

Title: Broccoli, Borsht and Heinz-57: Food and National Identity in the Prose of Lara Vapnyar
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Lara Vapnyar, one of the most promising writers of the new generation of Russian Americans, has plenty of reasons to feel accomplished and successful. Over the course of last five years her stories have appeared regularly in such sophisticated literary magazines as *The New Yorker*, *Harpers* and *Zoetrope*; she has published two books “There are Jews in My House” and “The Memoirs of a Muse” and received numerous awards.

What distinguishes her from Gary Shteingart and David Bezmozgis (the three of them have been called the brilliant “troika” of Russian Jewish American literature by numerous critics) is the fact that she came to North America not as a child (Shteingart and Bezmozgis were six and seven), but as a young adult in her early twenties. She was far from fluent in the English language or American culture, with which she became acquainted in a very different way than the other two, who were schooled and brought up in the tightly knit émigré communities of New York and Toronto. A graduate of the Russian department of Moscow State Pedagogical University, she has however, chosen English as her language for relating the pathway of the Russian émigrés and their search for national identity.

The proposed paper will deal with the way Vapnyar presents the images of food and produce to tell stories of human connection and disconnection, deteriorating marriages, awakening sexuality and, most importantly, cultural ambivalence. Her heroines, torn between their Russian, Jewish and American identities, try to adapt to the new world without giving up their old traditions and erstwhile recipes for survival. This paper will examine which cultural characteristics are of more importance to the author and how she portrays the multifaceted identities of transnational characters.