

## Exploring His/Her Library: Reading and Books in Russian Romance

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**Abstract:** Scholars of popular romance have extensively studied the forms of literary reference that predominate in Anglo-American romance fiction, but to date little work has been done on patterns of allusion in the romance novels that are being written in other languages and areas of the globe, partly in imitation of Western models. This article examines literary references in one emerging romance tradition: the original romance novels that Russian authors began to produce shortly after translations of Western romance fiction first entered the Russian book market at the beginning of the 1990s. Considering first a forty-book sample of recent novels and then two texts in particular, Galina Kulikova's *Tender Fruit* and Natal'ia Mironova's *Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome*, the author shows that Russian romance novels, unlike the Western novels that inspired them, rarely make allusion to specific works or subgenres of romance fiction, instead relying predominately on allusions to the classics. This pattern of references reflects both proscriptive attitudes to reading from the Soviet period that continue to shape Russian culture today and the still amorphous nature of the romance genre as it is emerging in Russia.

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As scholars such as Laura Vivanco, Tamara Whyte, and Sarah Frantz and Eric Selinger have noted, metafictional motifs and literary references play an important role in many contemporary American and British romance novels (Vivanco 109-150; Frantz & Selinger 1-

2; Whyte 218-228). Just as Tatiana explores Onegin's library in Aleksandr Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (Evgenii Onegin), the heroes and heroines of contemporary English-language romance novels often learn about each other by looking at and even reading each other's books (Pushkin, ch. 7, xvii-xxv). Shared literary tastes or an ability to complete each other's citations can signal compatibility and also can, particularly if a classical work such as a Shakespearean play is cited, help combat the prejudices that label romance writers and readers as lacking in literary sophistication (Osborne 47-50; Whyte 219-221). The genre of romance fiction itself, as Vivanco points out, represents one of the most common subtexts in contemporary British and American romance novels (109-150). Heroines are often depicted as passionate romance readers: their shelves and e-readers are full of popular romances, often in the same subgenre as the book in which they appear (see, for example, Hartnady 152; Rivera 155, 262). They reference favorite authors and compare their own situation and significant other to plot details and characters from favorite books.

Of course, as Dana Polan points out, to some extent a "self-reflexive dimension" represents a "recurrent aspect of popular culture" (175). However, it may be worth considering whether such a general observation is enough to explain the kind of detailed references to specific authors and works that often appear in contemporary English-language romance fiction, which have potential commercial as well as literary functions. By referencing the novels of a more established author in a particular sub-genre, a writer can encourage fans to see her work as similar, thereby effectively arguing for her own place within a particular category (for example, Dare, location 818-819). Writers also sometimes use references and even borrowed characters or settings to cross-promote each other's work (for instance, Blake 276). It is not unusual for a character from one author's opus to cross over into the fictional world created by another: such connections are often designed to introduce fans to a new romance writer, just as the Facebook posts that writers issue noting novels released by professional friends are often calculated and reciprocal. Organizations such as the Romance Writers of America and forums like Romance Divas encourage authors to network, to mentor new voices, to cross-promote each other's novels, and to build community with other writers and fans through the use of social media and at industry events (for example, see the recordings of 2016 RWA panels by Chase and Vaughn, 53:15-55:00; Harber et al 38:30-41:00).

Given the out-sized role that such professional organizations and forums play in the romance industry in the major English-speaking markets, one might perhaps ask whether the values and habits that they instill in writers have contributed to the self-referentiality of the romance novel itself. Would the same patterns of literary references dominate in romance fiction written outside of these professional networks? Do similar elements appear in the indigenous forms of romance fiction that are emerging, partly in imitation of Western models, in countries such as Russia, China, and Turkey, or are metafictional allusions to the genre of romance fiction significantly more common in English-language books written for the major Western markets? This article aims to open up a discussion of these issues by looking at patterns of literary references in recent Russian-language romance novels. With evidence gleaned from an examination of forty original Russian works of romance fiction, I will show that, on balance, the Russian genre is less self-referential than its Western counterpart. Russian writers reference reading and books less frequently than Western authors do; moreover, the literary allusions that do appear in their work focus overwhelmingly on the classics or on Soviet literary fiction and poetry—not on romance

fiction. Mass culture, when it figures in indigenous Russian romance novels, is generally represented through allusions to Russian and Western television serials, cartoons, fairy tales, popular songs, blockbuster films, and occasionally well-known horror or detective novels (for example, Stephen King or Arthur Conan Doyle), not other romance novels.

If one takes into account the current state of romance fiction publishing in Russia, this is perhaps not surprising. As I will explain in more detail below, romance fiction remains a relatively immature genre in Russia with amorphous boundaries. Russian writers do not receive the kind of mentoring and introduction to best practices and genre norms from professional organizations, writing forums, and publishers that has helped, in the West, build romance fiction into a clearly defined industry and community. Moreover, Russian romance readers are also less connected to each other and to the writers whose work they read. As such, romance fiction provides a much less stable reference point than other forms of literary production. When they include specific cultural references in their work, Russian romance authors generally allude to texts that are better positioned to serve as common ground in Russian culture today: first and most important, the canon of Western and Russian literary classics that are familiar to many readers from the school curriculum, but also, to a lesser extent, literary authors from the Soviet period, as well as popular television and film. Such references effectively inscribe indigenous Russian romance novels into larger literary and cultural frameworks as opposed to setting them apart as a defined form warranting self-referential allusion. References to the classics and to literary fiction in Russian romance novels often seem calculated to underscore the fact that both readers and writers of romance represent part of a larger literary conversation and that romance as a genre deals with the same problems and themes as other earlier forms of literature, just from a slightly different perspective. In this sense, these allusions operate similarly to the references to Shakespeare and other classics that often appear in Western romance fiction. They implicitly defend the value of romance fiction and counter stereotypes that suggest that both romance readers and romance writers are poorly educated, lack literary sophistication, and value books solely as a source of cheap entertainment (Osborne 47-50; Whyte 219-221).

In examining an indigenous romance tradition inspired by Western models, I am following in the footsteps of scholars such as Juliet Flesch, Annick Capelle, and Eva Hemmungs Wirtén, who have explored Australian, French and Dutch, and Swedish romance fiction respectively. Like these scholars, my work considers how the form of romance fiction that first emerged in English-speaking markets is “domesticated” when it is exported to new countries. As P. Alasuutari notes, “external models are never just adopted; when turned into actual practices and incorporated with local conditions their meaning and consequences are different from the original blueprint” (67). Studies of the domesticated offshoots of an imported literary form often require a certain measure of generalization inasmuch as they map the outlines of a genre within a single culture and/or serve to introduce the international community of scholars to a category of texts that may be difficult to access due to language barriers or simply unknown outside their country of origin. Nonetheless, here I have tried to balance the need to provide general information on the genre of romance fiction in Russia with more specific readings of individual novels. I recognize that, as Frantz and Selinger, Mary Bly, and Flesch have all noted, scholarship on romance fiction has at times suffered because scholars have too often framed arguments as discussions of the genre as a whole and made too little effort to distinguish between individual books and writers (Frantz & Selinger 5; Bly 60; Flesch 11).

In early sections of this article, I make general observations on patterns of literary and cultural allusion based on a survey of forty Russian novels, most of which were published after 2005. I chose to focus on relatively recent novels and largely exclude texts from Russian romance's formative period (1990s and early 2000s), because I wanted to identify patterns of literary allusion in the genre as it exists now. In selecting books, I tried to include a range of subgenres (historical romance novels, romantic thrillers, romantic comedy, and paranormal novels), works by particularly popular and acclaimed Russian authors, and also works marketed or titled in ways that explicitly connected them with the Western romance tradition. For instance, I included several titles from the series of original Russian-language romances "Russkii arlekin" (Russian Harlequin), which was released by Tsentrpoligraf, Harlequin's Russian licensee, and also chose several novels because advertisements for them referenced well-known British and American romance authors. I made the decision to add works marketed in ways that evoked the Western romance tradition to my study relatively late. Many of the first Russian romances I read differed strikingly from this Western model. I wanted to make sure that this pattern was not simply a coincidence resulting from my sampling choices, so I sought out works that seemed likely to hew more closely to Western genre norms. However, even these texts, as the examples I provide below will show, often diverged in important respects from the Western romance tradition.

After describing the general characteristics of the forty-book sample that I worked with on this project, I provide a more detailed analysis of the literary references employed in two well-loved titles, Galina Kulikova's *Tender Fruit* (*Nezhnyi frukt*) and Natal'ia Mironova's *Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome* (*Sindrom Nastas'i Filippovny*), both of which have gone through multiple editions. In order to provide some context for this discussion, I open with a brief account of the emergence and evolution of Russia's romance fiction market. Obviously, the story of how Russian romance fiction took shape under the influence of both foreign and domestic literary precursors could fill an entire monograph. Here I confine myself to outlining what I see as the most essential aspects of this topic with an eye to orienting readers who do not have much prior knowledge of Russian popular culture and mass-market fiction. The bulk of this article focuses on the problem of literary references in contemporary mass-market Russian romance novels.

## Romance Fiction in the Russian Marketplace

Romance fiction for a mass audience has a relatively brief history in Russia. During the communist period, Soviet readers were taught "to regard culture in general and literature as more than mere entertainment" (Barker 14). Both state leaders and representatives of the intellectual elite tended to react with dismay to popular enthusiasm for "boulevard literature" translated from Western-European languages, worrying that such titles would depress interest in more useful forms of fiction, including classic works of Russian literature, which, from the point of view of the state, might inspire the Soviet Union's citizens to patriotism, and ideologically correct Soviet novels in the officially sanctioned style of socialist realism. Although, as Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy notes, Soviet writers did, with the encouragement of the state, produce some "red" detective, spy, and crime novels, particularly in the post-Stalin decades, and the Soviet publishing industry also

printed some classic Western mysteries and detective novels (Agatha Christie, for instance) in translation, no real equivalent for Western romance fiction existed in the Soviet Union (162-165; Makarova, "Liubovnyi roman," 75). The priority given to private domestic happiness in the genre meshed poorly with official Soviet culture, where other values, including collective struggle and self-sacrifice for the state, tended to occupy the foreground. Individual copies of romance novels in English or German may indeed, as Judy Margolis suggests, have reached Eastern Europe as contraband brought back by returning travelers or in parcels from abroad, but, in the Soviet Union itself, the language barrier would have meant that such copies had more limited impact than in East Germany (58).

Western romance novels reached the Russian market in large numbers only in 1993, two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall (*Chitaiushchaia Rossiia* 179; Makarova, "Romany o liubvi," 90; Lovell 137, 196).[1] Harlequin, which, Margolis reports, sent trucks laden with a reported 720,000 copies of West-German published romances into East Germany as a goodwill gesture as soon as the Berlin Wall collapsed, reportedly chose to delay its entry into Russia because it wanted to get the campaign "just right." CEO Brian Hickey explained, "If we had screwed up in Hungary, it wouldn't have been the end of the world. But Russia's just too big of an opportunity" (Margolis 57). When Harlequin did enter the Russian book market, it faced significant distribution challenges and found its initial profits disappointing (Grescoe 261-264; Markert 189-190). Nonetheless, the earliest translations of Harlequin novels and work by authors such as Barbara Cartland, which reached Russian bookstores in about the same period, sold well enough to inspire domestic imitations almost immediately. Initially, however, many works of Russian-language fiction sold as part of the romance category bore little resemblance to Western mass-market romances. A study of Russian reading habits at the turn of the twenty-first century that the Russian National Library released in 2014 notes that, in their rush to chase the trend and enter the category, Russian publishers sometimes repackaged classics and contemporary literary novels—both Western and Russian—as romances. Works by Guy de Maupassant, Viacheslav Shishkov, John Fowles, and Romain Gary were all sold as "romances" in the 1990s (*Chitaiushchaia Rossiia* 179, fn. 42).[2]

The Russian female writers who began writing original romance fiction in the 1990s also did not adhere closely to Western models, often failing even to provide the HEA (happily ever after) that represents the genre's core requirement (Cherniak 161). Noting this disparity, some early Russian commentators argued that romance as a form was purely Western and "Russian soil" was "not a suitable environment for the development of love stories that end happily (and properly)" (as reported in *Chitaiushchaia Rossiia* 180, fn 45). Researchers from the Russian National Library echoed such views in 2014 by noting:

Apparently Anglo-Saxon culture is better suited to the emergence and development of this kind of literature: the balance of sincerity and restraint observed in it is violated in any other culture, resulting in either erotic (France, Italy) or sentimental (Germany) novels—in other words, a different genre entirely. In the same way, Russian romance novels become either crime novels or psychological. (*Chitaiushchaia Rossiia* 180, fn. 45)

Notably, neither crime nor psychological novels typically end in perfect romantic harmony and commitment.

In part, of course, Russian romance fiction differed from its Western precursor because its influences included domestic as well as foreign texts and genres. Clichéd socialist realist plots about female protagonists overcoming obstacles and helping to build socialism one factory or tractor at a time, the urban novels of Iurii Trifonov, and, most important, high literary women's prose from the late Soviet period by authors such as Natal'ia Baranskaia and I. Grekova, which chronicled the everyday life of ordinary Russian wives and mothers, all blended with the new imported form of romance fiction to create a hybrid genre (on the "master plot" evident in most socialist realist novels, see Clark; on Russian women's fiction and the poetics of the everyday, see Sutcliffe). Such novels tended to emphasize the heroine's struggles (at work, on the battlefield, or against the hard realities of Soviet domestic economy—depending on the type of book). To the extent that romantic love figured in them at all, it generally took on a secondary role: it was the reward after a hard-fought battle, not the heroine's principal motivation or aim.

Although, over the last twenty-five years, indigenous Russian romances have arguably moved closer to their Western equivalents and one certainly now often finds novels that offer Western-style happy endings, differences persist. Novels released as romances by some of the most popular Russian writers in the category—Tat'iana Vedenskaia and Ekaterina Vil'mont, for example—feature plots in which the hero appears only 69 percent of the way through the story, the heroine cycles through affairs with multiple married men before finding a life match, the hero has played an ignoble role in a custody case before proposing (bribing witnesses to support the claims of an alcoholic, derelict father), or the principal female character remains conflicted about her romantic choices even at the novel's conclusion—all plot elements that defy expectations for the dedicated reader of Western romance (Vedenskaia, *Devushka s ambitsiiami*; N. Mironova, *Vozhidanii Aivengo*; Vil'mont, *U menia zhivet zhirafa*).

Some of the distinctive characteristics of Russian romance fiction doubtless reflect real cultural differences and native literary influences, but continuing instability in the way the category itself is defined in Russia also probably plays a role. Although romance fiction has represented one of the most popular segments of the Russian book market for twenty-five years, superseded in fiction only by detective novels and the classics, the Russian language still does not have a standard term for it (Makarova, "Liubovnyi roman," 71). The phrases "*liubovnye romany*" (love novels), "*zhenskie romany*" (women's novels), and "*sentimental'nye romany*" (sentimental novels) are all used interchangeably to designate the category. In 2017, Kniga.com, one of the premiere online book-sellers to the Russian émigré market in the United States, employed the term "*sentimental'nye romany*" for physical copies and "*liubovnye romany*" in its e-book section. Together, the terms "*liubovnye romany*," "*zhenskie romany*," and "*sentimental'nye romany*" encompass not only Western romance fiction but also a range of related material that might, in the West be classified as "chick lit" or "women's literature," as well as all Russian works that appear somewhat similar.[3] Notably, Liudmila Ulitskaia, perhaps the most widely acclaimed author of high literature in Russia today, has noted in interviews that she publishes her work with Eksmo, Russia's leading publisher of both mass-market and romance fiction, because she sees this as a way of reaching a broader audience (Sutcliffe 134). In Russian bookstores, her books are typically shelved alongside romance novels.

Because no single online distributor dominates in Russia in the way that Amazon does in the U.S. and reader reviews are scattered as opposed to concentrated in major sites,

finding information about authors and titles is daunting. Few romance authors in Russia maintain a social media presence; many operate effectively anonymously, not even posting biographies to their own publisher's website. Arguably, they have little financial incentive to do so: up to 92% of book downloads in Russia are pirated, and popular titles often appear online in illegal copies before they hit bookstores, so writing, for even very well-known authors, brings in scandalously little money (Russo; "Simon Dunlop"; *Knizhnyi rynek Rossii* 82; "Pochemu piterskie literary"). The internet, which helped fuel the boom in Russian romance fiction beginning in the mid-1990s by making it easier for new writers to distribute popular novels and for readers to discover them, has conversely, in a sense, held back the genre's development by rendering it impossible for most authors to turn a profit.

In addition, romance writers arguably receive even less respect in Russia than in the West: proscriptive attitudes to reading that date back to the Soviet period are, under Putin, increasingly resurgent. In forums and at conferences in recent years, Russian cultural leaders have repeatedly expressed concern "that the main function of books" has become "entertainment," often singling romance fiction out for specific opprobrium (Cheskis). For instance, Aleksandr Kibovskii, the head of the city of Moscow's Culture Department, made the following comments on library acquisition policies in March 2016:

There will always be reader demand for literature such as romance novels. I do not have anything against methodological recommendations, books on topics like "How to Hang on to Your Straying Husband." That is also probably useful information. There is demand for this kind of literature too. But we all say that libraries are centers for the distribution of high-quality information. There is no need to play up to readers: libraries have a higher mission. For this reason, libraries should not [lower themselves to] compete in quality with networks of book stalls. ("Kibovskii")

"The Year of Literature," a 2015 campaign to promote literature and reading that was authorized by President Putin and heavily promoted in Russian mass media, notably focused entirely on classics and contemporary high literature ("God literary"). Now an annual event, it largely retains this emphasis on high—as opposed to mass—literature.

The fragmentation of the Russian marketplace, the absence of information on authors and titles, rampant piracy, and the disdain with which romance fiction is treated in Russian culture probably all play a role in impeding the consolidation of the genre. Even now, twenty-five years after romance literature appeared in the Russian marketplace, almost any contemporary Russian-language novel with a central female character and a romantic element can be marketed as part of the category. Nonetheless, original Russian novels are gradually gaining popularity with readers. Native Russian romance writers like Ekaterina Vil'mont now regularly join popular Western authors (Jojo Moyes, E. L. James, Nora Roberts, Eloisa James) on bestseller lists (*Knizhnyi rynek Rossii* 65; see also *Statisticheskie pokazateli* for 2012-2017). It is possible that, in time, the sales of domestic Russian romance titles will surpass those of foreign translations, as has been the case for detective novels, although to date this has not happened. In 2016 almost twice as many copies of translations of foreign romances were sold as of original Russian works ("Vypusk knig").

## Literary References in Russian Romance Novels

Because Russian romance fiction as a category remains so amorphous, such works are rarely self-referential in the way that English-language romance novels often are. The heroines of Russian romance novels are depicted as readers much less frequently than their American counterparts, and when they do hold a book in their hands, they often coyly hide its spine from us. When an evil cousin asks the heroine of Iuliia Klimova's *Take Action, Princess!* (Deistvui, Printsessa!) what kind of books she reads, she answers first, "Anything and everything," and then more specifically, "Adventure novels." When asked pointedly if she also reads romance novels, she finally acknowledges, "Those too," but offers no details (chapter 8, location 2363-2373). The heroine of Natal'ia Domanchuk's *Don't Call Me Stupid* (Ne zovi menia duroi) is a writer, but the short stories that she composes, which are interpolated into the novel, belong in the category of horror, not romance. In *Love and Prejudices* (Liubov' i predrassudki), a historical novel with a Victorian setting composed by two Russian-language authors who use the evocative pen-name Emiliia Osten, books figure only as defensive weapons in a near rape scene in a library.[4] Aside from the title and authors' pen name, which, to Russian readers, suggests a mash-up of Emily Brontë and Jane Austen, no references to Austen, the author who Pamela Regis identifies as "the master of the romance novel," are to be found (75). Perhaps this is fortunate: another novel by the same duo, *Silk for a True Lady* (Shelk dlia istinnoi ledi), borrowed both plot elements and entire passages from Zola's *The Ladies' Delight* (Lady.webnice.ru, reader comments on Emiliia Osten). Ekaterina Bobrova's *Ril': The Dragon's Love* (Ril': Liubov' drakona), a dragon-shifter novel, also includes few references to books and reading—if one excludes collections of magic spells and an initial setting that resembles the famous Hogwarts school of the *Harry Potter* novels. The heroines of Russian romances may wonder when their "prince" may come, but they generally do so in terms that recall standard fairy tales or dating advice columns from women's magazines as opposed to romance fiction specifically (Vedenskaia chapter 5, location 3798-3801, 6643-6648; Korsakova 80; E. Mironova location 1031-1036).

Allusions to the canon of literary classics, both Russian and Western, which would be particularly familiar to most middle-aged Russian readers as a legacy of the standardized curriculum in Soviet schools; mentions of dissident works banned during the Soviet period; and even citations from pieces by minor Soviet-published writers are all more common than references to romance fiction in Russian romance novels. For example, although the narrator of Ekaterina Vil'mont's *She Found Herself a Blond!* (Nashla sebe blondina!) is a writer who hopes to turn a young acquaintance's orally related love story into a novel, the book itself is steeped in references to classics as opposed to romance novels. The younger woman, Tania, compares the tale of her own poor rural childhood to *My Universities* (Moi universitety), an autobiographical work by Maxim Gorky, the great socialist author, and also lists the banned books that she read as a teenager, such as Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* (8, 35). In Tat'iana Aliushina's *A Girl with Problems* (Devushka s problemami), the hero and heroine exchange citations from the poems of Leonid Filatov and Kornei Chukovsky, a well-known Soviet actor who also enjoyed some literary success and Russia's major children's poet respectively, and also reference Soviet and American films and post-Soviet television serials (61, 155, 101, 159, 203, 304).



References to films and television programming are quite common in Russian romance novels. Galina Kulikova's *An Engagement for Three* (Odna Pomolvka na troikh) mentions *Gone with the Wind*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, and the *Phantom of the Opera*, in addition to including citations from Nikolai Gogol and Homer, as well as allusions to Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, and Alexandre Dumas. The book directly refers to only two authors of mass-market fiction: Stephen King and Arthur Conan Doyle (62, 117, 171, 200, 232, 235, 308, 148, 192). In Elena Bulganova's *Number One Bachelor in the Country* (Pervyi zhenikh strany), which appeared in the short-lived "Russian Harlequin" series issued by Tsentrpoligraf, the hero and heroine meet in a television station: he is a well-known actor, and she is a fan with pictures of him all over her room and an obsession with the American television serial *Lost*. The only book specifically mentioned is a well-known theoretical work on the theater, which the heroine reads as part of her efforts to find common ground with the hero (location 600-601).

*Tender Fruit* and *The Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome*, the two novels that I examine in more detail below, to some extent qualify as exceptions to the general pattern that I have outlined here in that they include more extended references to reading and books than is typical for Russian romance novels and at least mention popular romantic fiction. They also each feature a key scene set in the hero's personal library, in some respects mirroring the classic passage from *Eugene Onegin* in which the lovesick heroine Tatiana Larina explores the eponymous hero's library, looking for clues as to his real nature in what he reads and the thumbnail marks that he leaves behind in the margins of books. Even in *Tender Fruit* and *The Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome*, however, references to high literature are significantly more numerous and detailed than those to romance fiction as a genre.

## Galina Kulikova's *Tender Fruit*

Galina Kulikova is primarily known to Russian readers as an author of ironic detective novels, but has also, in recent years, written rom-com novels, many of which evoke late-Soviet comedic films in their tone and use of familiar plot elements.[5] Her novel *Tender Fruit* represents one of her first efforts to write romantic comedy. When it first appeared in 2009, its cover featured a cat and fruit that did not clearly mark it as a romance; later editions include cover images of a heterosexual couple and also an expanded title, *Seducing the Bachelor or Tender Fruit*, changes that more clearly tag the book as Western-style romance fiction.[6] All recent editions of Kulikova's rom-com novels are clearly marked in the upper-right corner of the cover with the phrase "A good mood is guaranteed," which effectively promises a happy ending.

In its storyline, *Tender Fruit* recalls the most popular Russian New Year's film of all time, the classic 1975 made-for-television movie *The Irony of Fate or Enjoy Your Bath* (Ironiia sud'by, ili S legkim parom!). In Kulikova's book, Dmitrii Grushin, a physics professor who has been unsuccessful at finding love, agrees, at the suggestion of his niece, to marry Liuba, an acquaintance of hers who is a provincial librarian, sight unseen. When Liuba arrives in Moscow, she misreads the blurred slip of paper with the address of her future husband and arrives instead at the apartment of a literature professor, Dmitrii Astrakhantsev. He is in the process of getting a divorce and is expecting a specialist in bio-energetics, hired by his

unfaithful soon-to-be-ex-wife, to exorcize the family apartment. Her name happens to be Liuda. Much confusion ensues, partly because of the main characters' similar names and the common profession of the two male love interests. Ultimately, however, Astrakhantsev and Liuba find romantic happiness, of course, as do Dmitrii Grushin, the physics professor, and Liuda, the specialist in bio-energetics.

University professors and librarians both represent professions that enjoyed prestige in the Soviet period because of their associations with high culture, but that lost much of their status and economic security in post-Soviet Russia. Although Kulikova depicts her principal characters as oddly economically comfortable given the post-Soviet setting of her work, in early scenes she suggests that the values and habits of such intellectuals are at odds with some aspects of post-Soviet culture. We first see the thirty-five-year-old heroine Liuba seated in a café with her friend Fedor, discussing her latest romantic failure. "The whole problem is that you work in a library," Fedor helpfully explains. "The constant reading of books impedes a woman's ability to fulfill her role as a member of the fairer sex. [...] You are surrounded by [books], which stamps you as old-fashioned" (58). Alone in the ladies' room after the conversation, Liuba berates herself for getting carried away by the romantic narratives she loves to read and believing that something exceptional could happen to her. Despair motivates her to accept her friend's unconventional suggestion that she consider an arranged marriage (61).

When she enters the apartment of the literature professor, Dmitrii Astrakhantsev, Liuba is immediately impressed by his extensive personal library. "Before her she saw very rare editions of Russian and foreign classics—she had considerable expertise in those. As well as art books, an entire collection of old fairy tales and contemporary bestsellers in avant-garde covers, all carefully selected and arranged by genre" (132). Even before Dmitrii realizes that Liuba is not who he initially took her to be, their shared love of books establishes a strong connection between the two. When he paraphrases a passage from Tanya Huff's *Blood Price*, she immediately identifies the source of the citation and asks, "Do you like vampire novels?" He responds, cautiously, "Well, in general... They have a certain charm. They're full of passion..." He then thinks longingly to himself:

Not one of the women he had liked had ever been able to conquer Proust or known who the Anti-Stratfordians were. It was scarcely believable that a specialist in bio-energetics, who had appeared out of nowhere [...] was also able to identify citations on the fly. But perhaps that was only the case for certain kinds of books? (135-136)

He then tests her by citing a poem that rails against deceitfulness and baseness: "So often it is impossible to tell/What intention hides in our souls/Even the burden of treachery is not onerous/When it remains a secret,—have you ever happened across these lines?" When Liuba immediately recites the next section of the poem from memory and identifies the source—an anthology that, we are told, was published in 1999 by the non-existent publishing house "SPLEEN"—Astrakhantsev realizes that he may have found his true love-match (136). In fact, although presented in *Tender Fruit* as an example of boutique-published high literature, the poem was written by Kulikova herself (Kulikova, "Vash e-mail"). It now enjoys a second life on the internet, where it appears relatively frequently in forums that

collect readers' favorite citations and poems, although the source is rarely identified (see, for example, Kinozal TV forums).

Literature and books represent key touchstones for the second hero in Kulikova's novel as well as the first. Dmitrii Grushin, the physics professor, realizes he is in love with the specialist in bio-energetics Liuda only after she has fled his apartment. In search of her, he goes to Dmitrii Astrakhantsev's apartment and begs for information: "You are a scholar of the humanities," he pleads with Astrakhantsev, "Hasn't world literature inculcated in you some sympathy for the feelings of others? Haven't you, professor, read wonderful works such as 'Lady with a Dog' and *Eugene Onegin*? Is it really possible that Pushkin, the sun of Russian poetry, has failed to melt your icy heart?" (261) Grushin's words implicitly divide mankind into two essential categories: those who know and value literature and hence understand love and loss, and base and deceitful souls like those described in the poem that Liuba and Astrakhantsev recited together, as well as like Astrakhantsev's unfaithful spouse.

It is not surprising that Kulikova equates sincerity and warmth of feeling with a love of literature. The late-Soviet rom-com films that her novel seems to echo often featured educated beta heroes and heroines (engineers, surgeons, school teachers) and deployed references to literature in similar ways. Romantic pairs came together over ballads featuring classic poems as lyrics and perused each other's libraries just as the heroes and heroines in Western romance novels often do (see, for example, *The Irony of Fate*). What is striking—and for Russian literature, radical—is the inclusion of Tanya Huff, whose books are not exactly romance fiction but certainly popular fiction, alongside Pushkin and Chekhov in the list of literary passions that Kulikova's literature professor and librarian share. Moreover, the citation from Huff is the first piece of literature that links Astrakhantsev and Liuba, a position that arguably privileges it. This suggests at least some pushback against proscriptive attitudes to reading that largely disdained popular fiction as inherently vulgar and low in quality. The inclusion of Huff implies that popular genres as well as the classics can cultivate the soul and validates the presence of such titles in the personal libraries and reading patterns of members of even staid intellectual professions.

### **Natal'ia Mironova's *Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome***

The second writer I discuss, Natal'ia Mironova, deploys in her novels a mixture of references to both classic literature and popular genres in a way that achieves a similar but more nuanced effect. Before her untimely death in 2012 at the age of 62, Mironova translated books by Nora Roberts and Sandra Brown into Russian, and also wrote six romance novels herself. In the best of these, Mironova rivals Liudmila Ulitskaia in her literary sophistication and detailed depictions of both late-Soviet and early post-Soviet life. This is nowhere more evident than in Mironova's novel *The Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome*. The title of this work references perhaps the most famous damaged female character in all of Russian literature, the spectacularly self-destructive heroine of Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, who was sexually exploited as a girl and left so filled with hatred and self-loathing that she was unable to accept even the ultimate fairy tale ending for herself—marriage to a wealthy and kind prince—instead descending into darkness and violence. Dostoevsky's Nastasia Filippovna ultimately meets her death at the hands of the jealous, abusive lover whom she mistakenly thinks she

deserves. Echoing Dostoevsky's character, both the heroine of Mironova's novel and her mother, a key secondary character, were the victims of gang rapes in adolescence. Mironova's novel describes the consequences of these traumas before leading each woman through a process of recovery and to the kind of happy ending that was impossible for Dostoevsky's heroine.

Unusually for Russian romance, Mironova's mother and daughter pair are partly African in heritage, and the violent traumas that they suffer are explicitly identified as racist attacks. Russian romances often feature heroines described as darker-skinned than average and who worry that, as a result, potential suitors (or in-laws) may perceive them as undesirable—just as “curvy” heroines with initially low self-esteem abound in American romance novels. For example, part-Cuban, part-Georgian, and part-Roma characters figure in other novels that I read for this project. Few Russian authors, however, go much beyond the kind of superficial Orientalist description that uses “hot southern blood” as a marker of romantic passion or explore racial issues in depth as Mironova does (Korsakova 19; see also Vedenskaia chapter 4, location 5645-5648 and N. Mironova's *Vozhidanii Aivengo*). Moreover, I found no other examples of part-African heroines. Given Russian culture's prevailing racism, Mironova's narrative choices are very bold. Much like Jennifer Crusie's *Bet Me*, which features a curvy heroine, *The Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome* seems designed to educate readers and to challenge prevailing standards of beauty and biases (on Crusie's novel, see Kramer). It is unfortunate, but not perhaps surprising, that Mironova's publisher has gradually whitened the female figures on the covers of *The Nastasia Filippovna Syndrome* as successive editions have appeared.[7]

Mironova's heroine Iuliia is, we are told early in the novel, a granddaughter of “the festival”: her mother was born in the wake of the All-World Festival of Youth and Students, an actual historical event, which brought 34,000 visitors from 131 countries to post-Stalinist Moscow in 1957 and briefly filled the city with enthusiasm for international brotherhood. “There is no counting the number of young girls,” Mironova's third-person narrator slyly notes, “who surrendered their virtue during the festival” (27). Nine months later, the mixed-race babies that resulted were, the narrator adds, in many cases deposited at Russian orphanages. Iuliia's mother Ella—whose skin-tone indicated that her father was, most likely, an African delegate to the Festival, grew up, we learn, in horrific conditions in an orphanage where she encountered both regular racist slights and Soviet-style hypocrisy. Seeing staff members who constantly belittled her weeping during a screening of the classic 1936 musical comedy *Circus* (Tsirk), which depicted the Soviet Union as a haven from racism for African-Americans, enraged little Ella. Gang raped at fourteen by a trio of older boys, she vows to avoid all entanglements with men and dedicates herself to her studies, going on to win a scholarship to the Friendship of Peoples University in Moscow, where she ultimately earns a Ph.D. in African studies and a position on the faculty. She has a brief affair with her advisor, a sympathetic married faculty member, with the sole aim of getting pregnant but then refuses to allow him any contact with the child—even though he loves her, offers to leave his spouse, and insists on helping her on key occasions. Instead she raises Iuliia on her own, weathering the economic crises that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union by translating business documents.

When Iuliia, like her mother, is gang-raped by her middle-school classmates in a racially charged incident, her mother feels tremendous guilt for failing to protect her. In the opening pages of Mironova's novel, we see the results of this traumatic two-generational

backstory, which is revealed only gradually: an adult Iuliia has chosen a career as a high-fashion model because it allows her to keep her distance from men—they can look but not touch. Approached by the love-struck Dania, a computer systems engineer, she initially cannot trust him. Throughout a long central section of the novel, he waits, repeatedly offering his love and support, even as she, following the model of Dostoevsky's *Nastasia Filippovna*, spirals into greater self-abasement, working for a time in a strip club where she narrowly evades a sexual predator.

Dania's long quest to teach Iuliia to trust again is punctuated not just by scenes in which he tries to protect her and helps her find the resources she needs to heal, but also by repeated references to and conversations about books. Initially in the novel, Iuliia is prone to dismiss the men she meets with a muttered "stupid ox" or as "second-grade fresh sturgeon"—embedded citations from *Anna Karenina* and Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* respectively—and she looks down on the heroines of romance novels who quickly yield to the advances of heroes (201, 207; for original contexts, see: Tolstoy 323 and Bulgakov 205). The narrator notes:

Just let such a hero with an athletic figure and a square jaw try to make advances on Iuliia! [...] With Iuliia his love story would end even before it began. She did not understand how women could stand men. It even occurred to her that romance novels were perhaps composed by men using female pseudonyms (219).

Yet Iuliia also seems to long for the happy endings that such stories provide. When she first visits Dania's apartment and sees his vast library, much of which is comprised, we are told, of books of poetry, he recites Alexander Blok's 1915 poem "The Nightingale Garden" (Solov'inyi sad) to her from memory. Iuliia angrily demands to know why the poet's lyric I left the beautiful garden and his love at the end and reacts with annoyance when Dania explains that good authors cannot mechanically control the fates of their characters and provide a happy ending on demand. "In the hands of a bad author," Dania notes, referencing the plot of *Anna Karenina*, "Vronsky would have married Anna and they would have lived happily in Italy while Karenin looked after the children in Petersburg" (241-242).

Of course, the irony is that in Mironova's very good book, we receive just such a revised plotline—a version of *The Idiot* in which *Nastasia Filippovna* is saved and marries her prince. Seated in a restaurant with Dania after visiting his apartment, Iuliia realizes that she and her mother have walled themselves in, keeping even good people out of their lives. However, the site of their isolation—unlike the nightingale garden that provided Blok's lyric I with respite from back-breaking labor and romantic happiness, albeit briefly—contains no beauty or rest. "It was she and her mother who were breaking up sedimentary rocks and hauling them to the railroad" (249). After this realization, Iuliia tells Dania her story and begins letting down her guard. Although it takes time and the help of a psychiatrist for Iuliia to learn to trust, this scene sets her in motion towards the novel's happy culmination, a double wedding for Iuliia and Dania and for Iuliia's parents where the band plays "Some Day My Prince Will Come" from *Snow White* as the two couples waltz. Following her marriage, Iuliia auditions for the prestigious Russian Academy of Theatrical Arts and reads Marina Tsvetaeva's searing 1934 poem about the experience of exile, "Homesickness" (Toska po rodine). In her strange, hoarse voice, which was damaged in the rape, she manages to express

all the poet's alienation, and yet finds herself embraced and acclaimed (429). She has acquired the home and expansive circle of loving friends—all able to accept her race—for which she always longed. In the epilogue, Iuliia, now a theatrical star, is offered the chance to star in a film of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. When her mother hears the news, she cautions Iuliia, "I would just ask you: don't play yourself. You know that motif; it is your role, but it is not you," and Iuliia can confidently answer, "Yes, mama. It is not me. I understood that a long time ago" (443). She has freed herself from the codes of classical literature and now inhabits a different genre—the romance—which allows for a truly happy ending.

Mironova's novel reads almost as collective therapy: it provides a positive fictional resolution for one of nineteenth-century Russian literature's most devastating plotlines and for some of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century Russia's most evident failings: the racism and sexual violence that flourished despite slogans touting equality and brotherhood. In the novel, these problems are both posed and resolved in literary terms, with reference to Dostoevsky, Blok, and Tsvetaeva, and by means of the happy ending of traditional romance fiction.

## Romance Fiction Without the Romance Fiction Community

Both Galina Kulikova and Natal'ia Mironova were familiar with the Western romance tradition before they began writing romances themselves. Mironova, as noted earlier, translated work by some of the best-known American romance authors, which would have given her an excellent opportunity to absorb the genre's conventions. In an email exchange with me, Kulikova made the following comments on her personal reading habits and history:

At one time I read a great deal of romance fiction, including everything available [in Russian] by Sandra Brown, but then later my attention settled on the work of two authors: Judith McNaught and Susan Elizabeth Phillips. I buy their books as soon as translations appear in our book stores. I don't really favor romances by Russian authors; I only read books by my friend Ekaterina Vil'mont, but I would not call them romance novels, but rather just prose about love. Irina Murav'eva also writes wonderfully about love, but her pieces are in many respects tragic. I read Tat'iana Ustinova. Her detective novels contain strong love stories. (Kulikova, "Vash e-mail")

Such comments suggest that we should not assume that Russian romance novels differ from their Western antecedents because their authors are unfamiliar with the conventions that govern the Western form of romance fiction. Russian romance novels emerged in response to the success of British and American novels, and translations of imported books continue to exert a strong influence on the market today—as reflected by their dominant sales position. Other factors, however, also influence the kinds of romantic narratives that Russian authors choose to write and have played an important part in the domestication process that romance fiction has undergone since entering the Russian market. These include Russia's own literary and cultural traditions, the economics of book publishing in Russia, the way in

which books are characteristically grouped and sold in stores and online, ingrained social biases, and attitudes towards reading.

Literary allusions in novels work best when the book's intended audience knows enough to connect with the references on at least a basic level. As Tamara Whyte notes, references to Shakespeare work particularly well in English-language romance novels because they appeal to the many highly educated readers of romance and yet also do not alienate those without a formal education: "Shakespeare is readily accessible throughout popular culture" (220). Similarly, in Western romance fiction, references to subgenres of romance fiction and even specific authors and titles are popular because fans and authors represent part of a stable community, share reference points and enthusiasms, and can connect with the same names. The kind of mentoring provided by professional associations such as Romance Writers of America and the fan enthusiasm that surrounds events such as the Romantic Times convention play an important role in educating both writers and readers about the conventions that govern romance fiction, the genre's history, the identity of its luminaries, and the boundaries of its subgenres—all of which encourages a high degree of self-referentiality.

In Russia, where romance fiction remains amorphous as a form and where fans and writers lack such common spaces to learn about and to discuss the genre, self-referentiality makes less sense. No clear canon of luminaries to which authors can refer exists, and it is harder to predict what allusions to romance might be meaningful for readers, who might not even understand the genre's basic conventions or where romance fiction begins and ends as a category. If Ekaterina Vil'mont, the bestselling Russian writer in the genre of Russian romance fiction, as defined by the country's online and physical bookstores, is *not* a romance novelist, then who is? Given the indeterminacy in the genre, it is not surprising that few Russian romances are self-referential to the same extent that American romance novels so often are. Specific references to romance titles, authors, and subgenres are rare; when Russian authors mention romance novels at all, they do so in passing and in the most general terms. For the more specific literary references they employ, writers largely rely on what functions more clearly as common cultural currency in Russian society today: classical literature, resurgent now again in state-sponsored cultural programming and as a mandatory part of the Russian school curriculum, and, to a lesser extent, Soviet literary fiction and poetry, well-known movies, and popular television. These references are important since they help establish romance fiction as part of the larger landscape of Russian culture and implicitly combat negative stereotypes surrounding popular fiction and reading for entertainment. Through them, the most sophisticated Russian romance novels, including the works by Kulikova and Mironova analyzed above, emerge as potential sources of spiritual enlightenment and emotional warmth—just like the work of Pushkin and Chekhov—and also perhaps as proving grounds for solutions to wrenching social problems such as those described by Dostoevsky and Tsvetaeva.

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[1] All the sources I cite date the appearance of large numbers of romance novels in Russian books stalls and stores to 1993 or the mid 1990s. Isolated examples of such works, however, surfaced slightly earlier in Russian translation. The Russian National Library of St. Petersburg by law is supposed to receive two copies of every book published in Russia.

Because of the chaos that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reemergence of private publishing, its collection for the 1990s is notably incomplete. Nonetheless, its holdings of the work of foreign romance authors who gained early followings in Russia are illustrative. The oldest Barbara Cartland edition in the Russian National Library's collection dates to 1992, and it is the only book by that author that the library has from that year. The library owns nine separate Russian translations of Cartland novels that were published in 1993 and hundreds of examples of later Russian-language editions. It owns one edition of a Juliette Benzoni novel from 1991, nine from 1992, and 131 that were released in 1993. The oldest Sandra Brown novel in the collection dates to 1993.

[2] Of course, in the West, marketing decisions sometimes blur distinctions between mass-market romance and literary fiction as well: as William Gleason and Eric Murphy Selinger note, book stores in Great Britain typically shelve romances alongside general fiction (8).

[3] For an argument that the genre of detective novels is similarly broad in Russia, see Nepomnyashchy 167.

[4] Of course, in both Russian and Western literature, many examples can be found of the use of a single pseudonym by a collective of authors. In Russian literature, perhaps the most famous example is Koz'ma Prutkov, a pseudonym employed in the 1850s and 1860s by the poets Aleksei Tolstoi and Aleksei, Vladimir, and Aleksandr Zhemchuzhnikov.

[5] On ironic detective novels, see Beumers 303-305.

[6] The original cover can be viewed on Kulikova's official website: [http://galina-kulikova.ru/proizvedeniya/vezhnyy\\_frukt/page/1/](http://galina-kulikova.ru/proizvedeniya/vezhnyy_frukt/page/1/). The most recent cover is posted on the website of her publisher Eksmo: <https://eksmo.ru/book/soblaznit-kholostyaka-ili-vezhnyy-frukt-ITD595353/>.

[7] The original 2008 cover, which depicts a dark-skinned fashion model walking the catwalk with a bird cage in her hand, appears here: <https://eksmo.ru/book/sindrom-nastasi-filippovny-430121978/>. The 2011 cover, which shows a somewhat tan female hand holding a wedding bouquet against a white dress, can be found here: <https://eksmo.ru/book/sindrom-nastasi-filippovny-ITD89122/>. The 2015 cover features a white man holding a white woman in a wedding dress in his arms on a beach; it is posted here: <https://eksmo.ru/book/sindrom-nastasi-filippovny-ITD639500/>.



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## Appendix

### **Russian romance novels included in the sample:**

Note: Where possible, I have provided a date of first publication as indicated in the catalogue of the Russian National Library.

- Arsen’eva, Elena. *Noch’ na vspakhannom pole (Kniaginia Ol’ga)*. First published in a collection of novellas: Arsen’eva, Elena. *Tsaritsa liubit ne shutia*, Eksmo, 2004. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- *Veshchie sny (Imperatriza Ekaterina I)*. First published in Arsen’eva, Elena. *Tsaritsa liubit ne shutia*, Eksmo, 2004. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Aliushina, Tat’iana. *Devushka s problemami*, Eksmo, 2015. First published in 2013 by Eksmo.
- *Dvoe na kraiu sveta*, Eksmo, 2014. First published in 2013 by Eksmo.
- Barskaia, Mariia. *Zhenshchina-Feierverk*. First published 2010 by Eksmo. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Berseneva, Anna. *Antisterva*. First published in 2005 by Sovershenno sekretno. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Vil’chinskaia, Mariia. *Aleksandra i Kurt Seit. Istoricheskii roman*. AST, 2015. First edition.
- Bobrova, Ekaterina. *Ril’: liubov’ drakona*. First published in 2016 as an ebook by the multimedia publishing house Strel’bitskii. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Bulganova, Elena. *Moia-mama—Snegurochka*. First published in 2008 by Tsentropoligraf as No. 13 in the series Russkii Arlekin. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- *Pervyi zhenikh strany*. First published in 2007 by Tsentropoligraf as No. 11 in the series Russkii Arlekin. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Gertsik, Tatiana. *Malen’koe nedorazumenie na dache*. First published in 2008 by Tsentropoligraf as No. 19 in the series Russkii Arlekin. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- *Trudnaia doroga k schast’iu*. First published in 2008 by Tsentropoligraf as No. 20 in the series Russkii Arlekin. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Domanchuk, Natal’ia. *Ne zovi menia duroi*. First published in 2008 by Tsentropoligraf as No. 23 in the series Russkii Arlekin. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.

- Roman s mechtoi*. First published in 2010 by Tsentropoligraf as No. 29 in the series Russkii Arlekin. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Forsh, Tat'iana. *Chernyi kotel*. E, 2016. First edition.
- Iuzhina, Margarita. *Duel' na skovorodkakh*. First published in 2013 by Eksmo. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Kadzi, Tania. *Russkaia geisha: tainy obucheniia: iskusstvo tantsa, besedy, obol'shcheniia—vse radi predannoi liubvi*. Eksmo, 2015. First edition.
- Klimova, Iuliia. *Deistvui, Printsessa!*. First published in 2012 by Eksmo. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Smeisia, Printsessa!*. First published in 2014 by Eksmo. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Zdravstvuite, ia vasha Zolushka!*. First published in 2010 by Eksmo. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Korsakova, Tat'iana. *Millioner iz podvorotni*. E, 2016. First published in 2007 as Korsakova, Tat'iana. *Polnoe pogruzhenie*, OLMA Media Grupp.
- Kruz, Mariia and Maikl Mar, *Uspet' povernut' na pravo*. AST, 2017. First edition.
- Kulikova, Galina. *Odna pomolvka na troikh*. Eksmo, 2014. First edition.
- Rybka moia: romanticheskaiia komediia*. First published in 2009 by Astrel' AST. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- *Soblaznit' kholostiaka ili Nezhnyi frukt*. Eksmo, 2015. First published as in 2009 as Kulikova, Galina. *Nezhnyi frukt*, Astrel'.
- Metlitskaia, Mariia. *Ee poslednii geroi*. First published in 2014 by Eksmo. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Mironova, Elena. *Vorovka*. First published in 2007 by Tsentropoligraf as No. 3 in the series Russkii arlekin. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Mironova, Natal'ia. *Sindrom Nastas'i Filippovny*. E, 2016. First published in 2011 by Eksmo.
- V ozhidanii Aivengo*. E, 2015. First published in 2012 by Eksmo.
- Osten, Emiliia. *Liubov' i predrassudki*. First published in 2009 by Eksmo. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
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- Tronina, Tat'iana. *Ta, kto prikhodit nezvanoi*. Docheri Evy, Eksmo, 2014. First edition.
- Vakilova, Iuliia. *Korol' moego serdtsa*. First published in 2016 as an ebook. Self-published. Mobi e-book purchased from Amazon.
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- Vil'mont, Ekaterina. *A ia dura piataia*. First published in 2016 by AST. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- Nashla sebe blondina! Pro zhizn' i pro liubov'*. AST, 2016. First published in 2003 by Olimp i dr.
- Sploshnaia Lebedian'!*. First published in 2016 by AST. Mobi e-book purchased from kniga.com.
- U menia zhivet zhirafa*. AST, 2016. First published in 2015 by AST.
- Vafli po-shpionski*. AST, 2017. First edition.