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IDEALS OF PHYSICAL BEAUTY IN THE PROSE OF RUSSIAN WOMEN WRITERS IN THE SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET ERA

Introduction

Beauty is a notion that has always attracted the attention of philosophers. The first known definitions of beauty come from ancient Greek authors, such as Aristotle and Plotinus,¹ who defined physical beauty as the ideal proportion, size, color and the interrelationship of body parts. The eighteenth century philosopher Johann Joachim Winckelmann was one of the most influential thinkers of the time, and developed the idea of classical influences on art and literary aesthetics in his “Reflections on the Imitations of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture” (1755).² He also found contemplating beauty useful for philosophers. Winckelmann’s ideas, and most importantly the concept of classical influences on aesthetics, are still relevant for today’s art and literature.

The proportional idea of beauty has been challenged many times, since antiquity, by thinkers who endeavored to explain the concept of beauty in terms other than pure ideal proportion of parts. Among the most significant proposals challenging the idea of proportional beauty is the idea that beauty is subjective, and depends on the recipient, or the viewer, expressed, for example, by the eighteenth century philosopher Francis Hutcheson.³ Hutcheson in his “Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design” (1725), pointed out that beauty is the idea raised in us, that is, it is cultural. However, our perception of beauty depends on our “sense of beauty,” individual in each case, which Hutcheson called “our power of receiving the idea of beauty.” Hutcheson pointed out that beauty is defined by uniformity against variety and variety against uniformity. In other words, beauty is something that many beautiful things have in common, but also something which distinguishes one thing from another, and both are equally important.

1. Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, “The Great theory of Beauty and its Decline,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 31, no. 2 (Winter 1971), pp. 165-80; also Anthony Synnott, “Truth and Goodness, Mirrors and Masks – Part 1: A Sociology of Beauty and The Face,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1989), pp. 607-36.

2. Raymond Giraud, “Winckelmann’s Part in Gautier’s Perception of Classical Beauty,” *Yale French Studies*, 38 (1967), pp. 172-82.

3. Peter Kivy, “The ‘Sense’ of Beauty and the ‘Sense of Art’: Hutcheson’s Place in the History and Practice of Aesthetics,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 53, no. 4 (Autumn 1995), pp. 349-57.

Plotinus, and following him Chernyshevsky in Russia, believed that beauty is defined by a relation to something, or correspondence to something as much as it is by proportion. Thus, a plump and rosy-cheeked girl may seem beautiful to simple folk because her complexion indicates that she is healthy and is able to do the necessary work, while higher classes may have other ideals of beauty, because they have other requirements for qualities important for life. This point of view on beauty leads to an archetypal notion of beauty, also first expressed by Plotinus (cf. also Francis Hutcheson's view above): we see something, including, or especially, a human body and face, as beautiful if it resembles a certain archetype. The eighteenth century romanticists, according to Synnott,⁴ with their attention to beauty of nature, were especially important in manifesting a new, non-proportional and more subjective approach to beauty.

The idea of proportional beauty has been successfully dismantled in philosophy, and beauty has become the subject of everyday speech and art⁵ rather than philosophy where it has been replaced by other, more precise terms, such as aesthetics. The latter, however, are also prone to acquiring imprecise meanings and building up connotations, similarly to the notion of beauty. The concept of beauty, as it exists in languages like English and Russian, is still very much based on the ancient prototype of proportional beauty, which is reflected by existing dictionaries of these languages.

It has been long known that the concept of beauty, or rather, of being beautiful, is subject to change with fashion and, therefore, is culture-specific. In other words, what is seen as beautiful in a certain place and at a certain time, may not be seen so in other places or even, in the same place at a different time. To give just one example, two hundred years ago in Russia being slim was not considered beautiful because it was a sign of poverty and malnourishment. This is still reflected in the semantic structure of the Russian word *khudoi* meaning being physically slim/thin and also "bad."

Since real bodily beauty ideals, existing in people's minds and art, are still very much based on the classic idea of proportional beauty, they are structural in nature. In other words, we think of beautiful in terms of certain archetypes, consisting of many elements, such as "it is beautiful for a woman to have long limbs, smooth skin, small feet"; "it is beautiful for a man to have wide shoulders, a square chin, a strong neck." Some of these elements may be universal or quasi-universal at a certain time whereas others are culture-specific: for example the value of having small feet obviously used to be very high for Chinese aristocracy that applied a kind of wrapping procedure to girls' feet to keep them small. Some elements of a beauty ideal change over time, as it happened with the value of being slim within Russian culture.

4. Synnott, "Truth and Goodness," p. 609.

5. Tatarkevich, "The Great theory of Beauty and its Decline," p. 180.

If we realize that beauty ideals exist as complex culture-specific structures that change over time, the main question is, how can we study them? Like all value systems, beauty ideals can be studied in a few different ways. The present paper is a study in beauty ideals based on literary texts. The material we are going to deal with are text fragments, concerning ideals of physical beauty, that is, spontaneously expressed beauty statements (as opposed to those elicited in surveys and experiments).⁶ Since beauty is an area which for many people is charged with complex emotions and ideology,⁷ analyzing spontaneous beauty descriptions may have an advantage of having access to more natural and sincere, less preconceived opinions, which perhaps reflect an existing aesthetic value system which is involved in generating them. On the other hand, dealing with only spontaneously expressed beauty statements has its limitations: not all fragments of a value system may have a chance to be expressed by a particular author (or even a group of authors). In other words, we are interested in analyzing existing descriptions of beauty in texts of a certain group of authors rather than the investigation of it in experiments or interviews. In what follows, I am going to sketchily discuss the change in beauty ideals in Russian women writers' prose over the post-war Soviet and post-Soviet eras.

Research area and methodology

One can identify various writers' groups on the basis of features such as thematic unity (for example, poets-revolutionaries in Russian literature), time of writing (post-War prose), intended audience (teenage prose), and even authors' life history (immigrant writers). The underlying assumption in using descriptions like this is that writers within a group have some features in common, often beyond the single one which has been used as a basis for the classification. Women writers are recognized as a certain literary unity in literary criticism, and women writers' work in English and European literatures has been extensively studied.⁸ The topic of what are the features characteristic of women writing may be a sensible one because it is

6. See, for example, Jon Oberlander and Alastair J. Gill, "Language with Character: A Stratified Corpus Comparison of Individual Differences in E-mail Communication," *Discourse Processes*, 42, no. 3 (2006), pp. 239-70, who studied individual differences in some ways parallel to differences in aesthetic values in e-mail elicited communication, and R. Bull and N. Rumsey, *The Social Psychology of Facial Appearance* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), for a contemporary survey of experimental studies of ideals of physical, mostly facial, beauty. See also Seymour Fisher, *Development and Structure of the Body Image* (New Jersey and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, 1986).

7. Cf. Shields, Vicki Rutledge and Dawn Heineken, *Measuring up. How Advertising Affects Self-Image* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); and J. Hakelmulder, "Foregrounding and Its Effect on Readers' Perception," *Discourse Processes*, 38, no.2 (2004), pp. 193-218.

8. See, for example, Rhoda B. Nathan, ed., *Nineteenth Century Women Writers of the English Speaking World* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Avriel H. Goldberger, ed., *Woman as Mediatix: Essays on Nineteenth Century European Women Writers* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

also significant from the point of view of feminist and women's studies. Thus, if feminists often believe that a feature common to women writers which differentiates them from their contemporary men writers is anger⁹ and writing for a social purpose (presumably, women's liberation), other students of women writers may see attention to family and domestic life as women writers' common feature.¹⁰ Feminists, according to Kissel,¹¹ also see beauty more in accordance with the correspondence view, discussed above, that is, they believe that beauty is what is useful in asserting oneself. One of the most important feminist works dealing with beauty in particular is Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*.¹² Admitting that the concept of beauty is part of our cultural upbringing, she argues that it also serves as a tool of implementing male power and depriving women of control over their own bodies. This is done, Wolf claims, in the modern times on a larger scale than ever, by means of disseminating mass-produced images (a similar position is taken by Shields and Heinecken).

Whatever stance towards feminism is taken, however, most observers agree that women writers share some important interests and attitudes.

Russian women writers have been the focus of attention in the last two to three decades, both from translators and researchers.¹³ Among the diversity of views on what constitutes common themes in contemporary Russian women's prose, one can trace two polar attitudes: some authors, similarly to their counterparts writing on English language women's prose, believe that heroines' anger and dissatisfaction with their life, and, consequently, the description of violence and activities reflecting this dissatisfaction, is the most important theme. Others believe that domesticity and *byt* [daily life] remain in the centre of women writers' interests.¹⁴ As pointed out by Kelly,¹⁵ both attitudes may be present simultaneously and the actual contradiction between the two may be the centre which keeps many women writers' work alive.

9. See Susan S. Kissel, "Double Vision: The Differing Views of Contemporary Male and Female Writers," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 6, no.1/2 (Spring 1981), pp. 39-43.

10. Amy Mandelker, review of Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene, eds., "Women Writers in Russian Literature," *Slavic Review*, 54, no.4 (Winter 1995), pp. 1074-75.

11. Kissel, "Double Vision," p. 40.

12. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth. How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1990).

13. For example, Christine Tomei, ed., *Russian Women Writers* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), *Nine of Russian Foremost Women Writers* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2003), *Soviet Women Writing. Fifteen Short Stories* (New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1990); *Women Writers in Russian Modernism: An Anthology*, T. Pachmuss, ed. and trans. (Urbana, Chicago, and London: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1978).

14. Robin Bisha, review of "Dictionary of Russian Women Writers" by Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal and Mary Zirin, in *Slavic and East European Journal*, 39, no. 2, (Summer 1995), pp. 309-11.

15. Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994).

Among works considering the general picture of women's writing in Russia it is not easy to find those concerned with a particular theme. One good example is Helena Goscilo's article on the place of hospital in recent Russian women's prose.¹⁶ Another example of a consideration of a particular theme in women's writing is Sibelan Forrester's textual analysis of the role of the female body in Marina Tsvetaeva's poetry.¹⁷

As Goscilo argues, any work considering the development of a certain theme in a number of literary works has to emphasize the commonalities and blur some substantial differences between the texts. However, this is a process of abstraction common to most scientific and critical analyses. In fact, one can find a methodological justification of this type of analysis in Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, where he claims that in every society the production of discourse is controlled, selected, and organized according to a certain number of procedures, or rules, the most "tightly woven" of which concern the areas of politics and sexuality.¹⁸ According to Freundlieb,¹⁹ in one phase of his career (the sixties) Foucault rejected the idea that subjects are in control of the language, which, in the case of literature, led to his well-known critique of the figure of the author.

In what follows, I will argue that beauty and consideration of what is beautiful – and how this concept may change over time – is one of the important themes in Russian women writers' prose. The process of changing aesthetic values concerning human bodies, like all changes in value systems, can be traced through texts. This is not to say, of course, that what is called beautiful or ugly in a text reflects actual aesthetic preferences of the author. The narrator's voice may not coincide with that of the author thus creating an obvious difference, often with ironic overtones in a text, between the author's and the narrator's judgement. In fact, as emphasized by Kelly,²⁰ at a certain time (between 1820 and 1880) Russian women writers often tended to eliminate the first person narrator from their texts replacing her with the third person, often male narrator. This is much less so in the twentieth century, perhaps due to the diminished shyness of women writers, although it still does occur. Besides, even the first person narrator may be ironically distanced from the author.²¹ However, whether there is a clear discrepancy between the author's view and that of the narrator, appreciated

16. Helena Goscilo, "Woman's Space and Woman's Place in Contemporary Russian Fiction," in Rosalind Marsh, ed., *Gender and Russian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 326-48.

17. Sibelan Forrester, "Bells and Cupolas: The Formative Role of the Female Body in Marina Tsvetaeva's Poetry," *Slavic Review*, 51, no.2 (Summer 1992), pp. 232-46.

18. Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 3.

19. Dieter Freundlieb, "Foucault and the Study of Literature," *Poetics Today*, 16, no.2 (Summer 1995), pp. 304-44.

20. Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*, p. 71.

21. This is so, for example, in Marina Vishnevetskaia's *Arkhitektorka, zapiatataia, ne moi* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004).

as the ironic character of the text as a whole or some of its descriptions, or whether the author speaks quite seriously and sincerely through the narrator, in most cases the reader is able to read the author's view, be it between the lines or in the lines themselves.

Another finding clearly relevant for the appreciation of the relationship between the author and the narrator in women's writing comes from Alison Lewis's discussion of the author-narrator pairs in contemporary East German women's writing.²² According to Lewis, a common trope in East German women's writing has been the duplication of the female self through the splitting of narrative personae into two separate but complementary identities. This splitting serves "not so much as the displacement of authorship as the conferral of authority; it entails therefore an act of authorization which at the same time involves a sharing of authority and responsibility for the written world."²³

Since the present paper considers change in the concept of beauty occurring over time, time has to be subdivided in some way. In section three I consider statements concerning change in ideals of physical beauty in contemporary Russian women writers' prose. Following Kelly,²⁴ further time division is based on Stalinist vs. post-Stalinist opposition. Section 4 considers a post-war writer, who has done most of her work in the Stalinist era, Vera Panova. Section 5 considers the emergence of new beauty types in the post-Stalinist era, and section 6 – some fairly new young women writers, who have emerged in the post-Perestroika period.

A slightly different approach to time stratification of women's writing is taken by Helena Goschilo,²⁵ who differentiates between generations of women writers on the basis of date of birth: (1) those born before the October Revolution (I. Grekova and Natalia Baranskaia), (2) between the two world wars (including Victoria Tokareva, Galina Shcherbakova, Nina Katerli, Liudmila Ulitskaia and Liudmila Petrushevskaja), (3) after World War Two (Tatiana Tolstaia, Dina Rubina, Irina Polianskaia), and (4) in the post-Stalin era (Svetlana Vasilenko and Valeria Narbikova). However, as noted by Goschilo herself, the time of birth is not the only relevant factor influencing an author's style and value system. Another important consideration is the time of professional debut, which varies significantly across the Russian women authors, and the publication time of a certain work.

The present article does not aim at arriving at any decisive conclusions on how the ideals of beauty have developed over the course of the last fifty years. What it aims at is, rather, to discuss possible directions of this devel-

22. Alison Lewis, "Foiling the Censor": Reading and Transference as Feminist Strategies in the Works of Christa Wolf, Irnstraud Morgner, and Christa Moog," *The German Quarterly*, 66, no.3 (Summer 1993), pp. 372-86.

23. Lewis, "Foiling the Censor," p. 372.

24. Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing*, part 4.

25. Helena Goschilo, "Paradigm Lost? Contemporary Women's Fiction," in Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene, eds., *Women Writers in Russian Literature* (New Haven, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 205-29..

opment using the analyzed texts as “orientation points” which are representative, to some extent, of other texts of the period. Considering a wider picture, may, of course, add some new details to our understanding of the process.

Contemporary women writers on change in beauty ideals

It is encouraging to know that authors, especially women, are very aware of the existence of beauty ideals. Many authors articulate beauty ideals in great detail, listing a number of their components, concerning different body parts. Like all awareness of value systems, this often happens in the context of reflection on their change.

Victoria Tokareva is a well-known contemporary woman writer who is loved by both the intelligentsia and less high-brow readers. Trained as a musician, Tokareva later studied at the Moscow State Institute of Cinematography and worked as a script-writer (her most popular script is, perhaps, “Mi-mino,” directed by Danelia). In her literary *oeuvre*, including mostly short stories and novellas, one can find several comments on the process of the change of beauty ideals.²⁶ In Tokareva’s short story *Kheppi end* (Happy End) we find the following passage accounting for the change of beauty ideals:

(1) *Katia Minaeva porazhala neobychainost’iu krasoty: rost kak u basketbolistki, ploskaia – ni speredi, ni szadi, nos na semerykh ros, a glaz ne otorvat’. Zhenshchina iz budushchego. A Elia so svoimi paklianyimi volosami kazalas’ sebe zhenshchinoi iz vchera i dazhe iz pozavchera, s tex poslevoennykh otkrytok, gde dva tseluiushchikhsia golub-ka. Elia perezhivala.*

[Katia Minaeva struck one as an unusual beauty: she was tall like a basketball player, flat – nothing much neither on her chest nor bottom, a huge nose, but you couldn’t take your eyes away from her. A woman of the future. And Elia with her colorless hair seemed to herself a woman of yesterday and even before yesterday, somebody from those post-war postcards where two doves kissed each other. Elia was upset.]²⁷

Galina Scherbakova, born in 1932, that is, five years earlier than Tokareva, belongs to the same “stream” of women’s writing. Both Tokareva and Scherbakova are loved for their realistic plots and dialogues, and for capturing the effect of the double burden and harsh living conditions on a woman’s character. Like Tokareva, Scherbakova wrote film scripts, of

26. For more background information, see *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers*.

27. Victoria Tokareva, “Kheppi end” [“Happy End”], in *Masha i Feliks. Povesti i rasskazy* [Masha and Felix. Novels and Short Stories] (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ACT, 2001), p. 102.

which one, “Vam i ne snilos” (You Wouldn’t Dream of It) is a story of two school children, Russian Romeo and Juliet, Roman and Iul’ka, and is still remembered. Shcherbakova gives a strikingly similar account of changes that beauty ideals have undergone in the past:

(2) *Kunia – poslednii vsplesk pradedushkinoi energii – byla krasavicei po tem vremenam. Eto nuzhno ogovorit’ – po tem vremenam. Potomu chto nichto tak ne menialos’ za odnu chelovecheskuiu zhizn’, kak po-niatie “krasivyi – nekrasivyi”. U Kuni byl togda permanent, zache-sannyi nabok, tri zakolki strogo parallel’no derzhali vylozhennye volnoi volosy. Kunia byla rumiana, upitanna, bezbrova, chto bylo khorosho, potomu chto broviam polagalos’ mesto povyshe, chto i sozdvalos’ pri pomoshchi khorosho posliuniavlennogo chernogo karandasha. . . . I takaia vot rusogolovaia molodaia zhenshchina, pomechennaia zhirno i cherno, sootvetstvovala predstavleniiu o prekrasnom.* (Kostochka Avocado).

[Kunia was the last strike of the great-grandfather’s energy and was a beauty in those days. Because nothing has changed as much over one human life as the notion “beautiful – ugly.” Kunia had permed hair combed onto one side, and three hair clips exactly parallel to each other held the waves of her hair. Kunia was rosy-cheeked, stout, browless, which was good, because brows had to be higher up on a face, which could be achieved by using a well licked black pencil. And such a fair-haired young woman, painted with thick black lines, was an idea of a beauty.]²⁸

Shcherbakova specifies the time over which changes in beauty ideals have taken place as one human life. This, however, still leaves some space for reconstruction and interpretation. My guess is that Shcherbakova, like Tokareva, means changes that happened after the war. Like Tokareva, she lists a number of changes: beautiful hair is no longer permed or looks like paklia [tow (fiber material for packing)]; in the present and future, beautiful women are tall and flat, whereas in the past they were upitannye [well-fed, stout] and rumianye [rosy-cheeked]. An obvious way to explain some of these changes is that in times of hardship, such as during the war, everything which tells of the lack of hardship, namely, being well-fed and rosy-cheeked is considered beautiful. The aesthetics change when the hard times are over. However, this explanation gives only very limited insight into aesthetics, because it doesn’t tell us why permed hair or thick black painted brows are no longer beautiful. Some other subtle differences, hinted at by Tokareva (big facial features are more likely to be considered beautiful now than in the past) also are left unexplained.

28. Galina Shcherbakova, *Kostochka avokado* [Avocado Stone] (Moscow: Vagrius, 2005), p. 74.

This process of change of aesthetic values has a lot in common with what Shklovsky²⁹ described as “ostranenie priema” [defamiliarization of a narrative technique].³⁰ The idea behind this term, coined by Shklovsky, is that, after a technique or certain words have been used in narratives a number of times, their use and perception become automatic and they are neither able to create a desired impression any longer, nor do they possess the former aesthetic value. As the use of old narrative techniques becomes automatic, new techniques are called for, and therefore, new aesthetic values are shaped. It is possible to model changes in aesthetic values in a similar way: perception of some features may become automatic in the sense that they are perceived as neither new nor beautiful any more, and then different features come to be perceived as beautiful.

Beauty ideals in the prose of women-authors in the Stalinist era: Vera Panova

It is interesting to see whether beauty ideals which can be actually found in women authors’ texts of the war and post-war periods are in any way similar to those described by modern authors like Tokareva and Shcherbakova. Vera Panova provides us with texts which are representative of the Soviet women writing in the fifties. Panova was a Soviet bona-fide author, and “one of the major figures in the Soviet prose from the 1940s through the early 1970s.”³¹ A very popular author, Panova managed to navigate between the necessity to comply with a strict censorship regime, and her own need to subtly mock some of the Soviet dogmas. She was considered at one time as a rather liberal author; during her late years, Sergei Dovlatov was her secretary.

The first thing one notices when reading Vera Panova’s novel *Vremena Goda* (Span of the Year), published in 1953, is that one can actually find in it post-war ideals of woman’s beauty as described by Shcherbakova – hair combed over to one side, blonde and wavy, and *podbritye* [shaved] brows:

(3) *Dorofee sorok vosem’ let. Ona srednego rosta, khuden’kaia. Smu-gla. Legko smeetsia, legko tumanitsia. Pokhodka devich’ia. Volosy tem-no-rusye, podstrizhennye, na kotsakh zavivaiutsia v kol’tsa. Probor sboku, i odna priad’, s kolechkom na kontse, zalozhena za malen’koe ukho.*

[Dorofeia is forty eight. She is of middle height, slim. Dark skin. She laughs a lot, but can be easily saddened. She walks like a young girl. Her cut hair is blond, the ends are curling in rings. The hair is

29. Victor Shklovsky, *Gamburgskii schet* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), pp. 62-64.

30. See Eric Naiman, “Shklovsky’s Dog and Mulvey’s Pleasure: The Secret Life of Defamiliarization,” *Comparative Literature*, 50, no. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 333-52 on the effect of defamiliarization in cinema.

31. *Dictionary of Russian Women Writer*: 483.

combed over one side, and one lock, with a ring in the end, is behind her small ear.]³²

However, it may be that even at the time when this novel was written this style was already out of fashion and taken rather ironically: Dorofeia is not that young and by no means too glamorous even in the narrator's perception. Strictly speaking, it remains to be seen whether at any time (perhaps at the time of the October Revolution?) wavy blonde hair combed over one side was seen as the fashionable style of the day. It seems plausible that this style of appearance was considered beautiful approximately at the same time when communist hopes were still alive. However, it may be that this wavy hair swept onto one side worn, perhaps, by women-revolutionaries, was not specific for Russia and was a European fashion of the twenties or thirties, as it is mentioned by English speaking authors as well.

If one starts tracking back in time this short wavy haired look, frequently mentioned by both Russian and English speaking authors as a feature of the fifties, one can, perhaps, find some hints that it existed long before that. For example, Marietta Shaginian, in her novel *Peremena* (Change), published in 1923,³³ where she describes the events of the October Revolution, writes:

(4) *Za stolikom v kontseliarii devushka v shapke ushastoi, s kashtano-vym lokonom za ukhom i karandashom mezh obrubkami pal'tsev: dvukh pal'tsev u nei ne khvataet na pravoii ruke.*

[A girl was sitting at the table in the office in a long-eared hat on her chestnut locks tucked behind the ears. She was holding a pencil between the trunks of her fingers: two fingers on her right hand were missing].

The girl in (4) is clearly a Bolshevik, and although her hair is covered with ushanka [long-eared hat], one can guess that under it it looks like that of the beauties of the fifties, whose description even by the faithful Soviet authors is not infrequently rather ironic. Going back to Panova, it should be noted, that Panova's beauties, both male and female, are rusye [fair-haired] and belokuryi [blond]³⁴:

32. Vera Panova, "Vremena goda" ["Span of the Year"], in *Sobranie Sochinenii* [Selected Works] (Leningrad: Khudozh. Lit., Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1970), 5: 15.

33. Marietta Shaginian, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [Selected Works] (Moscow: "Khudozh. Lit-ra", 1986).

34. Panova, "Vremena goda," p. 11.

(5) *Kakoi-to molodoi chelovek smotrel na Dorofeiu s parovoznoi le-senki. Litso krasivoe; ot brovei vniz zagoreloe, a lob belyi. Nepokrytye rusye volosy volnoi, molodetskie plechi.*

[A young man was looking at Dorofeia from a steam-train ladder. His face was handsome, tanned below the brows, but the forehead was white. His uncovered fair hair lay in a wave, shoulders were strong.]³⁵

(6) *Golova byla belokuraia, chisto-chisto vymytaia, s tonkim proborom ot lba do khuden'kogo zatylka; kosy ulozheny v dva ventsa.*

[The hair was blond, washed and clean, divided from the forehead towards a thin neck; the plaits were arranged in two crowns.]³⁶

One of the changes pointed out by Tokareva in (1) is that big facial features may be considered beautiful now but they were not seen so before. Panova mentions big cheekbones, nose and mouth as ugly:

(7) *Na portretakh ona nekhoroša: skulastaia, s napriazhennym litsom.*

[She does not look good on her portraits: high cheek-bones, a lot of tension in the face.]³⁷

(8) . . . *litsom nekrasiv, nos shishkoi*

[. . . his face was not handsome: a nose like a big pinecone]³⁸

(9) *Ona byla gubastaia, tiazhelyi seryi vzgliad ispodlob'ia; strizhenye volosy bleklymi priadiami svisali iz-pod kosynki na vorotnik.*

[She had big lips, with a heavy gaze of her grey eyes under the frowning brows; her cut hair hung in colorless strands from under the hair-scarf onto her collar.]³⁹

However, a big forehead is good:

(10) *Tol'ko lob, ochen' bol'shoi i bugristyi, byl khorosh.*

35. *Ibid.*, p. 32

36. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

[Only his forehead, big and uneven, looked good.]⁴⁰

Although gubastyi [big-lipped] is mentioned as ugly in (9), there is another passage in the same novel by Panova, where big lips are seen as clearly attractive:

(11) *U nego bylo bezusoe, pravil'noe prodolgovatoe litso s krupnymi gubami; glaza nebol'shie, ser'eznye; v ikh spokoinom vzgliade i v ochertaniakh gub byla dobrota.*

[He had a smooth face with no hair, of an ideal oval shape, with big lips; his eyes were small, serious; one could see kindness in their calm gaze and in the shape of his lips.]⁴¹

One can see this seeming controversy in the aesthetic value of big features as the gradual emergence of a new system, in which big features are seen as no longer ugly but rather interesting. On the other hand, there are data indicating that big features are seen as becoming and attractive for men, but not for women,⁴² which is in accordance with examples (7) - (11).

Looking for change in beauty ideals over post-Stalinist pre-Perestroika years: Natalia Baranskaia and I. Grekova

In order to find out when the changes in ideals of physical beauty started occurring, it makes sense to look at women writers who are situated in time between the contemporary writers whose statements on change in beauty ideals we quoted in the beginning, and war and post-war women writers. There were surprisingly few well known women writers at the time. Among those best remembered at present are Natalia Baranskaia and I. Grekova.

Natalia Baranskaia

Natalia Baranskaia is considered by some critics today as a predecessor of Russian feminism,⁴³ who despite her conscious will was expressing intrinsically feminist ideas in her most acknowledged novella "Nedelia kak nedelia" (Week like any other), published in 1969. According to Kelly,⁴⁴ Baranskaia's prompt debut in *Novy Mir* indicated how important "women issues" were considered in Soviet official discourse, the view which was,

40. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

42. See Fisher, *Development and Structure of the Body Image*.

43. See E. Koshkarova, "Zhenskaia tema v proze 60-kh godov: Natalia Baranskaia kak zerkalo russkogo feminizma" ["Feminine theme in the prose of the 60s: Natalia Baranskaia as a Mirror of Russian Feminism"], in *Vse ljudi sestry. Bjulleten' PTSGI* [All people are sisters. Bulletin of PTSGI] no. 5 (1996), pp. 57-69 (available at: www.a-z.ru/women/texts/kashkarr.htm)

44. Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing*, pp. 397ff.

perhaps, shared (or had to be shared?) by Tvardovsky who was the chief editor of *Novy Mir* at the time. One of the problems tapped on by Baranskaia, which is responsible for the enormous response her novella generated, is the double burden of working women in the Post-Stalinist time, whose domestic duties, in official view, were considered important only because they could detract women from being servants of the Soviet State. The main heroine of the novella and many of her contemporaries came to detest this view, as well as many Soviet shortages and hardships aggravating their life even more, which clearly differentiates them from the previous generation of women, far more compliant towards 100% emancipation forced on them by the Soviet authorities.

Let us look at the beauty ideals in this novella.

(12) *Nenavizhu svoi sputannye volosy, zaspannye glaza, svoe mal'chisheskoe litso s bol'shim rtom i nosom, kak u Buratino. Pochemu ia s takim litsom ne rodilas' muzhchinoi?*

[I hate my tangled hair, eyes swollen from sleep, my boyish face with a big mouth and Buratino's nose. Why wasn't I born a man with a face like this?]⁴⁵

Here the attitude to big facial features and sputannye [tangled] hair seems somewhat controversial: on the one hand, the heroine says that she hates her tangled hair and big mouth and nose, on the other hand the author's description lets us feel that all this is attractive.

When the heroine wants to make herself beautiful she gets a haircut pod mal'chika [boy haircut]:

(13) – *Soglasno vashemu litsu, predlagaiu pod mal'chika – ne vozrazhaete? – sprashivaet Lenia.*

[According to your face type I suggest you get a boy's cut – do you agree? – asked Lenia.]⁴⁶

I. Grekova

Irina Grekova is a writer who started to write, like Baranskaia, late in life, and had previously had another career in science. Like Baranskaia, she was associated by many with describing the life of intelligentsia.

In Grekova's prose one finds the same familiar stereotypes of beauty that can be traced back at least to the time of Panova, but there also appear some clearly new beautiful features, perhaps indicating the emergence of

45. Natalia Baranskaia, "Nedelia kak nedelia" ["A Week Like Another"], in *Novy Mir* [New World], 11 (1969), p. 24.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

new ideals of beauty. Beautiful hair means colorful and mostly svetlyi [fair] or ryzhyi [red], can be called rusyi [fair] and bronzovyi [bronze]:

(14) *Magda o sebe pochti ne rasskazyvaet. Delovita, sobranna, vsia v rabote.*

- *Zhenshchina epokhi NTR?*

- *Esli khotite, da. Zhenstvennost' v nei est', no ona gluboko zapriatana, utaena. Tol'ko inogda prob'etsia vo vzgliade, v bronzovom bleske volos.*

[Magda tells almost nothing about herself. She is very businesslike, reserved, all absorbed in her work.

– A woman of the epoch of the science and technology revolution?

– Yes, if you like. There is a feminine side to her, but it is hidden, secretive. Sometimes you can see it in her gaze, in the bronze shine of her hair.]⁴⁷

A blonde woman with a lot of hair is called by Grekova snopovolosaia [sheaf-haired] which, perhaps, refreshes the attractiveness of blonde hair:

(15) *Bystraia, snopovolosaia, s malen'kim iarkim rtom, ona zabezha-la kak-to v obshchuiu komnatu . . .*

[Swift, sheaf-haired, with a small bright mouth, she ran once into a common room.]⁴⁸

The following example illustrates where the stereotypes of the time were different from those of today. Volosy do plech [shoulder length hair] and a flat chest seemed to be attributes of an immature person in 1981 when *Porogi* (Thresholds) was published:

(16) *I v samom dele ona byla mala rostom i ploska, pochti bezgruda. Pricheska mal'chika pazha – speredu chelka, szadi volosy do plech – eshche usilivala vpechatlenie nedozrelosti. Na litse vsego zametnee byli glaza – bol'shie, chrezmerno svetlye, zelenye s golubiznoi, gliadevshie priamo i trebovatel'no. "Prelestnaia zhenshchina", - skazal o nei Gan. Nu net. Krasota, pozhalui, byla – tonkaia, sobrannaia, smuglaia; prelesti ne bylo.*

[Indeed she was small and flat, with almost no bust. The hairstyle was of a page-boy: a fringe in the front and shoulder-length hair in the back which enhanced the impression of immaturity. The most notice-

47 Irina Grekova, *Porogi. Roman, povesti* [Thresholds. A novel, novellas] (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1986), p. 47.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

able feature in her face were eyes – big, too light, green with a blue shade, which looked at you directly, as if with a request. “A charming woman,” – Gan said about her. No. There was, perhaps, beauty in her – thin, dark, concentrated; but no charm]⁴⁹

Example (16) illustrates the actual change of beauty ideals: on the one hand, full-bodied war and post-war figures are still in fashion and the boy-figure divergence from this stereotype is seen as immature; on the other hand, this type of appearance, as well as shoulder-length hair and blue-green eyes are admitted, though not without doubt (*pozhalui* [probably]) to be beautiful.

A child-like face is perceived by Grekova as beautiful, although to the hero (Neshatov) it seems, perhaps, somewhat unattractive by being too patrician and angel-like:

(17) *V uglu u pul'ta stoial krasivyi, ochen' vysokii molodoi chelovek Tak i videlas' na nem bogatymi skladkami zadrapirovannaia toga. Neshatov otchuzhdenno otmetil nezumno rozovoe litso, rovnnye dugi brovei i mladencheski chistyie, udlinennye golubye glaza.*

[There was a handsome, very tall young man standing in the corner near the desk. One could easily imagine him in a toga draped in rich folds. The detached gaze of Neshatov noticed his tender pink face, the straight arches of the brows and baby-like pure, long blue eyes.]⁵⁰

It should be noted that although it seems unusual for a male child-like face to be seen as attractive, passages like this could be found in earlier writers. For example, Panova writes:

(18) *U nego bylo bezusoe, pravil'noe prodolgovatoe litso s krupnymi gubami; Glaza nebol'shie, ser'ioznye; v ikh spokoinom vzgliade i v ochertaniiakh gub byla dobrota. . . . Stoialo v glazakh ser'ioznoe detskoe litso s dobrymi gubami.*

[He had a smooth face with no hair, of the ideal oval shape, and big lips. His eyes were small, serious; one could see kindness in their calm gaze and in the shape of his lips. . . . She could still see his serious childish face with kind lips.]⁵¹

49. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

51. Panova, “Vremena goda,” p. 14.

Modern Post-Perestroika writers: Svetlana Vasilenko, Irina Denezhkina, Linor Goralik, Valeria Narbikova

It is interesting to see whether beauty ideals of women writers who emerged in the nineties and later, that is, in most cases, fairly young writers, are in any perceivable way different from those who have been there for a while.

It should be noted that there is not much agreement on who are the most prominent modern women writers in Western criticism.⁵² Significant signs of critical acclaim, other than literary theorists' attention, are, of course, frequent publication in leading journals and well-established literary websites, and the winning of literary prizes.

Some modern women writers may not seem any different from their predecessors in their use of body descriptions. For example, the well-acclaimed Svetlana Vasilenko is not any different from writers of the previous generation in her frequent use of references to the size, shape and color of body parts, which are often connected in her writing to character traits. To quote just one example:

(19) *U maiora krasivoe, kak antichnaia maska, seroe nepronitsaemoe litso*

[The major had a handsome, like a classical mask, grey, unreadable face].⁵³

Other modern writers are downright polemic in their use of body descriptions towards the previous aesthetics.

Irina Denezhkina published her book *Daj mne!* (Give me!) in 2004 at the age of twenty and was short-listed for the "National bestseller" prize in the same year. On one of the first pages of her novel one finds the following description:

(20) *Nemnogo obo mne: ia vyshe Liapy na piat' santimetrov, u menia dlinnye temnye volosy, karie glaza, gromadnoe samomnenie i figura mo-deli.*

52. For sources discussing contemporary Russian women writers see *Nine of Russia's Foremost Writers*, Natasha Perova and Joanne Turnbull, eds. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2002); Helena Goschilo, "Women's Space and Women's Place in Contemporary Russian Fiction," in *Gender and Russian Literature*, Rosalind Marsh, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 326-48; Goschilo, "Paradigm Lost? Contemporary Women's Fiction"; *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers*, Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal, Mary Zirin, eds. (New Haven, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

53. Svetlana Vasilenko, "Gorod za koliuchei provolokoi" ["A city behind barbed wire"], *Novy Mir* [New World], 6 (2006).

[Now a little bit about me: I am taller than Ljapa by five centimeters, I have long dark hair, brown eyes, I am hugely arrogant and I have the figure of a model.]⁵⁴

As we can see, the development of beauty ideals still follows the trend described by Tokareva in example (1): tall is beautiful (in this case a woman is taller than her boyfriend by 5 centimeters). It should be noted too that this beauty is different from beauties of the forties, fifties and seventies in her coloring: she is no longer *belokuraia* [blonde] and has brown rather than blue eyes, which may be seen as a kind of polemic with the beauty ideals of the past. The following description is, perhaps, also polemic and shows the author's obvious reserve towards a well-fed curvy body and carefully styled hair:

(21) *Na Volkovoi dlinnoe sinee plat'e, pokazyvaiushchee vsem, chto vot u nee grud', vot popa – vse bol'shoe, sochnoe. Volosy svetlye, tshchatel'no ulozhennye i politye lakom – “Ne to chto tebe – lysinu prichesala i poshla.”*

[Volkova is wearing a long blue dress that lets everybody see her chest and bottom – all big and juicy. Her hair is fair, carefully arranged and lacquered. “Not like you – comb your bald head and go” – she says.]⁵⁵

One of the most interesting modern women authors writing in Russian, Linor Goralik, writing as a co-author of Sergei Kuznetsov, provides refreshingly strange descriptions of what beauty is:

(22) *Lenochka vse-taki ochen' khorosha – strannaia, kak edinorog, shiroko rassazhennye glaza i miagkie, pripukhshie gubki embriona pri plastike ne to striptizershi, ne to, naoborot, nevinnoi shkol'nitsy, bessovestno drazniashchei v tenistom skvere vzroslykh pokhotlivykh diadek.*

[Lenochka is very beautiful, after all – strange like a unicorn, with eyes placed far from one another and the soft, swollen lips of an embryo, with the plasticity of, maybe, a stripper or, maybe, quite the opposite, of an innocent schoolgirl, shamelessly teasing lusty adult men in a shadowy park.]⁵⁶

Shiroko rassazhennye glaza [eyes placed far from one another] can be seen as a big facial feature, characteristic of a modern, or post-modernist,

54. Irina Denezhkina, *Daj mne! Song for lovers* [Give me! Song for lovers] (Saint-Petersburg and Moscow: Limbus Press, 2004), p. 8.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

56. Linor Goralik and Sergei Kuznetsov, *Net* [No] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005), p. 30.

view on what beauty is. The previous passage is also valuable because it makes explicit the connection between moral and aesthetic values often implicit in the writing of other authors. Moral values of Goralik and Kuznetsov, or at least what they proclaim as such, are totally different from those of the past, and so is, apparently as a consequence, their aesthetics. Along these lines, it does not seem surprising that features that used to be seen as ugly, such as *gubastaia* [big-lipped] (cf. (9) from Vera Panova) are treated by Linor Goralik as beautiful:

(23) *Eto Landa Gold, kogda-to prekrasnaia aktrisa, gubastaia i tonkonogaia, kak obez'ianka, teper' – bessmennyi sekretar' koalitsii . .*

[This is Landa Gold, who was a wonderful actress at one time, looking like a monkey with her big lips and thin legs, now she is a permanent secretary of the coalition.]⁵⁷

However, it is good to see that there is some “preemstvennost” [feature inheritance] between what Vera Panova saw as beautiful and what it means to Linor Goralik. One of her two main beauties in the novel *Net* (No) has extremely long gold hair:

(24) *I pervoi v kachestve souchastnitsy madam Glorii Lorkin poidet divnaia, divnaia devochka s prekrasnymi, kak zolotoe runo, volosami.*

[And the first one to be considered as an accomplice of madame Gloria Lorkin will be a wonderful, wonderful girl with hair beautiful like the Golden Fleece.]⁵⁸

It is interesting to note that differences between modern women writers' approach to beauty and that of their predecessors can be seen in terms of the different concepts of beauty they choose, similar, if not as philosophically developed, to those discussed in the introduction. Thus, if some modern writers, like Denezhkina and Goralik, are different from the previous generation of writers in what proportions they consider beautiful and may be clearly polemic towards the previous human body aesthetics in their choice of beautiful “interrelationships” of parts, others do not use descriptions of body proportions at all. One of the most striking examples of this kind is Valeria Narbikova's book *Izbrannoe, ili shepot shuma* (Selected Works, or the Whisper of the Noise),⁵⁹ which hardly contains a single tra-

57. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 374.

59. Valeria Narbikova, *Izbrannoe, ili Shepot Shuma: Roman, Povesti* [Selected works, or the Whisper of the Noise: A Novel and Short Stories] (Paris- Moscow-New York: Izd-vo “Tretiiia volna,” 1994).

ditional body description at all, despite its highly romantic, not to say erotic, content. All references to a value system involved in body perception are purely subjective: these are words like *krasivaia* [beautiful] occasionally used by Narbikova as well as rather rare unconventional metaphors.

Similarly, Marina Palei's "Long Distance ili Slavianskii Aktsent"⁶⁰ is almost free of traditional body descriptions. What this text relies on for evoking the necessary visual ideas is, again, metaphors and word combinations referring to culturally significant images, often not specifically Russian: *gollivudskii liubovnik* [Hollywood lover], *nos v stile Pikasso* [a Picasso style nose].

Conclusion

Ideals of physical beauty are subject to change over time. Although it is tempting to connect changes in bodily aesthetics with changes in other systems, such as economics, in accordance with the correspondence theory of beauty, its explanatory power, as we have seen, is limited. Another mechanism involved in the evolution of bodily aesthetics is "defamiliarization" described by Shklovsky: the constant change of values is caused by the fact that what used to be perceived as new and different from "an average" gradually ceases to be seen so, and other features, at first seen as unusual, come to be seen as beautiful.

One of the most notable directions, in which the aesthetics of the human body has developed in the texts of modern women writers is the drift towards the subjective understanding of beauty, as opposed to the classical proportional ideals.

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60. Marina Palei, "Long Distance ili Slavianskii Aktsent" ["Long Distance or A Slavic Accent"], *Novy Mir* [New World], 1-5 (2000).