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INTRODUCTION

KARIN SARSENOV

Over the course of Nina Sadur's career as an author, the position of the writer has changed dramatically in Russia. "Engineers of the human soul" reflecting "the consciousness of the people" have exchanged their illustrious garb for modest garments, more suitable for the blue-collar labor of surviving in an overpopulated cultural arena. Literature with high artistic ambitions has become socially marginalized by popular fiction, TV serials, and home video on the one hand, and by religious and political engagement on the other. Sadur therefore belongs to a generation that spent its youth struggling to enter the ivory tower of Literature, was rejected because of "unseemly" originality, and finally reached maturity only to witness this tower's ignominious collapse.

Except for a brief period during perestroika, when her formerly unpublishable plays attracted large audiences in Moscow theaters, Sadur has remained a writer at the margins in all senses: as a provincial in Moscow, as a woman in the male dominated cultural sphere, as an outsider of the literary groupings during Stagnation, and, most importantly, as a writer whose concerns lie precisely on the periphery of social community and empirical reality. Even her occasional forays into popular culture as a scriptwriter show her predilection for the liminal. Her most recent public appearance was in the credits of *Takcycmka* [*The Woman Taxi Driver*], a prime time TV serial in twelve parts (broadcast in 2004), whose heroine roams the Moscow streets after her profession—organizer of political celebrations at a house of pioneers—evaporates.

Due to Sadur's emphatic incompatibility with the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, the bulk of her work was published only in the 1990s. At that time she was drawn, unwillingly, into the battle between the "realists" and the "postmodernists," neither of whom impressed her. She belonged to the sizable group of authors uninterested in theoretical and analytical considerations, who avoided labels, theses, and manifestoes. Mark Lipovetsky (2000) has proposed the term "neo-sentimentalism" to describe this "manhole" between realism and postmodernism. Its representatives (Lipovetsky mentions Timur Kibirov, Evgenii Kharitonov, Liudmila Ulitskaia, Marina Palei, Galina Scherbakova) demonstrate the possibility of a literature that questions the capacity of language to capture a fragmented social reality yet avoids the intertextual playfulness of postmodernism. The "sentimentalism" of this literature consists in a heightened attention to corporeality, whereby suspicion towards the world of reason generates a confidence in the body and its sensations as bearers of meaning. Sadur's use of corporeality is rather idiosyncratic insofar as her work subjects physical atrocities to an intertextual play with incantations and spells from Russian folklore. Nevertheless, her professed distrust of rationality and her belief in the spiritual meaning of bodily functions certainly ally her with the neo-sentimentalists as described by Lipovetsky.

Born Nina Nikolaevna Kolesnikova in 1950 in Novosibirsk, and raised by her mother, Sadur never felt socially vulnerable, for the reputation of her father, Nikolai Perevalov—a renowned poet and a hero of WWII—shielded the family.¹ His poet's salary enabled him to pay generous alimony, but his bohemian mode of existence prevented him from participating in family

¹ All biographical information in this article is retrieved from Nina Sadur in a recorded interview, 24 Nov. 2004.

life. Sadur drew closer to him in her teens, and adopted the same lifestyle for herself: after finishing school, instead of entering higher education, she spent her time with her circle of poets-friends: Ivan Chigov, Aleksandr Denisenko, Anatolii Makovskii, and Ivan Zelenin. She subsequently became a member of Il'ia Foniakov's "литро" (literary association),² which facilitated her access to print, for the main editor of the journal *Сибирские огни* [*Siberian Fires*] belonged to the group. Sadur made her literary debut on its pages in 1974 with the unpretentious story "На работу с песней мы идем" ["We Go to Work with a Song"], followed by the *novella* *Это мое окно* [*This is My Window*] in 1977, both describing a young girl's introduction to adult life.

Novosibirsk appears frequently in her oeuvre: as the provincial town to which it is impossible to return (*Новое знакомство* [*A New Acquaintance*], "Что-то откроется" ["Something will Open"]) or as the site of warm, safe childhood in a snowy landscape (*Сад* [*The Garden*], *Вечная мерзлота* [*Permafrost*]). The experience of a fatherless upbringing is also commented on, for example, in Larisa's words in *Новое знакомство*:

Это только Рогачевы говорили, что наша мама дрянная гулящая, а мы неизвестно кто – кто наши папки? Где они? Что с нас будет? Ужасно их волновало – что с нас будет. А это потому они так говорили, что у них самих, кроме денег, ничего никогда не было, а у нашей мамы и красота была, и платье с черным бантиком, и любовники, и мы, мы у нее были! (34)³

² See Stepanov (1990) for more information about literary Novosibirsk during the Thaw.

³ "Only the Rogachevs kept saying that our Mom was a fast girl, and God knows who we were—who were our Dads? Where were they? What would become of us? They were terribly worried about that. And they kept saying so, because they had nothing except for money, but our Mom had beauty, and a dress with a black bow, and lovers, and moreover, she had us!" (All translations are mine, K.S.)

But there are also darker images to be found. In *Это мое окно*, a passage with strong autobiographical parallels describes the traumatic experience of having a father who officially is a hero, but in everyday life is an alcoholic and wife-batterer:

Тесная комната, в которой они жили втроем, поздний вечер, пьяный смех отца, мама, мечущаяся по комнате с растрепанными волосами и горящие спички ... Отец зажигал их и бросал в мамины волосы. [...] А потом Тане пришлось научиться врать. Врать было стыдно, но так надо было почему-то. Она поняла—герои не такие, как папа. Но папа как раз был самый настоящий герой—у него была медаль "За отвагу." (59)⁴

At the age of twenty-one Sadur married a fellow poet, Oleg Gareevich Sadur, an ethnic Tatar, who after their divorce became the model for the demonic Dyrdybai in the novel *Сад*. Sadur herself claims to be Russian, dismissing suggestions that she is Tatar or Jewish. She traces her genealogy to Tambov on one side, and to Old Believers on the other. Her work teems with colorful pictures of non-Russians, pictures that emphasize their otherness, and evoke associations with earlier Oriental portraits by Russian Romanticists (Layton 1994) or the philosophical racism expressed by Vladimir Solov'ev and his followers (Barta 29). When asked in an interview to comment on this issue, Sadur made a strong statement of her rights as an artist:

Я же художник, я же отличаю людей. Он совершенно другой, у него другие повадки, другие манеры. Это целая палитра красок. Конечно же я это использую. Это целый мир, непостижимый. [...] А мне интересно все о

⁴ "A narrow room where they lived the three of them, a late evening, Father's drunken laughter, Mom, running around the room with tousled hair and lighted matches ... Father lighted them and threw them at Mom's hair [...] Then Tania had to learn how to lie. She was ashamed of lying, but she had to, for some reason. She understood that heroes are not like Dad. But Dad was as much a hero you could be—he had a medal 'for Bravery.'"

нем, все, какой он есть. Почему я должна сюсюкать над ним, если у него есть какие-то черты, которые мне неприятны. А те черты, которые мне приятны, я тоже описываю. Сюсюканье—это как раз лицемерная сторона расизма.⁵

In 1973 Sadur gave birth to a daughter, Ekaterina. The experience of childbearing surfaces as a recurring contradictory motif in Sadur's work. Traditionally, the bodily processes of conception, pregnancy, and delivery have served as the emblems of womanhood, while simultaneously being tabooed, and therefore narratively underrepresented in Western culture. In Sadur's work they are revealed in all their complexity, with a sharp focus on their emotional and spiritual aspects.

The contradictory experience of witnessing the miracle of a budding life on the one hand, and, on the other, of harboring an alien body within one's own becomes a matter of exceeding narrative intensity in her work. In *Это мое окно*, the latter feeling dominates:

Дело в том, что она не знала, хочет ли она ребенка. Почему-то считалось, что надо обязательно его хотеть. Как можно хотеть кого-то *незнакомо*? [...] Для всех, даже для Ленки, она перестала существовать как просто Таня, она для них стала сосудом, оболочкой для кого-то, чьего лица никто не знал. (66f)⁶

In the novella, Tania consistently substitutes strange, randomly chosen people for those who mean most to

⁵ "I am an artist, I distinguish among people. He is totally different, he has different habits, different manners. It's a whole palette of colors. Of course I make use of it. It's a whole world, inconceivable. [...] But I am interested in everything about him, everything, what he's like. Why do I have to pussy-foot around it if he has some traits I don't like. I also describe the traits I don't like. Pussyfooting is really the hypocritical side of racism." Recorded interview 24 Nov. 2004.

⁶ "The thing was that she didn't know whether she wanted a baby. For some reason everybody thought that you had to want one. How could you possibly want somebody *unknown*? [...] For everybody, even for Lenka, she ceased existing as simply Tania, for them she became a vessel, a cover for somebody, whose face nobody knew." (Emphasis as in Sadur)

her. Consequently, her period of pregnancy is related as a story of friendship with *another child*, with whom she gets acquainted by chance in a backyard. When the baby appears, it has a "strange, vaguely familiar face," and is immediately abandoned to be brought up by granny. One discerns the same kind of estrangement in the novel *Caд*, where the pregnant body through displacement becomes an expanding bubble stuck to the radiator.

The conflict between incompatible desires spurred by pregnancy—to be loved for one's own sake and to care for the unborn—organizes the peripeteia of the 1987 play *Пока живые* [*While Still Alive*]. A young couple visit their old relatives in the countryside, inviting them to their city apartment as volunteer nannies to their expected baby. The couple's entrance into this other realm of superstition, poverty, and illiteracy crudely jolts them out of their well-arranged life and modes of thought. The young wife's confrontation with one of the women who is skilled in magic leads her to acknowledge her strong desire for passionate love, and her readiness to sacrifice her child to that end. As in the story "Witch's Tears" (commented on in the contributions by Nadya Peterson and Sophia Wisniewska), the sorceress proves to be the narrative's most authoritative protagonist, whose concern is primarily for the unborn child:

Ты сейчас его носишь, ты тихая должна ходить. В тебе кровь сейчас тихая, сытная, питательная дитю твоему. А зажгу я тебя? Чё будет? (21)⁷

A similar concern is attributed to the half-witted Tikusia in the play *Любовные люди* [*Amorous Peo-*

⁷ "You're carrying him now, you have to walk around quietly. The blood in you is quiet, nourishing, nutritious for your child. But if I set you on fire? What'll happen?"

ple, 1979].⁸ Her mental disorder is manifested in her nocturnal conversations with a three-year-old child burning in napalm, whose image she sees in a magazine: she carries the illusory child and imagines a reversed birth:

Прижмись ко мне теперь и не дыши, растворясь во мне
и я тебя никогда не рожу, насовсем спрячу ото всех и
ты будешь в безопасности. (166)⁹

Again, the peripeteia of the play involves the fate of a child: Tikusia's distant Vietnamese has a more palpable counterpart in the son of their neighbor, Uncle Степа. Tikusia's heightened sensitivity gives her intuitive knowledge about Uncle Степа's crime: he has forced his wife to abandon her child from her first marriage in an orphanage, a secret that is revealed in the last scene. The boy's dysfunctional upbringing has resulted in a life in and out of prison, and Tikusia's desire to bring him back to the womb suddenly seems rational. If in *Пока живые* the woman's hesitation to merge her body and life with strange people presents a challenge to motherhood, in *Любовные люди* reluctant fatherhood constitutes the main threat to the child. In both plays, the destructive and procreative forces are monitored by the indeterminate figure of the mad-woman/witch/healer.

⁸ This strange name might be borrowed from the fox-demon Tikusa in the Japanese author Jun Ishikawa's short story "Asters" (1961). In spite of her demonic nature, she is able to initiate the hero into the mystery of self-sacrificing love. Ishikawa's story is based in Japanese mythology, where the fox spirit Kitsune-Tsuki is believed to enter women's bodies through fingernails and the breast and make them speak in strange voices. Kitsune-Tsuki is also the name of this state, which translates as "fox lunacy" (Roberts 65). Kitsune-Tsuki has many features in common with the ailment of the *кликуньи* (shriekers) in the Russian folk religion, which forms an important backdrop to several stories and plays by Sadur, as I argue in my contribution to this volume.

⁹ "Cuddle up against me now and don't breathe, dissolve in me and I'll never give birth to you, I'll hide you from everybody and you'll be safe."

However, despite the clearly declared feelings of alienation in connection with childbirth, the mystic power of life-giving motherhood is present to an equal extent in Nina Sadur's oeuvre. In "Запрещено—все" ["All is Forbidden"] the untouchable sacredness of a mother with her newborn baby in a pram is set off against the saturnalia taking place in the basement of her house. Here, the voice of the newborn child transforms into a shield, capable of protecting the vulnerable, unmarried mother:

и она сделала самое лучшее—не стала ни с чем
бороться, особо заботиться о жизни, стала
вслушиваться в дальний, пока еще тихий голос, щека к
щеке со своей новорожденной Аней. [...] Она была
тверда, неколебима, сбить, уничтожить, высмеять ее
было невозможно. Она могла стать грозной и изгнать
всякую нечисть.¹⁰

As Inna Caron's contribution shows, Sadur's work conveys a strong involvement in the fate of children, and crimes against them have dire consequences.

In 1978 Sadur enrolled in Viktor Rozov's theater seminar at the Gor'kii Literary Institute in Moscow. After a brief period in the Institute's dormitory, she moved with her family to a dacha in Vostriakovo, at commuting distance from Moscow. This was a productive time in her life: the plays *Чудная баба* [*The Odd Broad*, 1983], *Заря взойдет* [*Dawn Will Come*, 1982], *Любовные люди* (1979), and *Влюбленный дьявол* [*Devil in Love*, 1983] were written here, and this peripheral, isolated site figures in such short stories as "Девочка ночью" ["A Girl at Night," 1981] and *Юг* [*The South*, 1992]. None of the plays was published before

¹⁰ "and she acted in the best way possible—she didn't struggle with anything, she didn't care especially about life, she began listening attentively to the distant, still quiet voice, cheek to cheek with her new-born Ania. [...] She was hard, steadfast, it was impossible to bring her down, to destroy her, to make fun of her. She could become menacing and burn up all kinds of evil spirits."

perestroika, however, as editors judged their meta-physical bent and existential despair unsuitable for Soviet readers.

Sadur's next "home," a communal apartment close to *Патриаршие пруды* (Patriarch's Pond) in central Moscow, also spurred her creativity. Her neighbors across the corridor—according to witnesses, rather harmless people (Dark 2001)—are transformed in her prose into grotesque protagonists, such as Mar'ia Ivanovna, the victim of the Blue Hand in the eponymous story, the promiscuous Farida in *Алмазная долина* [*The Diamond Valley*] and the six-fingered Polugarmon' (Semi-Accordion!) in *Чудесные знаки спасенья* [*Miraculous Signs of Salvation*]. These works contribute to the large corpus of "communal art" in Soviet/Russian culture—artistic interpretations based on the provisional Soviet housing experiment that became a permanent tool of surveillance.¹¹ Whereas films such as *Покровские ворота* [*The Pokrovsky Gates*, 1982], *Все будет хорошо* [*All Will Be Fine*, 1995], and *Жизнь забавами полна* [*Life is Full of Amusements*, 2003] emphasize the atmosphere of mutual support and solidarity in these domiciles, and songs such as Bulat Okudzhava's "Черный кот" ["The Black Cat"] and Diuna's "Коммунальная квартира" ["The Communal Apartment"] center on their political aspects,¹² Sadur's primary concern is the violation of private space that constantly occurs within the permeable walls of the apartment.

¹¹ For an overview of "kommunalka-literature" see Boym (1994).

¹² Cf. Diuna: "Коммунальная квартира" (1996): "Эх, страна моя родная, край загадок и чудес / Где еще такое счастье, где еще такой процесс / под одной огромной крышей и просторней и светлей / Ни к чему нам дом отдельный - вместе жить нам веселей / Это коммунальная, коммунальная квартира / Это коммунальная, коммунальная страна."

Sadur was graduated from the Literary Institute in 1983 and began her travails as self-supporting mother and nonconformist author. Her work as a cleaning lady in the Pushkin Theater is reflected in stories such as "Замерли" ["They Froze"] and "Червивый сынок" ["Worm-Eaten Sonny"] in the cycle *Проникшие* [*Touched*]. Her daily interaction with her co-workers may be traced in the stylistics of *Проникшие*, whose discourse largely corresponds to the idiom of the female urban working class (see Julia Sagaidak Houkum's and Sophia Wisniewska's contributions).

Perestroika finally put an end to Sadur's literary invisibility. In 1987 the student theater at Moscow State University staged *Чудная баба*, and established theaters soon followed suit, including Lenkom (Lenin Komsomol Theater) and the Ermolov Theater. In 1989 she published her first collection of plays, also titled *Чудная баба*, which contains the bulk of her texts written during her years in obscurity.

By late perestroika Sadur had managed to exchange her four rooms in the *коммуналка* (communal apartment) for an individual apartment on Nikitskii Boulevard, in the "house of the polar explorers," close to Nikolai Andreev's Gogol monument and next to the mansion where Gogol burnt the second part of *Dead Souls*. Like the more mundane localities of her earlier years, these historical sites inevitably made their way into her works. Gogol's statue figures as a silent witness and interpreter of the lives of the homeless in *Сад* (1997), and as an unfortunate object of children's mockery in *Юз*. Gogol is also a cherished source for her stage adaptations (see Nadya Peterson's article in this volume). Built in 1935 to accommodate the heroes of the Soviet polar expeditions, Nikitskii Boulevard no. 9 witnessed the atrocities of Stalinist persecutions, and in *Вечная мерзлота* Sadur vividly transforms it into a basement populated by starving, dislocated old-

erly people (2002; see Sara Schwartz's contribution in this volume).

In "Старик и шапка" ["The Old Man and the Hat"] written in 1993, the captivating name of the house generates a meditation on Russia's contemporary history:

Это у всего нашего народа однажды запросили радостных
верящих сил на тысячу лет вперед, разом и без
отдачи. И народ радостно отдал, и полярник полетел в
ботиночках, и хрупкие его ноги сдавил нежный холод
Заполярья, и кремлевские звезды вскипели рубиновой
кровью, и высокомерные салюты гремели в зеленом
небе, и мертвец хохотал в мавзолее, и бедняцкое
счастье сверкало (Sadur 2000, 381).¹³

This attempt to capture the Soviet experience is elaborated in the novel *Сад*, where the Kremlin similarly appears as personified evil, in images associated with the Snow Queen's enchanted kingdom in H. C. Andersen's tale, and Morozko, the anthropomorphized Father Frost in Russian fairy tales.

During the nineties Sadur turned to fiction: her first prose collection, *Ведьмины слезки* [*Witch's Tears*], was published by Glagol in 1994, and in 1997 the volume *Сад* appeared in Vologda, sponsored by the businessman German Titov. The limited circulation and admittedly poor typography of the latter collection presumably explain why most novels and stories in it have been republished in *Чудесные знаки* [*Miraculous Signs*, 2000] and *Злые девушки* [*Wicked Girls*, 2003]. Sadur's prose of the nineties is distinguished by an increasing interest in linguistic experimentation

¹³ "Once they required happy, believing energy from our people, that would suffice for thousand years ahead, at once and without reimbursement. And the people happily gave what was required, and the polar explorer departed dressed in boots, and his fragile feet pressed down the delicate cold of the polar area, and the Kremlin stars boiled up in ruby-colored blood, and arrogant fireworks thundered in the green sky, and the dead man laughed in the Mausoleum, and the poverty-struck happiness sparkled."

amidst her continued engagement in the folkloric and supernatural. If the stories in *Проникшие* (published in 1990) were enigmatic due to their hints at an unknown reality (though narrated in a simple, straightforward manner), the novels *Сад* and *Немец* and the collection *Бессмертники* [*The Immortals*] approach this reality using deliberately obscure narrative strategies, which associate them with the aesthetics of early modernism.

Sadur's most recent original publication, *Вечная мерзлота* (2002), includes the novella by that title, which receives in-depth analysis by two of the contributors to this volume (Inna Caron and Sara Schwartz). According to Sadur, this novella is the book's sole *raison d'être*: the other texts—including three erotic stories previously published in pornographic magazines—were added to make for a book-length manuscript. As Michelle Kuhn's contribution to this volume shows, Sadur's erotic stories are complex enough to stimulate a reading in which Soviet and Russian sexuality in general may be discussed.

Sadur did not abandon her former profession as a dramatist, however. In 1999 a new collection of plays was published (*Обморок* [*The Faint*], also sponsored by Titov), and in 2001 one of them, *Брат Чичиков* [*Brother Chichikov*], had great success in a staging by Mark Zakharov at Lenkom. That year the Pushkin Theater, where she formerly worked as a cleaning lady, performed *Зовите Печориным* [*Call Me Pechorin*] based on Lermontov's novel.

For many women authors, writing scripts for Russian light TV entertainment has proved a welcome source of income, and Sadur has benefited from this boom. In 2002 the serial *Ростов-на-Дону* [*Rostov-Papa*] included two parts based on her scenarios, and in 2003 she headed the group that wrote the script for *Таксистка*.

Sadur's work is situated in the twilight zone between a readily recognizable empirical reality and "the other side"—an indefinable reality that Sadur conjures up with her densely metaphorical and often very poetic language. Even if critics sometimes situate her among the postmodernists, she herself characterizes her prose as a "realism of the illusory" (Sadur, "О реализме ..." 1997). She constructs her role as author in a way reminiscent of the shaman's: her sensibility enables her to approach other worlds that are enriching yet dangerous. The process of writing thus constitutes a struggle with the unnamed forces populating these worlds.

The present volume comprises polemical readings of Sadur's stories and plays, with each contribution followed by a discussant's response. This structure foregrounds and challenges the inevitable subjectivity of literary interpretation: when readings are confronted with counter-readings or with inspired supplementary comments, the contours of the text's core begin to emerge.

If contributors' attention to the cycle *Проникшие* seems disproportionate, one can easily explain the reasons for singling out this text. It not only is among the few works by Sadur translated into English, but was also considered indispensable by the Russian editors selecting the most representative texts of the 1990s for the volume *Антология современного рассказа* [*Anthology of the Contemporary Short Story* 2002]. Both Peterson and Wisniewska emphasize the gynocentric character of this collection of urban folklore: folk magic constituted a meaningful system of belief in a metaphysically impoverished Soviet reality, offering solutions to problems that women frequently encounter. Here, Peterson's close reading of the text aptly complements Wisniewska's stylistic analysis. Their combined observations prompt Benjamin Sutcliffe to develop the notion of *быт* (everyday life) as an

important feature of Russian women's contemporary literature. Houkom examines the cycle in terms of narratology, which facilitates a stringent discussion of the cycle's structure on a number of levels. Irina Makoveeva uses the three available English translations of "Червивый сынок" in *Проникшие* to theorize about the art of translation, and to reach a deeper understanding of the text. Irina Reyn, herself a professional writer, responds to these rather technical explorations with an eloquent "variation on a theme."

Whereas *Проникшие* represents Sadur's "early prose," most of the stories investigated in Karin Sarsenov's essay—*Юз*, "Девочка ночью," "Нос" ["The Nose"], and *Сад*—belong to her later, formally more experimental period. Sarsenov proposes reading the recurrent marginal female protagonist in Sadur's oeuvre as based on the historical experience of the *кликунья*—the rural female demoniac. She also applies a poststructuralist framework in order to understand the question of madness in these texts. Sarsenov's arguments are forcefully disputed by Helena Gosילו, who suggests the hermeneutical benefits of replacing the *кликунья* with the *юродивая*—the fool in God from Orthodox tradition—and of replacing a poststructuralist framework with a religious one informed by Bakhtin.

The disturbing novella *Вечная мерзлота* contains a comprehensive sampling of the acts Freud attributed to the Oedipal logic of the human unconscious—incest, parricide, and castration—plus some of the symptoms allegedly resulting from these unconscious processes, such as fetishism and masochism. Schwartz's choice of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory as her interpretive tool is therefore a productive one. Her essay does not limit itself to a mechanical pinpointing of stages in psychosexual development, however, for her concluding proposition—to read the story "as a criticism of a sex-crazed free-market post-Soviet

culture, which relies (at least in certain spheres) on psychobabble and theory mongering” (11)—reveals a satirical vein in a text that at first glance seems little more than a rather distasteful catalogue of anti-social behavior. In his discussion of Schwartz’s analysis, Gerald McCausland finds further evidence of a satiric stance in the text’s disrespectful use of the idols of Soviet pedagogical thinking.

Whereas Schwartz focuses on the male protagonist of the story, Caron investigates his female counterpart, Lena, a teenager whose malnutrition prevents her acquiring secondary sex characteristics. Lena’s arrested development prompts Caron to compare her to other images of children in adult literature, images that since the age of Dickens may be classified as belonging to either an angelic or a demonic subgroup. Caron argues that Lena’s combination of virginal untouchability and vampirism disrupts the previous black-and-white dichotomy and locates the child in a textual subject position. By tracing the association of stasis/snow with the sacred in Russian literature and by connecting Lena’s untouchability to the words uttered by the resurrected Christ at his grave—*noli me tangere*—Goscilo counters with a reading of the text as a modern revision of the Virgin birth and its attendant narrative of salvation.

The story “Тухлой час” [“The Late Hour”] was originally published in the Russian *Playboy* in 2001. Although Sadur explains that lack of funds prompted her debut within the pornographic genre, a delight in confronting mainstream morality certainly also played its role. Yet Sadur could not refrain from ridiculing her voyeuristic, masturbatory reader by letting him take center stage in the story, as Kuhn observes in her essay. Although the male protagonist, Lesha, ultimately emerges as a bleak persona in his shortsighted occupation by the window, Kuhn regards him as a hero of post-Soviet adaptation within the private sphere.

McCausland takes issue with this last proposition, pointing out that Lesha has no need to adapt to post-Soviet sexual practices, as his Soviet ones could be just as extravagant, the only difference being the ban on their articulation.

Timothy Schlak frames the play *Красный парадиз* [*Red Paradise*] in the Bakhtinian concept of carnival. A superficial reading of the play yields all the required elements of carnival: billingsgate, reversal of hierarchies, and a focus on bodily orifices and apertures. However, Schlak convincingly argues for a limited applicability of this concept: given the lack of regeneration, one could classify the play as a modern, satirical carnival, as defined by Bakhtin. In her response, Goscilo develops Schlak’s identification of satirical elements and interprets the play as a juxtaposition of two utopias: the illusory Soviet version and the paradise promised in the Gospels. Finally, Irina Reyn concludes the volume with her own, artistic response to the cycle *Проникшие*, attaching special importance to the story “Миленький, рыженький.”

This volume maps a space within which the oeuvre of Nina Sadur can be addressed, conceptualized, and disputed. According to the contributors, this space is overtly gynocentric: the fictional world construes women’s traditionally downplayed concerns as crucial and sometimes fateful. The essays invite readers to confront Sadur’s texts, joining in her profound explorations of the metaphysical periphery—*окраина*, the literary examination of which has become the hallmark of Sadur’s oeuvre.

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