Literary St. Petersburg in Contemporary Russian Transnational Writing: Anya Ulinich, Gary Shteyngart, and Zinaida Lindén

Tintti Klapuri

ABSTRACT

This article elucidates the ways in which the Russian literary tradition and literature, associated with St. Petersburg in particular, are reflected in contemporary Russian transnational fiction written in English and Swedish. The article focuses on the work of three prominent writers: the American-Russian writers Gary Shteyngart and Anya Ulinich, and their respective novels *Absurdistan* (2006) and *Petropolis* (2007), and the Finnish-Swedish-Russian author Zinaida Lindén and her novels *Waiting for an Earthquake* (2004) and *Takakirves–Tokyo* (2007).

The main argument of this article is that while the fourth wave of transnational writers are well-acquainted with the St. Petersburg myth, they do not, as a rule, develop the literary tradition of the *peterburgskij tekst* further in their own texts. Instead, St. Petersburg, as well as Russian literature associated with the city, is employed in the construction of a new hybrid identity, in which Russian heritage is complemented by the culture of the author's new country of residence.

Keywords: St. Petersburg myth, Russian literary tradition, transnational literature, contemporary Russian literature, immigration, Zinaida Lindén, Gary Shteyngart, Anya Ulinich

1.0 Introduction

During Soviet times, Russian emigrant writing gained a special position within the history of Russian literature. Due to political and social factors its formation diverged from the literary tradition that developed in the Soviet Union at the same time. Émigré literature ceased to exist as such after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the situation of the post-perestroika émigrés, or the so-called fourth wave writers, differs from the previous waves in several ways. Most of the émigré writers from this last wave emigrated for non-political reasons, and their contact with Russia and its literary life is, in principle, unrestricted. Moreover, several writers of the younger generation settled in their respective new home countries as children and adapted more fully to cultural and societal challenges than the previous émigré generations. This has markedly affected their choice of language in fictional writing.

Russian-American writers born in the 1970s are perhaps the most representative, or at least the most well-known examples, of the fourth wave of émigré writing. Such writers as Gary Shteyngart (b. 1972), Anya Ulinich (b. 1973), Lara Vapnyar (b. 1976) and Sana Krasikov (b. 1979) share similar backgrounds: they immigrated to the United States when they were children or teenagers, and they were mostly educated in English, which became their second language. They all write in English, even if they all employ Russian to some extent in their fiction. There are, however, considerable differences in the ways in which the writers have adapted English language. For Shteyngart, the decision to write in English was a natural choice, as he immigrated with his family when he was seven. However, Ulinich only moved to the United States in her teens and her decision to write in English has been far more problematic. She explains in an interview that for a long time she felt that English was not her own language: “It all made me feel that the English language was someone else’s tool, like a chainsaw that I was clumsily borrowing. I certainly didn’t dare to take it and use it for my own creative purposes.” (Ulinich 2009) What further unites Russian-American writers of the

fourth wave is that most of them are Russian-American Jews. Hence, their cultural background is multi-ethnic and hybrid in nature.

While Russian-American fiction has already established its position as a literary field worthy of academic studies, the situation is quite different in Europe. Apart from Andreï Makine (b. 1957) and Wladimir Kaminer (b. 1967), whose works have been accorded attention mostly from the perspective of French and German studies, contemporary Russian transnational writing still remains in the margins of academic interest.[1] In this respect, Zinaida Lindén (b. 1963), the leading Russian-Nordic émigré writer, adds a new dimension to research into Russian transnationality. Lindén, who immigrated to Finland in the early 1990s, stands out from other prominent Russian transnational writers in her language choices. First, she writes and publishes in Swedish *and* Russian. Second, her decision to write in the minority language of Swedish in Finland ensures she is doubly marginal in the Finnish literary field. In comparison with Russian-American writers, Lindén's connections with contemporary Russian literature and Russian everyday life are far more pertinent: she publishes both in Finland and in Russia, and visits her relatives and friends in St. Petersburg on a monthly basis (Lindén 2016).[2]

In this article, I examine some of the ways in which the Russian literary tradition is employed in new transnational writing. More specifically, I seek to define the meaning of this tradition in literature that is being written in-between two cultures in the post-Soviet era. I focus on the utilisation of one of the most productive tropes within the Russian literary canon: the corpus of texts

[1] See, however, Adrian Wanner's work on Makine and Kaminer in his monograph *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New Translingual Era* (2011) and in his 2008 article "Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writings of Andrei Makine, Wladimir Kaminer, and Gary Shteyngart" in *Slavic Review* 67(3), 662–681. In addition to Wanner's book-length study, contemporary Russian-American writers have received scholarly attention, for example, in Amelia Glaser's article "Messages in a Bottle" (2008), in a special issue of *The Slavic and East European Journal* (4/2011) and in Julie Hansen's article "Making Sense of the Translingual Text: Russian Wordplay, Names, and Cultural Allusions in Olga Grushin's *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*" (2012).

[2] For examples of Russian-American writers' visits to their country of origin, see Furman 2011, 23–24.

associated with the St. Petersburg myth (*peterburgskij tekst*), which stems from the work of Puškin, was developed by Gogol´ and Dostoevskij, and gained new meanings in twentieth-century modernist and postmodernist literature.[3] Due to its clearly defined nature, the St. Petersburg text is easily identifiable in varied literary works. The core of the myth centres around the duality of St. Petersburg as an imagined city: on the one hand, it appears as the assumedly rational, European capital of Russia, and, on the other, it is viewed as a utopian project born "out of nothing" (Lotman 1984, 35–36; Anciferov 2014, 21–22). The extreme location of the city at the threshold of nature and culture – by the sea, at the mouth of an estuary and set amidst a deceptive Finnish marsh – accentuates its fragility as a cultural space and provides fruitful ground for various eschatological myths (Toporov 1984, 23–26; Lotman 1984, 31–32).

As Roman Timenčik and Vladimir Chazan (2006) demonstrate, St. Petersburg is probably the most common literary trope in the work of earlier émigré writers. In émigré writing of the first and second waves, the image of the city is often employed as a metaphor for the *peterburgskij period* in Russian literature, or for Russian literature in general (Timenčik & Chazan 2006, 10, 16). On the one hand, a feeling of nostalgia colours the image of the city in early émigré writing: St. Petersburg appears as a lost paradise and emigration from the city represents a turning point in Russian history (idem, 15). In retrospection, the phantasmagorical aspects of the literary city grow even more prominent. As Timenčik and Chazan summarise, "the city becomes which it is supposed to become – a city of eternal memory, unreal, a scenery that creates itself" (idem, 37).[4] On the other hand, there is a tendency for the émigré writers to implant the image of St. Petersburg into the setting of their new country of residence: in the poetry of the first and second wave émigrés, the main

[3] Some of the most famous examples of the St. Petersburg text are Puškin's *The Bronze Horseman* (*Mednyj vsadnik*, 1833), Gogol´'s "The Overcoat" ("Šinel´", 1842), Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 1866), Anna Akhmatova's *A Poem without a Hero* (*Poema bez geroja*, 1962), Andrei Bitov's *Pushkin House* (*Puškinskij dom*, 1978) and Tatyana Tolstaya's early short stories such as "Okkervil River" ("Reka Okkervil´", 1985).
[4] Translation by the author.

symbols of St. Petersburg – the Neva, in particular, – are also felt to be present in Paris, New York and Boston (idem, 44–45). In this respect, Yasha Klots' (2011, 44–46) observation concerning Russian-American émigré literature of the second and third waves is interesting: he notes that the sceneries of New York and St. Petersburg, in particular, are often juxtaposed, with the former often being seen as the latter's foreign equivalent.

Arguably, the St. Petersburg literary trope also colours the way in which the city is reflected in the fourth wave émigré writing of the 2000s.[5] I have chosen Shteyngart's novel *Absurdistan*, Ulinich's novel *Petropolis* and Lindén's novels *Waiting for an Earthquake* and *Takakirves–Tokio* for analysis because not only do they all make explicit use of Russian literary *tradition*, but they also refer to St. Petersburg as a literary topos. I argue that while these fourth wave transnational writers are well-acquainted with the St. Petersburg myth, they do not, as a rule, develop the literary tradition of the *peterburgskij tekst* further in their own texts. Instead, St. Petersburg, as well as Russian literature associated with the city, is employed in the construction of a new hybrid identity, in which Russian heritage is complemented by the culture of the author's new country of residence.

2.0 The Functions of Literary St. Petersburg in the novels of Ulinich, Shteyngart and Lindén

2.1 Mandel´štam's *Tristia* and *Petropolis*: The End of an Era

Ulinich's novel *Petropolis* tells the story of a Russian teenager, Sasha Goldberg, who grows up in the early 1990s under her mother's strict surveillance in the fictional town of Asbestos 2. It is a God-forbidden place, which was developed as a model Soviet industrial town and is located

[5] References to St. Petersburg in Russian-American fiction have previously been noted only sporadically. To my knowledge, only one study has been published regarding the connections between contemporary transnational writing and the canonical St. Petersburg text; namely Adrian Wanner's 2009 article "Gogol's 'Portrait' Repainted: On Gary Shteyngart's 'Shylock on the Neva'" (*Canadian Slavonic Papers* 51(2–3), 333–48).

somewhere in Siberia. Sasha gets pregnant and is forced to leave her new-born daughter with her mother in order to attend art school in Moscow. New York is another important city in Ulinich's novel, as Sasha ends up living there after leaving Russia and travelling around the United States in search of her father.

Sasha's surname is Jewish and she is regarded as a Jew in her hometown, but she is in fact of Russian-African descent. Her African grandfather attended a Soviet international cultural festival in Moscow in the 1950s and impregnated an unmarried Russian woman. The illegitimate child of this transnational sexual encounter – Sasha's half-African father – had been adopted into a Jewish family as a child. Sasha's multi-ethnic identity and its literary connections are central to the transnational theme of the novel: *Petropolis* can be read as an emancipatory transnational *Bildungsroman*, which depicts Sasha Goldberg's developmental journey from a Soviet backwater, where her African complexion marks her out from the rest, to Brooklyn, where no-one pays attention to the colour of her skin. Furthermore, Sasha's African origins are reminiscent of Puškin's African roots. Her first name, Aleksandra, also refers directly to the poet. Through this allusion, the sentiments of outsiderness that Sasha experiences are shown to be deeply rooted in the classical Russian literary canon.[6]

The connection with the Russian literary tradition is elaborated further with the help of the main subtext of the novel: Osip Mandel´štam's collection *Tristia* (1922), and particularly the poem "At a

[6] *Petropolis* includes several allusions that would be overlooked without a good knowledge of the Russian literary tradition. Such allusions will probably only be noticed by rather experienced readers of the Russian classics. Hence, it appears the novel was intentionally written for two audiences: non-initiated American readers and an initiated readership of Russian-American-Jews. Nevertheless, the question of this dual audience merely concerns the employment of literary allusions, not the language of the novel, since every Russian word used is explained to the reader. The case is different with bilingual writers, such as Olga Grushin, who employ two languages in their work in a more extensive way. In Grushin's novel *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* (2005), which also uses allusions to Russian literature in the narration, it is possible to define two different reading models according to the language of the reader (see Hansen 2012). Gary Shteyngart, in turn, often employs Russian words to mark the specific idiolect of his characters, the Runglish spoken in the immigrant communities of New York.

fearsome height stands a wandering fire" ("Na strašnoj vysote bluždajuščij ogon´"), to which Ulinich refers repeatedly: "Na strašnoj vysote bluždajuščij ogon´, / No razve tak zvezda mercaet? / Prozračnaja zvezda, bluždajuščij ogon´, / Tvoj brat, Petropol´, umiraet." (Mandel´štam 1922, 45).[7] *Tristia* as a whole and "At a fearsome height stands a wandering fire" in particular concern the collapse of a cultural paradigm and the emergence of a new standard. Mandel´štam develops this problematic in relation to antiquity and relates it to both the abstract cultural space of St. Petersburg and to the concrete situation faced by its citizens in March 1918, when German troops were threatening the city (see Surat 2008).

In the work of Ulinich, the central symbols of Mandel´štam's poem are adapted to refer to the new socio-cultural situation faced by her characters in early post-Soviet reality: "Petropolis" refers to the dying Soviet Union, which in the novel is symbolised by the model town of Asbestos 2, as well as by Sasha's mother, Lubov Aleksandrovna, who represents the last remnants of a disintegrating Soviet civilization. Lubov Aleksandrovna's main goal in life has been to uphold cultural values in the Soviet/post-Soviet backwater she inhabits, and to give her daughter a proper education regardless of their appalling circumstances and her daughter's own individual will. Her death at the end of the novel marks the final end of an era: she is found frozen to death in the local library where she used to work and where she fled after escaping from the local hospital, holding *Tristia* in her hands.

For Sasha, her mother's death means that she has lost her last bond to Asbestos 2 and is free to take her own daughter with her to New York. While she also casts a nostalgic gaze at the lost "Petropolis", it is clear that her future is in New York. The emergence of a new hybrid cultural

[7] The image of St. Petersburg as a dying city is also prominent in the émigré poetry of the first and second waves. For examples, see Timenčik & Chazan 2006, 38–42.

identity is manifested in Sasha's new family, in which cultural barriers are finally overcome and marginal creatures are able to find each other: the family consists of Sasha and her daughter, both Russian-African-Americans, and Sasha's disabled American-Jewish lover. Her distance from the post-Soviet reality that she has left behind is crystallised by the image of her dead mother in an émigré newspaper: "*You're my lover*, Sasha thinks in an in-between language. *You're my daughter*. When they're gone, she goes back into the store and buys *The Foreign Land*. Her mother sleeps on the cover, upright, over a book." (Ulinich 2008, 324) The name of the newspaper – *The Foreign Land* – is thus employed in the narration to refer to the Soviet Union, which is represented by Sasha's mother in the novel, instead of the United States.

2.2 A Transnational Myškin in *Absurdistan*

Shteyngart's *Absurdistan* refers to the Russian literary tradition in several ways. The novel begins with a detailed explanation of the literary inheritance of the protagonist, Misha Vainberg, an obese Russian-American-Jewish millionaire, who lives in New York but is temporarily sent back to St. Petersburg and then to the former Soviet republic of Absurdistan in Caucasia:

> As you read about my life and struggles in these pages, you will see certain similarities with Oblomov, the famous large gentleman who refuses to stir from his couch in the nineteenth-century novel of the same name. I won't try to sway you from this analogy (I haven't the energy, for one thing), but may I suggest another possibility: Prince Myshkin from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Like the prince, I am something of a holy fool. (Shteyngart 2007, 15)

By offering these intertextual reading instructions, Shteyngart guides the reader directly into the literary framework of his novel. Vainberg's Oblomovian characteristics are straightforward: he

loves eating and spending time on his sofa. The Myškinian dimensions of the protagonist's actions unfold during the course of the novel: he establishes a charity organization for street children in St. Petersburg, for example, and is depicted as developing strong emotions for fallen women. However, the specifically Russian literary origins of the protagonist are only surface deep. Misha feels he is an American wrapped in a Russian cover. The mixture of *oblomovščina* and Myškin-related holy foolism, which form the core of his character and make him wobble between inaction and action throughout the novel, has an American flavour. This is because Misha's Oblomovian eating habits and his Myškinian generosity are represented (in an intentionally stereotypical manner) as American characteristics. A similar sense of hybridity also personifies Rouanne, the hilariously empowering Bronxian wanna-be-secretarian – Misha's variant of Nastas´ja Filippovna from *The Idiot* – who betrays Misha by cavorting with Rogožin's equivalent in the novel, the autofictional Jerry Shteynfarb. In her combination of naïve, half-literate purity and well-developed eroticism, Rouanne resembles a dualistic Dostoevskyan female character, but with a multicultural American accent: she is "[h]alf Puerto Rican. And half German. And half Mexican and Irish and everything else besides" (Shteyngart 2007, 32).

As Klots (2011, 47) notes, *Absurdistan* almost appears to be an inversion of the Russian émigré tradition in the sense that the protagonist feels at home in the new country, but is made to endure "exile" back in the country of his origin. While St. Leninsburg is one of the main sites of action in *Absurdistan*, together with New York and Svanï City, the capital of of Absurdistan, it is made clear from the very start that Misha Vainberg's ultimate city is the bold and brazen Big Apple. When he is forced to stay in St. Leninsburg, his hometown, he longs for the multi-ethnic buzz of Brooklyn. Similarly, when he is in Absurdistan, he displays no nostalgia for St. Petersburg; instead he yearns for New York and its laundromats.

New York, in turn, has a tangible literary potential of its own that is manifested especially in immigrant narratives, in which the multicultural population and the gigantic proportions of the city have been the dynamo for the mythopoetic framework for immigrant writers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds for decades (see Klots 2011, 38). In these narratives, New York appears as both a repulsive and lovable city, full of hope and potential for the American dream, also for immigrants. In Shteyngart's novel, the highly capitalistic post-Soviet city of St. Leninsburg is represented as a reflection of the duality of New York. The combination of "Lenin" and "Burg" (with the underlying connotation of being bourgeois) in the name of the city can be seen to reflect the specific post-Soviet form of capitalism at the turn of the millennium. The city appears as an unoriginal metropolis that is trying its hardest to be identical with Western models: "The City of the Czars, the Venice of the North, Russia's cultural capital… forget all that. By the year 2001, […] our intelligent, depressive citizenry has been replaced by a new race of mutants dressed in studied imitation of the West." (2007, 3) In this sense, Shteyngart's hyper-capitalistic city appears as the successor to Peter the Great's Western city that was born "out of nothing". As a topos for unoriginality and well-developed capitalism, St. Leninsburg can be seen as the ultimate result of opening Russia's window to Europe.

2.3 Lindén's Eternal St. Petersburg

While Shteyngart's St. Leninsburg strips all vestiges of nostalgia from the city of St. Petersburg, for Zinaida Lindén's émigré protagonists St. Petersburg-Leningrad and its literary and cultural heritage form a topos of almost unquestioned emotional cohesion. The novel *Waiting for an Earthquake* is based on the memories of Leningrad in the late 1970s and 1980s of Ivan, a former weightlifter, which his friend Iraida develops into a novel. Its sequel, the epistolary novel *Takakirves–Tokyo*, focuses on Ivan's and Iraida's memories of Leningrad and their experiences of St. Petersburg in the

1990s and 2000s. Lindén draws heavily from the Russian literary and popular culture of the era in constructing a collective experience, which appears particular to her generation. Most of the references in the novel are given merely as names, which a reader with some familiarity with the Soviet rock, pop and bard scene will recognise, while some allusions are more pertinent and help to construct the thematic basis of the novel.

In *Waiting for an Earthquake*, the central subtext concentrates on the bard Aleksandr Gorodnitskij's song "Atlantes" ("Atlanty", 1963), which refers to the titans that hold up the portico of the New Hermitage. The song crystallises the main theme of Lindén's novel, namely the idea of St. Petersburg's eternal temporality. In "Atlantes", significant moments of the city's contemporary urban history, such as the siege of Leningrad, are reflected from the perspective of the titans who have observed Russian revolutions on the Palace Square for almost two centuries:

> Stojat oni, naveki
> Uperši lby v bedu,
> Ne bogi – tšeloveki,
> Privyčnye k trudu.
>
> I žit´ješče nadežde
> Do toj pory, poka
> Atlanty nebo deržat
> V kamennyh rukach.
> (Gorodnitskij 2008, 50–51)

In Lindén's novel, the atlantes observe the "earthquake" of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The weightlifter Ivan is represented as one of the titans: he has been holding up his home country as if it were a weight above his head, and when it collapses, Ivan experiences a mental breakdown. The Soviet Union is hence represented as a machine-like superbody that has been constructed with the help of anabolic steroids. The breakdown of this body results in Ivan entering a mental hospital on Vasilevskij Island. This marks the slow and complicated emergence of the new Russia. The socialist project is trampled under the march of the emerging capitalist order, but this historical crisis is represented as a temporary change of paradigms that is neither the first nor the last. The paradisiac Leningrad of Ivan's and Iraida's youth is juxtaposed with the sunken Atlantis: "After the earthquake part of the seabed is exposed from under the sea. […] At the places of fire there rise flowers that are happily unaware of the bygone times. Atlantis sunk into the deeps but the Palace Square atlantes stay on guard, as they have stayed for many years." (Lindén 2004, 221)[8] In *Waiting for an Earthquake*, St. Petersburg thus gains a dimension of eternal temporality that is characteristic of a mythical conception of time. When seen from the vantage point of the urban myth of St. Petersburg, Lindén's view of the granite atlantes as eternal guards confirms its rational side. Hence, the Soviet Leningrad-Atlantis may sink, but the granite atlantes survive even the most chaotic of times.

In *Takakirves–Tokyo*, the somewhat idyllic view of the urban landscape of Leningrad in the 1980s is challenged by the conflicting view of the home country held by Ivan's niece. She grew up in Čerepoveč in the post-Soviet periphery, and finds it difficult to understand why someone would long for Russia when living abroad. Iraida's categorical view of St. Petersburg as the ultimate city also begins to appear as questionable towards the end of the novel. At first she feels that she is living outside of time and place, as the Soviet Union of her childhood and youth has collapsed,

[8] Translation by the author.

whilst for her the new Russia merely generates feelings of estrangement. Later, however, she comes to view her previous émigré sentiments as a temporary experience of "falling out of time" – a reference to Čvetaeva's émigré poem "Praise for Time" ("Chvala vremeni", 1923) – and begins to feel that it is entirely possible to have two cities, St. Petersburg and Helsinki, as homes.

An important aspect of Lindén's novels is that Iraida and Ivan are represented as constantly moving between different cultural spaces or situated in transnational spaces, which accentuates the characters' in-betweenness and their hybrid identity. The in-betweenness of Lindén's characters is also highlighted in her choices of genre. *Waiting for an Earthquake* is a travel novel set on a train. The central crux of the story takes place in the no-man's-land aboard an international train travelling between Moscow and Helsinki. *Takakirves–Tokyo*, in turn, is an epistolary novel that describes the protagonists' email correspondence between Finland and Japan. Here the sense of non-belonging that unites Iraida and Ivan is made possible by the cyberspace in which the exchange of letters takes place. This is represented as a similar kind of no-man's-land as the international train in the former novel: "In cyberspace everything is possible. It is neutral, it does not belong to anyone." (Lindén 2007, 214)

3.0 Conclusion

The way in which St. Petersburg is represented in the work of the three authors studied in this article accords with the view that the city not only represents itself or the St. Petersburg myth, but also the Russian literary tradition as a whole and even Russian and/or Soviet culture at large. In the work of Ulinich, the post-Soviet condition is analysed in light of Mandel´štam's poem: the Soviet Union and its cultural remnants are associated with the dying "Petropolis". In constructing an analogy between the change of a cultural paradigm in Mandel´štam's time and the disintegration of

the Soviet Union, Ulinich employs *Tristia* not primarily as a central text in the St. Petersburg myth, but rather as a symbol for the Russian literary tradition per se. In so doing, she follows the example of earlier émigré writing. In *Absurdistan*, Shteyngart alludes to previous literature through the intertextual construction of his protagonist's identity and the triangular drama between his protagonists. However, in spite of the hints at Russian literary tradition, the central characters of Shteyngart's novel identify themselves primarily with American multi-ethnic culture and not with their Russian cultural heritage. For Misha Goldberg, it is Brooklyn, with its endless restaurant districts, which truly is an "Oblomovian paradise" (Shteyngart 2007, 19), and not some obscure district in St. Petersburg as in Gončarov's novel. Furthermore, the phantasmagoric dimensions of St. Leninsburg appear as mere reflections of New York, its multicultural big brother. In Lindén's novels, Leningrad is viewed in retrospection as a topos of emotional cohesion for an entire generation. Yet, this nostalgic view is compromised by competing experiences of Soviet and post-Soviet reality, and complemented by the growing sense of homeliness that the protagonist develops in her new country of residence. In their preference for New York and hybridisation, the fourth wave novels analysed in this article differ from the work of the third wave of émigré writers. In Eduard Limonov's *It's Me, Eddie* (*Ėto ja – Edička*, 1979), for example, the autofictional protagonist fully enjoys his sexual adventures in the bohemian circles of New York, but remains an outsider in American culture in both linguistic and cultural terms. Nevertheless, in Sergej Dovlatov's writings one can sense a similar kind of enthusiasm for multi-ethnic New York as in Shteyngart and Ulinich. Dovlatov, however, focuses primarily on Russian émigré life. Hence, the characters he depicts with obvious literary precursors – such as Tasja in *Affiliate* (*Filial*, 1990), who clearly descents from Nastasja Filippovna in Dostoevskij's *The Idiot* – do not gain hybrid dimensions in the same way as those in the works of Shteyngart and Ulinich.

The employment of the Russian literary tradition in the narration of the novels by Ulinich, Shteyngart and Lindén stands out from both earlier émigré literature and contemporary Russian literature, in the sense that previous literature is mostly referred to in a straightforward way. Ulinich hints at Mandel´štam in the title of his novel and quotes *Tristia* repeatedly; Shteyngart relates his protagonist explicitly to Dostoevskij and Gončarov; and Lindén peppers her narration with names from both classical Russian literature and Soviet popular culture of the 1970s and 1980s. In directly hinting at Russian literature and culture, the authors can be seen as interpreters of Russian literature for a new audience (see also Glaser 2011, 15), that is, as mediators who decode the intertextual and cultural framework of their texts for uninitiated readers. Interestingly, both Ulinich and Shteyngart are regarded as particularly "Russian" writers in the States, while in Russia they are considered thoroughly American. Lindén's position is somewhat different. In Finland, her work is mostly approached in general multicultural terms, as her work includes also other cultural spheres than Russia. As Lindén has written several of her works both in Swedish and in Russian, and published the Russian versions in St. Petersburg, her work is far more closely affiliated with Russian literature than the Russian-American writers' work.[9]

An analysis of the ways in which three prominent contemporary Russian émigré writers make use of the literary tradition of the St. Petersburg myth contributes to the on-going discussion regarding the specific characteristics of the fourth wave of émigré literature. On the one hand, transnational writing can be seen to revitalise the literary traditions of the countries in which the Russian émigré writers settle – in this case the United States and the Nordic countries. On the other hand, contemporary émigré authors can also be seen as forming a branch of Russian literature, as they are fluent in the country's literary tradition and actively integrate their knowledge of this tradition into their writing. In the light of the present analysis regarding the functions which St. Petersburg gains

[9] Three of Shteyngart's novels, including *Absurdistan*, have been translated to Russian. Ulinich's *Petropolis* remains untranslated.

in the transnational writings by Ulinich, Shteyngart and Lindén, I agree with Yelena Furman (2011), who sees that what best defines Russian-American fourth wave writing is its hybridity. This feature draws on transnational and multi-ethnic experiences. As Furman (2011, 30) suggests, the continual shifting between various geographical, cultural, and linguistic spaces by contemporary Russian-American authors (particularly the work of Ulinich and Shteyngart), stresses the hybridity of the protagonists' identity. *Petropolis* and *Absurdistan* constantly switch from Russia to the United States and back, and Shteyngart's novel also ventures elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Lindén's work also reflects Furman's notion of hybridity. In a similar manner as the novels by Ulinich and Shteyngart, Lindén's novels move constantly between different cultural spheres, or, more precisely, in-between these spheres. Thus, the culturally hybrid central characters in her novels feel most at home in ambiguously defined national spaces: aboard international trains or in e-mail correspondence that takes place in transnational cyberspace.

Bibliography

Anciferov, N. P. 2014 [1924]. "Byl´ i mif Peterburga". In *Duša Peterburga*. Moscow: BMM.

Furman, Yelena. 2011. "Hybrid Selves, Hybrid Texts: Embracing the Hyphen in Russian-American Fiction". *The Slavic and East European Journal* 5, no. 1:19–37.

Glaser, Amelia. 2011. "Introduction: Russian-American Fiction". *The Slavic and East European Journal* 55, no. 1:15–18.

Gorodnitskij, Aleksandr. 2008 [1963]. "Atlanty (pesnja)". In *Izbrannoe*. St. Petersburg: Vita Nova.

Hansen, Julia. 2012. “Making Sense of the Translingual Text: Russian Wordplay, Names, and Cultural Allusions in Olga Grushin’s *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*”. *Modern Language Review* 107:540–558.

Klots, Yasha. 2011. “The Ultimate City: New York in Russian Immigrant Narratives”. *Slavic and East European Journal* 55, no. 1:38–57.

Lindén, Zinaida. 2004. *I väntan på en jordbävning* (“Waiting for an Earthquake”). Helsinki: Söderströms.

Lindén, Zinaida. 2007. *Takakirves–Tokyo*. Helsinki: Söderströms.

Lindén, Zinaida. 2016. An e-mail interview that took place on 5 August 2016.

Lotman, Ju. M. 1984. “Simvolika Peterburga i problemy semiotiki goroda”. In *Semiotika goroda i gorodskoj kultury. Peterburg.* Trudy po znakovym sistemam XVIII, edited by Ju. M. Lotman et al. Tartu: Tartuskij gosudarstvennyj universitet.

Mandel´štam, O. E. 1922. “Na strašnoj vysote bluždajuščij ogon´”. In *Tristia*. Petrograd–Berlin: Petropol´.

Shteyngart, Gary. 2008 [2006]. *Absurdistan*. London: Granta Books.

Surat, Irina. 2008. Poet i gorod. Peterburgskij sjužet Mandel´štama. *Zvezda* 5. <http://magazines.russ.ru/zvezda/2008/5/su16.html> (accessed 24 March 2016)

Timenčik, Roman & Vladimir Chazan (eds). 2006. *Peterburg v poėzii russkoj ėmigracii (pervaja i vtoraja volna).* St. Petersburg: Akademičeskij proekt.

Toporov, V. N. 1984. “Peterburg i peterburgskij tekst russkoj literatury (vvedenie v temu)”. In *Semiotika goroda i gorodskoj kultury. Peterburg.* Trudy po znakovym sistemam XVIII, edited by Ju. M. Lotman et al. Tartu: Tartuskij gosudarstvennyj universitet.

Ulinich, Anya. 2008 [2007]. *Petropolis*. New York: Penguin Books.

Ulinich, Anya. 2009. “Interview”.
<http://www.anyaulinich.com/interview.html> (accessed 17 March 2016)

Wanner, Adrian. 2011. *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New Translingual Era*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.