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ARTICLE

"A hitherto unheard-of and harmful thing": Breastfeeding and Violence in Russian Literature

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Abstract

This article examines the construction of maternal subjectivity in the context of breastfeeding narratives in Russian literature, from the early 1800s to the 1920s. It draws on historical and contemporary socio-economic contexts, in Russia and the West, to support its major contention that, in literature, breastfeeding and violence are intrinsically connected at a symbolic level. As a literary trope, breastfeeding tends to be presented either as the antithesis of violence (as in the passages analysed from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Krylov's *Fables*) or as a continuation of underlying structural violence (with examples from Korolenko, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky). Through three detailed close readings of fictions by Ivan Lazhechnikov (the 1859 novella "My Doctor's Grimace"), Mikhail Voskresenskii (the 1858 novel *Natasha Podgorich*), and Vsevolod Ivanov (the 1922 short story "The Child"), I argue that realist literary depictions of maternal breastfeeding and wet-nursing demonstrate both the social vulnerability of mothers and the temporary autonomy or even sanctuary gained through these practices. I apply Bourdieu's definition of "symbolic violence" and Cixous's notions of "white ink" and "écriture féminine" to the context of Russian maternal fictions. I conclude that the characterization of nursing mothers in Russian realist literature is both revelatory and subversive.

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act I, Scene VII

[Correction added on 26 April 2023, after first online publication: The copyright line was changed.]

INTRODUCTION

It may seem counterintuitive to link breastfeeding with violence. Both behaviors are hardwired into human biology, yet they are mutually opposed: one epitomizes nurture and tenderness, the other destruction and fear. As a symbol, breastfeeding is uniquely privileged in the semiotics of infant care. It is consecrated in art, especially religious art, as the supreme expression of maternal love. Depictions of the "Madonna Lactans" nurturing the Holy Infant form a subgenre of Christian iconography. In Eastern Orthodox art, this includes the Byzantine "Bogomater' Galaktotrophousa" and the Russian "Mlekopitatel'nitsa"; both terms mean "the Mother of God who nourishes with milk" (FIGURE 1).[1] In literature, breastfeeding was endorsed by Rousseau as the gold (or gold top) standard of motherhood; an approval famously seconded by Tolstoy. In *Anna Karenina* (1878), the positive heroine Kitty Levin finds comfort in feeding her infant, at the exact moment her troubled husband is contemplating self-murder.[2] The critical theorist Hélène Cixous, attempting to shift the symbolism of creativity from what she termed the "false theatre of phallocentric representationalism" to a holistic, feminine-influenced perspective, enshrined "white ink," or mothers' milk, as her metaphor for a new literary aesthetic modelled on the maternal body.[3] Tolstoy might have rejected Cixous's terminology, but the final section of his novel appears to reinforce her point by setting Levin's fantasy of ending it all with a (phallic) shotgun beside Kitty's calm confidence as she hurries towards her hungry son, "feeling the rush of milk" within her.[4] Levin's self-destructive despair could not be more flagrantly contrasted with his wife's maternal instinct to soothe and satisfy.[5]

Yet, in most world cultures, breastfeeding is inseparable from violence. And by the latter term, I have in mind not only brutality inflicted against mothers (or, as in the epigraph to this article, potentially inflicted by them), but also indirect (symbolic) violence, whether psychological or structural. Psychological violence results when mothers are prevented from making their own nurturing choices. The harm suffered by mothers and their infants as a result of failed, compulsory, or interrupted breastfeeding may entail both physical and psychological consequences. Symbolic violence, defined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as "violence … exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity," encompasses bodily and mental harm as well as the structural violence implicit in mothers' tacit conformity to the economic, social, and ethnic rules of any given society.[6] Clearly, physical and symbolic violence overlap; one often contains, or provokes, the other. Nineteenth-century

[1] The early Christian symbolism of breastmilk is extremely complex (sometimes lactation was even metaphorically attributed to male figures, famously including Bernard of Clairvaux and Christ himself). See Janet Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford, 2008), esp. 85–99. Visual images of the Madonna breastfeeding the Christ child, although widespread in Western Christianity from the early medieval period onward, appeared rather later in Eastern Orthodox art, due to theological concerns that this type of icon oversexualized the Virgin and overemphasized the Christ-child's human vulnerability. See Sarah T. Brooks, "An Engraved Copper Plate of the Virgin *Galaktotrophousa*: Images from the Holy Mountain in the Modern Age of Reproduction," *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 27 (2009–10): 131–52, to which I am indebted for the translation of "Galaktotrophousa" used above.

[2] L. N. Tolstoi, *Anna Karenina* (Moscow, 2009), 765–73.

[3] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1;4 (Summer 1976); 880. The complexities of "white ink" and Cixous's related concept of "*écriture feminine*" are more fully explored in Hélène Cixous and Susan Sellers, *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics* (Oxford, 2014); and concisely summarized in Susan Sellers's "Introduction" to *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (London, 2004), xxix–xxx.

[4] Tolstoi, *Anna Karenina*, 766. All translations in this article are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[5] Tolstoy's opposition of self-harm to nurturing does not necessarily align with gender difference: the titular Anna Karenina famously chooses suicide by train (another phallic symbol) over a rewarding life with her second family. As many critics have noted, Anna's decision to hire a wet-nurse (*kormilitsa*) for her daughter with Vronsky indicates her failure to bond maternally with this child. Nurture is therefore not nature. For at least some of Tolstoy's female characters, the ability to nurture children is aspirational rather than inborn. Tolstoy's intention, therefore, is not to simplistically oppose men and women, but to display the contrast between maternal selflessness and insecure egocentrism as character types. Similarly, Cixous's aesthetic of *écriture feminine*—writing in "white ink"—is not centred on female authorship or female themes, but on a harder-to-define "feminine practice of writing," which writers of any gender can develop ("The Laugh of the Medusa," 883).

[6] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago, 1992), 167. The development of Bourdieu's views on symbolic violence, somewhat elusively sketched in this volume, are helpfully adumbrated in J. Daniel Schubert, "Suffering/Symbolic Violence," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael James Grenfell (Oxford, 2014), 179–94. See also Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, "Symbolic Violence," in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Pierre Bourgois (Oxford, 2004), 272.

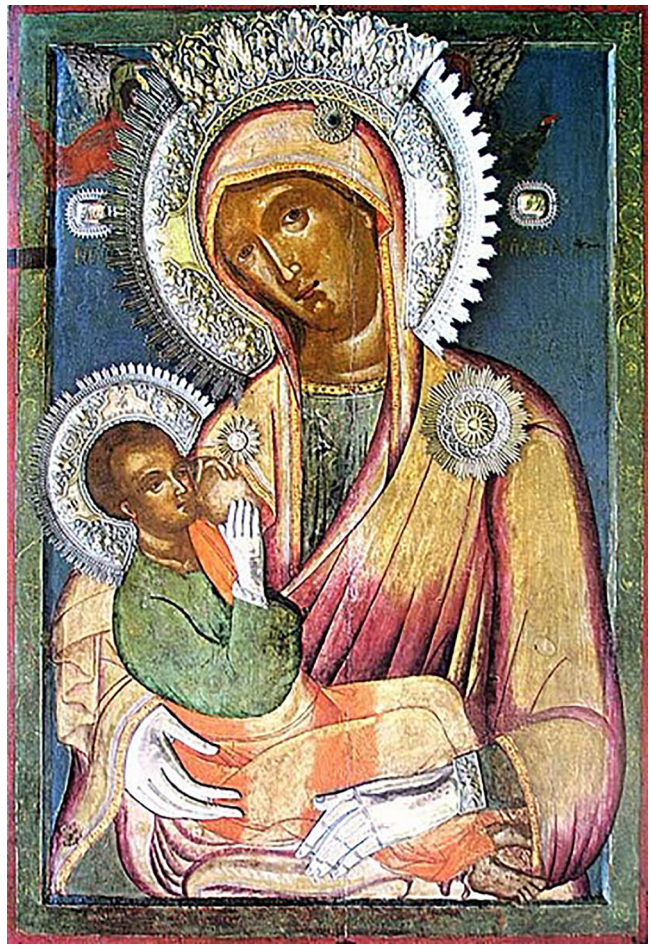

FIGURE 1 Sixth-century AD icon of the *Mlekopitatel'nitsa* from Mount Athos, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Икона_Млекопитательница.jpg.

literature features several recurring breastfeeding plots: mothers prevented from breastfeeding their infants; mothers obliged to nurse children (their own or others') or even young animals against their own will, often through economic pressure; and mothers for whom breastfeeding, however unwelcome, provides temporary refuge from sexual violence or financial deprivation. These narrative patterns reveal the entanglement of nurture and danger in nineteenth-century realist fiction: breastfeeding repeatedly figures as a focus for violence, sometimes even as a form of violence, but also as a time-limited escape from it.

Breastfeeding narratives are a key part of the representation of motherhood in literature, a space where social attitudes to maternal behavior are simultaneously forged, perpetuated, normalized, and challenged. While this process has been unfolding since the dawn of storytelling, my article will focus on the interaction of breastfeeding and violence in Russian writing between the mid-nineteenth century and the introduction of Socialist Realism in the 1920s. Realism, the dominant genre of this period, was an important crucible for the formation of maternal subjectivities in modern literature: Flaubert's Emma Bovary, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, Fontana's Effi Briest, and Ibsen's Hedda Gabler all fail at domesticity in ways that challenged socially accepted parameters of motherhood. Through their actions and fates, these female protagonists elaborated transgressive alternatives to maternal norms,

alternatives which have informed the self-fashioning of real and fictional women ever since. Into this canon of contested motherhood I introduce (for the first time in the Russian context) breastfeeding narrative. I begin by tracing the cultural grounds for associating breastfeeding with real and symbolic violence, both in the contemporary West and in post-medieval Russia. In the main part of this article, I examine how three different tropes of breastfeeding narrative play out in three male-authored Russian realist texts: the infliction of, respectively, psychological, economic, and ethnic violence upon female characters.[7]

My reading of historical novelist Ivan Lazhechnikov's 1859 novella "My Doctor's Grimace" interprets breast milk as a symbol of female instability, but also of autonomy and self-expression; the titular doctor's efforts to suppress both lactation and female agency do not end well for anyone involved. The now-forgotten popular writer M. I. Voskresenskii's four-part novel *Natasha Podgorich* (1858), conversely, demonstrates how wet-nursing allows a young woman to *gain* agency and thus temporarily escape male control. The short story "The Child" (1922) by the Soviet-era author Vsevolod Ivanov further scrutinizes the ethical complexity of wet-nursing: here, as a mode of simultaneously escaping and resisting colonial violence. Since fictional depictions of motherhood both describe, and contribute to shaping, real-life maternal practices and experience, I explore how these texts reflect contemporary gender (and other) prejudices while unexpectedly revealing pathways for female independence. This aspect of realism has already been celebrated, in other literary contexts, through late twentieth-century feminist post-structural criticism. In her important 1975 manifesto for *écriture feminine*, *The Newly-Born Woman*, Cixous called for the realization of "woman's libidinal economy," or "the female imaginary," a form of narrative which would be inspired by female physiological experience, including birth and motherhood.[8] The female imaginary, crucially, is not the exclusive preserve of women writers: Cixous's point is that the adoption of female-inspired semiotics leads writers of any gender in unexpected and liberating stylistic and thematic directions.

My analysis of breastfeeding narrative here proposes, if not a new libidinal economy for Russian literature, a new "semiotics of milk" within realist prose, signalling both the influence and the vulnerability of mothers in Russian society. Breastfeeding is a symbol of female power, since it not only keeps children alive but contributes to their formation: it empowers lactating mothers, allowing them social and economic independence. When breastfeeding is inhibited, as in Lazhechnikov's story, the family unit collapses. Wet-nursing allows women whose experiences may intersect with the familiar archetypes of the wronged woman or the courtesan an alternative narrative arc, one which does not involve prostitution or dependence on others, as Ivanov's and Voskresenskii's characters demonstrate.[9] Tragically, the breastfeeding plot entails its own conclusion: the breastfeeding woman's independence is both temporary—limited by the child's development—and transient, like milk itself, easily interrupted by physical or structural violence. I conclude by arguing that, almost in spite of themselves, male-authored narratives suggest alternative (even if paradoxical or short-lived) pathways for their female characters to evade confining social structures and hierarchies; even, potentially, to recognize and re-frame them.

[7] Comparatively few Russian examples of what Cixous would call "*écriture feminine*" (literature inspired by the patterns of female physical sensation) are written by female authors. Contemporary exceptions, whose writings focus on exclusively female physiological experience such as menstruation, pregnancy, and breastfeeding, include Liudmila Ulitskaia, Narinè Abgarian, and Guzel' Iakhina. Scholarship is similarly meagre. On Ulitskaia's maternal fictions see Benjamin Sutcliffe, "Mother, Daughter, History: Embodying the Past in Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Sonechka* and *The Case of Kukotsky*," *Slavic and East European Journal* 53:4 (Winter 2009): 606–22. For a detailed investigation of breastfeeding as a theme in Tolstoy's fiction see Aura Evenstar Young's extrapolation in her "'And She Nursed Them All Splendidly Herself': Breasts and Breastfeeding in the Works of Lev Tolstoi" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2019).

[8] Hélène Cixous, *The Newly-Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis, 1986), 90. For the original see Hélène Cixous, *La jeune née* (Paris, 1978).

[9] On the prostitute, the kept woman, and other similar archetypes in Russian before 1917 see Colleen Lucey, *Love for Sale: Representing Prostitution in Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, 2021).

"MYSTERIOUS, POLLUTING, DANGEROUS AND DIFFERENT": NURSING AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Infants nurse from the mother's breast in every ethnicity across the globe; if they did not, the human race would be long extinct. Yet the practice of breastfeeding is fiercely contested. Historically, it has been shunned by entire cultures: even in the ancient world, before formula milk existed as a viable alternative, maternal breastfeeding was occasionally, yet significantly, considered unhealthy, unclean, or obscene. In the contemporary rich world, breastfeeding has become a partisan issue, entangled with feminism, workplace rights, economic status, and class identity. Mothers in receipt of paid maternity leave can choose to breastfeed during their child's infancy; mothers who work full-time may be unable to sustain lactation, even if they wish to do so.[10] Some popular media outlets label breastfeeding advocates "Breastapo" for their supposedly aggressive shaming of mothers who turn to formula milk.[11] Globally, maternal breastfeeding is often interrupted or preempted by the introduction of artificial milk, a practice condoned by many hospitals and promoted by those international conglomerates which profit from selling infant formula. In the developing world, formula milk can strain the family budget and sometimes proves fatal for infants, especially where clean water and sterile implements are unavailable.[12] Thus, globally, breastfeeding is implicated in several forms of violence, direct and indirect. These are also forms of gender violence: aggression directed against an individual or group specifically on account of their gender.[13] Forcing a woman to breastfeed, or preventing her from doing so, is necessarily gender violence.[14] While not gender violence, withholding breastfeeding was a common form of infanticide among the medieval and early modern poor of Europe and Russia, widely acknowledged (although not legally abetted) as a means of post-natal birth control.[15]

Even where breastfeeding is culturally accepted, religious or social strictures (and fashions) often undermine its success. Ancient Greek and Roman physicians generally recommended maternal breastfeeding, to support emotional bonding. But this view was not unanimous: others considered the child's own mother's milk harmful during the first month of life. Plato supported breastfeeding, but advised against maternal exclusivity: in his *Republic*, he suggested that infants should be kept in crèches and fed by lactating mothers on a wholly random, rotating basis.[16] In early modern Russia, religion

[10] A recent UNICEF report (2019) showed that the United States is the only OECD nation to offer no nationally mandated paid maternity leave. See https://www.unicef-irc.org/family-friendly. On October 22, 2021, the House of Representatives passed the bipartisan Providing Urgent Maternal Protections for Nursing Mothers Act, which compels employers with more than 25 employees to provide an appropriate space and paid time for nursing mothers to express milk in their workplace, over a maximum period of two years. See https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3110. All URLs cited in this article were last accessed December 12, 2022.

[11] See, for example, this article by the *Daily Mail*'s "medical expert" Dr. Ellie Cannon, "How I was hounded by 'Breastapo' and why we MUST stop bashing mums who choose the bottle," *Daily Mail*, March 2, 2014, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2570925/How-I-hounded-Breastapo-MUST-stop-bashing-mums-choose-bottle.html. For a similar view in an American magazine, see Élisabeth Badinter, "The Tyranny of Breast-Feeding: New Mothers vs. La Leche League," *Harper's*, March 2012, https://harpers.org/archive/2012/03/the-tyranny-of-breast-feeding.html. Badinter was at that time a major shareholder in the publicity agency Publicis Groupe, global promoter of Nestlé infant formula.

[12] For in-depth analysis of the commercialization of artificial milks and the consequence of their use for infant health see Gabrielle Palmer, *The Politics of Breastfeeding: When Breasts Are Bad for Business* (London, 2011). See also Kimberley Seals Allers, *The Big Letdown: How Medicine, Big Business and Feminism Undermine Breastfeeding* (New York, 2017) and, for a specifically American case study of the interaction of aggressive formula marketing, race, and child poverty, Andrea Freeman, *Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race, and Injustice* (Stanford, 2020), esp. 59–86.

[13] For discussion of gender violence as a structural, pervasive, intersectional phenomenon, see Sally Engle Merry, *Gender Violence: A Cultural Perspective* (Oxford, 2009); on the family itself as "one of the most violent of social institutions," see Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, "Introduction: Making Sense of Violence," in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, eds. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (Oxford, 2004), 3, and also Scheper-Hughes's chapters in the same volume.

[14] The term "chestfeeding" is increasingly used in LGBTQ communities replacing "breastfeeding," to include trans men and other genderqueer individuals who choose to lactate. See Brintni de la Cretaz, "What It's Like to Chestfeed," August 23, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/08/chestfeeding/497015.html.

[15] For more on this practice in Russia see Eve Levin, "Infanticide in Pre-Petrine Russia," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* (1986): 215–24, esp. 217.

[16] See Patricia Salzman-Mitchell, "Tenderness or Taboo: Images of Breast-Feeding Mothers in Greek and Latin Literature," in *Mothering and Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Lauren Hackworth Petersen and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (Austin, 2012), 141–64, esp. 143; and

complicated maternal breastfeeding: since the Orthodox Church considered women impure for forty days following childbirth, affluent women may have engaged wet-nurses to protect their newborns from their own impurity.[17] The clergy both recommended and discouraged maternal breastfeeding. Although infant feeding is ignored in the influential sixteenth-century *Domostroi*, the Orthodox Bishop Dmitrii Tuptalo (later canonized as St Dimitrii of Rostov) later penned a treatise advising: "It is best of all and healthiest for the baby when the birth mother feeds [the baby] with her own breast milk, because the birth mother's milk is needed at the birth of a baby."[18] Yet by 1755 a visiting French physician would write that "the practice of giving women's milk to infants is wholly unknown in Muscovy."[19] Russia's apparently capricious attitudes to maternal breastfeeding echoed those abroad: many European cultures have cyclically stigmatized, or even locally forbidden, maternal breastfeeding.[20] Justifications for these extreme views have ranged between religious prejudice, hygiene concerns, and conjugal responsibility, including simple discomfort with the perceived sensual or animalistic connotations of suckling.[21] From the medieval period to the nineteenth century, most elite Russian women hired wet-nurses to feed their infants (despite idealistic Enlightenment-era promotion of maternal breastfeeding as a civic duty, both by physicians and by well-known intellectuals like Nikolai Novikov). Wet-nurses were also hired for orphaned infants, with tragically little success.[22] This practice, the only viable alternative to maternal breastfeeding before the availability of infant formula, created a new set of intersectional anxieties based around the wet-nurse's character, as we shall see later in this article. Although Russian peasant women breastfed their own babies, heartbreakingly high rates of infant mortality reflected the mothers' long working hours, unhygienic homes, and an unfortunate cultural obsession with giving tiny infants solid food.[23]

These economic, social, and mystical obstacles to breastfeeding have always been reflected in the cultural world. Potentially erotic, even incestuous, connotations of the maternal breast in art limited the representation of breastfeeding mothers in Ancient Greek and Roman visual culture; breastfeeding was perceived by some as an atavistic, even animalistic practice. (Even Orthodox religious art courted controversy: by displaying the Virgin Mother's bared breast and the pleasure experienced by the Christ-child, icons risked corporealizing and [arguably] sexualizing these

Larissa Bonfante, "Nursing Mothers in Classical Art," in *Naked Truths: Women, Sexuality and Gender in Classical Art and Archaeology*, ed. Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow and Claire L. Lyons, 174–96. On how the Greeks associated the female breast with both desire and fear, see Douglas E. Gerber, "The Female Breast in Greek Erotic Literature," *Arethusa* 11:1/2 (1978): 203–12, esp. 208.

[17] Anna Kuxhausen makes this argument in *From the Womb to the Body Politic: Raising the Nation in Enlightenment Russia* (Madison, 2013), 56. See also Eve Levin, "Childbirth in Pre-Petrine Russia: Canon Law and Popular Traditions," in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements et al. (Berkeley, 1991), 44–59, esp. 49–50, 57. Levin notes the additional complication that no-one, including the newborn infant, was supposed to eat in the presence of an impure woman (ibid., 50).

[18] Cited and translated by Rosemary Jane Finlinson, "Gender, Body and Parenthood in Muscovite Russia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2020), 75.

[19] Pierre Brouzet, "An essay on the medicinal education of children; and the treatment of their diseases," trans. unknown (London, 1755), cited by Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles & Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh, 1986), 265. Brouzet (c. 1714–72) was the court physician of King Louis XV of France, and a Correspondent of Royal Academy of Sciences and Belles-Lettres at Beziers. His treatise on infant feeding in Muscovy claims that babies were placed on the ground and encouraged to suck a tube connected to a bowl of animal milk "whenever [they are] oppressed with hunger or thirst." Fildes argues that these feeding strategies were more likely to prevail in Northern Europe, where cold conditions discouraged stored milk from spoiling; in some parts of Central Europe as late as the eighteenth century, newborn infants were fed animal milk mixed with flour and boiled water flavored with ground antlers (*Breasts, Bottles & Babies*, 264–65).

[20] Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles & Babies*, 16 and *passim*. See also, for a global cultural history of human milk¸ Lawrence Trevelyan Weaver, *White Blood: A History of Human Milk* (Chicago, 2021).

[21] For example, Toni Bowers analyses Part Two of Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740–41) in the context of eighteenth-century sexual politics, as a case study in the reassertion of "patriarchal prerogatives over maternal bodies." Mr. B. successfully persuades the heroine to stop breastfeeding their son (despite excellent arguments to the contrary), so that he can have sex with her again. See Bowers, "'A Point of Conscience': Breastfeeding and Maternal Authority in *Pamela* 2," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7:3 (April 1995): 278, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.1995.0055.

[22] Kuxhausen examines this ideological shift during the eighteenth century, as well as the Russian state's efforts to feed abandoned infants, in *From the Womb to the Body Politic*, esp. chap. 3, "Mother's Milk," 55–74, The widespread use of professional wet-nurses by both middle- (and upper-) class families and state-run foundling homes also occurred in France at the same period, where it persisted well into the nineteenth century. By the 1750s over ten thousand registered wet-nurses were available for hire in Paris alone. See George D. Sussman, *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France, 1715–1914* (Urbana, 1982).

[23] David L. Ransel, "Infant Care Cultures in the Russian Empire," in *Russia's Women*, 113–32, esp. 117–20.

divinities.) Larissa Bonfante, attempting to explain the paucity of positive representations of maternal breastfeeding in Ancient Greek art or literature, suggests that bared female breasts (even in the context of infant nurture) stimulated "feelings of a world awry, of anxiety and nightmarish danger."[24] Patricia Salzman-Mitchell notes that "the tenderness of the breastfeeding experience [in Ancient Greek and Roman literature] tends to foreshadow tragedy and carries with it a sense of doom."[25] Classical authors, typically male, reacted with "discomfort" to a practice that appeared closer "to the animal side of nature rather than to the civilized world"; they depicted breastfeeding women as "mysterious, polluting, dangerous and different."[26] This confused response to motherhood—veering between idealization and censure—informs the persistent literary concatenation of breastfeeding with violence.

The sacral ideal of motherhood, firmly correlated with national identity, was inscribed in Soviet cultural mythography during an early pronatalist campaign which urged maternal breastfeeding, even offering cash prizes to multiparous mothers (Hoffmann has noted that the campaign was less effective for population increase than it might have been, very likely because women were still expected, and often aspired, to continue full working lives outside of motherhood). *Rodina-mat'* imagery was pervasive in Soviet patriotic propaganda.[27] Canonical Soviet literary texts, notably Gorky's *Mother* (1908), celebrated maternal self-sacrifice on behalf of children or society; "bad" fictional mothers have also been shown to play a crucial symbolic role, as markers of communal or familial decadence.[28] But whether mothers are sanctified or decried, relatively few Russian writers (with Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Sholokhov, Pasternak, and Ulitskaia among the honourable exceptions) have engaged creatively with the physiological and biological reality of pregnancy, childbirth, and infant nurture. Motherhood is all too often idealized and essentialized, thus overlooking its roles as transformative physical experience and as vital economic function (albeit not immediately remunerative for the individuals most closely concerned). Breastfeeding occupies a more ambiguous cultural position. Midway between the sentimentalization and exploitation of women's labour, it demonstrates the distance between the symbolic status of nursing mothers and their actual function. Thus breastfeeding narrative exposes the persistent gap between populist veneration of motherhood and the paucity of practical or economic support offered to real-life families—whether in nineteenth-century Russia or the twenty-first-century rich world.

BREASTFEEDING AGAINST VIOLENCE—AND AS VIOLENCE

Literary tropes of maternal nurture tend to fall into two categories. In the first, breastfeeding and violence are represented as polar opposites. In the second, they overlap: oppressive social structures reconfigure breastfeeding as a form of symbolic violence. My epigraph for this article cited one of the most famous oppositions of breastfeeding and brutality in literature: Lady Macbeth's motivational speech from Act 1 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623). She inserts into a sentimental evocation of physical intimacy ("I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me") a gruesome child-murder ("I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums / And dash'd the brains out"). Her rhetoric is effective because her listeners accept that breastfeeding and infanticide are moral opposites: no good mother harms her child. By boldly offering to overcome this taboo, Lady Macbeth boosts her husband's resolve to kill King Duncan of Scotland. Yet the connection between motherhood and murder, once made, cannot be forgotten. When

[24] Bonfante, "Nursing Mothers in Classical Art," 175.

[25] Salzman-Mitchell, "Tenderness or Taboo," 158.

[26] Ibid., 141–42.

[27] On the pronatalist campaign and its shortcomings see David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, 2011), esp. 168–80 ("Infant Care and Childraising"). On propaganda see Elizabeth Waters, "The Female Form in Soviet Political Iconography, 1917–32," in *Russia's Women*, 224–42, esp. 236–37.

[28] Jenny Kaminer, *Women with a Thirst for Destruction: The Bad Mother in Russian Literature* (Evanston, 2014).

she instrumentalizes maternal tenderness with successful rhetorical effect (inspiring her husband to murder the king), Lady Macbeth unintentionally undermines the Madonna-esque sanctity of the nursing mother. This instability is dangerous, because it flips a core cultural cliché: if a mother can commit infanticide during the very act of feeding, who can be trusted? What is safe?

Both fascination with, and avoidance of, potential maternal violence can be traced through *Macbeth*'s earliest Russian translations, already problematized by the play's central theme of regicide. Indeed, one of the play's earliest unmediated Russian translators, the poet Vil'gel'm Karlovich Kiukhel'beker (1797–1846), was in prison (for his role in the Decembrist rebellion) while completing *Makbet* in 1828. Although Kiukhel'beker's translation style was literalist, and despite his admiration for *Macbeth*'s Romantic melodrama, his version softens Lady Macbeth's speech by removing its startling physical detail. Rather than nursing her infant, she merely "carries" it; she tears her "breast" (*grud'*) rather than her "nipple" from its "tender lips" (*iz nezhnykh gubok*).[29] In contrast, Kiukhel'beker's contemporary, Mikhail Pavlovich Vronchenko (1801–55), exaggerates her diction in his 1833 translation, leaving less to the audience's imagination. "I have fed with this breast here," his Lady Macbeth states (the phrase seems to require an accompanying gesture); she threatens to "wrench her nipples" (*istorgnut' sostsy*) from the infant and "smash" (*razshibnit'*) its skull against a convenient "stone."[30] (Boris Pasternak's 1951 translation of this passage unites the best of each version: it is both uncharacteristically faithful and lexically vivid).[31] Vronchenko's clumsy enhancement of Lady Macbeth's fantasy, as well as Kiukhel'beker's apparent attempt to tone it down, suggest that each translator perceived maternal violence as a taboo potentially more provocative than the play's core plot of conspiracy and treason.

Just as maternal breastfeeding can be cited *against* violence, it can also—paradoxically—become through its very selflessness a form of violence committed by the mother against herself. A pertinent Russian example is Ivan Krylov's 1814 fable "The Doe and the Dervish."[32] Here, another sentimentalized mother—a young doe whose fawns have died—suckles two orphaned wolf cubs, demonstrating the selflessness of maternal love. Krylov's narrator praises the doe for fulfilling "the sacred duty of a mother" (*dolg materi sviashchennyi*). This idealistic portrait, however, is complicated by the commentary of a passing Dervish. He apostrophizes the doe as "Unthinking one!" (*O bezrassudnaia!*), challenging her to consider on whom she "squanders" her milk. He warns her not to expect gratitude from the wolf cubs, who may one day "spill her blood." The doe responds that she is motivated by the sentimental pleasure of indulging her maternal feelings (*chuvstvo materi*), as well as the physical relief of discharging her milk. By reiterating cognates of the noun *tiagost'* (meaning a weight or burden), Krylov weaves an analogy between the physical weight of full breasts, and the psychological burden of repressed virtue. But given that the doe is alleviating temporary pain at the future cost of her life, should we really trust the poem's moral that generosity is always a good thing? As in Lady Macbeth's speech, the contrast between potential future violence and present maternal tenderness, although intended to emphasize the latter, ultimately undermines it instead. As the examples from Krylov, Shakespeare, and the latter's Russian translators show, the opposition of breastfeeding and destructiveness all too often demonstrates hidden resonances between them. Even maternal tenderness can be subverted and transformed into self-harm.

[29] For more on Kiukhel'beker's translation career and his evolving attitude to literalism see Yuri D. Levin, "Russian Shakespeare Translations in the Romantic Era," in *European Shakespeares: Translating Shakespeare in the Romantic Age*, ed. Dirk Delabastita and Lieven D'hulst (Amsterdam, 1993), 75–90, esp. 82–84. Kiukhel'beker's 1828 *Makbet* may be accessed at http://az.lib.ru/s/shekspir_w/text_1836_makbet.shtml . The full passage reads: "Кормила я и ведаю, как сладко / Любить дитя, которое сошу;/ А хоть бы улыбался мне в лице, / Из нежных губок вырвав грудь, младенцу / Я мозг бы вышибла, когда бы так / Клялась, как ты клялся."

[30] M. P. Vronchenko's 1833 *Makbet* can be accessed at http://az.lib.ru/s/shekspir_w/text_1857_mcbeth_oldorfo.shtml. The full passage reads as follows: "Я кормила / Вотъ этой грудью; знаю, какъ младенецъ, / Ее сосущій, дорогъ; но исторгнувъ / Сосцы изъ милыхъ устъ малютки, черепъ / Его разшибла бъ я объ камень, если бъ/ Клялась въ томъ, какъ мне клялся ты!"

[31] For an overview of the topic see Anna Kay France, *Boris Pasternak's Translations of Shakespeare* (Berkeley, 1978).

[32] Ivan Krylov, "Lan' i Dervish," in *Russian Fables of Ivan Krylov*, ed. and trans. Bernard Pares (Harmondsworth, 1942), 39.

FIGURE 2 Nikolai Kasatkin, *Kormilitsa*, 1911, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kasatkin.jpg.

Other tropes of breastfeeding reveal its continuity with (structural) violence still more overtly. Vladimir Korolenko's short story "On a Cloudy Day" (1896), for example, describes the historical, although almost certainly quite rare, Russian custom of compelling serf women to breastfeed pedigree hound puppies. Anna's master orders her to suckle a pair of puppies; her husband Aleksei returns home and kills them. From Aleksei's point of view, the natural order of things is upset: "Where is the law? The child is crying in the cradle while pups are sucking the woman's breast. … Even if the child is a peasant's son, he still has a human soul in the sight of God. And [that] he should lie in the cradle while you foul a woman's bosom with curs," he defends himself to the master.[33] But the latter, viewing Aleksei's actions as murder, drowns him in a cauldron of boiling gruel intended for the kennels. Although all the physical violence here is committed by men, the breastfeeding mother, Anna, is implicated as both victim and collaborator in a cycle of abusive management and retribution. This shocking (and excitingly sordid) content made "On a Cloudy Day" an effective vehicle for Korolenko's polemical liberalism.[34] Similarly, early Soviet propaganda gleefully reproduced Nikolai Kasatkin's "voyeuristic" 1911 painting of a voluptuous, erotically dishevelled serf feeding puppies as a postcard with a print run of fifteen thousand copies (FIGURE 2).[35]

Tolstoy, himself guilty of compelling a woman to breastfeed, represented a different kind of gender violence in *War and Peace* (1867).[36] After the novel's heroine Natasha Rostova delivers her first child, her mother-in-law (and spouse Pierre) well-meaningly discourage her from nursing the infant.[37] The Rousseau-inspired Tolstoy shows Natasha resisting symbolic violence: here, pressure exerted structurally within a culture that did not endorse maternal breastfeeding among high-status families.

[33] V. G. Korolenko, "V oblachnyi den'," in Korolenko, *Povesti i rasskazy 1880–1896* (Moscow, 1966), 547.

[34] Korolenko's political opinions were frequently controversial; as a young Populist activist, he was arrested twice and later exiled for six years; even in later life, his political journalism proved explosive. Susan K. Morrisey discusses this in her "Violence, Publicity, and Incitement in the Russian Revolution of 1905–7," *Kritika* 3 (2020): 489–523, which traces national and media reaction to Korolenko's 1907 pamphlet *Sorochinskaia tragediia*, about a mass shooting perpetrated by Cossack troops in Poltava province. Barry P. Scherr investigates the influence of Korolenko's political views on his younger (and more widely known) contemporaries in "Reshaping the Past: Gorky's Reminiscences of Korolenko," *Russian Review* 73:4 (2014): 532–49.

[35] Henrietta Mondry, *Political Animals: Representing Dogs in Modern Russian Culture* (Leiden, 2015), 35. For Mondry's analysis of Korolenko's story see pp. 53–74.

[36] Tolstoy, influenced by Rousseau's defence of maternal breastfeeding, insisted that his wife breastfeed all their children. See Rosamund Bartlett, *Tolstoy: A Russian Life* (London, 2010), 163, 185–86. Finally in 1884, Sofiia Tolstoia engaged a wet-nurse for their twelfth child, their daughter Aleksandra (ibid., 312).

[37] I thank Aura Evenstar Young for directing me to her own discussion of this passage in "'And She Nursed Them All Splendidly Herself,'" 70–76.

> With her next child, in spite of protests from her mother, her doctors, and her husband himself, who all protested against her feeding as if against a hitherto unheard-of and harmful thing, she got her own way and ever afterwards fed all her children herself.[38]

Anna Karenina's Kitty, created a decade later, would enjoy a more positive experience, with her mother and sisters offering her advice on how to breastfeed (half a century has passed between the fictional worlds of *War and Peace* and *Anna*, and fashions have changed). While Tolstoy continued here and elsewhere, as I have suggested, to judge a woman's moral character by her choice to either feed her own babies or hire a wet-nurse, the three texts I will analyse in detail below do not allow their female characters the privilege of choice. Each narrative demonstrates how structural gender violence—sexual and economic—causes the heroine physical or mental harm; and in each story, breastfeeding allows women to resist or postpone the infliction of this violence.

LAZHECHNIKOV: "THE MILK WENT TO HER HEAD"

Ivan Ivanovich Lazhechnikov (1792–1869) is remembered today primarily for his historical novel *The House of Ice* (1835), depicting the reign of the Empress Anna (1730–40). He began his literary career as a memoirist by publishing his recollections of the War of 1812 and his subsequent involvement in Tsar Aleksander I's European campaign against Napoleon. In 1859, already fêted as a historical novelist, Lazhechnikov published a final brief memoir of the war, "My Doctor's Grimace (From An 1813 Campaign Notebook)." His insistence that "My Doctor's Grimace" is factual seems unlikely to be entirely true. While his original *Campaign Notebooks of a Russian Officer* (published serially 1817–19, and in book form in 1820) were based on diary entries made while actively campaigning—even, as Lazhechnikov claimed, sometimes written on horseback—he later admitted that all the entries dated after May 16, 1813, were reconstructed from memory, as the relevant notebook had been lost.[39] A second reason to doubt the strict veracity of Lazhechnikov's tale is its remarkable thematic and narrative similarities with E. T. A. Hoffmann's story "Councillor Krespel," from the latter's 1819 anthology *The Serapion Brethren*, which was well-known to Russian *literati*. Factors common to both stories—including a deceptively tyrannical father, a sequestered daughter, and a small-town Prussian setting—have been identified by S. M. Isupova.[40] Nonetheless Lazhechnikov—as a young adjutant—did spend part of 1813 in Ludwigslust, the palace of the hereditary Grand Duke of Mecklenburg, who is a minor character in "My Doctor's Grimace." Lazhechnikov's autobiographical memories of Mecklenburg serve to frame his presumably fictional subject: the doctor's family tragedy. And while many narrative elements, including the symbolic violence directed against the female characters, are almost certainly borrowed from Hoffmann, the importance of breastfeeding and of the semiotics of milk is unique to Lazhechnikov's tale.

"My Doctor's Grimace" opens with its first-person narrator, ostensibly Lazhechnikov, recovering from a wound in Mecklenburg. Since the grand duke's court physician is sick, Lazhechnikov is tended by the town doctor, Moselle, recently arrived and mysteriously overqualified for service in such a remote, rural province. Despite Dr. Moselle's urbanity and skill, there are rumours that he mistreats his daughter Karolina, who is rarely seen outdoors. If anyone mentions her name, the doctor suffers an involuntary spasm, the titular "grimace."

[38] L. N. Tolstoy, *Voina i mir*, II (Moscow, 1966), 593.

[39] Ivan Ivanovich Lazhechnikov, "Grimasa moego doktora (iz pokhodnoi zapisnoi knizhki 1813 goda)," in I. I. Lazhechnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 6 tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1994), accessed at http://az.lib.ru/l/lazhechnikow_i_i/text_0170.shtml. All citations in the text are from this source. On the composition and verisimilitude of this work see S. M. Isupova, "Formirovanie zhudozhestvennogo istoricizma v rannom tvorchestve I. I. Lazhechnikova," *Nauchnyi dialog* 10 (2020): 273.

[40] S. M. Isupova, "Khudozhestvennyi metod memuaristiki I. I. Lazhechnikova 50–60 gg," *Vestnik AGPU* 1:55 (2013): 64. See also E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Rat Krespel," in his *Die Serapionsbrüder* (Berlin, 1819).

> Whenever this happened, his kindly, pleasing face worked into a sort of convulsive, painful grimace, which always made me feel sad and troubled. … Despite making every effort to overcome the fit, the doctor could not recover his equilibrium and would hastily leave me.[41]

Lazhechnikov forms a rapport with Moselle, who is in fact a gentle, adoring father. Soon Lazhechnikov's friend, a Hussar cavalry officer called Lidental, also arrives to recuperate. The grand duke billets him at Dr. Moselle's house. Inevitably, Lidental and Karolina fall in love. The match appears eminently suitable, even flattering for Karolina; Lidental does not expect her father to object. But Dr. Moselle confides a terrible family secret to Lazhechnikov, asking his friend to disillusion—and refuse—the ardent bridegroom. The three men agree to postpone Karolina and Lidental's wedding indefinitely, while pretending to Karolina that nothing has changed. Soon the two officers are ordered back to the front. Lidental is killed; by the time Lazhechnikov returns to Mecklenburg in autumn 1813, the town has been sacked. The doctor and his daughter are nowhere to be seen. Inspecting their ruined house, Lazhechnikov has an eerie experience: "When I was walking out of the courtyard, the wind blew open a shutter at one of the windows … the hinges wailed wretchedly … and it seemed to me that through the glass the doctor's dead face nodded to me with his convulsive, painful grimace." Only the doctor's grimace lingers behind, like the smile of the Cheshire Cat.

Dr. Moselle's dreadful secret is inseparable from his mistreatment of two women, mother and daughter. Unlike Hoffmann's Councillor Krespel, who is not averse to manhandling the women in his life, the doctor shuns physical violence. His acts of sexual and psychological violence, however, prove insidiously destructive. As a young man, he specialized in treating mental illness, accepting charity patients at his asylum in Berlin. One patient, Amalia, would probably now be diagnosed with a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder; any trace of dirt or untidiness triggered uncontrollable panic attacks, ending in a swoon.[42] When anxious, ordinary things terrified her: "If there was a cloud in the sky, she saw it as covered in black blotches; the periods in a book merged into blotches, her own eyes in the mirror seemed to her like a pair of dreary, intolerable blotches." Dr. Moselle treated Amalia's condition by removing the stimuli for her fits. In a comfortable private room, with clean clothing, Amalia's attacks stopped. Meanwhile, the doctor grew infatuated with his beautiful patient. Ignoring his nurses' warnings about the risk of relapse, he convinced himself that Amalia was cured. He even seduced her, making marriage—in his own words—"inevitable." To the outside world, Amalia appeared completely normal. The doctor married her. A year after their ethically dubious wedding, Amalia gave birth to a little girl—Karolina—whom she breastfed. I cite Dr. Moselle's account of his fateful intervention in full because of its wealth of lactation clichés:

> Fearing lest the infant should suck up her mother's madness with her milk, I prepared a wet nurse (*kormilitsa*), but Amalia firmly wished to feed her own daughter. You can form your own estimate of my agonies; my heart was torn to shreds, tugged on both sides. How to reveal to the mother why I did not want her to feed her own babe? How could I again decide to sacrifice this poor, innocent being to an awful disease and thus destroy it for a whole lifetime? In the first days, how could I take the unfortunate child away from her mother's breast! I know it would have killed Amalia. A few days later, however, I informed her that her milk, by such-and-such indications, was unwholesome for the little one, in whom I pretended to observe painful fits. At the same time our Karolina, rosy and fresh like a heavenly apple, lay in her mother's arms smiling sweetly at her. After this sight, my words were not believed. The next time, fearful for the little one's future, I decided to secretly give her a medicine … or a substance, call it what you will …

[41] Lazhechnikov, "Grimasa moego doktora."

[42] I would like to thank Dr Byron Creese (a psychologist at the University of Exeter's Medical School) for his diagnosis of Amalia's fictional symptoms.

> which served my purpose. … The child became unwell, turned pale, began moaning. Her moans tore at Amalia's soul. I reminded her of the unwholesomeness of her milk; she was terrified for her daughter, and in order to save her, she hastily sacrificed her greatest joy, her happiness. After giving the child to the wet-nurse, she fell into a deep depression. … Soon the milk went to her head (*moloko brosilos' ei v golovu*). Put yourself in my place: imagine, if you can, what I felt at that time. Within a few days I was already watering my poor Amalia's tombstone with my tears.

The principal irony here is the doctor's failure to realize that he has authored his own misfortunes. Considering Amalia his "Galatea," a constructed being "who only comes to life in [his] presence," he configures himself as her Pygmalion. He rejects the idea that Amalia can in fact make autonomous choices, instead casting her as a "submissive child" who perceives in him her own "protector, doctor, friend, relative, all her present and future." In short, he refuses to allow Amalia any agency—and when she does act independently by breastfeeding her own infant and rejecting his advice, he compels her compliance by deceit. By Dr. Moselle's own admission, his relationship with this vulnerable young woman is tantamount to rape and forced marriage. His psychological and legal abuse of Amalia culminates in the involuntary termination of her breastfeeding relationship with her daughter. Mother's milk is scapegoated twice by the doctor—first as a carrier for madness (*pomeshatel'stvo*), then as the direct cause of Amalia's death, when "the milk went to her head." The latter condition may have been acute mastitis, caused by the abrupt cessation of breastfeeding and progressing to sepsis. Lazhechnikov implies, however, that Amalia succumbed to grief caused by premature weaning, combined with guilt over her inadequacy as a mother (since she believes that her own milk had made her child sick). The reader also gathers that Dr. Moselle is conscious of his own culpability. Unfortunately, the doctor fails to learn from his mistakes. Instead, he repeats them: limiting his daughter's agency by removing dangerous stimuli from her environment, hiding her away from potential suitors, and finally by preventing Karolina's marriage to an eligible young man. This last decision leads indirectly to her death when the town is stormed by Napoleon's troops (had she married Lidental, she might have been safe at the latter's Russian estate). Dr. Moselle's psychological violence against both women ultimately causes their deaths.

A final irony is that, although the doctor locates the cause of Karolina's madness in the mother's breast milk, he is an equally likely suspect. As an infant, Karolina only showed signs of illness after he poisoned her; she had thrived on her mother's milk. And when exposed to the same stimuli that triggered her mother's hysterical attacks (spilled ink, black stones), she manifests her *father's* infamous symptom—the titular hideous grimace. As Lazhechnikov reports:

> Suddenly her face changed; the beautiful eyes, full of the charms of love, grew dim; she fixed them rigidly on the sandy park before us. It even seemed to me that the grimace, which I liked so little in her father, flitted across her lips.
>
> "How that little stone tortures me! Somebody has put it there on purpose, to cause me pain. For the love of God, put it away!" she shouted.

Dr. Moselle, keen to ascribe his daughter's disorder to maternal inheritance, fails to consider that this mental illness may originate on his side of the family, or that his own obsession with suppressing insanity may amount to a compulsive fixation in its own right. Breast milk exemplifies both female autonomy (like Natasha Rostova, Amalia chooses to feed her own daughter) and matrilineal connection (because maternal love is expressed through the milk), neither of which Dr. Moselle can tolerate. Instead, he reconfigures mother's milk as a conduit for insanity, mendaciously assuring Amalia that her milk is lethal. By thus forcing his wife to stop breastfeeding, he silences her. The analogy between creative and lacteous expression has been widely acknowledged in poststructuralist criticism: Cixous's celebrated essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" urged women to "write your self," to "return to the

body which has been more than confiscated."[43] She refused to distinguish between a woman author's embodiment as a (potential) mother and her creative activity: "There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink."[44] Similarly, Julia Kristeva argues that breast milk, like tears, are "metaphors of non-speech," a discourse that transcends the spoken word.[45] Lazhechnikov's novella, conversely, depicts a woman whose creativity is silenced by a lifelong (mis)diagnosis. Nursing her child is Amalia's last means of self-expression, both literally and metaphorically. When thwarted, she suffers a fatal depression—just as the milk, stopped from flowing into the baby, turns destructively on its source by "going to her head." Amalia's body reacts in the semiotics of milk to psychological violence; her milk spoils when it is not consumed, rejecting the regime of psychological and physiological restraint described by Cixous and personified by Dr. Moselle.

VOSKRESENSKII: THE WET-NURSE'S LUCRATIVE CALLING

Mikhail Il'ich Voskresenskii (1803–67) was a medical doctor and minor author whose many successful novels, plays, and poems (including well-received parodies of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* and Griboedov's *Woe from Wit*) were quickly forgotten after his death. His posthumous reception has hardly been enhanced by one of the few accounts of his work still readily accessible today, the critic Nikolai Dobroliubov's 1858 *Sovremennik* review of *Natasha Podgorich*, the novel discussed here. Dobroliubov is dismissive of Voskresenskii's literary ability: mockingly emphasizing the author's "good-heartedness" (*dobrodushie*), he categorizes *Natasha Podgorich* as a novel for readers who "have never heard of a certain George Sand, and as for the Russian [writers], certainly Gogol doesn't interest them, they barely know Turgenev or Grigorovich, because for them they are too subtle, too elusive."[46] In Dobroliubov's view, Voskresenskii's prose was over-familiar, sentimental, and formulaic: in short, "pitifully poor" (*zhalko-plokhi*). But in the final paragraph of his critique, Dobroliobov thanks Voskresenskii, this time without irony, for foregrounding the "grievous question … Who is to blame?"[47] Natasha's well-trodden path of seduction and abandonment, her brief efflorescence as a Dumas-esque "camelia," and her final phthisic expiry may make for a cliché-ridden novel, but at the same time this narrative draws attention to the sexual hypocrisy embedded in Russian society.

> Must a man's dominance in marital relations last forever, merely because he is occupied with duties in society to which a woman is not admitted? Must a woman really always be a victim and a slave, enjoying her portion of authority only when a man's reason is overshadowed by passion? … For it is truly shameful to watch and listen: a man boasts of his triumph over a girl, while the poor girl must hide her shame. If a man seduces a woman, we look on indifferently and fondly call him a scamp and a rascal; if a girl entertains herself with a man, we say she is a lost, fallen woman. Tell me: are they really not both equally fallen? Why should one be treated so gently, and the other with merciless sternness? Why?[48]

Dobroliubov's attack on society's implicit sexual inequality seems to foreshadow the theme of Tolstoy's *Kreutser Sonata* (1889) by thirty years. But when Dobroliubov dismisses Voskresenskii's novel

[43] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1:4 (Summer 1976): 880.

[44] Ibid., 881.

[45] Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," trans. Léon S. Roudiez, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York, 1986), 174.

[46] N. A. Dobroliubov, review of "*Povesti i rasskazy M. I. Voskresenskogo* (Moscow, 1858), and *Natasha Podgorich: Roman M. I. Voskresenskogo* (Moscow, 1858)," *Sovremennik* 8:2 (1858), 233–40, reprinted in Dobroliubov, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* (I), ed. Iu. G. Burtin (Moscow, 1986), http://az.lib.ru/d/dobroljubow_n_a/text_0570.shtml .

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

as sustained cliché, he overlooks how the heroine's brief career as a wet-nurse enables her to interrupt her predetermined, stereotypical decline and briefly establish an original, even independent place in society.

The eponymous Natasha Podgorich is the illegitimate child of a Polish landowner and a beautiful Russian serf, whom he either seduces or rapes—certainly her intended marriage to a fellow peasant, Alyosha, never takes place. Raised by the estate manager's family to anticipate imminent wealth and favor, Natasha's childhood ambitions are gratified when her father brings her to the city to be educated as a lady. Spoiled by her father and his friend, a wealthy spinster, Natasha circulates in the best society, charming everyone she meets with her beauty and talents. Unfortunately for Natasha, both her father and her benefactress improvidently die intestate. Aged sixteen, she becomes the penniless ward of her father's younger brother Kazimir—a rapacious socialite whose affections for her are more than avuncular. When Natasha refuses to sleep with him, Kazimir makes her a house-serf; later, she becomes a poultry-maid on the country estate where she was born. Soon, she falls for a young officer who gets her pregnant and disappears. Uncle Kazimir, enraged by Natasha's pregnancy, plots to marry her off to a brutish, mentally handicapped shepherd. Help arrives from an unexpected source: Alyosha, Natasha's mother's former fiancé, offers to save her from this degrading fate by marrying her himself. Now a free man, Alyosha is leaving the estate for a new career driving a carriage in Moscow; as his legal wife, Natasha will escape her uncle's control. Alyosha promises to treat her like a sister, making no sexual demands. With limited options, Natasha accepts his proposal and returns to Moscow as Alyosha's wife. Her child dies within a day of birth and is never mentioned again; Natasha appears more perturbed by her milk coming in, which she mistakenly considers a symptom of illness, than by her bereavement.[49] Her former piano teacher, whose aid she enlists, explains to her that breast milk is not only a sign of health, but potentially lucrative. He encourages Natasha to become a wet-nurse (*kormilitsa*); through his mediation, a wealthy German family hires her to nurse their fourth child.

Now Natasha, for the first time, enjoys true autonomy. Whereas her previous life as a peasant was onerous and humiliating (her lover, for example, wondered how a simple *krest'ianka* could read a French novel), her new role provides material comfort and social respectability, if not intellectual exercise. Like any remunerated position, however, it will only last as long as her services are needed. "In the first moments," Voskresenskii elaborates,

> she even imagined that her former happy life, which she had enjoyed since childhood without the wit to appreciate it, had returned to her. … She had again a warm, comfortable bedroom; her rough country dress was replaced by fine linen and silk; the table was excellent; there was no end to the affection shown by everyone around; her least desire was fulfilled, because in a wealthy house the wet-nurse of a beloved infant is regarded with the same love and attentiveness as the child itself; she was a second mistress for all the staff; she was indulged, they feared to cause her pain with an ungentle world, or to tire her with an unnecessary step. … It was understood that all this was done only in order not to spoil the wet-nurse's milk, and through this cause harm to the child; but after all you don't immediately grasp that you are being minded and spoiled only like a cream in a churn, out of fear that it might go sour and cause the masters to do without their coffee. … Sometimes you think that in truth they like you for yourself![50]

Voskresenskii's milk-based simile—comparing a wet-nurse's well-being to cream for coffee—places Natasha's position in the household in an aptly inglorious perspective. Nonetheless Natasha thrives (and so does the infant). She learns to manipulate her interstitial status by frustrating conventional expectations of how a servant should behave and speak—and how much she should know.

[49] M. I. Voskresenskii, *Natasha Podgorich: Roman*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1858), 3:178. I thank Professor Valery Vyugin (St. Petersburg State University and the Institute of Russian Literature [Pushkinskii Dom]) for providing me with a scanned copy of this rare text.

[50] Ibid. 3:185–86.

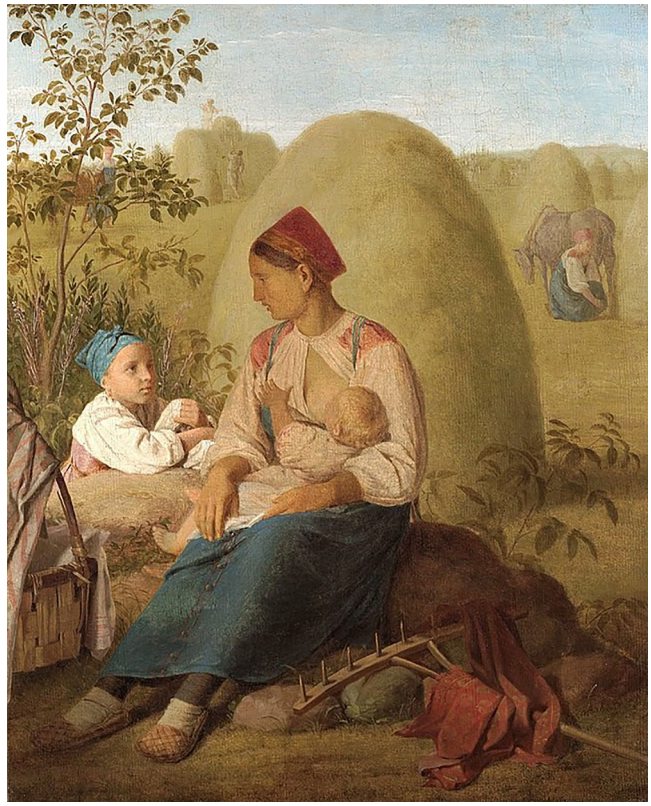

FIGURE 3 A. G. Venetsianov, *Haymaking*, c. 1825, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexey_Venetsianov_26.jpg.

Although a wet-nurse enjoyed greater respect than an ordinary servant, she was not expected to be at the same cultural level as the gentry. The German family is puzzled to hear music played in the drawing room when Natasha is alone there with the infant. As a beautiful young woman caring for someone else's child, she exemplifies a certain naturalist yet picturesque peasant aesthetic popularized by A. G. Venetsianov in the 1820s (FIGURE 3). This painterly quality is noted by other characters:

> Three young rakes, dressed in the latest fashion, passed arm-in-arm and laughing loudly near the bench where Natasha was seated with the sleeping child.
> "Look, my friends," said one of them, stopping his two comrades, "what a charming wet-nurse (*kormilitsa*) is sitting on that bench with a child. She's just a beauty!"
> "Yes," answered the second, "I have rarely seen such perfect facial features."
> "It's a veritable picture," decided the third, directing his lorgnette upon her.[51]

But Natasha, unlike a picture, is reactive—and subversive. She deliberately upsets the young men's expectations by challenging their male gaze—and their comments. When they discuss her in French, she reproves them in that language. They switch to German, and she responds in German. This encounter sparks Natasha's next affair with Paul, one of the young men. Paul has no intention of marrying Natasha, nor is she free to marry because of Alyosha; but she willingly accepts the wealth and independent household Paul bestows on her as soon as she has completed her duties with the

[51] Ibid., 198–99.

German family. Since her employment as a wet-nurse was conditional (on the quality of her milk and the child's need for it), her economic independence is time-limited, almost to the day: Natasha plans her relationship with Paul around her weaning schedule. Her new role as his mistress, and later as a courtesan, is also short-lived; but unlike wet-nursing, which rarely lasts more than a year or two, her amatory contracts are open-ended.

Natasha's taste of autonomy while wet-nursing, combined with her disappointment in previous emotional attachments, inspires her to arrange all her future relationships on a transactional basis. She accepts a gift of fifty thousand rubles from Paul's mother to leave the country; later, she states explicitly that she chooses to be "free" (*svobodna*) from the constraints of marriage, even though her understanding of freedom is based upon a sequence of sexual exchanges.[52] Voskresenskii implies that men would not allow themselves to be bought and paid for in the same way. Natasha's legal husband, Alyosha, illustrates this difference by unexpectedly reentering her life during the interlude with Paul. Both Paul and Natasha, without recognizing him, had inadvertently traveled in his cab the previous day—and kept him waiting while they skated, compensating him with a "red assignation"—probably a ten-ruble note. This condescension from his wife's lover outrages Alyosha. He decides to annul the terms of their earlier agreement, rescue Natasha from her sinful life, and become a true husband to her—in every way. He now passionately loves Natasha as he once loved her mother, undeterred by her obvious abhorrence or her tactless attempts to buy him off. "Clearly a wet-nurse's calling is lucrative in Moscow," he observes sarcastically—suggesting, not without some grounds, that Natasha has used the sentimentally consecrated image of the wet-nurse to enhance her new role as a courtesan.[53] After failing to kidnap Natasha (tricking her with the promise of a visit from her long-lost mother), Alyosha commits suicide.

The word *kormilitsa* literally means "one who feeds (others)"; its masculine equivalent, *kormiilets*, is usually understood as "breadwinner." Natasha's mother Dunya uses the latter term apparently without irony to apostrophize the doctor-narrator, who has observed Natasha's career from afar. Dunya never reveals her identity either to her daughter or the doctor, who draws his own conclusions later. Natasha's disorderly life is exculpated (*otkupilis'*) by her lonely death from consumption "in the arms of her birth mother, yearning and thinking that she was dying in the arms of a mere hired maid."[54] Despite this pathetic finale, both the narrator and Dunya reiterate contemporary clichés about maternity as a kind of safety valve for rebellious females. The doctor comments that "Motherhood is a great thing!" (*Mat' – velikoe delo!*) while Dunya observes, "Had this woman been a mother, she would not have turned out like this, nor would she have ended so badly (*durno*)."[55] Yet, as the reader is aware, Natasha *was* a mother—a role she ring-fenced emotionally, by burying any feelings for her dead child, and which she even monetized through working as a wet-nurse. *Natasha Podgorich* is a female *Bildungsroman*, whose flawed central character fails at motherhood much as other, more famous eponymous heroines of the realist era will do. Her undoing is not self-doubt, like Anna Karenina, nor convention, like Hedda Gabler. Instead, Natasha Podgorich's brief independence is curtailed by her own biology: the maternal body cannot provide indefinite security in a patriarchal world.

VSEVOLOD IVANOV: STEALTH BREASTFEEDING

The central characters in "The Child" (1922), a short story by Vsevolod Ivanov (1895–1963), are, in the critic Viktor Shklovskii's words, "both very good and very evil."[56] A detachment of Red Guard partisans, originally from the Irtysh steppe where Ivanov himself was born, has retreated into Mongolia, coexisting uncomfortably with Kirghiz herders, also Civil War refugees. The partisans regularly

[52] Ibid. 4:136.

[53] Ibid., 53.

[54] Ibid., 222.

[55] Ibid., 220–21.

[56] Viktor Shklovskii, *Zhyli-byli* (Moscow, 1966), 423.

raid the Kirghiz settlements, stealing cattle and raping women. From the opening passage, which uses pathetic fallacy to depict the Mongolian land as "a wild beast, and a gloomy one" (*zver' dikii i ne radost'nyi*), nothing is quite as it appears; Ivanov's story creates an atmosphere of almost Gogolian hybridity.[57] The Kirghiz women, who undress and lie down as soon as they see the Russians approaching, are likened to cattle ("it was unpleasant to take them … like sinning with livestock").[58] The partisans compare themselves, in terms of their sexual demands, to stallions. Their paymaster, Afanasii Petrovich, is said to resemble a child (*rebenok*) on account of his "small, hairless, and rosy" face; but at the same time "his legs were long and strong, like a camel's."[59] On patrol one day, the partisans mistake a man and a woman crossing the desert for White outriders; accordingly, they shoot them dead without warning. When they inventory the contents of their carriage, they discover a "light-eyed and fair-headed child. … Unweaned, tiny, whimpering faintly."[60] Ironically, Ivanov notes that because the child, like the dead couple's other items, has now been seized as "the people's property," its care is henceforth the partisans' responsibility as representatives of the Soviet people.[61]

By describing the child as "grudnoi," meaning "of the breast," Ivanov foregrounds its dependence on human milk. The partisans' conflation of female identity with maternity, and specifically with breastfeeding, is unsubtle. The dead woman, the child's presumed mother, merits only one line of physical description: her "soldier's tunic was pushed up high by her womanly bosom."[62] One of the partisans regrets shooting her since, "women (*baby*) are necessary to society" (if only, one assumes, for making and feeding children).[63] The child-like paymaster instantly reproaches his comrade as a "fiend and a bourgeois," apparently because sympathy for females is a recidivist tendency.[64] But it is this paymaster, Afanasii Petrovich, who manifests an immediate sentimental, indeed almost maternal attachment to the child. He carries it back to camp in his arms, crooning a lullaby; he christens it Vaska (a diminutive of Vasily); and he endeavors to entertain and feed it with offerings of pulped bread and cooled cabbage soup.

After masticating a mouthful of bread, Afanasy thrust a bit of it into the open tiny mouth, to the accompaniment of:

> "Pp-i-pi … little fellow (*basko*) … get it down, little wood-demon."
> But the infant turned away its head and shut his mouth—he simply wouldn't have any of it. He was whimpering through his nose, in low but piercing tones.[65]

The partisans agree unanimously on two points: that child nurture is a woman's business (*delo bab'e*) and that this child should not be punished for his parents' class origins:

Selivanov [the detachment's chairman] collected a crowd and announced:

[57] Vsevolod Ivanov, "Dite," in his *Loga: Rasskazy* (Petrograd, 1922), 7. I have used the earliest extant English translation of this story, "The Child" by John Cournos (in *Russian Short Stories* (London, 1943), 423–33), which is occasionally too free. This quotation is from Cournos, "The Child," 423. For optimal accuracy I have sometimes used my own translation. Uncredited translations are my own. I thank Professor Valery Vyugin for providing me with a scanned copy of Ivanov's 1922 text.

[58] Ivanov, "Dite," 8.

[59] Ibid.; Cournos, "The Child," 424.

[60] Ivanov, "Dite," 13.

[61] Ibid., 12.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Cournos, "The Child," 427.

[64] Ivanov, "Dite," 12.

[65] Cournos, "The Child," 429.

"It's impossible to let the little Christian fellow die like a beast (*kak zhivotine propadat'*). Let's say, the father was a bourgeois, but the baby—what about him? He's not to blame." The moujiks (*muzhiki*) agreed.
"It's nothing to do with the child. He's innocent."[66]

To save Vaska from dying of starvation, the partisans raid the nearest Kirghiz village for milch cows. While the cattle are rounded up, their calves, also set free from confinement, attempt "joyously" to suckle from their mothers' udders.[67] In an unpleasantly proleptic moment, one of the partisans fires at the calves to distract them from suckling. Meanwhile Afanasii Petrovich is inspired to look for a "teat" (*soska*) as well; he finds more than he had expected. A young nursing mother, thinking the angry Russian wants to rape her, undoes her kaftan and undershirt and opens her legs. Noticing her crying infant, Afanasii Petrovich grabs one of her breasts: "'Oho! … A teat. A big one!'"[68] Inspired, he brings the Kirghiz woman back to camp. Although Ivanov tells us that "in the darkness … from time to time he felt her breast," this statement is desexualized by the context. Afanasii Petrovich is too excited over finding an acceptable food source for "Vaska" to derive sexual pleasure from the woman's breast.[69] Even the belated realization that the Kirghiz woman has brought her own child along (perceived by the partisans as a cunning imposition rather than a normal maternal reaction), is received philosophically: "Never mind," the moujiks said. "There'll be enough milk for both. There are cows, and she's a healthy wench (*baba zdorovaia*)."[70]

Although the Kirghiz woman feeds both children in apparent harmony ("The two of them lay on the felt bed in the tent—one of them all white, the other a little yellow fellow—and they whimpered in one voice"), the paymaster soon suspects that she is favoring her own child.[71] (This recalls Korolenko's scenario, where Aleksei assumes his own child is deprived of breast milk by the puppies.) After inspecting the children, the partisans decide that "the Russian was meagre compared to the Kirghiz," who is "like a ripe melon" in color and plumpness.[72] Having rigged up a primitive scale, they conclude that the Russian is indeed lighter—by the weight of a sheep's skull. This provokes general outrage.

Afanasii Petrovich introduces the concept of stealth breastfeeding (*kormit' abmanom* [sic]; the partisans speak non-standard Russian), arguing that the mother secretly offers the breast to her own child more often than to Vaska.[73] Afanasii Petrovich is sure of his facts because, as he says, "'I've peeped'" (*Ia, brat, podsmotrel*).[74] They all agree that the Kirghiz woman, who is never named, is guilty of "'deceit'" (*abman* [sic]). Like the Cossacks in "Salt," a short story from Isaak Babel's 1922 *Red Cavalry* cycle, the partisans consider themselves entitled to spy upon and police maternal behavior. Babel's Cossacks allow a mother with an infant to travel on their military train without raping her, as a mark of respect for her maternal status. But one Cossack, observing that the woman's infant never stirs to demand the breast, opens the swaddling—to reveal a bag of salt. The woman is exposed as a self-interested smuggler, cynically posing as a nursing mother to gain the Cossacks' protection. In reprisal, she is flung off the train and shot. Ivanov's partisans' reaction to this mother's trick is comparably inhumane. Selivanov, as Chairman, proposes that they should "let the little Kirghiz, God be with him, die," adding, "We've beat up a lot of them. What's one more or less to answer for?"[75] The

[66] Ibid., 430.

[67] Ibid., 432.

[68] Ivanov, "Dite," 21.

[69] Cournos, "The Child," 433.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 434.

[73] Ivanov, "Dite," 22.

[74] Ivanov, "Dite," 22; Cournos, "The Child," 433.

[75] Ivanov, "Dite," 24; Cournos, "The Child," 435.

sentimental Afanasii Petrovich then places the Kirghiz child "in a torn sack": "The mother began to howl. Afanasii Petrovich struck her lightly in the teeth and set off from the camp into the steppe."[76]

"The Child" ends with an image which could be an ironic distortion of the Orthodox "Mlekopitatel'nitsa" icon (see FIGURE. 1 above): the partisans watch with admiring laughter as the Russian child suckles enthusiastically, his face buried in the Kirghiz woman's breast (*lichikom v grud'*), "legs beating comically and clumsily."[77] The woman remains expressionless: Ivanov describes her "submissive face, with narrow eyes like grains of oats."[78] Like the doe from Krylov's fable, the Kirghiz woman is compelled—here, by Russian violence rather than by maternal instinct—to feed a child that will grow up to destroy her. For the Kirghiz, as the villagers' warning cry makes clear ("Ai-ai, the Reds – the Whites – Russians"), their Russian persecutors are all the same.[79] Analogously, the Russian partisans, regardless of Red or White political affiliations, recognize an underlying and unifying ethnic and religious "Russian" identity. They objectify individuals of any other ethnicity, or, at best, treat them as useful animals. The Kirghiz woman is essentialized as a lactating body; when Aleksei Petrovich calls her a "teat" (*soska*), the synecdoche is only semi-ironic.

Ivanov's story has been frequently anthologized in both Russia and the West; Stalin reportedly memorized its first paragraph, although this accolade did not prevent the story from being banned during the dictator's lifetime.[80] This reception is understandable, since its heroes are simultaneously fervid Marxist-Leninists and failed human beings. Shklovskii summarized his friend Ivanov's "brilliant" story as a parable of incomplete education: "They [the partisans] correctly identify class prejudice, but they cannot overcome the prejudice of 'mine and thine'. … The old ways (*staroe*) exist uncorrected within them; this is the essence of the story."[81] In other words, the partisans can accept a fellow Russian even though his parents are class enemies, but they are unable to recognize common humanity in the Kirghiz (or in women, whom they treat little better than brood animals). Valentina Brougher emphasizes the rich "associative imagery" of nature which allows human behavior to interpenetrate with the instinctive brutality of beasts and the bleakness of the surrounding landscape.[82] These semi-literate, half-starved, refugee Red Guards are struggling to follow the tenets of empirical materialism under desperate conditions. As such, they are Soviet heroes. But by testing the limits of Soviet doctrine as they understand it, they uncover its moral aporia. Does their treatment of the Kirghiz characters imply that all non-Russians, or non-Soviets, or indeed all women, should be objectified in the same way? If human life can only be justified by the provision of material good to others, how can anyone's life be independently meaningful? And how do we reconcile Aleksei Petrovich's rejection of bourgeois sentimentality (including respect for women) with his sentimental guardianship of Vaska, the White Russian orphan? The ignorant hypocrisy of Ivanov's Red Guards threatens to undermine the entire Soviet socio-ethical experiment.[83]

Within Ivanov's deceptively simple story, there is a further disruptive element overlooked by previous critics. This is the Kirghiz woman's role as a wet-nurse. Wet-nurses' influence over their charges' physical and moral growth has been much debated: since ancient times, it was thought that their character, ethnicity, or class attributes might shape, or even dominate, an infant's future behavior through the milk.[84] A wet-nurse is entrusted with the lives of her employers' children, reversing the power

[76] Ivanov, "Dite," 24.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Cournos, "The Child," 432.

[80] Viacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, the author's son, alleges this in a 1998 interview with Vladimir Nuzov, published in *Chaika*, October 10, 2017, https://www.chayka.org/node/8417.

[81] Shklovskii, *Zhily-byli*, 423.

[82] Valentina G. Brougher, "Introduction," in Vsevolod Ivanov, *Fertility & Other Stories*, ed. Brougher (Evanston, 1998), xxiv.

[83] I am grateful to Dr. James Ryan (Cardiff University) for a stimulating email exchange in which we discussed the contradictions inherent in Ivanov's partisans' Marxism.

[84] For historical context see Weaver, *White Blood*, 46–48.

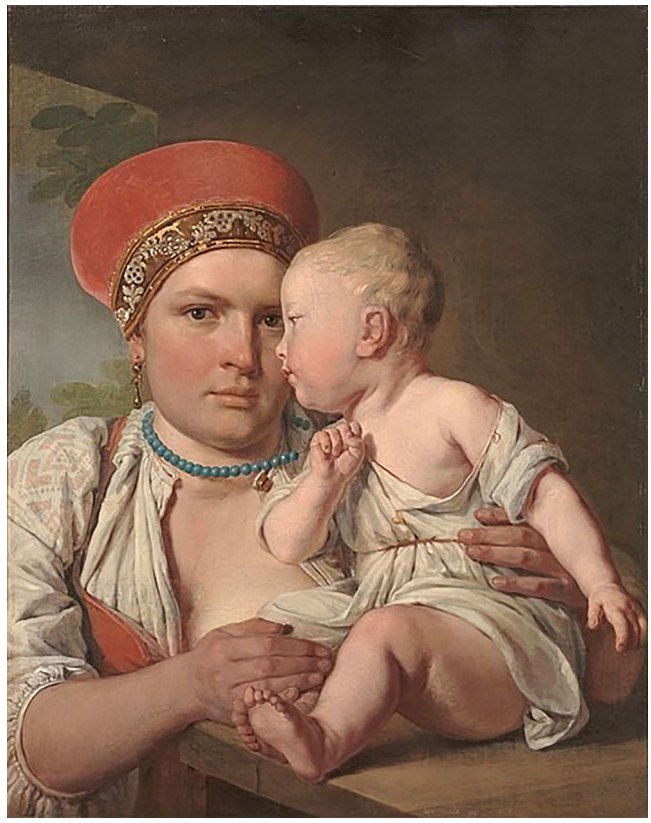

FIGURE 4 A. G. Venetsianov, *The Wet-Nurse*, early 1830s, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexey_Venetsianov_03.jpg.

dynamic between conqueror and subjugated. In the Anglo-Irish author Maria Edgeworth's 1809 novel *Ennui*, an Irish wet-nurse secretly substitutes her infant son for the heir to the titled English family that had previously displaced her own clan. Colonial relationships—whether Russian-Kirghiz or British-Irish—clearly contain scope for mutual deception as well as mutual influence; in Edgeworth's novel, the wet-nurse's action destabilizes the English project of "maternally" dominating and reeducating the conquered Irish nation.[85] Could the bereaved Kirghiz woman, unable to reinstate her own murdered son, nonetheless control the Russian child through her milk and her maternal influence? Mothers have historically feared their children's excessive affection for their wet-nurses, despite the low social status of the latter.[86] In other colonial contexts, such as the Book of Exodus, the wet-nurse epitomizes "the resistance of the enslaved class to oppression and genocide."[87] Her own transformation from slave to mother-substitute demonstrates the cyclical nature of oppression; her privileged position allows her to rear infants who will grow up to reject the colonial oppressors' regime (as Moses does in the Biblical account). It is unclear whether Ivanov's Kirghiz wet-nurse will become a future fifth-columnist or remain a passive victim of circumstances. Her breast milk, however, ensures not

[85] See Julie Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity and the Body Politic* (Cambridge, England, 2003), esp. 173–92.

[86] Narin Hassan, "Feeding Empire: Wet Nursing and Colonial Domesticity in India," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 38:5 (2016): 353–63, esp. 359–62.

[87] Gale A. Yee, "'Take This Child and Suckle It for Me': Wet Nurses and Resistance in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39:4 (2009): 188.

only the orphan Vaska's survival in the uncertain Soviet world, but also her own—at least until Vaska weans (FIGURE 4).

CONCLUSION

In one of the oddest passages from Fyodor Dostoevsky's earliest notes for the novel that would become *The Adolescent* (1869), he describes an "impossible" husband who, in his wife's presence, "draws milk from the wet-nurse's breasts and drinks it." "*Most* important," Dostoevsky adds, "the idea of disintegration is everywhere, for everything is falling *apart*, and there are no remaining ties not only in the Russian family, but even simply between children in general."[88] It is tempting to suggest that Dostoevsky intended the semiotics of milk in this peculiar domestic scenario—the husband helping himself to a stranger's breast milk, the humiliated wife—to illustrate a world destructively out of joint. If maternal breastfeeding (and even wet-nursing) is part of the natural order of things, it makes sense that they too lose their place within a fractured society, where pedigree dogs or disaffected husbands can demand a share of the milk. Conversely, where breastfeeding thrives, women can expect greater autonomy and freedom of expression—whether literary or lacteous. The practice of breastfeeding allows mothers to work both within and against the structures of gender violence, overcoming, albeit briefly, the cultural limitations of the female body (what Bourdieu called "*contrainte par corps*") through its milky abundance.[89] In Russia, to say that you have acquired a skill or a language "with mother's milk" (*s molokom materi*) is to imply that the knowledge was acquired effortlessly, unconsciously, and indelibly. This phrase testifies to the secure position of breast milk in the Russian cultural imaginary: that which is inscribed in Cixous's "white ink" cannot be easily erased.

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[88] Dostoevsky, *The Notebooks for* A Raw Youth, ed. Edward Wasiolek, trans. Viktor Terras (Chicago, 1969), 37.

[89] Bourdieu, "Symbolic Violence," 273.

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