

The Age and Gender of Homesickness

Mother Russia's Prodigal Sons

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1. Introduction: The Exile's Age

Literary representations of the exilic experience widely make use of images of ageing.¹ Emigration is depicted as “existential rupture” (Grübel 2006), as it always is involuntary, even if the émigré is not forced to leave his home country by expulsion but feels forced to leave in order to save his life or to be able to live with dignity.² When losing his former home, the émigré also appears to irretrievably lose part of his own self: The loss of the places of one's childhood, of the places of youth or first love are imagined as the loss of one's youth itself. Just like for the émigré returning home is impossible, one cannot revisit one's past; in the same way as exile is perceived as irreversible, the experience of ageing is linked to notions of irretrievable loss and irrecoverability. It is, thus, not surprising that in literary representations of exile, protagonists seem to grow old almost all of a sudden and sometimes turn grey nearly immediately after passing the threshold to the foreign land.

This topos is, for instance, revisited – and deconstructed – in Efraim Sevela's 1975 novella *Ostanovite samolet – ia slezu!* (Stop the plane – I'm getting off!). The first-person narrator, a Soviet-Russian Jew like the author himself, relates his encounter with Soviet Jews at New York airport – he himself being a remigrant on his way back 'home', to the USSR, whereas

1 See Gramshammer-Hohl 2015, 2017, 2019.

2 See, e.g., Neubauer 2009, 8.

the new arrivals are on their way into emigration. The narrator comments on how his compatriots must feel:

Ведь уже проливали они слезы, прощаясь с Россией, сидели и старились на глазах, когда с кровью рвали все нити – друзья, родня – что связывали их с прошлым. (Sevela 1980, 186)

For they already spilled tears when bidding farewell to Russia, turned grey and grew old for all the world to see, when sorely breaking all the bonds (with friends, kin) that connected them with their past.³

Representations of ‘exile as ageing’ are not confined to Russian émigré literature. For instance, the French writer Albert Camus, in his notebooks, describes exile as a vanishing of youth (cited in Camus 1995, 12). Catalin Dorian Florescu, a Swiss author of Romanian origin writing in German, depicts the change that his protagonist undergoes when arriving in Switzerland – after his flight from Romania – as having “turned grey overnight” (Florescu 2002, 46). The Romanian writer Norman Manea even speaks of the “leap years” of exile: Every year in exile was equal to four years of “normal” existence (Manea 2003, 44). The émigré, in Manea’s view, thus grows old more quickly than do those who have stayed in their home country. Apparently, the exiles’ longing for home has a certain age; does it also have a gender?

2. The Gender of Homesickness

The poet Konstantin Bal’mont, having gone into exile in 1920 in the wake of the so-called ‘first wave’ of Russian emigration, published the collection *Gde moi dom?* (Where is my home?) in 1924; it contains an essay entitled *Bez rusla* ([River] without bed), written in 1923, where he says:

3 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

Но нет дня, когда бы я не тосковал о России, нет часа, когда бы я не порывался вернуться. [...] Я полон беспредельной любви к миру и к моей матери, которая называется Россия. [...] я на чужбине, я вне действительной связи с душой здешней жизни, и я вне действительной связи с моей Матерью, с моей Родиной [...]. (Bal'mont 1990)

But there is not a single day where I would not long for Russia, not a single hour when I would not strive to return. [...] I am full of boundless love for the world and for my mother, who is called Russia. [...] I am in a foreign land, I do not have any true bond with the soul of this country's life, and I do not have any true bond with my Mother, my Motherland [...].

In many texts of exilic literature written in that key, one cannot help noticing that homesickness seems to be a gendered experience – at least, in its literary treatment. The major part of the works that I have thus far analysed features a male protagonist longing for, imagining or even attempting a homecoming, and desperate about its impossibility and failure. In exilic poetry, we also seldom meet a homesick female persona.

Similarly, the journey in the “monomyth” described by Joseph Campbell – which necessarily ends with the adventurer’s return home – is generally undertaken by a male hero.⁴ Referring to Russian literature, Aleksei Podchinenov and Tat’iana Snigireva state that in the nineteenth century, the one who comes home usually is the Son (*Syn*, capitalised) as opposed to the Father (*Otets*), who is the primary homcomer of Soviet literature (Podchinenov and Snigireva 2011, 162). However, there does not seem to exist any prototype of the homecoming daughter or mother. There are examples to rather support the contrary: E.g., in Aleksandr Pushkin’s story *Stantsionnyi smotritel’* (*The Stationmaster*, 1830), the eponymous hero’s daughter Dunia does not return, though the pictures on

4 Adopting James Joyce’s term of “monomyth” from *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Campbell argues that all the myths of the world share the same basic structure. See Campbell 1968.

the wall described at the narrative's beginning, which display scenes of the biblical prodigal son's homecoming, might make the reader expect Dunia to do so (see Schmid 2014, 34).

In her *Kniga o rodine* (Book about the Homeland, 2001), Russian linguist Irina Sandomirskaia also points to the fact that in Russian discursive practices, the theme of the 'homeland' does not unfold in 'female' stories. The author explains this by the distinctly patriarchal character of the 'homeland' discourse:

Интересно задуматься [...] над тем, почему тема родины не порождает отдельную "женскую" историю и не очень приветствует в качестве своего протагониста персонаж женского рода. Причины кроются, по-видимому, в патриархальном характере дискурса. [...] малая родина – это отношения матери и сына. В дискурсе о родине "женский" сюжет уже отведен родине, и это сюжет материнства. Кроме того, родина [...] – это сюжет странствия, а образ странствующей женщины (вообще сочетание образа женщины с образом дороги) грубо противоречит патриархальному идеалу женственности и женскому назначению сидеть "в доме", "в тереме", на месте. (Sandomirskaia 2001, 60)

It is interesting to reflect [...] upon the question of why the theme of the 'homeland' does not generate a distinctive 'female' story and does not embrace as its protagonist a female character. The reasons obviously lie in the patriarchal nature of the discourse. [...] home is the relationship between mother and son. In the discourse about the homeland, the 'female' storyline already pertains to the 'homeland' itself, it constitutes the maternal theme. Furthermore, the homeland [...] develops the plot of peregrination, and the image of the wandering woman (generally, the conjunction of the image of the woman with that of the road) grossly contradicts the patriarchal ideal of femininity and a woman's destiny to sit 'in the house', secluded in the 'terem' [i.e., the Old Russian women's chamber], to stay in place.

In the patriarchal worldview, the 'female' space is the house; a woman who leaves the house and sets out to peregrinate or go *tramping* (Russ.

bluzhdaet), becomes a 'public' woman, that is, a prostitute or *tramp* (Russ. *bludmitsa*).

As a cultural concept, the house epitomises the Self: It provides protection from the threatening Other, warmth, security, the feeling of belonging and intimacy, thus connoting motherliness or the maternal womb itself. Etymologically, the house (Russ. *dom*, Lat. *domus*, Gr. *δῶμος*) is linked to Indo-Eur. **dem(ə)*- or **dom(ə)*- 'to tame, to force' and is thus opposed to nature, which is untamed and threatening. The protecting, enclosing and enwombing aspect of the house is conspicuous in the etymological link of, e.g., Germ. *Haus* 'house', Germ. *Hose* 'trousers', Eng. *hose*, Eng. *hide* (the noun and the verb), Germ. *Haut* 'hide' or Russ. *kryt'* 'to cover' und *krysha/krov* 'roof' (see Baak 2009, 25–28).

The garden represents a transition zone which belongs to the sphere of the Self: a natural, although – unlike untamed nature – built environment. It is cultivated and taken care of, thus providing man with nourishing fruits, which is why it belongs to the realm of the mother. The father, by contrast, is the one who moves outwards and passes the threshold of the house to the road, towards the unknown.

The 'homeland' is an extended 'home': It fulfils the same role as the built house and the fenced-in and cultivated garden, offers security, a familiar organisation, and nourishment. The homeland constitutes the outermost of a number of protecting layers which man creates or imagines and which can be conceived of as concentric circles, at whose very centre is the individual himself: body/hide, womb, house, garden fence, village/town boundaries and the country's frontiers. In representations of the 'homeland', analogies drawn between the home country and the house are therefore frequent. Imaginations of the homeland as house or home are so widespread in Russian émigré literature, that Joost van Baak, in his seminal study on the mythopoetics of the house, stated that treatment of emigrant literature was beyond the scope of his book (Baak 2009, 13). The equation of home with the mother or of the motherland with the womb, which can also be observed in the previously mentioned quotation by Konstantin Bal'mont, is a result of the same metonymical process.

In general, the personification of a national community as a female character – most frequently a mother figure⁵ – is very common. ‘Mother Russia’ (*matushka-Rus’/matushka Rossiia*), a myth revived in Soviet times in the shape of ‘Mother Motherland’ (*Rodina-mat’*), is just one among a number of examples – alongside Polonia, Mother Sweden, Britannia, Helvetia, and others (see Edmondson 2003). The homeland embodied in a mother figure is linked to the myth of Mother Moist Earth (*Mat’ Syra Zemlia*), the Great Goddess, who gives life, growth and nurture, but also takes life back, burying the dead within herself. By contrast, the state represents the fatherly principle. Consequently, the rule of tsarist Russia was imagined as ‘Father Tsar’ (*Car’-batiushka*) marrying ‘Mother Russia’ – a marriage repeatedly performed as such in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Edmondson 2003, 54; Hellberg-Hirn 1998, 111–135).

Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) has demonstrated that the categories of nation and gender are closely intertwined; she speaks of *gendered nation* and *nationed gender*. According to her, women not only function as the national community’s biological reproducers but also as “symbolic border guards” (Yuval-Davis 1997, 37). One aspect of this function is the allegorical representation of the nation as woman or mother, aside from the female roles of the reproducer of culture, who preserves and passes on tradition, and of the bearer of the community’s honour.

In view of such widespread and deeply engrained notions, it is not surprising that there is almost no room in literature for female protagonists’ longing for lost homes; they rather fulfil the task of embodying that very home. Homesickness, thus, is the male role in the story.

The homecoming motif is closely connected to a biblical tale: the parable of the prodigal son (*bludnyi syn*) (Luke 15:11–32). The son has sinned against the father but shows repentance and is welcomed by the father with open arms upon his return. In the discourse about the sons’ duty towards the Russian homeland, this Christian subtext was always

5 Exceptions are young maidens such as, e.g., *Suomi-neito*, who at the end of the nineteenth century came to replace a mother figure as the personification of Finland, as well as the *Kosovka devojka*, known from Serbian iconography and epics (see Edmondson 2003, 58).

present – in prerevolutionary and in atheist Soviet culture alike (see Sandomirskaja 2001, 59). He who leaves home commits an act of betrayal; return, thus, appears as the confession of a guilt (Sandomirskaja 2001, 70). However, the homeland lovingly forgives those who repent, and welcomes them back into the fold.

The return narrative of Russian emigration recurrently evokes this Christian compound of sin, penitence, and forgiveness. Interestingly, however, it is not the father who meets and embraces the prodigal son but the mother, or a woman or mother figure that personifies the motherland. As cases in point, I have selected for analysis four texts from Russian émigré literature: poems by first-wave poets Viacheslav Lebedev and Nikolai Turoverov and a novella by third-wave writer Efraim Sevela.

3. The prodigal son's 'evening return'

The poem *Vechnnee vozvrashchenie* (Evening return), which Viacheslav Lebedev published in 1928, stands out due to two intertextual references to biblical texts: the Book of Ecclesiastes (1:4–7) with its verse about the wind that returns on its circuits and the previously mentioned parable of the prodigal son.

The poem's male poetic persona shows certain parallels with the prodigal son of the Gospel of Luke: He is returning home from a foreign land – although only in his imagination, which projects the longed-for future homecoming – suppliant, pitiful, leaning on his walking stick. Recalling his “noisy years” [“шумные года”; line 12] is painful to him; they stand in stark contrast to the “quiet evening” [“И будет вечер тих”; line 9] of his return home (Lebedev 1994, 126). The homcomer's “timid” [“робко”; line 7] knocking on the door echoes the humbleness and penitence of the biblical prodigal son. However, in contrast to the Gospel's forgiving father, in Lebedev's text, it is the mother who has longingly been waiting all those years for her son to come home and now recognises him instantly, in spite of the pitiful state he is in. Her reaction is not full of anger but, just as that of the Bible's forgiving father, full of mercy.

Lebedev's returning son does not manage to recognise his mother in the aged, lined face of the woman who opens the door:

О, как узнаю средь морщин
 Твои черты, что, помню, были...
 – Ты крикнешь, жалостное: –
 “Сын!”
 И я, растерянное: –
 “Ты ли?”.

Oh, how will I recognise amidst the wrinkles
 The features of your face that I remember..
 You will exclaim a piteous:
 “Son!”
 And me, a distraught:
 “Is it you?”

If we conceive of the mother as the personified motherland, the primal Christian scene evoked by the text reflects a *leitmotif* of literary return narratives: the question of how much the regained homeland will resemble the one which the émigré once left.

4. The émigré between mother and stepmother

In the poem “Osypaetsia sad zolotoi...” (“Leaves are falling in the golden garden...”, 1939) by the first-wave ‘Cossack’ poet Nikolai Turoverov, a mother is waiting in vain for her son to come home. She represents the poem’s lyrical ‘you’, which can be recognised as a parent in line 6 but as a mother only in line 10 (Turoverov 1939, 36). The text evokes images of autumn and approaching winter that are traditionally associated with the ‘autumn of life’ and, thus, with old age and the idea of death being near. Throughout this poem, coupled, masculine rhymes are used – a conspicuous exception to Turoverov’s poetry collection *Stikhi* (Poems) from 1939 – which reinforces the impression of uniformity and

monotony characterising the mother's later life. Her final days consist in waiting for the son's return:

Ты все смотришь на листьев полет,
Ты все веришь, что сын твой придет,
Возвратится из странствий – и вот
У твоих постучится ворот. (Turoverov 1939, 36; lines 5–8)

You still look at the flying leaves,
You still believe that your son will come,
That he'll return from his wanderings and all of a sudden
Will knock at your door.

The monotony of waiting and ageing is emphasised by the identical end rhyme in all of these four successive lines. The poem concludes with anticipating death: “Недалек твой последний покой” [“Your last resting place is near”] (line 12). This reminds of the common home-coming-through-death motif: However, in Turoverov's poem, it is the vainly waiting mother who dies. Her death makes the son's non-return definite.

Whereas in “Leaves are falling in the golden garden...”, the homeland left behind is represented by the mother, in the poem “Zhizn' ne nachinaetsia snachala...” (“Life does not begin from scratch...”, 1939), France, the country of exile, appears as a stepmother – just like in the well-known Russian saying “Родимая сторона – мать, чужая – мачеха” [“The homeland is a mother, the foreign land – a stepmother”] (Dal' 2000, 336). France is the poem's lyrical ‘you’, which is personified throughout the text. The lyrical ‘I’ refers to himself as “son of foreign origin” [“чужеродный сын”] (Turoverov 1939, 27; line 8). The stepmother has accepted this son, but she also has her own children [“родные дети”] (line 5). She cannot or does not want to replace the stepson's Mother Russia. This is revealed by the fact that she does not let him into her house; he is forced to dwell at the threshold: “Долго жил у твоего порога, / И еще, наверно, проживу” [“I've lived for a long time at your threshold, / And will be likely to do so for another while”] (lines 11–12).

Significantly, France is apostrophised as “my cheery stepmother” [“Мачеха веселая моя”] (line 16). Given the gloom of the poetic persona who is mourning his past and has lost all his hopes, this cheerfulness seems inappropriate. Herein, Turoverov’s poem echoes Georgii Ivanov’s famous verse from 1932 “Likovanie vechnoi, blazhennoi vesny...” (“The exaltation of eternal, blissful spring...”), in which the lyrical ‘I’ feels repelled by the joyous atmosphere that reigns in “repugnant Nice” [“постылая Ницца”] (Ivanov 1994, 586; line 9). Springlike stepmother France, thus, other than a real mother, always shows the wrong feelings: “Ты меня с улыбкой не встречала / И в слезах не будешь провожать” [“You did not meet me with a smile / And will not say goodbye to me in tears”] (Turoverov 1939, 27; lines 3–4). Therefore, she cannot assure her stepson of being unconditionally accepted and loved.

5. The émigré’s return into his motherland’s arms

In Efraim Sevela’s novella *Stop the plane – I’m getting off!*, the first-person narrator Arkadii Rubinchik, an émigré on his way back ‘home’, reflects on what symbolises ‘home’ for an emigrant Russian. He resorts to numerous linguistic clichés which have also been listed by Irina Sandomirskaja in her analysis of the Soviet homeland discourse (see Sandomirskaja 2001, 53ff.).

Россия... Родина... Родимая сторонка...⁶

Если верить книгам и кино, то русский человек, или вернее, советский человек, где-нибудь на чужбине, в ужасной тоске или на смертном ложе, в последний сознательный миг непременно увидит белые березки, качающиеся на ветру, и это ему напомнит обожаемую родину. (Sevela 1980, 142)

Russia... Homeland... Motherland...

If we believe what the books and the cinema say, a Russian man,

6 According to Sandomirskaja (2001, 51), *rodnaia storonka* ‘motherland’ is a keyword in the narrative of ‘love of the homeland’.

or rather a Soviet man somewhere in a foreign land, feeling desperately homesick or lying on his deathbed, will, in his last conscious moment, inevitably see white birch trees swaying in the wind, and be reminded by them of his adored homeland.

For Rubinchik, however, the symbol of Russia is not a birch, but a real woman he has known:

Для меня символ России был в другом [...]. Через ностальгическую муть пробивалось и возникало как образ Родины одно и то же видение: лицо парторга нашего треста обслуживания Капитолины Андреевны [...]. Добрейшая Капитолина Андреевна. Матушка-заступница, но и строго взыскающая с нерадивых. Бог московских парикмахеров. Вернее, богиня. Простая русская баба [...] женщина с большой "Ж". (Sevela 1980, 142–143)

For me, Russia was symbolised by something else [...]. Through the nostalgic mist, one vision cut through and arose as the Motherland's image time and time again: the face of our [hairdressing] service company's local party organiser, Kapitolina Andreevna [...]. Most kind-hearted Kapitolina Andreevna. Mother of Mercy, but also most demanding towards those who failed. The God of Moscow hairdressers. Or rather, Goddess. An ordinary Russian *baba* [older woman] [...] a woman with a capital 'W'.

Kapitolina Andreevna is the person who has offered him the testimonial he needed in order to receive his exit permit. Her personal relationship with Rubinchik is not merely a motherly one. However, in her function as the homeland's allegory, the narrator lends her essential maternal qualities, not incidentally associating her with the image of the Mother of Mercy as the sinners' advocate (*matushka-zastupnitsa*). This image ironically refers to a conflation, common in Russian discourse, of pre-Christian (Mother Earth) with Christian concepts (Mother of God).⁷

7 See Edmondson 2003, 54; Hellberg-Hirn 1998, 116.

Kapitolina Andreevna's document will also help Rubinchik upon his return to the Soviet Union – this is what he, at least, believes. His former party organiser's testimonial appears to him now as a lifesaver and the woman herself as the longed-for homeland that will enclose him in its arms again:

Словно знала, провидица, что я обратно запрошусь. [...] Берегись, диван! Гремите, пружины! Принимай в объятия, заступница моя! (Sevela 1980, 192)

As if she knew, the clairvoyant, that I would beg to be allowed back home. [...] Watch out, divan! Creak, springs! Take me in your arms, my advocate [*zastupnitsa*]!

The common metaphor of the protagonist returning into the motherland's 'fold' (womb) is used here by Sevela not only in a figurative sense but taken quite literally, and thus stripped of its pathos.⁸

Yet, in Sevela's novella, the mother figure becomes a symbol of the homeland in yet another respect, namely, the "old mother" (*prestarelaia mama, staren'kaia mama*):

Скажите мне, как вы относитесь к своей престарелой маме, и я скажу вам, кто вы – животное, скотина или человек.

Итальянцы – люди. Там матери – почет и уважение. О, мамма mia! Так, кажется, поют в Неаполе. Грузины у нас на Кавказе – еще больше люди. У них мама – Бог. Ну, уж о евреях нечего и говорить. Они в этом смысле – сверхчеловеки. Потому что в настоящей еврейской семье мама – Бог, царь и воинский начальник. (Sevela 1980, 178)

Tell me how you behave towards your old mother, and I will tell you who you are – a beast, a brute, or a man.

8 Klavdia Smola (2019, 243) has rightly stated that Sevela is one of those Jewish writers for whom "every nationally and ideologically motivated romanticisation becomes an object of deconstruction and is freed from its taboos".

Italians are men. They respect and revere their mothers. O, mamma mia! This is, it seems, what they sing in Naples. Our Georgians in the Caucasus are even more human. For them, the mother is God. Well, and about the Jews, there's nothing left to say. In this respect, they are supermen. For in a truly Jewish family, the mother is God, the tsar and commander-in-chief.

In Rubinchik's view, the importance the old mother has in a society reveals everything about this society's merit: "[...] по этому признаку я вам определю с точностью аптекарских весов, чего стоит та или иная нация, та или иная страна" ["on this basis, I will determine for you as accurately as an apothecary's scale a nation's or a country's worth"] (Sevela 1980, 178). Compared to Russia, America comes off badly in this regard. As the narrator contrasts habits "in America" (*v Amerike*) with those "in our country, Russia" (*u nas v Rossi*), it becomes clear why he does not feel he belongs to his receiving country, and why returning to the Soviet Union is the only option for him. It is no option for Rubinchik to live in a society in which older people are moved to nursing homes and left there to await their death:

В Америке – богатейшей стране, где евреи далеко не самая бедная часть населения, у каждой семьи по два-три автомобиля, у большинства – собственные дома, и комнат в этих домах столько, что в Москве бы там поселили семей пять не меньше. Так в этой самой Америке родители, престарелые люди, – отрезанный ломоть, от них избавляются под любым предлогом без всякого зазрения совести. [...] Старики живут в этих домах [для престарелых] без семейной ласки и внимания, хорошо оплаченные кандидаты в покойники, и все их мысли невольно гуляют вокруг одной и той же темы: кто следующий в этом доме отправится в мир иной. Они живут среди дряхлости и тлена, и страшной такой пытки не придумать даже людоедам. (Sevela 1980, 179)

In America – a very rich country, where the Jews are by far not the poorest segment of the population and where every family has two

or three cars – the majority has their own houses and so many rooms in these houses that in Moscow at least five families would be accommodated in them. Well, in this same America, parents, older people, are cut off, they are disposed of [by their offspring] under any pretext, without the slightest twinge of remorse. [...] Older people live in these [nursing] homes without their families' embraces and care, well-paid men and women destined to die, and all their thoughts are inadvertently focused on this very topic: who will be the next in the nursing home to depart this world. They live surrounded by frailty and decay, and even cannibals couldn't think of a more terrible torture.

Certainly, Sevela makes the protagonist of his satirical text exaggerate, in accordance with the genre's conventions. However, the comparison of people who expect their old parents to endure such a dreary end of life with cannibals highlights how alienated the narrator feels from this culture, which he, apparently, cannot consider as civilised.

In Rubinchik's view, the standing that old people have in Russia is completely different:

У нас в России, где не только нет лишнего места для стариков, где в одной комнатке живут три поколения вместе: внуки, дети и дедушки с бабушками, вас бы посчитали извергом и самым последним человеком, если бы вы заикнулись о том, что, мол, не мешало бы избавиться от стариков.

Свою собственную маму, которая тебя взрастила, вскормила, выходила из самых жестоких болезней, спасала от голода, сама недоедая, телом прикрывала во время бомбежек, разве можно во имя своего комфорта лишить ее на склоне лет семейного тепла, внимания, радости жить с внучатами и молодеть, глядя на них? (Sevela 1980, 180)

In our country, Russia, where there is no spare room left for the elderly, where three generations – grandchildren, children and grandparents – live together in one room, you would be considered a monster and the very foulest of men, if you only hinted that it wouldn't perhaps be bad to get rid of old people.

For can you really, for the sake of your personal comfort, deprive your own aged mother – who has brought you up, fed you, helped you out of most terrible illnesses, saved you from hunger by depriving herself of food, who sheltered you with her body during the bombings – of family warmth, care, the pleasure of living with her little grandchildren and becoming young again by watching them?

In this part of the novella, the ironic undertone present throughout the text has vanished; for the first time, the narrator appears not a cynical distant observer but a man (or son) with feelings. Arkadii Rubinchik is, indeed, homesick. He is longing for his motherland, which is personified in varying mother figures. Yet above of all, he is longing for a country to call his ideal home, in which old mothers are not left alone by their children but loved and cared for by family caregivers – a home country, to which sons, and prodigal sons like himself, always return, thus fulfilling their duty toward their mother, or motherland.

6. Conclusion

As the literary texts selected for this paper among many other comparable ones show, emigration generates specific notions of home and belonging. On the one hand, the involuntary departure and the impossibility – perceived or real – of returning entail a sense of irreversibility and self-estrangement, which manifest themselves as the feeling of growing older. On the other hand, this specific ‘émigré-aged-by-exile’ type embodies a gendered experience: The relationship of ‘homeland’ and ‘émigré’ is conceived of and described in familial terms, as the longing of a prodigal son for his mother.

Whereas female characters are assigned the role of embodying the home, the roles of representing mobility, displacement, and the longing for return are attributed to and experienced mainly by male protagonists and personae. This gender and kinship pattern can be observed in numerous works of émigré literature throughout the twentieth century,

from texts of the first- to the third-wave of Russian emigration, and beyond.

As Eva Hausbacher has argued, voluntary migration – which does not prevent people from returning home at least temporarily – on the one side, and involuntary emigration, on the other, produce quite different literatures (Hausbacher 2009, 10–12). While Russian émigré literature has targeted Russian-speaking audiences and dwelled on retrospection and memory, migration literature is oriented towards the writer’s receiving countries, uses the latter’s languages and is, thus, transnational and transcultural in nature. In what way these basic differences affect the age and gender of homesickness as represented in migration literature opens up spaces for further investigation.

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