-affirming project, they suppress their erotic selves and de-gender their appearance and behavior. They insist that sacrificing life, whether someone else’s or even one’s own, is legitimate and indeed desirable when this is done in pursuit of the revolutionary ideal. The world they wish to build is the opposite of the one that Likonya loves. That world will eventually manifest itself in the material form of the Soviet terror state and in the textual form of its official literature of Socialist Realism, an artistic model which all of
Solzhenitsyn’s works, from *Love the Revolution* to *The Red Wheel* and his short stories of the 1990s, reject implicitly and explicitly.

While Solzhenitsyn’s dialogue with Socialist Realism is a negative one, he enters into a positive and productive dialogue with the artistic space of the Russian Silver Age and two of its major representatives, Marina Tsvetaeva and Aleksandr Blok. My project reconceptualizes the feminine characters and themes in Solzhenitsyn’s works by demonstrating their many connections to the poetry of the period. One key topic is the manner in which Solzhenitsyn’s historicized construction of femininities interrogates Marina Tsvetaeva’s highly imaginative and personal treatments of the female experience during the Russian revolution and the civil war. In Solzhenitsyn’s and Tsvetaeva’s multi-generic productions, a woman’s desire for sovereignty over her core self as a wife, lover, and mother are thwarted by the 1917 revolution and ensuing decades of oppression. Where Blok is concerned, the concept of the Eternal Feminine, as presented in his poetry in the image of the Beautiful Lady, allows the reader to identify certain types of femininities – a-sexual, mystical, and highly spiritual - in Solzhenitsyn and define their in-text function as witnesses to, and survivors of, the historical process (cf. Agnia). In turn, Blok’s treatments of the nineteenth-century female Populists, i. e., his representation of Sofia Perovskaya in the narrative poem “Retribution,” (1911-1919) offers a point of reference for Solzhenitsyn’s own conceptualizations and reinterpretations of the same category of revolutionary females in *The Red Wheel*.

My discussion of the Solzhenitsyn-Blok-Tsvetaeva intertextual dialogue hinges on the issue of literary influences. In his famous essay “On Literary Evolution,” Yuri Tynianov defines a literary work as a complex of mensurable units: “[…] a literary work is a system, as is literature itself. […] In this way the problem of the role of contiguous systems in literary evolution is actually posited […]” (67). Tynianov identifies various poetic and prosaic formal devices such as composition, style, rhythm, and syntax as the constituent “elements” in such a system, explaining that “an element is […] interrelated with similar elements in other works in other systems” (68).

The Russian formalist goes on to pose a question: “Is the so-called ‘immanent’ study of a work as a system possible without comparing it with the general literary system?” (68). His answer is as follows:
“Such an isolated study of a literary work is equivalent to abstracting isolated elements and examining them outside their work. […] We cannot be certain of the structure of a work if it is studied in isolation” (68-9).

In this dissertation, the literary works of Tsvetaeva, Blok, Solzhenitsyn and other authors are treated as systems in a Tynyanovian sense, that is, not as stand-alone productions but complex structures that exist in dynamic contact with each other. They share, singly or in combination, numbers of “elements” (tropes, plots, chronotopes), which interact with one another, while the poems, novels, and stories comprise a systematic narrative of Russia’s twentieth-century historical tragedy.

My dissertation treats Solzhenitsyn, Tsvetaeva, and other works under consideration as texts in dialogue. As Mikhail Bakhtin observed in the Dialogic Imagination: “Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation” (421). Bakhtin also acknowledges the possibility of “the re-accentuation of poetic images into prosaic ones” (1981, 421), which he calls a phenomenon of “special importance” (421), states that “dialogic relationships are possible, for example, among images belonging to different art forms” (1984, 185) and identifies the notion of “a referential object”: “Dialogic relationships are absolutely impossible without logical relationships or relationships oriented toward a referential object, but they are not reducible to them, and they have their own specific character” (1984, 184). The “referential object” for the purpose of this dissertation is the experience of damaged, captive, or resistant womanhood in the period of 1914-1956, as imaginatively recorded by the Russian poets and writers of that period as well as of later times. The term “dialogue” is employed in a broad sense that embraces the “dialogical” functions, listed by Bakhtin, but also and mainly includes my own empirical reading of the authors in question. It is my objective to identify themes, plots, tropes, and other formal devices to connect both artists’ works within the frame of historically shaped modalities of femininity.

Finally, there is the issue of literary genres, since the dialogue between Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn and the other authors who are my subject is truly multi-generic, functioning as it does across texts that are variously prose, poetic, or historiographical (cf. The Gulag Archipelago). Tsvetan Todorov, who studied the problem of “genres in discourse,” observes that “from several narratives the reader has to construct a
single event. [...] the reader needs only the language in which the text is written” (42-3). This is the approach I have adopted as an empirical reader of the literary narratives in question: several works by different authors who wrote in different genres during different historical periods and followed different artistic models have been selected, categorized, analyzed, and interpreted with reference to their language, as forming a single event, a wide-ranging and moving account of the experience of historicized femininity in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia.
CHAPTER 2

Solzhenitsyn is a writer who privileges history. His entire corpus of fictions may be read as an exploration of the manner in which the Russian revolution of 1917 led, by a succession of intermediate and violent stages, to the destruction of a viable and authentic national way of life and the consequent catastrophe of the gulag [ГУЛАГ]. Among his literary works, the author always considered his epopee *The Red Wheel* his most important production, far more so than the novels and stories that won him the Nobel Prize (1970), more so than even *The Gulag Archipelago*, his magisterial and impassioned history of the Soviet prison system. *The Red Wheel*, which Solzhenitsyn conceived as a schoolboy in Rostov-on-the-Don in 1936 and completed in Cavendish, Vermont in 1990, is a four-part, ten-volume, multi-generic fusion of fictional narratives and historical scholarship. It tells the story of the Russian revolution by tracing its causes and ascertaining the degree of individual and collective responsibility for it borne by the political actors and societal elites of that period, as well as other strata of the population from the urban proletariat to the peasant masses.

Solzhenitsyn’s epic, which is subtitled “A Narrative in Discrete Stretches of Time,” comprises four Knots or novels: *August 1914*, *November 1916*, *March 1917*, and *April 1917*. Each novel in the tetralogy deals with a key moment in history: the term “knot” [*узел*] “is derived from the mathematical concept of “nodal point”, and in the present context referring to intervals in historical time when the interconnected issues of the day become aligned in a manner that proves decisive to the course of events” (Ericson and Klimoff 152). *The Red Wheel* depicts the historical process on two different levels. The first level directly describes political, military, and economic events as well as the virtues and vices of leading figures on the national stage – the tsar, his ministers and generals, and the public figures and revolutionary conspirators who oppose them. It also shows the inescapable and often brutal impact of political developments upon the
lives of even those characters, many of them women, who have no interest in or personal connection to the political life of the nation. This level is predominately mimetic. It is supported by the epic’s non-fictional chapters, in which the empirical author, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, speaks as an analytical historian. The second level delves into the hidden side of things. It interprets the lives of the nation and the individual alike through a structured set of images, symbols, and topoi that have a folkloric, or fairy tale, or sui generis figurative meaning. It evokes and indicates, rather than names and describes. This level is mythic and expands the parameters of the text beyond the events of history to the realm of archetype and legend and, ultimately, that of religious faith. In addition, The Red Wheel employs experimental forms and tropes which, as we shall see, engage with the practices of Russian modernism, and in this sense, represents a notable departure from Solzhenitsyn’s previous prose works.

Despite the importance that Solzhenitsyn attached to his epic, the aesthetic and narrative strategies that shape the representation of history in The Red Wheel remain underresearched and undercontextualized, a point that may be extended to the writer’s entire fictional oeuvre. After all, he has been studied primarily as a political writer, social chronicler, and commemorator of the victims of communism. Yet, his literary productions contain numerous family, amatory and even erotic situations that feature richly textured characters in the tradition of his great nineteenth-century predecessors. The Russian literary critic Andrey Nemzer draws a parallel between August 1914 and War and Peace and has this to say about November 1916:

In its breadth and variety of love- and family-related plots (all of which, however, are intimately intertwined with the story of the relentless approach of revolution), November 1916 can only be compared with Anna Karenina, in which virtually every character is presented from the perspective of “family thinking.” […] In November 1916 the trials of love […] occur on every level of Russia’s social hierarchy […] from a peasant’s house to the palace of the tsar. (Nemzer 92, 102)

Thus, The Red Wheel’s first two constituent novels are infused not only with “popular thinking” (“мысль народная”) but also “family thinking” (“мысль семейная”), to use Leo Tolstoy’s terms (Tolstoi 7). In a very Tolstoyan manner, this discourse of love and family relationships enters into a fictively productive dialogue with the epic’s discourse of history.
Next, there is a broad consensus among Solzhenitsyn scholars that he is an emphatically masculine writer whose male characters dominate the narrative at the expense of their female counterparts, few of whom are considered historically voiced heroines. It is true that this writer’s plots are, as a rule, patrilineal, and that across the body of his fictions the male characters outnumber the female ones. The male personalities reveal the work’s historical conception explicitly, through direct statements and their narratively privileged evaluations of the events of the present and the past, as well as by virtue of their public engagements as political figures, warriors, or revolutionaries. Their female counterparts, on the other hand, usually have agency in the moral, religious, or domestic sphere, but may carry a higher concentration of purely fictive content. Their presence in the text prompts the reader and the researcher to look more deeply into its imaginative and formal aspects. Yet despite the women’s plot-determined relative (and sometimes absolute) dependence on the men in their lives, they always occupy a significant philosophical and ideological space in the text. In the case of some works (“For the Good of the Cause,” 1963; Cancer Ward, 1963-1967), they are fictively co-equal with the male characters. And of course, in several of Solzhenitsyn’s productions the women are at the center of the fictive proceedings and indeed are the protagonists. This is especially true of his shorter fictions such as “Matryona’s Home” (1959), “What a Pity” (1965), and “Nastenka” (1995).

The Red Wheel depicts a spectrum of young femininities such as intellectual Olda, artistic Likonya, religiously conflicted Zinaida, and earthy Katyona. These are women who have complex relationships with their respective families or actual or would-be lovers. Moreover, as they experience joy or suffering in course of the relationships with the men they love, these characters sustain, each in her own way, the epic’s antirevolutionary discourse, while acting as witnesses to and, occasionally, participants in the large-scale public events that unfold around them. Thus, thirty-something Olda Andozerskaya, a professor of history who specializes in the European Middle Ages, has a passionate affair with the most important male character in the epic, Colonel Georgy Vorotyntsev, with whom she debates the political and constitutional issues of the day, while 22-year old Likonya, who is one of Andozerskaya’s students, constructs for herself an overtly apolitical, artistic identity that attracts the disapproval of her revolutionary minded (female)
elders. Spirited Zinaida Altanskaya suffers the death of her infant son and seeks solace in religion while improving her mind through the study of philosophy and literature, and Katyona Blagodareva, a peasant wife and mother, finds fulfillment in caring for her children and planning a future with her husband, a sergeant in the imperial army who is fighting at the front. These female personalities make an essential contribution to the multivocality of the work, that is, its plurality of character voices, each one of which expresses, sometimes implicitly or obliquely, a particular, individualized interpretation of the tragic events of war and revolution.

Central to my analysis of the epic’s representation of female subjects and themes during a period of catastrophic political and cultural upheaval is the concept of the *Feminine Eros*, that is, as it is stated in the first chapter, the agglomeration of romantic, sexual, and family-oriented drives that forms part of a woman’s core identity and manifests itself in both the private and public sphere through her relationships, behaviors, and communication practices. *The Red Wheel* depicts two mutually incompatible yet complementary modalities of the feminine Eros, the creative or amatory (Eros realized and evolved through a woman’s love for a man), and the destructive or revolutionary (Eros realized and devolved through a woman’s participation in, or support for, political violence).

In philosophy and psychology, *Logos*, that is, the category of speech or utterance, has been traditionally linked to *Eros*, in a variety of ways. Carl Jung contrasted the rational masculine aspects of Logos with the emotional, mythical, and feminine elements of Eros. Writing in a similar vein, the Russian culturologist Georgii Gachev argues that the language (Logos) of a given ethnos reflects its type of Eros, just as the particularities of a given literary character’s speech reveal his or her secret erotic side. As an example, Gachev adduces one of Nikolai Gogol’s character, the humble clerk Akaky Akakievich, whose passion for laboriously spelling out letters on sheets of paper amounts to the unconscious drawing of the curves and curlicues of the female figure. Akaky Akakievich, this scholar adds, is a personality controlled by an infantile kind of Eros – undeveloped and androgynous (120–26). The speech of Solzhenitsyn’s characters, as we shall see, is linked to a particular type of Eros that in each individual case possesses a textual, mimetic and/or diegetic marker.
Virtually all of Solzhenitsyn’s characters, whether male or female, live through historical traumas. Some female characters, however, preserve their gender and social integrity despite the terrible experiences they endure, as it is shown in *The Red Wheel*. They resist pressure from political forces that disrupt the “natural” patterns of life, which, according to Solzhenitsyn’s overarching conception, center on the family and community. Even Olda, Likonya, and Zinaida, who all find themselves involved in extra-marital relationships, believe in the ideal of family life. But there are other female personalities in the epic, radicals and conspirators and political fellow-travelers, who are ideologically motivated and claim to possess historical agency. They are hostile or indifferent to the values of marriage and motherhood. Their goal is the violent overthrow of the established order, to be followed by a radical reorganization of society according to an abstract notion of social justice. As they embrace this vision of a radiant future, they sublimate their erotic potential into a variety of destructive acts and behaviors. This is particularly true in the case of Solzhenitsyn’s revolutionary females, who suppress their sexuality and de-gender their identities, indeed, their very appearance as women, out of a passionate ideological commitment, a phenomenon that forms part of a continuum which will eventually lead to the forced depersonalization and mechanization of the female body in the gulag.

The heroine who is the focus of this chapter, the very feminine, artistic, and erotically charged Likonya, who is present in all four of *The Red Wheel*’s constituent novels, is completely foreign to the tradition of revolutionary womanhood exemplified by a number of characters, some entirely fictional, others actual historical figures, depicted in the epic. Instead, she enters the narrative surrounded by the texts, sights, and sounds of the Russian Silver Age. This young woman is fascinated and even intoxicated by the flowering of Russian avant-garde culture in the first and second decades of the twentieth century. Likonya is a passionate fan of this new art and she responds to it directly and emotionally. She enjoys equally the stage productions of the Symbolist Vsevolod Meherhold and his famous associate, the darkly charismatic actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya, the poetry of the Acmeist Nikolai Gumilev and the lyrical modernist Marina Tsvetaeva, as well as the *chansons* of the café bard Aleksandr Vertinsky. She uses these different and
sometimes incompatible artistic models and productions to form her own flamboyant, bohemian persona, one that is therefore fragile and fissiparous.

Likonya belongs to what is the most important cluster of female characters in *The Red Wheel*. The oldest members of this group are Adalia and Agnessa, two middle-aged spinster aunts in the revolutionary Lenartovich family. Despite their respectable years, Adalia and Agnessa are enthusiastic adherents of the Russian tradition of political terrorism which began in the second half of the nineteenth century and was associated with *The People’s Will* [«Народная Воля»], a secret organization of extremist Populists that used assassinations and bombings in an attempt to overthrow the autocracy and bring about a socialist state. The ranks of these Populists included both men and women, all of them young. In manner and speech the two aunties recall a range of famous *narodovolki* or female Populists, who came to be admired as heroines and martyrs by an influential segment of Russian society, including non-revolutionary liberals and moderates. The *narodovolki* took part in the murder of several high-ranking government officials, and most notoriously, were active members of the successful plot to assassinate Tsar Alexander II in 1881. These women Populists are revered by the two aunties, who constantly set them up as paragons for their niece Veronya, Likonya’s best friend. Adalia and Agnessa hope that the violent deeds of these female political activists, indeed, their very type of femininity, will arouse Veronya’s revolutionary enthusiasm and free her from the influence of the otherworldly, disturbingly individualistic Likonya. Like her, Veronya is a student of Professor Andozerskaya, who as an academic and scholar exemplifies a very different kind of feminine identity, intellectual, analytical, though also intuitive and, as the reader eventually learns, attuned to the mythic meaning of revolutionary events.

Accordingly, this chapter aims to analyze Likonya’s self-textualization through contemporary poetry and art, with a view to showing how Solzhenitsyn’s conception of the feminine and the erotic, as embodied in this character, brings the text of the epopee into direct and polemical dialogue with certain verse productions of the Silver Age. In order to show how this intertextual dialogue operates, I offer close readings of the works of two poets. One is Marina Tsvetaeva, whose verses Likonya repeatedly cites and whose poetic persona she uses as a model for the construction of her private, public, and cultural self. The
other is Aleksandr Blok, whose unfinished narrative poem Retribution (1911-19) anticipates the treatment of revolutionary femininity in The Red Wheel and in its formal structure recalls the nodal arrangements in Solzhenitsyn’s epic.

Solzhenitsyn’s attitude to modernism in general, and its Russian manifestations in particular, was equivocal. Aesthetically and structurally, most of his works gravitate towards the traditions of nineteenth-century critical realism, but as a writer who was active throughout the entire second half of the twentieth century, he inevitably absorbed certain modernist techniques and devices. The Red Wheel, especially its last two sections, March 1917 and April 1917, contains many instances of elliptic prose, stream of consciousness, and formal experimentation, the most vivid example of which are the Screens [Экраны], chapters (or parts of chapters) that take the form of short movie scripts. Moreover, many of the twentieth-century Russian writers and poets Solzhenitsyn particularly admired were modernists. In a 1976 interview with Nikita Struve, he noted:

[…] I consider that for us writers of the twentieth century – and that includes me as well – there are definite models to be found in the prose of Zamiatin and Tsvetaeva. (Tsvetaeva’s prose is altogether concentrated in an unbelievably powerful way.) Hers is a prose for writers, not for readers, and it would have to be diluted ten times over in order for ordinary people to be able to read it. […] A verbal compactness with such dynamic twists and turns, and explosions. But there is much about Zamiatin, too, that is striking. Chiefly his syntax. If I regard anyone as my predecessor in syntax, it is Zamiatin. And then there is the unbelievable vividness and power of his portraits. (326)

Richard Tempest notes Solzhenitsyn’s generally skeptical attitude to modernism, which the writer considered a self-indulgent cultural practice largely devoid of a sense of historical or moral responsibility. Tempest felt that many of modernistic exponents in Solzhenitsyn’s texts actively promoted the destruction of national values. At the same time, this scholar shows that Solzhenitsyn’s attitude to modernist art was never wholly negative:

Generally appalled by the stridently iconoclastic character of Russian and European modernism he particularly disliked the claims of its practitioners […] to have superseded and surpassed 2000 years of cultural tradition. […] Of course, most of his works are far removed from the modernist aesthetic […]. Modernism or “avant-gardism” was the art of “destruction” and played a sinister role, especially in Russia, where it “preceded and foretold the most physically destructive revolution of the twentieth century”. […] The writer singles out the Futurists for special censure as the artistic enablers and collaborators
of the new Bolshevik regime […]. Solzhenitsyn has a particular disdain for Vladimir Mayakovsky, the most famous Russian Futurist of them all. In *The First Circle* Klara Makarygin, whose views on literature are the author’s, thinks of Mayakovsky not as cutting-edge and shocking, but boring, boring, boring! […] Yet, in the same novel the truth-seeking Innokenty Volodin is culturally intoxicated when he stumbles across a treasure trove of letters and journals from the Russian Silver Age. […] Things, it seems, are not that simple where the author’s attitude to modernism is concerned [Tempest, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2010-11-12-tempest-en.htm].

In this regard, Solzhenitsyn’s ambivalent attitude towards modernism, expressed in his polemical works and critical essays such the ones on Boris Pilniak (1997) and Joseph Brodsky (1999), relates in interesting ways to Olga Matich’s concept of the “decadent imagination.” Her notion takes into account the breadth and variety of the Symbolists’ artistic achievements while stressing their creative-destructive, apocalyptic impulse to “bring history to an end” (9) by means of an “erotic utopia” (4). Like the Bolsheviks, the Symbolists longed for a collapse of the existing order of things, but conceived of this grand unraveling in mystical terms. They, too, tried to model themselves into a new human type that would best accomplish this much-awaited breakthrough to a new era. This identity-building endeavor resulted in a range of experiments, which rejected traditional gender roles or marital arrangements and which the Symbolists implemented both in their textual productions and private lives. Matich states:

> The program for erotic revolution […] aimed at […] creating new forms of love and corresponding life practices that would transform the family and even the body itself. […] Living in the stage of historical decline, the early Russian modernists grafted onto it apocalyptic rupture, which would mark the end of cyclical history […]. Utilitarian ideas lay hidden below the top layer of the symbolist palimpsest of life creation, and there were indirect links between the symbolist and Bolshevik visions” (4, 9, 277).

The representation of modernism in Solzhenitsyn’s artistic works is more flexible and varied than his critical statements about it would lead us to expect. The textualization of Likonya as a fan and consumer of Silver Age art goes beyond the anti-modernist strictures in Solzhenitsyn’s publicistic writings. In fact, her modernistic identity and lifestyle serve as a counter-argument against the utilitarian, politicized, and masculine approach of the two revolutionary aunts. At the same time, Likonya stands in remarkable contrast to a particular type of Silver Age erotic femininity identified by Matich, that of the symbolist poet Zinaida Gippius. Here let us note that Likonya is not a creator of modernist texts, but their selective reader. She
may be artistic, but she is not an artist. Unlike Gippius, who employed her body and sexuality in pursuit of apocalyptic and utopian symbolist goals (took an “antiprocreative position” (164) and formed same-sex relationships and triple sexual or asexual unions), Likonya’s aura of eroticism in the epic is non-ideological, non-revolutionary, and non-apocalyptic. Her love life is not a part of an artistic or ideological project, but a succession of life events of a rather traditional kind that occur naturally and spontaneously: she falls in love with a wealthy Volga merchant, desires a family, hopes that he will be faithful and give her a child. While Gippius, like Matich’s other “decadent utopians” (4), frequently perceived of Eros in metaphysical and divine terms, rather than physical and sexual ones, Likonya’s own erotic situation is rooted in the realities of her life as a young woman who has fallen in love with a married man. When she makes love with her beloved or invents plans for a future together with him, she privileges these intimate experiences over the political events occurring in the country: “During those hours they never wondered whether the revolution was still rolling across the rest of the city. They locked and curtained themselves in, and every time this happened Likonya’s power over him grew ever sweeter and stronger — and she in turn gave in to his strength, down to her final sigh and lowered eyelids [И – во всём остальном городе катилась ли революция, нет, – в эти часы они не думали. Запирались, зашторялись, и от раза к разу всё усладистей и захватней забирала его Ликоня, – да не забирала, а сама была забрана до последнего вздоха, до затворенных век […]” (14: 605). Last, in contrast to Gippius, who possessed an unstable sexual identity and cultivated an androgynous appearance, thereby acquiring a public reputation as a “cross-dresser” (172) and a “female dandy” (177), Likonya is clearly heterosexual and emphatically, even exaggeratedly, feminine in speech, manner, and clothes.

Likonya has an episodic but vivid presence in the epic, which is distributed across all four Knots. The chapters that feature her character amount to an occasional, discontinuous fictive exploration of Silver Age literature and culture not only as a source of artistic and linguistic experiments or a particular type of Bohemian lifestyle, but also as a historically contextualized site of ethical and philosophical contestation. There is a precedent for this fictive procedure in Solzhenitsyn’s novel *The First Circle*. In this work, which is set in 1949, one of the main characters, the high-ranking diplomat Innokenty Volodin, reconsiders his
life values, his relationship with his promiscuous, selfish wife Dotnara, and his allegiance to a tyrannical state.

Volodin is a 1940s version of that classic Russian literary type, the idealistic and passionate seeker after the truth. Solzhenitsyn’s hero is the son of a famous revolutionary of humble origins, who perished in the civil war, and a refined woman of noble birth, who is also no longer living. His point of departure on his moral/intellectual quest is the archive of his late mother, a member of the pre-revolutionary Silver Age generation. He becomes a kind of cultural archeologist, studying her papers, letters, diaries, and printed artifacts of the period such as art magazines and theater programs. Volodin gradually forms a picture of his mother’s pre-marital identity, her artistic tastes and “classless” ethical ideals (Compassion, Fairness, Truth, Kindness, and Beauty), and as he does so, he becomes aware of an entire lost world of artistic and cultural endeavors, of which until then he had been completely ignorant. By going back in time through the medium of literature, Volodin acquires a new, more accurate perspective on the pre-revolutionary period and realizes that he is a “savage, reared in the caves of social science, clad in the skins of class warfare [дикарь, выросший в пещерах обществоведения, в шкурах классовой борьбы]” (Solzhenitsyn 2009, 440; 2: 433):

В пестроте течений, в столкновении идей, в свободе фантазии и тревоге предчувствий глянула на Иннокентия с этих желтеющих страниц Россия Десятых годов, последнего предреволюционного десятилетия, которое Иннокентия в школе и в институте приучили считать самым позорным, самым бездарным во всей истории России – таким безнадёжным, что не протяни Bolsheviks руку помощи – и Россия сама собой сгнила бы и развалилась. (2: 432)

Early twentieth-century Russia, with its ideological battles, its dizzy proliferation of trends and movements, its unbridled imagination, and its anxious forebodings, looked out at Innokenty from these yellowing pages – Russia of the last pre-Revolutionary decade, which he had been taught at school and at the institute to regard as the most shameful and most barren in Russia’s history, a decade so hopeless that if the Bolsheviks had not come to the rescue, Russia left to itself would have rotted and collapsed. (Solzhenitsyn 2009, 439–40)

Volodin experiences a life situation that constitutes a common topos in the genre of the *Bildungsroman*: having reached a certain level of maturity and personal experience, the protagonist begins to gain a better understanding of the two most important figures in his childhood and youth, his parents. As
he studies his mother’s diaries, Volodin makes a sinister discovery: he realizes that his father, the famous Bolshevik, took his mother as a trophy bride, won in the class struggle. He also learns that she never loved his father and that she always remained her own woman:

В матери из этих дневников оказалась не просто дополнением к отцу, как привык сын, но – отдельным миром. [...] Несколько суток просидел он так на скамеечке у распахнутых шкафов, дыша, дыша и отправляясь этим воздухом, этим маминым мирком, в который когда-то отец его, опоясанный гранатами, в чёрном дождевике, вошёл по ордеру ЧеKa на обыск. (2: 430, 432)

But in these diaries his mother was revealed as not just an appendage to his father, as their son had been accustomed to thinking, but as someone with a world of her own. [...] He sat there for days on end, on the little stool by the wide-open cabinets, breathing their air, intoxicated with it and with his mother’s little world, which his father had once entered, wearing a black raincoat, girded with hand grenades. And bearing a Cheka search warrant. (Solzhenitsyn 2009, 438–39)

Volodin’s father was a brutal, violent personality down to his very body and clothes. Thus, the ring of grenades encircling his waist and his black coat: in Solzhenitsyn, black is commonly associated with revolutionary figures such as the leader of the Provisional Government, Aleksandr Kerensky, depicted in *The Red Wheel* as wearing a black jacket.

Gradually the reader of *The First Circle* becomes aware of a set of conceptual binaries that are central to the novel: a subtle, Silver Age-inflected femininity versus a hyper-aggressive, militarized revolutionary masculinity; the variety and multi-layeredness of pre-revolutionary culture versus the shallowness and crudity of the Leninist-Stalinist culture that replaced it. It becomes evident that the split in Volodin’s personality arises from his family background. Throughout his life, except for early childhood when he was close to his mother, the diplomat has engaged in the thoughtless, passive assimilation of his father’s values, basking in that heroic, black, paternal shadow. Innokenty’s moral crisis, which leads him to embark on his search for personal and historical truth, is due to the posthumous, textual influence of his mother. Her refined, ethical femininity ultimately triumphs over her husband’s weaponized, ideological masculinity in the mind and personality of their son. Eventually he takes direct action against the Stalinist regime by making a phone call to the American embassy in Moscow in order to give warning of a Soviet plot to steal US nuclear secrets. Three days later he is arrested.
Likonya is a contemporary of Volodin’s mother and her artistic soul mate, even though they belong to different texts and lead different lives. With her consciously eroticized, mannered feminine persona, Likonya is quite unlike the warm, idealistic figure that Volodin encounters on the pages of his mother’s diaries. Here is her portrait, filtered through the aunties’ disapproving perceptions:

Это была девушка совсем иного мира – играющая шалью, ломкой талией […]. Играла голосом, но ещё больше ресницами, сразу замечались её глаза с их отдельной красотой, переблескивающим значением, будто она видела в окружающем совсем не то, что все остальные. И голову переводила с медленным недоумением, а густые чёрные волосы были свободны до плеч, как у красавицы большого опыта. (8: 63)

She was a girl from an entirely different world, forever coquettishly adjusting her shawl […]. She made great play with her voice, and even more with her eyelashes. Her eyes were the first thing you noticed about her – their beauty and the way they flashed mysteriously meaningful glances, as though in what was going on around her she saw much more than did others. The hesitant, wondering turn of her head and the thick black hair falling loosely to her shoulders would have done credit to a beauty of great experience. (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 444–45)

Yet, both these characters experience the formative influence of Silver Age culture. Like Volodin’s mother, Likonya likes attending plays and accumulating cultural artifacts in her room: theatre posters, items of stage scenery, portrait silhouettes. She, too, stands in contrast to an aggressively masculine revolutionary figure. Sasha Lenartovich (the aunts’ nephew), who comes from a family with a long history of revolutionary commitment and hates the imperial government and all its works, is passionately in love with Likonya, but she does not return his feelings. There is a cultural and ethical gulf that separates them; and then, she just does not fancy him. He is out of place in the artsy, ornamentalized private space she has constructed. For his part, Sasha is convinced that his beloved’s interest in Silver Age culture distracts her from the revolution and the pursuit of social justice. He cannot imagine squiring her to the Stray Dog [Бродячая собака] café, Likonya’s favorite haunt and a famous site of Silver Age social life.

Other than his feelings for Likonya, Sasha is of a piece. All of his thoughts and ambitions are directed towards the pursuit of revolutionary violence, even if for much of the epic he is shown as rather vain and lacking in a coherent ideology to underpin his destructive drives (eventually, he joins the Bolsheviks). In contrast, Likonya is a multilayered, evasive, and inscrutable heroine who is looking for her
own, non-politicized truth. The situation plays out on the familiar novelistic plane of female/male incompatibility and mutual incomprehension. Likonya’s behavior always bewilders Lenartovich, who sees her as both enticing and exasperating:

 [...] а Сашу настолько тянуло всё только к ней, а не к каким другим, кто с пониманием, ясным взглядом, ясной речью. Сам Саша был ясен, прям, отчётлив, и всё замудро-запутанное его обычно отталкивало, – и только одна Еленька, с её смутностью, нечёткостью, привлекала необормо. (14: 451)

Sasha was achingly drawn to her but not to those others, who had a clear understanding, a clear vision, and spoke in clear words. Sasha himself was all clarity and precision and everything that was intricately confusing usually repelled him, yet he found himself longing for baffling, ever-changing Elen’ka.

Among the “eccentricities” that Sasha discerns in Likonya is what he considers her unclear speech, that is, her Silver Age-inflected, feminine idiolect. Sasha finds Likonya’s language inaccessible because it relies on a vocabulary he does not know and is underpinned by an aesthetic he does not appreciate. The source of both is the verse of the modernist poets Likonya reads, commits to memory, and occasionally recites in public or private. To be precise, her speech is a self-designed, imitative mix of Acmeist and Symbolist poetic tropes and quotes, held together by intermittent sighs and pouts. In August 1914, the aunts frequently express their disgust at Likonya’s studiedly poetic way of expressing herself. For these retired women of action, Likonya’s favorite poets are nothing but purveyors of vaguely phrased nonsense. The aunties sneer at the “incantations of murky prophets [наговаривание мутных пророков]”, “symbolist nonsense [символистический вздorp]”, and “nebulous ravings [гуманный бред]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 444; 8: 62). Likonya is especially fond of declaiming the verses of the Acmeist Nikolai Gumilev; and like the Symbolist poets she equally admires, her speech and the manner of her self-expression is oblique, allusive, mysterious, and full of vague but sinister portent.

Likonya also imitates the Symbolists by paying close attention to the musical quality of her own voice, as well as that of others. She has absorbed the Symbolists’ lesson that speech has a mythical dimension of sound that may trump conventional, everyday meaning and reveal a higher truth. Likonya’s mystical, musical side manifests itself when a group of female students of which she is a member has a
conversation with their professor, Olda Andozerskaya. Likonya does not comment on the theme of the discussion – the importance of medieval history as a field of study – but focuses on the sound of her teacher’s speech:


I liked her a lot. Especially her voice. She could be singing an aria. A complicated one – you can’t catch the melody at first”. Her friends burst out laughing. “What about the words though?” “Did you like her discussion subject?” Likonya wrinkled her small forehead, but her full lips parted in a smile. “The words? I wasn’t listening to them. (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 790)

Likonya’s own voice is seldom directly present in the text. When participating in a conversation or a social situation she is silent, estranged, mentally absent, and sometimes spatially distanced. She does not speak in full sentences, but laconic phrases or even single words that often have an aphoristic ring: “We have to be citizens of the universe [Мы должны быть гражданами Вселенной]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 446; 8:64); “You must never lose yourself [Никогда нельзя терять себя]” (13:122). After releasing these statements into the public space, Likonya disappears either verbally, by falling silent again and refusing to explain what she meant, or by departing physically from the scene. The heroine’s quality of evanescence and her enigmatic utterances make them invitingly open for readerly interpretation. Like the poetic texts of the Symbolists, they prompt the receptor to search for hidden, esoteric meanings.

Even Likonya’s body language is shaped by Silver Age values and practices. As Sasha ponders his beloved’s personality and conduct, he uncharacteristically lapses into a style of speech that is almost Symbolist-like in its allusive, poetic tone: “[…] she is like a ghost that always slips away even when your arms encircle her, – she walks the spirit world with uncertain, shaky steps [она, как привидение, ускользает, если и замкнуть кольцо рук, – и своей покачливою, нетвёрдой походкой движется в мире этих призраков […]” (11:99). The image of the circle or wheel is central to the epic and defines its mythic import. When “ghostlike” Likonya breaks out of the “circle” of Sasha’s arms, that confining loop of unwanted love crafted by the male revolutionary hero, unbeknownst to herself (but not the attentive reader)
she wins a small victory against the gigantic Red Wheel of the revolution that Sasha is helping to direct toward the destruction of Russia, and, incidentally, of the very culture that Likonya so loves. Physically and metaphorically, Likonya is effecting an escape from this circular, revolutionary, masculine space.

As a matter of fact, Likonya’s language, formed by the aesthetics of Silver Age culture, possesses, on the imaginative plane, a watery quality: ever-flowing and therefore impossible to grasp or hold. Sasha’s reaction to Likonya’s erotic appeal expresses itself along similar lines (or waves): he sees her as always changeable, forever flowing away to some place beyond his understanding, “chatoyant [переливчатая]” (11:99), as he likes to describe her (derived from the verb лить – to stream or to pour). Georgii Gachev also connects what he calls the “Russian Eros” to water. To quote Gachev:

The world is made in such a way that in order for contact with the soil to be established you need not move, for it is right there, you can step on it with your two feet and touch it with your hands; where respiration is concerned, air is also everywhere, you can breathe your full of it. Light also falls from everywhere above to everywhere below. Water, however, is not found everywhere, but only in certain special places: people must walk to it, assemble around it, they must make an effort to move […] toward water = the path to life. (69)

This is exactly how water-themed Likonya, without ever wishing to do so, acquires dominion over Sasha’s feelings. Her power of female attraction moves Lenartovich spatially from one geographical location to another: from the town of Orel where he has established his revolutionary-military base to Petrograd where Likonya lives, thence to the theaters that Sasha hates but obediently attends in order to have the opportunity to be with her, and finally to her apartment, where he goes uninvited. Yet, his attempts to “catch” and “hold” her are always unsuccessful, for she is like water: “Just as a treacherously gentle swell steals upon ships to rock and toss them, so did Elen’ka’s waverings threaten to pull Sasha and this life of great deeds he had planned off course and into her wake /my emphasis/ [Как скромно-коварная зыбь, дошедшая, начинает качать, кидать корабли, – так Сашу и, более того, его будущую важную жизнь – Еленька этими колебаниями уводила, увлекала за собой]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 292; 7: 315–16).

Likonya’s governing image or totem is the “world well” [“мировой колодец”, 8:62] – a phrase that she borrows from Gumilev’s poem “Choice” [“Выбор”, 1908]. This trope counterbalances the images of fire and flames, with which Lenartovich is associated in the text, where his speech is peppered with
combustible revolutionary clichés such as “flames,” “beacons,” and “sparks.” In *The Red Wheel*, fire metaphorically correlates with political violence and the color symbolism in the epopee’s title (*krasnoe/red*). The water maiden Likonya neutralizes, “cancels” Sasha’s fiery lexicon. Just like their respective types of Eros, their idiolects fail to connect. The power balance in this erotic (non)relationship is definitely on Likonya’s side, for water has the capacity to put out fire. But in the realm of history, Sasha is, or will be, one of the victors. And so, he may yet achieve his longed-for love conquest: “Oh, but one day you may find that you will need me. There will be no one to hide you in some quiet corner, because soon there will be no quiet corners [Ох, еще я тебе понадоблюсь. В тихий угол тебя не уведут – потому что тихих уголков не будет скоро]” (14:457). A proleptic hint, perhaps, of what will happen to Likonya after the epic ends and the revolution triumphs, when a heroic Sasha will have his pick of the beautiful and cultivated acolytes of the Silver Age, just like Volodin’s father in *The First Circle*.

The turning point in Likonya’s life occurs when she embarks on an affair with an older married man, the merchant Gordey Pol’shchikov. The owner of a company that operates steamships on the Volga River, he too is surrounded by water images and contexts (as well as numerous textual references to Maxim Gorky’s novel *Foma Gordeyev*, 1899, which his given name clearly invokes). The locus of their meetings is the theater, for Gordey shares Likonya’s interest in drama. As they grow closer, he enjoys listening to Likonya as she recites poetry for his pleasure. Once she finds herself in love, Likonya’s written and oral speech patterns begins to change. She becomes fond of writing letters, though these are still permeated by a Silver Age sensibility. However, her literary sources are now different. She finds herself reading more and more of Tsvetaeva’s poetry. The epic formats Likonya’s language of love as a true Tsvetavian discourse. This poet of passionate femininity now expresses Likonya’s evolving emotional state. When the heroine finds herself alone and feels the need to come to terms with her feelings for the new man in her life, she recites Tsvetaeva’s early verse (1910-11). These poems, penned by an adolescent hand, illustrate the freshness and purity of Likonya’s feelings. By borrowing Tsvetaeva’s poetic diction, stylistics, and aesthetics, Likonya also assimilates herself to the young poet’s vision of Eros: like the latter’s lyrical persona, she craves passion, lives at the highest emotional pitch, and longs for her beloved and to have a
family. Interestingly, this poet, whose vision Likonya embraces repeatedly, associates her unique femininity, sensibility, and poetic gift with water images: “[…] Мне имя – Марина, Я – бренная пена морская [My name is Marina/I am the mortal foam of the sea]” (Tsvetaeva 534).

Likonya’s idiolect, whether in its initial Symbolist/Acmeist or later Tsvetaevian phase, stands in contrast to the thwarted, distorted Eros that governs the speech and actions of the female revolutionaries portrayed in the epic. The texts that are quoted or referenced by Adalia and Agnessa have a very different provenance. They belong to the established discourse of Russia’s revolutionary Populists and give voice to their political exultation and utilitarian attitude to the emotional side of life. The Populists were famous for denying or suppressing the need for love, whether of the romantic, lyrical, or domestic kind.

In its own way, the aunts’ language is as vivid as that of Likonya. They insist that the ideal woman should possess an “armor-plated heart [бронированное сердце]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 452; 8:70), which is closed to any emotional, let alone romantic contact with the opposite sex. The aunts’ political lexicon contains many figurative references to marriage and motherhood. They are eager to be married to the social idea: “mystically wedded to the idea [мистический брак с идей]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 462; 8:81). They see the revolution as an epic act of parturition: “Revolution is a great new birth [Революция – это великие роды]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 466; 8:85). Even the aunts’ clothes express their political identity and amount to an artifactal extension of their revolutionary discourse: they wear no make-up or jewelry and have the appearance of nuns:

Но в их время, время юности Адалии и Агнессы, не были редкостью как бы революционные монашки – те народницы и подвижницы с некосвенным взглядом, с речью несмешливой […] свою отвлекающую красоту, если она была, прятали под бурьми, грубыми платьями и платками, на простонародный манер. (8: 60)

Well, in their time, when Adalia and Agnessa were young, there was no shortage of what might be called “nuns of the revolution”, heroines of the populist movement who looked everyone (and everything) in the face, made no attempt to be amusing […]. They concealed their beauty, if beautiful they were, so that it would not distract others, wearing coarse brown dresses and kerchiefs like peasant women. (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 442)
Unlike Likonya, whose allusive and poetic speech sets off her femininity to vivid and exuberant effect, the aunts’ ideologically driven sublimation of their female and erotic essence is so intense that their language and perhaps their core identity lacks any gender specificity:

The female characters in question and others like them have the function of “loudspeakers” and “transmitters” of this or that system of radical political beliefs. Were one to replace the names of the heroines with male ones and were one to change their sex, the reader will, in all probability, remain ignorant of the substitution. (Urmanov, 376)

While Adalia and Agnessa impatiently await the coming of the revolution, Likonya sits alone in her room declaiming lines from Tsvetaeva’s poem “The Wild Will” [“Дикая Воля”, 1910–1911]:

…Чтобы рвал меня на части
Ураган! (13:511)

…Let it tear me to pieces!
The hurricane!

The image of the hurricane [ураган] frequently occurs in The Red Wheel, where several characters employ it to refer to the revolution after it happens. The Empress Aleksandra thinks of it as “the hurricane whirl of these days [ураганный вихрь этих дней]” (13:239). The wise seer Pavel Varsonofiev, who is visited by mystical visions of the future, speaks of “the hurricane-like sweep of events [ураганный размах событий]” (14:10). Therefore, in this epic of the national catastrophe of 1917 the word in question carries a specific historical meaning. For apolitical, un-historical Likonya, however, it stands for something entirely different. By vocalizing Tsvetaeva’s verses, she expresses her longing to be carried away by her own, personal “hurricane” of love, those amorous and erotic feelings that matter to her more than anything else. Her lover encourages her to live and feel to the full, regardless of the catastrophic developments taking place in Russia: “People say that the Germans are approaching Petersburg, that they have already taken Riga and Dvinsk. But all this was like a pale shadow, a backdrop [Говорят в городе: немцы идут на Петербург, уже взяли Ригу, Двинск. Всё это – бледной тенью, второстепенно]” (14:301).

The deadliness of Tsvetaeva’s hurricane is linked to the two modalities of Eros, the creative and the destructive. In The Red Wheel, the words spoken by Likonya and the aunts contain frequent references
to death, but the death images these female characters are so fond of have different connotations. Adalia and Agnessa’s ideology is explicitly, flamboyantly death-oriented. Intoxicated by their ideal of revolutionary violence, they proclaim the necessity and desirability of death in general and young female death in particular, for the sake of that ideal: “Go, fight, die!” – the revolutionary’s whole life is in those three words [“Иди, борись и умирай!” – в трёх словах вся жизнь революционера]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 468; 8: 87). For this murderous pair, the violent pursuit of universal happiness means that individual happiness is of no importance. On the contrary, Likonya embraces the romantic notion of death as a mode of private, supremely aestheticized being: “Даже смерти хотелось. Именно смерти: чтоб ничто другое не пришло на смену этому [I even wanted to die. Yes, to die: so that nothing else could supplant this feeling]” (11:204). That said, Likonya is one of the epic’s most life- and love-affirming characters. It is no wonder that the two death-affirming aunts disdain her. They cannot comprehend Likonya’s unwillingness to sacrifice her self and her life for the sake of a public ideal. When the aunts ask Likonya and Veronya one of those weighty questions that have traditionally featured in Russian novels, the response they get is as counter-revolutionary as it gets:


“Tell me, girls, what do you want to achieve in life? What is your ambition?” The girls exchanged cautionary coughs. Likonya, taking care to purse her bee-stung lips beautifully, vouchsafed a reply: “To live.” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 445)

Although this is an intuitive and impulsive reply, which it is accompanied by one of Likonia’s characteristic pouts, it gives voice to a central motif in The Red Wheel. Extracted from its immediate conflict-of-the-generations context, it has a palpably Tolstoyan ring: human life matters infinitely more than any ideology and ought not to be disrupted or destroyed by terror, war, or revolution.

While Adalia and Agnessa want Likonya to “live by the light of reason” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 445) and by the creed of the revolution, she privately recites Tsvetaeva’s poem “By the Memory of the Heart”


[“Памятью сердца”, 1910–11], as an indirect response to the aunts’ insistence on the primacy of the (politicized) intellect:

Но был так нежен – это не могло так сразу пропасть!
Днём утоляет и лечит рассудок.
Вечером – нет.

He was so tender – all this could not vanish at once!
In daytime, my mind grows calm and heals
But in the evening, it isn’t so.
So what then? Maybe something happened to him? Because of those events?

Now, it is traditional that the hours of love occur in the evening and during nighttime. Likonya’s emotions rise to their highest level of intensity as darkness falls (вечером). On the other hand, for the revolutionary males and females in The Red Wheel nighttime offer the best opportunities for their dark deeds: conspiracy, political meetings, acts of violence or terror. These are not acts of individualized love, but of an abstract, arid passion, Eros stripped of its creativity and warmth, and viciously inverted. Thus, Tsvetaeva’s poem as recited by Likonya turns into one more borrowed item of implied commentary in the epic’s anti-revolutionary discourse.

Another Tsvetaeva quotation that Likonya privately enjoys and that expresses the truth about her love situation and love-oriented femininity is the introductory lines of the poem “In the Park” [“В сквере”, 1911]. In The Red Wheel, the punctuation and spelling are subtly changed, in order to reflect Likonya’s idiosyncratic diction:

Пылают щёки на ветру –
Он выбран! он – Король! (11:205)

My cheeks are burning in the wind –
He is chosen! he is – my King!

In another context, the words “king” [король] or “queen” [королева] would have obvious political connotations. For revolutionaries of every stripe, the king (i. e., tsar) and the queen (i. e., tsarina) are the enemy. Also, the young Populist females were fond of coding themselves as “queens,” as a way of asserting

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power, status, and glamor in the revolutionary movement. The aunts make this point in suitably
grandiloquent terms:

But Iron Sofia perhaps eclipsed the rest of them. She came from a great family – the
Razumovsky-Perovskys. [...] She seems to have grown up with an awareness of her
extraordinary destiny, of the enormous tasks ahead of her (one of her childhood dreams
was of becoming a queen). [...] Then there was Yevlalia Rogozinnikova. Another of the
queens of terror! (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 452, 460)

By claiming to be “queens”, the female revolutionaries separated themselves from the rest of humanity and,
importantly, proclaimed their independence from their male revolutionary colleagues and, more broadly,
from all men. The reference in the above-quoted passage is to the celebrated Populist Sofia Perovskaya
(1853-1881), a leading member of the successful plot to assassinate Tsar Alexander II, who was executed
by the authorities following the Tsar’s death. Perovskaya “always treated men with reserve and respected
women more [...]” (452). This is a proto-feminist stance, corrected for the requirements of revolutionary
snobbery. Likonya, on the other hand, adopts Tsvetaeva’s poetic voice to declare her beloved Gordey her
king. She is happy to acknowledge his power over her, which is in keeping with her propensity for self-
sacrifice and with the reality of her life situation: the man she is involved with is married and she is prepared
to put up with it. He is the ruler and she is the subject. He leads, she follows.

The portraits of Likonya and the female Populists have a consistent imaginative referent, that of
childhood. Likonya has something of a child about her not because she has failed to grow up, but because
her sense of self and her expectations of love have a fairy-tale quality. She visualizes her beloved as a Puss-
in-Boots, her king or prince: “Он весь – большое сильное движение. [...] И сам в сапогах, но не по-
военному, а по-походному. Носится по всей России! [He is one strong movement. [...] He wears boots,
not to go to war but to go on the road. He rushes about the whole of Russia! ]” (12: 679). The image of
Likonya running at night in her high-heeled shoes from a name day gathering calls to mind Cinderella:
“Так нужно было к нему! Сейчас, будь он в городе, бросила бы их всех, имениных, – побежала бы
к нему в гостиницу в туфельках по снегу, придерживая платье, чтоб не путаться, — мимо этих патрулей с кострами […] [She had to see him! If he were now in town, she’d leave all those partygoers, she’d run to his hotel in her party shoes, holding up her dress so as not to trip, past the patrols warming themselves around a fire…]” (11: 316). Through Likonya, Eros expresses itself in fanciful ways that recall the language of children, but she is a grown woman of flesh and blood and has adult needs and desires; and lives in a time of a historic and national upheaval.

In the case of the female Populists, their erotic potential remained arrested in its development, even when they formed relationships with their male revolutionary colleagues, as Perovskaya did with her co-conspirator Andrei Zheliabov. These young women were eternal children, “brides-never-to-be [небывшие невесты]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 460; 8:79), as the aunts describe them. Their childlike traits, however, appear particularly sinister, since they are combined with an extreme ruthlessness and the will to murder. One Russian scholar notes:

[…] childishness, kindness, and a willingness to kill are presented not as an indication of the contradictions in each revolutionary’s character, but as a unity and wholeness, which define this human and social type. (Glinin 48)

On the same plane of intertextual reference and implied commentary, the text of the epic, in addition to featuring these Tsvetaeva interpolations, contains another instance of poetic citation relating to the theme of revolutionary femininity. This second dialogic connection is to a passage in Aleksandr Blok’s narrative poem Retribution that describes a secret meeting of political conspirators in the late nineteenth century, one of whom is Sofia Perovskaya:

Средь прочих – женщина сидит:
Большой ребячий лоб не скрыт
Простой и скромною прической,
Широкий белый воротник
И платье черное – всё просто,

Худая, маленького роста,
Голубой детский лик,
Но, как бы что найдя за дальню,
Глядит внимательно, в упор […] (Blok 1999, 30)

More brightly where a woman’s sitting,
The romanticized portrait of Perovskaya does not exhaust the meaning of this passage. The language here is similar to the one used by Adalia and Agnessa. The famous narodovolka fits the aunts’ ideal of a woman, “a revolutionary nun” who is austere in appearance and wears plain, dark clothes. Indeed, the aunts think of the Populists, both male and female, as “saints”, giving that word a non-Christian, politicized meaning: “What women they were! The glory of Russia! The aging Turgenev was thrilled: ‘Saintly one, enter in’…[Что за женщины! – слава России! Пробрало же старого Тургенева: Святая, войди!]” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 455; 8: 73).

In a similar descriptive procedure, Blok’s lyrical voice exalts Perovskaya by implicitly comparing her face to a saint’s visage on an icon. He focuses on her forehead ("brow"), a facial feature which, beyond its traditional associations with wisdom, is a prominent element in iconic representations of saints and angels. The phrases “голубоокий детский лик” and even “белый воротник” (“blue-eyed childlike face” and “white collar”) are just as evocative. According to the color code in Blok’s poetry, white stands for purity, harmony, and the ideal, whereas blue is a symbol of the divine. The same colors of blue and white have symbolic value in icon painting, with the former representing the life of man and the latter representing Uncreated or Divine Light [Фаворский Свет], the radiance of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. Also, the female revolutionary’s childlike appearance invites associations with the infant Jesus.

Furthermore, the primary meaning of the word лик is “the face of a saint.”

Next, in the English translation Perovskaya eyes are “intent and steady,” but in the Russian we read: “глядит внимательно в упор,” which rendered literally means “gazes steadily at point-blank range”. There are hints of guns and assassinations here. If she is a child, then she is a homicidal one.
Here let us note that Likonya’s name is triple-coded in a religious sense. It is phonetically similar to *lik*, which is a synonym of the word *ikona* ("icon"). [L]ikonia also sounds like *ikona*. Lastly and most importantly, the character’s full name, Elikonida [Еликонида] (onomastically revealing of her origins as a merchant’s daughter) is that of a female martyr of the third century. During the persecution of the Christians under the Roman emperors Gordian and Philip (244–249) this saint protected her fellow-believers and denounced the townspeople of Corinth for worshipping pagan gods. According to her hagiography, she was thrust into a cauldron of boiling pitch but an angel of the Lord appeared and put out the fire. After it was relit and burned all night, she emerged from the flames unharmed [http://days.pravoslavie.ru/Life/life1158.htm].

St. Elikonida and Likonya: once again, we see an association between fire and water.

In addition to Blok’s representation of Perovskaya, the character of Likonya is intertextually connected with another female figure in his poetry, that of the Stranger [Neznakomka], who appears in the famous eponymous poem of 1906. This set of Blokian associations is most vividly present in *November 1916*. The novel in question features a scene where Likonya arrives at the “Cubat” restaurant in Petrograd and has dinner there with a male companion of a decidedly “decadent” appearance. In this episode, she is observed by the epic’s near-protagonist, the patriotic and manly (though rather unliterary) Colonel Georgiy Vorotyntsev, who unbeknownst to himself adopts the visual perspective of Blok’s lyrical *I* in “The Stranger”:


A slender girl in a reddish-brown coat and a black hat which did not quite cover her hair, she jumped lightly down, lost her footing, and was steadied by her companion in what looked like an embrace. They went in before the two officers, and a whiff of perfume followed the girl into the vestibule. […] Likonya was sitting half turned toward him and could be conveniently studied. […] and yet some residual awareness of them lingered in his eye and in his mind. What could they be talking about? What kind of lives did they lead? And why should he concern himself with this girl. Whom he would never see again?
Some piquant essence emanated from her, it was impossible not to feel her presence.
(Solzhenitsyn 1999, 501, 504)

Likonya’s body language and clothes are coded so as to evoke Blok’s Stranger. Like that enigmatic figure, she too is fashionably hatted and fills the air with an otherworldly fragrance. She is supple and graceful, and her movements are almost preternaturally fluid. The beguiling aura of mystery and beauty surrounding her draws and arrests Vorotyntsev’s male (and uninformed) gaze.

Matich defines Blok’s Stranger as a female image associated with death and antiquity [“древние поверья”] and views her as “the dead body of history” (2004). The “funereal feathers [траурные перья]” on the Stranger’s hat symbolize a “connection with the underground world and death” (2004). Through her “dark veil [тёмная вуаль]” the poetic I “for a brief moment penetrates the past,” while her “silks [шелка]” represent layers of history and myth” (Matich 2005, 133; Blok 1997, 122-123). As Matich imaginatively argues, the dead female body, particularly one that connotes ancient times, was a common “fetish” (2004) of decadent art. The worship of this body was one of the ways in which the Symbolists affirmed the death of history and strove to bring it to an apocalyptic end:

Decadence feminized history […]. By giving its preference to death instead of procreation, the decadents rejected the concept of biological continuity, associated with the female body. By rejecting a woman as a manifestation of life, they glorified her as a representation of death (Matich 2004).

Despite the Blokian references surrounding Likonya in the restaurant scene, she does not correlate with the death-oriented feminization of history discerned by Matich. For this poetry-loving character, Symbolism and its works are mainly a matter of style. As a reader, Likonya chooses to interpret it on her own and adapts her appearance and public demeanor so that they conform to its preferred notions of femininity. However, her erotic appeal is not death-, but life-affirming, even before she meets Gordey with whom she desperately hopes she can find fulfillment as a lover and a mother. She is not “antique,” nor does she strive to be so. In fact, she is one of the most contemporary characters in the epic. For the observant Vorotyntsev, who spent much time at the front and therefore looks at life in the capital with a fresh eye, Likonya is a manifestation of modernity, a living example of cultural and social change: “Did young ladies like that
come here in the old days? Wasn’t Cubat’s a place for talking business? When we get back a lot of things will be unrecognizable […]” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 501).

Through successive Knots of the epic, Likonya persists in becoming ever more closely engaged with the language and the literary tradition that the two elderly lady radicals find so objectionable. As Likonya’s love for Gordey grows stronger, Silver Age values and tropes increasingly shape her speech patterns. At the same time, her language and techniques of self-expression start to exhibit a new dynamic. Earlier the heroine was merely fascinated, in a fan-like manner, by the fashionable literary productions of the age and used them chiefly as a source of quotes, with each borrowed line of poetry a discrete rhetorical ornament. These quotations still belonged to their authors (Gumilev, Tsvetaeva, Vertinsky), and Likonya was self-consciously making temporary use of them. Now (mostly in April 1917), she herself becomes, in a sense, an author of the Silver Age. Her interior monologues and the written notes she sends to Gordey are modernist mini-productions. Each love reflection or love letter is a small, emotionally charged prose poem containing a plethora of Tsvetaevian syntactic, descriptive, and imaginative devices. Moreover, there is another, non-poetic referent for the Likonya story line, particularly as it is presented in the epic’s later chapters, that of Tsvetaeva’s prose works, which date from the late 1920s–1937 (let us recall the high praise Solzhenitsyn lavished on these texts). This similarity between Tsvetaeva’s prose and the particularities of Likonya’s oral and written speech has not escaped the attention of some scholars:

[…] the narrative mask of “an implied female author” generates the fascinating phenomenon of Solzhenitsyn’s “feminine” prose. Thus, the artistic structure of the Likonya chapters exhibits certain similarities with the artistic structure of Tsvetaeva’s prose. (Spivakovsky 52)

In April 1917 we find Likonya brooding over her beloved’s departure from Petrograd:

Но всё время, когда Ликоня и не думает о нём, – она о нём думает, он – есть у неё.

2 As a writer, Solzhenitsyn was always interested in forms that are intermediate between prose and poetry. His two cycles of Miniatures [Крохотки] (1958-1960; 1996-1999) are a case in point.
Since he left her, time has slowed down: then it was rushing forward, now it just crawls. Yet even when Likonya does not think about him, she thinks about him, she feels his presence. Those days of March, which flowed in a single stream, she later learned to distinguish them one from the other, and all their meetings too. Because then she was suffocating. A frightening thought: after they see each other again, must she wait anew? It would be better if they didn’t meet too soon, so that the waiting comes later. […] Every letter is like a conversation in the dark, when faces are invisible. […] I want to say thank you! Without a thank you, it is as if there are no letters.

The passage contains numerous Tsvetaevian ellipses. Explanations or connections are omitted wherever possible, to highlight the intensity of feelings and thoughts. Like Tsvetaeva’s literary personas, Likonya experiences a succession of emotional states within the space of a single sentence. The dashes (Solzhenitsyn’s and Tsvetaeva’s favorite punctuation mark) are graphic indicators of the “compressed” nature of the narration, which, as is often the case in Solzhenitsyn’s third-person narratives, takes the form of a free indirect discourse that is informed by Likonya’s speech patterns.

The representation of revolutionary and non-revolutionary femininity in The Red Wheel is inventively coded and structured on multiple levels of meaning. The female personalities depicted, particularly that of Likonya, are placed at the center of a network of intertextual connections and references that enrich the reader’s understanding of these characters, as well as of the historical events they witness. Although Tvetaeva’s poems appear in the narrative in the form of recitations or quotations articulated by Likonya, they are much more than mere markers of her literary tastes or dreamy nature. The interplay between the Tsvetaeva texts and the historiographic and culturological dimensions of the epic adumbrates and reflects the appearance of the Feminine Eros within the revolutionary cataclysm that overwhelmed Russia in 1917.
CHAPTER 3

THE DARK EROS. AGGRESSIVE REVOLUTIONARY AND PUNITIVE MASCULINITY. THE FEMININE RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION IN SOLZHENITSYN’S FICTIONAL AND NON-FICTIONAL WORKS AND TSVETAeva’S AND BLOK’S POEMS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AND CIVIL WAR PERIOD (1917-1922). THEMATIC AND TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS TO EVGENY ZAMIATIN AND MIKHAIL BULGAKOV

There is a direct relationship between Eros and history. As Mikhail Epstein observes, “History is the great metasexual tension of humanity” (109). This tension can be either released, or accumulated, suppressed, and strictly controlled. This chapter aims to show that Eros is sensitive to historical transformations and responds to them and, in accordance with the progression (or regression) of historical events, itself becomes the object of socially coded change. It is alive, pulsing with the rhythm of history.

In turn, history is influenced by Eros. People’s perceptions of their bodies, gender identities, and sexual relations are factors that can impact political, social, economic, or cultural realities or even shape them. In The Red Wheel, the personalities of the politically radical Lenartovich sisters, who proclaim and themselves exemplify the suppression of female sexuality and a woman’s maternal capacity for the sake of a revolutionary ideal, are bearers of the rudiments of totalitarian psychology. The words and deeds (though mostly, words) of these spinsterish, agamic characters foreshadow the objectification and mechanization of the human body during the Soviet period and its transformation into a de-gendered instrument of state policy. Adalia and Agnessa Lenartovich, who first appear in August 1914, represent the initial stage, the starting fictive point of what I define as the Dark Eros. These childless women are the in-text “mothers” of this notion.

In addition to a range of theoretical works listed in the first chapter, the term “Dark Eros” is inspired by Marc Chagall’s painting The Revolution (1937) and reflects its compositional logic. This painting is based on the play of opposites. The center of the canvas is occupied by the black-clad figure of Lenin doing a handstand on a chair in a typically Chagallian acrobatic pose. On the left is an armed revolutionary crowd dominated by the colors red and black. In the lower right corner, we see a wooden hut with a bride and
bridegroom and an infant, all lying on the roof (the present and the future, generationally depicted). The yellow ceiling lamp suspended over the street and the enormous sun behind the lovers are the two sources of light. The sun may be interpreted as representing the cycle of the married couple’s life/love; or the passage of time — cyclical, ahistorical time. In one version of the painting, the bride and groom are shown floating in mid-air, in another, they are looking back at Lenin, who disturbs their sensual idyll, with a sense of bewilderment. Their Eros is still illuminated — luminous. It is the Eros of Light. It is harmonious, whole, reciprocal, and potentially or actually procreative (thus, the baby). Yet this Eros is also doomed, as Lenin’s artificial posture suggests, to be turned upside down: from light to darkness. This chapter seeks to explore the concept of the Dark Eros and trace its fictive and textual manifestations from the immediate prerevolutionary period to the end of Stalin’s reign.

Solzhenitsyn’s fictional and polemical writings continue the Russian literary tradition of imaginatively conceptualizing and dramatically textualizing twentieth-century historical tragedies. At the same time, they interrogate it and, arguably, supersede it. This is a dialogic procedure that transcends categories of genre and style. The works of Blok, Tsvetaeva, Bulgakov, and Zamiatin may be read as the points of textual departure for Solzhenitsyn’s re-evaluation of the Russian revolution and the first four decades of Soviet rule, particularly in view of the fact that the last three authors were among those he especially admired, both as stylists and artistic chroniclers of the Russian twentieth century. Solzhenitsyn’s dialogue with his Silver Age and early modernist predecessors follows multiple lines of inquiry, one of which centers on the manifestations and transmutations of the erotic in the private and public sphere from the February revolution onward. In this regard, the place and role of the Dark Eros during the 1917-1953 period is a crucial theme in Solzhenitsyn’s dialogue with his literary predecessors.

The Dark Eros is a textual phenomenon that Solzhenitsyn and the other authors I discuss employ in order to fictively conceptualize the impact of revolutionary ideology, the revolution, and the gulag on the female personalities they describe. The structure of the chapter will embrace most of Solzhenitsyn’s major works and genres starting with his early narrative poem The Road, including his best-known novel The First Circle, his short fictions; and, finally, his epic of World War One and Russian revolution - The
Here it should be mentioned that *The Gulag Archipelago* stands apart from Solzhenitsyn’s fictional works. While the narrative strategies and artistic treatment of femininity in this work are not dissimilar to those in the fictions, this is not a novel or even an epic but an “Experiment in Literary Investigation.”

Solzhenitsyn’s works contain a discontinuous chronology of the genesis and evolution of the Dark Eros from 1914-1953. In chapter II I discussed Adalia and Agnessa Lenartovich’s principle of placing human bodies (and lives) in the service of a political doctrine for the revolutionary transformation of society. This principle will find its ultimate realization in the closed spaces of the gulag camps. But before that happens, it must go through several historical stages. There is the revolution and its immediate aftermath (1917-1921), which includes the civil war years. Here, Eros ceases to be warm, private, and domestic and begins to violently entrench itself in the public spaces of the city or the village. This period, as it is shown in Solzhenitsyn’s multi-generic productions as well as in Tsvetaeva’s poetic texts, is marked by the breakdown of traditional morality, public lechery, sexual permissiveness, and aggressive displays of male sexual violence toward women, all against the backdrop of country-wide military operations, epidemics, and hunger that cost the lives of millions. It is also characterized by displays of female submissiveness and even depravity, when women surrender and enthusiastically respond to the depredations of an offensive, eroticized, and politicized masculinity. In 1917-1918 the aggressive, everything-is-permitted male Eros is part of the unrestrained revolutionary carnival, while during the civil war it becomes sanctioned by the state, which privileges and appropriates this dark masculine force in order to carry out its new policies. Solzhenitsyn’s short story “Ego” shows that during peasant uprisings such as the Tambov Rebellion, Red Army punitive expeditions make wide use of sexual terror tactics, collectivizing female bodies in the villages themselves or in concentration camps and raping them at will.

The second stage, as it follows Solzhenitsyn’s textual logic, embraces the NEP period up until 1928, when the new Soviet state, as the writer shows, consolidates and extends its political power, even as it allows a measure of private enterprise and retreats from the *violent* reorganization of society and human nature. The human body turns into the subject of scientific or scientistic experiments, though the element
of coercion is no longer violently present. Instead, the practices of the Dark Eros are spread through propaganda and peer pressure, primarily among the younger generation. In a 1923 article, a prominent Russian female revolutionary Aleksandra Kollontai declares: “Make way for the winged Eros!” Sex and sexual energy is perceived as a power source that will serve the collectivist spirit and the industrial growth of the country: “However great the love connecting two sexes, however many tender and spiritual ties bind them together, the bonds within the entire collective must be stronger and more numerous and more organic. [...] The morality of the proletariat prescribes – everything for the collective” (236). A large number of people, especially youth, accept these sexual innovations and adopt the state-decreed, experimental-mechanical attitude towards their bodies.

The final stage, as it is mainly reflected in The Gulag Archipelago, is the world of the camps. The prisoners are turned into a biomass, that is, a collection of living human specimens that are sources of energy and labor for the communist construction project. Sexual relations between women and men – their possibility, frequency, and forms – are subject to administrative regulation in the carceral spaces of the gulag. The “warm” or “light” Eros is taken out of its domestic environment, the marital (or extra-marital) bed. The violence no longer reveals itself in streets, squares, and other public locations. It is transported to the punitive and correctional spaces of the camps where the violent masculine erotic force, now entirely sanctioned by the state, takes an extreme and often deadly form.

All these stages are proleptically adumbrated in August 1914, Chapter 8, where the 20-year old orphan and revolutionary sympathizer Varya Matveeva, a student attending the Bestuzhev women’s courses in St. Petersburg (soon to be renamed Petrograd), encounters the hyper-masculine, broodingly charismatic anarcho-communist Zhora in her hometown of Piatigorsk in the northern Caucasus. Zhora is a tinsmith who has a workshop in Piatigorsk’s commercial district. Varya had met Zhora as a prepubescent schoolgirl, when she was both fascinated and frightened by his aura of violence and hate.

This episode contains an embryonic and compacted scheme of the Dark Eros’s future evolution. The Varya-Zhora encounter occurs within three successively presented loci: the public space of the street,
the *enclosed space* of the tinshop, and finally a dungeon-like cupboard at the back of the premises, a *trap*, where the young woman finds herself servicing the tinsmith’s sexual wants.

Varya comes across the tin shop by accident, as she wanders the streets of Pyatigorsk after visiting her dying benefactor, a merchant who has been supporting her education for years (a plot line that forms part of the epic’s representation of the richness and variety of human and social situations in the Russian Empire). She is thrilled when she sees Zhora. Despite or rather because of his frightening appearance, she finds herself powerfully drawn to him. The description of the tinsmith’s appearance and physical movements is densely coded to evoke fairy-tale or mythological details as well as his credentials as a proletarian. Standing as he does inside the dimly lit interior of the shed, Zhora is enwrapped in darkness, even blackness. He is swarthy, has black hair, “stiff black stubble”, and a “black stare” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 55, 56). When Varya first sees him, his body is almost static and stiff like the metallic objects that surround him. In spite of the summer heat, he wears a “thick shirt” and an “apron standing out stiffly from his body” (53). Richard Tempest compares Zhora with the Greek God of blacksmiths, Hephaestus: “In the Iliad, Hephaestus is shown limping. […] When Zhora stands up in order to lead the girl to that terrible cupboard where she will undergo her fall, he has a cramp in his leg. This is a coded allusion to the Greek god” (interview 2014). In fact, Zhora’s appearance combines the features of a fairy tale giant and a butcher: “[…] he was a grown man, and a strong one with brawny shoulders. […] His strong, fleshy lips were twisted in a grimace [сильный мужчина с узластыми плечами. […] и перекошены были его сильные, крепкие, мясистые губы]” (54; 7: 64-5). His apron resembles a dragon’s scaly back (“стоял дыбчатый фартук неподвижным хребтом”, 7: 67) and his eyes are also draconic, full of a dull fire: “There was fire in his hard black eyes. From some underground smithy? From a hidden furnace? [Сильные чёрные глаза. Но заогнились, от подземной кузницы, от скрытого горна?]” (58; 7: 68).

Zhora’s instrument is a hammer (hints of the Soviet symbol of the hammer and the sickle), with which he “angrily” and “savagely” works a tub. The sounds coming from his shop are loud and jarring: “[…] the harsh, angry noise of hammer on tin from inside the booth made you want to cover your ears. […] He went on furiously hammering his tub, as though he were landing blow after blow on his worst enemy [a
Varya tries to establish a connection with the tinsmith by making conversation. She reminds him of his youthful engagement with the revolution (he distributed anarchist leaflets) and gradually, if reluctantly, the latter shares with her details of his life. He invites her into the shed and there his hands that have just held the hammer and beaten the iron tubes start treating her body in the same “downward” manner, with Varya passively submitting to his coarse and aggressive sexual moves: “She was beginning to understand but trying hard not to. […] She was breathing heavily with terror and from the heat in this tight black trap, this dark well. She felt the pitiless pressure of his hands on her shoulders. Down, down, down [Она – если и начала понимать, то не хотела понять! […] Она задыхалась от страха и жара в этом чёрном неповоротливом капкане! колодце! И ощутила на плечах неумолимое давление его нагибающих рук. Вниз]” (59; 7: 69). This episode, therefore, shows the vector of carnal, revolutionary coercion and points to, and intertextually frames, the scenes of the abuse and rape of the female body shown in March 1917 and April 1917 and in the binary tales “Ego” and “Nastenka,” as well as The Gulag Archipelago.

Zhora’s shed is a narrow, stuffy space — metaphorically, a “black well” or “cave” (54). The loci where sexual violence occurs in the camps are of similar shape and appearance, dark, closed spaces such as prison vans, railroad carriages, bathhouses, barracks, and storehouses. The world of the gulag is like a gigantic shed or a multitude of sheds scattered across the whole country. Zhora is the prototype of the gulag chief or trustee who has rights to the defenseless body of a female prisoner, as recorded on multiple occasions in The Gulag Archipelago. His name – Zhora (cf. ob-zhora, “glutton”) – is suggestive of a devouring maw. On the timeline of Solzhenitsyn’s prison narratives, the sound of his hammer will be echoed in the first lines of the tale One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1959): “The hammer banged reveille on the rail outside camp HQ at five o’clock as always [В пять часов утра, как всегда, пробило подъём – молотком об рельс у штабного барака]” (2006, 3; 1: 15). The same aural topos opens the poetic proceedings in Solzhenitsyn’s poem The Trail (1947-1952) and his play The Republic of Labor (1954).
What is most striking in this passage are the patterns of Varya’s temptation and seduction and her utter non-resistance to Zhora’s sexually aggressive behavior. She is attracted to the anarchist’s brutal masculinity and his sinister “proletarian” environment, which only add sexual enchantment to Varya’s perception of him as a powerful and enigmatic figure: “She, however, was fixed to that dirty, dark wooden counter. […] She saw now how grown-up and manly and strong he had become in the years since she had known him. There was something secret and mysterious about him too [А её – как приковало к этому тёмно-деревянному нечистому прилавку […] И как она видела теперь всё его возмужание за эти годы, и всю его решительность! И закрытую загадочность]” (54-5; 7: 65-6). Varya is one of several young female characters in The Red Wheel who suffer from an inversion of values engendered by an idealization of revolution and revolutionaries. To borrow Solzhenitsyn’s expression, she already “lives by lies,” having succumbed to the kind of moral relativism that is preached by the Lenartovich sisters later in the same Knot of the epic: “[…] nobody insists on the absolute moral purity of the revolutionary. […] only of purity where and insofar as it is possible. […] As long as his political, social, and moral ideals are in harmony. […] Just a long as the revolutionary does not commit the sin against the Holy Ghost, against his own party. All the rest will be forgiven him! [Так и о моральной чистоте революционера мы можем говорить не абсолютной, а – о чистоте постолько поскольку. […] Поскольку он живёт в гармонии политических, общественных и нравственных идеалов. […] Лишь бы только революционер не совершил преступления против духа святого – против своей партии! Всё остальное ему простится!]” (467-8; 8: 86-7). The sinister formula “purity where and insofar as it is possible” will also guide the future creators of the gulag: the primacy of the contingent values of ideology and class over the absolute values of good and evil, whether these are derived from religion, family, or one’s personal sense of right and wrong.

In The Gulag Archipelago, Solzhenitsyn famously observes: “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart – and through all human hearts [Постепенно открылось мне, что линия, разделяющая добро и зло, проходит не между государствами, не между классами, не
между партиями, – она проходит через каждое человеческое сердце – и через все человеческие сердца]” (Solzhenitsyn 1975, 615; 5: 496). Varya does not realize that that ethical dividing line in her heart has shifted. In her encounter with Zhora, she proactively invites his attention. She is drawn to, and submits to, evil, which impacts her own body. Zhora is coded as a dragon, and it is as a “dragon” that the Soviet terror state is metaphorically described in The Gulag Archipelago (“Дракон”), while in The First Circle, the minions of the terror state are shown as being dragonlike, for example, the secret policeman and assassin Smolosidov (whose black hair and saturnine features recall Zhora).

As Zhora’s name implies, the revolution and the regime it will create have a tremendous hunger for victims: “Дракон уже проголодался он хотел новых жертв”. By sympathizing with and embracing the destructive political processes happening in Russia, Varya makes a fateful choice to descend into the abyss, just as many young Russians will do in subsequent years and decades. This choice affected not only the revolutionary or fellow-travelling few, but millions of others as well. The deeper tragedy lies in what Solzhenitsyn terms “the falsehood of all the revolutions in history”: “They destroy only those carriers of evil contemporary with them (and also fail, out of haste, to discriminate the carriers of good as well) [они уничтожают только современных им носителей зла (а не разбирая впопыхах – и носителей добра)]” (1975, 615-16; 5: 496).

The evolution of the Dark Eros through all its successive stages will be shown from the perspective of a dialogue between Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn, which at times will be expanded to include the other writers or poets who were preoccupied with the interplay of the erotic and the political in the public and private spaces of the nation during the 1914-1953 period. It is Solzhenitsyn’s firm conviction that the tragedy of the gulag was rooted in the events of 1917, and by the same token, he shows that the causes of the gulag’s sexual brutality towards women first manifested themselves during that revolutionary catastrophe. In this sense, the violent scenes of male-on-female sexual assault and abuse scattered throughout The Gulag Archipelago represent the culmination of a process whose beginnings are laid out not only in The Red Wheel, as in the episode of Varya’s encounter with Zhora, but also in other works by Solzhenitsyn that have the revolution and the civil war as their subject (“Ego,” “Nastenka”); but also in the
works of such literary witnesses to the events of 1917 and thereafter as Marina Tsvetaeva and Aleksandr Blok. Their poems of the period amounted to an immediate reaction to the excesses of the revolutionary epoch and recorded the displays of aggressive and murderous masculinity and sexual violence that characterized it.

Solzhenitsyn’s revolutionary and gulag narratives that describe a codified system of state-sanctioned sexual violence engage Blok’s and Tsvetaeva’s post-Silver Age verse productions in a cross-textual, cross-historical dialogue (those Solzhenitsyn fictions such as “New Generation” that touch upon the ideologically driven sexual experimentation of the 1920s stand somewhat apart). The poems in question show the genesis of public sexual transgression and sexual violence in its as yet spontaneous, uncontrolled, and carnavalesque mode, as part of the two poets’ impressionistic and imaginative panoramas of the revolution. Solzhenitsyn’s works, in this reading, acquire a meta-analeptic stance. They refer back to the events of the past in order to reconstruct and re-textualize them. Blok’s and Tsvetaeva’s poetic texts, on the other hand, acquire a meta-proleptic quality: they describe the poetic persona’s (poetic witness’s) terrifying and tragic here-and-now, which will become the template for the experience of captive femininity during the 1930s. In this chronologically re-arranged intertext, these works come together and form a single multigenre record of the rise and triumph of the Dark Eros.

The unfolding of an aggressive erotic masculinity that victimizes and corrupts the female object of revolutionary desire is particularly evident in Aleksandr Blok’s narrative poem *The Twelve* (1918). Like Solzhenitsyn’s Varya, Blok’s Katka is a willing sexual partner to brutal, politically motivated male figures whose malevolent lust is awakened and excited by the freedom of action granted to the revolutionary under the circumstances of national collapse. Katka, who was a prostitute in Imperial Russia, now adjusts her profession to the new social realities. Instead of the officers and cadets she used to pleasure, she now spends time with revolutionary soldiers by dancing with them in the taverns and sleeping with them while driving around St. Petersburg in a horse cab.

The masculine erotic force to which Katka submits is weaponized. It moves across the city armed with rifles and bayonets: “Идут без имени святого Все двенадцать – вдаль. Ко всему готовы, Ничего
並且 [So the Twelve go marching on, unsanctified, unblessed… grim and ruthless, every man ready for the worst]” (5: 18; Blok 1981, 316). In contrast to Zhora, whose capacity for violence is yet to be fully realized at this moment in historical time (thus far, he has been involved in one violent attack), though he hammers those iron tubes with revolutionary gusto, the Red Guards in Blok’s poem are marching bearers of wanton destruction and murder. The rhythms of depraved sexual intercourse coincide with the sounds of shooting in the street. Sex to the accompaniment of gunshots, or gunfire as a kind of sex. Either way, this is a lethal, godless business:

Свобода, свобода,
Эх, эх, без креста!
Катька с Ванькой занята –
Чем, чем занята?..

Тра-та-та! (11)

Liberty! Liberty!
We
Ain’t
Got no Cross!
Johnny’s having fun with Kate.
What can Kate be playing at?

Rat-tat-tat! (309)

“Тра-та” as an onomatopoeic representation of gunfire is rhymed with “без креста [without a cross].” Katka’s sexual affair with Vanka is part of the revolutionary carnival which transgresses religious and moral ethics. The meaning of this hurried coition expands across the entire space of the nation. Russia (Русь), which elsewhere the lyrical subject identifies with sacred and ethereal womanhood (“Ты и во сне необычайна. Твоей одежды не коснусь”, 2: 79) or even a mystical wife (“О, Русь моя! Жена моя!”, 3: 170), is now poeticized as a village slattern who deserves to be shot for being behind the revolutionary times:

Товарищ, винтовку держи, не трогты!
Пальнем-ка пулей в святую Русь –

В кондоловую,
В избяную,
В толстозадую! (12)
Comrade, have courage! Keep hold of your rifle!
Let’s give Holly Russia a bloody bellyful!

Stolid old
Solid old
Fat-arsed
Russia! (310)

Solzhenitsyn employs the same epithet, “Кондовая [backwoods]” in “Matryona’s Home” (1959), but in an entirely positive way: “And further on there was a whole countryside full of villages – Chaslitsy, Ovintsy, Spudni, Shevertni, Shestimirovo, deeper and deeper into the woods, farther and farther from the railway, up towards the lakes. The names were like a soothing breeze to me. They held a promise of backwoods Russia [А дальше целый край идёт деревень: Часлицы, Овинцы, Спудни, Шевертни, Шестимирово – всё поглуше, от железной дороги подале, к озёрам. Ветром успокоения потянуло на меня от этих названий. Они обещали мне кондовую Россию]” (2006, 27; 1: 118). It refers to authentic village Russia, as described in the novels and stories of Ivan Turgenev, which are abundant in scenes of nature, rural views and sounds, and portraits of peasant men and women (and sometimes children) who have retained the appearance and the ways of their ancestors. The narrator, Ignatich, who is returning from a place of exile somewhere in Asia (cf. “dusty desert”) in 1956, yearns for such a place of refuge yet almost poetically doubts that it still exists (“if it was still anywhere to be found”, 25). We saw that Blok’s “apostles” deny “backwoods Russia”’s beauty and its very right to existence in 1918, believing that it deserves only destruction and death. The rifle, the bayonette, and the bullet are symbolic of their male penetrative power. Their de-aesthetization of Rus, and sexual de-aesthetization in particular (“толстозадая”), is so objectifying that rather than inflict sexual violence on it, they would prefer just to shoot it.

Contemptuous references to Holy Russia were common in the writings of many authors of the period, with differing attitudes to the revolution. Vasily Rozanov in his “Apocalypse of Our Time” (1917-1918) metaphorically viewed the revolutionary fall of Russia as that of a “drunken village wench who stumbled and sprawled on earth [шла пьяная баба, спотыкнулась и растянулась]”.
If Varya encounters sexual evil that is incarnated in a single person, Zhora, Katka is the sexual victim of many men. She cannot be shared out among the revolutionary soldiers and is killed by one of them out of jealousy, in a vestige of old-world notions of a woman as sexual property. She is fatally surrounded by a *collective* of violent masculinity in a public location, a masculine grouping that will be depicted in more explicit and brutal terms by Marina Tsvetaeva.

Tsvetaeva’s poem “Maslianitsa Shiroka” (“Butter Week Celebrations,” 1922) presents the revolution and its aftermath as the semi-pagan carnival of Butter Week, which is depicted as an androcentric festival of offensive, strident manhood that objectifies, commodifies, and abuses women. As in Blok, the male sexual force escalates, dominates, and exults, often violently, all within the public spaces of Imperial Russia’s other capital, Moscow. The anonymous female celebrants in Tsvetaeva’s poem fit into the submissive, sexually collaborationist Varya and Katka mold and remain enthusiastically cooperative with the lustful males at all times, or at least until they are subjected to the final degradation of rape. Here are some relevant excerpts from this long Tsvetaeva’s poem:

Масляница широка!
Масляницу за бока!
[…]
Масляница-слобода!
Мочальная борода!
[…]
В тыщу девятьсот-от
Семнадцатом – счетом
Забралась растрепа,
К мужику в окопы.
[…]
Над ушком-то гудом:
Пора, брат, за бубен!
А в ладонь-то – зудом:
С кого брать – зарубим.
[…]
Тисканая!
Глаженая!
Румяная!
Ряженая!
Ротастая –
Твоя купель.
Одна сестра –
На всю артель!
In order to trace the vector of aggressive and unrestrained masculine sexuality, Tsvetaeva, like Blok, employs the device of juxtaposing revolutionary realities with figures and values from the Christian tradition. In Blok, the twelve Red Army soldiers are famously compared to the twelve apostles. The apostles gathered on the 50th day after the Easter, when the Holy Spirit descended upon them (the feast day of the Pentecost). In Blok, that gathering is now, much more implicitly, replaced by the Constituent Assembly, which met in 1918 to confirm the overthrow of the monarchy and establish a new form of government, only to be disbanded by the Bolsheviks at the end of its very first session. The Russian scholar Ivan Esaulov has also suggested that the meeting in question was an assembly of prostitutes who discuss the part-time or night-time rates of payment for their profession (240): “Ветер веселый […] Рвёт, мнет и носит Большой плакат: “Вся власть Учредительному собранию”…И слова доносит:…И у нас было собрание…Вот в этом здании…Обсудили – Постановили: На время – десять, на ночь – двадцать пять…И меньше – ни с кого не брать…[The wind is merry […] rips, wrenches, and yanks the great streamer away: “All Power to the Constituent Assembly!” And snatches on his way: “So we organized a meeting here inside this building… held a discussion, passed a resolution: ten for a moment, twenty for the night…and not one kopek under that]” (9; 308). The word “собрание” acquires an ironic sexual-political double meaning, which replaces its original religious (Pentecost meeting) connotation.

Tsvetaeva’s poem contains what Bakhtin defines as a “popular-festive system of images” (203). It references age-old Butter Week traditions and practices that would have been familiar to Tsvetaeva’s readers. In Russian Orthodox religious life, Butter Week had a somewhat problematic status. One scholar claims that “even though the Butter Week was included in the Church calendar and celebrated seven weeks before the Easter, it did not manage to appropriate any Christian content” (Uidin). Nevertheless, the holiday
was very much part of the paschal season and paschal notion and values were projected onto this originally pagan festival. Traditionally, Butter Week marks the week of preparation for the Great Fast and opens the cycle of Easter celebrations: Butter week – The Great Fast – Easter. The first and last holidays in the cycle – Butter Week and Easter – share certain festive traditions. Though the main ritualistic object of Butter Week – the scarecrow [чучело] – is not symbolic of the Godhead, its incineration symbolizes the death and resurrection of Christ. The immolation of the scarecrow, therefore, is a pagan-inflected reenactment of the Passion of Christ. This burning ritual also symbolizes the eradication of everything that is old, and the welcoming of a new life (Iudin). The fictive universe of Tsvetaeva’s poem correlates with Bakhtin’s view of the function of the “popular-festive spirit” in literary texts: “[…] these forms, developed during thousands of years, serve the new historic aims of the epoch; they are filled with powerful historic awareness and lead to a deeper understanding of reality” (208). In Tsvetaeva, the Butter Week images lose their original folkloric meaning as well as their Paschal associations and acquire a new, sinister historical content and context. They convey the cruel realities of the revolution. The Butter Week is “слобода” (“Масляница-слобода!”), which is derived from a word “freedom” (свобода) and means “free settlement” (e. g., Aleksandrovskaia sloboda, Nemetskaia sloboda). Yeast as the main ingredient in the pancakes traditionally consumed during this holiday now constitutes the imaginatively presented basis for “baking” a new and “free” revolutionary world: “Провалива́й, прежнее! Мои дрожжи свежие!” (108).

This device of intermixing Christian and revolutionary imagery will be adopted by Solzhenitsyn and employed in his large-scale, epic work of prose, The Red Wheel. Here the February Revolution and its aftermath are depicted as a nationwide holiday from history, a violently joyous or joyously violent event that assumes the ritual forms and social practices of the Eastern Orthodox Easter. Svetlana Sheshunova notes: “According to the church calendar, the revolution coincided with the Great Fast; yet for the Christian consciousness, the declaration of Easter in the midst of the Great Fast is madness and blasphemy”. The epic’s near-protagonist, Colonel Vorotyntsev, notices the expression of “paschal joy” (12: 370-371) on the faces of the people, representatives of the various social classes, who crowd the streets of Moscow during the revolution. His sister Vera Vorotyntsev, a thoughtful, observant soul, has the same impressions. As she
contemplates the mass displays of joy, unity, and “brotherhood” (11: 490) on the streets of Petrograd during the February revolution, she is struck by the similarities to the behavior and emotional state of churchgoers during religious holidays: “All Moscow is out on the street! – ladies wearing furs, maids in headscarfs, craftsmen, soldiers, and officers. […] And all the faces carry an expression of paschal joy and show happy smiles […]]; Vera had encountered something similar in the crowds of believers in front of the churches after a celebratory service, but it was unusual to see the same feeling of brotherhood among the unemotional Petersburg crowd, which had never been united by anything [Вся Москва на улицах! – и барыньки в мехах, и прислуга в платках, и мастеровые, и солдаты, и офицеры. […] И на всех лицах – радость пасхальная, умилённые улыбки […]. В толпах верующих у церквей, после праздничных обеден, Вера такое встречала – но необычно было увидеть сходное братское чувство у сухой петербургской толпы, никогда и ничем не спаянной]” (12: 370-371; 11: 490-491).

To return to Tsvetaeva’s poem, one of the major themes of the Butter Week celebrations is the fertility of plants, cattle, and women. Therefore, the holiday is an erotic and even “orgiastic” (Agapkina 198) celebration when male and female participants ignore all social norms and publicly enjoy a wide variety of sexual games, jokes, and songs (Iudin, Agapkina 195-196). In Tsvetaeva, however, this erotic freedom is no longer a happy occasion. Sexual permissiveness ceases to be theatrical and becomes rooted in the reality of a citywide or countrywide breakdown of accepted behavioral norms. The element of play is still there, but it is brutal and unrestrained. The custom of tearing the female scarecrow apart, a vestige of pagan times, is poetically transformed into a metaphor for the group rape of a female body. This basic fixture of Butter Week celebrations, which has Paschal associations, is now a symbol of degraded and insulted womanhood that is also shown to be willfully promiscuous.

Ротастая –
Твоя купель.
Одна сестра –
На всю артель!

Растерзана,
На круг – рвана!
Кто первый взял –
Тому верна:
Butter Week and the scarecrow as its central attribute now figuratively embody lecherous and accessible womanhood ("Тисканная! Глаженная!"): a young girl or woman who voluntarily seeks indiscriminate sexual contact with men: "В тыщу девятьсот-от семнадцатом — счетом забралась, растрепа, к мужику в окопы." A foxhole is dug by a soldier so that when he stands in it at full height, it protects his chest and lower regions. So, when Tsvetaeva’s camp follower climbs into the foxhole, the image implies that she provokes its occupant by getting into his pants. There is also a temporal point of departure for this female descent into sexual license. The events described are dated 1917, year three of World War I, thus the war imagery, but also year one of the revolution. We are told of a nameless woman whose anonymity and passivity is further emphasized by the structure of the poetic line, with the sentence subject occasionally omitted: “на круг – рава!” She is passed among the brutalized males who surround and squeeze her, her trajectory of sexual submission a crooked hoop.

In this context of depravity and sexual license, the image of the baptismal font (купель), which is cup-shaped, becomes suggestive of a woman’s body. More specifically, it is symbolic of her womb since kupel’ is used for the baptism of infants. In the poem, the qualifier for kupel’ is the colloquial “mouthy [ротастая].” The image of a “yawning wide mouth” is a cultural marker that is traditionally appended to the holiday of Butter Week, since it emphasizes the festive cult of food (Iudin). It is now a metaphorical indictor that the depraved woman’s reproductive organs have become grotesquely enlarged in order to provide sexual access for the whole “crew [артель]” of males she has sought out: “Ротастая - твоя купель. Одна сестра – на всю артель!” The wanton’s descent into the masculine, martial space of the foxhole has a parallel in Varya’s descent into the Zhora’s dark “underground” where his hammer acquires phallic overtones. In both cases, the act where the revolutionary male takes possession of a compliant, fellow-traveling female is presented as a symbolic “devouring” of a woman.

The French critical theorist Georges Bataille comments on the behaviour of the fallen woman, whom he defines as “the lowest type of prostitute” (139). Bataille’s approach is applicable to the Zhora-
Varya scene in *August 1914*, the Katka episode in *The Twelve*, and the instances of female sexual abandon depicted in Tsvetaeva’s poem, as when he writes that the fallen woman “turns to those who deny all taboos, all shame, and who can only maintain the denial through violence” (139). The “taboo”, as defined by this theorist, is the direct causal connection between “eroticism” and “violence” (or even “murder”). The killing act and the sexual act are “forbidden fruits” (72) and, therefore, arouse a murderous desire on the part of the male: “the desire to kill relates to the taboo on murder in just the same way as does the desire for sexual activity to the complex of prohibitions limiting it. […] Cruelty and eroticism are conscious intentions in a mind which has resolved to trespass into a forbidden field of behaviour” (72; 79-80). The Russian revolution as shown in Blok, Tsvetaeva, and Solzhenitsyn entails the complete de-tabooization of both, male violence, which is widely and publicly practiced, and male eroticism, which is no longer suppressed and controlled but is triumphantly displayed and produces violence of its own. According to Bataille, “every man” that is capable of sexual desire is a “potential killer” (72). Under the conditions of a revolution that denies all prohibitions, the eroticized male becomes an *actual* killer. The publicly promiscuous woman activates this process of de-tabooization by exciting male lust and thus inviting the male’s violence onto her own body. In a revolutionary reality, the categories of “cruelty” and “eroticism”, as Bataille shows, become interchangeable. Everything that is cruel — Zhora’s callous use of Varya’s body, Petka’s casual murder of Katka, the male mob’s orgiastic abuse of the slatternly “sister” in Tsvetaeva — becomes erotic, while everything that is erotic is permitted and, as a consequence, turns out to be cruel.

In Tsvetaeva’s poem, the men who indulge themselves with the fallen “sister” are described as an “артель” (crew). The original meaning of this word is a freely constituted group of artisans or laborers who hire themselves out for a job or perform some other kind of joint work project. Here артель stands for a collective of sexual license, a sinister unspoken agreement among a group of men to take turns making use of a woman’s body — to pass her around within this male *circle*. Eliot Borenstein characterizes the Soviet Russia of 1917-1929 as a place that undergoes “masculinization of society” (4) and refers to “the canon of the postrevolutionary male collective” (58) where there is no place for a woman. When a woman intrudes into the collective she must be removed, often violently. In his interpretation, Blok’s Katka is violently
expelled from such a male collective: “The triangular rivalry and jealousy of Petrukha-Katka-Vanka acts as a centrifugal force, destroying solidarity by driving the two former comrades apart. […] In terms of narrative, the resolution of the love triangle is, for the Twelve, a digression, and obstruction in their path. When they are introduced in the second verse, they are shown in motion […]. when it [the love triangle] is finally resolved by Katka’s death, the progress of the twelve can continue: “And the twelve march once again” (Borenstein 52-3). In the same manner, the forceful sexual subjugation or rape of the fallen female scarecrow (“Растерзанна”) is followed by the ritual of its eradication by fire. There is a need for a final and complete removal of the female figure from the revolutionary “crew” of men, which is shown through the familiar Butter Week’s custom of incineration, so that the collective and brutal male celebration can continue on its own:

Круты, парень, паклю в жгут!
Нынче масляницу жгут.

Гикалу!
Шугалу!
Хапалу!
Чучелу! (109)

Under the realities of NEP — and Tsvetaeva’s poem is dated 1922 — artel’ acquired the meaning of a trade cooperative. Rhymed with kupel’, this word gives the latter noun, which has a primarily Christian but also, as we have seen, a figuratively sexual connotation, a crass, commercial ring (“Ротастая – твоя купель. Одна сестра – на всю артель!”). In this context, we note the existence of sound associations between купель and купить, “to buy,” which are suggestive of the commercialization of the sexual act. The reader identifies a (violently) erotic bargain around a woman’s body, which is treated as a commodity, a means of exchange within the male group. When addressing his co-rapists and pointing at the female, one male participant of the Butter Week carnival exclaims: “Товарищество! Товар!” — a juxtaposition of the revolutionary and egalitarian form of address, “comrade,” with the capitalistic “item for sale” or “commodity.” Here we once again perceive a parallel to the Varya-and-Zhora plot line in August 1914. Zhora is both an artisan (i. e., a proletarian) and a trader (i. e., a capitalist), and just as he works the metal objects in his workshop, which he then sells, so he “works” Varya’s body, which he sexually commodifies
in this tiny industrial/commercial space. The first thing that Zhora notices when he sees Varya is that she is not a customer (“He could, of course, see that she had nothing for him to repair”, 53). Once they start to talk and Varya makes it clear she is attracted to him and sexually available, Zhora decides that her body itself will be the object of transaction.

Despite the scarecrow-woman’s depravity and the sexual degradation she suffers, her designation in the poem is “сестра,” a word that has not only familial connotations, but also religious ones: Christian believers or members of a congregation are brothers and sisters in Christ. The presence of the image of the baptismal font in this representation of a series of violent sexual assaults hints that the rape of a woman, even of one who acts in a sexually provocative manner, is akin to an act of desecration. Symbolically, the female body is likened to the sacral space of a church, within which sacrilegious acts occur. The rise of the Dark Eros in revolutionary Russia coincided with the nation-wide violation of religious values and practices, a process that reached its culmination in the 1930s, with the almost total suppression of religious self-expression in the country’s public spaces, the destruction of churches and cathedrals, and the arrest and murder of thousands of clergymen.

It is significant that Tsvetaeva’s poem abounds in circular or spherical images: a mouth, pancakes, the baptismal font, the foxhole. The sexual violence is carried out by a “circle” of male assailants (“Одна сестра – […] На круг – рвана!”). Now, the circle as a geometrical figure is closely associated with Butter Week, especially with the reproductive cycle of humans, animals, and agricultural plants. During this holiday a round dance or horovod is performed, in order to encourage the growth of crops, flax in particular (Agapkina, 195). The immoderate consumption of pancakes is a fertility rite that celebrates the arrival of spring and is meant to guarantee a successful planting season, that is, to ensure the continuation of the cycle of nature. The same symbolism attaches to Pascal eggs, those spheres of fertility. The round shape of loaf or karavai represents the cycle of all four seasons repeated year after year (Iudin). In Tsvetaeva’s poem, by a process of semantic substitution the circle (of life and fertility) loses its original, ritual Butter Week meaning. It now signifies the cycle of revolutionary violence. Solzhenitsyn’s prose displays the same imaginative logic. In Screen Chapter 453 in *March 1917*, the revolutionary inversion of Christian values
and practices is geometrically expressed through the transformation of a Red Cross sign on a building into a rotating red wheel, a symbolic shift that has apocalyptic-revolutionary implications.

The spontaneous public manifestations of sexual frenzy on the streets of revolutionary Moscow, given free reign by the advent of revolutionary freedom, acquire a new dimension during the civil war years. The violence is appropriated, regularized, and receives official sanction from the state, which now sustains male sexual aggression and makes possible its consistent and structured expansion in the public and private spaces of society. In Tsvetaeva’s revolutionary carnival, men and women arrive as seemingly co-equal participants, though as we have seen, the latter become the sexual prey of the former. As a part of the revolutionary mob, both sexes start by wildly celebrating the fall of the old order. The destruction of existing legal and moral prohibitions — Bataille’s “taboos” — produces an explosion of carnal ecstasy that turns out to be brutal and depraved. Physical power is obviously on the masculine side and allows the men to dominate the Butter Week event, but the new Communist patriarchy has not yet been constructed. Once the civil war erupts, revolutionary authority becomes clearly gendered and privileges the male component of the Russian population, or rather, those men who adhere to the Soviet cause. The females are subordinate to the males not only on the level of physical strength, but also on the level of the newly instituted political, military, punitive, and carceral structures, which open up opportunities for male sexual violence and the organization of masculine erotic bacchanalias.

Solzhenitsyn’s short story “Ego”, which depicts a peasant rebellion in the province of Tambov that was provoked by the confiscatory practices of the Bolshevik regime, shows how the sexual exploitation and rape of females that occurred during Tsvetaeva’s Butter Week now enjoyed government authorization and spread from the cities to the countryside on an ever-widening scale: “Meanwhile, Goldin’s food detachments kept up their pillaging of the villages, and they continued their lavish feasting when they took up quarters. (There were instances when they ordered a certain number of women be sent to them for the night, and the village would comply — what else could they do? It was better than being shot.) [А между тем гольдинские продотряды всё так же наваливались на сёла грабить, и всё так же сами пировали на стоянках. (А были случаи: велели подавать им на ночь заказанное число женщин — и подавало}
село, а куда денешься? легче, чем расстрелы]. (2011, 27; 1: 275). In imaginative terms, the enormous “maw” of Tsvetaeva’s male-dominated carnival of Butter Week (“ротастая”) “devours” food as well as women. In “Ego,” the “lavish feasting” by the food requisitioning detachments involves the confiscation and consumption, by armed and violent men, of both food and females, through an officially decreed practice. These women are young unmarried girls or wives who must sacrifice their bodies in order to protect their families. They never volunteer their bodies to the men. They are simply raped.

After a hiatus during the 1920s, when overt state-sanctioned sexual violence and abuse ceded place to an official policy of re-shaping the sexual mores and practices of the younger generation along experimental, scientific, “winged Eros lines” (Kollontai), sexual terror returned, though it now resided in the enclosed spaces of the Soviet prison system, the gulag. Here it was codified, normalized, and reached new heights of brutality. The unbridled carnavalistic sexuality of the early stages of the revolution was suppressed by the terror state that claimed maximum control over the sexual life of its prisoners (though even during collectivization or the Great Terror, the sexually regulatory reach of the state was not absolute: the marital or pre-marital or extra-marital bed could still be a place of refuge and physical love for couples). The codified sexual violence of the gulag and the state’s totalizing control over the erotic sphere in the public spaces of the polity were part of the larger political picture. However, as mentioned above, before the Soviet state’s policies of violence and coercion became institutionalized in the 1930s, there was another, transitional stage in the evolution of the Dark Eros. This stage, which bridged the revolutionary and the gulag periods, was one of government-sponsored endeavors to change traditional attitudes to sex, particularly among the young: “The proletariat cannot help but consider the psycho-social role which the feeling of love in the broad sense of the word and in the sphere of relations between the sexes, can and must play, not in the area of solidifying family-marital relations, but in the sphere of the development of collectivist solidarity” (Kollontai, 233). Participation in these innovative patterns of carnality might take an active form, as in the permissive sexual practices within the Komsomol, whose female members were directed to be proactive in servicing their male counterparts. As one of the contemporary slogans stated, “Every male Komsomol must and should satisfy his sexual ambitions. Every female Komsomol is obliged
to submit to him. Otherwise she is a petty bourgeois” (Pavlenko). Such participation, therefore, took the form of passive acceptance where female Komsomols were concerned.

In Solzhenitsyn’s binary tale “The New Generation [Молодняк]” (1993), which is set in Rostov in the year 1926, towards the end of the NEP period, the focus is on the demographic cohort of young people of Varya’s age, who have already been fashioned and shaped by the state into “the Builders of the New World” (Solzhenitsyn 2011, 65). In Part One of the story, Vozdvizhensky, a professor of engineering, gives a passing grade on an exam, out of pity, to Konoplyov, a working-class student who is a representative of the new professional and political elite being groomed to replace old-world academics and experts. In Part Two, which takes place two years later, Konoplyov has abandoned his studies and is now an NKVD interrogator. Konoplyov offers his old professor, who has been put under arrest on a trumped-up charge, his freedom, in return for an agreement to inform on his colleagues.

Before looking at the post-revolutionary generation in detail, let us recall that among the various categories of young men and women depicted in The Red Wheel there was one whose representatives are emphatically apolitical and a-ideological, preoccupied as they are with their own private lives and interests. Sexy and artistic Likonya is the most vivid example. The revolutionary Lenartovich aunts perceive in Likonya and her like “some sort of debilitating sickness”, because their “ears [are] blocked to urgent social concerns” (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 448). Likonya’s provocative, Silver Age-tinged eroticism, is a constant source of irritation for the aunts, those dedicated upholders of the revolutionary struggle. Likonya and Veronya, their niece, demonstratively ignore the aunts’ lectures about the nobility of political assassinations and the female Populists as an ideal type of de-sexualized, austerely ideological femininity. One imagines that Konoplyov and the other young people depicted in “The New Generation” would have met with Agnessa’s and Adalia’s approval. First, these young men and women of the 1920s are preoccupied with “social concerns,” privilege the building of socialism over the pursuit of private happiness, and, in the spirit of the two elderly radicals, believe that the communist cause requires a new situational morality. Second, Konoplyov and his peers, both male and female, are happy to mold their sexuality to the needs of the Soviet state. Even their appearance is coded in a revolutionary, utilitarian manner, in contrast to the exquisitely
and seductively dressed up Likonya. Indeed, the female component of the “new generation” wears items of clothing that are markers of revolutionary commitment: “red kerchiefs”, “bands of red calico round their heads” (Solzhenitsyn 2011, 65).

Like the Adalia and Agnessa chapters in *August 1914*, “The New Generation” features the message of revolutionary morality delivered by an older speaker to a young audience, though here the disquisition in question is not a private event, a quasi-parental sermon that falls on two sets of deaf ears (Likonya’s and Veronya’s), but a public presentation by a government-appointed speaker to an enthusiastic audience of hundreds. Following Konoplyov’s narrow escape from academic failure, the story’s anti-hero goes to a Palace of Culture to attend a lecture on “On the Tasks of Today’s Youth” given by a speaker from Moscow. Like the Lenartovich aunts, the lecturer is a comic character, but even more so — a prancing, ranting lampoon. His appearance and manner of comporting himself are suggestive of a baby or infant, an embodiment of immaturity: “[…] a short, fat little fellow who couldn’t keep his arms still. […] He approached the very edge of the platform and, showing no concern about tumbling off, he leaned toward the crowd as far as he could […]” (65, 67; 1: 339-40).

Among the advantages that the Party makes available to the younger generation, the lecturer mentions the regime’s educational policies and its effort to re-organize society and economy along scientific lines. This socio-scientific project extends to the sphere of love and family relations:

And you want to rationalize your biological processes as well. […] And your organic, class brotherhood has given you a sense of collectivism, one that has been so ingrained that the collective even involves itself in the intimate lives of its members. And that is just as it should be! […] And so the revolutionary resultant force is being sought and is being found in the realm of love as well: we switch our bioenergy onto socially creative rails. (Solzhenitsyn 2011, 67)
The lecture’s organizing image, which stands for the ideologically approved notions of love and sex, is the moving train or the railroad, classic symbols of modernity. According to the baby-faced, baby-bodied speaker, the “revolutionary resultant force” part-resides inside the human body and in the erotic realm, the better to contribute to the task of socialist construction. This is the vision of a utilitarian Eros, where the rhythms of intimate life function in an industrially and politically productive fashion. Like the movement of a train along the rails, this Eros is subject to scheduling and has an economic function, while being stripped of privacy, spontaneity, and fantasy.

In “The New Generation,” the lecturer proclaims the principle of “planetism” (66), a utopian conviction that the new ideology will conquer the entire globe. The mechanized sex life he advocates recalls the way in which the Single State in Evgeniy Zamyatin’s anti-utopian novel “We” (1920), an all-controlling, all-seeing tyranny, regulates every aspect of its Numbers’ (subjects’) private lives for the sake of a collectivist vision of what it means to be human and an ever-forward-moving endeavor to communicate and impose that vision upon new minds and bodies. And so, the perfect society having been already constructed on earth, its message and practices are to be carried to the stars. The protagonist of “We,” D-503, is a mathematician and engineer whom the Single State has put in charge of constructing The Integral, a spaceship that will bring a “mathematically infallible happiness” (Zamyatin 1993, 3) to other planets. D-503 perceives sex as a “rationalization” of his “biological processes” and a matter of “equation [равнодействующая, Solzhenitsyn 1: 341]” for himself and his fellow-Numbers. Coitus is a “rational” act, a “useful function of the organism” (Zamyatin, 23). In imaginative terms, sex for D-503, like the Rostov lecturer’s metaphorical train, is “a purely technical matter” (22). It is free of jealousy and other private emotions and geometrically and mechanically moves along a “straight line” (4). Like everyone in the Single State, D-503 is issued with “pink tickets” that give him rights to the body of any female Number during a special “personal hour”: “Any Number has the right of access to any other Number as sexual product” (22). Sexual life is a public political transaction conducted in the interests of the Single State.

D-503 secedes from this linear, mechanized rhythm of erotic existence when he falls in love with I-330, a dissident individualist (and therefore a true revolutionary) in a collectivist society. I-330’s
numerical designation, with its I = “The Self,” expresses her textual status as a self-sovereign personality, utterly unlike that of any Number D-503 has ever met. After I-330 seduces the hero, he describes his mental and emotional state in these terms: “[…] I broke free of the earth, a free planet, whirling furiously, down, down […]” (56). He ends up moving in an incalculable orbit (“нечисленная орбита”, Zamyatin 2011, 175) of love and desire, detaches himself from the machine-like programming of the Single State, the eponymous “we.” He becomes a part of a different “we,” the “we” of love, D-503 + I-330, which follows its own curved trajectory full of mysteries and emotional ups and downs. Through his love for I-330, D-503’s body stops operating like a mechanical device, i. e., a train, and becomes like “an overloaded rail” (219). The body of his beloved, her face in particular, is made, in his eyes, of “two triangles”, “an irritating X” – the rails are no longer parallel, but crossed. It’s a train wreck! This diagonally structured cruciform face is one of the markers of the process through which D-503 discovers his unquantifiable and illogical “soul” (86). However, at the end of the novel the protagonist is arrested and subjected to a “great operation” (171) during which his irrational and private “soul” is removed. As a result, he once again becomes a slave to the rational and mechanized rhythm of the Single State. I-330, who is eventually betrayed by D-503, undergoes torture “under the Bell” (225), but does not submit and dies.

The young audience in Solzhenitsyn’s story obeys the foundational formula of the Single State: “nobody is one, but one of” (8). Konoplyov and his peers also constitute a “we,” a highly collective personality. Its members feel themselves to be a part of a larger whole: a class, a generation, the Komsomol. Instead of a critically-thinking and free-willed “I”, there is only a pliant, suggestible collective: “So here we are, a united crowd, all us young people close friends, even though we don’t know each other: this is what we are, we’re all our people, all of us like one [Вот как: сплочённо, тесно дружим мы тут, молодые, хотя и незнакомые: это – мы, тут – все наши, все мы заодно]” (65; 1: 339). The lecture in the house of culture is also, in a way, a “great operation,” one that aims to excise the audience’s capacity for critical thought and their individual sense of self, what D-503 called his “soul.” The Numbers that rush to submit to the operation are like a machine, “some kind of tractors” (182), and a herd of animals: “Someone’s piercing scream: “It’s a roundup! Run for it! And there was a stampede. Right near the wall there was still
a narrow little breach in the living ring. Everybody headed that way, heads out […] [Чей-то пронзительный крик: — Загоняют! Бегите! И все ринулись. Возле самой стены — ещё узенькие живые вороота, все — туда, головами вперед…]” (1993, 182; Zamyatin 2011, 265). The Russian verb “загонять” (to herd) belongs to the lexicon of animal husbandry and is used to describe the process of directing cattle into a shed or pen.

The young audience in Solzhenitsyn’s story is also cattle-like. The word that serves as the story’s title, “Молодник,” is usually applied either to recently born domestic animals or recently sprouted agricultural plants (the English translation inevitably loses this meaning). In Solzhenitsyn’s own Dictionary for the Expansion of the Russian Language (2000), the related word molod’ [молодь] stands for underbrush [поросль] (110). “The New Generation” abounds in agricultural metaphors that pertain to animal husbandry or crop cultivation: “Как хлыстом, ещё взбудрили этими горнами! […] Обжигало сторожным кличом […]. Сеял речь без задержки […]. [The call of those buglers came like the crack of a whip and brought the whole crowd to life]” (1: 339-40; 65). The text implies that just as livestock is sustained by fodder, these young people are fed fodder of an ideological kind. The level of the listeners’ attention to the speaker recalls a bull’s proverbial fixation on the color red: “There was a whole lot of red to be seen [Много красного было]” (65; 1: 339). The lecturer is “a bit like a clown” (67) (the narrative perspective is Konoplyov’s), yet his behavior does not arouse laughter or bewilderment in the audience. The young people’s response is serious and full of curiosity. They ask earnest questions. Interestingly, the bugle, which was the basic musical instrument in communist children’s and youth organizations and which is heard at the lecture, reinforces the imaginative connection to animal husbandry: the first bugles were made of animals’ horns, which explains the derivation of the Russian name for this instrument (horn-горн).

The character’s last name, Konoplyov, forms part of the story’s imaginative schema, which as we have seen, relies on agricultural imagery. Konoplia is the Russian word for hemp, a plant used in the manufacture of rope and a coarse kind of fabric as well as marijuana. Not only is the anti-hero academically unsuited for the study of engineering (“[… this stuff’s so complicated it’s buggered up my whole brain”, 60), but he is inarticulate and indeed barely literate. None of this, as it turns out, is a disqualification for a
position in the secret police. The reliance on agricultural metaphors in the description of gulag officials, whether future ones, such as Konoplyov in Part One of “The New Generation, or actual ones, such as General Bulbanyuk in *The First* Circle, who has a head “like a grotesquely overgrown potato” (244), is a recurrent device in Solzhenitsyn’s prose. In fact, there is a developed system of animal images that describe NKVD members and chiefs in *The First Circle*, who appear not only as vegetables, but also as bulls and pigs.

Russian writers of 1920’s pay fictive attention to the unstable boundary between an animal and a human being in their imaginative responses to the scientific construction of the New Soviet Man (or Woman). Two authors, Mikhail Bulgakov, whom Solzhenitsyn particularly admired, and Vladimir Mayakovsky, whom he particularly disliked, offered satirical depictions of this project. “The New Generation” may be read as a commentary on Bulgakov’s tale *The Heart of a Dog* (1925) and Mayakovsky’s play *The Bedbug* (1929). Both productions explore the New Soviet Man project against the backdrop of NEP and within the framework of the science of the day. In *The Heart of a Dog*, a medical luminary in private practice, Professor Preobrazhensky (his name means “transformer” or “transmogrifier”), transplants a human hypothalamus into the body of a stray dog, Sharik (“Ballsy” — note the circular connotation), creating a grotesque and vulgar approximation of a human being, Poligraf Sharikov. This experimental human is proud of his mythical working class credentials but turns out to be a biological and moral abomination, though one that has the very human capacity to suffer: “Did I ask you for the operation?”, 70). In *The Bedbug*, Prisypkin, a former proletarian and actual crook and conman, is accidentally deep-frozen and then restored to life fifty years later, in an ideal communist society, where he becomes an exhibit in a zoo, gaped at like a parasitic insect by the new men and women of the future, who are blind to his humanity, however base or flawed. The agriculturally coded student from the Worker’s Faculty, Konoplyov, recalls both the animal-human hybrid, Sharikov, and the grotesque philistine, Prisypkin. He, too, is objectified in the name of (an alleged) science, in his case, the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. All three texts pose the question: is it ethical to use a human being — his body and mind — as an experimental subject, for the greater good of society or humanity as a whole?
The transformation of a dog into a man and the resulting man back into a dog is metonymically enacted. In Solzhenitsyn, the same notion is presented metaphorically and subtextually, with Konoplyov and his generational peers consistently likened to livestock. Like Sharik-Sharikov, who was anaesthetized prior to his transformation, the crowd of young people in the Rostov house of culture falls into a near-hypnotic state, in which they lose the ability to freely decide how to dispose of their own bodies. Instead, they assimilate their physical, mental, and emotional selves to the demands of the communist project. The “rationalization of biological processes” proclaimed by the lecturer, like the Frankensteinian operation performed on Sharik by Professor Preobrazhensky, are two artificial procedures that break the laws of nature.

Grigorii Tulchinskiy’s “philosophy of the body” includes two “fundamental metaphors of human existence” (272) by means of which people are perceived as objects of manipulation: zoomorphism, the tendency to associate a human body with the world of animals, and technomorphism, the identification of the human body with machines. In Bulgakov, the erotic sphere becomes a field for experiments at the purely zoomorphic level. Most of Professor Preobrazhensky’s patients wish to undergo an intimate physiological renewal and eagerly provide their bodies for his experimental operations, like the aging female patient who agrees to have the ovaries of a monkey implanted into her no-longer-nubile body: “We'll do a transplant. A monkey’s ovaries […] – And when is the operation? [Я вам, сударыня, вставлю яичники обезьяны […]. – Когда же операция?]” (22; Bulgakov 1995, 61). Preobrazhensky gives Sharik a human hypothalamus in combination with a human testicle in order to learn how to rejuvenate the human organism and restore its virility as it ages.

In Solzhenitsyn’s novel Cancer Ward (1963-1967), the main character, Oleg Kostoglotov, is a complete antipode of Preobrazhensky’s patients, both of those who voluntarily allow the professor to change their physiology, and of Sharik-Sharikov, the uninformed and unwilling experimental subject. A former gulag prisoner who is undergoing cancer treatment in a Tashkent hospital soon after the death of Stalin, Kostoglotov asserts his sovereignty over his body in front of the doctors and nurses. He is determined to be fully informed about the radiation therapy he undergoes and the drugs he is prescribed. He is a patient
who rebels against the practices of twentieth-century medicine and refuses to be treated like an animal in a lab: “[…] all my life I’ve hated being a guinea-pig. They’re giving me treatment here, but nobody explains anything. […] they just give me the treatment as if I were a monkey [я всю жизнь отличался тем, что не любил быть мартьышкой. Меня здесь лечат, но ничего не объясняют. […] лечат, как обезьяну]” (Solzhenitsyn 2000, 40, 42; 3: 34, 36). Kostoglotov specifically protests against medical methods that could deform him sexually, that is, the hormonal injections that would destroy his libido and make it impossible for him to have children. In contrast to Sharikov, who is Preobrazhensky’s guinea pig, Kostoglotov, in a conversation with the main female doctor Luidmila Dontsova, proclaims his absolute “right” to make his own life-or-death decisions in the medical space of the hospital: “I simply wanted to remind you of my right to dispose of my own life. […] Why do you assume you have the right to decide for someone else? Don’t you agree it’s a terrifying right, one that rarely leads to good? You should be careful. No one’s entitled to it, not even doctors [Я хотел только напомнить вам о своём праве распоряжаться своей жизнью. […] Почему вообще вы берёте себе право решать за другого человека? Ведь – это страшное право, оно редко ведёт к доброму. Бойтесь его! Оно не дано и врачу]” (86, 89; 3: 71, 74).

Konoplyov and his fellow-komsomols clamor to be part of the process of personality-construction underway in the proletarian state, which presupposes a combination of zoo- and technomorphic manipulations. Their eagerness to provide their bodies for this Marxist-Leninist experiment even exceeds the enthusiasm displayed by Preobrazhensky’s patients for his innovative rejuvenation treatments. When the komsomols fall into a collectively animalized state in that house of culture, they show themselves ready to be passengers in the lecturer’s metaphorical train that rolls along the rails of “equation”, “rationalization,” and mechanization of their sexual lives. Since they have subsumed their individual personalities in the communist collective, they have also deprived themselves of their erotic uniqueness. True, they are eager to assert their libido: “Most of the questions were about sexual liberation” (68), but strictly within the depersonalized frame of the “new generation” project. The vector of Eros manifests itself in the audience’s response to the speaker’s words and is directed toward the baby-faced figure on the stage. Notably, in this gathering of young people there is no flirting, sideways glances, or even holding of hands. Instead, there is
a triumphant recognition that they are all undifferentiated parts of a single and powerful whole: “[…] это — мы, тут — все наши […]. И от этого у каждого — тройная сила […] this is what we are, we’re all our people […]. And knowing that gives each one of us the strength of three]” (1: 339; 65). The ideological charge that passes through the young guys and girls’ bodies and joins them together is syntactically expressed through the connecting dash sign (—), Solzhenitsyn’s favorite punctuation mark which usually, as in does here, denotes a diegetic ellipsis. The ideological principle of “all of us like one” (65), so willingly embraced by Konoplyov, applies equally to himself and to the 600-strong audience in the house of culture, whose members are collectively excited by the presentation, the sound of the bugles, and the decorations on stage, to the level of sexual ecstasy.

The collectivized Eros that takes form in the palace of culture is shaped by history and is contingent on it. Epstein writes:

Eros is nature at the moment of its alienation from itself, and this is when it actually becomes history. […] Freud posited only an individual unconscious, whereas Jung discovered a deeper layer, the collective unconscious. Is it possible to speak of the erotosphere as a collective libido, in the same sense that Jung speaks of the collective unconscious? (109)

In the “The New Generation,” the answer to this interrogative comment is, yes. The “collective libido” shows itself in a variety of socially useful forms and contributes its portion of sexual energy to the new Soviet “erotosphere.”

In the gulag, the practice of “switching” the erotic toward the fulfillment of social and state-related needs proclaimed by the lecturer in “The New Generation” will produce sinister and brutal results: “The walls grew – and Eros dashed back and forth [Стены росли – и Эрос метался]” (1975, 248; 5: 195). This quotation from The Gulag Archipelago is of fundamental importance, because it is the only textual instance in all of Solzhenitsyn’s productions where the word “Eros” actually occurs. The meaning of this comment, however, applies across almost all of the writer’s texts where the theme of love or sexuality is evoked. In concrete carceral terms, the “walls” in question are erected, by the prisoners themselves, to separate the male and female camp zones, in order to exclude the possibility of any unauthorized male-female physical contact. In a broader imaginative sense, these are the “walls” of the state’s total control, which prevent
everyone who is subject to its authority, prisoners, non-prisoners, and at times even the guards and administrators, to use their bodies freely.

The image in the quotation is suggestive of a caged animal. In *The Heart of a Dog*, we see an actual animal that is captured, physically altered, and suffers pain in the course of a medical experiment. Sharik(ov) may be seen as the metaphorical embodiment of Russia’s human population. At the end of Bulgakov’s novella Professor Preobrazhensky concedes the failure of his experiment: “Science has not yet discovered methods of transforming animals into humans [Наука ещё не знает способа обращать зверей в людей]” (121; 1995, 136). However, the revolutionary state was already designing methods for turning humans into animals.

In the gulag, the process of fortifying male political power over women, which began in the civil war, acquires a certain structure. The male ruler(s) of the country placed men in charge of the camps. Inside these carceral spaces there is a hierarchy of power which is also based on a chain of masculine authority: among the prisoners, the camp chiefs privilege the informers (*stukachi*) who spy on the other inmates, and the criminals (*blatari*) who abuse the political *zeks* and enjoy a higher status as a result. The sexual exploitation of female prisoners is not only a male perk but has an administrative function: male authority is imposed on the female body. Moreover, in those camps where the female and male zones are not separated, women’s bodies are vulnerable to brutalized male prisoners, especially the trustees: “Obvious old age and obvious ugliness were the only defenses for a woman there – nothing else. Attractiveness was a curse [Только явная старость или явное уродство были защитой женщины – и больше ничто]” (Solzhenitsyn 1975, 233; 5:184). The state engenders an aggressive, brutal male-oriented eroticism that denies the physical and moral autonomy of a woman, who is transformed into an object of sexual use. In the political economy of the camp, the female body can be ordered and served, negotiated and traded. As part of these transactions, it may be displayed and examined naked.

A reader is in a position to see how the revolution and the state that arose as a result regulated the trade in female bodies on an ever-escalating scale. Blok’s Katka sells herself and is paid in the new *kerenki* (Kerensky roubles), the colloquial name for which derives from the name of Aleksandr Kerensky, the prime
minister of the Provisional Government. Her sexual services are denominated in a revolutionary currency. She hides her earnings in an eroticized section of her clothing: “А Ванька с Катькой - в кабаке...У ей керенки есть в чулке! [Johnny’s in a pub with Katie...Kerensky rubles in her garter]” (11; 1981, 309). For the violent “circle” of males in Tsvetaeva’s poem, women are a commodity: “Товарищество! Товар!” In the gulag, the Butter Week poem’s implied word-play “купель-купить” in relation to a brutal sexual act acquires a literal and explicit manifestation. When the brutalized male’s intention to objectify and commodify women sexually becomes sanctioned by the terror state, it expands far beyond the prostitutes and promiscuous females that crowded the city streets at the start of the revolution — thus the systematic abuse of peasant women during the civil war. The gulag camps consolidate these coercive sexual practices into a vast, transcontinental socialist market in female flesh that comprises women from every social and professional background and of every type of family status, as shown in The Gulag Archipelago:

Human nature, if it changes at all, changes not much faster than the geological face of the earth. And the very same sensations of curiosity, relish, and sizing up which slave-traders felt at the slave-girl markets twenty-five centuries ago of course possessed the Gulag Bigwigs in the Usman prison in 1947, when they, a couple of dozen men in MVD uniform, sat at several desks covered with sheets (this was for their self-importance, since it would have seemed awkward otherwise), and all the women prisoners were made to undress in the box next door and to walk in front of them bare-footed and bare-skinned, turn around, stop, and answer questions. “Drop your hands”, they ordered those who had adopted the defensive pose of classic sculpture. (Solzhenitsyn 1973, 562)

For these female captives, the interrogation procedure, frightening and humiliating in itself, is made even worse by the stripping away of the last vestiges — shreds — of their dignity. The women’s enforced nudity contrasts with the uniforms of the MVD officers, whose shoulder boards and insignia are coded to convey their masculine, militarized authority and identify them as ranking servants of the state. The scene implies a conflation of the sexual practices of several different historical epochs. The gulag officials’ rights
to the physical ownership of female bodies are explicitly compared to the institution of slavery (ancient or, as in the antebellum American South, modern). The female slaves’ nudity and postures are reminiscent of classical sculpture, which, in turn, offers an implicit reminder of the anthropocentric worldview of the Renaissance, when masters such as Michelangelo emulated the art of antiquity. (In the Harvard Address, Solzhenitsyn criticized the Renaissance because, in his words, it “proclaimed and practiced autonomy of man from any higher force above him”; Solzhenitsyn Reader, 572). The female prisoners pose as antique statues (“защитные положения античных статуй”) is an unspoken appeal for compassion and humanity. A woman’s gesture of concealing herself is not only an instinctive attempt to protect herself from the aggressive male gaze, but also a message to the gazing male: “I am a human being.”

In addition to the sexual objectification of the female body, the gulag world is abundant in instances of sexual group violence. Tsvetaeva’s metaphor of an erotic, de-Christianized vicious “circle,” which destroys female dignity during the mock-Paschal celebration of the revolution, has parallels in many scenes in The Gulag Archipelago and Solzhenitsyn’s narrative poem The Road. In these works, women are shown undergoing multiple rapes by numbers of men who form a circle around their prostrate bodies. In Tsvetaeva’s poem, this type of violence forms part of a combined male and female celebration of the victory of the February revolution of 1917, though as we saw, in the course of this sexually unconstrained festival of freedom the woman is reduced to a passive and abused receptacle of male desire. In this poem, the commercial notion of the artel’ metaphorically represents the collective, violent, male-dominated sexual act. It also hints at the new commercial practices permitted under the New Economic Policy, in which male businessmen (nepmany) predominated. The male bodies, which triumphantly tower above the victimized woman, demonstrate not only the men’s physical strength and sexual dominance, but also their privileged place in the new post-revolutionary erotic sphere. This is the embryonic stage of this process. While the communist patriarchy has not yet asserted itself, its first elements are starting to emerge. As early as 1918, images of ideologically driven sexual violence are assimilated into the Soviet state’s aesthetic. In his analysis of a case of a collective rape that happened during the period in question, Eric Naiman concludes: “In War Communist discourse, rape – in its metaphorical transformation – for the first time became a
positive symbol: the assault on the earth was essential to the building of an unprecedented, resolutely phallic and iconoclastic proletarian society” (275, 284-85).

In the gulag, where these socio-sexual arrangements attain their most developed stage, group rape becomes not only “positive”, but normalized: “The Kolyma was where the expression streetcar for a gang rape arose [На Колыме родилось выражение трамвай для группового изнасилования]” (The Gulag Archipelago 1975: 234; 5: 184). The expression is the equivalent of the modern American slang term for a gang rape, “to run a train.” Now, the streetcar was part of the cityscape in early twentieth-century Russia and is a common image in the urban poetry of the period, Nikolay Gumilev’s verses in particular: “Шел я по улице незнакомой и вдруг услышал вороний грай, и звоны лютни, и дальние громы – передо мною летел трамвай.” It was a widely used, mechanical, and public means of transportation. As referenced by Solzhenitsyn, the term “streetcar” indicates that “gang” sexual violence is a routinized practice that takes place in open view and is coldly machine-like. On an imaginative level, the perpetrators and victims of group rape in the camps are as numerous and anonymous as the passengers on a city streetcar.

In Solzhenitsyn’s prose and poetry, which, in contrast to Tsvetaeva’s highly metaphorical verse, both tend to privilege metonymy, sexual violence is presented much more explicitly and in much greater detail. One of Solzhenitsyn’s most graphic scenes, which details a brutal sexual assault and unfolds as a fictive illustration of the “tramvai” expression, occurs in chapter 7 of The Road. As a result of sexual harassment by her boss and her unwillingness to submit to his advances, Liubonka, a young secretary, decides to quit her job. The sleazy partocrat agrees to let her go, but does not formally process her dismissal. Since absence from work without official documentation was defined as a crime in the Soviet Union, Liubonka is arrested and sentenced to a five-year prison term. She escapes from the clutches of the bureaucratic variety of the Dark Eros only to find herself descending into another, far more sinister abyss of sexual cruelty that takes place within the moving spaces of the gulag. As she is transported from her trial to the Taganka jail in a prison van, known in Russian as a voronok, she falls victim to a succession of rapes carried out by ten urki (урка was a gulag term for a hoodlum or thug, a professional criminal).
We were thrown into the van with a dozen ugly-faced thugs. It was half an hour to the Taganka. The thugs took away the food from those who had it and then they noticed the girl, crowded her into a corner, tore her skirt off, and took turns. She threw herself this way and that, her breasts revealed. “And what about your lot?” – “Us? Each one was looking out for himself.” – “Did you knock?” – “A little. They wouldn’t open the door for us, and then, those other ones had knives” — “Oh yes, we kept quiet. We were thinking about our precious lives…” That rabble took the girls’ shoes and also someone’s boots, gave some sort of secret knock, the guards opened the door immediately and in exchange for the shoes passed them a few bottles of vodka. They drank them on the spot. A prison or a van is home sweet home to them. This happened in broad daylight. In the middle of the street. In Moscow!.."

There is a commonality of themes and topoi between Blok’s poem *The Twelve* and Solzhenitsyn’s poem *The Road*. In both cases, we have the leitmotif of a constant movement forward, whether it is the action of marching down a city street (“идут двенадцать”) or progressing along the road of life. On a cross-textual, dialogic level, Blok’s depiction of the twelve Red Guards’ quasi-military, quasi-apocalyptic march segues into the mechanized movement of the prison vans and transports of the gulag twenty or so years later. In Solzhenitsyn’s epic, poetic text, the autobiographical hero, Sergei Nerzhin (AKA Gleb Nerzhin in the novels *Love the Revolution*, 1948-1958, and *The First Circle*, 1968-1978, and the plays *Victory*
Celebrations, 1951, and The Republic of Labor, 1954) travels across Russia and, during World War II, the lands to the west, as a witness to, or participant in, the cruel events of history. In The Road, as in The Twelve, one of the loci of violence, depravity, and aggressive masculine power is a vehicle of some kind. Blok’s horse carriage in which a woman is assaulted by a male collective becomes the precursor of the gulag voronok (Black Mary), in which the young female detainee, Liubonka, suffers her terrible ordeal. Both conveyances move within the country’s capital cities, Petrograd in Blok and Moscow in Solzhenitsyn.

In the two scenes in question, the reader sees different female reactions to the manifestation of the dark, masculine Eros. Even though Katka has suffered physical injury as the result of a previous relationship (or relationships) (“У тебя на шее, Катя, шрам не зажил от ножа. У тебя под грудью, Катя, та царапина свежа!” – “Just below your neckline, Katie, there’s a knife-slash, newly scarred just below your bosom, Katie, skin and flesh are sorely marred!”, 13; 1981, 311), she insists on being both provocative and submissive to Vanka. The visual perspective through which we see her as she frolics with him is that of a male gazing down upon her: “Запрокинулась лицом, зубки блещут жемчугом...Ах ты, Катя, моя Катя, Толстоморденькая...[Head flung back in sheer delight, pretty teeth all pearl white...Oh, Katie, Katie, darling Katie, Little snub-nosed Katie]” (13; 311). Katka is a cooperative victim in the sense that she precipitates her own murder: “А Катька где? – Мертва, мертва! Простреленная голова! [But what of Katie? Dead, stone dead! Shot right through the bleeding head!]” (14; 312).

The young female victim in The Road is very different. She is a pure heart, faithful to her fiancée, who is far away fighting on the battlefields of World War II. The readers observe how Luibonka, stage by stage, is victimized by various types of darkly aggressive masculinity, bureaucratic, criminal, and secret police. Moreover, among the causes of her ordeal is male indifference or cowardice. For her trial, she naively dresses up (blue blouse, fashionable shoes) expecting to be contemplated in admiration and encounter sympathy. Liubonka is a diminutive of любовь and a cognate of любоваться: любовь = love; любоваться = admire the sight of someone or something. But this young woman is not surrounded by love or admiration — quite the contrary.
During the group rape, those male prisoners who do not belong to the *urki* gang refuse to come to her rescue. Instead, they enable the rape out of fear: “Всяк себе сопит, отгородись.” (102-3). There is also a third group of men, the prison guards, who are never seen yet act as enablers, for they are happy to let the *urki* stay in control of the interior of the van. The political prisoners know that the guards would ignore them if they tried to summon them: “Дверь нам не откроют.” But the criminals call for the guards and the latter hand them a bottle of vodka in exchange for Liubonka’s shoes (cf. the political economy of the gulag).

In contrast to Katka, she comes out of her encounter with violent sexual masculine power alive, but her sense of self is destroyed.

Based on these two scenes, we perceive a contrast between the patterns of male sexual aggression of the early revolutionary period, which occurs in the open space of the street, and the systematic victimization of female prisoners by the guards and trustees in the closed spaces of the gulag, which are insulated from public view. However, the spectrum of female reactions to the dark, masculine erotic force in the gulag varied and allows us to distinguish several categories of female victims as well as resisters. Some women prostituted themselves for food and protection, as is shown in the play *The Republic of Labor* (known it its “lightened” form as *The Lovegirl and the Innocent*, 1962) and *Cancer Ward*, where Kostoglotov’s college girlfriend, who was arrested with him, sells her body in the camp (thereby, in his harsh, and masculinist, judgment, she “perishes” as a person, 45). Occasionally female sexual compliance takes a particularly debauched form. Evgeniia Ginzburg’s memoir *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967) contains a scene where, impelled by the Dark Eros, men (prison guards) and women (inmates) lose the very appearance of human beings as they come together in raucous sexual congress:

В субботний вечер, уже после отбоя, дверь барака вдруг распахнулась настежь [...]. Ватага пьяных солдат ввалилась в барак так неожиданно, что я подумала: обыск. Но нет. В данном случае они явились по личным делам. Для смрадного, страшного, свального греха. Такого я ещё не видела за свои восемь тюремно-лагерных лет. Густой, пахнущий раскаленным железом жар валит от печки и смешивался с вонью от спиртного перегара. Визг голых девок вливался в непотребщину и гоготанье пьяных озверелых мужиков. В них сейчас нельзя было узнать ни солдат, ни вчерашних крестьян. Какие-то сатиры, какие-то маски из театра ужасов. (Ginzburg 1979, 114-15)
The barrack, in which the heated air carries the smell of metal, recalls Zhora’s shed. This is one of those closed carceral spaces in which the Dark Eros, described in the formula *smradnyi, strashnyi, sval’nyi grekh*, manifests itself in all its ugliness and cruelty. Each of these three words discharges a polysemantic function. *Smradnyi* explicitly denotes the stink of the drunken guards’ alcoholic breath and implicitly that of their (and the women’s) unwashed bodies and bodily secretions. *Strashnyi* refers back to the reaction of the female observer, who is terrified. *Sval’nyi* has a connection to the verb “валить” (to throw down) and hints at the downward moral trajectory of the sexual act, and to the noun “свалка” (garbage dump), indicating that these men and women are physically and morally unclean and treat each other, and themselves, as nothing more than a trash. The scene unfolds in accordance with the principle of depraved femininity described in Tsvetaeva’s Butter Week poem: “Кто первый взял – тому верна: на века на вечные: до первого встречного! [I am forever loyal to the one who takes me first: until the next one I meet!]” (107). The passage in Ginzburg’s memoir does not depict a violent group rape, where the men beat and bend the women to their will, as happens to Liubonka in the prison van, but a wild orgy from which the male and female partners derive equal pleasure, even as they lose their sense of self. As Bataille notes, “The orgy is necessarily disappointing. […] it is the complete negation of the individual quality. It presupposes, it even demands equality among participants. Not only is individuality itself submerged in the tumult of the orgy, but each participant denies the individuality of the others” (129).

The event Ginzburg witnesses is also a carnival, with the participants wearing grotesque “masks.” In Tsvetaeva’s poem and Blok’s *The Twelve*, the male figures still retain their military, professional, or social identity. Indeed, this is emphasized, as in the case of the soldiers in their foxholes (Tsvetaeva) and the Red Guards on patrol (Blok). Their peasant or lower-class urban background is evident from their names: Михалыч, Егорыч, Кузьма, Федот (Tsvetaeva) or Vanka, Petrukha (Blok). In Tsvetaeva, the men contrast themselves to the figure of the degraded nobleman (барин) and, as the masters of the Butter Week celebrations, express a malicious joy at the hunger he feels as a result of the new urban reality of food shortages, especially that of bread which, like the pancakes they devour, is a farinal comestible: “(Блины, вафли, сахар, мед!) Вставай, барин, под черед! Ни пекарен Вам, ни круп! Ложись, барин, под тулуп!”
(107). Even as they indulge in acts of sexual aggression, the male celebrants are still individualized, and so is the woman cum scarecrow, who is a “sister” to them. In Ginzburg, the members of the abusive male collective have lost their identity: “В них сейчас нельзя было узнать ни солдат, ни вчерашних крестьян”. Again, as Bataille observes, “the stable elements of human activity disappear” (114). Both sexes, but especially the men, are animalized. The men have almost lost the power of speech, shouting obscenities or merely guffawing. The women do not speak at all, they just squeal and screech. The guards have been transformed into mythological “satyrs”, the half-equine, half-caprine creatures with a human torso who are the companions of the god Dionysus and were famous for their drunkenness and lechery. One is also reminded of the demons in Dante’s Inferno or the sinners in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch.

*The Gulag Archipelago* depicts the patterns of personality formation that occur in older children or young teenagers (*malоletki* or “kids”), which will eventually turn them into sexually aggressive males or sexually submissive females:

Среди бела дня на виду у всех сидят в Кривощёковской зоне (1-й лагпункт) четверо малолеток и разговаривают с малолеткой Ж Любой из переплётного цеха. Она вчём-то резко им возражает. Тогда мальчики вскакивают и высоко вздёргивают её за ноги. Она оказывается в безпомощном положении: руками опираясь о землю, и юбка спадает ей на голову. Мальчики держат её так и свободными руками ласкают. Потом опускают негрубо. Она ударяет их? убегает от них? Нет, садится по-прежнему и продолжает спорить. (5: 363)

In broad daylight in full view of everyone, four kids were sitting in the compound of Krivoshchekovo Camp No. 1, talking with a girl called Lyuba from the bookbinding shop. She retorted sharply to something they had said. The boys leaped up, grabbed her legs, and lifted them in the air. She was in a defenseless position: while she supported herself on the ground with her hands, her skirt fell over her head. The boys held her that way and caressed her with their free hands. And then they let her down – and not roughly either. Did she slap them? Did she run away from them? Not at all. She sat down just as before and continued the argument. (1975, 455).

The bodily reversal to which Lyuba is subjected by being upended in plain view (though within a closed carceral space) is a function of the *upending* of moral norms in the gulag. The boys’ casually abusive actions are in keeping with the behavioral code of the camp. Let us recall Tsvetaeva’s poem with its imaginative depiction of how a woman is objectified, and collaborates in her objectification, by turning into a Butter Week scarecrow. That female is a “doll” (“кукольница”), a sex toy to be manipulated and *man-
handled. The nouns and participles employed to describe her ("Увальница!", “Тисканая!”, “Глаженая!”, “Висельница!”,”Хапала!”) are cognates or derivatives of verbs that denote tumbling, fondling, stroking, suspending, molesting, that is, actions that are associated with sexual assault or rape. In Lyuba’s case, this manner of treating a female like a doll or a puppet is very much in evidence. The boys maul her not only out of teenage lust but a desire to demonstrate her correct place in the camp hierarchy. Lyuba and the boys are engaged in a form of role-play that prepares them for their future, assigned sexual roles. The young girl is being taught that she is not co-equal with her male peers but is their subordinate, whose function is to be a sex object. She has already assimilated this lesson, because she does not see anything outrageous or even abnormal in the boys’ actions. Instead, she responds to the abuse with the same casual attitude with which it is administered. This group of “kids” are the embryos of the animalized males and females in Ginzburg’s orgy scene.

Another category of female prisoners consisted of women who offered their sexual submission to male authority figures as a survival strategy: “[…] many of them gave in during the first few days. […] And this choice was made by those who were almost little girls, along with solidly married women and mothers of families” (Solzhenitsyn 1975, 231). One of the motives behind this “giving in” was hunger. During the Butter Week festival depicted in Tsvetaeva’s poem the women are never shown as eating pancakes, as was in fact the tradition. Food, in effect, is a male prerogative. Its unrestricted consumption by the men is a key part of the celebration:

Посел парень, белены,
Пора, парень, за блины!
[...]
Проваливай, прежнее!
Мои дрожжи свежие!

Подправа из белены –
Пора, парень, за блины!

The consumption of pancakes, flavored by henbane, a toxic plant, spurs the men’s lust and catalyzes their sexual frenzy. The folksy expression “объться белены” means “to go crazy” or “to act irrationally.” The
act of eating pancakes loses its function as a magical fertility ritual with Paschal overtones and assumes an anti-religious character. The images of food in the poem are emphatically de-Christianized:

Поставцы – подковой,
Икра – жемчугова:
С Богордицыных риз,
Садись, парень, не стыдись!

Metaphorically, the pearls that decorate the Mother of God’s garments on the icon turn into “caviar” (traditionally a delicacy consumed only by the rich but now available to these men of the people), which the males will feast upon. Since the fish is a symbol of Christ, the passage points to the blasphemous nature of the revolutionary festival. In the same imaginative vein, we witness the shameless (“не стыдись”) denuding of the Virgin Mary, the stripping away of her robes, since on many icons, the caviar-shaped pearls cover the entire chasuble. For the males participants in the carnival, the depraved scarecrow woman’s chaplet (“Масляница! Бусельница!” 108) and the pearls from the holy image of the Virgin Mary are equally objects of entertainment and pleasure in their brutal celebration of the revolution. Also, in Eastern Orthodoxy one is expected to stand while praying before an icon. Hence, the fact that the men “sit down” to feast (“садись, парень”) is another indication of the desacralizing nature of the event. We observe the formation of a topos: men with privileged access to food, who pervert or violate the practices and values of faith, pleasuring themselves, forcefully, with a woman.

In the gulag narratives, we see this situation repeated. The political and administrative structures of the camps reduce a woman to a sex thing, a unit of carnal exchange. Access to food is an indicator of masculine power and revolutionary, i.e. communist, authority. The guards and trustees employ food as bait, to induce the female prisoners to let them use their bodies in return for extra rations:

М. Н., уже средних лет, на воле чертёжница, мать двоих детей, потерявшая мужа в тюрьме, уже сильно доходила в женской бригаде на лесоповале – и всé упорствовала, и была уже на грани необратимой. […] Как-то осталась на день в зоне. Присыпался повар: приходи в кабинку, от пуза накормлю. Она пошла. Он поставил перед ней большую сковороду жареной картошки со свининой. Она всю съела. Но после расплаты её вырвало, и – так пропала картошка. (5: 183).

M.N., who was already middle-aged, and a draftsman out in freedom, the mother of two children, who had lost her husband in prison, had already gone far along the path of a last-legger in the women’s logging brigade – and still kept on being stubborn, and was close to
the point of no return. [...] One day she somehow stayed behind in the compound. The cook played up to her: Come on over to my cabin. I will feed you a bellyful. She went. He put a big frying pan of fried potatoes and pork in front of her. She ate it all up. But after she had paid for it she threw up – and the potatoes were all lost. (Solzhenitsyn 1975, 232)

On this occasion, the female prisoner’s own body reacted to its commodification, on a primary physiological level, by purging itself of the food she had obtained as the price of her sexual submission. It is an act of rebellion against the sexual order of the camp. She is sickened by it not metaphorically, but literally.

The next category comprised women who chose to resist sexual degradation. They were often assigned to hard manual labor as a result:

А – нет? Что ж, смотри. Надевай штаны и бушлат. И безформенным, толстым снаружи и хилым внутри существом бреди в лес [...] Тело истощается на такую работу, и всё, что в женщине есть женское, постоянное или в месяц раз, перестаёт быть. [...] плечи её выступают открытыми углами, груди повисли иссохшими мешочками [...]. (А за несколько месяцев лесоповала, говорит гинеколог, опущение и выпадение более важного органа.) (5: 182, 185-6)

What if you said...no? All right, that’s your lookout! Put on britches and pea jacket. And go marching off to the woods, with your formless, fat exterior, and your frail inner being. [...] The body becomes worn out at that kind of work, and everything that is feminine in a woman, whether it be constant or whether it be monthly, ceases to be. [...] her shoulders stick out at sharp angels, her breasts hang down in little dried-out sacs [...] (And, as a gynecologist will tell you, several months of logging will suffice for the prolapse and falling out of a more important organ.) (1975, 231, 235-36)

Here we see that the convict woman’s appearance represents a materialization of the Lenartovich sisters’ de-gendered notion of revolutionary femininity. Fashion and beauty, they insisted, was an irrelevance, and harmful to the revolutionary cause. Twenty years after the triumph of the revolution, the female prisoners in the gulag are neither beautiful nor fashionable. In fact, their very biological femaleness is suppressed: they literally lose their reproductive organs, so that motherhood, which Adalia and Agnessa also rejected as an option for the revolutionary female, becomes a biological impossibility.

Finally, there were the women whose core identity was religious such as the nuns. Here we again can trace a connection to the revolutionary context. In Tsvetaeva’s Butter Week poem, the depraved male eye does not distinguish between two antipodal types of femininity: the earthily promiscuous, represented by the woman-scarecrow, and the divinely pure, represented by the Mother of God. The lecherous female
scarecrow is a “mummer” (ряженая) while the Mother of God as depicted on the icon is robed in a chasuble (“риза”). The male celebrants rip off the “scarecrow’’s clothes as they proceed to rape her, and they remove the pearls decorating the Mother of God’s chasuble from the icon: a symbolic undressing of the Virgin Mary.

In the gulag, sexually aggressive men of power may sometimes privilege professional prostitutes over nuns; and sometimes treat them in the exactly the same manner:

[...] в те же годы, особенно в 1927, вперемешку с «моношками» слали на Соловки и проституток. [...] Им отводились лучшие комнаты общежития, каждый день приносил им обновки и подарки, «моношки» и другие кхарки подрабатывали от них, вышивая им нижние сорочки [...]. В женском бараке блатнячки и «моношки» [...] Кто ещё в мировой истории уравнивал их?. Кем надо быть, чтоб их смешать? (4: 52; 5: 56, 336)

In those years, particularly in 1927, [...] they sent prostitutes to the Solovetsky Islands along with the “nuns”. [...] They (the prostitutes) were allotted the best rooms in the living quarters and every day new clothes and gifts were brought them, and the so-called “nuns” and the other KR women earned money by working for them, embroidering their underthings. [...] In the women’s barracks there were “nuns” and women thieves. [...] Who else in all world history ever equated them? What kind of person do you have to be to mix them together? (Solzhenitsyn 1973, 38; 1975, 67, 421)

The traditional occupation of nuns was to decorate icons, particularly the clothes of the saints as depicted on them. Instead of beautifying these holy images, nuns in the Solovetsky camp, which occupied the place of a former monastery, adorn the prostitutes’ underwear, which the latter use to seduce the men. Instead of decorating holy images, they must decorate material objects that whose function is to excite male lechery. Impelled by hunger or fear, the nuns cease to serve Christ and turn into the servants and facilitators of the Dark Eros.

“The New Generation” records that moment in historical time when the Soviet state advocated the mechanical deployment of “sexual energy” for the realization of a higher social purpose. In the brutal conditions of the gulag, the majority of prisoners, whether male or female, lack sexual energy; or if they experience sexual longings, have no opportunity to realize them, except in a same-sex relationship: “Lesbian love developed swiftly. [...] The women of a cruder type became the “men” [Быстро развивалась лесбийская любовь. [...] Женщины более грубого устройства становились «мужьями»]” (1975, 249;
5: 196). In *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the protagonist is entirely free of sexual fantasies and desires: “Не упомню, какая она и баба” (1: 21). The same is true of his fellow-prisoners. Here, however, is a passage from *The Gulag Archipelago*: “They say that in Solikamsk Camp in 1946 the wires separating the men from the women were few in number and strung on one set of posts […] And the insatiable natives thronged to this wire from both sides, with the women in the position they would have been in had they been washing floors, and the men took them without crossing the forbidden line [Говорят, в Соликамском лагере в 1946 разделительная проволока была на однорядных столбах, редкими нитями [...]]. The wire forces the couples to adopt a rear-entry sexual position that makes it difficult or impossible to indulge in a physical displays of affection or even to see each other’s face. Yet these collective sexual acts, conducted across a carceral dividing line, are a defiant expression of the prisoners’ humanity and autonomy as moral and biological personalities; an act of resistance.

In another scene from the same work, we see a group of male prisoners, Solzhenitsyn himself included, observing a sexual act through a window: “The one and only window in our room looked out on the Neskuchny Park. […] The corner of the Neskuchny Park facing our compound was set off by hillocks from people strolling in the park and was secluded, or would have been, if you did not count our shaven heads peering out of windows. On May 1st some lieutenant brought to this hiding place his girl, who was wearing a bright-colored dress. Here they were concealed from the rest of the park, but they paid no more heed to us than to the stare of a dog or a cat. The officer laid his girl right there on the grass, and she was not shy either [Единственное окно нашей комнаты выходило на Нескучный сад. […] Уголок Нескучного, обращённый к нашей зоне, отгораживался пригорками от гуляющих и был укромен – был бы, если не считать, что из наших окон смотрели мы, бритоголовые. На 1 мая какой-то лейтенант завёл сюда, в укрытие, свою девушку в цветном платье. Так они скрылись от парка, а нас не стеснялись, как взгляда кошки или собаки. Пластал офицер свою подружку по траве, да и она была не из застенчивых]” (1975, 276; 5: 218). This plain air tryst turns into a theatrical performance
where the “actors,” who have power act out and lead the sexual “play” while the rightless “spectators” can only watch and suffer. The audience is ignored. While the lieutenant and his girlfriend are oblivious of the prison gaze, the inmates can see that pleasure is the privilege of those who have (political) authority.

As we have seen, in the closed spaces of the gulag women are denied any choice in their sexual lives and are brutally punished if they are discovered to have made such a choice: “A Russian nurse became intimate with a German POW, and they were found out. For this woman [...] they nailed together a plank booth with a tiny window near the gatehouse outside the camp compound [...] They kept her in this boot for a week, and every free employee on his way “to work”, and on his return, would throw stones at the booth [...]! And spit at her [русская медсестра вступила в близость с военнопленным немцем, это обнаружили. [...] Для этой женщины [...] сколотили близ вахты за зоной тесовую будку (трудов не пожалели) с кошачьим окошком. В этой будке продержали женщину неделю, и каждый вольный, приходящий «на работу» и уходящий с неё, – бросал в будку камнями, кричал «б...немецкая!» и плевал]” (Solzhenitsyn 1975, 548–49; 5: 441). This is a case of the authority of the state publicly demonstrating to its subjects that it controls their bodies and their sexual functions. According to Michel Foucault, “The public execution is to be understood [...] as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested. [...] Not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid” (47, 58). Solzhenitsyn does not mention the biblical associations that are present here, as when Jesus said: “Let any of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8: 7). On a subtextual level, we are presented with an inversion of this biblical scene and therefore with one more illustration of the de-Christianized character of the gulag.

The male Dark Eros is at the center of the analysis in this chapter. As we saw, the Feminine Eros is impacted by its dark masculine counterpart in a variety of traumatizing ways. On the one hand, we observed female figures who are sexually violated by male aggression, and, on the other hand, we are also shown how women, when placed by force of historical circumstance in this tragic position, submit, however reluctantly, to the depredations of the masculine Dark Eros. In this way, Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn show
the complex interactions of the male and the female sexual-selves in the disorienting conditions of revolutionary chaos and the gulag.
Along with the revolutionary and gulag explosions of the Dark Eros, the fictive/lyrical worlds of Solzhenitsyn and Tsvetaeva depict its opposite manifestation, that of the Luminous Eros, the bearers of which form a different set of characters/poetic subjects. These are personalities who live in history and whose private lives and selves are damaged, or sometimes destroyed, by it. However, they do not allow history to distort the wholeness of their inner I and invert or distort their system of values. Despite their outward circumstances, they possess a high degree of inward immunity and moral resistance to historical evil.

In contrast to Blok’s twelve “apostles,” whose primary emotional reaction to the revolution is “pitch-black spite” (“Кипит в груди черная злоба”, 5: 11), the male carriers of Luminous Eros are distinguished by gentleness in their relationships with women and a lack of inner tension and outward-directed aggression. They are not eager for violence and destruction, but yearn for love. The female characters who are their counterparts seek to preserve their chastity or fidelity, as the case may be, while exhibiting a matching longing for intimacy that is based on sincere and reciprocated feeling and is oriented toward the creation or protection of a family.

In both artists’ works, the characters in question are predominantly associated with Moscow. In Tsvetaeva, this is a highly autobiographical lyrical heroine who does not observe the revolutionary events that unfold in the city’s public spaces from the side, as a witness, as happens in the “Butter Week Celebrations” poem. Instead, she speaks from personal experience as she describes the same historical tragedy, refracting it through the lens of the city and shaping it in accordance with her self-image as an itinerant mystic, lover, or mother-figure (often, all three). In Solzhenitsyn, these are male and female characters who live in Moscow or are studying there and whose private lives are interwoven with this
location. While the Butter Week revolutionary carnival discussed in the previous chapter represents an inversion of Christian values and traditions, the bearers of Luminous Eros never cross that sacred line. Their love affairs, private suffering, and trials by separation correlate with the realities of religious or secular loci of Moscow, in a positive sense. The city space frames their private lives while revealing the high degree of historization of the erotic force to which they are subject.

The religious loci referenced in this chapter are treated as a category of space within which both the female and male personalities sublimate their erotic selves. A Russian culturologist who brings together the concepts of religion (or religious image) and sexual sublimation is Boris Vysheslavtsev. He states that religious aesthetics (icons and, consequently, the holy spaces where these icons are located) “transfigure” the sexual longings of those who are observers or venerated of sacred images:

> Only an image that emits the radiance of sanctity and arouses mystical awe […] only that image may penetrate into the ultimate depths of the heart and has the power of sublimation in the supreme degree […] The greatest transfigurative power is possessed by religious images or “icons,” for they are illumined by the nimbus of holiness. […] An “icon” depicts a real person […]. Through its living image, a living face is infinitely more able to stir the imagination, reach into “hearts and wombs,” and transform the conscious and the subconscious. Love transfigures human beings and love is the condition of the transfigured human being: at the pinnacle of sublimation stands the Divine Eros. (67, 70).

The religious loci of Moscow which are central for the analysis presented in this chapter are the Iberian Chapel, where the miraculous icon of the Iberian Mother of God is kept, and the Church of Nikita the Martyr. It also contained an iconostasis and “a mosaic showing the Lord of Hosts” (Solzhenitsyn 2009, 169). Both loci were founded in honor of “real” or “living” persons who had been canonized as saints. As scripted by Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn, these locations indeed have the power to “transfiguratively” sublimate the erotic desires of the male and female presences in their texts, whose intimate feelings, in addition, have been traumatized by the newly arising revolutionary reality. Different levels of sublimation are imaginatively recorded, though all are aroused by a visual and/or spiritual contact with the holy spaces and artifacts in question. Some characters acquire the strength to control their sexual instincts while contemplating the icons and the interiors or exteriors of the churches or chapels that contain them (Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine or heroines), while other male and female personalities find themselves
needing to expend or “transfigure” their sensual impulse, which makes them erotically gravitate toward one another, by re-orienting themselves in the direction of the mystical and spiritual sphere, so that they may elevate their relationship with their partner from the mundanely sexual to the sublimely spiritual and divinely blessed (Ksenia and Sanya in Solzhenitsyn’s *The Red Wheel*). There are also more “extreme” female characters who under the impact of both the aesthetics of holy spaces and the brutality of the revolutionary events recoil from the erotic sphere and dedicate their lives and bodies to the service of God (Solzhenitsyn’s Agnia). In all of these cases the Luminous Eros must be viewed, in accordance with Vysheslavtsev’s conception, as “transfigured” (“преображеный Эрос”), that is, as transcending the sexuality and sensuality of the flesh and oriented toward the realm of the spiritual and the divine. Furthermore, mention should be made of the fact some of Tsvetaeva’s and Solzhenitsyn’s characters reconsider their erotic selves under the traumatic impact of history while connecting to certain secular locations in Moscow, which consequently will form part of my analysis as well.

Next, the luminous or “transfigured” Eros is textually historicized in a different way from its dark counterpart. The bearers of the dark erotic force actively contribute to the unfolding national tragedy. They are its facilitators. The bearers of the “luminous” Eros, on the other hand, are not complicit in it. They experience this tragedy, suffer through it and because of it, but offer moral resistance to it. The personalities that fall under sway of the Dark Eros become alienated from their own bodies and cede control over them and even political or economic ownership of them to the revolutionary project and the state that emerges out of the latter. As poetically or fictively depicted, their bodies become dissolved in history and are appropriated by it. However, the characters that exemplify the Luminous Eros assert the autonomy of their physical selves and resist the encroachment of history into their private lives and domestic spaces.

In *The Red Wheel*, Solzhenitsyn’s saga of World War I and the Russian revolution, Ksenia Tomchak and Sanya Lazhenitsyn are the most vividly depicted bearers of the Luminous Eros. Ksenia is the daughter of a prosperous landowner from the Kuban region in southern Russia and attends the University of Moscow. She dreams of having a son and has premonitions that she will meet her future husband in the ancient capital. Sanya is a young artillery officer and decorated war veteran from the same area who
encounters Ksenia’s in the city and turns out to be the man she has been waiting for: he too wants a family and a child. The as-yet-unborn, as-yet-unconceived, imagined son of these two characters, who are biographically accurate representations of the author’s own parents, is a pre-embryonic shadow of the empirical Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: an intriguing instance of a writer inserting himself into his text not as a self-portrait but a pre-self-portrait.

In April 1917, Pavel Varsonofiev, the Christian visionary and oracle who links the historical and the mystical planes of the narrative, has this to say about the revolution and Ksenia and Sanya’s relationship within it or beside it: “Надо всем и надо всеми — нависло, рушится, а у кого-то своим чередом должна завязываться любовь [Everything and everyone is threatened and about to be drowned by a wave of destruction, yet for some, this is the time when they will fall in love]” (16:554). Ksenia and Sanya meet on the 22nd of April in 1917 during the immediate post-revolutionary period, when the historical tragedy continues to unfold. “The miracle of their meeting and closeness to one another” (16: 527) shows that even at a catastrophic moment in history, human beings may experience joy and harmony. The wholeness of Ksenia and Sanya’s feeling stands in opposition to the societal and moral collapse that is occurring elsewhere. Their shared feeling of “uplifted purity [возносящая чистота]” (16:364) is contrasted to the “spirit of baseness [дух низости]” (16:529) that surrounds them. The two young people’s dream of a son serves to stress the unique importance and value of human life, which had become depreciated in the course of World War I: “И опять — о том же, о нашем. Как они будут жить — для него. Как будут его воспитывать [Again they spoke about those things, things that were theirs alone. They spoke of how they will dedicate their lives to him. How they will raise him.]” (16:369). While the revolution is an anti-Christian event, the life union of Ksenia and Sanya has a divine dimension that is textualized through images of height and distance: “∗ […] они узнали друг друга через какой-то высокий далёкий верх” [they recognized each other as if from across some tall and remote summit] (16:364).

The young couple’s happiness is initially darkened by a forthcoming separation. When he arrived in Moscow, Sanya was on leave. His impending departure for the front and the unpredictable course of events caused by the revolution, are perceived by both him and Ksenia as “the cold truth which they knew
and were afraid of, the truth that they did not wish to know [холодная правда, о которой они и знали, и боялись, и хотели бы не знать]” (16:529). The compassionate Varsonofiev, whom Sanya and Ksenia visit after they meet and fall in love, later thinks that the two young people are “unfortunate by the very fact that they must protect their happiness from the shooting, morbid stars of the revolution [всё равно несчастны уже тем, что своё счастье им придётся ограждать под метучими больными звёздами революции]” (16:554). On an imaginative level, the healing “summit” of love is threatened by the meteors of evil that have started to rain down on Russia.

The religious and architectural symbol of Ksenia and Sanya’s love is the Iberian [Iverskaia] chapel, which was located in Red Square. This sacred locus had a long history. In the mid-seventeenth century the Patriarch of Moscow wrote to Pakhomiy, Archimandrite of Aphon, to request that copies of the icon of the Iberian Mother of God be brought to Russia. Russian Orthodox believers were particularly devoted to the image that was placed on the Resurrection Gate (Voskresenskie vorota) of Kitai-gorod, which was then renamed the Iberian Gate (Iverskie vorota). In 1791, the same icon, which was acknowledged as miracle-working, was placed inside the newly built chapel, which was topped by a blue dome decorated with golden starts cupola and the entrance to which was flanked by a pair of golden statues representing two of the apostles (Dmitrieva).

In April 1917, Ksenia and Sanya, filled with the joy of requited love, take a walk around Moscow. While crossing Dumskaya Square, they observe a demonstration by Black Sea sailors. The revolutionary upheaval, of which this procession is a representative and emblematic part, fills them with anxiety about their future together. They feel that their dream of creating a family is under threat: “Они так забылись друг в друге эти дни, и за весною, — а грозная жизнь шагала. […] Они двое составили словно маленький челночок, безстрашно взявшийся переплыть море, и в самое неподходящее время [Over the course of these several days and in this season of spring, they had become absorbed by each other, yet the threatening march of events proceeded apace… The two of them were like a little skiff that has fearlessly launched itself into the sea under the most unpropitious of circumstances]” (16: 369). Note the imaginative connection between the revolutionary matelots and the “sea,” “storms,” and “skiff” of life. The love of
Ksenia and Sanya is contingent not only on their personal desires, but on the spontaneous and unpredictable processes of history. After making their way through the agitated crowd, the young people proceed to the Iberian Chapel where they offer up a prayer: “Соедини нас, Матерь Божья, прочно и навсегда [O Mother of God, make our union enduring and everlasting]” (16: 369). Now, when a couple first fall in love, the places they visit together often acquire a private significance, to be remembered and recalled by the two lovers in the months and years ahead. Here, however, the little church in Red Square carries another set of meanings. Amid the revolutionary chaos that is engulfing Moscow, this place of worship functions as a visual indicator of the fundamental religious and moral values privileged in all four Knots of The Red Wheel. “Все эти два месяца что ни кружило, ни скакало по московским улицам, а здесь — и при свете дня, и в вечерней темноте, и в утренней — одно и то же всегда, все дни и все часы: через раскрытую дверь видны многие горящие свечи и лампады внутри, протискивались туда и сюда, а внутри набито [During the last two months all manner of events had swirled and seethed in the streets of Moscow, but here, whether the sun was shining outside or the darkness of night was falling, day after day and hour after hour, things remained the same: through the open doors one could glimpse many burning candles and lamps, and people moved through the press of the crowd, which filled the chapel completely]” (16: 369). This sacred locus remains separate from the revolutionary carnival surging outside. Inside the chapel, the rhythm of time is slow and measured. It does not synchronize with the rapidly changing, “swirling” and “jumping” tempos that pulsate in the spaces of revolutionary Moscow. The chapel space is also sovereign. While the city streets and squares attract excited, milling mobs, the chapel space draws another type of gathering, a pacific congregation of believers who are never in a hurry but patiently conform to the recurrent rhythm of prayer. The soothing light of the candles and icon lamps stands in contrast to the fires and shootings occurring outside.

The image of the Iberian Chapel in the context of the love drama is a traditional presence in Russian literature. In Leo Tolstoy’s War and Peace (1864-1869), Piere, who comes back to Moscow after the betrothal of Prince Andrey and Natasha, “saw – on driving through the city – the Iverskaya Chapel with countless candles burning before the gold casing” and “felt himself at home, in a quiet haven [как только
он увидел — проехал по городу — эту Иверскую часовню с бесчисленными огнями свеч перед золотыми ризами” и “он почувствовал себя дома, в тихом пристанище”]” (Tolstoy 2007, 535;). In Ivan Bunin’s short story “Shere Monday” (1944), the protagonist, who has just left his beloved, “reached the Iverskaia Chapel, which was burning and glittering inside with bonfires of candles; amidst the mob of old crones and beggars […] got down on […] knees in the tramped-solid snow […] [Дошел до Иверской, внутренность которой горячо пылала и сияла целыми кострами свечей, стал в толпе старух и нищих на растоптаный снег на колени…]” (Bunin 2006 440, 6: 199). Also, “the Iverskaya Chapel’s bright crimson heart” is a recurrent image in Tsvetaeva’s cycle Verses about Moscow (Tsvetaeva 73).

Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroines and Solzhenitsyn’s imagined characters experience similar life situations and similar emotional states, while often visiting the same loci. These congruencies in the poet’s and the novelist’s respective created worlds reveal their overlapping conceptions of history and a set of shared moral values and principles these conceptions presuppose.

The Moscow promenades of Ksenia and Sanya and their visit to the Iberian Chapel, where they stand “across from the altar,” evokes associations with Tsvetaeva’s poetic and autobiographical cycle Verses about Moscow [Стихи о Москве] (1916). This cycle is formatted as the poetic I’s literary gift or “bequest” of Moscow to another poet, her friend Osip Mandelstam. Just like Ksenia, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine “loved the whole of Moscow by heart [любила всю Москву наизусть]” (16: 364) and “bestowed” the city to her beloved. And as in The Red Wheel, in Tsvetaeva’s verse cycle the Iberian Chapel appears as a “shelter from all ill [приют от зол]” (59, 1: 269) which is illumined by the golden light of its candles and stands apart from the rest of the city, although Tsvetaeva’s exuberant and eroticized poetic persona, whose private passions echo the surging violence that is unfolding elsewhere, is a very different personality from the gently loving Ksenia. Nonetheless, in both Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn the vectors of history converge on this sacred space.

Он видали — проехал по городу — эту Иверскую часовню с бесчисленными огнями свеч перед золотыми ризами” и “он почувствовал себя дома, в тихом пристанище”]” (Толстой 2007, 535;). В Иверской часовне, которая горела и блестела внутри с бонфарами свечей; среди толпы старух и нищих он упал на колени на трамплинной снегу. Над его головой горели красные сердца часовни. Твардова́ева́с своими лирическими героинями и Солженицыным в своих произведениях сталкиваются с идентичными жизненными ситуациями и сходными эмоциональными состояниями, которые посещают эти места. Эти сходства в концепциях истории, которые в их творчестве воплощены, свидетельствуют о пересечении их концепций истории и об их общих моральных и принципиальных идеях.

Площади нас мчат.
Ох, как в ночи страшен
Рев молодых солдат!

Мимо ночных башен
Площади нас мчат.
Ох, как в ночи страшен
Рев молодых солдат!
Греми, громкое сердце!
Жарко целуй, любовь!
Ох, этот рев зверский!
Дерзкая — ох — кровь!

Мой рот разгарчив,
Даром, что свят — вид.
Как золотой ларчик
Иверская горит.

Ты озорство прикончи,
Да засвети свечу,
Чтобы с тобой нонче
Не было — как хочу

31 марта 1916 [1: 269–270].

We cross the squares, in fright,
Past the evening towers.
O, how scary in the night
To hear the soldiers’ shouts!

Let the heart, thunder, loud!
Let love kiss, fiery hot!
O, these bestial shouts!
How insolent! — their blood.

My lips are ready to flare
Despite the saintly face.
The Iverskaya glares
As though a golden case!

End this mischief, stop!
Instead, set a candle alight
So that you don’t end up
Just as I wish you might.

March 31 1916 (translated by Andrey Kneller)

Metaphorically, the Iberian chapel is a golden jewelry case ("золотой ларчик"), a locus where the moral treasures of the city are kept. The very name "Iverskaya" takes on a function of signification that extends beyond the onomastic or even the historical-religious. According to Yuri Lotman

In poetry, the word becomes “larger” than in a non-poetic text. It is easy to notice that the more lapidary the text, the more loaded the word, which begins to denote a larger proportion of the universum. […] The conflict and the tension <…> between the two types of meanings become more tangible if they happen to be expressed in the text by the same sign – the same word.” (91-92)
In Tsvetaeva’s poetic text, the proper noun *Iverskaia*, in addition to its primary lexical function of signifying the chapel or the miracle-working icon inside it, acquires just such an “enlarged” meaning. The “-вер” syllable in *Иверская*, which recalls the root morpheme *ver*, as in *вера* (“faith”), is subjected to an inversion: вер-рев-рёв (the roars of the soldiers). The name “Иверская” is also assonant to the epithet “зверский” (“bestial”), which correlates with the semantic opposition “Иверская-рёв зверский”. The soldiers’ “shouts” or “roars” (rev) that resound in the streets of Moscow are an auditory indicator of the historical reality of war and the approaching revolution. They intrude into the sacred space of the chapel, “bestially” threatening its existence. Lauri Siisiainen, who reconsiders Foucault’s “politics of hearing,” identifies a connection between the three central categories that are present in Tsvetaeva’s poem, noise, threat, and space:

The noise and the threat related to it intrude in the same manner from everywhere and into every place, inside and throughout all the parts and partitions of the spatial complex. […] The noise spreads, the danger spreads, the enemy spreads […] so that there is no partition of the space that would be safe, no partition or segment that would remain intact. Yet, although the intruder is encountered everywhere, it is never apprehended fully and totally as present, it is never seized in this or that location […] (83).

The “shouts” of *soldiers* who are perceived by the lyrical heroine as the “enemy” disrupt the integrity of the entire secular and sacred “spatial complex” of Moscow. Though these “shouts” cannot be “fully apprehended” and “seized,” as they are emit by a faceless and anonymous armed mob, they carry the suggestion of enormous “danger” and fear. This is an “acoustic” intrusion by the “beast” (“Зверский” – зверь) or Antichrist into a temple of faith (*вера*), a house of God. Tsvetaeva’s mob of soldiers in this poem (1916) is an embryonic precursor of Blok’s twelve (anti-)apostles (1918) who march “without a cross” (Blok, 11), even though the urban space in question here is that of Moscow rather than Petrograd.

The violence of history also intrudes into the lyrical heroine’s private emotional world, while her body resonates with the sounds and rhythms of the mob outside: “Греми, громкое сердце! <…> Ох, этот рев зверский!” (Cf. Наш бог бег./Сердце наш барабан in Vladimir Mayakovsky’s revolutionary poem “Our March,” 1918). The lyrical heroine’s “bold blood” boils over in response to the intensifying crescendo of the soldiers’ shouts: “Ох, этот рев зверский! — Дерзкая — ох — кровь!” As in the case with Ksenia
and Sanya, the “mischief” of love (“да засвети свечу”) leads the poetic I into the chapel, even if hers is a much more fervid and transgressive kind of love. Here the passions of the lyrical heroine (“как хочу”) quiet down. She is ready to pray.

The Iberian chapel is the spatial antipode of separation, a symbol of unity. When she approaches this locus, a woman who fears separation from her beloved will feel comforted. In this sacred place the purity of a loving couple’s feelings is revealed, as when Ksenia and Sanya resolve to bring up the son they dream of in a way that will fill him with “everything that is good” and with “kindness” [вкладывать всё лучшее. Добро]” (16: 369). By the same religious token, the chapel sheds a moral light on the passion of Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroines.

Georgiy Gachev’s concept of the “Russian Eros” privileges the moral and spiritual aspect of love over the physical side of this feeling. This erotic dynamic is reflected in the national literature:

In Russian literature the sublimated, transformed forms of sex, when it functions as the Eros of the heart and spirit, receive supremely detailed treatment. <…> If one looks through books written by Russian writers, one finds that they contain vanishingly few images of sensual passion. Russian air is easy to breathe, and a person’s spirit is easily carried away by the wind into a distance […] the soul does not feel itself all that connected to the body, and this gives rise to self-abnegation, a readiness to make sacrifices, and the lack of importance attached to bodily pleasures, which are easily replaced by the joys of the spirit.

Ksenia and Sanya mutually desire a complete physical union that will result in the birth of a child. However, the depiction of their relationship does not include images of “sensual passion” and eroticized corporality. Where the two young people’s awareness of each other’s bodies is concerned, it is focused on their faces, which are luminous with the light of the spirit: “[…] а вот и незнакомый: молодой офицер с обильными русыми волосами, лицо задумчивое и светится — но не от возбуждения, а ровный какой-то изнутри свет […] так и вздрогнула внутри от этого светлого взгляда […]. […] и всё время хорошо было видно его лицо — эта особая чистота выражения […]”; “И Ксана крестилась, затяжно прикладывая трехперстье. Лицо её в светло-жёлтом отсвече — ещё нежнее” […] a young officer she didn’t know, with abundant blond hair and a pensive face that was radiant not with excitement but a kind of inner light […] when that luminous gaze fell on her, she felt herself stir […] And all the time she
had a clear view of his face with its unusually open expression [...]. Ksana made the sign of the cross, her three fingers slowly tracing each of its points. Her face in the yellowish light seemed even gentler.”] (15: 604, 607; 16: 369). There is also an emphasis on the movement of the arms and shoulders, which conveys a sense of mutual support: “Саня вдруг всплеском, не готовясь, повернул её к себе за плечи и выдохнул: “Я теперь жить без вас не могу! Выходите за меня замуж!” [...] Ксаночка — чуть к саниному плечу [Suddenly Sanya placed his hands on her shoulders, turning her toward him, and breathlessly said: “I can no longer live without you! Marry me! [...] Ksanochka leaned lightly against Sanya’s shoulder]” (16: 365, 369).

The incandescence of passion experienced by Tsvetaeva’s poetic heroine may have a higher order of intensity than Ksenia and Sanya’s serenely loving attachment to one another, but the mystical impact of the sacred space affects all of them along similar lines. Inside the Iberian Chapel the lyrical I’s mouth may “flare” with sexual desire, yet her face bears a “saintly” look (“Мой рот разгарчив, даром, что свят – вид”). The divine light that fills the chapel (“Как золотой ларчик/ Иверская горит”) absorbs the fire of the I’s passion and prevails: the ardor of kisses is dissolved in the glow of the votive candles, which is refracted in the gold covering the miracle-working icon of the Iberian Mother of God, and the passionate side of love comes into harmony with the moral constituent of that feeling.

This (dynamic) balance is not always maintained in Tsvetaeva’s poetic world. Occasionally we observe a discordance between passion and spirit within the space of a religious locus and the prevailing of the former over the latter. In 1914 Tsvetaeva had a same-sex love affair with another poet, Sofia Parnok, that resulted in a cycle of verses, “Girlfriend [Подруга]” (1914-1915). The seventh poem of the cycle, “The Snowflakes Sparkled Happily” (1914), depicts a scene in a cathedral where the two “Moscow young ladies” (1: 220), who have been wandering in the Rostov city market, are unable to pray and to contemplate the sacred space because they are sexually drawn towards each other. Here is an excerpt from this poem:

Как весело сиял снежинками
Ваш – серый, мой – соболий мех,
Как по рождественскому рынку мы
Искахи ленты ярче всех.
[…]

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Как в час, когда народ расходится,  
Мы нехотя вошли в собор,  
Как на старинной Богородице  
Вы приостановили взор.

Как этот лик с очами хмурьми  
Был благостен и изможден  
В киоте с круглыми амурами  
Елизаветинских времен.

Как руку Вы мою оставили,  
Сказав: «О, я ее хочу!»  
С какою бережностью вставили  
В подсвечник – желтую свечу...

- О, светская, с кольцом опаловым  
Рука! – О, вся моя напасть! —  
Как я икону обещала Вам  
Сегодня ночью же украсть! (Tsvetaeva 1: 220-21)

The snowflakes sparkled happily  
on my gray furs and your sable ones,  
in the Yule-tide market  
we looked for the brightest ribbons

[…]
At the hour when the crowds head for home  
we reluctantly entered the cathedral,  
where on an ancient icon of the Mother of God  
your gaze came to rest.

That image, with its somber eyes  
was numinous and hollow-cheeked  
resting in its case with the orotund cherubs  
from the reign of Empress Elizabeth.

You pressed my hand  
and said, “Oh, it is her I want!”  
And gently inserted  
A yellow candle into the candleholder…

O that worldly, opal-ringed  
hand! O, my whole obsession!  
I promised you I would  
steal the icon that very night!

The young women enter the cathedral “reluctantly” (Sofia Parnok, who was born into a Jewish family, converted to Eastern Orthodoxy in 1909). They are in a state of erotic ecstasy and are holding hands.
Sofia’s eyes come to rest on the “old-time” icon of the Mother of God. The sight of her gazing at this sacred female image arouses immediate jealousy in her lover, Marina. By continuing to look at the icon and by letting go of Marina’s hand (this is implied, because Sofia would need both hands to take the candle and place it before the icon) Sofia physically disengages from Marina while exclaiming: “О, it is her I want! [О, я ee хочу!]” /my emphasis/. The personal pronoun “ee” in relation to the Mother of God and the sexually-inflected verb “хочу” create the impression that Sofia’s erotic desire has been redirected to the image on the icon which, therefore, becomes interestingly drawn into a female love triangle inside the space of the cathedral.

Despite the fact that Sofia is now engaged in the religious act of lighting and placing a candle, Marina, who observes the process, defines her lover’s hand as “worldly” (“О, светская, с кольцом опаловым Рука!”). In astrology, the opal is the prime stone for the planet Venus and the birthstone for the month of October; Tsvetaeva had met Parnok in October 1914. Yet, the opal is also associated with ill fortune. Be that as it may, it is on Sofia’s hand that Marina, who has just been holding it, focuses all of her passion and jealousy (“Рука! – О, вся моя напасть!”). Hence, Sofia’s religious gesture of putting the candle into the holder distracts Marina from praying.

The religious feeling awakened in Sofia is entirely possessive. She claims ownership of the icon, which explains Marina’s promise to take it — steal it — from the cathedral and carry it into the secular space outside (“как я икону обещала Вам сегодня ночью же украсть!”). Sofia’s passionate desire to own the icon overlaps with Marina’s passionate, possessive feelings towards Sofia. This interplay of covetousness and jealousy makes it impossible for either lover to enter into a communion with the divine. The word “страсть” (“passion”) does not actually occur in the poem, but its phonetic components, rendered through sounds and letters, are present in the verb “украсть” (to steal) as well as in the noun “напасть” (“obsession” or “curse”). The icon, therefore, becomes a part of the love game between Sofia, who within the framework of the non-traditional relations between the two lovers assumes the role of a female (cf. her ring, a marker of femininity) and Marina, who acts the part of a young male (“как Вы меня дразнили мальчиком”). The promised “stealing” the sacred artifact becomes the equivalent of a chivalrous deed on
the part of Marina, who wants to display and give proof of her passion (страсть-украсть) by conducting herself heroically in the eyes of her lover. The icon in this poetic text does not perform its direct religious function of inviting veneration by a believer, but instead enhances the passion between the two female lovers, the two sinners, which has subsumed their identity as Christians.

Confirmation of this interpretation is provided by the frankly erotic scene in the nunnery-guest house where the two young ladies go right after their attendance of the cathedral:

Как в монастырскую гостиницу
- Гул колокольный и закат –
Блаженные, как именинницы,
Мы грянули, как полк солдат.

[…]

Как голову мою сжимали Вы,
Лаская каждый завиток,
Как Вашей брошечки эмалевой
Мне губы холодил цветок.

Как я по Вашим узким пальчикам
Водила сонною щекой,
Как Вы меня дразнили мальчиком,
Как я Вам нравилась такой...

Декабрь 1914 (1: 220).

Into the nunnery guest house —
the ringing of the bells and sunset —
blessed, like name-day celebrants,
we barged, like a regiment of soldiers.

[…]

You squeezed my head,
cressing each curl,
your little enamel broche’s
flower cooled my lips.

Against your narrow fingers
I rubbed my sleepy cheek,
you teased me for a boy,
you liked me like this…

December 1914
As the church bells call the faithful to prayer (“гул колокольный”), Marina and Sofia seclude themselves for a night of lovemaking. The poetic I gains possession of Sofia’s hand, which she had watched so closely and so jealously in the cathedral, and experiences sensual pleasure from this tactile experience (“как я по Вашим узким пальчикам водила сонною щекой”).

When the two women appear in the nunnery’s guesthouse they are compared to the “regiment of soldiers” (with its wartime implications of sacrilege and rape), the only instant in the poem when we are reminded of the historical realities of 1914, the first year of World War I. However, the female lovers remain oblivious to the currents of history. Instead, they are overwhelmed by their passion for each other. There is a contrast between the warmth of the candle that Sofia placed in the cathedral and the coldness that Marina feels while Sofia “caresses” her in the nunnery-guest house, though whether this implied difference has moral or religious implications remains for the reader to decide.

Two years later in the poem “We Cross the Squares, in Fright” the Marina persona behaves very differently. She manages to calm her erotic desire when she finds herself inside the Iberian Chapel and she prevents her lips, “flaring” with desire, from kissing. By restraining her own physical passion, Marina strives to suppress the sound and reality of the soldiers’ “bestial shouts” outside, emitted by hundreds of individual mouths or a single collective figurative maw which in some imaginative sense gives roaring voice to the city as it succumbs to the chaos and violence of the revolution. In another Tsvetaeva’s poem (“Butter Week Celebrations”), which was written in 1922 and which is analyzed in the previous chapter, the Butter Week masculine carnival of revolutionary celebration is imaginatively described as possessing an enormous “mouth” hungry for destruction and sexual violence. As we saw, this poem records an inversion of traditional Christian values. In another poem, “We Cross the Squares, in Fright…” (1916) the same gigantic “mouth,” which belongs to a multitude of aggressive males, “swallows” the sacred relics of the city and has a “frightening” acoustic resonance (“страшен рев”).

Siisiainen reminds us that according to Foucault, “the flesh and concupiscence – the field of instincts, desires, and pleasures – have been constituted as something to be listened to, as something to be heard” and that “the dispositive of hearing” is “an integral part of the genealogy of sexuality” (67). Sound,
therefore, may be sexual and, sometimes, sexy. The lyrical heroine harkens to the music of her own flesh. She *hears* the beat of her passionate heart, which “thunders” with erotic desire (“Греми, громкое сердце! Жарко целуй, любовь!”). However, there is a parallel, alien sound that intrudes into this private aural experience. This is the noise of historical danger that assails the poetic I’s body, filling her with alarm and interrupting the potential realization of her physical pleasure.

Siisiainen goes on to reconsider Foucault’s definition of the “threatening noise” as “an uninvited guest entering the *oikos* […] without revealing its identity” and a “stranger that has already entered […] before allowing the owner, the master of the *oikos*, to even ask for its name” (85-6). Oikos is an ancient Greek social unit or a space occupied by a particular household or a family. The anonymous ululations of the soldiers in Tsvetaeva’s poem is an alien force that invades the city where the lyrical and highly autobiographical persona was born, where her family is rooted, and where she feels completely at home up to the point that she treats Moscow as her own property which she can “hand” over to her beloved: “Из рук моих – нерукотворный град, прими, мой странный, мой прекрасный брат [From these my hands – a town not formed with hands, Receive, my strange, my handsome brother]” (1: 269; 59).

Moreover, this feminine poetic voice privileges the locus of the Iberian chapel and imaginatively perceives it as the heart of the city: “А вон за тою дверцей, куда народ валит, - Там Иверское сердце Червонное горит [And yonder, where the people press through the gate full throng – There Iverskaya Chapel’s Bright crimson heart burns strong]” (1: 273, 73). In this way, Moscow becomes anthropomorphized and in the process receives a life-threatening wound: the “frightening” noise of soldiers threatens those structures in the capital that are the seat of its historical identity and the site of its religious and cultural sense of self. At the beginning of the poem, she is ready to allow her love passion to swell so that her heart would beat, even “thunder” louder than the soldiers’ shouts (“Греми, громкое сердце! – Жарко целуй, любовь!”). She seeks comfort or refuge in her erotic desire, in order *not to hear* the audible and sinister march of history, to insulate herself from her “fear” of the approaching upheaval (“страшен рёв”). At the end of the poem, however, she wants to assert control over the passions of her flesh, to cease her erotic competition with the “frightening shouts” of the rebellious soldiers. So she suppresses the “thunder” of her
heart and forbids her lips to kiss. By quelling her own sexual, acoustic vibrations, she hopes to subdue the noise of history that is filling the external spaces of Moscow.

The sound “р” (r) “descends” throughout the poem and occurs nineteen times. It is an echo of the soldiers’ roar (рев) and permeates the entire work. Their terrible howls and hoots frighten the lyrical heroine at the beginning of her promenade (“страшен”), reverberate bodily within her through her passionate erotic yearnings (сердце, держая кровь, рот), can be heard at the instant of her moral ascent (“Как ларчик <...> Иверская горит”), accompany her suppression of her erotic drive (озорство прикончи), and die down at the moment of prayer and the lighting of the candle in the last three stanzas. The lyrical heroine’s Eros ceases to be ego-centered and private, for it is no longer confined within the boundaries of her relationship with her lover (as it was also in the poem “Kak veselo siial snezhinkami”), but has become historicized and Christianized in the context of the unfolding national tragedy.

In the earlier poem, Marina was jealous of Sofia, who lit a candle in front of an icon. Now, Marina herself invites her male love-addressee (Mandelstam) to do the very same thing and is eager to pray before a holy image, that of the Iberian Mother of God, together with him: “Да засвети свечу чтобы с тобой нонче не было – как хочу.” Her sexual desire – “как хочу” — is overshadowed (or overlit) by the burning candle, even on the prosodic plane, via the sound correspondence between two rhyme words: “засвети свечу, чтобы […] не было – как хочу.” “Хочу” is absorbed by “свечу.”

In Russian literature, there is an established tradition of fictionalizing a certain type of feminine Eros, which sacrifices love for the sake of religion or sublimates the desires of the body for the needs of the spirit. Liza Kalitina in Ivan Turgenev’s Home of the Gentry (1859) is an early example of such a character type. Liza is a “quiet angel,” an “ethereal being” who is deeply devout. She constantly prays, alone or in church. When she falls in love with an older man, the disillusioned nobleman Fedor Lavretsky, whose promiscuous wife had left him for another man, her erotic self comes into conflict with her religious self. As Lavretsky confesses his feelings to her, Liza encourages him to practice Christian obedience and charity: “You must forgive […] if you wish to be forgiven as well”; “Liza secretly hoped to bring him to God” [You должны простить […] если хотите, чтобы и вас простили”; Лиза втайне надеялась привести его к


A twist of fate ruins their chance for happiness. Lavretsky’s unfaithful wife, who he believed was dead, suddenly appears and reasserts her claim upon him as a husband. Liza, who does not understand “how can one separate what God has joined together [но как же можно разлучать то, что бог соединил?]” (98; 198), retreats from her relationship with Lavretsky. While she continues to love him and is loved in return, the young woman makes a life-changing decision to become a nun. She perceives the ruination of her marital hopes as the final confirmation of her life’s mission, which is to serve God. Many years later, Lavretsky visits Liza’s monastery and catches a glimpse of her:

Passing from choir to choir, she walked close by him, walking with the gliding, hurriedly meek step of a nun – and she did not look at him; only the lashes of the eye turned towards him fluttered very slightly and she bent still lower her wasted face, and the fingers of her clasped hands, entwined with the rosary, were pressed more tightly together. What did the two of them think, what did they feel? Who can know? (Turgenev 1964, 294)

A similar fictive treatment of the Russian Eros is present in Ivan Bunin’s short story “Shere Monday” (1944), which is set in Moscow on the eve of World War I. The heroine, a student who is interested in history, is at home in the ancient capital and comfortable with its ways: “You’re gentry class, you can’t understand Moscow the way I do, in all its variety [Вы – барин, вы не можете понимать так, как я, всю эту Москву]” (434; 6: 195). This female character is “enwrapped” in the sacred topography of the city: she lives across from the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and regularly visits Moscow’s monasteries and cemeteries. The male protagonist is passionately in love with her. Despite the fact that his feelings are requited, their intimacy remains “incomplete”: “Arriving at twilight I sometimes found her lying on the ottoman, wearing only a silk quilted robe edged in sable […]. I sat beside her in the semidarkness, not putting on the lights, and I kissed her hands, legs, her so incredibly soft body. She made no move to resist but kept silent all the time. I was seeking her hot lips, and she gave them to me, breathing hard now, but
still silent. When she felt I no longer had the strength to control myself she pushed me away, sat up, and in a low voice asked me to turn on a lamp […] [Приезжая в сумерки, я иногда заставал ее на диване только в одном шелковом архалуке, отороченном соболем […] сидел возле неё в полутьме, не зажигая огня, и целовал ее руки, ноги, изумительное в своей гладкости тело…И она ничему не противилась, но все молча. Я поминутно искал ее жаркие губы – она давала их, дыша уже порывисто, но все молча. Когда же чувствовала, что я больше не в силах владеть собой, отстраняла меня, садилась и, не повышая голоса, просила зажечь свет...]” (Bunin, 425; 6: 192). On the Shere Monday, the first day of the Great Feast, the protagonist’s state of sexual, “agonizing anticipation” ends when he and the young woman became “entirely close” (425), that is, make love. For the heroine, this instance of physical “closeness” is the first and last one she will ever experience in her life. It prompts her decision to go into a nunnery. This is the “freedom” of passionate bodily engagement with another she permits herself before her complete withdrawal from the secular world.

In this story, which is set during Butter Week, we observe the presence of the same festive and even carnavalasque mood as in Tsvetaeva’s “Butter Week Celebrations” poem (1922) which was analyzed in the previous chapter. On the last day of this week, on the eve of the Great Feast and their first and last moment of full sexual intimacy, Bunin’s male and female characters stop by a tavern where they sit down to a traditional meal of pancakes:

Мы прошли во вторую комнату, где в углу, перед черной доской иконы богородицы троеручицы, горела лампадка, сели за длинный стол на черный кожаный диван…[…] А она говорила, вынимая платочку из душистой муфты: - Хорошо! Внизу дикие мужики, а тут блины с шампанским и богородица троеручица. Три руки! Ведь это Индия! (6: 195)

Passing through to the second room, where an icon lamp was burning in the corner, in front of the Three-Handed Mother of God painted on a black slab of wood, we sat down on a black leather ottoman at a long table. […] Pulling a handkerchief out of the fragrant muff, she said, ‘This is wonderful! Downstairs we’ve got savage muzhiks, and here we have blini with champagne and the Three-Handed Mother of God. Three hands! That’s like India, you know! (434)

The differences with Tsvetaeva’s poem, however, are just as important: the topos of the Butter Week as a joyous celebration of the pleasures of the flesh is resolved not through violence and unlimited and depraved
sexual excess, but through the heroine’s final retreat from the world of sensual experiences. This retreat coincides with the holiday of Easter itself so that, in a biblical sense, the call of the flesh is rejected and the primacy of the spirit is asserted. As in Tsvetaeva, the readers observe the spatial proximity of an icon to the scene of sensory enjoyment that involves the consumption of food. In Tsvetaeva’s poem, there is a metaphorical shift, so that the pearls covering the robes of the Mother of God on the icon are transformed into grains of caviar, and the holy image, or a part of it, is consumed by the Butter Week celebrants. In Bunin’s story, the same proximity does not entail sacrilege on the part of the young woman. Even as she enjoys the rich food (pancakes with caviar), she is aware of the beauty and the sacred nature of the icon, while associating the image of the Virgin Mary with herself. The connection between the female character and the icon also operates on the plane of ethnic identity and contains a hint of heresy: the heroine associates this Three-Handed image of the Mother of God with Hinduism, whose gods and goddesses have multiple limbs, arms in particular, while she herself is interested in the Eastern world and has the appearance of an “Oriental Beauty” (437).

After the separation, Bunin’s male and female characters, each one in his or her own special way, immerse themselves in the religious sphere and enter its sacred spaces. The heroine takes monastic vows. The hero attends the Iberia Chapel, the Cathedral of the Archangel, and the Marfo-Mariinsky Convent on Ordynka Street, where he sees the procession of young nuns holding candles and recognizes his beloved among them. The ending of the story is very Turgenevian. As a nun, his former lover recalls Liza almost directly:

На Ордынке я остановил извозчика у ворот Марфо-Мариинской обители […]. а за нею тянулась такая же белая вереница поющих, с огоньками свечек у лиц, инокинь или сестер […]. Я почему-то очень внимательно смотрел на них. И вот одна из идущих посередине вдруг подняла голову, крытую белым платом, загородив свечку рукой, устремила взгляд темных глаз в темноту, будто как раз на меня...Что она могла видеть в темноте, как могла она почувствовать мое присутствие? (6: 200)

In Ordynka I told the cabman to stop by the gates of the Marfo-Mariinsky Cloister. […] Behind her (the Grand Duchess) stretched a lengthy chain of that same whiteness, singers with flamelets of candles in their hands, nuns or lay sisters […]. For some reason I looked very intently at them. And one of those walking in the middle of the group suddenly raised her head, covered by a white kerchief; a candle was cupped in her hand, and her dark eyes
threw a sharp glance out into the darkness, apparently right at me...What could she have seen in the dark, how could she have sensed my presence? (Bunin, 200)

In both stories, the male figure whose beloved left him for a life of religious devotion is unable to let her go and seeks her out in the sacred space wherein she now resides. Thus, the heroes, who were initially secular in their outlook or even skeptical toward religion find themselves in a situation where it is impossible for them to be detached from the holy spaces of Russia, to which they are forever tied through their love for a woman. The plots in both works follow the same logic: the female characters enter the heroes’ lives in order to offer them the chance to dedicate themselves to God. Both men, however, reject this possibility and instead pursue a romantic relationship with the woman, who reciprocates their erotic desire, though only up to a point. The men’s trial by faith (or lack of faith) continues when the relationship is ended. Both Lavretsky and Bunin’s male protagonist keep yearning for their lost loves, pursuing their respective moral quests through their perpetual connection to their only, invincible rival, Christ. Whether they desire it or not, Christianity becomes an inseparable part of their lives.

Once again, the reader beholds a “transfigured” Eros, which is framed by the spatial realities of Moscow (or in the case of Turgenev’s novel, the provincial town of O) and embodies/disembodies the triumph of the spirit over the flesh. The heroines, even though they have chosen the celibate life of a nun, still love the men who had once pursued them. Hence, they intuitively feel their unexpected presence inside the monastic space. The women are aware that they have been recognized by their former lovers, but the religious processions or services they are a part of and their strong faith preclude any communication with the men they have left behind. The impact upon the two nuns of the sudden appearance of their former suitors is rendered through the tiny changes in the heroines’ demeanor: the “fluttered eyelashes”, “bent face”, and “tightly pressed” fingers that hold a rosary in Turgenev, and the wistful female gaze in Bunin. In turn, the two heroes do not seek out new relationships after the separation. Lavretsky, though still in his early forties, considers himself an “old man” who “[has] passed from the walks of life [сошедший с земного поприща]” (203; 294). Bunin’s nostalgic hero keeps roaming the secular and holy spaces of Moscow in tears, even two years after the breakup, for these are the loci the two of them visited together.
The heroes remain chaste, while their spirits are guided by an enduring but impossible love that always keeps the possibility of a religious awakening open.

In Turgenev, Tsvetaeva and Bunin, the reader encounters a recurrent pattern: the heroine’s physical and metaphorical ability to hear history and history’s unfolding tragedy (or in Osip Mandelstam’s formula, to perceive “the noise of time”) intensifies when she diverts her passionate desires and longings toward religious values and practices. It is interesting that the three female personalities in question, Liza, Tsvetaeva’s poetic I, and Bunin’s exotic beauty, are unusually musical. Liza takes piano lessons from her old German teacher, Lemm. Tsvetaeva, who spent much time playing this instrument as a child (as we know from autobiographical essay “Mother and Music,” 1934), attributes this musical training to her grown-up lyrical persona’s musicality. As for Bunin’s heroine, she performs the opening of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” on her piano at home and is moved by the sound of the church choir.

Of these three female personalities, Liza is the one that is least historicized, yet even she carries a feeling of guilt for the transgressions of the gentry class to which she belongs: its unearned riches, pursuit of narrow self-interests, and ownership of serfs. As she arrives at her decision to become a nun, she exclaims: “I know everything, both my own sins and others’, and how papa made all our money […]. It all has to be paid for by prayer, wiped away by prayer [Я всё знаю, и свои грехи, и чужие, и как папенька богатство наше нажил […]. Всё это отмолить, отмолить надо]” (194; 286). In the case of Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine, the tragic “noise” of history she hears does not make her completely recoil from Eros. Instead, she acquires the power to restrain and control it when inside the holy spaces she visits and while contemplating the sacred objects they contain. By the same token of faith, she does not let her erotic self overpower and eclipse her civilian and patriotic identity. But to repeat, she does not completely suppress her sexuality. The poem ““We Cross the Squares, in Fright…” ends with the phrase “как хочу” (“чтобы с тобой нонче не было – как хочу”), a declaration of her continuing desire, which is temporarily subsumed by her religious feelings but is still there, as both the heroine and the reader are aware. And Bunin’s heroine, who is the exact contemporary of Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona, is passionately devoted to her lover, with
whom she has several erotic encounters, although eventually she gives up the relationship for the religious life, though not before giving her body to him, completely.

“Shere Monday” does not contain any direct references to the coming world war and revolution. However, Bunin’s heroine, who attends university courses and considers history as her favorite subject, senses the approach of a vast national tragedy, one that will lead to the disappearance of old Moscow and the collapse of Russia: “And now all we have left are vestiges of that old Rus, in a few northern monasteries. And in the songs they sing in church [И вот только в каких-нибудь северных монастырях осталась теперь эти Русь. Да ещё в церковных песнопениях]” (435; 6: 196). Besides, as a female character who is framed spatially, she discharges an implied topographical function that operates within the parameters of what Angela Brintlinger defines as the “Russian cultural memory” and the “geography of loss”: “Bunin constructed an elaborate map of the city of Moscow, placing the streets and cathedrals in their historical locations and deliberately ignoring Soviet and Nazi damage to the city he had known” (Brintlinger 39, 56, 40). The heroine’s spatial movements bring into fictive play the architectural sights of prerevolutionary Moscow, so many of which were damaged or destroyed after the Bolshevik takeover.

Above all, Bunin’s female persona is culturally informed. She has a deep knowledge of, and willingly talks about, the historical, religious, and literary realities of Russia all the way back to the fifteenth century. She cites War and Peace and keeps Tolstoy’s portrait in her apartment, admires “pre-Petrine Rus” (432), reveres the princes of Ancient Rus (Yury Dolgoruky), and has this to say about Old Russian literature: “I love the Russian chronicles and the age-old legends so much that I keep on rereading my special favorites until I have them down by heart [Я русское летописное, русские сказания так люблю, что до тех пор перечитываю то, что особенно нравится, пока наизусть не заучу]” (435-36; 6: 196). These are the layers of the Russian cultural heritage upon which the heroine’s language, values, tastes, and behaviors rest. Therefore, when she anticipates the disappearance of the Russia she loves, she proleptically mourns not only the culture of the immediate prerevolutionary period she lives in, but also that of the country’s past.

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In this context, the heroine’s decision to become a nun acquires a clear logic. Only behind convent walls will she be able to immerse herself in the atmosphere of old Russia: “Recently I was at the Zachatev Monastery […]! It is even better at the Chudov monastery. Last year I kept going there during Holy Week. Oh, how fine it was! Puddles all around, the air already soft, a kind of tenderness, a sadness in your soul, and that perpetual feeling of the homeland, its ancient days [Недавно я ходила в Зачатьевский монастырь […]! А в Чудовом еще лучше. Я прошлый год все ходила туда на Страстной. Ах, как было хорошо! Везде лужи, воздух уж мягкий, на душе как-то нежно, грустно и все время это чувство родины, ее старины...]” (435; 6; 196). Her choice of the monastic way of life represents an escape from the approaching destructive reality of the revolution which, she senses, will not attach any value to the “ancient days” but, in fact, will attempt to speed up history along Time Forward! lines, to quote the title of Valentin Kataev’s 1932 production novel. In this new society that imagines itself speeding ever faster along the axis of historical time toward a secular, earthly paradise, religious values will be denied and desacralized as vestiges of a backward and backward-facing age. So, the heroine resolves to secede from this forward-looking, linear-temporal project before it is initiated, by removing herself to a locus where time follows a circular pattern through recurring and never-changing acts of prayer. Then, she will be in a position to commune with the aesthetic and spiritual values she holds so dear.

Although the female character in Bunin’s story is oriented toward Russia’s olden times, its “ancient days,” she is also connected to the artistic practices of the day, including advanced modernist productions. She meets her future lover at a lecture given by Andrey Bely. Together the hero and heroine go to the theatre where they encounter a range of famous male stars of the stage: Stanislavsky, Moskvin, Kachalov, and Sulerzhitsky. However, the heroine dismisses the actors at the Moscow Art Theatre as “charivaris” and “vulgar” (436). Brintlinger suggests that the text contains cultural meanings and interpretations beyond the heroine’s quest for a spiritual life. “It can also be read in the context of early twentieth-century decadent sensuality and religiosity, à la Vladimir Solov’ev” – as practiced by Zinaida Gippius, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, and their followers – in which case it becomes a commentary on the Moscow (and émigré) atmosphere of what Olga Matich has called ‘decadent utopianism’” (39). I would argue, however, that just
as is the case with the Likonya chapters in *The Red Wheel* (unlike Bunin’s heroine, Likonya enthusiastically embraces the aesthetic of Russian modernism), this story does not engage with the artistic projects of the age that aimed to bring about the “apocalyptic end” (Matich), but instead merely shows the cultural realities of the time in order to better situate the female character fictively. The examples of decadent or modern art presented in the story serve as points of contrast to the heroine’s aesthetic and spiritual attachment to older, more nationally authentic cultural values. The heroine’s dislike of contemporary art is a reflection of her desire to stand outside the current of history and to nurture within herself the “feeling of homeland.”

The extra-textual chronological gap that exists between the years in which the story is set (1912-1914) and the date of its publication (1944) allows the historically informed reader to imagine the likely tragic consequences of the heroine’s decision to choose a religious life: the founder of the Marfo-Mariinsky Convent, Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fyodorovna, who is shown leading the procession of nuns at the end of the story, was brutally murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1918, and the convent itself was closed by the Bolshevik authorities in 1920.

Solzhenitsyn’s heroine who best fits into the paradigm of ascetic femininity as depicted in Turgenev and Bunin is Agnia in *The First Circle*, whose name derives from the Greek word for “pure” or “holy” (we have already noted that in Solzhenitsyn, the characters’ names are as a rule densely coded). Agnia is the one-time fiancé of Anton Yakonov, the director of the prison science institute or sharashka where much of the novel is set. He had loved her and courted her many years before he rose to high office in the Stalinist terror state. In contrast to the ambitious and sensuous Anton, Agnia is an ethereal and otherworldly personality who combines a love of nature with a deep religious faith that has pantheistic overtones: she is not so much a blood-and-flesh woman as an angelic spirit in female form, and thus belongs to the hierarchy of the novel’s heroines (cf. Nerzhin’s girlfriend *Serafima*) who are in some sense celestial or supernal. Like Turgenev’s and Bunin’s heroines, Agnia leaves her male partner for a monastery. It is her act of secession from the Soviet world-historical project that aims to destroy the Church as it directs the nation’s energies toward the construction of a godless state. As in the case with Bunin’s female protagonist, the convent is a locus where a young woman may hope to transcend the linearity of historical time and
preserve her internal (and eternal) Christian values in opposition to its secularizing, spiritually leveling impulse. However, unlike Bunin’s heroine or Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona circa 1916, Agnia dwells in the post-revolutionary Soviet society of the late 1920’s. She is an actual witness to the devastation and degradation inflicted by the communist regime on the Church: “When people say and print anything they like about the church and never give it a chance to defend itself, when they confiscate the altar furnishings and exile priests, don’t you call that persecution? […] I have to live here and now. I see what is happening in my own lifetime [Раз на неё говорят и печатают, что хотят, а ей оправдываться не дают, имущество алтарное описывают, священников ссылают – разве это не гонят? […] Я ведь живу – теперь…я вижу, что при моей жизни]” (Solzhenitsyn 2009, 166; 2: 170). And the heroine realizes that this is just the beginning: she foresees that the state will inflict yet more violence against Christian disciples and believers and their places of worship.

Unlike the other female personalities we have discussed, Agnia’s male counterpart is himself a servant of historical evil. In the course of the novel, Yakonov appears during two discrete periods of history. The reader first meets Anton twenty-two years after his relationship with Agnia has ended, when he holds the rank of colonel and is in charge of the Marfino sharashka, although he was once a prisoner in that institution himself. He is a family man, married to another woman and has two young daughters. The story of his love for Agnia (1927) is presented in the form of a reminiscence by Anton. He recalls declaring to his betrothed that her religious faith is a mistake and a distraction from the “process of living” (168). He criticizes her disdain for the Bolsheviks, who, he tells her, “show the greatest respect and concern for world culture” (167) and are creating a society of “universal, total, absolute equality” (167). He is at the point of ascending the professional and political ladder and has doubts that Agnia, to whom he has recently proposed, would be an appropriate wife for a Soviet career man.

Like Bunin’s heroine, Agnia is a topographically defined character who is tied to certain sacred spaces in Moscow and who acts as a guide when she shows these spaces to the man in her life. Agnia’s favorite city locus, which she considers “one of the loveliest places in Moscow” (164) and which she visits together with Anton in the fall of 1927, is The Church of Nikita the Martyr. It is one of the oldest churches
in Moscow, known to have already existed in the fifteenth century. It stands on the southeastern slope of Taganka Hill, by the confluence of the Moskva and its tributary, the Yauza. In the Soviet period, it became one of the sites that would make up the nation’s “geography of loss”: in the late 1930’s the church was closed and fell into ruin.

The elevated location of the church, from which the two characters have a full view of the old Moscow district of Zamoskvorechie, is congruent with Agnia’s celestially-oriented and angelic aura. Indeed, this young woman compares the emotion of love to “a fiery angel descending from heaven” (163).

Her own body is depicted in a way that suggests she is about to levitate into the vertical, “heavenly” dimension of space: “Sometimes, when she was talking, her brows and nostrils quivered as though she were about to take flight”; “her step was so light that she seemed scarcely to touch the ground” [“Её брови и ноздри иногда так трепетали в разговоре, словно она собиралась ими улететь”; “а походка – такая лёгкая, будто Агния вовсе не нуждалась наступать на землю”] (162-63; 2: 167). When she shows Anton the church, “the transparent yellow shawl had slipped down over her bent elbows and looked like a pair of delicate golden wings [Прозрачная жёлтая шаль её за плечами повисла на освобождённых, полуопущенных локтях и была как тонкие золотые крылья]” (167; 2: 172). To use the title of Brad Siberling’s famous movie from the late 1990’s, in this particular fragment of Solzhenitsyn’s novel Moscow becomes a “City of Angels,” where the female character’s personality conjoins elements of the human and the angelic. While standing by the church at the top of Taganka Hill, Agnia behaves as if at any moment she might rise up and fly above the panoramic view she is admiring:

Агния натянутой рукой быстро повlekла Антона дальше – к паперти главного входа вышла из тени в поток заката и села на низкий каменный парапет, где обрывалась ограда и начинался просвет для ворот. Антон ахнул. Они как будто сразу вырвались из теснин город и вышли на крутую высоту с просторной, открытой далью. Паперть сквозь перерыв парапета стекала в долгую белокаменную лестницу, которая многими маршами, чередуясь с площадками, спускалась по склону горы к самой Москва-реке. Река горела на солнце. Слева лежало Замоскворечье, ослепляя жёлтым блестком стёкол, впереди дымили по закатному небу чёрные трубы МОГЭСа, почти под ногами в Москва-реку вливалась блестящая Яуза, справа за ней тянулся Воспитательный дом, за ним высились резные контуры Кремля, а ещё дальше пламенели на солнце пять червонно-золотых куполов храма Христа Спасителя. И во всём этом золотом осиянии Агния, в наброшенной жёлтой шали тоже казавшаяся золотой, сидела, щурясь на солнце. (2: 169)
Agnia’s outstretched hand quickly drew Anton farther on, to the portico outside the main door; they emerged from the shadow into the stream of light from the setting sun and sat on the low stone parapet, beside the churchyard gate. Anton gasped. It was as though they had soared free from the narrow ravine of the city and come out on a steep eminence with an open view far into the distance. The portico swept down through the gap in the parapet to a long course of white stone steps, several flights of them, alternating with little landings and descending down the hillside to the Moscow River. The river was on fire in the light of the setting sun. To their left Zamoskvoreche dazzled them with the yellow brilliance of its windows; straight ahead the black chimneys of the Moscow Power Station poured smoke into the glowing sky; almost directly under them the glittering Yauza flowed into the Moscow, with the orphanage to the right beyond it, and beyond that the fretted contours of the Kremlin; while still farther away the five red-gold domes of the Church of Christ the Savior blazed in the sun. And in all this golden radiance Agnia sat with a yellow shawl around her shoulders, screwing up her eyes at the sun and looking golden herself (164-65).

Agnia has a premonition that this city of cathedrals and churches that were built by Russia’s “righteous men” (165) in ancient times will soon be no more: ‘‘But it’s going, Anton,’ she cried. ‘Moscow is going!’ [...] ‘They’re going to demolish this church [...] [- Но она – уходит, Антон, – пропела Агния. – Москва – уходит!..]’’ (165; 2: 169). For Agnia, as for Bunin’s heroine, Old Russia was comprised not only of architectural masterpieces, but also of the sound of church choirs and the ringing of bells. The disappearance of old Moscow, as both women sense, will mean the silencing of the city’s harmonious sonority. Siisiainen notes: “ [...] music [occupies] a unique significance for the constitution and preservation of the city state, because music alone is the instrument capable of producing, shaping, and organizing the irrational character of each individual citizen [...]” (96). Agnia is a musical Muscovite who perceives the life rhythm of the capital through her highly sensitive and “irrational” hearing: “‘But will you be happy, Anton? [...] When we get interested in the process of living, we lose…we lose…how can I put it? [...] ‘Once the bell stops ringing, once the tuneful sounds fade, you can never call them back. But all the music is in them. Do you understand?’ [Но будешь ли ты счастлив, Антон?...] Заинтересовавшись процессом жизни, мы теряем…теряем…ну, как тебе передать…[...] Вот колокол отзвонил, звуки певчие улетели – и уж их не вернуть, а в них вся музыка. Понимаешь?]” (168; 2: 172-3).

In his analysis of the campanological motifs in Solzhenitsyn’s works, Urmanov notes:

[...] bell ringing spiritualizes lifeless physical space as if filling objective physical reality with a metaphysical substance and turning the flat, mechanical, and rationally perceivable
world into a multidimensional, spiritualized universe, into a world that was created and which is filled with the sings of God’s presence. (193-94)

The bell ringing is the “metaphysical substance” of Moscow, its metaphorical heartbeat, a trope that is recurrent in Tsvetaeva’s poetry where the sound of the bells often resonates in the lyrical persona’s chest or coincides with the rhythm of her own heartbeat: “А этот колокол там, что кремлевских тяжеле, безостановочно ходит и ходит в груди […] [A bell that is heavier than those in the Kremlin never stops tolling in my breast]” (1: 309). Like Agnia, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona perceives Moscow through the medium of sound and sensually internalizes the church melodies of the city. She is horrified when she anticipates the bells falling silent and does not want to stay in such a “dead” acoustic vacuum whence there is no access to the “immaterial” and “timeless” (Urmanov 194) life of the spirit:

Над черною пучиной водною –
Последний звон.
Лавиною простонародною
Низринут трон.

Волочится кровавым волоком
Пурпур царей.
Греми, греми, последний колокол
Русских церквей!

[…]

Цари земные низвергаются.
- Царстви! – Будь!
От колокола содрогаются
Город и грудь.

9 октября 1918 (Tsvetaeva 1: 430)

Above the black abyss of the waters
the final tocsin.
The avalanche of the people
overturns the throne.

Trailing a bloody trail
the purple of the tsars is dragged along.
Thunder, thou last bell
of the Russian churches.

[…]

The kings of the earth are overthrown
Thy Kingdom! Come!
The bell shakes
The city and my breast.

The “the final tocsin” of the “last bell” reaches the ear and stirs the body of the lyrical persona, The tolling of the bell is an aural message that announces the destruction of Moscow as a Christian city and the fall of its guardian, the tsar. It is a sonorous, sinister sign that marks the ultimate desacralization of both city and country. As in Agnia’s case, the ringing of the bells is closely related to the image of a Moscow that is “going,” disappearing. The nouns “город” and “грудь” and the verb “содрогаются” in the line “от колокола содрогаются город и грудь”, through the acoustic associations, produce the effect of another noun - “род” [“family clan”]. The “last bell”, therefore, announces the forced disruption of a range of the heroine’s identities: Christian, national, family, and Muscovite. In the city outside and within her body, a world-historical/existential earthquake has taken place (“содрогаются”).

Let’s return to the relationship between Agnia and Yakonov. The latter, despite his secular outlook and cynical determination to build a career in the service of the Soviet state, whose ideology and workings he secretly despises, is able to share his fiancée’s poetic appreciation of the holy spaces she once showed him. Like the male protagonists in Turgenev and Bunin, Yakonov keeps returning to these sacred loci, impelled by the memory of the woman he loved. In the same autumn of 1927, when Agnia had taken him to the Church of Nikita the Martyr, she had “insisted on going inside to pray” (169):

Было два дня до Рождества Богородицы, и читали долгий како
ин=./y на. Канон был неисчерпаемо красноречив, лавиной лились хвалы и эпитеты Деве Марии, – и в первый раз Яконов понял экстаз и поэзию этого моления. Канон писал не бездушный церковный начётчик, а неизвестный большой поэт, полонённый монастырём; и был он движим не короткой мужской яростью к женскому телу, а тем высшим востхищением, какое способна извлечь из нас женщина (2: 173).

It was two days before the Nativity of the Mother of God, and they were reciting the litany of the day. It was an inexhaustibly eloquent outpouring of praise for the Virgin, and Yakonov felt for the first time the overwhelming poetic power of such prayers. The canon had been written not by a soulless dogmatist but by some great poet immured in a monastery, and he had been moved not by a furious excess of male hunger for a female body but by the pure rapture that a woman can awake in us. (169)

Inside the church Yakonov attains a brief breakthrough to the celestial realm with which his beloved is in constant communion. He is moved by the sight of the church interior and the poetry of the prayers he hears.
His erotic self undergoes a moment of transfiguration. Anton, a man who prefers “best a woman with some flesh on her” (163), that is, one quite unlike the ethereal Agnia, responds to God and admires a totally unbodied type of femininity – the Mother of God.

Yakonov, who is in charge of a high-priority science project at Marfino, which is not going well, has just had a meeting with the head of the secret police, Abakumov, one of Stalin’s most brutal and brutish satraps. Abakumov threatened the colonel with prison unless he sees the project through. It is under the impact of that meeting that Yakonov returns to the Church of St. Nikita twenty-two years later after he was last there. When he reaches the church, he finds “heaps of broken stone and rubbish”: “[…] he stood there, his elbows resting on dead stones, and he did not want to live [А он стоял, локтями припав к мёртвым камням, и жить ему не хотелось]” (170; 2: 174). At this moment he faces a wrenching moral crisis. The communist state to the service of which he dedicated himself after his breakup with Agnia gave him the status of “a high official of a mighty ministry” (170) and provided with all manner of material goods, but at the same time took away his moral autonomy and self-respect, and now threatens him with jail or worse.

Standing on the ruins of the church, Anton finally realizes the meaning of Agnia’s idea of “happiness,” which cannot be obtained in an “insane race” (II: 163) with speeding time, that is, with the historical “process” that unfolds outside the self. Instead, true happiness lies in the intensity of one’s inner life and the ability to move above and beyond temporality in seeking a connection to the divine. When Anton and Agnia had visited the same church in 1927, they had had this conversation: “‘What century does it belong to?’ ‘Do you have to have a century?’” [– Какого ж она века? - Тебе обязательно век? А без века?]” (164; 2: 169) Anton, who is well versed in the literature of Marxist historical materialism and knows “how to recognize the new in good time” (168), sees himself as a man of the twentieth century, for good or for ill (mostly, for ill). Agnia does not “have… a century,” since her definition of her own self ignores calendric and temporal measurements. Instead, it exists on the plane of eternity. When Anton makes his way to the ruined church after spending hours aimlessly wandering the nocturnal streets of Moscow, he loses track of time: “Яконов безмыслино держал на ладони карманные часы, не понимая, что они показывали [Yakonov stared unseeingy at the pocket watch in the palm of his hand]” (2: 161; 156). The
narration, which is in the form of a Yakonov-inflected free indirect discourse, then shifts to an explicitly historical perspective that stresses the “Time Forward!” imperative that underlay so much of the Soviet industrial and scientific experience. He now understands.

Яконов не раз вокруг себя и на себе испытывал ту безумную, непосильную гонку, в которой захлестнулась вся страна – её наркомы и обкомы, учёные, инженеры, директора и прорабы, начальники цехов, бригадиры, рабочие и простые колхозные бабы. Кто бы и за какое бы дело ни брался, очень скоро оказывался в захвате, в защеме придуманных, невозможных, калечащих сроков: больше! быстрее! ещё!!! норму! сверх нормы!! три нормы!!! почётную вахту! встречное обязательство! досрочно!! ещё досрочнее!!! (2: 163-4)

Yakonov had witnessed and been drawn into an insane, an impossible scramble, in which the whole country – with its people’s commissars and oblast secretaries, scientists, engineers, directors and site managers, shop foremen and team leaders, workmen and women on collective farms – was swept off its feet. Whoever you are and whatever you set out to do, you very soon find yourself in the grip, the stranglehold, of arbitrary, impossible, crippling schedules! Give us more! Faster! Faster still! Fulfill the norm! Overfulfill the norm! Fulfill it three times over! Work a voluntary shift! Beat the deadline (159).

This, however, is a realization that comes too late. Middle-aged Yakonov has been broken by the “impossible scramble” and “crippling schedules.” The “dead” ruins of the church symbolize the collapse of his inner self: “His soul was so empty of hope that he had not the strength to stir hand or foot. He was not moved to look around at the beauty of the morning [И так безнадёжно было в его душе, что не имел он силы пошевелить ни рукой, ни ногой. Не тянуло его оглянуться на красоту утра]” (170; 2: 174). He goes back to Marfino and there he does what he must do: he follows Abakumov’s instructions and forces the prisoners, by threat or manipulation, to do the state’s bidding and work that much harder for its greater glory.

As I have attempted to show, Turgenev’s Liza, Bunin’s female protagonist, and Solzhenitsyn’s Agnia are all monastic heroines. They suppress their sexual instinct — their own private Eros — and withdraw from the world into a sacred, cloistered space in order to free themselves of the social structures and strictures of the age, so that they may live in a concordance with the divine. It is possible to interpret their situations in Freudian terms. In such an interpretation, these female characters are impelled in the choices they make and the actions they take by the death instinct, or Thanatos, which stands in opposition to Eros. Indeed, the three female personalities are all death-oriented, if not death-obsessed. Liza often thinks
about death and is convinced that “One must be a Christian […] not without a certain effort, not in order to perceive the divine […], but because every man must die [Христианином нужно быть […] не для того, чтобы познавать небесное […], а для того, что каждый человек должен умереть]” (111; 210). Bunin’s heroine is fond of visiting attending cemeteries, where she spends her time watching funerals: “Yesterday morning I was at the Rogozhskoe Cemetery. […] They were having a funeral for their archbishop. And just imagine, there was a coffin made from an oak log, like in ancient times, the golden brocade looked like forged iron, the face of the dead man was covered by a white Eucharist cerecloth with a large ornamental pattern sewn on it in black – the beauty of it and the horror [Вот вчера утром я была на Рогожском кладбище[…] Хоронили ихнего архиепископа. И вот представьте себе: гроб – дубовая колода, как в древности, золотая парча будто кованая, лик усопшего закрыт белым «воздухом», шитым крупной черной вязью – красота и ужас]” (432; 6: 194). Agnia often says that “living is very difficult” (168) and often seems lethargic and apathetic, in contrast to the virile and flesh-loving Anton: “[…] Anton fell at her feet in one of those forest clearings and proposed. Agnia was deeply dismayed. […] When I think about it, I just don’t want to live. You are a clever man, a brilliant man, and I ought to be overjoyed; but, instead, it makes me want to die”; “She sometimes let him embrace her and even kiss her, but her lips and arms were unresponsive” [“Антон объяснился в любви – припал к её коленям на лесной лужайке. […] Но глубокое уныние овладело Агнией. […] Мне даже от этого не хочется жить. Ты умный и блестящий, и я бы должна только радоваться, – а мне не хочется жить…”; “Она давала себя обнимать и даже целовать, но её губы и руки были при этом безжизненны”] (163; 2: 167-8).

However, here I would like to insert a caveat. Turgenev’s earnest Liza and Bunin’s melancholy heroine are beautiful young women who are responsive to the erotic advances of the men they love. The female character in Bunin’s story is particularly sensuous and actually makes love with her partner. Agnia, however, is estranged from the life of the flesh. Her sexuality is almost or entirely nonexistent and she reacts to Anton’s displays of physical affection with distaste, if not disgust, even though she is in love with him. “She shared the long summer days with him happily enough, walking verst after verst into the green depths, lying beside him in forest clearings, but she was reluctant even to let him stroke her hand. ‘Must
you?” she would say, trying to free herself [Однако, с удовольствием деля с Антоном долгие летние дни, уходя с ним за много верст в зелёную глубь, лежа с ним бок о бок на лужайках, – она очень нехотя позволяла погладить себя по руке, спрашивала, ‘зачем это?’ – и пыталась освободиться]” (163; 2: 167). In fact, Agnia is not really a flesh-and-blood woman, but an untouchable ghost, a fragile, fugitive spirit who lacks the energy for even the most ordinary physical exertions: “She was not very strong, and an uphill walk, hurried movement, or even animated discussion tired her out. […] Anton gently, as though afraid he might break it, clasped his hands around one elbow [Слабенькая, она утомлялась от подъёма на гору, от беготни, даже от оживлённого разговора. […] Антон двумя ладонями облёт её локоть, словно боясь сломать]” (162, 167; 167, 172). It is as if this young woman is already dying. Agnia’s face and body shape a reminiscent of an image on an icon, and icons represent the saints’ and angels’ physical form in ways that are meant to evoke the incorporeal and ethereal:

The icon lacks a linear perspective […]. Instead of the illusion of a three-dimensional space it features […] a range of planes that combine with one another […]. The icon does not show solidity and mass, flesh and blood. Therefore, in contrast to a painting, it does not affect the passionate and emotional depths of the human unconscious […]. (Karelin 8, 30)

Like the image on an icon, Agnia is almost fleshless and bloodless: “Агния не была хороша, ни нехороша собой. Лицо ей часто преображалось /my emphasis/: то в миловидной улыбке, то в непривлекательной вытянутости. Роста она была выше среднего, но узка, хрупка […]. Фигура девушки казалась костлявой, очень уж худой [Agnia was neither pretty nor plain. Her expression changed continually: At one moment she wore a winning smile; at the next she looked drawn and unattractive. She was above middle height but slender, fragile […]. The girl’s figure looked bonier, thinner than ever” (2: 167, 172; 163, 168). Agnia has the body of an adolescent: “[…] when he [Anton] had become used to her, he told himself that he also liked her as a woman and that she would ripen with time”; “There was something of the retarded child about her” [“приобывкнув, он уверил себя, что как женщина она тоже ему нравится, что она разовьётся”; “В ней было что-то задержавшееся детское.”] (163; 167-8).

This phenomenon of arrested womanhood was discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, in relation to the female Populists who had the appearance of children because their erotic drive become sublimated in their
fanatical dedication to the revolutionary cause. Agnia, of course, is an entirely apolitical personality who is indifferent, if not actively hostile to, the cause of transforming the world into an earthly paradise through the scientific application of violence. Yet, the development of her sexuality has been similarly arrested, albeit for dissimilar reasons. She wishes to become a nun: we recall that the female terrorists discussed in Chapter 2 were perceived as “nuns” of a romantically revolutionary kind. The Populists’ sublimation of their sexuality and femininity was overtly anti-Christian, unlike Agnia’s own physiologically de-sexed and spiritually de-eroticized posture. Indeed, it is not Agnia’s etiolated body that attracts and intrigues that young voluptuary, Anton Yakonov: “[…] но чем-то, не телом тянула его Агния” (2: 167). Instead, he is drawn to this unusual girl by the element of the intangible and incorporeal that he discerns in her.

In a sense, Agnia is reminiscent of the Eternal Feminine as conceived by the poets of the Russian Silver Age. Let us recall those semi-literary, semi-mystical marital experiments they conducted, in which they would “elevate eros to the metaphysical sphere” (Matich 5). In such a marriage, instead of having physical intimacy with a woman, they would turn her into the untouchable object to be worshipped at a sexual distance but in erotic proximity as the incarnation of Sofiya, the ideal type of womanhood, the feminine aspect of divine wisdom, popularized by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev. The celebrated threesome that Alexander Blok and Andrey Bely formed with Luibov Mendeleeva, which Olga Matich defines as “the spiritual marriage of Revelation” (97), is a case in point. Be that as it may, Agnia is a strangely asexual personality, as may be seen from this conversation between her and Anton: “She was afraid of the intimacies that bind husband and wife and would ask in a faint voice, ‘Is all that necessary?’ ‘It certainly isn’t the most important thing,’ Anton would answer earnestly. ‘Most certainly not! It only supplements our spiritual union!’” [Она боялась тех тайн, которые связывают мужчину и женщину в супружестве, и упавшим голосом спрашивала у него: ‘А без этого нельзя?’ – ‘Но это совсем, совсем не главное! – с воодушевлением отвечал ей Антон. – Это только дополнение к нашему духовному общению!'] (163; 2: 168).

Agnia’s presence in *The First Circle*, a novel in which Silver Age themes and topics are conspicuously present in the context of Volodin’s discovery of his mother’s cultural identity through her
letters and papers of the period, confirms this work’s connection to the literary and artistic practices of the first and second decades of the twentieth century. In particular, the manner in which her character is actualized in the text evokes Blok’s image of the Beautiful Lady, which is based on the same Solovievian idea of the divinely wise Sofia.

Вхожу я в темные храмы,
Совершаю бедный обряд.
Там жду я Прекрасной Дамы
В мерцаньи красных лампад.

В тени у высокой колонны
Дрожу от скрипа дверей.
А в лицо мне глядит, озаренный,
Только образ, лишь сон о Ней.

О, я привык к этим ризам
Величавой Вечной Жены!
Высоко бегут по карнизам
Улыбки, сказки и сны.

О, Святая, как ласковы свечи,
Как отрадны Твои черты!
Мне не слышны ни вздохи, ни речи,
Но я верю: Милая – Ты.

25 открября 1902 (Blok 1: 128).

I enter the darkness of churches,
I practise a plain, humble rite.
There I wait for the Beautiful Lady
Where the icon lamps spill their red light.

In the shadows close by a tall column,
I start at a creak of the door,
But the face that regards me is only
An image, a vision of Her.

I am used to the robes that are worn by
The Majestic, Eternal Bride!
On the cornices high up above me,
Smiles, visions and fairy-tales glide.

O Holiest, how fair are the candles,
How consoling Thy lineaments are!
Though I hear neither sighing nor speaking,
I believe: Dearest one Thou are here. (Blok 1981, 56-7)
Unlike the future Colonel Yakonov, who so highly values the pleasures of the flesh, Blok’s lyrical hero seeks only a wispy and immaterial female semblance — not a warm-hearted, warm-bodied woman, but a “dreamy” sensation of femininity (“лишь сон о ней”), whose visitation he awaits in the “dark temple.” Such dark, sacral spaces are especially dear to Agnia as well. Again, Agnia’s almost intangible presence in her trysts with Anton is reminiscent of the Beautiful Lady, who in the poem quoted above is spectral to the third power: cf. such traditional indicators of ghostliness as the eerie creaking of a door, the spirit’s vertical trajectory of descent from the astral realm into the mortal’s field of vision, and long robes.

Blok’s knightly hero enters into a mystical trance in which his soul leaves his body and encounters his astral lover. This contact occurs face-to-face and arouses in him not passion or lust, but a mild and tender emotion (“А в лицо мне глядит, озаренный, только образ […]; Но я верю: Милая - Ты”). The male and female personas “smile” at each other (“бегут […] улыбки”) and co-exist in a spiritual harmony. In contrast, Agnia’s relationship with her admirer, Anton, remains unbalanced, for they belong to opposite planes of being and perception. She cannot relate to him on the spiritual plane or at the level of the soul: instead she has to do with the male ego (Я-конов), whose fleshy masculinity, prudent rationality, and scientific professional interests are utterly alien to her.

Only once, at the instant of “entering” the church in the company of Agnia, does Anton attain the state of overflowing poetic meditation that is similar to the one that characterizes the Blokian poetic I, when the future Colonel Yakonov is visited by an out-of-body sensation and experiences the “pure rapture that a woman can awaken in us” (169). On that occasion, he is fascinated by the beauty of the female “lineaments” in the face of his fiancée (“Как отрадны твои черты!”): “The diffused glow of the sunset and the orange reflection of candlelight had brought life and warmth to Agnia’s cheeks [И рассеянный свет заката и оранжевые отблески свечей вернули щекам Агнии жизнь и теплоту]” (169; 2: 173). Anton, who is afraid “to be noticed by a colleague anywhere near a church” (168), unknowingly assumes the role of the knight who overcomes his fear and accompanies the Lady he serves to the sacred locus that is her private refuge, while Agnia, who accepts the engagement ring he offers her while avoiding or rejecting Anton’s physical advances, recalls the Blokian persona’s “Eternal” soul-wife.
In contrast to Turgenev’s and Bunin’s grounded, rooted, and sexually whole heroines, who become nuns in order to escape the power of Eros, Agnia is an earthly embodiment of a spiritual abstraction. Her ascetic femininity takes an extreme form because she happens to live in one of those periods of history when the realm of the sacred is violated and destroyed by the enemies of faith with a particular degree of malevolence and intensity. For someone like her, hiding oneself in a nunnery would not be enough, for convents and monasteries can and will be destroyed by the godless state in which she lives, as she recognizes herself. In order to remain true to her religious identity, Agnia must therefore be bodily abstract, corporeally absent. By way of compensation for the disappearance of the spiritual from the historical realm and the urban space she lives in, she needs to become a spirit herself.

Let us return to The Red Wheel. Ksenia’s and Sanya’s future together as well as the ultimate fate of the Iberian chapel remain untextualized. The narrative ends in April 1917, which is also the title of the fourth and last Knot of the epic. We know that the chapel was pulled down in 1929 during one of the Bolsheviks’ antireligious campaigns. The destruction of the chapel, however, is recorded in “The Outline of Unwritten Knots,” an appendix to the main narrative, which lists the major events that took place at the subsequent “knots” or nodal points of Russian history up to the year 1945 (16: 563-702).

The eventual, extra-textual demolition of the church where Ksenia and Sanya dedicated themselves to each other looms over their relationship. Where the lives of the principal fictional characters are concerned, they point to a future reality of separation and loss: “Что же с нами будет? В этих бурях я боюсь и совсем потерять к вам последнюю ниточку [What will happen to us? In these storms I’m afraid I am going to lose that last little thread that links the two of us together.” (Likonya) 16: 390]; “Со всем, со всем нам придет рассстаться: и друг с другом, и с этим последним солнцем, и с этим городом, и с этой страной. И может быть — скоро…” [We will have to take our leave of everything: of each other, this last sun, this city, this country. And may-be soon.” (Vorotyntsev) 16: 464]. Separation is also a leitmotif in The First Circle. One of the heroines who suffers through this experience is Nadya Nerzhin, the wife of autobiographical protagonist Gleb Nerzhin, who is a prisoner at Marfino.
After living together as newlyweds for a few brief months, Nadya and Gleb were separated by the “four-year” war (1941-1945) and then Gleb’s arrest and imprisonment: “My husband’s been in prison nearly five years,” she said. And before that he was at the front…” (Solzhenitsyn 2009, 268). On the level of imagery and metaphors, those episodes of the novel that depict Nadya’s sufferings are parallel, in many ways, to Tsvetaeva’s poetic texts in which the female drama of separation with the beloved during the Civil War period (1918-1922) comes to the fore. In particular, we observe some parallel topoi between the concluding scene of Chapter 52 of the novel, which is titled as “To the Resurrection of the Dead!,” and Tsvetaeva’s poem “I lift the hands that I let fall” (1921) from her Separation verse cycle. Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona laments the absence of her warrior-beloved (in biographical terms, Tsvetaeva’s husband Sergey Efron was away fighting in the civil war with the Whites), and Nadya is also a “soldier’s wife” (378) who feels downcast and depressed after a prison visit with her husband. In addition, the two the texts are filled with similar biblical imagery and feature a materialized metaphor of the crucifix (of the cross):

Leaning her brow against the window sash, Nadya pressed the palms of her hands against the cold panes. She stood as though crucified on the black cross of the window frame. […] She stared into the darkness, trying to make out the chimney stack of the Matrosskaya Tishina prison. Disperato! That helpless despair, when you struggle to rise from your knees and sink back again. That importunate high D flat, like a woman’s hysterical shriek! Like a cry of inconsolable suffering! The row of streetlamps outside carried her eyes into the pitch darkness of a future she would rather not live to see. The etude ended, and 6:00 pm., Moscow time, was announced. (2: 373)

And Tsvetaeva’s poem:

Уроненные так давно
Вздымаю руки.
В пустое черное окно
Пустые руки
Бросаю в полуночный бой
Часов,— домой
Хочу! — Вот так: вниз головой
— С башни! — Домой!

Не о булыжник площадной:
В шепот и шелест…
Мне некий Воин молодой
Крыло подстелет.

Май 1921 (26)

I lift the hands that I let fall
So long ago.
Into a black and empty window
Empty hands
I fling into mid-nocturnal
Striking
Clocks - I want
To go home! – Like this: head first
- From the tower! –
Homeward!

Not onto the cobbled square:
Into rustle and whisper…
Some youthful Warrior will
Spread
His wing beneath me.

May 1921 (translated by Sibelan Forrester)

We behold two female figures who must contend with the trauma of separation from a lover in the same topos of Moscow, at a precisely recorded moment of time: 6:00 o’clock in the evening in Solzhenitsyn’s novel and midnight in Tsvetaeva’s poem. Interestingly, the poem’s prosodic structure — the number of lines, twelve – correlates with the twelve chimes of the clock. To quote Bakhtin, the respective chronotopes function “thanks precisely to the special increase in density and concreteness of time markers – the time of human life, of historical time – that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas” (Bakhtin, 250). Both women, Nadya and the warrior’s wife, grieve by a “black” window (cf. “the black cross” of the window, the “black and empty window”), through which the topographical contours of Moscow are visible. “The semantics of the window as a mediator between “this” world and the outer world” (Vinogradova, 10) reflect the emotional state of the female personalities, who are exhausted by the burden of separation and the fear of loss. The arms that are “lifted” toward the window (Tsvetaeva) or “spread” as
a crucifix on a cold window glass (Solzhenitsyn) are gestures of supplication or sacrifice, gesticular prayers of help. The parallel imagery in the two works is a meta-indicator that the historical circumstances that have engendered the heroines’ predicament, that is, the civil war (Tsvetaeva) and the Gulag (Solzhenitsyn), are successive elements in a single historical tragedy. The female personalities face analogously tragic life situations within the same continuum of national suffering. Nadya’s gesture is, of course, explicitly biblical: “[…] as though crucified on the black cross of the window frame”/my emphasis/. The double image of the cross (the arms and the window) imaginatively cancels Nadya’s skeptical attitude towards the Christian faith, for earlier, during that prison conversation with her husband, she had exclaimed: “Don’t tell me you’ve started believing in God?” (276).

The reader does not know if Nadya will become a believer. Despite the religious imagery that accompanies her in this chapter, there is no God in the space in which she lives and grieves: from the window she can see a “fragment” of Moscow that is the source of her personal tragedy – the chimney of the Marfino prison, the carceral locus which in the novel is depicted as the “first circle” of the hell that is the Gulag. The window is the chronotope through which Nadya seeks to maintain her connection to Gleb Nerzhin, the man she loves. As for Gleb, who is torn between his prison girlfriend Simochka (Serafima) and Nadya but who in the course of the novel will choose to remain faithful to his wife, at one point he “turned away and leaned on the windowsill. With is nose and forehead pressed against the pane, he looked in the direction of the sentry. Eyes dazzled by lights nearby could not see into the watchtower, but farther away separate lights merged and became blurred stars, while beyond and above them a third of the sky was blanched by reflected light form the capital nearby [отвернулся, перегнулся на подоконник. Лбом и носом приплюснулся к стеклу, посмотрел в сторону часового. Глазам, ослеплённым от близких ламп, не было видно глубины вышки, но вдали там и сям отдельные огни расплывались в неясные звёзды, а за ними и выше – обнимало треть неба отражённое белесоватое свечение близкой столицы]” (659; 2: 641). Nadya’s and Gleb’s respective gazes follow symmetrical trajectories, traveling from a window and over the cityscape of Moscow and intersecting somewhere within that urban space. Rita
Brakman notes: “In some sense, The First Circle may be described as ‘the poetics of the window’” […] (115).

Interestingly, the scene with Nadya in Chapter 52 refers the reader back to the very first lines of the novel, which contain references to a window, a character’s hand movements, and the exact time of day:

Кружевные стрелки показывали пять минут пятого. [...] Стёкла высокого окна начинались от самого пола. [...] Видя всё это и не видя этого всего, государственный советник второго ранга Иннокентий Володин, прислонясь к ребру оконного уступа, высвистывал что-то тонкое-долгое. Концами пальцев он перекидывал пёстрые глянцевые листы иностранного журнала. Но не замечал что в нём. (2: 13)

The filigreed hands pointed to five minutes past four. […] A high window, beginning at floor level, looked down on bustling Kuznetsky Most. […] State Counselor Grade Two Innokenty Volodin surveyed all this unseeingly, lolling against the edge of the embrasure and whistling something long drawn out and elusive. His fingertips flipped through the pages of a glossy foreign magazine, but he had no eyes for them. (1)

The similarity of structure and detail in the two passages demonstrates the conceptual unity of the novel.

The scene of Nadya’s figurative crucifixion and Tsvetaeva’s poem are shaped by the same erotic dynamic. In Tsvetaeva, the lyrical subject’s for death is connected with the image of a tower: “I want to go home! – Like this: head first - From the tower! – Homeward!” The “striking of the clocks” and the reference to the “cobbled square” imaginatively adumbrate the contours of Red Square and the Spasskaya Tower (i.e., the Tower of the Redeemer, cf. Nadya’s “crucifixion”), the Kremlin’s clock tower. The top of the tower symbolizes the intensity of the lyrical persona’s tragic emotional state, the peak of her sufferings. Hence, a jump or fall from the tower represents her escape from the torments she is suffering, her headlong “homeward!” flight to her beloved warrior. The tower in Tsvetaeva’s poetic world serves as an organizing metaphor of separation and female yearning for the beloved, who is fighting on the battlefields of the civil war. This is a topos that ultimately derives from The Tale of the Host of Igor (1185): “Вопль стародавний, Плач Ярославны – Слышите? С башенной вышечки Неперерывный Вопль – неизбывный...[ ]; “Башенный бой […]. Где на земле […]. Брошенный мой! [Tower-bell striking […] Where on the earth is […] My downcast one]” (2: 7, 25; Forrester).

Another Old Russian text that includes the image a tower in the context of the tragic female experience in history is The Tale of the Destruction of Ryazan (1237). This work contains a passage that
describes how Princess Evpraksia, the wife of Prince Fedor Uir’evich, the ruler of Ryazan, climbed to the top of the fortress wall with her infant son in her arms and threw herself down when she received news of her husband’s violent death at the hands of the Tatars, who burst into the city. This episode brings together the three elements that are central to the poetic and prose narratives of tragic twentieth-century womanhood analyzed in this chapter: the violence of history, the wounded Eros, and a sacral space. Evpraksia killed herself in the vicinity of a church where the miraculous icon of St. Nikola of Korsun was held. She was buried at the same place with her husband and son, and the holy image became known as the Zarazskaya icon: “И по той причине зовётся великого чудотворца Николы икона Заразской, что благоверная княгиня Евпраксия с сыном своим князем Иваном сама себя на том месте ‘заразила’ (разбила)” [This is the reason why the icon of the great miracle worker Nikola was given the name Zarazskaya, for it was here that the reverent princess Evpraksia with her son Prince Ivan threw herself down and perished.”

In The First Circle, the grief of the prisoners’ wives is spatially connected to the image of a tower at a range of textual levels: metaphorical, topographical, and historical. In fact, the Marfino jail, where the captive scientists depicted in the novel are imprisoned, is a tower: “As they went uphill, Nerzhin turned around to look at a view he had never seen properly before: the building in which they lived and worked, the dark redbrick seminary with its dull rusted hemispherical dome over their semicircular beauty of a room. Above it rose the “sixer”, as hexagonal towers were called in Old Russia [Нержин обернулся, чтобы с пригорка увидеть, чего почти не приходилось ему: здание, в котором они жили и работали, тёмно-кирпичное здание семинарии с шаровым тёмно-жёлтым куполом над их полукруглой красавицей-комнатой и ещё выше – шестериком, как звали в Древней Руси шестиугольные башни]” (249; 2: 250).

These wives were separated from their husbands by the walls, flag stones, gates, and the pillars of the prison constructions: “Women visitors passed on admission through an opening in a stone wall two meters thick and were conducted around the grim Pugachev Tower between walls several times a man’s height [А когда женщин пропускали на свидание, то вводили сквозь каменную кладку двухметровой толщины и вели меж стен в несколько человеческих ростов в обход страшной Пугачёвской башни]” (263; 2: 263-4).
However, in Tsvetaeva’s poem the lyrical I’s midnight jump from the tower does not end in death. Her beloved warrior’s metaphorical wings “spread beneath her” and she is drawn into the “whisper” of his embrace, which leads to the “rustle” of a tender love conversation (the wings serve as a compound part of a larger cross-textual metaphor that depicts the White Army as “the Swans’ Encampment [Лебединый стан]”). The shift of imaginative accents from the woman’s hands and arms to the male’s “wing” corresponds to a movement from the material and earthly sphere into the aerial or celestial realm. In fact, the lyrical persona’s fall is an anti-fall, a flight or ascension from the earth, that is, from death. As was already noted, the time at which the action in the poem unfolds is midnight, “a mythological and ritually marked boundary in the diurnal cycle […]. […] a time of night that is “impure” and dangerous for man […]. This is a time when he feels threatened, sees or imagines seeing things, conjures up visions, loses his bearings, wanders off the beaten track, is tempted to go into the water or the wilderness…” (Levkievskiaia 12). Therefore, the anti-fall may be interpreted as a victory over the powers of darkness, a winged passage across or above that sinister “boundary” that leads to the female personality’s reunion with the beloved male.

At the moment of historical crisis women, as depicted in Solzhenitsyn’s and Tsvetaeva’s texts, become vulnerable and unprotected. They do not possess the material strength to oppose the new and brutal historical reality directly. Instead, they fall back on their inner resources. They become extremely conscious of the strength of their own bodies and of their reserves of erotic energy, while refusing to submit to the political and sexual demands placed upon them by the revolution and the society it has brought forth. These female characters treat their erotic selves as something that cannot be detached from them. They do so while seeking and finding a spiritual and religious connection to the sacred loci of Moscow or of Russia at large. In lieu of ceding their erotic autonomy to this new dispensation of power, they sublimate their sexual instincts, not in a manner that is dictated by the “process of history,” but in accordance with their own private values and needs. And in this way, whether they survive or perish, they emerge victorious.
CHAPTER 5

THWARTED, UNREALIZED, AND TRAGIC MOTHERHOOD DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY AND EARLY SOVIET PERIOD. CHILDREN AND THE TRAUMA OF HISTORY. THE REPRESENTATION OF MOTHERHOOD WITHIN SACRAL, SPATIAL FRAMES IN TSVETAEVA AND SOLZHENITSYN

In the created worlds of Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn, pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing are consistently shown as life events that belong not only in the personal realm, but possess a larger, historical and mythic, meaning, one that is almost invariably tragic and harrowing. Themes and situations relating to motherhood during this calamitous time in history are a prominent strand in the dialogic connection between the two oeuvres. As Mikhail Bakhtin showed, a given work of literature may enter into dialogue with an earlier one, and that work will communicate in turn with the text that post-dates it.

It is a rule in Solzhenitsyn and Tsvetaeva’s imagined universes that mothers and their children live in the permanent shadow of danger and death. Motherhood was one of the most traumatic experiences for women during the revolution and the gulag period, when this fundamental biological and familial reality of the human condition was transformed into a source of anxiety, vulnerability, and extreme suffering, for both mother and child. As artistically conceptualized by the two artists, these biological and family practices are related to particular spaces such as the home and the church and, in Solzhenitsyn’s case, the “country” of the gulag.

Solzhenitsyn and Tsvetaeva’s literary productions posit an axiological shift from the established structures of family, communal, and religious life of pre-revolutionary Russia, which centered on certain treasured secular or sacred locations, to a different kind of space, one in which these special places are destroyed or polluted. In Tsvetaeva’s poetry of the revolutionary years, this new space is only just coming into being, whereas in Solzhenitsyn it exists as a fully constructed territory of suffering and injustice that includes, concealed behind a line of metaphorical walls and doors, the realm of camps and prisons. The two artists record the destruction of these sacred and domestic loci and the violent severing of connections and
relationships between people, including parents and children, which accompanies the transition from the pre-revolutionary way of life to the new Soviet reality.

The theme of motherhood, whether actual, potential, thwarted, or lost, forms one of the central perspectives from which these tragic developments are shown. The same applies to the representation of the suffering and death of children. It is important to note that Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Nekrasov, to name just three nineteenth-century literary figures, depict the same order of family tragedy, with parents morning the suffering and loss of their infant sons and daughters, which occur for all kinds of natural and man-made reasons. The death of children is a constant in their imagined worlds and is a reflection of the social and medical realities of the age. By the same token, in Solzhenitsyn’s novel November 1916, Zinaida Altanskaya’s baby dies of an illness that is wholly unrelated to the historical events unfolding elsewhere, and she blames herself for deciding to be with her married lover instead of with her child when the latter falls ill: personal choice and tragic happenstance are the causes of her tragedy. As a rule, however, the suffering and death of children in Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn is shown as the consequence of a world-historical project, an organized endeavor by utopian idealists to create a perfect society with perfect people on this earth.

In Tsvetaeva’s case, one should also bear in mind the circumstances of her life at the time. During the revolutionary and Civil War period (1917–1923), she lived through a succession of personal tragedies. Her husband Sergey Efron joined the White movement and fought in the Russian civil war. Tsvetaeva, however, stayed behind in Bolshevik-ruled Moscow with her daughters, Alya (born in 1912) and Irina (born in 1917), where she experienced the brutal impact of the new political realities and the devastation of War Communism. In 1920 Irina died of hunger, an event that shaped Tsvetaeva’s poetry of that period and later. During this period the theme of motherhood/children, which was already a prominent element in Tsvetaeva’s poetry, becomes central to her art. She addresses this subject in different ways. Her older daughter, Alya, inspires in the maternal / feelings of admiration, gratitude, and joy and helps her confront the cruel impact of history: (“Мне – от всей моей Обиды Утешенье – Консуэла!”, Tsvetaeva 1: 485 / In the midst of the Offense I suffered, there is Consolation). There are also the motifs of the absence of the
paternal figure, the topos of the warrior-father who leaves his family to fight for a noble cause, and the poetic I’s sadness and feelings of spiritual and physical torment due to her struggle to protect her daughters and survive herself.

Alya’s lyrical voice wonders at the absence of her father: “– А папа где? – Спи, Спи, за нами Сон, Сон на степном коне сейчас приедет [Where is Daddy?] — “Close your eyes and Sleep will come to take us away on a horse from the steppes]” (1: 415). The maternal persona speaks of the difficulties of taking care for her children: the breadlines, the cold and snowy winter, and the sense of rootlessness and unpredictability. “В год…………Было у меня две дочери, – Так что мучилась с мукой И за всем вставала в очередь”; “Много снегу и мало хлеба Шатки подножки [That year… I lived with my two daughters/I worried about flour/And stood in queues for everything; Much snow and little bread/My steps are unsteady]” (1: 428, 497). The lyrical I fears she is failing as a parent and protector. After Irina’s death, she is overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and despair: “Старшую у тьмы выхватывая – Младшей не уберегл [Tearing my eldest away from the darkness — I failed to save my youngest]” (1: 518).

Parallel treatments of the theme of motherhood and children are to be found in Solzhenitsyn and, indeed, are central to their mimetic representation in his prose, which features the same topoi of infant suffering and death. In his fictions, a combination of personal and historical factors causes children to die at an early age, or even prevents them from being conceived and born in the first place. In The First Circle, Gleb Nerzhin, an imprisoned mathematician who is an autobiographical representation of the author, experiences a revelation of an intensely personal nature that is set in the framework of history. The prison bus that is taking Gleb to a meeting with his wife Nadya almost runs over a little boy. This incident sets the hero to thinking about the children he and Nadya never had and, most likely, will never have:

Надя и Глеб жили вместе один-единственный год. […] Потом сразу пришла война. И вот у кого-то теперь бегают смешные коротконогие малыши. А у них — нет…

Один малышок хотел перебегать шоссе. Шофёр резко вильнул, чтобы его объехать. Малыш испугался, остановился и приложил ручёнку в синей варежке к раскраснелому лицу. И Нержин годами не думавший ни о каких детях, вдруг ясно понял, что Сталин обокрал его и Надю на детей /my emphasis/. (2: 251)
Nadya and Gleb had lived together for just a year. [...] Then, suddenly, the war was upon them. Some people their age had funny little kids running around on short legs. They did not.

A small child tried to run across the road. The driver swerved sharply to miss him. The child was frightened and stood stock-still, pressing a little hand in a blue mitten to his flushed face. Nerzhin, who had not thought about children at all for years, suddenly saw clearly that Stalin had robbed him and Nadya of their children (2009, 250).

Hitler, whose name remains unmentioned, and Stalin, who is identified explicitly, are the two despots whose historic malevolence took away the Nerzhins’ chance to become parents. In Biblical terms, Stalin is implicitly assigned the part of a twentieth-century King Herod: an imaginative reference that combines with other coded descriptions of the dictator in the novel as a “pithecanthrope” or a modern-day Kashchey the Deathless, the evil monster of Russian folklore. King Herod I of Judea ordered the execution of all male young children fearing he would lose his throne to the newborn Jesus (the Massacre of the Innocents) after the magi refused to tell him the Holy Infant’s location (Matthew 2: 16-18). As presented in Solzhenitsyn, Stalin is a patriarch of evil: the ultimate anti-father figure. “And when he cried the little children died in the street” [W. H. Auden, Epitaph on a Tyrant], though the Soviet general secretary is by a considerable degree more sinister than W. H. Auden’s Tyrant: he murders children, or causes them to be murdered, without shedding a single tear, and moreover, his words and actions result in countless children never even being conceived or born.

During his meeting with Nadya Gleb is not allowed to touch his wife and he gazes upon her breasts, those twin symbols of a woman’s sexuality and her capacity for motherhood, not with desire but compassion, moved by their sagging, fading shape, a biological sign that Nadya (Nadezhda = “Hope”) is approaching the time of life when a woman can no longer bear children: “Он увидел её шею, по-прежнему девически-точёную, неширокие, слабые плечи и, под сборками блузки, – грудь, уныло опавшую за эти годы. И короткая укорная мысль, что у неё своей чередой идут новые наряды, новые знакомства, – при виде этой уныло опавшей груди сменилась жалостью, что скаты серого тюремного воронка раздавили и её жизнь [She threw the coat open, and he saw her neck, as smooth and girlish as ever, her weak slender shoulders, and, under the gathers of her blouse, her breasts, which had sagged miserably in
all those years. Mentally he reproached her for living a life in which new finery and new friends were a matter of course, but when he saw her pathetically sunken bosom, this fleeting thought gave way to pity. Her life, like his, had been crushed beneath the wheels of the gray prison truck” (2:270; 2009, 270).

In “Matryona’s Home,” Ignatich, Solzhenitsyn’s autobiographical narrator, visualizes a young peasant couple, Matryona and Fadei, working in the fields in the days before World War I, a retroactive, imagined idyll that contrasts with the tragic course of their lives in the twentieth century. The promise of family felicity and childbirth for them was unfulfilled because of the war:

Война германская началась. Взяли Фаддея на войну. […] и вспыхнул передо мной голубой, белый и жёлтый июль четырнадцатого года: ещё мирное небо, плывущие облака и народ, кипящий со спелым жнивом. Я представил их рядом: смоляного богатыря с косой через спину; её, румяную, обнявшую сноп. И – песню, песню под небом, какие давно уже отстала деревня петь, да и не споёшь при механизмах. (1: 133)

They took Faddei in the army. […] and suddenly the blue and white and yellow July of the year 1914 burst into flower before my eyes: the sky still peaceful, the floating clouds, the people sweating to get the ripe corn in. I imagined them side by side, the black-haired Hercules with a scythe over his shoulder, and the red-faced girl clasping a sheaf. And there was singing out under the open sky, such songs as nobody can sing nowadays, with all the machines in the fields. (Solzhenitsyn 2006, 41)

The exuberant son-of-the-soil (bogatyr) masculinity of Fadei and the red-cheeked daughter-of-the-soil femininity of young Matryona, who dreamily hugs the sheaf of hay like an allegory of fertility, are figures in a timeless (that is, ahistorical) rural paradise, in which the birth of many children, as was common in peasant families, is the happy norm. The same Arcadian ideal is referenced in The Red Wheel, where a young peasant couple, Arseny and Katyona Blagodaryov, are happy in their marriage and are raising two small children. Here, however, the mythic dimension of their life situation is textualized on the plane of topos and allusion, rather than directly via the perceptions and words of an imaginative third-person narrator. Like Fadei, Arseny is a soldier, but although he is away at the front during World War I, he comes back to his home village on leave. There he spiritually and bodily reunites with Katyona and sees his son, who has grown a year older while he was away, and his infant daughter, who was born after he left:

Особливое узнавание: вот это я, отлитой, от лобика до ноготочка. Не просто мой сын, мой станет и непохож, а тут и словами не перебрать – какой оно в склади, а
до дрожи – я! второй, ещё раз! […] Дочка. Есть и дочка. Сын да дочь, красные дети. (9: 462)

A startling realization: this is me, the spitting image of me, from his little forehead down to his little toenail. Not just my son, a son of mine might look different from me. There aren’t any words to say just what it is, but it’s a shock to see just how like me he is, it’s me all over again! A second me! (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 461)

Note Arseny’s characteristically male reaction at the sight of his son: he sees him as a reproduction of his own self, that is, a confirmation that his seed and blood have now been perpetuated. In Arseny and Katyona’s case, the harmonious, rooted Eros of matrimonial love, which makes it possible to conceive children and plan the future of the family still functions outside the frame of history, despite the terrible battles that are being fought in western Russia. Eros most vividly reveals itself in the scene where after a long separation husband and wife stay alone in the bathhouse [баня] and give way to their passion for one another. Afterward, they talk:

но больше всего и ладней всего говорили они о будущем […], так как будут они жить? […] да вместе-то, да любя, да при детях, Богом посланных, это же радость одна [...].

— Сенюшка! А если… ещё?

Сенька безпечно:
— А его нам и надо!
— А — девка опять?..
— Ка-ти чередом!
— А потом — ещё?
— А хоть и ещё.
Ой-й, в-весело!! (9: 480–81)

But most of all and most happily they talked of the future… how will they live then?.. together, loving each other, together with their children, sent by God, what joy awaited them…

Senyusha! What if we have another one?

Senya was nonchalant: “That’s the ticket!”

“But what if it’s another girl?”
“Katyas one after the other!”

“And the another one?”

“The more, the merrier.”

“Ка-ти чередом!” [Katyas one after the other!] is an instance of polysemantic speech that functions in a variety of ways. First, “Ка-ти” is a homonym of the name Катя name in the nominative plural form (Katyona-Katya-Kati) and the genitive singular. Arseny’s eagerness to have daughters who will be his wife’s namesakes is a marker of his love for her and reveals an unusual willingness for a male peasant of his time and generation to have female offspring. Second, “кать” is the imperative form of the verb катить, to roll, which has a crucial meaning in this wheeled epic that is replete with circular figures and shapes. In speech and spirit, Arseny wants to “roll” forward the “wheel” of his family and to expand its perimeter, as it were. This family wheel or circle is a thing of warmth and love. However, it is doomed to be crushed by the larger, sinister, Red Wheel of history.

The final Knot of The Red Wheel is entitled April 1917, but some of the epic’s fictional characters reappear in Solzhenitsyn’s other works, set during subsequent periods in history. For example, Arseny, who is the epic’s most important peasant figure, has a presence in the binary story “Ego” (1994), a work for which the writer used material he had assembled for the unwritten Knots of the epic. In “Ego,” Arseny joins the Tambov rebellion, an anti-Bolshevik rural uprising that took place after the end of the civil war. The rebellion was provoked by the Bolsheviks’ policy of War Communism, which entailed the confiscation of the peasants’ grain and the destruction of their centuries-old way of life. In response to the uprising, the Soviet authorities unleash a reign of terror. Women are put in concentration camps and systematically raped, hostages are taken and shot, and villages are raised to the ground. The Red Army commander, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, employs modern weapons against the lightly armed rebels, including airplanes and poison gas. The Blagodaryovs’ home village of Kamenka is one of the centers of the insurgency and Arseny is among the first to join the revolt, eventually rising to command of a regiment in the guerrilla army. We never learn what happens to him after the rebellion is crushed in 1922: as is common in Solzhenitsyn’s
longer fictions, the narrative concludes with the plot lines suspended in an extra-textual dimension of story time and discourse time. However, in the historical circumstances depicted, where thousands of rebels are killed and their families suffer terrible hardship or worse, Arseniy’s survival as well as the survival of his young family appears problematic. And even if every one of the Blagodaryovs survive, the reader can imagine their possible fates in the 1930s, the decade of collectivization, and the 1940s, the decade of World War II.

Among the atrocities depicted in “Ego” is the murder of the village priest Father Mikhail by Red Army soldiers at the door of his own home. Father Mikhail is also a character in The Red Wheel where he officiates at the christening of Arseniy and Katyona’s son. In this set piece scene, he lets it be known that he is angry with Katyona for having conceived during the Great Fast, when church law forbade sexual relations between spouses. In fact, Arseniy and Katyona had broken the rules knowingly, out of passion for each other as well as a desire to have a family:


Nobody had any thought of war as yet, and the rule was that even newlyweds had to take a break after Shrovetide. But Katya wasn’t pregnant yet, and they were both hungry for it. So they told each other in whispers, “If we are committing a sin, maybe God will forgive us.” And they kept it up till Palm Sunday. But God must have forgiven them, because look what a fine son she’d borne! If they’d bowed to the law Katya might still have been childless when the war came. Father Mikhail had frowned over his calendar and threatened Katya. […] – “During the Great Fast! And that’s how he’s turned out! A great big boy!” […] (Solzhenitsyn 1984, 472)

The newlyweds consider their son, conceived during the Great Fast, as a Great boy. Marital Eros triumphs over the constraints imposed upon it by the Church, and this, as the exchange between Arseny and Katyona makes plain, is indubitably a good thing.

The priest’s violent death at the hands of authorities will have consequences for the traditional order of things in the village, including matters of childbirth. Henceforth there will be no one there to make sure that spouses remain celibate on certain feast days, and baptisms will no longer be performed. The age-old
country rhythms of procreation will be disrupted, even if the notion of bringing children into the world during the brutal dekulakization campaign, or later during World War II, or later during the postwar famine of 1946-47 would be an unlikely one in the first place.

That re-structuring of rural Russia relied on the same terror practices that are depicted in “Ego,” minus the use of poison gas, this time against an unarmed and bewildered peasantry. In the late 1920s and early 1930, millions of lives were destroyed, displaced, or upended. The womenfolk and children of kulaks or, to be more accurate, those classified as kulaks and their supporters, were especially vulnerable and defenseless. Part Six of The Gulag Archipelago, “The Peasant Plague,” is devoted to the deportation of the kulaks. It contains the following scene:

В […] эшелоне с Дона […] одна баба в пути родила. А давали им стакан воды в день и не всякий день по 300 граммов хлеба. Фельдшера? – не спрашивай. Не стало у матери молока, и умер в пути ребёнок. Где ж хоронить? Два конвоира сели в их вагон на один пролёт, на ходу открыли дверь – и выбросили трупик. (6: 319)

In […] convoy of Don Cossacks […] one woman gave birth to a child on the journey. Their rations were one glass of water a day, and 300 grams of bread not every day. Was there a medical attendant? Need you ask? The mother had no milk, and the child died on the way. Where were they to bury it? Two soldiers climbed in for a short trip between two stations, opened the door while the train was moving, and threw the tiny body out. (Solzhenitsyn 1978, 360)

In spare terms that overtly eschew any rhetorical flourishes (elsewhere in this work, rhetorical devices abound), the passage records the successive stages by which this Don woman lost her identity as a mother at the hands of the state. She was taken away from her home in an advanced state of pregnancy; she had to give birth in a moving prison train without any medical care; she was malnourished to the extent that her body was unable to produce milk for the newborn baby. What happened next was almost as terrible. The mother was not given the opportunity to grieve over her dead child or to bury it. The guards’ act of “throwing the tiny body out” reflects the state’s brutal attitude towards children in that historical period, which relates to its treatment of the population it controlled as a pliable biomass, its individual elements to be employed, retained, or discarded as the situation warrants. In this case, the infant is a piece of human refuse, and is treated as such. He is cast aside from the train that wheels his Mother “to the great
Magnitogorsk building operation”: “There’s no other way to build the New Society” (Solzhenitsyn 1978, 360, 363).

In this historical light, Katyona, her husband (if he survives) and their living children are doomed to live tragic lives or die tragic deaths. In The Gulag Archipelago, the comparison to Herod’s Massacre of the Innocents is made explicit: “С тех пор как Ирода не стало – это только Передовое Учение могло нам разъяснить: как уничтожать до младенцев [Since Herod was no more, only the Vanguard Doctrine has shown us how to destroy utterly – down to the very babes]” (6:318; Solzhenitsyn 1978, 359). The implication, which is all the more effective for not being explicitly textualized, is that the Leader and his System toil in the service of Satan.

Part One of the binary story “Apricot Jam” [“Абрикосовое варенье”] (1994) addresses the realities of the collectivization campaign directly. This is another tale of a peasant child that suffers a terrible fate. Fedya, the teenage son of a deported kulak family who is dying of malnutrition in a labor camp hospital, is writing a letter to a famous establishment writer (a nominally disguised Aleksey Tolstoy) in the hope of receiving a food parcel. The idiolect designed by Solzhenitsyn for this character, with its fractured vocabulary and inverted syntax, is entirely adequate to the story Fedya tells:

Отвеку жили мы в селе Лебяжий Усад Курской губернии. Но положили отруб нашему понятию жизни: назвали нас кулаками за то, что крыша из оцинкованной жести, четыре лошади, три коровы и хороший сад при доме. А начинался сад с раскидистого абрикосового дерева – и туча на нём абрикосов каждый год. И я и младшие братья мои сколько по нему полазили, любили мы абрикосы больше всякого фрукта – и вперёд мне таких уже никогда не есть. На летней кухоньке во дворе варила мать по домашеству и варенье из тех абрикосов, и мы с братьями тут же пенками обслащивались. А когда раскулачники вымогали от нас, где чего у нас спрятано, то иначе, вот, мол, лучшее дерево срубим…И порубали его. (1: 372)

As long as anyone can remember, our family lived in the village of Lebyazhy Usad in Kursk Province. But then they put an end to the way we thought to live. They called us kulaks because we had a house with a galvanized iron roof and four horses, three cows, and a fine orchard by the house. The first thing in the orchard was a spreading apricot tree, and there would be heaps of apricots on it every year. My younger brothers and I would climb all over that tree. Apricots were our most favorite fruit, and I never ever tasted any as good as ours. In the summer kitchen in the yard my mother would make us apricot jam, and my brothers and I just could not get enough of that sweet foam. Before they deported us as kulaks, they tried to make us tell them where we had hidden our goods. Otherwise, they said, we’ll chop down your apricot tree. And they chopped it down. (Solzhenitsyn 2011, 2).
The apricot tree stands at the beginning of a chain of images that relate to carefree childhood, fecundity, and nurturing motherhood. This is the “tree of life” of Fedya’s family. It grows in an idyllic home space—a garden—and sustains the present generation, as it sustained earlier ones. The cutting down of the tree by the collectivizers marks the severing of a way of life that has existed for “as long as anyone can remember” (“отвеку”). The word the boy uses to describe the destruction of this life is “отруб” (“отруб нашему понятию жизни”). It is near-synonymous to the word “сруб”, which means the chopping down of a tree.

The act of felling a tree that carries a symbolic value for a given family is a common topos in Russian literature, with Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* the most famous example. The formula “as long as anyone can remember” stands for folkloric, ahistorical time, the cyclical rhythms of which are destroyed by the sudden and brutal intrusion of modernity with its linear, historicized calendars of collectivization campaigns and five year plans.

Fedya’s parents and younger brothers are exiled to the taiga, while he manages to escape. After a succession of adventures and close shaves he is apprehended and conscripted into the “logistical support troops,” a militarized version of hard labor. The backbreaking work and starvation rations made him sick and he ends up in the hospital where in a state of utter despair he begs the famous Soviet writer for a food parcel. Part Two shows how instead of heeding this desperate cry for help, the literary celebrity, identified throughout as The Writer, treats the letter as a lexical source, extracting from it the “primordial language [первозданный язык]” he can use in his novels. The Writer derives a refined pleasure from the contemplation of raw human suffering, which he skillfully aestheticizes for his creative purposes: it is made clear that, though an egregiously callous soul, the novelist is also an artist of considerable talent. The apricot jam the Writer consumes while he quotes phrases from Fedya’s letter to a couple of fellow-intellectuals connects Part Two to the organizing image of the apricot tree in Part One: “And, indeed, every single apricot lay like a condensed fragment of sunlight in the crystal bowl [Да ведь в хрустальной вазе и каждый абрикосовый плод лежал как сгущённое солнце]” (Solzhenitsyn 2011, 19–20; 1: 385). The beautiful
crystal vase with its refracted sunlight contains the processed fruits from the destroyed peasant tree of life for the enjoyment of the writer.

The destruction of Fedya’s family takes place by several stages, one of which occurs inside a church, in which they are held prior to being transported to Siberia. This once sacred locus is now a jail, a place of suffering and despair. Under the Soviets, churches were often turned into storehouses, but here the items stored are human beings. In *The Gulag Archipelago* we find a detailed description of the terrible conditions endured by deported peasants in the former churches where they were confined:

При подходе Чумы, в 1929, в Архангельске закрыли все церкви: их и вообще-то назначено было закрывать, а тут подкатила всамделишная нужда размещать «раскулаченных». […] В церквах настроили многоэтажных нар, только топить было нечем. […] В церкви Введения восьмитажные нар, не скреплённые со стенами, рухнули ночью, и много было подавлено семей. На крики стянулись к церкви войска. (6: 320)

As the Plague approached in 1929, all the churches in Archangel were closed: they were due to be closed anyway, but the very real need for somewhere to put the dekulakized hurried things along. […] Many-tiered sleeping platforms were put up in the churches, but there was no heat. […] In the Church of the Presentation, an eight-tiered bed platform which was not fastened to the wall collapsed in the night and several families were crushed. Their cries brought troops rushing to the church. (Solzhenitsyn 1978, 361)

The church space with its architectural emphasis on height (domes, chandelier, kliros or “choir stalls”, lectern) and its symbolic extension towards the heavens is now used for a purpose that has a uniquely pragmatic and utilitarian function: the most efficient storage of live human bodies. The authorities take advantage of the vertical arrangement of the church interior to place people in layers one upon the other all the way up to the dome.

Among the living human bodies stored and shipped like so many items of freight, the most vulnerable and defenseless ones belonged to the mothers with infants: “А грузили их: хорошо, если по тёплому времени в телеги, а то – на сани, в лютый мороз и с грудными детьми, и с малыми, и с отроками [They were loaded onto carts…if they were lucky enough to be taken in the warm months, but it might be onto sledges in a cruel frost, with children of all ages, babes in arms as well]” (6: 318; Solzhenitsyn 1978, 359). The verb “to load”, in Russian “гру́зить”, is used only in relation to goods and
material objects. As in the case with the “tiny body” thrown from the train, deported parents and children in this situation are things, byproducts of the Soviet modernization project. Earlier, in this location rituals were performed that marked and celebrated the crucial events in a family’s life: birth (baptism), marriages (church weddings) and death (funereal). Now, however, it is a place where families are torn apart and perish.

As part of the same Soviet modernization transformation project, other, secular spaces become the site of ideological practices that reproduce the rituals of church life. If this is a religion, however, then it is a false one, in which the Godhead is denied and the Trinity is replaced by the figure of the country’s Great Leader. In part three of Evgeniia Ginzburg’s memoir *Within the Whirlwind* [“Крутой маршрут”], which also describes the tragic experiences of mothers and children in the gulag, there is a scene where the little orphan girl Tonya, whom the author will soon officially adopt, is shown inside one of these newly constructed places of secular worship (the child’s mother, a former camp prisoner, abandoned her and disappeared):

Однажды в субботу, когда шла раздача детей родителям на выходной, я задержалась у заведующей на каком-то совещании и вернулась в зал уже в сумерках. Эта странная приземистая комната, с несимметричными окнами, выглядела в пустоте и полутьме особенно мрачной. Единственным пятном на грязно-серых стенах, кроме черного силуэта пианино, был огромный, не по масштабам помещения, портрет генералиссимуса в орденах и красных лампасах. У подножия портрета, на самодельном пьедестале, всегда стояли искусственные цветы. Очень грубые цветы из кусков шелка, а то и просто из накрахмаленной марли. Но в детях воспитывали священный трепет перед этим алтарем, и даже самые отчаянные шалуны никогда не прикасались ни к цветам, ни к самому портрету. Но сейчас кто-то возился у этих цветов. Какая-то крохотная фигурка теребила букет белых марлевых роз.

– Тоня? Что ты тут делаешь одна впотьмах?

Она ответила очень точно:
– Я тут плакаю…

[…] Наверное, начала плакать, когда субботнее буйство было ещё в полном разгаре […]. И над всей этой суетолокой висело слово «домой!» […]

– Домой, – повторила Тоня, – а это чего такое? […]

И тут она выповолвила с неправдоподобной для ее возраста четкостью:
– А у меня нету дома…(Ginzburg 1979, 252–53)

One Saturday, when the children were being handed over to their parents for the day off, I was kept back in the head’s office for meeting of some sort, and it was twilight in the music
room by the time I got back there. This queer, low-ceiling room with asymmetric windows looked more gloomy than ever in the half light with no one around. The only patch on its dirty gray walls, apart from the black silhouette of the piano, was an enormous portrait of the Generalissimo with his medals and red-striped trousers – quite out of proportion with the size of the room. At the foot of the portrait, on top of an improvised pedestal, there was always a vase of artificial flowers. They were very rough-and-ready imitations made out of pieces of silk, or, failing that, starched gauze. But the children had been taught to treat the altar with holy awe, and not even the most mischievous of them ever ventured to touch either the flowers or the portrait. But at the moment someone was standing by the flowers. A diminutive figure was fingering the bunch of white gauze roses.

“Tonya? What are you doing there in the pitch dark?”

She gave me a straight answer.
“ать crying…”

[… She had probably begun to cry when Saturday’s hurly-burly was at its height […]. And the word “home” would be hanging over this chaos. […] Tonya echoed the word.

“Home – what’s that?” […]

The she announced with a precision almost incredible in one of her age:
“I haven’t got a home….” (Ginzburg 1982, 274–75)

The orphanage’s music room is a grotesque version of a church interior, squat (“low ceiling”), malformed (“asymmetric windows,” “an enormous portrait […] out of proportion”), and crudely decorated (“a vase of artificial flowers”). Stalin’s enormous portrait is the surrogate of an icon, and the table with the artificial flowers performs the function of an altar. The songs performed by the children in inside this space are hymn-like encomiums to Stalin and his works: songs of praise, of a sort. The biological fact of Tonya’s small stature acquires a symbolic meaning when shown against the background of Stalin’s portrait which, like much of totalitarian art, is monumental in scale. If Stalin is the patriarch of the “fatherland” and the Soviet Union is the super-national home for all its people, young and old, city and village, as so many poems and songs insisted, then this one little crying girl speaks the terrible truth, that she does not have either parents or a home, she does not belong (“А у меня нету дома”). Unlike the other orphans, who have been taught never to touch the sacred objects in this place of worship, she fingers the cheap imitation flowers in front of the painting: she has not yet internalized, it seems, the requirement to feel “holy awe” when entering this ideological temple.
Solzhenitsyn’s plots that are set in the period before 1917 rely on an implied contrast between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary cultures and systems of national values, and the spatial locations on which these center. Sometimes in these plots, mothers (actual, future, or bereaved) find themselves inside a church or a chapel or close to one and become observers of, or participants in, ceremonies and sacraments that take place within the sacred locations in question, which still discharge their religious function. Almost always, however, these scenes contain a hint of the impending national catastrophe that will result in the destruction of these places of worship. Looming over the narrative on a meta-proleptic plane, there are images of ruined churches, persecuted believers, and murdered or imprisoned priests.

Two such plot lines in The Red Wheel involve a “grief-stricken young mother [сокрушённая молодая мать]” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 997; 10: 527), Zinaida Altanskaya, and eighteen-year old Ksenia Tomchak, a kind and gentle high school graduate who is modeled on Solzhenitsyn’s own mother. Key scenes featuring these two characters recall a sequence of Tsvetaeva’s autobiographical poems in which on the eve of the revolution the motherly lyrical heroine guides her daughter Alya around a number of religious loci in Moscow. Mother and daughter look at these churches from the outside, or enter them to perform their devotions. In a moment of history before the advent of the revolutionary upheaval they, like Solzhenitsyn’s two heroines, closely and unhurriedly engage with an entire stratum of culture that was formed over a period of many centuries, but which is doomed to disappear in just a few short months. The function of the motherly gaze in these poems acquires a special prominence. As it so often shown in Solzhenitsyn, the male gaze is a penetrative and fragmenting one, while the feminine one has an integrating, harmonizing quality. “Men’s lives are roomier, easier, they do not even have to try to understand themselves, they feel no need to examine themselves in depth. But a woman’s life is narrow, and she must live in depth [Мужчинам живётся шире, легче, они и не пытаются себя понять, не нуждаются прорабатывать себя в глубину. А женщина живёт тесно – и всё в глубину, в глубину]” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 985; 10: 515). As Zinaida thinks of her ability to contemplate the icon of Christ after the death of her son: “A mind at ease might not have responded to these depths. But Zinaida, with her heightened perception, saw that Christ was suffering acutely, suffering yet not complaining [В лёгком состоянии души можно
было этой глубины не заметить. Но сейчас отзывалось всё. Что было выразительно ясно: Христу – остро больно, но он не жалуется)” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 993; 10: 523). The “depth” of her maternal grief reveals to her the whole “depth” and meanings of sacred relics and objects.

A year before the collapse of the old order, in 1916, the lyrical heroine of Tsvetaeva’s poem “The Eve of the Annunciation” [“Канун Благовещенья”] (1916) and the most spiritually-inflected heroine of The Red Wheel, Zinaida Altanskaia, walk into a church, in Moscow and Tambov respectively. The name Zinaida is derived from that of the Greek god Zeus, while “Altanskaya” invites associations with the Latin *altitudo*, “height.” The ascending verticality of the two female characters’ thought patterns and body movements within the sacred spaces they enter have meanings that go beyond their private maternal situations, and compositionally and figuratively extend into the realm of history.

Tsvetaeva’s lyrical/maternal persona is anxious about the future of her three-year old daughter, who accompanies her. She is praying to the Virgin Mary for the child’s wellbeing in the Cathedral of Annunciation [“Собор Благовещенский”] in the Kremlin.

Lost in the shadows there,
I, too, turn to the Sun Mother,
Offer her, joyfully, my prayer:
Mother – of mothers,
Preserve and guide
My blue-eyed
Daughter!
Instruct her

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3 Alya’s age is indicated in the next cycle’s poem *Chetvertyi God* [Четвертый год] (1916).
Upon the lost path –
Of blessedness.
Grant her health,
At her pillow head
Install – the Angel
Since fled
From me. (Tsvetaeva 2003, 39)

In the epic’s spectrum of femininities, Zinaida is one of the most memorable characters, a redeemed sinner whose spiritual tergiversations recall the heroines of Dostoevsky. Her redemption occurs inside the Utkino Church in her home town of Tambov. The church, which the authorities blew up in the early 1930s — an act of desecration that is mentioned nowhere in the text but which, for the informed reader, endows this sacred space with a special tragic aura — was famous for its miracle-working icon of the Virgin Mary. For six years Zinaida has been in love with her former schoolteacher, Fedor Kovynev, a representation of the Cossack writer Fedor Kryukov (1870-1920), whom Solzhenitsyn considered the true author of the novel Quiet Don. While Zinaida longs to join her life to Fedor’s, the latter treasures his independence and freedom from family ties: “If you are a man in your forties? If you’re already set in your opinions? If independence is the first principle of your existence? […] With her it was a very serious matter, she wanted to take possession of him body and soul, wanted every last bit of him [– Так если вам уже пятьдесят? Если жизненные взгляды ваши совершенно устоялись? Если основа вашей жизни – независимость? […] С этой – очень серьезно, она – до души добирается, она – его всего хочет]” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 193–94; 9: 203, 205). As a result, she becomes a home breaker: she has an affair with a married man and becomes pregnant by him. She leaves Tambov for a nearby village in order to conceal the pregnancy from her mother, who soon passes away. Ashamed, Zinaida decides not to attend her funeral. The lowest point in Zina’s misfortunes occurs when she travels to Tambov for a tryst with Fedor, during which they become lovers, while her infant, whom she has left behind, falls ill and dies.

Her child’s death first brings Zinaida inside the village church: “Unexpectedly, and unthinkingly, she had found herself drawn by her son’s death to the church. It was a path she had never once taken in her young days [Смерть сына так неожиданно и просто вела в церковь, куда никогда не долегали пути всей
юности]” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 988; 10: 518). Her redemptive spiritual experience takes place, however, inside the Utkino Church, where she is confessed by its priest, Father Aloniy.

Зинаида, в ветру, остановилась на площади. Перед ней была Уткинская церковь. [...] У неё мысли не было такой, что – сюда. Привели ноги сами. [...] Я – младенца покинула…для свидания…Как безумная…И он заболел без меня…и вот отчего умер. (Solzhenitsyn 10: 521, 527)

Zinaida came to a stop, out in the wind, in the middle of the square. The Utkino church stood there before her. [...] She had not consciously intended to come there. Her legs had brought her unbidden. [...] “I abandoned my child for a lovers’ meeting…Like a mad thing…And while I was away he got sick…And because I wasn't there he died…” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 991, 997)

Interestingly, in the penultimate chapter of Knot II, the epic’s near-protagonist colonel Georgi Vorotyntsev, who learns about Zina and the story of her life from Kovynev himself, happens to see the same church. Georgi is in a difficult family predicament as well, for his relationship with his wife has broken down and he has an adulterous relationship with Olda Andozerskaya, a history professor from Petrograd (and one of the work’s most important intellectual voices). However, Georgi, though a brave soldier and patriot, is a fundamentally irreligious personality, and so he chooses not to go inside the church. In the epic, the fictive privilege of entering its mystic interior and undergoing a spiritual cleansing is reserved for Zinaida:


Walking by the dark monastery wall […] he found himself passing a broad gate […]. The gate was open wide. So were the church doors beyond it, and he could see the inner glass doors. Light shone through them, and he could see candles in tall candlesticks. The service had already begun, or was about to begin. […] He hesitated. Should he go in, or shouldn’t he? No […]. All his life, he had been drawn on by a single purpose, always in a hurry — always as now, striding headlong forward. (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 984)

The two mother figures, Zinaida Altanskaya and Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona, contemplate the exterior and especially the interior of the church and the cathedral respectively. In both cases, their movements inside these sacred loci and their spiritual and psychological states are meticulously related to certain objects and forms they see therein: icons of the Virgin Mary, votive candles, and the “celestial” domes:
Горят фонарики
Вкруг Божьей материи. (Tsvetaeva, 1: 262)

Lamps are burning
Round the Holy Virgin. (36)

Служба начиналась в правом, Богородичном, приделе, где стояла небольшая, но известная по городу икона Тамбовской Божьей Матери. (10: 521)

The service was just beginning in the side chapel on the right, the Chapel of Our Lady, where there was an icon, modest in size but renowned throughout the country, of the Tambov Virgin. (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 992)

[…]
Никнет паникадило.
[…]
Пошла странствовать
По рукам – свеча.
[…]
Светла, горяча
Зажжена свеча. (Tsvetaeva 1: 262)

[… it dangles there,
The huge chandelier.
[…]

It has journeyed
From hand to hand – the flame.
[…]
Radiant with heat,
The candle is lit. (38-9)

Горело много лампад – у всех икон […]. (10: 521)

There were lamps before all the icons, and a few candles […]. (991)

Над главным куполом,
Под самым месяцем,
Звезда […] (262)

Above the grand cupola,
Under the sickle moon,
A star […] (37)

Она взглядом провела по арке столпа, как та плавно уходит вверх, а так уходила и растворялась в купольном своде. Сам же свод был над средним простором храма – как малое круглое небо […]. (10: 522)
She stood near a pillar and looked upward. The pillar ended in an arch which carried her eyes along its smooth curve until it merged with the vaulted dome. The dome itself, up above the nave, was like a miniature round heaven. (992)

Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona observes the upward spatial perspective of this religious locus. The poetic text contains a set of architectural and religious images related to the celestial sphere: the central chandelier [паникадило], and the dome’s cross. There is a reference to the Star of Bethlehem reflected in the imagination of the maternal lyrical persona since she came to the cathedral on the feast day of Annunciation (“Канун Благовещенья”) when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would conceive and bear the Son of God. In the poem, the maternal voice refers to the Mother of God [Богородица] as the Sun-Mother [“Солнце-матерь”], the heavenly protector of all earthly mothers and their children [“Матерь – матери”], and asks this female saint to send an angel to protect her own daughter. At the end of the service mother and daughter walk over to the Moskva river to watch the ice breaking up: an image pregnant with seasonal meaning.

The theme of ice breaking recurs in the next poetic text of the same cycle, “The Fourth Year,” [“Четвертый год”] (1916). This poem bears the same date, March 24, 1916. Here the maternal persona and her daughter observe the melting and moving ice from a vantage point that is somewhere in the Kremlin, which stands high above the Moskva:

Служба кончилась.
[…]  
Я же весело
Как волны вальки
Народ расталкиваю.
Бегу к Москва-реке
Смотреть, как лед идет (263).

As for me, I merrily –  
As through unsteady waves,  
Thrust my way through the crowd.  
I run down to the river Moskva  
To watch the ice flow there. (40)

Четвёртый год.
Глаза, как лед,
Брови уже роковые,
Сегодня впервые
С кремлевских высот
Наблюдаешь ты
Ледоход.

Льдины, льдины
И купола.
Звон золотой,
Серебряный звон.
Руки скрещены.
Рот нем.
Брови сдвинув – Наполеон! –
Ты созерцаешь – Кремль!

– Мама, куда – лед идет?
– Вперед, лебеденок.
Мимо дворцов, церквей, ворот –
Вперед, лебеденок!

Синий
Взор — озабочен. (1: 264)
– Ты меня любишь, Марина?
– Очень.
– Навсегда?
– Да.

Скоро — закат.
Скоро — назад:
Тебе — в детскую, мне —
Письма читать дерзкие,
Кусать рот.

А лед
Всё
Идет.
24 марта 1916

You’ll soon be four.
Your eyes — like ice.
Already now — Portentous brows.
For the first time, today.
From the Kremlin heights,
You shall survey
The drifting ice.

Ice flows, ice flows,
And cupolas.
Chimes are gold,
Silvery chimes.
Arms — afold.
Words — untold.
Twitch of the brows – Napoleon! –
You contemplate – the Kremlin.

– Mama, how far – does the ice go?
– Onwards, my cygnet,
Past palaces, churches, gates, it flows –
Onwards, my cygnet!

That deep blue gaze
Betrays
The cares within her.
– Do you love me, Marina?
– Dearly.
– For always?
– Surely.

Soon – will be sundown.
Soon – we’ll be back home:
You – to your nursery, I –
To reading impudent letters,
Bringing my lips.

And the ice drifts
On
And on. (Tsvetaeva 2003, 43)

This poem depicts an urban, historical, and mythic space that is traversed by the mother’s and the child’s gaze. On the level of imagery, the ice flow discharges an organizing function. In the first two lines of the poem [“Четвертый год. Глаза, как лед”] лед rhymes with год (year) and, therefore, is semantically linked to the flow — passage — of time. While figurative comparisons of time to a river are common in poetry, those that liken in to floating, flowing ice are highly unusual. Here notions of the cold and therefore of death are superseded by those of spring and therefore rebirth, for the ice is in motion, it is breaking up and melting. The eyes of Alya, who observes the river, look like ice themselves. The maternal voice reconfigures the three-year old child as a figure of retrospective and prophetic insight. The little girl’s position as an observer who stands above and in front of Kremlin prompts the mother to recall the storied historical episode, so often depicted by painters and writers and poets, of Napoleon’s heroic but melancholy contemplation of the Kremlin after his conquest of Moscow in 1812. “Alya the Napoleon” is her mother’s little genius whose blue eyes (the same color as Napoleon’s) discern in those moving chunks and pieces of ice the shifting strata of history. Hence, the ice becomes a floating signifier of the flow or progression of
national and world history, while the plethora of mythic and historical references in the text (Napoleon, Moscow, the Kremlin) compress it into a kind of miniature *War and Peace*.

When set in the context of subsequent Russian history by an informed receptor, the poem becomes a prophecy. The child’s all-encompassing gaze (“Льдины, льдины и Купола”) and all-hearing ears (“Звон золотой, Серебряный Звон”) apprehend profane and sacred spaces that will be destroyed or transformed by the events of the revolution and the subsequent years and decades, in the same way that the ice is borne away by the river. Alya’s crossed arms are a multivalent gesture that recalls countless Napoleonic statues, including the one that stands in Eugene Onegin’s study of Pushkin’s eponymous verse novel, but it also reproduces the form of the Christian cross (in *The Red Wheel*, the Cross is occasionally materialized in the form of intersecting paths or the joining of hands).

With the continual movement of water and ice in the foreground, the dialogue of love between the mother and the daughter (“– Ты меня любишь, Марина? – Очень”) acts as an affirmation: a mother’s love is the one thing that has permanence, while everything else, including the pealing church bells, the city scenery, even history itself will float away, “ahead,” into the unknowable future. The mother attempts to protect the child by emphasizing the necessity to go in the opposite direction, “back” to the domestic space, “nursery” (“Скоро – назад: Тебе – в детскую […]”). Outside the space of home, the flow of time, however, continues to move. This motif persists in the last short poem’s stanza:

А лед
Всё
Идет.

Jane Taubman notices: “She [Alya] sees in the breaking ice a sign of change, and fears that the foundations of her own life may be breaking up as well.” (Taubman 80) Although this scholar connects Alya’s anxiety to the little girl’s relationship with her mother, it can also be contextualized historically. The ice image is also aurally present in the child’s affectionate nickname – лебеденок [cygnet]. The image of a swan, “swan flock” [‘лебединый стан’] in Tsvetaeva’s poetry is highly historical and in her poems of the civil war period acquires anti-revolutionary meanings. Through the color of their plumage, swans are mythically
associated with the White movement of which her husband is a participant: “Не лебедей это в небе стая: белогвардейская рать святая [...]” (1:390)

Similar to the imaginative procedures in Tsvetaeva’s poem of “On the Eve of Annunciation”, Zinaida’s presence in the church is framed through a set of architectural and spatial references. Zinaida Altaanskaya contemplates the high dome when she enters the church, she ascends several “steps” in order to take confession, she lifts her head to look up at the priest. The most vivid metaphor in the scene, however, is that of the well:


It was like using the grapnel at a wellhead, with tree hooks facing different ways – and what you have to do is find down there, in the dark depths of your soul, a hot stone, fish for it, grip it, only the hooks won’t take hold, it breaks loose, seventy times over it breaks loose until at last, with delicate movements, as cautiously as if it was your dearest treasure, you latch on to it, draw it upward, raise it carefully, carefully, then seize it. You burn your fingers but you have rid your soul of it. [...] Flinching from the flames, she drooped her hook, staggered back from the well, and – oh, God! – had all the stones crashed back down there? Help me, oh God! You see that I want to tear myself away! I want to change! (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 527, 529).

The well is the sepulcher of Zina’s soul, but thanks to her recovery of faith and hope, her soul leaves that darkest, most buried of spaces. The image of the well, which recurs in a variety of metaphorical guises throughout the epic, connects Zinaida to Likonya. In August 1914, Likonya engages in a polemic with the two revolutionary aunts, Adaliya and Aglaya, reciting lines from Nikolai Gumilev’s poem “Choice” [“Выбор”, 1908]:

Созидающий башню — сорвётся,
Будет страшен стремительный лёт,
И на дне мирового колодца
Он безумье своё проклянёт (8: 62)
[...]
Разрушающий — будет раздавлен,
Опlokнут обломками плит.
И, всевидящим Богом оставлен,
He who would build a tower to the sky  
Shall hurtle down in fearsome flight  
In a world-deep well to lie,  
Curse his madness, moan his plight. (Solzhenitsyn 1989, 444)  
[…]

He who would destroy the shrine  
Shall lie crushed beneath its stones,  
Abandoned by the love divine  
With none to hear his dying groans. (449)

As Vladislav Krasnov notes, “Like the Tower of Babel in the Biblical story, the tower of the poem symbolizes the futility of human efforts to surpass in creativity the Creator Himself” (181). In *The Red Wheel*, the tower image corresponds to Russian revolutionary project based on a godless social ideal. The punishment for the embodiment of this project is falling into the well which is the “world” grave for theomachists. Despite the non-historicity of Zinaida’s situation, her self-realized depravity follows the same metaphorical logic. Gumilev’s theomachists “crushed beneath [the tower’s] stones” echo in Zinaida whose moral descent is textualized through a range of ponderous and compressing metaphors: “a life as heavy as a lead [свинцовая жизнь]” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 997; 10: 527); “iron bands that had immobilized her for so many days [чугунная скованность стольких дней]” (993; 10: 523); stones-sins that loaded her soul-well. However, during her visit to the Utkino Church Zina overcomes this “heaviness” and ascends to a state of internal weightlessness, the state of a “spirit”: “hauling” the “heavy as a lead” life “up the slope”; “ridding” her soul of stones; the “falling away” of “iron bands” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 993, 996–97).

In *The Red Wheel*, the titular image has invariably sinister, even demonic connotations. Here is the description of the initial stages of Fedor and Zina’s mutual attraction: “Но уже! Уже какая-то сила включилась, выше обеих воль. Уже катали их друг на друга, и ничто не могло помешать [Ah, but by now some force superior to his will or hers had intervened. Something was propelling them toward each other, and nothing could prevent it]” (9: 204; Solzhenitsyn 1999, 193). The Russian verb *катило* conveys an image of a rolling wheel: a warning to the attentive reader. By the same token, the moral lessons the two lovers derive from their affair are different. For Fedor, an indecisive soul who is not clear about what he
wants from this relationship, his love for Zinaida continues to follow an uncontrolled, wheeled trajectory that points downward:


[…] A man tumbling downhill has no time to think – bouncing helplessly, rebounding, bumping his head, now back, now front, he flings out his arms, clutching wildly, and if they meet a stone, a root, a blade of grass – grab it! You can’t make out what it is, but grab it! Farther on there will be nothing, no fences no gentle slope, nothing will save you! (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 194–95)

During her visit to the church, however, Zinaida’s sense of her self and the relationship takes a different direction, one that points upward. This vertical orientation, though refracted through the life of a character who is an entirely private person and is in no way interested in, or involved with, the political sphere (unlike the publicly engaged Kovynev), acquires a crucial meaning when viewed within the epic’s imaginative historiosophic scheme. In August 1914 and November 1916, the course of events, in particular, prime minister Stolypin’s assassination (described in an embedded narrative in Knot I), the tsar’s failures of leadership before and during the world war, and Lenin’s plots to incite revolution within the country are all figuratively depicted as having a downward slant. The defeat of General Samsonov’s Second Army at the battle of Tannenberg is summarized by one of the Russian proverbs, those kernels of village wisdom, that periodically interpolate the narrative and effect a junction between the historical developments it records and a mythic, folkloric, proleptically structured sensibility: “ЦАРЬ И НАРОД – ВСЁ В ЗЕМЛЮ ПОЙДЁТ [TSAR AND COMMONER – THE GRAVE AWAITS THEM]” (7: 402; Solzhenitsyn 1989, 374). What we have here is a multidimensional, tripartite prediction of the fall of the monarchy and, beyond the textual parameters of the main narrative, the physical murder of the tsar in 1918 and the peasant tragedy of dekulakization in 1928–1932. Russia’s future is implicitly shown as a “grave”, an enormous pit in which countless millions, whatever their class origins or the degree of power they hold in the empire, are doomed
to perish. The land of the gulag, which is mapped and described in Solzhenitsyn’s other works, will contain thousands of such pits, whether in the form of underground punishment cells, mass burials, or grand canals constructed by slave labor.

Zinaida is a Christian believer who rediscovers her faith. As portrayed in The Red Wheel, the last Russian tsar, Nicholas II, is a good father and husband and a devout Christian who never strays from the path of faith. None of this, however, makes him an effective ruler. In August 1914, the tsar’s reliance on religion at the expense of forceful and informed action in his capacity as the head of state is summed up by means of another proverb: “МОЛИТВОЙ КВАШНИ НЕ ЗАМЕСИШЬ [PRAYING KNEADS NO DOUGH]” (8: 460; Solzhenitsyn 1989, 827). After the abdication of Nicholas II, the epic’s quasi-protagonist, Georgi Vorotyntsev, thinks of Russia as collapsing into an abyss: “[…] Ощутил Воротынцев, что русская громада – поскользила, пошла вниз! […] Vorotyntsev sensed that the mass of Russia was sliding down a slope]” (13: 116).

By turning to God at the lowest point in her life Zinaida joins those of the epic’s characters, whether they be public personalities or private individuals, who during a moment of supreme national peril resist historical evil. The heroine’s escalating connection to the dome’s “miniature round heaven” with “the representation of God the Father looking down from the clouds” (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 992) and her aspiration to lift herself up spiritually are a composite, obliquely narrated clue: in her despair and hope, Zinaida points to the direction in which the salvation for Russia lies, according to the epic’s conceptual, historiosophic terms. It is worth noting that in a fabulatory and compositional sense, the chapter featuring Zinaida’s confession in the Utkino church textually occupies a privileged position. It occurs in the last chapter of November 1916, Knot II of the epic, and consequently, functions as a prelude to March 1917, Knot III. That novel stands at the center of Solzhenitsyn’s epopee and shows the revolution as a mock-Paschal, nation-wide carnival of demonic, ecstatic joy. In terms of discourse-time, the heroine’s private act of spiritual contrition immediately precedes the nation’s public and collective moral implosion, leaving it to the reader, however, to make the final connection.
In the year 1916, Zinaida and Tsvetaeva’s poetic persona, two literary creations impelled by a maternal need, enter a sacred locus, Solzhenitsyn’s heroine – to grieve over her son’s death and to redeem her failure as a parent, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine – to pray for her daughter’s salvation and health. However, within four short years Tsvetaeva will experience the same devastating tragedy as Zinaida, that of losing her youngest daughter, three-year old Irina (1920). The contexts of the two deaths and the mother figures’ consequent feelings of guilt are, however, very different. In Solzhenitsyn’s epic, Zinaida’s loss of her baby boy is purely a fact of private life, whereas in Tsvetaeva’s threnodic poems and letters and diary entries of the period Irina’s death is also a fact of history. Zinaida’s character still fits in the traditions of the nineteenth-century novel: her maternal tragedy occurs as a result of personal choice and a concatenation of circumstances that have nothing to do with the march of history, except on the plane of symbolic meaning. Tsvetaeva’s case is different. In 1919, a year when the food situation in Moscow was particularly dire, she placed her two daughters in the Kuntsevo Orphanage in the hope that there they would receive better nutrition. She soon found that Alya had contracted malaria, so she took her home and made every effort to look after the child. Meanwhile Irina, who stayed in the orphanage, died of hunger.

As might be expected, there is a debate among Tsvetaeva scholars and biographers concerning the issue of Irina’s death, with some attributing it to a lack of maternal love and others choosing to interpret it as a terrible, tragic oblation made by the poet to her muse (Revzina 82). Tsvetaeva never denied her responsibility for the tragedy and even conceded that she was more strongly attached to Alya than to Irina.

“— В чём её схоронили? – И шубка её там осталась. […] История Ириной жизни и смерти: на одного маленького ребёнка в мире не хватило любви” (Tsvetaeva 2001, 86). The historical context, however, must be paramount in evaluating the meaning of this episode. Here is the evidence of Tsvetaeva’s famished winter of 1919 in recollections of her sister Anastasia Tsvetaeva:

Потом Тарусский рояль продала за пуд чёрной муки […]. В эту зиму уже легче было с едой, и со всем. В прошлую, последнюю Ирину (она умерла без недель двух в 3 года) – ничего не могла достать. Одно время: мерзлая капуста и чёрная мука, а её истощению это не шло. Аля как-то держалась. Но ведь она в отца – я и за неё боялась! Все загоняла на Смоленском, для них, что брали. Но давали – гроши… И надо уметь продавать. […] Я – отдавала… Пока было что отдавать! (A. Tsvetaeva 58)
Then I sold my Tarussa piano for a pud of coarsely ground flour… This winter was not as difficult in terms of food and everything else. The winter before, which was the last one of Irina’s life (she died two weeks short of her third birthday) I couldn’t find anything. On one occasion there was frozen cabbage and coarsely ground flour, which in her starving state she could not eat. Alya somehow kept going. But she is like her father, and I feared for her as well! In order to help them I sold everything I could at the Smolensky market, anything for which I could find a buyer. I got just pennies… You have to have the knack of selling… I gave things away… While there was something left to give!

Tsvetaeva poeticizes Irina, who was born in April 1917, as a child whose arrival in this world marked the border line between the old pre-revolutionary Russia and the new post-revolutionary one:

Колыбель, овеянная красным!
Колыбель, качаемая чернью!
Гром солдат – вдоль храмов – за вечерней…
А ребенок вырастет – прекрасным.

С молоком кормилицы рязанской
Он всосал наследственные блага:
Триединство Господа – и флага.
Русский гимн – и русские пространства.

В нужный день, на Божьем солнце ясном,
Вспомнит долг дворянский и дочерний –
Колыбель, качаемая чернью,
Колыбель, овеянная красным!
8 сентября 1918 (1: 425–26)

A cradle shaded by red!
A cradle rocked by the mob!
The thunder of soldiers beside the churches during evening service…
But the child will grow up to be a beautiful one.

Given the breast by a wet-nurse from Ryazan,
It was weaned on the gifts of its legacy:
The triple unities of the Lord and the flag.
The Russian anthem and the Russian expanse.

On the appointed day, in the light of God’s son
She will remember her noble and daughterly duty —
A cradle rocked by the mob,
A cradle shaded by red!

In 1918 the lyrical I’s maternal sensibility is still, in essence, a nineteenth-century one. She thinks of her baby as the heir to the blessings of Imperial Russia: the Christian religion (“Триединство Господа”), noble status (“долж дворянский”), the Russian flag and national anthem, as well as the country’s expansive —
imperial — geography (“и русские пространства”). However, she simultaneously realizes that she is a child of a new age, the age of revolution. There is the revolutionary color — red — which overhangs the girl’s “cradle” (“Колыбель, овеянная красным!”) in the implied form of the Bolshevik flag. The cradle is rocked not by a mother’s loving hands but the revolutionary rhythms of history. Irina’s sleep is at the mercy of the sordid mob outside the cozy domestic space (“Колыбель, качаемая черною”). “Чернь” is the collective image of historical evil that, at the level of morphemes – черн, connects to the adjective “дочерний [daughterly]”. Чернь looms like a threat and has the potential to interfere with the maternal subject’s rights of parenthood over her daughter.

In this poem the poetic I is the same mother figure as in the 1916 “ice” poem, who expects her child to be shielded by Holy Trinity. She also hopes that her daughter will enjoy the protection of the Imperial state symbolized by the Russian tricolor, with its white, blue and red (“Триединство Господа – и флага”). In both these cases, the number three, with its theological and folkloric connotations, affirms a connection between these two protective forces on a mystical numerological level. The lyrical subject harkens to the noise in the street, which promises the destruction of religion: (“Гром солдат – вдоль храмов […]”). Чернь disrupts not only the quiet of the home, but also the quiet of the evening service “Гром солдат […] за вечерней…”.

In this emerging historical reality, the mother figure’s expectations that her baby girl will grow into a “beautiful” woman (“А ребёнок вырастет–прекрасным”) are doomed. Tsvetaeva would soon append a note to the poem informing the reader of her daughter’s death on the day of Presentation of Jesus at the Temple: “(Моя вторая дочь Ирина […] умерла 2-о февраля 1920 г. В Сретение, от голода, в Кунцевском детском приюте.”). The adjective “прекрасным” and its prefix “пре-,” which conveys the superlative meaning of “very” (очень) has the effect of intensifying the poem’s red color scheme: пре-красным = очень красным. The deeping, brightening color red, with its connotations of fire, symbolizes the escalation of revolutionary events, which will thwart the little girl’s “beautiful” potential. Her death occurs as the revolutionary ideological project to make Russia an ideal society, a paradise on earth, begins.
to unfold. Extra-textually, it prefigures the deaths of countless other children that will take place over the following years and decades.

The lyrical persona’s maternal grief over Irina’s death is shown in the poem “Two hands resting lightly” ("Две руки, легко опущенные") (1920):

Две руки, легко опущенные  
На младенческую голову!  
Были – по одной на каждую –  
Две головки мне дарованы.

Но обеими – зажатыми –  
Яростными – как могла! –  
Старшую у тьмы выхватывая  
Младшей не уберегла.

Две руки – ласкать-разглаживать  
Нежные головки пышные.  
Две руки – и вот одна из них  
За ночь оказалась лишняя.

Светлая – на шейке тоненькой –  
Одуванчик на стебле!  
Мной еще совсем не понято,  
Что дитя мое в земле.

Пасхальная неделя 1920 (1:518)

Two hands gently resting  
On an infant’s head!  
Once my two hands  
Rested on two little heads that I was gifted.

But while clenching my fists  
Furiously — in any way I could  
I tore my eldest from the dark  
I lost my youngest.

Two hands to caress and comb  
Those little, sumptuous heads.  
Two hands — but now one of them  
Turned out to be one too many in the space of a night.

Fair-haired — on a narrow neck —  
A dandelion on its stem!  
I still do not realize  
That my child rests in the earth.
Easter Week 1920.

The poem’s core number is two. The poetic subject’s very body is transformed into a marker of motherhood: her two daughters are like her two hands, they are extensions of her own sense, in a sense they *are* her two hands. Each child, like each hand, is indispensable. The historical reality identified as “тьма [darkness]” interferes with this numerical, infant-related balance and turns the protective maternal hand away from the mother’s “youngest.” The darkness stands in contrast to the blond (“светлая”) head, which is compared to a dandelion, which is yellow when it flowers. The child is now buried and lies in the ground, out of which the dandelion grew. The dandelion metaphor, which hints at the shape of a child’s head and neck, stresses the fragility of the infant body.

The motif of the child’s death is continued in the poem “A Star over the Cradle — and a Star over the Coffin” (“Звезда над люлькой – и звезда над гробом!”) (1920):

Звезда над люлькой – и звезда над гробом!
А посредине — голубым сугробом —
Большая жизнь. — Хоть я тебе и мать,
Мне больше нечего тебе сказать,
Звезда моя!..

4 января 1920. Кунцево — Госпиталь (1: 506)

A star over the cradle — and a star over the grave!
And in the middle, like a blue snow mound
Life in all its grandeur. — Though I’m your mother
I have nothing left to say to you,
My star!..


The two references to a star in the first line invoke the Star of Bethlehem (“a star over the cradle”) and Wormwood, the Star of the Apocalypse (“a star over the grave”). For the maternal lyrical persona, her daughter’s birth was as miraculous as the birth of Christ, but the divine starlight that once gave the mother hope (“The Eve of the Annunciation”) has been extinguished. The second, deadly, star signifies the apocalypse of maternal world, with the mound of snow — redolent of cold and the absence of life — separating on the plain of metaphor and Biblical reference the child’s birth and death. The lyrical maternal
I am left almost speechless ("нечего сказать"), a poetic acknowledgment that there are states of being which even poetry is incapable of expressing — a meta-proleptic topos in the context of twentieth-century Russian poetry. See, for instance, the opening lines of Akhmatova’s “Requiem”.

The two deaths, of Zinaida’s son and Tsvetaeva’s daughter, adumbrate a shift in the entire discourse of mothers and children in post-revolutionary Russian literature. In Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Nekrasov, and Chekhov the suffering and death of children is an ever-present theme, but its narrative or poetic treatment and conceptual contextualization differs from the one found in Tsvetaeva or Solzhenitsyn (The Red Wheel, perhaps, excepted). In nineteenth-century novels and poems the suffering or death of a child is always a family event, even when the family has broken up or one or both of the parents are absent. Anna Karenina’s son Seryozha suffers terrible emotional pain because he is unable to be with his mother, whom he continues to love despite her abandonment of her family and her pursuit of erotic fulfillment and the expense of the balanced, harmonious Eros of family love. The child’s distressed state is most evident when he sees Anna on his eighth birthday: “– лучше тебя нет!.. с отчаянием закричал он сквозь слезы и, схватив её за плечи, изо всех сил стал прижимать её к себе дрожащими от напряжения руками” (Tolstoy 1935, 109). Another way to display children’s sufferings is to show the poverty or cruelty of their living conditions in the social-economic realities they or their families find themselves. The Mamelavod family in Dostoevsky’s novel Crime and Punishment is an example. The misery of the Marmeladov children has a powerful impact on the erotic turn of the novel’s plot: the need of their salvation becomes the reason for Sonya to choose the sexually sinful way of life and, eventually, approach God. And then, along with scenes of children’s sufferings, nineteenth-century Russian literature, and those twentieth-century works that formally reference the classic canon, presents nostalgic pictures of a lost “childhood paradise” [детский рай] (Leo Tolstoy’s Childhood, Ivan Bunin’s Life of Arseniev, Vladimir Nabokov The Defense).

In Brothers Karamazov there is a terrible scene when a landowner’s whim results in an eight-year-old serf boy being torn apart by the dogs in front of his mother’s eyes, as punishment for a childhood prank: the little boy accidentally hit the paw of the landlord’s dog with the stone. This episode prompts Ivan Karamazov to doubt the existence of Christ and initiate a dispute with his brother Alëša the theodicy: “[...]
от высшей гармонии совершенно отказываюсь. Не стоит она слезинки хотя бы одного только того замученного ребёнка [...]". The Marmeladov family does not belong to high social strata: the scenes of tragic childhood in the works of nineteenth century authors are framed sociologically, economically or even historically, but in most cases suffering or dying children are not depicted as the direct victims of history. Behind these tragedies, there is some other operating factor: the malevolence of adults, the discord between parents, unfortunate accidents, sickness, poverty. History is still a process, a narrative given (when it is mimaetically textualized), where children may suffer or die. They are not yet doomed to fall victim to a massive annihilation as a part of some modernizing ideological project, as will happen in the twentieth century.

The created worlds of Tsvetaeva and especially Solzhenitsyn, however, reflect the direct and brutal action of historical and political forces in the form of a utopian, planned, and consciously applied project for the transformation of the environment, society, and humanity as a whole along scientific lines into the perfect community. As was stated earlier, Zinaida’s maternal tragedy and the vagaries of her love life, which so materially contribute to her son’s death, take place during a period that in The Red Wheel is depicted as constituting the pre-history of that world-historical project. These are private facts in a private life. But after 1917, things change. The suffering of children in Solzhenitsyn’s gulag narratives is shown as the outcome of a conscious plan decreed from on-high, which refuses to distinguish between adult and infant, let alone the individually guilty or innocent. “В том и был замысел, чтобы семя мужицкое погибло вместе со взрослыми [This was the nub of the plan: the [...] seed must perish together with the adults]” (VI: 318; Solzhenitsyn 1978, 359). The image of the “seed” emphasizes the biological cruelty of this historical design: the thorough eradication of a category of human beings, in this case a stratum of the peasantry, down to its youngest members. In the context of the gulag this image is polyhedral. First of all, the experience of guiltless adults who are imprisoned, exiled or put into camps hardens for they have to survive or witness the death of their children, sometimes of those who are just conceived or only about to be born. Descriptions of the fates of arrested females include numerous cases where women miscarry because of stress or the brutality of the guards: “Последний, самый короткий этап – от Кокчетава до
райцентра Володаровки. Нас поставили в кузове грузовика. [...] Поперек кузова была натянута толстая цепь, отделявшая заключённых от конвоя. На каждом ухабе, как ни береглась, я все же ударялась о цепь животом. [...] В володарской больнице я родила мертвого ребенка” (Zaporozhets, 537–38). Second, this image is highly masculine. It stresses the sadistic yet cunningly designed actions of the NKVD interrogators to deprive male prisoners of their reproductive capacity by beating or torturing them: “Но самой страшное, что с тобой могут сделать, это: раздеть ниже пояса, положить на спину на полу, ноги развести […], а следователь […] становится между твоих разведенных ног и, носком своего ботинка (своей туфли) постепенно, умеренно и всё сильней, прищемляя к полу то, что делало тебя когда-то мужчиной, смотрит тебе в глаза и повторяет, повторяет свои вопросы или предложения предательства [But the most awful thing they can do with you is this: undress you from the waist down, place you on your back on the floor, pull your legs apart […] and then the interrogator […] stands between your legs and with the toe of his boot (or of her shoe) gradually, steadily, and with ever greater pressure crushes against the floor those organs which once made you a man)” (IV: 126; Solzhenitsyn 1973, 127–28).

The embryonic stage of this brutal twentieth-century ideological project is shown in Dostoevsky’s novel The Demons. It features a range of human male “demons” who, each propelled by his own individual ideological or destructive drives, pursues the goal of revolutionary violence in a provincial city. The public face of this conspiratorial network is the charismatic Nikolay Stavrogin, the “demon” of ideas. His involvement into the city’s disorder is not always direct: in contrast to the uncharismatic, actuarial “demon” Verkhovensky Jr., who plots in secret and works for the revolutionary cause from behind the scenes, the magnetic Stavrogin operates in the open and carries out a series of flamboyantly evil acts, some of them petty, others grand. His erotically charged figure illustrates a central tenet in the novel: a personality who embraces historicized evil is capable of committing a crime against any person, even a helpless child.

Stavrogin outsized personality with its addiction to violent and sadistic displays, which foreshadows the charismatic tyrants and terrorists of the twentieth century, is indeed infanticidal. There is an episode in the novel when he arouses fear in an infant girl: the child is happily playing with a red ball
with Kirillov but bursts into tears when Stavrogin enters the room: “Николай Всеволодович вошел в комнату; ребенок, увидев его, припал к старухе и закатился долгим детским плачем, та тотчас же его вынесла” (Dostoevsky 1974, 10: 185). In a subsequent conversation with Kirillov, Stavrogin asks wonders, in paradoxically childlike language, whether it might be a good thing if one were to injure or dishonor this little girl: “[…] а кто обидит и обесчестит девочку – это хорошо?” (189). He soon moves from words to deeds, raping the adolescent Matrêsha, who then hangs herself. Stavrogin’s crime conforms to the principles of Verkhovensky’s ideological project, despite being the result of Stavrogin’s ostensibly self-indulgent, impulsive behavior: Verkhovensky advocates the violation and destruction of universal moral values in order to level the world-historical field for the eventual construction of his utopian edifice of justice and truth. Despite his obsessions, Stavrogin is fully in command of his faculties and in control of his senses, as we learn when he contemplates his defilement of Matrêsha: “[…] я и задал себе вопрос, могу ли я бросить и уйти от замышленного намерения, и я тотчас почувствовал, что могу, могу во всякое время и сию минуту” (Dostoevsky 1996, 268). After the rape, he could have stopped the girl from hanging herself, for he had an “inkling” [догадка] that this is what she would do. Instead, he waits until she kills herself and then verifies the result by peering at Matrêsha’s dead body through the eyehole.

Dostoevsky (prophetically) shows that a world ruled by revolutionary conspirators is no a place for a mother and a child. Shatov’s wife Marie who became a mother on the eve of her husband’s being murdered, does not survive this cruelty and dies. The death of her infant is also the result of this tragic murder: “[…] несчастная Марья Игнатьевна в ночь убийства мужа проснулась перед рассветом, хватилась его и пришшла в неописанное волнение, не видя его подле себя. […] Она вбежала в свою светелку, схватила младенца и пошла с ним из дома по улице. Утро было сырое, стоял туман. […] К полудню она впала в беспамятство, из которого уж и не выходила, и скончалась день через три. Простуженный ребенок помер ещё раньше ей” (1974, 507-8).

The world-historical project for the total transformation of humanity, the initial stages of which are recorded in Dostoevsky’s novel, reaches its final, triumphant form in Solzhenitsyn’s gulag narratives. Children’s deaths become uncountable. A single child’s “tear” of Ivan Karamazov speech, that would
arouse readers’ confession, becomes a flow. “Как идёшь по деревне – и на крылечке видишь мёртвую женщину с мёртвым ребёнком на коленях [Or of how you could walk through a village and see on the steps of a peasant house a dead woman with a dead child in her lap]” (VI: 315; Solzhenitsyn 1978, 356). This is passage is almost ekphrastic, for it resembles a description-in-words of some tragic painting. And here is another scene: “На изобильной Полтавщине в деревнях, на дорогах и на полях лежали неубранные трупы. В рощица у станций нельзя было вступить – дурно от разлагающихся трупов, среди них и младенцев. […] во многих местах собирали мертвецов приезжие команды, своим – уже некому было хоронить” (VI: 310). Dead bodies, including dead infants, are once again treated as heaps of biological refuse, to be collected by special services. The location of the corpses – on the fields, roads, close to train stations – indicates that the degree of emaciation was so high that people were dying on their feet. “И если страдания детей пошли на пополнение той суммы страданий которая необходима была для покупки истины, то я утверждаю заранее что вся истина не стоит той цены” (Dostoevsky): Ivan Karamazov’s words, refracted through Solzhenitsyn’s historiographic prose, acquire the status of a true and accurate prophecy: the suffering of all those dead infants were the price they paid for the nation’s guided acquisition of an ideologically defined “truth.”

On the whole, however, children have a relatively minor presence in Solzhenitsyn’s fictions and even The Gulag Archipelago. If a tiny corpse body is thrown from the train or happens to lie in a pile of other dead bodies, there is nothing more to say: end of story, as it were. Still, in The Gulag Archipelago Solzhenitsyn occasionally finds a place for a description of a particular child’s fate. One of them is the peasant girl Motya, who is known as “the little Edison”:

[…] посаженной в 1936 году в тюрьму за самовольный уход – пешком две тысячи километров! […] из уральской ссылки в родное село Светловидово под Тарусой. Малолетней школьницей она была сослана с родителями в 1929 году, навсегда лишена учёбы. Учительница ласково звала её «Мотя-Эдисончик»; девочка не только отлично училась, но имела изобретательский склад ума […]. Через семь лет потянуло её хоть глянуть на брёвна той недостижимой школы – и получила за то «Эдисончик» тюрьму и лагерь (VI: 313).

[…] was jailed in 1936 for leaving her place of banishment without permission to go to her native village, Svetlovidovo near Tarusa, two thousand kilometers on foot! […] She had been exiled with her parents in 1929 when she was a little schoolgirl, and deprived of
schooling forever. Her teacher’s pet name for her was “Motya, our little Edison”: the child was not only an excellent pupil, but had an inventive turn of mind […] After seven years she felt an urge to look just once more at the log walls of her unattainable school – and for that “little Edison” went to prison and then to a camp. (Solzhenitsyn 1978, 354).

Solzhenitsyn’s source for Motya’s story was the recollections of the former gulag prisoner Olga Adamova-Sliozberg. The readers can also figure out how Motya’s family was gradually destroyed in the exile: her father was arrested, the mother, little sister and brother died one after another out of hunger, cold and disease. After reaching her native village, she lived there with her caring grandmother only for a week before arrest. (Adamova-Sliozberg, 25–26). At the end of this child’s story, in an intertextual reference to Ivan Karamazov’s theodicial speculations, Solzhenitsyn poses his own question: “Did any child suffer such a fate in nineteenth century?”

Although in his essay on Anton Chekhov, “Окунаясь в Чехова. Из «Литературной коллекции” (1998) Solzhenitsyn treats that writer’s prose productions with a good deal of readerly skepticism, there are points of continuity between the two writers’ oeuvres, most obviously in the case of Chekhov’s exposé of the imperial Russian forced labor system, Sakhalin Island, and The Gulag Archipelago. Solzhenitsyn’s treatment of the motherhood/childhood theme also recalls Chekhov. In the latter’s short story “Wanting to Sleep” [“Спать хочется”] a thirteen-year old servant girl, Varka, suffers abusive treatment by her employers. They beat her for every default connected to the child’s care. Tired after a day’s unrelenting toil and desperately craving sleep, she must rock a cradle with the masters’ baby, until she reaches a point where she can no longer stand its crying and strangles the child. After doing so, the adolescent falls into sleep “as if she is dead”. It is implied that the murder of the infant would have fatal consequences for Varka herself. The impossibility of Varka’s sleep and the death of the baby here comes as a result of masters-parents’ cruelty: it may be metonymically representative, but this does not make it a common, universal occurrence in the world beyond the text.

In the worlds of Solzhenitsyn, lack of sleep and the consequent suffering of children is the norm and can lead to a child’s death. Here is an exiled mother’s typical morning:

А ещё в Караганде велики расстояния, многим долго ехать от квартиры до работы. Трамвай от центра до рабочей окраины скрежетал битый час. В трамвае напротив
Then again, distances in Karaganda are great and many people had a long way to travel to work. It took the tram a whole hour to grind its way from the center to the industrial outskirts. In the tram opposite me sat a worn-out young woman in a dirty skirt and broken sandals. She was holding a child with a very dirty diaper, and she kept falling asleep. As her arms relaxed, the child would slide to the edge of her lap and almost fall. People shouted, “You’ll drop him!” She managed to grab him in time, but a few minutes later she would be falling asleep again. She was on the night shift at the water tower, and had spent the day riding around town looking for shoes — and never finding them. (Solzhenitsyn 1978, 373).

The baby might suffer a fall, and this time the mother might not be able to prevent it from striking its head on the floor. The scene occurs not inside a domestic, family space, on a public conveyance. The exiled woman’s inability to take care of her baby is on full public display in front of her fellow-passengers. Mother and child are victims of the Lenin-Stalin modernization project, on a multiplicity of levels: not only is the former an exile, and therefore belongs to a category of people defined by the state as criminals, but she must work for the state on pain of prison and when she is not working, must look for a basic item of clothing — shoes — which in this planned economy, is impossible to obtain.

Solzhenitsyn’s Zinaida and Tsvetaeva’s lyrical heroine are tragic mothers who seek and find solace when they visit a church. They approach God and visually and acoustically absorb the religious space in which they perform their devotions. In stark, marked contrast, the young mother in Solzhenitsyn’s binary tale “Nastenka” (1993–1995) draws away from God by successive, traumatic stages. This is one of Solzhenitsyn’s darkest productions that shows how a changing but planned historical environment may deconstruct a feminine identity and reconfigure a female body. Nastenka is the granddaughter of a village priest, Father Filaret, and is brought up as a believer. In childhood she is a regular attendant at church services and as an eleven-year old girl makes a pilgrimage to a local monastery: “А в одиннадцать лет, на Николу вешнего, Настенька одна, через поля, за 25 вёрст, ходила пешком в монастырь” [When she

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was eleven, at St. Nicholas in the Spring, Nastenka walked alone some twenty-five *versts* through the fields to the monastery]” (1: 346; Solzhenitsyn 2011, 75).

After Nastenka’s departure from the home village at the age of fifteen and her admission to *komsomol* things change. Her rooted existence within her family and community is transformed into a life of sexual abuse and depravity. Rapes, a short-lived marriage, casual disordered affairs and abortions eventually lead to a two-year stint as a prostitute in a NKVD brothel, which the by now thoroughly corrupted Nastenka actually *enjoys*. Nastenka’s childhood village, religious and family identity, which was organic and authentic, is destroyed. Her new identities as a komsomol activist, rural librarian, prostitute, and even mother — she has a daughter, Yulka, by one of her lovers — lead to her moral degradation. On the eve of joining the komsomol Nastya performs a private ritual of apostatic renunciation of her Christian — and family, for her grandfather is a priest — faith. She tears a paper icon of Christ she her grandfather had given her:Да, жизнь сходилась всё уже, всё неуклонней…В комсомол? И однажды поздно вечером, когда никто не видел, Настя вынула иконку Христа, приника к ней прощальным и раскаянным поцелуем. И порвала мелко-мелко, чтобы по обрывкам было не понять [Yes, her path in life was becoming more and more narrow and constricted…Was it really leading her to the Komsomol? Late one evening when no one was watching, Nastya took out the little icon of Christ and gave it one final and penitent kiss. Then she tore it into tiny pieces so that no one could tell what it had been (1: 348; Solzhenitsyn 2011, 78). When she takes up employment as a village librarian, Nastenka becomes a representative of Soviet power and is alienated from the peasants.

The characters of Nastenka and Zinaida reveal the following consistent pattern in Solzhenitsyn’s works: the female personalities who are the closest to leading the Christian life or adhering to Christian values possess a maternal energy that is never exhausted. Those female figures who abandon their faith lose this energy or find that it becomes inverted and destructive of their sense of self.

Despite the loss of her child and the terrible difficulty of her personal situation, Zinaida retains a desire to become a mother once again. During confession she thinks of having another child by Fedor. This desire emerges right after the death of her infant and, therefore, is perceived by Zinaida as the gravest sin.
The young mother feels guilty for not allowing herself a period that she could totally devote to living through a suffering caused by the tragedy with her son. She understands it is not possible to fill up his life with another baby: “Пустота! […] Другим человеком, другим ребёнком не заполнится, не пройдётся никем! – этого существа никогда уже на земле не будет [Emptiness! […] A vacuum never to be filled by any other human being, any other child! That being would never exist again on this earth]” (10: 517; Solzhenitsyn 1999, 987). Yet, she immediately longs for another child by a person who, just like herself, is partially at fault in this tragic situation. Metaphorically, this contemplated sin happens to be the only “stone” that Zinaida is not able to draw out from the well, to detach from herself.

Maternity for Zinaida is a complicated, winding, tortuously structured road which, nevertheless, she is prepared to follow. Her confession is also depicted, in imaginative terms, as a road. While the bereaved mother confesses her sins to Father Aloniy and presses her forehead to the Bible, she metaphorically overcomes a distance: climbs hills, makes her way through a darkness, rolls over stones, falls down and gets up on her feet again. This path away from sins is hard work, a hard slog: “А аналой – сейчас поняла: крутый подъём! Крутою тяжёлый извокол […] Но – самой продираться через тьму. […] А сама, по извлекющую, на каждом грехе как через камень перекатываясь, – и носом вниз, и носом в землю […]. Труд – испотевающий, пот холодный на лбу [The lectern – she saw it now – was a steep slope, a rough steep slope […]. She must struggle through the darkness unaided. […] But she was struggling up that slope, every sin a stone over which she stumbled and slithered backward, nose to the ground. […] Her brow was bathed in cold sweat” (10: 526–27; Solzhenitsyn 1999, 995–97).

The most difficult part of this metaphorical road – the passage through the fire – is connected to that gravest, in Zinaida’s perception, moral failing: her continued love for Fedor and her desire to have a child by him:


[…] for the second time (all futile! All rejected!), or perhaps it wasn’t the second time? Perhaps this was another betrayal? Yes, I have betrayed you again, sinned not against your life this time, but against the still fresh, still warm memory of you, before your little grave has been smoothed over, that will have to wait till next spring – and who is it I am thinking of again? Of him, of him, that is why I fled, among flying sparks, like a mad thing swerving so as not to burn myself, at times even leaping through the flames, unable to find the straight path, which anyway did not exist, over the baking-hot earth, the soles of my feet burning, returning to the same place – he rapped my fingers, said keep away, get your claws out of me – for six years I had thought of him, and now I am thinking of him again, I have sacrificed my little son, and before I am out of mourning here it comes again, for the fifth time like a tornado, and now…there is no pulling this stone out, it is ablaze! Scorched as I am, desire writhes in me like a fiery serpent – the desire to conceive again! Conceive a child of his! He has never known this joy – with me! (Solzhenitsyn 1999, 998)

From the perspective of syntax and imagery, this lengthy stream-of-consciousness passage, which mostly consists of a single sentence, conveys a sense of speed. It is the speed of Zinaida’s running and jumping through the fire as well as of the fire’s flame and of the burning twister (как смерч) of the fifth sin. The metaphor of pregnancy as a tornado is an imaginative indication that the heroine’s maternal energy is as powerful as an uncontrolled natural phenomenon: it should be fulfilled as soon as possible, as quickly as possible. Like Zinaida’s life and spiritual path, this is not a linearly structured sentence (“не зная прямой, которой и нет”), but a complicated, compound one full of syntactical curves: discontinuous dashes, repetitions, self-posed questions, and emotional exclamation marks. The impression of speed is further conveyed through locutions such as “меж огнями металась”, 10:528): she simultaneously strives to run away from her love situation (“отстань, оторвись”) and, despite the pain, (“ожоги”, “жгут подошвы”) repeatedly comes back to it. The last word of the sentence is the italicized adverb вместе [together], deposited there like an object carried from one place to another by a whirlwind, and it is an indicator of family values of a kind, even if Zinaida and Fedor remained unmarried — or perhaps, it conveys a hope and a promise of marriage, hope entertained by Zinaida, a promise made by her to herself.

Fire is a symbolically ambivalent element (“элемент символически противоречивый”). On the one hand, it can cause pain or death, and in contexts such as these, carries an appropriately sinister symbolic value. In many religious systems, including of course Christianity, flames have a punitive function. The
protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne, must wear an eponymously colored “A” on her dress as a public punishment for conceiving a child out of wedlock. Here the infernal connotations of the color scarlet or red are inverted and the mark of shame becomes a symbol of feminine strength and dignity in front of the prudish crowd of the city’s puritans and, incidentally, recalls Christ’s words, “I am the alpha and omega”. Zinaida views her desire to have a child by Fedor as sinful, and in a similarly emblematic fashion, this passage also evokes the image of a fiery, and therefore infernal, snake (“огненная змейка”). On the other hand, fire may also be an instrument of spiritual purification. Fire symbolizes the life energy, the reproductive force: there is a close connection between a fire and the home (the fireplace) the family sphere. Despite the fire of passion that brought destruction to Zinaida’s life, she still hopes to harmonize and domesticize her life with Fedor. Her fire is also the flame of moral light and redemption (on fire see Bidermann, 184–85).

Matryona, the protagonist of the story “Matryona’s Home,” is another of Solzhenitsyn’s bereaved mothers. Unlike Zinaida, she is not shown performing her devotions inside a church, indeed, Solzhenitsyn’s autobiographical narrator never sees her praying or crossing herself and he even calls her a “pagan.” Yet Matryona follows some basic Christian traditions, occasionally visiting a neighboring church to obtain holy water and keeping icons in a corner of her house. However, it is the content of her character, and not the form and frequency of her devotions, that define her as a Christian figure, even a Christian paragon [праведник]. After all of her six children die in infancy, Matryona resolves to fill the void in her life by adopting Kira, the youngest daughter of her husband’s brother Faddei, to whom she was betrothed before the outbreak of World War I. Instead of the children she would have had with Faddei, she brings up one of his children as her own, thereby reversing the two tragic topoi of thwarted and bereaved motherhood.

Another female character who by turning to religion reconstructs herself as a caring mother is Tanya in the binary story “Fracture Points” (“На изломах”, 1996). The action in the story is set in the 1990s, a chaotic and violent period in the aftermath of the imperial Soviet collapse. Tanya’s husband, who had studied to be a physicist, abandons the disinterested (and now unremunerated) pursuit of pure knowledge in favor of banking. He quickly prospers, but good fortune and success come at a price: he and
his wife survive an assassination attempt by business rivals. Henceforth the young couple live in constant fear not only for their own lives, but also for that of their two-year-old son: “Так – и сынишку взрывом угробят? [So, are you prepared to let our little boy to be killed by a bomb?]” (1: 434; Solzhenitsyn 2011, 328), asks Tanya. During this traumatic time, she recalls one of her late grandmother’s sayings: “– Моя бабушка говорила: игры служат, пока уши, а люди – пока души” [A needle will serve when it’s got an eye, a person will serve when he’s got a soul]” (1: 434; 328). The message is that material objects have value only as long as they are useful, whereas human beings have a value that is unquantifiable and eternal, like their souls. Tanya’s thoughts now turn to God. At Easter the young woman resumes the traditions of her grandmother, who likely belonged to the pre-revolutionary generation. Seceding from the buy-and-sell, kill-or-be-killed world of Russian robber capitalism, Tanya bakes an Easter cake and has it blessed and in keeping with the same Paschal tradition, colors eggs. She in convinced that she and her husband survived the assassination attempt because of divine protection, and that the Christian faith of her ancestors will keep safe the life of their child: “[…] А бабушка всегда святила, и красила. Что же это не наша вера? […] – А ты не понимаешь, что мы были обречены? Что нас спасла какая-то Высшая Сила? И вот эти месяцы бережёт – Она же? [Granny always colored eggs and had the cakes blessed. What’s the matter, don’t you follow our religion? […] Don’t you realize that we were doomed? That we were saved by some Higher Power? What do you think was keeping us safe these past months, if not that Power]” (1:439–40; 337).

Tsvetaeva’s maternal persona also seeks solace in a world where the death of children has become the norm by hoping for another child. She longs for a son and onomastically associates him with St. George (Georgi), the patron of Russia and all soldiers. As Alyssa Dinega puts it: […] the very first poem she wrote after “Two hands resting lightly” – entitled “Son” […] is a fantasy about the son who will, implicitly, someday replace the daughter she has just lost so tragically. […] Her decision to name the boy Georgii – always her favorite saint and the patron saint of Moscow – likewise speaks of her fantastically inflated hopes for her child. (Dinega, 218–219):

[…]
Так, выступив из черноты бессонной
Кремлевских башенных вершин,
Предстал мне в предрассветном сонме
Тот, кто ещё придет — мой сын. (Tsvetaeva 1: 519)

Пасхальная неделя 1920

…Thus, stepping out of the sleepless dark
Of the Kremlin’s towering peaks
He appeared before me as one of the pre-dawn host,
The one who is yet to come — my son.

Easter Week, 1920.

The Christological associations in this Paschal poem are plain to see.

Unlike Zinaida, Matryona or even Tanya, Nastenka’s character never puts down roots. This character is in a constant state of motion. She leaves one city or village for another, changes jobs and professions, forming liaisons with numerous men on the way. Her lovers — minor party bosses, village bigwigs, and fellow-komsomols — fail to provide her with a stable family environment, and how could they, for they see her merely as a willing and pliant body: “Arandarenko had compliments for her: ‘You’re turning into a proper young tart. Your eyes sparkle, you’re lovely’” (2011, 83). In the way of victims of sexual abuse, Nastya internalizes her semi-public status as a komsomol whore and treats it as a source of validation. Her disorganized sex life is realized in hotels, dorms, and train compartments, all of which have associations with travel and the road. Sometimes these encounters occur in formerly sacred locations: a confiscated deacon’s house, a cemetery, a Crimean monastery that has been converted into a workers’ rest home.

Nastya is a character who is rushing headlong down the road to perdition. Take, for instance, the scene that describes the act of physical intimacy she is forced to engage in with the village chairman Arandarenko, he of that “comely tart” comment. The Chairman likes to ravish women while “racing” in a sledge or carriage, depending on the season. Here Nastenka is a victim, and an entirely passive one: “Ох, и кони же черти, и как не вывернут? Лютый чубатый кинул её наопрокидь, закалачила она руки за голову – и мимо чубатого только видела широкую спину кучера, ни разу он не обернулся, да небо в
облачках [Lord, those horses flew like demons, and it seemed for certain they'd be thrown out of the carriage. The vicious Arandarenko with the forelock threw her on her back and twisted her arms over her head. Past his dangling forelock she could see the driver’s broad back – he never turned around once – and the clouds in the sky above]” (1: 350 Solzhenitsyn 2011, 82). And yet she is soon happy to give herself to Andarenko, rejoicing at his coarse caresses and crude compliments.

The scene in the cart recalls one in Aleksandr Blok’s narrative poem “The Twelve” (1918) where a horse-driven cab becomes a portable locus of depraved sexual dalliance between the prostitute Katka and the soldier Vanka, symbolic stand-ins for a fallen Russia and her deserting army during the first phase of the nation’s revolutionary upheaval:

Снег крутит, лихач кричит,  
Ванька с Катькою летит –  
[…]
Катьку дуру обнимает,  
Заговаривает…  
Запрокинулась лицом,  
Зубки блещут жемчугом…  
[…]
Эх, эх, поблуди!  
Сердце екнуло в груди! (Blok 12–13)

Snowflakes fly, the coachman cries,  
Johnny and Katie go spanking by –  
[…]
Holding Katie in his arms,  
Trying out his charms…  
Head flung back in sheer delight,  
Pretty teeth all pearly white…  
[…]
Hey, hey letch away!  
Kill your conscience for a day! (Blok 1981, 310–11)

The revolution gives public license to the basest emotions and behaviors. Katka is a professional prostitute who used to service commissioned ranks in the imperial Russian army, but is now a trophy tart of the Red Guards: “Свобода, свобода, Эх, эх, без креста! […] С офицерами блудила […] С юнкерем гулять ходила – с солдатьем теперь пошла? (11–13). During her frolick in the cab with Vanka, she is killed by one of the poem’s “apostles,” Petrucha (cf. St. Peter), a jealous sort who shoots her in the head.
Nastenka, though she survives her own session in the carirage, will suffer irreversible moral and physical damage. She becomes a prostitute in all but name and as a result of her many abortions, is unable to bear any more children. As a little girl, Nastenka was connected to the divine vertical that joins the human and the divine by rising from “damp mother earth” (in which she eventually buries the little paper icon of Christ) to that sacred “miniature round heaven” (the church dome) that Zinaida saw and apprehended: “С любовью ходила на церковные службы, и стояла на коленях, и в погохие утра засматривалась, как солнечные лучи бьют через оконца купола, а сквозь них с верхнего свода низирал – со строгостью, но и с милостю – Всевышний [She loved going to church. On sunny mornings, on her knees, she would lose herself in contemplating the rays of sunlight shining through the tiny windows of the cupola, in which she saw the solemn yet compassionate descent of the Almighty from the dome above]” (1:346; 75). In the carriage scene where Andorenko has his way with Nastya, this verticality is geometrically reversed and brought down to earth, as it were, through the horizontality of the enforced sexual act: “[…] а он их – на полной гонке распластывает. Так любит.” /my emphasis/ In the open steppe, behind the male body rutting inside her Nastenka could still see the divine space – “clouds in the sky above [небо в облачках]” – an ironic allusion to one-time childish ability to commune with the Godhead.

Zinaida spiritual tergiversations never strip her of her identity as a mother, even if her child is dead. Nastenka’s life’s trajectory, however, takes her away from motherhood. Her daughter, Yulka, receives from her a minimum of care — food and shelter — but little or no love. When she first becomes pregnant, Nastenka thinks of committing suicide by throwing herself into a well because her current lover does not want the child and leaves: “И – от первого раза зачала. И сказала Сашку, а он: «Откуда я знаю, с кем ты ещё таскалась?» […] Хотела – в колодец броситься, подруга успела удержать [She conceived from their very first time. She told Sashko, and all he said was: ‘How do I know who else you’ve been running around with?’ […] She tried to drown herself in a well, but one of her friends managed to stop her]” (1:351; 2011, 83-4). In contrast to the scene in the Utkino church, where the well is a trope, a figure of thought produced in Zinaida’s disordered mind that is related to the archetype of the World Well, for Nastenka the same object is an actual space in which she intends to end her life: the same mythic archetype, materialized.
While the bereaved Zinaida is able to ascend from that dark, dank space of the soul by reaffirming her faith, Nastenka the apostate is prepared to kill herself, and her unborn child, in a situation that is much less tragic than Zinaida’s.

Yulka is just an item of baggage that Nastenka carries with her during her trips and transitions. The young woman goes through a series of abortions casually, as a matter of convenience. The notion of sin does not even come into it, as far as she is concerned: “Сделала аборт, ещё только месячный. […] А беременность – в этот раз перепустила, пришлось в частную больницу ложиться […]. После того ли тяжкого абORTа – она уже не беременела [She had an abortion – it was only a month after all. […] This time she missed the first signs of her pregnancy and had to go to a private hospital. […] May be it was because of her last, difficult abortion, but she never got pregnant again]” (1: 352–53; 85, 87).

In Tsvetaeva’s and Solzhenitsyn’s texts, a woman’s experience of pregnancy and motherhood is framed, usually by implication, with reference to the Eastern Orthodox concept of Prisnodevstvo, the incorporeal conception of the Christ child by the Mother of God. According to Orthodox teaching, the Savior was conceived miraculously, through the agency of Holy Spirit: “Дух Святой найдёт на Тебя, и сила Всевышнего осенит тебя: посему и рождаемое Святое наречется Сыном Божиим” (Лк 1, 35). During the act of giving birth Mary felt no pain and remained a virgin after Jesus was born (Malkov 486–492). The two artists’ treatment of the physiological stages of the birth cycle posits that a woman must feel reverence towards the child in her womb as well as the changes that occur in her body during pregnancy and childbirth. The logic in Tsvetaeva’s and Solzhenitsyn’s works is that a woman’s aesthetic and moral desire to bless the pure impregnation of Christ is a sign of her reverence towards her own physiology as a mother while a woman’s disregard of this religious phenomenon adumbrates her intention to destroy her own, maternal body. Tsvetaeva’s lyrical maternal I reverently identifies herself with the Mother of God:

Золотым кустом,
Родословным древом
Никнет паникадило.
— Благословен плод чрева
Твоего, Дева
Милая! (The Eve of the Annunciation)
Like a golden bush, like a family
Tree, it dangles there,
The huge chandelier.
Blessed is the fruit of Thy womb,
Merciful Virgin! (Tsvetaeva 2003, 36)

These six lines comprehend three biblical plots: the Fall of man; the story of Moses and the Burning Bush, when God appoints him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt; and the birth of Christ. It is a simultaneous blessing to the Mother of God and to the first Mother of all humans Eve [Ева]. The word плод is multivalent: it is the unborn child (fetus) of the Virgin Mary but also the Forbidden Fruit eaten by the first people, Adam and Eve. The cathedral’s central candle-lamp [паникадило], which phonetically contains the same word, плод [паникадило], resembles in form the “golden bush” [золотой куст] and the Tree of God and Evil. Addressing the Mother of God in prayer, Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona calls her Дева (Virgin), a word that phonetically contains the name Ева [Дева] or Eve. The implied figure of Eve relates also to the two other assonant words, Чрева and Древом. On the level of sound and imagery, therefore, this poem brings together references to two opposing female figures in the Bible: the Mother of God and the mother of all humanity, just as on the same feast day of the Annunciation the lyrical persona prays for two children, the holy child (God) who is as yet unborn and an earthly child, the infant who will be her own. The birth of the human being, her daughter in particular, is comparable to the miracle of the divine birth.

The purity and sacred nature of Alya’s conception and birth is more openly textualized in another of Tsvetaeva’s poems of the same period, “Konsuella! – Consolation!” (Консуэлла! – Утешенье!) (1919):

Видно с ангелом спала я
Бога приняла в объятья.
Каждый час благословляю
Полночь своего зачатья. (1: 484)

I must have slept with an angel,
held God in my arms.
Every hour I bless
midnight, when you were conceived.

The midnight hour of Alya’s conception coincides with the midnight hour of the conception of Christ, and its sacred nature is adumbrated by the lyrical persona’s ascending, erotic connection to the angel of God
and to the Lord Himself. It might be said that these lines verge on the blasphemous, for they clearly — or obscurely — contradict the traditional Orthodox view of the incorporeal nature of Christ. Yet, the lexicon and tropes of an earthly, carnal love are employed to convey the lyrical subject’s longing to achieve union with the Godhead. Those angelic or divine embraces [объятья] have a meaning that may be physical in terms of first-order signification, but are sacred in terms of second-order signification.

As a mother, Nastenka, however, has diverged from the ideal of Prisnodevstvo. Early on in the story, she attends an antireligious play staged by her komsomol cell on St. John’s Day (cf. St. John the Baptist), in which the Virgin Mary and her Son are explicitly mocked. This dramatic performance contains the following lines:

Не целуй меня взасос,
Я не Богородица:
От меня Исус Христос
Никогда не родится. (1: 349)

French kisses only make me bored,
I’m not the Virgin Mary.
I won’t give birth to Christ the Lord,
So let us both be merry. (Solzhenitsyn 2011, 79)

Nastenka, who at this point in the story has not lost her childhood memories of faith, even though she has already renounced them, feels a terrible shame, both as a former believer and a young woman: “Сжималось сердце – унижением, позором [This wrung her heart. It was a humiliation, a disgrace]” (1: 349; 79).

This vulgar ditty, however, has a proleptic meaning. It becomes the script for Nastya’s failures and sins as a Christian believer, family member (granddaughter of a priest), woman, and, especially, mother. From the moment of her induction into the komsomol, Nastenka’s life is defined by acts of betrayal. By renouncing her religious faith, she commits a double betrayal: Of God, and of her grandfather the priest, who eventually perishes in the Solovetsky prison: “Прошлое. Всё, всё – провалилось куда-то [It was the past. All of it, every trace, had vanished somewhere]” (1:355; 88).

While rejecting Christ, Nastenka also denies and thwarts the birth of her children, arguably, has them murdered. In contrast to the lyrical persona of Tsvetaeva who imaginatively assimilates herself to the
Mother of God and perceives her earthly pregnancy as divine and sacred, Nastenka experiences a series of sinful or forced conceptions and is not able to give birth purely to a healthy child who is blessed by her (Я не Богородица). Each successive abortion is more cruel and casual than the one before: during the second abortion she discontinues the life of a third-month embryo whose sex can already be identified: he is a boy. “[…] вынули трёхмесячного, доктор ругался, уже видно, что мальчик, выбросили в помойное ведро [They took out a three-month fetus, and the doctor cursed her; they could already tell that it was a boy: his body was tossed into the waste bucket]” (1: 352; 85). Nastenka herself made a garbage out of her child.

She is negligent toward her own gynecological health by getting inflammations and eventually loses her biological capacity for motherhood (Никогда не родится). Because of health problems associated with these repeated abortions, Nastenka goes to a sanatorium, which is located on the territory of the former George monastery. If in childhood pilgrimages to the local monastery represented the apogee of Nastenka’s moral elevation, her catharsis, this visit involves merely the restoration of her physical wellbeing. The displacement of the monastery by the sanatorium, an atheistic temple of health, as well as of Nastenka’s true purpose of going there for the false one is another indication of her inverted values. For her, the space of the monastery becomes the space of getting into the next series of sins, sexual connections with a range of sailors.

Nastenka’s abortive experience of motherhood stands in contrast to Matryona’s six bereavements, when she loses her children to poverty and disease, with none of them surviving beyond the third month (“Matryona’s Home”). Year after year Matryona patiently endures the same tragic cycle: carries a child to term, gives birth to it, and then buries it. While Nastenka’s behavior as a mother lacks all religious context — she leaves Yulka unbaptized — Matryona always relates the birth and death of her children to the Christian calendar: “– Одна дочка только родилась, помыли её живую – тут она и померла. Так мёртвую уж обмывать не пришлось…Как свадьба моя была в Петров день, так и шестого ребёнка, Александра, в Петров день схоронила [One daughter, Elena, was born and was alive when they washed her, and then she died right after….My wedding was on St. Peter’s day, and it was St. Peter’s day I buried my sixth, Alexander]” (1: 134; Solzhenitsyn 2006, 43). St. Peter’s day, a folk-Christian holiday which is
celebrated on June 29 (Old Style) traditionally marked the end of spring. As it is noted in the preface to the story in *The Solzhenitsyn Reader* (2006), “The first syllable of Matryona’s name is the Russian word for “mother”, and in her life readers may glimpse symbolic aspects of long-suffering Mother Russia” (24). The period from the beginning of World War I until the death of Stalin in 1953 was one when millions of children dies violent or unnatural deaths and millions of others were never born, and Matryona’s maternal history symbolically reflects this national tragedy.

In Solzhenitsyn and Tsvetaeva, religious beliefs, traditions, and places are invariably privileged, especially in relation to the life of the family and the birth of children. In *The Red Wheel*, Ksenia Tomchak, who dreams of one day having a son not in her native southern Russia but in Moscow, aspires to the same kind of rooted maternal identity, framed by sacred spaces and obligations, that is possessed by Tsvetaeva’s maternal poetic persona, who brings up Alya in that very city, with its myriad of churches and sacred loci. Tsvetaeva’s poem “Clouds are Around” (“Облака – Вокруг”) (1916), which inaugurates the poetic cycle *Verses about Moscow* (*Стихи о Москве*) (1916), is structured around a dialogue between two female personas, a mother and her daughter (Alya), who converse about Moscow and the child’s future life in the ancient capital. To be more precise, the mother engages in a monologue on her own and her daughter’s behalf:

Облака – вокруг,  
Купола – вокруг, 
Надо всей Москвой  
Сколько хватит рук! —  
Возношу тебя, бремя лучшее,  
Деревцо мое 
Невесомое! 

В дивном граде сем, 
В мирном граде сем, 
Где и мертвой – мне  
Будет радостно, —  
Царевать тебе, горевать тебе,  
Принимать венец,  
О мой первенец! 

Ты постом говей,  
Не сурьми бровей  
И все сорок – что –
The maternal I takes the little girl on a tour of Moscow. She teaches her the importance of keeping the Christian fast ("ты постом говей") and honoring the city’s “forty churches” ("сорок церквей"), an established expression that indicated the abundance of places of worship in the city. The mother envisions
her own death (“Где и мертвой – мне будет радостно”), thereby transforming Moscow into a legacy: she bequeaths the city to Alya and even identifies her as its future tsarina (“Где […]…царевать тебе”). The mother belongs to Moscow, just as Moscow belongs to the mother: a reciprocal relationship founded on the poetic persona’s inalienable status as a native-born Muscovite. These rights and obligations of mutual ownership can never be taken away from the poet, or from her descendants. In this poem, this city, with its traditionally matriarchal identity, will be “passed” along the female line, from mother to daughter, for two generations ahead: Moscow-born Alya, as her mother’s lyrical voice foresees, will one day in turn bequeath the ancient city to her own daughter.

The poem includes several circle images. One of them is explicitly religious – the circle of domes above Moscow (“купола – вокруг”), the city’s imaginative nimbus. It is the circle of faith. Another one is implicit – the circle of family, genealogical connections, and (female) generations. The two circles are congruent and metaphorically fused. The basic image associated with the daughter is “the little tree” [деревцо]. Alya is supposed to “grow” in this city by putting down roots in this circular space of containing a nexus of family, urban, and religious traditions.

Like Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona, in April 1917 Ksenia Tomchak, accompanied by her fiancé Sanya, seeks out the city’s religious spaces, in which she finds a source of maternal strength, though in her case, she is not yet a mother, nor even a wife. Yet she knows that one day soon she will conceive and bear a child. Moscow is in the grip of revolutionary excitement, and the two young people avoid the excited, baying crowds as they make their way to the Chapel of Iveron [Иверская часовня], where they pray. Afterward, they talk about the son they will have (the novel’s empirical author and in this sense, their own creator): “Есть ли что-нибудь на свете сильнее – линии жизни, просто жизни, как она сцепляется и вяжется от предков к потомкам? [What can be stronger in this world than the line of life, just life, and how it is transmitted from the ancestors to the descendants?]” (16: 369) This “line of life” is most visible, more sensible to the imagination when one stands close to, or inside, a sacral locus such as that little chapel.
Like Zinaida, Ksenia is a personality for whom motherhood constitutes the core meaning of her life as a woman. Even as the revolution unfolds and the structures of the old way of life give way to the chaos of the new, Ksenia remains true to her dream of having a child:

Всё, что она жила и мечтала до сих пор, – было приготовлением. И вот наконец счастье неизбежно должно было явиться Ксенье – именно этой весною, да просто вот в этих днях! Пришла пора радости! Всё нутро её это чувствовало! И нутро же – жадным толчком завидовало каждой беременной, встреченной на улице. Каждой беременной. Уж кажется, в эти революционные дни чего только удивительного не было на улицах, лишь озирайся. Но и в эти дни ничто так не удивляло Ксенью, так не толкало в сердце – как вид беременных женщин. Всё-таки это – чудо из чудес!

Everything she lived for and dreamed about until now was but a preparation. And now happiness would inevitably come to Ksenia, it would come this very spring, perhaps in the next few days! The time of happiness was at hand! She felt this with every fiber of her inner self! And her inner self would give an envious spasm whenever she met a pregnant woman in the street. Every pregnant woman made her feel this way. You might think that in these days of revolution you could see in the streets all manner of surprising things, as long as you kept your eyes open. Yet nothing surprised Ksenia more, nothing touched her heart in the same way than the sight of a pregnant woman. Truly, this is the miracle of miracles!

It is of course no accident that the religious figure Ksenia feels a particular attachment to is the Mother of God [Иверская Божья Матерь]: “Так и мимо Иверской часовни – Ксенья при Бертэ шла, как будто не замечала, а на самом деле ощутимо раздвоилась, – и хотелось бы подойти, послушно постоять”

(13: 246) [As she walked past the Chapel of Iveron together with Berta, Ksenia pretended not to notice it, but in truth felt herself sensibly doubled, wishing she could walk over there and stand humbly in prayer].

As in the case with Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona, by honoring the Mother of God a woman honors herself as an actual or a potential mother.

Both Ksenia and Tsvetaeva’s poetic I are linked to theme of campanology. In their respective texts, they are accompanied by images of church domes and the sound of ringing bells. When the revolution erupts, the two literary presences hear the disharmony in the pealing bells which are now rung not in celebration of the Christian holidays, but in honor of the unfolding political events. Ksenia:

Вчера среди дня, неурочно, вдруг грянул над Москвою громовой колокольный звон, как пасхальный! […] Правда, слышали, что этот звон – подменный какой-то: не только не все церкви, но и полезли на колокольни ненастоящие, видимо, звонари: сбивались и перебивались нестройно. Многие были в восторге, а Ксения
postesnialas' vozrazhit', chto eto neumestno i dazhe obidno: kak же tak, na velikiy post? (13: 245)

[Yesterday in the middle of the day, suddenly and unexpectedly, the thunderous ringing of bells was heard over Moscow, as if in celebration of Easter! […] Yet those who heard it felt there was something wrong about the sound: it wasn’t just that some of the churches stayed silent, but it seems that the ringers who climbed into the belfries didn’t know their business: they lost their rhythm and interfered with each others’ ringing. Many liked it, and Ksenia was too shy to object that this was inappropriate and even offensive: how can allow such a thing during the Great Fast?

In the poem “Blue Clouds over the Church” (“Над церковкой – голубые облака”) (1917) Tsvetaeva’s lyrical persona feels the same sense of campanological disharmony, though here the sound of the bells is distorted by the sight of the revolutionary flags in the city streets. Sound + vision = chaos.

Заблудился ты, кремлевский звон,  
В этом ветреном лесу знамен. (1: 339)

The ringing of the Kremlin bells is lost  
Amidst the windy forest of flags.

In Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn, the campanological motif is linked to the theme of motherhood and children. First, it should be mentioned that for Tsvetaeva’s autobiographical lyrical persona the ringing of the church bells is related to her life cycle, which it accompanies from the moment of her birth to the (anticipated) hour of her death. In “With the Red Cluster” (“Красною Кистью”) (1916), she announces that when she was born, hundreds of church bells were rung in honor of the feast day of St. John the Apostle [Иоанн Богослов]:

Красною кистью  
Рябина зажглася.  
Падали листья,  
Я родилась.

Спорили сотни  
Колоколов.  
День был субботний:  
Иоанн Богослов. (1: 273)

Crimson, bright clustered,  
The rowan waxed warm.  
Falling leaves fluttered,  
And I was born.

Belfries competed
In hundredfold chimes.
Saturday: Feast of
Saint John the Divine.

Till now I cherish
The craving to crunch
Warm rowan berries’
Bitter-sharp bunch. (Tsvetaeva 2003: 75)

In the “Clouds are Around” cycle, the lyrical subject prophesies that when she dies, bells will toll as she is laid to rest in her grave at the Vagankov cemetery in Moscow (“колокольный звон, зори ранние – на Ваганькове”). The tolling of the bells will mark the end of her life on this earth, but her descendants will be alive and will remember her. In this poem, the first thing that the maternal persona shows Alya is the church domes of Moscow: “Купола – вокруг.” Once again, the vertical, celestially oriented perspective comes into imaginative play. Indeed, the entire collection is expressive of an aspiration upwards. All of the images and motifs that relate to Alya’s future, adulthood, and the formation of her values vectored vertically toward the clouds and the domes, the first two — celestial — images in the text. Arms point upward and “encircle” Moscow (“Сколько хватит рук!”), Alya is *exalted* by her mother (“Возношу тебя”), a little tree is shown growing (“Деревцо”), and Alya is bequeathed the seven hills above the Moskva river on which, legend says, the city was founded (“Семихолмие”).

Another Tsvetaeva poem, *The Young Belfry* [Молодой Колоколенкой] (1918), is devoted to Alya and features a vivid combination of the theme of childhood with campanological imagery. Alya contemplates the belfry and then is magically transformed into a belfry herself.

Молодой колоколенкой
Ты любуешься – в воздухе.
Голосок у ней тоненький,
В ясном куполе – звёздочки.

Куполок твоей золотенький,
Ясны звёзды – под лобиком.
Голосочек твоей тоненький,
Ты сама колоколенка.

(1:430)

The young belfry
You admire up there in the air.
Her voice is piping
Her bright dome is covered by stars.

Your little dome is golden,
There is a bright star beneath your brow.
Your voice is piping,
You are a little belfry yourself.

The fictive logic in the Ksenia chapters of *The Red Wheel* recalls the poetic logic in Tsvetaeva’s verse of the 1916-22 period. In Solzhenitsyn, the connection between the sound of the bells and Ksenia’s expectation of motherhood is mediated through the mimetic representation of Moscow’s cityscape, the emerging revolutionary realities, descriptions of the heroine’s emotional and psychological state, as well as the text’s compositional structure. Chapter 416, *March 1917*, which starts with Ksenia’s hearing of the discordant, out of Easter, bell ringing, describe a promenade. Ksenia and her friend find themselves excused from attending classes, which have been cancelled because of the revolutionary events that are taking place, so they go on a walk around the Kremlin. At the end of the chapter, after observing a parade of revolutionary troops and listening to the bells, they end up in the Aleksandrovskiy garden beneath the Kremlin wall. The little park is full of children where Ksenia observes them and longs for her own pregnancy. It is textually significant that the declination from the true church bell ringing to the false revolutionary one is noticed by Solzhenitsyn’s heroine of *The Red Wheel* who possesses the highest maternal instinct.

Tsvetaeva’s poems function as a framing referent for the treatment of motherhood, whether actual, potential, thwarted, or bereaved, in Solzhenitsyn’s prose in general, and in *The Red Wheel* in particular. In turn, his stories and novels expand on the imaginative representation of these subjects in Tsvetaeva’s verse, affirming the tragic connection between a mother’s private joy and grief and the impersonal march of history, which in the case of the Russian twentieth century entailed an organized attempt to construct a perfect, scientific City of Man on this earth instead of the perfect, mystical City of God that exists in heaven.
CONCLUSION

Tsvetaeva’s and Solzhenitsyn’s multi-generic literary productions offer similar axiological conceptions of twentieth-century Russian history. In Tsvetaeva’s case, this is expressed primarily through the voice of her highly autobiographical, deeply personalized lyrical persona who acts as a witness to history and suffering as she observes and imaginatively re-configures the revolutionary events in the streets and squares of Moscow. In the case of Solzhenitsyn, his female characters, who are either that Tsvetaevian poetic subject’s cross-textual contemporaries or live during subsequent decades of Soviet Russian history, exemplify with a special poignancy the authorial position that the events of 1917 and their aftermath represented a wrenching break in the organic and harmonious continuity of national and private life. Solzhenitsyn’s heroines experience the Russian twentieth century as a tragedy of universal scope, which not only wounds, perhaps mortally, their homeland, but ruins families, disrupts or distorts amatory relationships, and imposes what are at times unbearable sexual or political demands on women’s very bodies. Both artists record the way in which revolutionary violence and political terror thwart, stunt, alter, or destroy a range of feminine identities, artistic, patriotic, urban, rural, maternal, filial, and religious. These are the axes along which Solzhenitsyn’s novels and stories and Tsvetaeva’s poems intersect, via their textual and conceptual explorations of the Female Eros in history, thereby generating a plethora of affecting aesthetic and ethical outcomes.

The erotic themes explored by Tsvetaeva are embodied in and mediated through her lyrical persona. This poetic personality is inevitably different from Solzhenitsyn’s socially or politically contextualized female heroines, who in addition are often psychologically or culturologically textured constructs and who inhabit prose texts that privilege metonymy over metaphor (a feature of his writings that holds true even in the case of the quasi-modernistic The Red Wheel). The Tsvetaevian lyrical subject’s passions and her reactions to the amatory situations she encounters tend to be intense, impulsive, and fervid, while Tsvetaeva’s poetic discourse is explicitly figurative and its formats are overtly and exuberantly
experimental, their densely coded imagery resistant to a literalizing, historicized reading. Also, the range and nature of erotic scenarios in her poetry, which may be hetero- or homosexual, or both, is broader. In comparison with Solzhenitsyn’s heroines, Tsvetaeva’s poetic and erotic I must make, when she is willing or able to do so, a much greater effort to sublimate her desire within the spatial or spiritual realms of religious faith; and her religious faith is always in some sense eroticized. Accordingly, the informed reader may find himself identifying Solzhenitsyn’s vision of Eros with the Apollonian dimension of culture, and Tsvetaeva’s with the Dionysian.

As literary chroniclers of a nation’s historical tragedy, both artists posit a categorical rejection of the notion and practice of redemptive violence and of the revolutionary project for the reconstruction of society and the human beings that it serves. At a time of national crisis, the female personalities in Tsvetaeva and Solzhenitsyn attempt to re-direct their erotic desire toward a salvational endeavor that will embrace both themselves and the Russia they love. Their consuming emotional attachment to their native land is expressed through a powerful affinity with certain urban, rural, or sacred spaces, to which they are bound by intimate ties of faith or family or romantic/erotic experience.

Solzhenitsyn identifies a link between the tragedies of the revolution and the gulag and aims to show that the connection between these national traumas inevitably followed from the revolutionaries’ “scientific” vision of a future universal human happiness and the methods they employed to bring about its paradisical arrival on this earth. Many of his female characters, whether they were able to survive the revolution as its witnesses (as did Tsvetaeva), supported or actively participated in it, or even resisted it on some private or public level, become the victims of the waves of repression that followed. This aspect of Solzhenitsyn’s fictionalized retrospective treatments of revolutionary and Soviet history complements Tsvetaeva’s poetic prolepsis of the horrors that are still to come.

As read from a historical, ethical, and textological perspective, Tsvetaeva’s and Solzhenitsyn’s erotically charged worlds form a fabulatory and valoric whole, while their verse and prose productions together constitute a cross-generic, cross-textual dialogue or a multiplicity of dialogues, in which the Russian twentieth century is imaginatively interrogated through the representation of the female experience.
before, during, and after the revolution of 1917. In this dialogic sense, the poet and the writer are not just fellow-artists, but co-authors of a moving narrative of female suffering, love, and redemption.


