

The Gallop, The Wolf, The Caress: Eros and Nature in *The Tragic Menagerie*

JANE COSTLOW

An extraordinary book—*The Tragic Menagerie*, the last book of L. D. Zinov'eva-Annibal. . . . We cannot imagine what she might have given Russian literature.

Blok

Lydia Dmitrievna Zinov'eva-Annibal (1866–1907) has been memorialized in Russian cultural history in two ways. As the second wife of Vyacheslav Ivanov, she appears in memoirs of Russian Symbolism as one of the central figures in his life. She was central to the ambiance and ferment of “The Tower,” the Ivanovs’ apartment in St. Petersburg, their Wednesday evening center of Symbolist conversation and creative self-presentation. She was the great love of Ivanov’s life, the living embodiment of the “Dionysian” forces he imagined might rejuvenate the world, the woman whose early death inspired *Cor ardens*, one of his greatest cycles of poetry.¹ She appears in memoirs of the period as an intense figure in a crimson caftan, as the “earth” of his soaring abstractions, fin-de-siècle variant of the Wife of the Great Poet, her life an appendage and echo of his.²

Zinov'eva-Annibal is also remembered as the author of a work of infamous reputation, *Thirty-three Abominations (Tridtsat'-tri uroda)*. Published in 1907 (the year of her death), the work seems to embody and exploit all the excesses and clichés of Decadent aestheticism. An account in diary form of a lesbian love affair, the story is a hothouse rendering of eroticism, sensuality, the cult of the body, and the lust to

¹ For a reading of *Cor ardens* that pays particular attention to the impact of Lydia Dmitrievna's death see Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante* (Cambridge, Eng., 1989), 173–228.

² T. L. Nikol'skaia, in “Tvorcheskii put' L. D. Zinov'evoi-Annibal,” *Blokovskii sbornik (A. L. Blok i revoliutsiia 1905 goda)*, 7 (Tartu, 1988), compiles accounts that suggest the impression of eccentricity conveyed by Zinov'eva-Annibal on first acquaintance, an impression subsequently displaced by a sense of her warmth. “She was considerably closer to real life than Ivanov himself, who seemed not to exist for mundane matters” (Johannes von Guenter, *Ein Leben im Ostwind*, quoted by Nikol'skaia, “Tvorcheskii put',” 125). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

control. The work has been anthologized, translated, criticized both by her contemporaries and ours; yet our readings of it seem as doomed to a sterile hothouse as the affections of her heroines.³ The story suggests that visual representations become abominations, distortions of an essence that is changing and fluid, perhaps inarticulable. The canvas deceives. Identity, suggests Zinov'eva-Annibal, demands a narrative, a temporal, rather than static, form. But what narrative do we need, if we are to apprehend and understand *her*?

The narrative that I will offer for our reading and reflection is one published in the same year as *Thirty-three Abominations*, 1907. *The Tragic Menagerie* (*Tragicheskii zverinets*) is a work that begs and betrays generic classification, a work that gives an account of self-in-process, a work that narrates "childhood-girlhood-youth." It is Zinov'eva-Annibal's greatest work, the work in which she was most richly in control of her talents. It is also a work in which the fate of an "elemental" nature in society is placed firmly at the center. We are asked in this work to meditate on the fate of animals, but also on the fate of the animal within the human, on the intersections of nature and culture, the wild and the tame. It is a work in which Zinov'eva-Annibal may respond most intensely to the searchings of her own heart, but it is also, quite wonderfully, a work that resonates with the intense longings of late twentieth-century life.

By the time she embarked on the writing of *The Tragic Menagerie* Lydia Zinov'eva-Annibal was a writer of some experience.⁴ In 1904 she had published a symbolist play, "Rings" ("Kol'tsa"), which examined the complex love relationships among a group of men and women; she had begun work on the novel *The Torches* (*Plamenniki*), which remained unfinished and unpublished; she had published short stories (the first published in 1889 under her first married name, Shvarsalon) and critical articles on André Gide, Henry James and Georgette LeBlanc (French feminist and wife of Maurice Maeterlinck). Her vocation as a writer had become evident only in her thirties, however. She was born into an affluent St. Petersburg family that traced its lineage on her mother's side to Pushkin.⁵ She was schooled first at home and then in girls' gymnasia, from which she was twice expelled. She studied for a time at the "Bestuzhev Courses" in St. Petersburg, university courses for women that were at one point denounced as a "veritable sewer of anarchist disease."⁶ At

³ A translation into English by Sam Cioran is available in *The Silver Age of Russian Culture: An Anthology*, ed. Carl Proffer and Ellendea Proffer (Ann Arbor, 1975). For a recent critical reading of the work's exploitation of decadent clichés of lesbian sexuality see Diana Lewis Burgin, "Laid Out in Lavender: Perceptions of Lesbian Love in Russian Literature and Criticism of the Silver Age, 1893–1917," in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, ed. Jane Costlow, Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 182–84.

⁴ For a comprehensive bibliography of Zinov'eva-Annibal's work see Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal and Mary Zirin, eds., *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 754–55.

⁵ For biographical information on Zinov'eva-Annibal see *ibid.*; and Nikol'skaia, "Tvorcheskii put'." There is extensive information on Lydia Dmitrievna in Olga Deschartes's introduction to the *Collected Works of Viacheslav Ivanov*: "Vvedenie," in V. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Brussels, 1971). Pamela Davidson's *Viacheslav Ivanov: A Reference Guide* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1996), provides information on memoirs that include references to Zinov'eva-Annibal.

⁶ Prince Meshchersky, quoted by Richard Stites in *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*:

age eighteen she married her history tutor, K. S. Shvarsalon, a self-styled radical who inspired her interest in social causes (and provided her with illegal literature), but proved less interested in living out the consequences of his beliefs than she was.⁷ She left her husband and took their children to Europe, where in 1893 she met Vyacheslav Ivanov—a meeting that became for both of them a creative watershed.⁸ It was after meeting Ivanov that Zinov'eva-Annibal began to write in earnest; when they returned to Russia in 1905 their apartment in St. Petersburg became a crucible of intellectual and creative life for Russian symbolism.

We get some sense of Zinov'eva-Annibal's character from the reminiscences of her daughter, Lydia Ivanova.⁹ While the memoir focuses on Vyacheslav Ivanov, Lydia's father (its subtitle is "Kniga ob otsse"), its early pages sketch a portrait of Zinov'eva-Annibal as a woman of passionate commitments, a life-long socialist with an anarchic disregard for propriety.¹⁰ Ivanova recounts the family's annual springtime walks to gather huge bouquets of wildflowers in Swiss meadows marked "Propriété privée. Défense d'entrer sous peine d'amende." The pleasure of the flowers, Ivanova suggests, was heightened for her mother by the sense of danger and trespass. In these same pages Ivanova recalls her mother's fine voice as she accompanied herself at the piano. The daughter galloped as the mother played; the sessions transformed the drawing room into a playful, elemental space. "I sensed in [mother's playing of Schubert's "Forest King"] some kind of unbridled horses and galloped through the rooms in ecstasy at its rythm. Mama didn't protest [the galloping]—perhaps she felt it, too."¹¹

Something of those unbridled horses—and what Ivanova calls her mother's "sunny life force" ("zhiznennaia solnechnaia sila")—are evident in the work that was to be the final publication of her life, *The Tragic Menagerie*. There are a number of motifs one might trace in Zinov'eva-Annibal's life, ways in which one might make sense of her identity as a woman, parallels one might draw with other female cultural figures in Russia. There is the conventional education and her rebellion against it; the influence of populist ideals; the crucial milieu of Ivanov and symbolism; the "decadent" sexuality she depicts in *Thirty-three Abominations*; her relationships with in-

Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930 (Princeton, 1978), 168. Lydia Dmitrievna's daughter describes her mother's enrollment in these courses as tantamount to rebellion: "For mother—a young woman from an aristocratic, monarchist family—just attending such courses represented rebellion and a challenge to the society in which she had grown up." It was at these courses that Lydia befriended Mariia Mikhailovna Zamiatina, who in later years lived with the Ivanovs and took over much of the responsibility for the children's upbringing. See Lydia Ivanova, *Vospominaniia: Kniga ob otse* (Moscow: Kultura, 1990), 14.

⁷ Lydia Ivanova goes so far as to suggest that Shvarsalon's socialist enthusiasms were a pose designed to attract a bride "with money and high connections" (Ivanova, *Vospominaniia*, 16).

⁸ "I would say that we found God" (*Ia by skazal, my obreli Boga*), Vyacheslav Ivanov recalled, "and it was not just in me that the poet for the first time discovered and acknowledged himself, but in her as well" (S. A. Vengerov, *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, quoted in Nikol'skaia, "Tvorcheskii put'").

⁹ Lydia Ivanova was her daughter by Vyacheslav Ivanov. Lydia Dmitrievna had three children by Shvarsalon: Sergei, Vera and Alexander. After Lydia's death Vera Shvarsalon married her step-father in 1913. For an account of their relationship see Davidson, *Poetic Imagination*, 120–23.

¹⁰ Ivanova, *Vospominaniia*, 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

tellectual mentors (Shvarsalon, her tutor; Ivanov himself) who may have both enabled and encumbered her process of self-discovery. But it is in the “sunny life force” that her daughter recalled, and in the unbridled horses of *The Tragic Menagerie*, that I believe we find Zinov’eva-Annibal’s own credo as a writer, a woman, a woman-writer.¹² Her own contemporaries recognized the work as her strongest, the work in which she was, they felt, “finding her voice.”¹³ For if her earlier work occasionally seemed mired in derivative and turgid symbolism, in *The Tragic Menagerie* she galloped off in a different direction, to the tune of a different aesthetic, what one contemporary critic called “elemental realism” (*stikhinnyi realizm*).¹⁴ The work discovers its own poetic source, not in cultural refinement or the Symbolists’ “Tower,” but in the animal, the meadow, the erotic. One contemporary Russian critic has suggested that Zinov’eva-Annibal was “Russia’s Virginia Woolf,” a woman who pointed toward directions still untaken in Russian prose.¹⁵ Aleksandr Blok, in the passage cited above as epigraph,¹⁶ felt her death deprived Russian literature of inestimable riches. For this contemporary American reader, *The Tragic Menagerie* is a breathtaking example of the search for honesty and resolution in understanding eros and creativity, the earthly grounds of self and culture. For both Russian and American audiences she is a writer who deserves rereading.¹⁷

The Tragic Menagerie is subtitled by its author “a collection of stories”; Olga Deschartes, in her introduction to Vyacheslav Ivanov’s *Collected Works*, draws on *The Tragic Menagerie* for details of Zinov’eva-Annibal’s childhood;¹⁸ Anastasiia Chebotarevskaia assumed its “autobiographical character”;¹⁹ and Iurii Aikhenval’d, in a 1907 review, was drawn to compare *The Tragic Menagerie* with Tolstoy’s autobiographical trilogy: “This book is composed of memoirs of childhood and youth—though not with the naiveté and purity [*naivnosti i chistote*] which makes Tolstoy’s unfading pages so charming; rather, they are refracted through the strange, broken, not quite sincere spirit of contemporary woman.”²⁰

¹²In her review of Georgette LeBlanc’s *Le Choix de la vie*, Zinov’eva-Annibal focuses on the author’s “being in love with women” (*vliublennost’ v zhenshchinu*) as deeply revealing of the “soul of feminism.” It is in this emotional or erotic sense—rather than in the spirit of a more politicized feminism—that Lydia Dmitrievna’s own work is woman-centered. The review appeared in *Vesy*, 1, no. 8 (1904): 60–62.

¹³Anastasiia Chebotarevskaia, for example, closes her review with words of approval at Zinov’eva-Annibal’s turn toward realism, “closer to the true nature of her bright, strong style than the pretentious efforts at symbolism which deformed the interesting conception of *Thirty-three Abominations*” (*Obrazovanie*, 1907, no. 3:128). And Aleksandr Blok suggests that while in *Thirty-three Abominations* language controlled Zinov’eva-Annibal (*slovo vladela pisatel’nitsei*), in *The Tragic Menagerie* it is the author who is in control of her words (*pisatel’nisa ovladela slovami*). See “Literaturnye itogi,” 226.

¹⁴G. Chulkov, reviewing *The Tragic Menagerie* in *Tovarishch*, quoted in Nikol’skaia, “Tvorcheskii put’,” 130.

¹⁵Mariia Mikhailova, personal communication, June 1995.

¹⁶“Literaturnye itogi 1907 goda,” reprinted in Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos’mi tomakh*, vol. 5 (Moscow–Leningrad, 1962), 226.

¹⁷The first re-edition of her collected works is being prepared in Moscow. My translation of *The Tragic Menagerie* will be published by Northwestern University Press in 1998.

¹⁸See note 5.

¹⁹See note 13.

²⁰Iu. Aikheval’d, “L. Zinov’eva-Annibal. Tragicheskii zverinets. Razskazy,” in *Russkaia mysl’*, 1907, no. 8:147.

These references pose two generic questions: the extent to which the stories may be read as a unified work; and the extent to which they are autobiographical. While *The Tragic Menagerie* may be compared with “pseudo-autobiographies”²¹ of earlier Russian tradition,²² it also may be profitably read in other generic contexts: as *Bildungsroman*, as spiritual journey, as the modernist *zhitie* of an elemental child, one in which a girl moves from the sacred spaces of childhood through alienation from her deepest self—an alienation associated with educational institutions and urban spaces—toward the epiphanic reimagination of self in nature.²³

To the extent that one may speak of “autobiographical” impulse, then, that impulse operates at the level of creative intuition and mediated structure. “Vera” is related to “Lydia” in complex and oblique ways. My intent here is not to delineate the extent to which specific aspects of the stories are or are not autobiographical, but to suggest instead the ways in which the stories constitute a cycle, a brilliantly composed and integral whole, informed by a series of tightly drawn, centrifugal motifs. Zinov’eva-Annibal refers to “rasskazy,” but these are stories that share a single heroine, have a consistent narrative tone, and display a unified if complex progression. Aikhenval’d read *The Tragic Menagerie* as a “fall” from Tolstoyan purity, a comparison that is worth entertaining: like Tolstoy’s trilogy, *The Tragic Menagerie* recounts both childhood and the genesis of adult sensibility. As we shall note, the elements that structure the young Tolstoy’s world and self—in particular nature and the mother—are submitted in Zinov’eva-Annibal’s text to the “tragic” refractions of a “strange, broken” spirit. Such refractions have their genesis, however, not in the “insincerity” of contemporary woman, as Aikhenval’d suggested, but in Zinov’eva-Annibal’s concerted movement beyond the idyllic, in a gesture of more complicated reconciliation.²⁴ These stories raise ethical questions regarding the relationship of

²¹ The term is Andrew Wachtel’s. He uses it to refer to a genre that derives in large part from Tolstoy’s *Childhood–Boyhood–Youth*, in which the author draws on aspects of his or her own childhood, but creates a fictional version of the self in the first-person child/narrator. Wachtel suggests, following Gary Saul Morson, that the pseudo-autobiography is a “boundary” genre, a notion which seems particularly appropriate in discussions of *The Tragic Menagerie*, where boundaries, both psychological and aesthetic, are multiple. See Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

²² Zinov’eva-Annibal uses an alternating perspective of older and younger self, with the latter predominating; the heroine’s name is Vera—not Lydia—a choice that suggests either allegory or premonition. Vera means “faith” in Russian; Vera (Shvarsalon) was also the daughter who “replaced” Lydia for Vyacheslav Ivanov. See Davidson, *Poetic Imagination*, 120–23.

²³ Annis Pratt discusses women’s use of *Bildungsroman* conventions in the nineteenth century, suggesting ways in which they contest the inevitability of women’s submission to accepted gender roles. Charlotte Rosenthal has referred to *The Tragic Menagerie* as a “spiritual journey,” a term also used by Rita Felski to speak of women’s narratives of transformation. Liudmila Dmitrieva, in private communication, suggested that Zinov’eva-Annibal’s work might be thought of as a modernist *zhitie*. Whichever generic designation one chooses, one would need to note the extent to which *The Tragic Menagerie* draws on but diverges from existing conventions. See Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction* (Bloomington, 1981); Charlotte Rosenthal, “Achievement and Obscurity: Women’s Prose in the Silver Age,” in *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, ed. Toby Clyman and Diana Greene (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), 163; and Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), chap. 4.

²⁴ Read against the Tolstoyan model, the work seems to support Mary Zirin’s conjecture of a different set of emphases in Russian women’s autobiographical writing. See Zirin, “Butterflies with Broken

humans to the natural world, and psychological questions regarding the impulse to violence. At the base of both ethics and psychology is the search for a place that will nurture the “animality” of body and spirit without constraining it.²⁵

The Tragic Menagerie has been most readily available to American readers in Temira Pachmuss’ important anthology of Silver Age women’s writing. While her excerpts from the cycle are of enormous value (they are what first entranced me and led me to the original), they give an imperfect sense of the whole, since she includes only stories drawn from the first half of the work.²⁶ The cycle begins with stories about the heroine Vera’s relationships to wild animals—bear cubs and a crane who are pets, bound wolves with whom she identifies, a pair of mules named Ruslan and Liudmila—but it also includes stories that explore her growing consciousness of class privilege (“The Centaur Princess” [“Tsarevna-kentavr”]), and reaches its crisis in the lengthy “The Devil” (“Chert”), an account of Vera’s time in a boarding school.²⁷ In “The Centaur Princess” Zinov’eva-Annibal retains motifs of the heroine’s immersion in the natural world, her fantasies of being “half-horse, half-girl,” but they are interwoven with scenes of hunger and abundance, so that acts of giving food and eating become laden with political significance. In “The Devil” Vera is transformed into a classic demon of decadence, fascinated with whips (in the “year of the whip, without God”) and erotic games, engaging in theft, deceit and torture. The author takes her readers through the hell of adolescence (in tones indebted to the culture of Russian decadence) en route to a vision of paradise regained, when the expelled girl returns to nature, and we return to nature with a more complex vision.²⁸ The cycle closes with the story “Will” [“Volia”], in which Vera, now eighteen years old, resolves to embark on a life of love and struggle. Her quest is inspired both by revulsion at Russia’s inertia and misery (she confronts in this story the corpse of a childhood friend, a peasant woman dead in childbirth) and by her own insatiable longing for freedom.

The narrative movement of *The Tragic Menagerie* is in some sense risky since the tales of boarding school violence try the reader’s nerve; we are as separated from the bliss of childhood as is Vera, the heroine. But if we avoid that tortuous separation we lose the energy and breadth in Zinov’eva-Annibal’s vision of release. My intent in what follows is to begin with the “sacred spaces” of childhood—and the problems of violence and human intervention that are raised there; and then to move to the cycle’s climax, in which adolescent violence finds its resolution in a new vision of nature. I will close with a brief return to the cycle’s midpoint, “The Centaur Prin-

Wings? Early Autobiographical Depictions of Girlhood in Russia,” in *Gender Restructuring in Russian Studies*, ed. Marianne Liljestrom, Eila Mantysaari and Arja Rosenholm (Helsinki: University of Tampere, 1993), 255–66.

²⁵ “Animality” is Dorothy Dinnerstein’s term. See note 53.

²⁶ Temira Pachmuss, ed., *Women Writers in Russian Modernism: An Anthology* (Urbana, 1978). Pachmuss includes “The Bear Cub,” “The Fledgling,” “The Wolves,” and “The Monster.”

²⁷ The stories are, in order, “Medvezhata,” “Zhuria,” “Volki,” “Glukhaia Dasha,” “Chudovishche,” “Moshka,” “Tsarevna kentavr,” “Chort,” and “Volia.”

²⁸ Dante was, of course, a crucially important text for Vyacheslav Ivanov; I use the terms “hell” and “paradise” intentionally, therefore, with some sense that Zinov’eva-Annibal is attempting her own account of redemptive journey in this narrative.

cess," where Zinov'eva-Annibal's concerns with eros, nurture, imagination, and justice seem most compellingly interwoven. It is here, I believe, that we find Zinov'eva-Annibal's most complex intuition of the radical possibilities of a different conception of ourselves in the natural world.

The "sacred space" of the heroine's childhood is her family's estate near the Baltic Sea, sacred less for its idyllic associations with nurturant nature than for its openness to a feral world of freedom.²⁹ This is a world that Vera later recalls as "without order or law," a world in which bear cubs clamber onto the veranda tea table to eat honey cakes and jam, and the mother does not object.³⁰ The first three stories of the collection form something of a block, united by their focus on wild animals' encounter with humans. "The Bear Cubs," "The Crane" and "The Wolves" each originate in the hunt: in the first two stories Vera's brother (called "The Wild Hunter" ["Dikii okhotnik"]) returns from hunting with animals he gives his sister. In "The Bear Cubs" the nursing cubs' mother has been killed; in "The Crane" the Wild Hunter brings home a bag of dead birds, a bag of dead rabbits, and a live baby crane. In "The Wolves" Vera, along with an assortment of governesses and local gentry, goes off to view the tsar's hunt as a kind of spectator sport, to witness the wounding and capture of wolves who will later be released for the tsar's entourage to kill. In each of these stories we touch on a realm of blood and violence and capture, but at least initially the world of the estate enables a freer, more elemental existence for the young girl.

The cubs and the crane become the girl's closest companions: she speaks of the bird as her "free friend, her pride." They run and roll and play together like the two animals they are: "I ran along the paths. Crane, flapping his wings, flew along between the trees. I lay down in the grass and Crane nipped me on my dress, pulled on my hair till it hurt, mumbling something incomprehensible and wheezy" (p. 24). Her play with the bear cubs is similarly physical: "In no time at all we were romping through the soft, fragrant grass. It smelled of spring earth and warm fur, and Mishka's warm breath right in my face made me laugh happily, as his flat, heavy paws padded over me." The bear cubs are "God's creatures," a gift from God (*bozhii dar*) (p. 11). They ramble onto the veranda of the family's country house sending the whole table flying. Vera's mother, herself described as "meek" (*krotkaia*), does not intervene.

One wants to read this girlhood in the context of what we know about girlhoods in the nineteenth century, what we think we know about the constraints that hemmed them in—constraints both metaphoric and literal, constraints of manner and body. Karolina Pavlova, writing in 1848, represents her heroine's late adolescence as severely restricted by maternal machinations, her body and imagination "corseted," her impulses to movement and freedom harnessed by a rhetoric of feminine weakness.³¹ And Nadezhda Durova must celebrate a "fortunate fall" from her mother's

²⁹ Pratt, in her discussion of the female novel of development, devotes considerable attention to the role of natural spaces in the "psychological sustenance" of young girls' sense of self (*Archetypal Patterns*, chap. 2).

³⁰ L. Zinov'eva-Annibal, *Tragicheskii zverinets* (St. Petersburg, 1907), 12. All translations are my own. Further citations to this work will be made in the body of the essay.

³¹ Cecily, the heroine of *A Double Life*, is reprimanded for galloping off; the narrator rues Cecily's habituation "to wearing her mind in a corset." See Karolina Pavlova, *A Double Life*, trans. Barbara Heldt (Oakland, 1986), 26.

world of drawing rooms and embroidery hoops into the arms and saddles of soldiers.³² Mothers in these narratives (as in Turgenev's novels of spirited women) are embodiments of order, not enablers of their daughters' aspirations. Zinov'eva-Annibal suggests a girlhood—at least in the summertime, at least in the country—virtually free of constraint, with a mother who encourages play and disruption rather than censoring it, who contributes to her daughter's sense that such animals, and their disruptions, are blessed by divine order: they are *bozhii dar*, not *neprilichno*. We are struck in these stories by the places Vera can go (to the stables, on a hunt, into the woods, boating on a pond by herself), and by the kinds of physical, sensory and imaginative freedom she experiences. As she grows older the girl will come to think of herself as a wandering princess (*kochevaia tsarevna*), but it is clear that her love of movement, her imagination and her physicality are grounded not in denied longings but in actual experience. This, in part, is why I call these childhood chapters "sacred space," a ground from which she grows.

But there is a darker side to the stories, suggested in their opening sentences, with their references to the hunt. Part of the darkness in the stories is the hunt itself, most fully represented and problematized in "The Wolves." The hunt in this story is associated not with the need for sustenance or protection, but with spectacle and diversion; the wolves are only wounded, to be released later for the "pleasures" of the tsar's party. At one particularly grisly moment the English governess, Miss Florry, expresses her disgust with the Russian hunt, comparing it unfavorably with England's more genteel traditions: "If one were on horseback, with a gun, I myself would shoot. But this way—it's unpleasant, pathetic" (p. 50). The point of Zinov'eva-Annibal's stories, however, is not to juxtapose genteel and "barbaric" cultures (the same governess refers to the Russians' "barbaric cruelty"), but to explore deeper kinships, kinships that are acknowledged in the unmediated encounter of humans and animals. The sententiousness of genteel society is repeatedly unmasked by Vera's looking animals in the eye. She sees wolves, the crane, even a swamp "monster" as kindred beings, capable of revealing to her something of herself. These moments of looking are the gestural equivalents of Zinov'eva-Annibal's narrative process, as the author looks unflinchingly at what will vitiate sentimental treatments of childhood and animals—just as the cycle contradicts the "naivete and purity" Aikhenval'd claimed to find in Tolstoy.

The most troubling darkness of *The Tragic Menagerie* exists then not merely in the cruelties of the hunt but in Vera herself. Each story relates an act of violence or neglect. In "The Bear Cubs" the grown cubs are released in the forest, only to be brutally killed by peasants who fear these half-tame, half-wild bears who come toward them. In "The Crane" Vera forgets to feed her crane, and discovers his body after three days, rotting and fetid in a bucket of water. In "The Wolves" the hunt itself is described as a ritual of violence and class, with the spectacle of the wolf's maimed body occasioning a moment of profound revelation for the girl. The girl's

³²The female cavalry soldier's closest companion is her horse; as Barbara Heldt wittily suggests, Durova's memoirs "are the ultimate girl-and-horse story." See Heldt, *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* (Bloomington, 1987), 83. Durova's memoirs are available in translation by Mary Zirin, *The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars* (Bloomington, 1988).

complicity with violence, and her own power to commit it, is made the central focus of “The Monster,” in which Vera brings home a jar of pond water, only to discover she has created a world where a “monster” is devouring tadpoles. Tormented by her role in their death, she nonetheless destroys the “monster” only *after* it has consumed all its prey. These stories present the world of unfettered girlhood as paradise with a worm in it, a worm of violence represented not merely as something “out there,” ritualized and separate, but as part of a landscape that Vera must untangle and understand.

Zinov’eva-Annibal’s narratives open up the question of what to make of the often violent and tragic results of human-natural interaction; they open that question through the interplay of voices within the stories, voices interwoven with the intense experiential language of the heroine herself. Mariia Mikhailova, in a recent essay on Zinov’eva-Annibal, has suggested that the author was largely “mono-vocal” in her creative work.³³ This designation may be apt in suggesting the focus of Zinov’eva-Annibal’s prose, its concentration on the “whirlwind of emotion” experienced by a single character, but it seems inadequate in describing the way her narratives contextualize those emotions.³⁴ The stories that open *The Tragic Menagerie* explore the heroine’s complex relations to the natural world in part through her apprehension of various voices, which represent traditional responses to and explanations of nature. Confounded by the violence she sees and performs despite her profound love for and connection to animals, Vera hears others’ accounts with sharply attentive ears. The tutor in “The Bear Cubs,” for example, offers a commentary on the bears’ death: “That’s what you get, when man meddles with the life of nature” (p. 18): a position that assumes fixed and firm boundaries (“the human” set off sharply from “nature”) which in practice are less easily drawn. Human intervention in nature predates the first word of the story, since the “Wild Hunter” (Vera’s brother) is arguably emblematic of the confusion of those two realms.³⁵ Even on other grounds it is a separation that Vera clearly will not accept, since she has benefitted from that “meddling” and the confusion of animal and human, discovering a kinship with wild things that goes far deeper than the rhetoric of caution. She turns then to her mother with the question that shakes her—“How could God permit it?” How can God have allowed the animals to die?—but receives an answer that seems equally unsatisfactory: the mother responds with Christian clichés, saying that there is no truth on earth, that the girl must love and pray and renounce earthly attachment.

³³ Mikhailova points out the frequency with which Zinov’eva-Annibal turned to genres that enabled first-person narrative (either in diary form, like *Thirty-three Abominations*, or in stories where the horizon of the narrator is indistinguishable from the central character), suggesting that the “polyphonism of ‘Rings’ [Zinov’eva-Annibal’s play of 1904] did not correspond to [her] mode of thinking.” See Mariia Mikhailova, “Strasti po Lidii,” *Preobrazhenie: Russkii feministkii zhurnal*, 1994, no. 2:150.

³⁴ Mikhailova suggests that it is precisely that impression of emotional “whirlwind” that distinguishes Zinov’eva-Annibal’s writing from the “olympic calm” of her husband’s prose.

³⁵ Matt Cartmill, in his cultural history of hunting, suggests that the Romantic image of the hunter assumes an emotional, even spiritual connection between human and animal: “For the Romantic hunter, the Man in the Buckskin Suit, the hunt is an act of loving communion with nature.” See Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 137.

Each of these stories in fact ends with a turn to “Christian” answers. In “The Crane,” remorseful at having let her beloved crane die, the girl confesses her sin to an elderly priest, who tells her that Christ will forgive her; the story ends with Vera’s own vision of the bird at Christ’s side at the final judgment, its grotesque death overcome by Apocalyptic blessing. And in “The Wolves” the girl comes to her mother for an explanation of what she has witnessed on the hunt. It is in this story that the violent intrusion of humans into nature is most graphic; it is here that Vera’s identification with wild animals is deepest; it is also in this story that the Christian account of the relationship of human and natural worlds is most extensively dialogized with one we might provisionally label “Darwinian.”

Vera is taken along to watch the hunt; she passes the time before the wolves appear in fantasy play; she imagines herself the queen of a wandering tribe; she hunts for food for her people; their camp has been encircled by ogres and she alone must lead them to freedom—but she is hounded on all sides by wolves. Vera’s fantasy represents a passage from “tame life” into another one, wild and free [*iz etoi ruchnoi i skladnoi zhizni v inuiiu, dikuiiu, vol’nuuiu, kochevuiiu* (p. 45)]; she is interrupted, however, by real “wildlife,” by the bark of dogs and hunters approaching with bound wolves. As she watches the wounded animals she repeats to herself what she’s been told about them—that they are evil, eat sheep, have terrible eyes (*gadkie glaza*)—but her repetition of internalized voices is countered by a stark recognition of kinship when she looks into the wounded wolf’s eyes.

The wolf gnawed at the stick in his mouth, his eyes so close to my face where I had pressed up against the cage. I saw the white in the corners of his eyes, all bloody. His pupils strained straight into mine. Insufferable pain, furious hatred, sorrow and a final, hopeless, resolute horror were compressed in them. Those pupils held me spellbound and I, like him, bared my clenched teeth; I tensed the wild pupils of my eyes, now dried of their recent tears. (p. 50)

Zinov’eva-Annibal depicts the wounded body graphically: pierced by a pitchfork, with air escaping through the wound, the wolf’s pupils exert a hypnotic influence on the girl. Her response to this body is to think of her own (“How terrible, the way the body is put together! If you pierce it, there’s some kind of bloody softness, and something else besides—the liver? the heart? a lung?”) and run into the woods. When her governess catches up with her she calls Vera a “wild animal,” but this is, after all, the voice of her governess, “Miss Florry”—a stalwart representative of the “tamed” life the girl would run away from.³⁶

The opposing voices in “The Wolves” belong not only to Miss Florry but to Vera’s mother, and to a peasant named Fedor who drives the wagon carrying the gentry to watch the hunt. On their way home, immediately after her moment of intense identification with the wounded wolf, Vera begins a conversation with Fedor by reaffirming others’ opinions of wolves:

³⁶ Is there an echo of Beatrice Potter in this name, with its evocations of safe, domesticated rabbits? *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was first published in 1902.

“Fedor, it’s good that they catch all the wolves. We’ve got a good tsar if he orders them to do it.”

“Well, of course!”

“Right. Of course. No doubt about it. They’re awfully mean wolves. They tear up the peasants’ sheep. . . .”

I begin to cry.

“Fedor, I don’t love the wolves. You shouldn’t feel sorry about them.”

(p. 52)

Vera is arguing against herself here; she is caught between received opinion and her own intense identification and outrage, all crystallized by a scene of extraordinary brutality. Fedor’s response to her quandary is to tell her that brutality is a law of nature: “Everybody feeds on somebody else. That’s just how it is.” (*Vse drug druzhku zhrut. Eto uzh tak polozheno*). His vision of the world is one in which one must eat or be eaten: “If you don’t eat you’ll die of hunger” (p. 53). A vision of the survival of the fittest—a kind of bastardized Darwin—sits easily with his understanding of Christianity: God has ordained to Man what meat is clean, what is not. Man’s position in creation—as Great Hunter, as one who rules over creation—is biblically justified: “God put Man above all the animals and revealed all he needs to know about the animals” (p. 53). Fedor’s words recapitulate a vision of human and animal worlds united by desperate need, brutality legitimized by divine hierarchy, untroubled by compassion. Ironically, he, like Vera, recognizes a kind of kinship, but it is a kinship grounded in struggle, hierarchy and the supremacy of will.³⁷

This justification of dominion and cruelty is not one that will satisfy Vera, so she turns instead to her mother, who gives her an extended account of two modes of life: in the first one we are passionately attached but greedy and jealous; in the second one we love deeply, but without attachment. In her mother’s life, the passage from the first mode to the second has been aided by an unidentified disease that cripples her: everything, she insists, has become dear in and of itself, not as it is useful to her. She has become, she claims, this “second” person, capable of loving, but free of attachment. Vera listens, but continues to cry. When her mother asks why, she can only reiterate her affection: “I feel sorry for the wolf” (p. 60). These words through tears rehearse Vera’s dilemma—the wolf is both that being to which Vera is most deeply attached (symbolic of the girl’s own wildness and impulse to freedom) and emblematic of passionate (and brutally denied) attachment to life. The mother’s response is to call her daughter “silly” (*glupaia*). The words enact a severing from the daughter as chilling in its way as the separation of the wolf from its natural habitat. The mother’s denial of the daughter’s tears and questions will be one force impelling her toward the violence and confusion that awaits her.³⁸

³⁷I do not know if Zinov’eva-Annibal had read Darwin; however, it seems reasonable to assume that she would at least have known of him, and might have shared what Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal has characterized as the Symbolist generation’s attitude toward Darwinian thought: “Russian symbolists and idealists . . . were hostile to Darwin per se, believing, as Nietzsche did, that Darwin demeaned man.” See “Introduction” in *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. Rosenthal (Princeton, 1986), 41.

³⁸“The Devil” traces, among other things, Vera’s alienation from her mother. The reasons for that estrangement are complex—Vera shames her mother with her bad behavior, the mother is repeatedly absent, depicted as caught up in conventional social life—but the two stories together (“The Wolf” and “The Devil”) suggest that the daughter’s willful antagonizing of the mother results in part from the mother’s inability to hear her daughter at a crucial moment of her psychic and emotional development.

The peasant's voice insists that violence is embedded in nature: "Everybody feeds on somebody else. That's just how it is"; the mother's quiescent Christianity urges a stance of disengagement from the world, liberating us from the will to control. The balance of *The Tragic Menagerie* is, I think, a working out of those two positions, the efforts of both Vera and the older author³⁹ to resolve the problems set in these early stories—and to resolve them not in an intellectual sense, but in a sensory, emotional manner. Vera's increasing distance from the forest world of childhood summers will be marked by increasing violence and willfulness on her part: when she enters adolescence and is sent away to school (in "The Devil"), she enters an accelerating cycle of deceit and violence.⁴⁰ She comes to embody, in these stories, the peasant's maxim: we all devour each other. She is a successful devourer, playing erotic games of violence and manipulation that end with her expulsion. The narrative of her schooling is an account of institutionalization that works the classic motifs of decadent prose; the girl who identified with the wolf and thought of herself as a gypsy queen becomes here a woman "beyond good and evil," without remorse. The violence of the hunt, so graphically depicted in "The Wolves," is deeply internalized, as the heroine tyrannizes her schoolmates. The mother, significantly enough, fades completely from view; the meek, loving, indulgent presence she had embodied in the early stories completely recedes, and with it her Christian ethic of dispassion. We reach the end of this account, I think, expecting one of two outcomes: the narrative triumph of the damned (the decadent); or the return of the repressed (the mother's Christian ethic). Darwin, or Jesus. Interestingly, and wonderfully, Zinov'eva-Annibal chooses another path. She overturns the violent will of "The Devil" without espousing the denials and deferred hopes of classic Christianity. Zinov'eva-Annibal ends her narrative with neither the mother's ethic nor the peasant's, but with another vision.

Having moved through the hell of institutionalized classrooms, infatuations and love games—and through the hell of herself—Vera is expelled and sent off to visit her older brother and his wife in Italy. It is there that the enormous energies of violence and repression are released and transformed in an extraordinary moment at the sea. Wandering along the beach, Vera bends over a tidal pool and watches stones beneath the water; she sees a dolphin offshore; hot from the sun she decides to swim, even though she hasn't brought her bathing suit;⁴¹ she swims deeper and deeper into

³⁹ One of the charms of this work for me is the repeated interpolation of the older woman's voice with the remembered experience of the girl; the narrator repeatedly wonders aloud if she "truly remembers" or if her reflections belong to a later stage of life. This suggests to me, among other things, that a sense of fluid identification with a younger self was important to the process of creation for Zinov'eva-Annibal as she worked on *The Tragic Menagerie*.

⁴⁰ Simon Karlinsky, in the first edition of his biography of Tsvetaeva, notes similarities between the two women's "Devils." "The significant difference is that while for Zinov'eva-Annibal the devil of the title represents a pure, metaphysical evil force that is an integral part of human nature and existence, Cvetaeva's devil is a symbol of escape and possibly revolt." See Karlinsky, *Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art* (Berkeley, 1966), 284. Tsvetaeva was given a copy of *The Tragic Menagerie* by Voloshin; in "Zhivoe o zhivom" she speaks of it as "an enchanting woman's book": "Ne zabyt' voskhittel'noi zhenskoi knigi 'Tragicheskii zverinets'" (Tsvetaeva, *Proza* [Moscow, 1989], 204).

⁴¹ Lydia Ivanova refers to this as "Russian-style swimming" in her memoir: she describes an annual family outing where "we swam with delight, as one did in Russia, without bathing suits" (*Vospominaniia*, 22).

the water, carried for a while by the current, unconcerned with where she's going. She returns to the beach and lies naked on the sand ("I'm already on the beach, on the evenly strewn shingle. . . . I want to spread my shirt out on my wet body. But I wait a bit, lazily, basking. I'm not afraid. Who would come along a deserted beach at high noon?" [p. 276]). She then runs to cliffs, where she slips into a cave; it is damp, quiet and dark. She lies there, silent, and happy. And while she is lying there, close to the black, smooth stone of the cave, she notices something moving: a tiny red spider, no larger than a bead, with four tiny eyes. They pause there, looking into each other's eyes.

It doesn't move. I look into its four small eyes, four small eyes on a small red bead. And suddenly I sense that the four eyes of the red spider are watching my eyes, unfathomable as the sea, like two boundless seas . . . those two endlessly small eyes look into my two boundless eyes, look and size them up, fearing, pondering [*i boiatsia, i razmyshliaiut*]. . . . Why frighten him? Why peer uninvited into his life and choices? (pp. 277–78)

Emerging from the cave, she pulls on her dress but not her shoes; and with caressing steps (*laskovymi podoshvami*)⁴² she steps along the damp, hot stones, stones that have been smoothed by caressing waves (*laskovymi volnami*). She cries without knowing why; lies down on the pebbly shore; thinks "O God—I am a stone!"—and then thinks that she is the spider as well. She kisses the stones and then licks them, tastes their salt and wonders whether it is her tears or the sea that makes them salty.

Is the sea crying too?

Or is it all tears—the tears of rocks, of spiders, of crabs, my tears, and the tears of the earth?

How good I feel; something that had become unbearable has broken.

I haven't cried for a long time. For too long . . . in this way, from joy. (p. 279)

What Zinov'eva-Annibal gives us in this scene is a phenomenology of eros, a young woman reconnecting bodily, sensually and psychically with the deepest sources of her being. This is, first and foremost, a return to the intense physicality and connection of Vera's childhood, a return to the space—both psychic and literal—of her greatest freedoms. The sea serves throughout *The Tragic Menagerie* as emblem of freedom and longing: In "Deaf Dasha" dusty ruts on a country road remind Vera of the swirls in sand left by waves, life "without order or law" when she ran barefoot over pebbles. In "The Centaur Princess" she imagines herself high in a tree, from which the seaside village of Dolgovo will be visible, beloved Dolgovo with its bare feet and bright, wet sand; she imagines herself setting out to sea in a sailboat, riding swells over treacherous reefs. The sea is Vera's grail of freedom and abandon, a place

⁴² Zinov'eva-Annibal apparently liked to go barefoot. See Liubov' Dmitrievna Blok's comment: "I want to write Lydia Dmitrievna that I'm running barefoot, she likes to do that, too" (*Literaturnoe nasledstvo [Aleksandr Blok: Pis'ma k zhene]*, 89 [Moscow, 1978], 204).

she travels to in fantasy. Vera's ritual immersion in the Italian sea suggests the adolescent's final achievement of girlhood's dreams of freedom.⁴³

But there are more complicated ways in which the psychic and ethical problems of *The Tragic Menagerie* are reassembled in this climactic moment, which serves as a non-Christian baptism, the heroine's literal reimmersion in her source. The epiphanic eros of the sea supplants the pornographic violence of the girls' school; it includes an encounter with a spider, Dostoevskian symbol of evil, represented here as a sentient, "thinking" creature, defying any easy manipulation as a "symbol" of something human; it takes place in the womb-like space of the cave, as though this rebirth involves a complicated reconnection with maternity. The girl reemerges from the dark, wet enclosure with "caressing footsteps," onto a beach "caressed by waves." The image of *laska*, caress, is one that Zinov'eva-Annibal associates from the very beginning with Vera's mother. In their searching conversations at the end of "The Bear Cubs," "The Crane," and "The Wolves," the older woman's words do not seem to satisfy, but Zinov'eva-Annibal implies that the physical presence of the woman represents a kind of embodied "answer," as in these closing words from "The Bear Cubs": "It was warm and caressing [*laskovo*]. There was certainty and salvation in that caressing maternal warmth" (p. 20). There is resolution and salvation, she suggests, not in "words" but in presence. Any words that might serve as answer to the conundrums of the world must originate in presence and physicality, whether it is the tumbling play of a girl and bear, or the intense enclosures of a tidal cave. To come to the words too quickly eviscerates their potential meanings; the mother, Miss Florry, Vera's brother speak words that cannot be Vera's own. The epiphanic ending represents the beginning of a language that might be Vera's own because it will be grounded in an acceptance of her own physicality and contradictions.

Zinov'eva-Annibal revisits in this passage not only the caresses of her mother and the longing for the sea, but the intense mutual regard of human and natural worlds. When Vera stares at the spider and sees not only herself but the other, seeing her, we are brought back to numerous moments in the early stories. When she found the dead crane, Vera met the dead animal's gaze: "Someone's deadened murky eye emerged from the depths to meet my eyes, as they drew near" (p. 29). When the "monster" had devoured all other creatures, Vera looked one last time into his eyes before destroying him: "It seemed I was looking into his eyes, right into them—hideous, yellow, voracious, merciless" (p. 120). Zinov'eva-Annibal describes Vera

⁴³ There is also the possibility—symbolically implicit in religious rituals of baptism—of real death. Olga Deschartes cites an unpublished letter of 1893 from Zinov'eva-Annibal to Vyacheslav Ivanov, in which she describes having contemplated suicide when she was travelling in Italy after having left her first husband. «Жить стало страшно, страшно до ужаса. Красота природы величаявая, подавляющая, холодная и надменная едва окончательно не задавила меня. Самоубийство обратилось в *idée fixe* и томило меня до головокружения. О эти чудные, чарующие синие воды итальянских озер, как манила меня их глубина!» ("Vvedenie," 21). What is striking is the letter's connection of suicide with the gorgeous, tempting water of the Italian lakes. The fictional Vera's swimming leads to a happier outcome, but the language of death remains even here: «А если на минуту потупить голову в воду и глаза раскрыть—станет вдруг глухо, глухо, застелется струйстая тусклость, и не страшно станет тогда . . . умереть не страшно» (p. 275). One thinks of Zinov'eva-Annibal's American contemporary, Kate Chopin, whose heroine Edna Pontellier ends her "awakening" in suicide by drowning.

throughout the work as a person with eyes that see too much: *slishkom zorkie glaza* (p. 111). “Why peer uninvited into his life and choices?” she asks in the cave. What she seems to come to here is a revelation of nature as something other than the repository of death and destruction (the crane, the monster, herself), but as a place of reconciliation and mutuality, a place we can be in without power, a place we can come to *know* without controlling. To acknowledge one’s “animality” means acknowledging sentience and thought and connection to creation, as well as one’s more anarchic impulses to violence.

Zinov’eva-Annibal resolves this chapter of Vera’s life with her heroine’s erotic reconnection to the world. In doing so, she works against a whole tradition of female narratives in the nineteenth century, in which the heroine’s “maturation” is contingent on her forswearing virginal connections to “the green world.”⁴⁴ The heroines of Karolina Pavlova and Aleksandr Pushkin, among others, must renounce their connections to nature; their heroines’ ends involve matrimony, not natural epiphanies.⁴⁵ Zinov’eva-Annibal seems more than cognizant of this tradition in narrating Vera’s transformation. When Vera arrives in Italy she meets again her brother’s wife, a woman Vera had been infatuated with as a girl. Vera remembers the bride as energetic and witty: “Then she was swift as the wind in our city apartment, playing jokes, cheerful, quick-tempered; her long hair twined above her calm, clear forehead” (p. 269). Vera had once stolen the fiancée’s velvet slipper and taken it to bed, where she kissed it under the pillow as she fell asleep.

What has become of this childhood infatuation is instructive for Zinov’eva-Annibal’s resolution. “Now, in her large, bright eyes beneath their severe red bow-shaped brows I saw only one order, only one request, when her light lashes suddenly shuddered: Keep Quiet. . . . Work, work. . . . Do not ask. . . . You’ve been told your duty. Keep Quiet. Keep Quiet” (p. 270). *Molchi*. The “quiet,” I think, refers not only to girlhood same-sex affections, but to the very structure of a woman’s life, the repressions and compromises the wife has accepted. Her life is built on renunciation, duty, silence. It is those things she would try to enforce upon Vera, but she becomes emblematic of the way not taken, rather than prophetic of Vera’s own fate. The final chapter of Vera’s story imagines regeneration and a broad horizon, not duty and silence but love and justice conjoined. Zinov’eva-Annibal’s ending is a defiance of the wife’s injunction to obedience and silence, associated here with conventional domesticity; in this sense, *The Tragic Menagerie* evokes Zinov’eva-Annibal’s own unconventional life of creative relationship, suggesting that a woman can live not as the Silent Wife but as a traveler, a hero, a poet.

As an account of the author’s own genesis, *The Tragic Menagerie* imagines verbal creativity grounded in a profound, often anarchic connection to Nature. A woman of profound imagination finds liberation not only from the constraints of scholarly

⁴⁴ Pratt suggests that it is part of the canonic treatment of women’s development that attachment to that “green world” must be forsworn (*Archetypal Patterns*, 16–24).

⁴⁵ Natural epiphanies are the province of male heroes in Russian literature: one thinks of Tolstoy’s Olenin in the deer’s lair, or Turgenev’s Lavretskii contemplating the slow modulations of a summer day from his estate window. On the latter’s significance for Turgenev’s aesthetics see my *Worlds within Worlds: The Novels of Ivan Turgenev* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 69–70.

institutions and the “stone prison”⁴⁶ of the city, but from words of authority that do not name her experience. In a statement that is in its own way extraordinarily revealing, Vyacheslav Ivanov spoke of Zinov’eva-Annibal’s fighting “desperately for final inner emancipation from my intellectual influence.”⁴⁷ The question of influence is in this case deeply complicated and perhaps unresolvable. Many of the deepest concerns of *The Tragic Menagerie* resonate with those of Ivanov, and indeed with those of the creative world of which they were a part. Ivanov was, in Pamela Davidson’s words, critical of modern Christianity’s loss of “vital roots in Earth and Nature.”⁴⁸

The Tragic Menagerie is, nonetheless, more than a roman-à-clef for her husband’s ideas; if we are to take seriously the work’s movement toward liberation, we must entertain seriously its own authority, not just his. Any compelling account of the relationship of this work to Ivanov’s will demand subtle acquaintance with both authors’ texts, and a complex reading of their creative relationship.⁴⁹ *The Tragic Menagerie* narrates a form of liberation where woman and nature reconnect in a moment of profound eros, claiming both inner and outer emancipation. Vera’s nature epiphany, however, is outside of society, in ways that are perhaps problematic: not just outside *Russian* society, but beyond all social contact. It is nonetheless clear from the work as a whole that Zinov’eva-Annibal understood there to be a clear connection between a resacralized connection to the natural world and the possibility of social justice.⁵⁰ In “Will,” the final story of *The Tragic Menagerie*, the eighteen-year-old Vera comes face to face with the misery and submissiveness of Russia’s earth-bound *narod*: the sight of a girlhood friend’s dead body strengthens her resolve—her will—to acts of love and social change. What she wants at last is heroic action and love: “Mne zakhotelos’ podviga i liubvi” (p. 284). Vera’s beloved place by the sea is called “Dolgov”: the name implies duty (*dolg*), and when Vera is reconciled with the sea (with inner and outer nature), she is able to imagine and act on love that is neither submissive nor tyrannical.

What is implied sequentially in the ending is hinted at in its center, as well: in “The Centaur Princess,” the adolescent girl’s longings for justice, for freedom and for erotic connection are brought together in a meadow of high grass, when she shares stolen bread—and a kiss—with a peasant girl. The kiss intrigues me for many reasons: it is a stunningly rendered moment of lyric narrative; it envisions boundaries

⁴⁶ Vera’s words for St. Petersburg in “The Midge,” 125.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Nikol’skaia, “Tvorcheskii put’,” 132.

⁴⁸ Davidson, *Poetic Imagination*, 27.

⁴⁹ For an incisive treatment of Zinov’eva-Annibal’s complex but critical relationship to Ivanov see Pamela Davidson’s “Lydia Zinov’eva-Annibal’s *The Singing Ass*: A Woman’s View of Men and Eros,” in *Gender and Russian Literature*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154–83. Davidson argues on the basis of *The Singing Ass* that Zinov’eva-Annibal at the end of her life “was beginning to detach herself from her surroundings and to emancipate herself from her husband’s influence” (p. 174).

⁵⁰ Felski’s discussion of the “novel of awakening”—as practiced by contemporary women writers—is critical of the asocial or “mythic” aspect of the genre (in contrast to the *Bildungsroman*, in which the heroine’s evolution takes place in opposition to, but still *in*, society). *The Tragic Menagerie* arguably combines “realist” and “symbolist” concerns in an effort to overcome the impasse between natural epiphany and sociopolitical effect (Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 141–45).

between classes and between the human and natural world as porous and capable of transformation; it translates the ecclesiastical ritual of shared bread into a subversive communion of eros and innocence; and finally, it narrates erotic connection between women in ways so radically different, so “undecadent,” that it suggests we should reconsider Zinov’eva-Annibal’s writing of lesbianism. *Thirty-three Abominations*, Zinov’eva-Annibal’s notorious account of same-sex love, imagines lesbian sexuality imprisoned in conventionality, cliché, voyeuristic male desire, the mirrored walls of urbanity. *The Tragic Menagerie* imagines the desire of adolescent girls for each other (and for older women) as potentially liberatory and deeply erotic. Such desire is deeper, Zinov’eva-Annibal suggests, than the inequities of society.

In her imagination of the liberatory potential of eros, Zinov’eva-Annibal finds perhaps unexpected company in late twentieth-century America (or perhaps not unexpected, since the critique and reimagining of central categories of gender and of the Judeo-Christian heritage invoked in some Silver Age culture prefigures similar efforts in late twentieth-century feminism).⁵¹ Eros, the late African-American poet and critic Audre Lorde suggested, is “a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane,” a force born of Chaos; the “nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge”; an energy from which modernity has separated women, abandoning them to its travesty in the pornographic.⁵² In reimagining Eros, Zinov’eva-Annibal forges the link of animality and the poetic, insisting, as has Dorothy Dinnerstein, that the creative is linked most profoundly not with transcendence of the body but with the remembering of our immanence and creatureliness—something that binds us *to*, rather than separating us *from*, the animal.⁵³ It is not our animality that is “tragic,” but the menagerie: the distorting force of institutions that cage the animal and convert wild space into menagerie, eros into the will to power. This is at heart a pastoral critique of society, a condemnation of the distortions of urbanity, decadence, and tyrannical institutions that suggests the utopian potential of a return to nature. What saves Zinov’eva-Annibal’s vision from naiveté is her clear-sighted (all too clear-sighted) recognition of the violence of the “natural” self. It is a complex but compelling vision, one still worth attending to.

⁵¹ Kelly notes the “complete dislocation,” in Russia, of political feminists and modernist cultural figures; she further notes, however, that Symbolist and post-Symbolist writers were “in some sense more ‘feminist’ in the modern sense,” given their concern with “issues of self-expression and sexuality” (*A History*, 153).

⁵² Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA, 1984), 53.

⁵³ Dinnerstein suggests that human enterprise (art and religion in particular) presents opportunities “for direct recapture of the earliest mode, the unqualified animal-poetic mode, of erotic intercourse with the surround.” Her analysis of modern gender relations is in part concerned with why we are so unable to avail ourselves of such opportunities. See *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York, 1976), 145–46.