LYUDMILA PETRUSHEVSKAYA'S FAIRY TALES:

BETWEEN SUBVERSION AND TRADITION

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August 2019

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The vast scholarship on Lyudmila Petrushevskaya's works pertains almost exclusively to her prose and drama and focuses largely on the dark side of man and life. The ensuing one-sidedness does not offer a full appraisal of her complexity as a writer. In an attempt to redress the imbalance in critical studies and enrich the understanding of Petrushevskaya's achievement, the present dissertation focuses on Petrushevskaya's fairy tales and reveals an image of Petrushevskaya as a writer whose worldview is at odds with the well-established focus on the *chernukha* of her prose and drama.

My first task is to situate Petrushevskaya's fairy tales within the postmodern creative practice of fairy-tale writing and discuss them within the context of the contemporary fairy tale entering into dialogue with the traditional fairy tale. My second, interrelated task is to locate Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in a broader critical context. The question I pose is why a major writer such as Petrushevskaya reaches for the fairy-tale genre today, and what implications this literary choice has for Russian culture today. I argue that turning to the fairy-tale genre is for Petrushevskaya a way to gain a critical distance that allows for reflection on the traumatic past and the horrors of everyday life. Apart from the sociopolitical vector, the rationale behind Petrushevskaya's drawing on the old genre has a spiritual dimension. I see Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as, on the one hand, inscribed in the poetics of postmodernism—as they spotlight fragmentation and chaos and follow the creative and critical impulse of subversion. On the other hand, they are written in the poetics of postrealism—albeit in a new form, they return to tradition and reflect on the ideological and spiritual crisis in contemporary Russian culture.

CONTES DE LUDMILA PETROUCHEVSKAÏA:

ENTRE SUBVERSION ET TRADITION

Résumé

L'immense littérature consacrée aux travaux de Ludmila Petrouchevskaïa est presque exclusivement dédiée à sa prose et ses pièces de théâtre en s'intéressant le plus souvent aux côtés sombres de l'humain et de la vie. La lecture partiale qui en découle ne permet pas d'apprécier pleinement la complexité du travail de cette auteure. En vue de rétablir un certain équilibre dans les études critiques, et pour enrichir la compréhension de l'œuvre de Petrouchevskaïa, la présente thèse s'intéresse aux contes en dévoilant une image de Petrouchevskaïa reconnue comme auteure dont la vision du monde est en rupture avec l'accent mis sur le *chernukha* de sa prose et de ses pièces de théâtre.

Ma première tâche consiste à situer les contes de fées de Petrouchevskaïa à l'intérieur d'une pratique esthétique postmoderne du genre du conte, et de les discuter dans le contexte du conte contemporain en entrant aussi en dialogue avec la tradition du genre. Ma seconde tâche, liée à la précédente, consiste à les positionner à l'intérieur d'un contexte critique plus vaste. Ce qui m'intéresse de prime abord est la question de savoir pourquoi une écrivaine aussi importante que Petrouchevskaïa se consacre au genre du conte et de déterminer les implications de ce choix littéraire pour la culture russe contemporaine. Je soutiens que le travail de Petrouchevskaïa relativement au genre du conte lui permet de prendre une distance critique en vue de mieux analyser un passé traumatisant de même que les horreurs de la vie. Hormis ce vecteur socio-politique, une autre raison pour laquelle Petrouchevskaïa se consacre à ce vieux genre littéraire est d'ordre spirituel et philosophique. Je considère que les contes de Petrouchevskaïa sont inscrits dans une poétique postmoderne : en tant qu'ils mettent de l'avant la fragmentation et le chaos et qu'ils expriment un élan subversif, créateur et critique; inscrits également dans une poétique postréaliste : en tant qu'ils jettent la lumière au cœur des ténèbres en faisant le contrepoids à la crise idéologique et spirituelle.

Acknowledgements

I am first and foremost indebted to my supervisor, Professor Lyudmila Parts, for her tremendous work in guiding me through the process of writing this dissertation, which must have been at times a time-consuming and daunting task. Professor Parts has helped me articulate and clarify my ideas, patiently reading and re-reading what I wrote. Her meticulous comments and constructive critique were invaluable throughout the whole process.

I would like to thank Ms. Kaylin Land for her valuable editorial help; Professor Laura Beraha for her incessant efforts in encouraging the atmosphere of collegiality in the Department; as well as Ms. Lynda Bastien for administrative assistance throughout the years.

Finally, I wish to thank my family and friends for all of their encouragement. I am grateful to my father and my sister for their valuable support. I thank A. for understanding what motivates my work and for believing in it. I also thank my children who helped me realize that there will be life after the dissertation. Tosiu i Lusiu, kocham Was nad życie.

Note on Transliteration and Abbreviations

I have used a modified version of the Library of Congress transliteration system with exceptions for proper names (i.e., the-y ending instead of -ii). Except for one online translation, all translations of the excerpts in the source materials are mine. The following abbreviations of Petrushevskaya's works appear in the text:

SB — *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*. *Tom 4*: *Skazki*. Khar′kov: Folio, 1996.

NS — *Nastoiashchie skazki*. Moskva: Vagrius, 1997.

ChB — *Chernaia babochka*. Sankt-Peterburg: Amfora, 2008.

IiMSZh — *Istorii iz moiei sobstvennoi zhizni*. Sankt-Peterburg: Amfora, 2009.

NSvMgD — *Ne sadis' v mashinu, gde dvoe (istorii i razgovory)*. Moskva: AST, 2012.

KMZZh — *Kak mnogo znaiut zhenshchiny*. Moskva: AST, 2014.

INTRODUCTION

Known predominantly as a prolific prosaist and playwright who throughout her career has ignited fervent controversy, Lyudmila Stefanovna Petrushevskaya (born on May 26, 1938 in Moscow) is considered one of the most influential contemporary Russian writers. Petrushevskaya is largely recognized as a writer of *chernukha*; that is, hyper-naturalist prose that emphasizes "[e]veryday cruelty and crime, tortures and humiliations of recruits in the army, the horror of prisons and other penitentiaries, the ordinary life of homeless derelicts and prostitutes, coupled with the interest (...) in the corporeal aspects of the everyday, especially sexuality."[1] The gloom of her fiction and drama pertains to the disturbingly dark themes she explores, which include suicide, alcoholism, child abuse, broken marriages, one-night stands, low income, unwanted pregnancy, homelessness, abject poverty, and physical and psychological violence.[2] As they deal with the "underbelly of adult relations,"[3] it is unsurprising that Petrushevskaya's works were considered too bleak for publication in the Soviet Union.

Petrushevskaya began writing in the late 1960s. She wrote her first short story, "Takaia devochka, sovest' mira" ("Such a Girl, the Conscience of the World") in 1968, but it was published only twenty years later.[4] Her first published short story —"Cherez polia" ("Across the Fields")—appeared in the journal *Avrora* in 1972.[5] Until 1987, Petrushevskaya published

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[1] Mark Lipovetsky, "Post-Soviet Literature between Realism and Postmodernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. by Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 179.
[2] Helena Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex. Womanhood During and After Glasnost* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 18.
[3] Ibid., 18. Quoted in Sally Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void. The Genres of Liudmila Petrushevskaia* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), 2.
[4] A story about a prostitute whose motivations are explained by an unsympathetic narrator. The story includes main Petrushevskian themes, such as prostitution, loneliness, depression, pathological interhuman relations, suicidal thoughts and acts, shortage of living space, and abuse of alcohol.
[5] The gloomy existential element merges with the crude descriptions of everyday life, conjuring an image of overwhelming hopelessness.

individual stories in various journals. Her first collection of stories (*Bessmertnaia liubov' — Immortal Love*) was published only in 1988. Petrushevskaya's first plays were staged in independent theatres: "Uroki muzyki" ("Music Lessons") by the theatre-studio Moskvorech'e and theatre-studio LGU, and "Chinzano" ("Cinzano") by the Lviv theatre Gaudeamus. Only in the 1980s were Petrushevskaya's plays staged in larger Russian theatres: "Liubov'" ("Love") by the Taganka Theatre, "Kvartira Kolombiny" ("Kolombina's Appartment") by the theatre Sovremennik, and "Moskovskii khor" ("The Moscow Choir") by the Moscow Art Theatre. Petrushevskaya was more successful with her fairy tales, which were published individually throughout the 1970s[6] and then in a collection of fairy tales for children in 1981.[7] Since *perestroika*, her works have received public recognition and won acclaim, and her fiction and drama have been published steadily ever since. Petrushevskaya is the recipient of several prizes, including the Pushkin Prize (1991), the Russian Booker Prize (1992), and the World Fantasy Award (2010).

The scholarship on Petrushevskaya's works is equally vast and includes scholarly articles and full-length monographs by both Russian and Western scholars. Although the existent scholarship is without a doubt valuable, it pertains almost exclusively to Petrushevskaya's prose and drama. Moreover, it focuses largely on the dark side of man and life. The ensuing one-sidedness in terms of both the author's genres and the interpretation of her themes does not offer a full appraisal of her complexity as a writer. In an attempt to redress the imbalance in critical studies and enrich the understanding of Petrushevskaya's achievement, the present dissertation

[6] There were six of them: "Govoriashchii samolet" ("The Talking Plane," 1971), "Vse neponiatlivye" ("Nothing Understood," 1972), "Lechenie Vasiliia" ("The Curing of Vasilii," 1975), "Kot, kotoryi umel pet'" ("The Cat who Knew how to Sing," 1975), "Verbliuzhii gorb" ("The Camel's Hump," 1976), and "Belye chainiki" ("White Teapots," 1976). Quoted in Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 18.

[7] The following fairy tales appeared in *Skazki bez podskazki* ("Unprompted Fairy Tales," 1981): "Kot, kotoryi umel pet'," "Belye chainiki," "Zaiachii khvostik," ("The Hare's Tale"), and "Lechenie Vasiliia." Vadim Kurchevsky turned the tale "Zaiachii khvostik" into an animated film under the same title (1984).

examines a largely unacknowledged segment of her oeuvre; namely, her fairy tales (*skazki*). At the same time, this analysis reveals an image of Petrushevskaya as a writer whose worldview, at least in her fairy tales, is at odds with the well-established focus on the *chernukha* of her prose and drama. Thus, my examination of the underlying narrative principles that govern the composition of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales within genre studies allows for a *re*-examination of the author's outlook on human beings and the world.

The Critical Foundation of the Dissertation

An examination of the secondary literature reveals the tendency to, first, concentrate on Petrushevskaya's prose and drama published largely throughout the 1990s; and, second, to emphasize the bleakness of her creative output, including the portrayal of the bleakness of human nature and human relations.[8] In her analysis of Petrushevskaya's prose, Josephine Woll stresses the author's "anti-ladylike" depictions of fragmented families who inhabit cramped and overcrowded spaces, reflecting society at large, with its loss of a centre, its harsh everyday reality as well as its hopelessness and pessimism.[9] Analyzing the scandal scenes in the short novel *The Time: Night* (1992), Woll posits that "Petrushevskaya provides not even a possible or hypothetical alternative to the bitter cycle of hurt-and-be-hurt, no way of breaking the closed circle of resentment and humiliation."[10] In her groundbreaking work, Helena Goscilo examines

[8] Accounts of Petrushevskaya's drama include Picon-Vallin's and Simmons'. Picon-Vallin points to the eschatological overtones in Petrushevskaya's plays and to the absence of hope or future, revealing despair, chaos and absurdity in a world in which the characters flounder about. Simmons underscores the lack of dialogue in Petrushevskaya's plays. Petrushevskaya's characters are unable to maintain communication with others, including themselves. According to Simmons, such modern ways of communication hinder human contact and contribute to the human degradation and the dislocation of the human condition. See also Vladiv-Glover, "The Russian Anti-Oedipus: Petrushevskaya's the 'Three Girls in Blue'," *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 12:2 (1998), 31-56.

[9] Josephine Woll, "The Minotaur in the Maze. Remarks on Lyudmila Petrushevskaya," *World Literature Today* 67 (1993), 25-30.

[10] Josephine Woll, "Kitchen Scandals: A Quasi-Bakhtinian Reading of Liudmila Petrushevskaya's *The Time: Night*," in *Against the Grain: Parody, Satire, and Intertextuality in Russian Literature*, ed. by Janet Tucker (Bloomington: Slavica, 2002), 185-195.

Petrushevskaya's fiction from several perspectives. Goscilo's most incisive analyses of Petrushevskaya's fiction situate the latter in women's writing and elaborate on her merciless outlook on the archetype of the mother. In "Mother as Mothra," for example, Goscilo examines the protagonist of Petrushevskaya's *The Time: Night*, Anna Andrianovna, as a sadist whose psychological modus operandi hinges on "self-exculpation via defamation,"[11] all in the name of love for her children and grandchildren. Goscilo's analyses stress the Dostoevskian intensity of Petrushevskaya's fiction, with its focus on suffering and inflicting pain. Pointing to the unsettling image of the family, the scholar writes about Petrushevskaya's obsession with violations of the psyche and her re-inscription of "sameness and neurotic patterns even as she hints at their potential termination."[12] Goscilo's most recent study of Petrushevskaya's *The Time: Night* leads her to conclude that Petrushevskaya is the supreme Russian author of trauma who does not allow for its [trauma's] potentially positive function.[13] Goscilo discusses Petrushevskaya's "long-standing narrative obsession with trauma"[14] and relates it to the author's personal experience during her formative years in the Stalinist era (including abandonment by her father, abject poverty, near starvation, and life in an orphanage). The scholar posits that Petrushevskaya resorts to obsessive narrative as "a means of conveying a perpetually traumatized state of mind."[15] Goscilo traces Petrushevskaya's preoccupation with trauma and examines its [trauma's] nature

[11] Helena Goscilo, "Mother as Mothra: Totalizing Narrative and Nurture in Petrushevskaia," in *A Plot of Her Own. The Female Protagonist in Russian Literature*, ed. by Sona S. Hoisington (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 110.
[12] Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex,* 41. See also: Helena Goscilo, *Fruits of her Plume: Essays on Contemporary Russian Women's Culture*, ed. by Helena Goscilo (New York: Armonk, 1993), 21-32.
[13] I will return to the notion of trauma in Chapter III and argue the contrary. On the example of Petrushevskaya's "Strogaia babushka" ("The Harsh Grandmother," 2008), which directly echoes *The Time: Night*, I will argue that the characters break the circle of trauma and attempt to affirm life and construct a productive existence.
[14] Helena Goscilo, "Narrating Trauma," in *Russian Literature since 1991*, ed. by Evgeny Dobrenko and Mark Lipovetsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 171.
[15] Ibid.

through the self-destructive repetition of dehumanizing family scenarios, thereby pointing to what Freud termed the acting out of trauma; that is, its repression and repetition.

In a related vein, Benjamin Sutcliffe's insightful study of female writers' representation of the prose of life examines how and why everyday life as a literary and philosophical category catalyzed the development of women's prose after the fall of the Soviet Union.[16] Sutcliffe situates Petrushevskaya along the lines of women's prose during *perestroika* and probes the quotidian as an existential hell that annihilates any higher purpose in life.[17] Sutcliffe, too, likens Petrushevskaya to Dostoevsky, discussing the "human animal, the simultaneous victim/victor, and the murdering mother."[18]

While the bleakness and spiritual and material poverty in Petrushevskaya's prose and drama have been duly acknowledged and analyzed, other genres and possible critical approaches to the author's creative work have been overlooked. Critics have noted in passing Petrushevskaya's steady development of other literary and non-literary interests, which have over the years encompassed experiments in such genres and modes as the fairy tale, detective story, and poetry, as well as such artistic activities as singing in cabaret, drawing, and painting. Scholars have thus signaled the need for and an interest in exploring another segment of Petrushevskaya's works (especially those published since the 2000s). They have also suggested that Petrushevskaya's work awaits a different approach, one that sees beyond the unsettling murkiness of everyday life and suffering. Mark Lipovetsky argues that the goal of Petrushevskaya's fiction

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[16] Carol Adlam, too, approaches Petrushevskaya's prose from the point of view of women's writing, Adlam addresses such notions as gender and sexuality, and observes Petrushevskaya's interest in epistemology. For more details, see Carol Adlam, *Women in Russian Literature after Glasnost* (London: Routledge, 2005), 72-107.

[17] I will return to the existential question in Chapter III and argue the contrary. The quotidian is still hell in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, but her heroes consciously work towards a higher purpose of life.

[18] Benjamin Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life*. *Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev to Putin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 64.

Throughout the dissertation, I will cite other scholars who have examined Petrushevskaya's writing, such as Lyudmila Parts, Nina Kolesnikoff, Alexandra Smith, and Edith Clowes.

and drama "is something more than merely revealing the dark and disgusting aspects of Soviet or post-Soviet reality."[19] As Sally Dalton-Brown notes, "Many critics look for some redemptive message, or quality of hope within the darkness of her words;"[20] and suggests that Petrushevskaya's writing "embraces much more than the gritty aspects of life."[21] Yet, in her review of Dalton-Brown's monograph that addresses various genres in Petrushevskaya's use, Goscilo concludes with a hint of dissatisfaction that Dalton-Brown's volume "confirms [the same] dark vision of the world."[22] Dalton-Brown's and Goscilo's, as well as Lipovetsky's, cues have helped me realize that precisely the other, more affirmative side of Petrushevskaya's writing should be adequately recognized in order to understand the range and complexity of her work. The "redemptive message" of which Dalton-Brown writes is discernible specifically in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales and balances out said destructive darkness embraced so eagerly in her prose and drama.

Petrushevskaya's Fairy Tales: Literature Review

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales have been published since the 1970s; and the author continues to write and publish them to this day. When asked about her fairy tales, Petrushevskaya is persistent in her declaration that writing them was a natural continuation to her daily storytelling in that, being a mother of three children, she would tell stories every night. She has repeated this

[19] Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, ed. by Mark Lipovetsky and Eliot Borenstein (New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 297.
[20] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void,* 6.
[21] Deming Brown, *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature: Prose Fiction 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 166. Quoted in Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 6.
[22] "Dalton-Brown too frequently invokes 'paradox' and 'doomed' as descriptive substitutes for rigorous analysis. For instance, she deems Petrushevskaia's acknowledgment of good and evil in people a 'paradox' (!), whereas Petrushevskaya repeatedly dramatizes mixed motives, recognizing that the mainspring to human action is inseparable from the coexistence of contradictory drives." Goscilo, "Book Review: Sally Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void: The Genres of Liudmila Petrushevskaia*," *Slavic Review* 61 (2002), 655.

statement on several occasions in interviews and in her essays.[23] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, however, have more than a domestic significance, especially as she is also the author of numerous fairy tales for adults (*skazki dlia vzroslykh*) that are less humorous and light than her fairy tales designed specifically for children. The latter include "Skazka pro azbuku" ("The Fairy Tale about the Alphabet," 1997); the cycle *Dikie zhivotnye skazki. Morskie pomoinye rasskazy. Pus'ki biatye* ("Wild Animal Fairy Tales. Sea Dishwater Stories. Pus'ki biatye," 2006); the cycle *Prikliucheniia Porosenka Petra* ("Piglet Peter's Adventures," 2008); or *Prikliucheniia bukvy A* ("The Adventures of the Letter A," 2013). Petrushevskaya's fairy tales for adults, in which the complexity and darkness of life is decidedly more perceptible, make up a significant portion of her literary canon. They are the subject of the present dissertation, and feature in such cycles and books as: *Nastoiashchie skazki* ("Real Fairy Tales," 1997); *Gorod sveta* ("The City of Light," 2005); *Kotenok Gospoda Boga* ("God's Kitten," 2012); *Volshebnye istorii* ("Magical Stories," 2018); and *Podarok printsesse. Rozhdestvenskie istorii* ("The Gift for the Princess. Christmas Stories," 2018).[24]

Although Petrushevskaya has published over 300 fairy tales, this rather impressive part of her oeuvre has not received adequate scholarly attention in comparison with her drama and, especially, prose.[25] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales have been the subject of several doctoral dissertations in Russia. The authors of these dissertations have predominantly focused on Petrushevskaya's fairy tales from the point of view of folklore studies (their poetics and imagery) or situated them in the history of the fairy-tale genre in Russian literature. Scholarly articles are

[23] "Я вообще-то писала сказки для детей, но моя задача была с самого начала такая: чтобы взрослый, читая ребенку книгу на ночь, не заснул бы первым. Чтобы бабушке, маме и папе тоже было бы интересно. Поэтому в сказках для детей я тоже прячу некоторые вещи посложнее, чтобы они были понятны разным людям по-разному." Petrushevskaya, "Lektsiia o zhanrakh," in *Ot pervogo litsa* (Moskva: Astrel', 2012), 366.
[24] It should be noted that the same fairy tales are often reprinted in different cycles.
[25] One reason for the lack of attention in the Western scholarship may be the lack of English translation. Keith Gessen and Anna Summers translated five of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, which have been included in *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill her Neighbor's Baby* (2009).

fragmentary, tend to list and describe without arriving at conclusions, and concentrate largely on one collection of the author's fairy tales, namely, *Nastoiashchie skazki* (1997).[26] Although illuminating in terms of offering textual examples of Petrushevskaya's defiance of tradition, these studies do not examine Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in detail; for example, from the perspective of contemporary fairy-tale genre studies. Furthermore, although to a large extent agreeing that Petrushevskaya cannot be labeled a *chernukha* writer, these studies do not pose the question why Petrushevskaya turns to fairy tales, which are decidedly lighter in tone than the rest of her writing.

There is only one monograph devoted to Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in the English-speaking world. Dalton-Brown has offered the only account of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, dedicating one chapter to this genre (also centering on the fairy tales written only before the late 1990s).[27] Insightful and helpful for the present analysis, Dalton-Brown's contribution offers ground for dispute. Although, as noted earlier, Dalton-Brown speaks of the need for a re-evaluation of Petrushevskaya's worldview, she ultimately insists on analyzing these narratives as "voices from the void," thereby perpetuating the view of the author as exclusively a writer of *chernukha*. Although Petrushevskaya's fairy tales indeed "deal with highly urbanized situations and ideas and offer large helpings of black realism," it is not fully accurate that she, "rather than

[26] T.A. Zolotova and E. A. Plotnikova point to the transformation of folklore in the cycle *Nastoiashchie skazki* and list textual examples of the references to the everyday reality, which contributes to genre parody. T.A. Zolotova and E.A. Plotnikova, "Poetika povsednevnosti i sovremennye fol'klornye formy v 'Nastoiashchikh skazkakh' L.S. Petrushevskoi," *Literatura. Literaturovedenie. Ustnoie narodnoie tvorchestvo* (2012). T. T. Davydova remarks on Petrushevskaya's penchant for vraisemblance, positing that comparing to the conventional folktale, Petrushevskaya's tales are "deeply rooted in reality." See T. T. Davydova, "Sumerki realizma (O proze L. Petrushevskoi)," *Russkaia slovesnost'* 7 (2002), 35. In a different study, E. A. Plotnikova and T. A. Zolotova examine Petrushevskaya's transformation of the fairy-tale tradition by rooting it in everyday reality, but also by pointing to the fairy-tale parody and game with the fairy-tale canon. See E. A. Plotnikova and T. A. Zolotova, *Fol'klorizm sovremennoi russkoi prozy* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

[27] Sally Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void. The Genres of Liudmila Petrushevskaia* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000). Alexandra Smith analyzes Petrushevskaya's doll novel *Malen'kaia volshebnitsa* (*The Little Sorceress*) but not from the point of view of folklore or fairy-tale studies (Smith, "In Populist Clothes: Anarchy and Subversion in Petrushevskaya's Latest Fiction," 1997). Lesley Milne examines the novel *Malen'kaia volshebnitsa,* as well as the ghost stories from the cycle *Pesni vostochnykh slavian* (*The Songs of Eastern Slavs*), from the point of view of the characters' fears and anxieties expressed through the supernatural. Victoria Sevastianova's doctoral dissertation, "The Fantastic in the Short Fiction of Liudmila Petrushevskaia" (2000), also focuses on the supernatural, but is not helpful for my analysis either, as it pertains to the mode of magical realism.

searching for mythic voices or the beauty of fairy tales, produces texts that contradict their genre;" and that they offer "little fairy-tale wonder." Furthermore, I posit that Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are not "the media to expose human impotence,"[28] but precisely the opposite. Above all, I disagree with Dalton-Brown's conclusions that "[u]ltimately, her [Petrushevskaya's] message appears to be that mankind should never quite believe in its own fairy tales."[29] This last statement especially does not do justice to these narratives, where the outlook is significantly less wry, cruel, or sadistic when compared to Petrushevskaya's prose and drama. I argue that although loss may be the dominant theme in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales—in this they hardly differ from her fiction and drama—it is followed by a path towards recovery. The theme of loss—the essential narrative aspect of the fairy tale—thus finds a convincing voice in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, as "loss, followed by a long hard road towards recovery, is very much part of Russian mentality."[30] Specifically that hope for recovery differentiates the author's fairy tales from her prose and drama and allows for a re-examination of her authorial stance.

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales follow a predictable fairy-tale structure and are always adorned with a happy ending. Scholars and readers accustomed to the author's existential anguish and gloom of everyday life may therefore find her fairy tales misleadingly undemanding or "bizarre."[31] They may also find them exclusively ironic, since the element of destructive darkness that is unwaveringly present even in her fairy tales often invalidates for the reader any credibility in a happy scenario. Consequently, scholars and readers may reduce Petrushevskaya's fairy tales to narratives that reveal their own meaninglessness, and her authorial stance as a "mocking

[28] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 196. Also quoted in Alexandra Smith, review of Dalton-Brown's *Voices from the Void*, *Russian Review* 61:1 (2002), 146.
[29] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 114.
[30] Anna Summers, Petrushevskaya's translator, in an interview with Mika Bar-On Nesher, https://pankmagazine.com/tag/ludmilla-petrushevskaya/ (Accessed May 30, 2019).
[31] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 121.

approach to human concerns."[32] Conversely, what I argue throughout this dissertation is that Petrushevskaya's fairy tales defy any one-sided view and that they must not be considered merely ironic. Furthermore, I argue that Petrushevskaya's stance, namely, her authorial withdrawal, does not have to be read as cruel indifference or anger but, to the contrary, as understanding and compassion towards her characters and her readers alike.

My reassessment of Petrushevskaya as a writer thus emphasizes an unresolvable duality of her visions: one dark, with the typical Petrushevskian themes of loss, despair, and inflicting pain; and the other a more affirmative vision. The latter evokes such universal virtues as selflessness and responsiveness that Petrushevskaya's characters either possess or learn in the process of transformation; and which are for her the vector for individual and social recovery. I see Petrushevskaya's duality of vision not as Dalton-Brown's "static binary opposition"[33] or "self-cancelling binary oppositions,"[34] which present to the reader a "struggle of narration which strangles itself, often comically, into silence."[35] Rather, I examine Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as dialectical: equally possible, or parallel, voices that create dialogues, thereby not necessarily leading to either "meaninglessness" on the one side of the spectrum or uncomplicated moralizing on the other. The coexistence of contradictory drives, including negation and affirmation, is inherent in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales; just as much as it is a constant companion of human life. This shift in interpretive perspectives thus allows for a revision of her as more than solely the *black writer*.

[32] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 132.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 17.
[35] Ibid.

My understanding of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is akin to Edith Clowes' conclusions regarding Petrushevskaya's short fiction.[36] Reading Petrushevskaya's story "Novye Robinzony" ("New Robinsons," 1989) as a meta-utopia, Clowes posits that the story only seems to deny the possibility of productive social scenarios and foresees a dark end only on the surface. Although it discloses "the pathologies of dystopia," the story nevertheless allows for a multiplicity of ways to imagine society: "In the face of terrible odds, in a world all but overwhelmed by brute political violence, each story asserts some notion of social vitality."[37] While pointing to moments that work against the effort to construct valuative frameworks (by way of an unreliable narrator), Clowes also accentuates those parts of Petrushevskaya's story that promote life and regeneration; namely, "the notion of building one's own independent universe, one's own notion of order and prosperity."[38] My approach is similar and consists in zooming in on the ever-unresolved dialogue between cynicism and darkness, on the one hand, and the belief in the overall value of life that emerges from Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, on the other. While Clowes' focus is on the social and ideological aspects, mine also includes the spiritual and existential matters in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. The open-endedness that allows for unresolved dualities serves as an interpretative key to these narratives. I trace that open-endedness on the narrative/creative level within the context of genre studies as well as in terms of these narratives' critical, sociopolitical and spiritual, resonance.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Genre Studies: The Postmodern Fairy Tale

[36] Clowes examines Petrushevskaya's short story "Novye Robinzony: Khronika kontsa XX veka" (1989) next to Alexandr Kabakov's story "The Deserter" (1989). See Edith Clowes, *Russian Experimental Fiction. Resisting Ideology after Utopia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[37] Clowes, *Experimental Fiction*, 198.
[38] Ibid., 202.

The present study is based on close reading of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales published in the 1990s and the 2000s. My analysis is rooted in genre studies, and as such examines the structure of a number of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales to determine the underlying narrative principles that govern their composition. I study them synchronically rather than diachronically, within the postmodern aesthetic practice, and discuss them within the context of the contemporary fairy tale entering into dialogue with the traditional fairy tale.

Although there exists a large body of scholarly analyses, the definition of the fairy tale remains problematic and not universally accepted. Jack Zipes notes that: "Fairy tales have been defined in so many ways that it boggles the mind to think that they can be categorized as a genre."[39] Most scholars tend to differentiate between folktales and fairy tales.[40] The former as a rule refer to orality, that is, they are told; and the latter refer to the literary process, that is, they are composed in a written form. As opposed to oral tales, traditionally told by the folk, literary fairy tales have a concrete author.[41] According to Zipes, with the expansion of printing and publishing, there has been a transition from the folktale to the fairy tale. That is, oral tales served as the basis for the development, analysis, and interpretation of literary fairy tales. Hence, both terms—folktale and fairy tale—are often used interchangeably, especially in terms of their genre attributes.[42] For example, the features Vladimir Propp argues are essential to the oral wondertale

[39] Jack Zipes, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales. The Western Fairy Tale Tradition from Medieval to Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xv.
[40] As Zipes traces the most detailed history of the folktale and the fairy tale and provides the most exhaustive definitions, I adapt them in the present dissertation for the sake of consistency.
[41] In Russian scholarship, they are referred to as 'avtorskie literaturnye skazki'.
[42] Propp's patterning of folktales is frequently applied to fairy tales, which in this respect consolidates both terms' interchangeability. To add nuance to deciding on workable definitions, in his seminal study Propp interchangeably uses the term *skazka* (tale) and *volshebnaia skazka*, which is closer to the English 'wonder tale', 'magic tale', or 'tale of enchantment, and which refers to oral productions. Maria Kravchenko points out that in Russian literature *volshebnaia skazka* is referred to as *skazka*. See Maria Kravchenko, "Preface," in *The World of Russian Fairy Tale* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1987), i-ii.

(*volshebnaia skazka*)—namely, the elements of transformation, enchantment (or wonder), and otherworldliness—are those that most scholars and readers associate with the fairy tale as well.[43]

In his fairy tale studies, Zipes, and Max Lüthi before him, lists miraculous transformation, happy endings, the presence of stock characters, and formulaic beginnings and endings as distinguishing components of fairy tales.[44] Apart from the above essential genre characteristics, most definitions of the fairy tale also include narrative structure; that is, a stable plot trajectory, famously studied by Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). Definitions of the fairy tale also encompass stylistic features—defined by Lüthi—which point to the genre's indefiniteness, abstraction, and conventional settings. Finally, discussions about the fairy tale invoke its functions pertaining to entertainment, didacticism, socialization, and therapy, depending on specific social, political, and historical contexts, which have been studied at length, especially by Zipes. The defining qualities of the genre also include its rather short length, although scholars agree that relying on length is misleading. Jessica Tiffin aptly remarks on the impossibility of defining the fairy tale through any single factor. Instead, she claims, "a constellation of central characteristics creates an overall, instantly recognizable effect"[45] on the reader. What gives us more insight into the fairy tale's nature, therefore, is openness to the diversity of genre attributes rather than focusing on a single defining element.[46]

Emphasizing its transformative capacities, Zipes posits that the fairy tale establishes its conventions, motifs, topoi, characters, and plots based largely on those developed in the oral

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[43] Jack Haney, *Russian Wondertales. Tales of Magic and the Supernatural* (London, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), xvi-xvii.
[44] See, for example, Jack Zipes, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, ed. by Jack Zipes, 2015; Donald Haase, "Fairy Tale," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, ed. by Donald Haase (London: Greenwood Press, 2008), 322-324; Max Lüthi, *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982).
[45] Jessica Tiffin, *Marvellous Geometry. Narrative and Metafiction in Modern Fairy Tale* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 6.
[46] Donald Haase, "Fairy Tale," 324.

tradition as it responds to changing social, cultural, and historical contexts.[47] Thanks to its transformative capacities, to use Zipes's term, we can now delineate the fairy tale's contemporary guise. Vanessa Joosen studies markers of the contemporary fairy tale in contrast with the traditional fairy tale. The term 'contemporary fairy tale' has been circulating in the field of fairy-tale studies along with such synonymous terms as 'postmodern fairy tale', 'anti-fairy tale', 'fairy-tale retelling', 'fairy-tale parody', or 'fairy-tale revision'. None of these terms has a specific definition, but they indubitably point to their relationship with or, to be more specific, their dialogue with the traditional fairy tale. As noted, the term traditional fairy tale is elusive as well, for although fairy-tale scholarship is not a new field, there is no consensus as to what exactly constitutes a fairy tale, or such synonymous terms as 'classic fairy tale' and 'conventional fairy tale'. What Joosen assumes as traditional for the purposes of her work are popular fairy tales such as "Beauty and the Beast" or "Cinderella." Drawing largely on Propp's and Lüthi's formative works, Joosen lists those traditional genre attributes—or the horizon of expectation—that the contemporary, or postmodern, fairy tale disrupts. These include the chronotope, the attitude to the supernatural, characterization, optimism, abstraction, and fixed stylistic and narratological features. Joosen concludes that the contemporary fairy tale has come to be understood as subverting fixed categories for the sake of relocating plots to concrete contemporary settings, renegotiating "the boundary between magic and realism," bursting the illusion behind the optimism conveyed in happy endings, rationalizing the style, and shifting the importance of action to psychological development.[48] Joosen writes that:

[47] The fairy tale is able to adapt to the standards of literacy and diffusion in a given public sphere. For more details, see Jack Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment. The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture* (Penguin Books, 1991), xiv-xv.
[48] For a detailed account of the changes, which Joosen believes comprise certain novelization of the fairy-tale genre, see Vanessa Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 13-16.

> Whereas some of the traditional features are retained, the function of these stories radically changes: conservative morals are transformed into antiauthoritarian messages; the utopian function of magic is traded for rational ideological criticism; the simple and linear structure is disrupted in collages that foreground their own constructedness; flat characterization is replaced with elaborate psychological explorations; and so forth. On the one hand, the concept of "the fairy tale" has become so stretched that it threatens to lose all meaning. On the other hand, this elasticity has made it possible for the fairy tale to remain relevant to date, to provide readers in and far beyond academia not only with nice stories but also with reflections on literature and on life.[49]

My analysis of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is partly informed by Joosen's theoretical framework in that I examine Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as contemporary fairy tales in dialogue with the conventional understanding of this genre, and in that I identify in them some of the genre attributes that the contemporary fairy tale subverts. My theoretical framework is informed by the recognizable categories of the genre: plot structure and narratological structure (Chapter I) as well as the approach to the chronotope, stock characters, and the supernatural (Chapter II). My analysis also includes the fairy tale's functions; more specifically, Zipes' understanding of the fairy tale's utopian function that has a subversive sociopolitical leaning and relates to the human being and his agency/autonomy (Chapter III). Throughout the dissertation, I analyze how Petrushevskaya's fairy tales disrupt recognizable genre categories, thus reflecting the new guise of the fairy tale. These narratives reveal alterations and contradictions to the "eternal" categories of fairy tales, thus reworking the genre creatively, but also critically. I determine from what exactly, how, and why Petrushevskaya departs.[50] I also suggest the uniqueness of

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[49] Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales*, 303.

[50] In Russia, the more common approach to the contemporary fairy tale lies in setting it against the folktale and folklore at large, arguably because folklore has enjoyed a particularly strong presence in Russian literature and culture. The term 'contemporary' or 'postmodern' fairy tale is rarely used. Instead, the term *avtorskaia skazka* (authorial fairy tale) is more common and refers to those fairy tales (*literaturnaia skazka*) that enter into dialogue with the conventions of the folktale (*narodnaia skazka*). For example, pointing to their dialogism, L. Ovchinnikova refers to Petrushevskaya's fairy tales specifically as authorial; that is, straddling the folktale, and folklore at large, as well as her authorial creativeness, which, as Ovchinnikova posits, acquires a philosophical overtone in Petrushevskaya's case. One remark that can be made is that the description of *avtorskaia skazka* among Russian scholars in many ways overlaps with the understanding of a contemporary fairy tale, since what largely brings them

Petrushevskaya's approach to the contemporary fairy-tale genre, which, especially in terms of its functions, has culturally specific—sociopolitical and philosophical—underpinnings.

To understand changing genre definitions, it is productive to keep in mind Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of genre memory, according to which most stable, "eternal' elements are preserved in a genre thanks to their constant renewal, or their contemporization.[51] Pointing to the rebirth of genre and its renewal at every stage in the development of literature, Bakhtin posits that every genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. I thus see the life of the fairy-tale in Petrushevskaya's contemporary rendering as rooted in tradition and simultaneously inscribed in the poetics of postmodernism. What I understand as tradition is precisely the "eternal" elements, or common features, that distinguish the fairy-tale genre: their specific structure as well as "form and nature,"[52] which Petrushevskaya retains. In turn, the postmodern frame in which Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are written is exemplified by such devices as irony, intertextuality, genre syncretism, genre contradictions and pastiche, which, as a rule, undermines genre distinctions. Petrushevskaya's fairy-tale strategies also reflect what Cristina Bacchilega defines in her analysis of postmodern fairy tales as "the strategies postmodern writers engage in to expose, question, and recreate the rules of narrative production."[53] According to Bacchilega, the characteristic features of postmodernism are "the pastiche, the schizophrenic de-realization and intensification of the world, the fragmentation and

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together is their authors' overturning of conventions and genre attributes. See Liubov' Ovchinnikova, *Russkaia literaturnaia skazka XX veka*, doctoral dissertation (MGOPU im. M. A. Sholokhova, 2001).

[51] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 106.

[52] Style and nature are terms used by Lüthi in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. As Lipovetsky posits, genre memory comprises its semantics, structure, renewal and revival of the folktale, which fairy-tale writers largely consciously or subconsciously follow. In the case of the fairy tale, Lipovetsky understands tradition as *volshebnaia skazka*, or wondertale. See Mark Lipovetsky, *Poetika literaturnoi skazki (na materiale russkoi literatury 1920-1980-kh godov*) (*Sverdlovsk,* 1992).

[53] Quoted in Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 157.

flatness of representation, the ensuing suspicion of concepts such as truth and identity, the immersion in a fast-paced, city-world of consumerism, and the lack of a positive or negative norm to refer to."[54] On a narrative, or textual, level, Petrushevskaya's writing in a postmodern key thus includes self-referentiality; that is, drawing attention to the workings of genre and its creative possibilities.

Straddling tradition and metafiction, Petrushevskaya's narratives parody the fairy-tale genre. According to Bakhtin, precisely parody plays a key role in guaranteeing the continuity of genre evolution, by subjecting worn-out categories and forms to a continuous attempt at renewal to prevent them from becoming monologized. Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody is also apt for the purposes of my analysis, as it helps inform readings of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. According to Hutcheon, "Parody is (...) repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity."[55] Unlike stylization, which simply recalls an original, parody stresses difference and creates an effect different from, or even opposite to, the effect originally intended by the parodied model.[56] I see Petrushevskaya's parody on the whole not as that of specific texts but, quoting Hutcheon, as "playful, genial mockery" of the fairy tale as a codifiable form, whose intent ranges from respectful admiration to biting ridicule.[57]

Broader Cultural Context: From Postmodernism to Postrealism

If my first task is to situate Petrushevskaya's fairy tales within an aesthetic postmodern practice and the creative aspect, my second, interrelated task is to locate them in a broader critical context. Thus, apart from examining Petrushevskaya's fairy tales from the point of view of genre parody

[54] Ibid.
[55] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody. The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 6. For other accounts of parody, see, for example, Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Tynyanov's *Arkhaisty i novatory*, and Morson's *The Boundaries of Genre*.
[56] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 20.
[57] Ibid., 15-16. The effect is similar to what Gary-Saul Morson calls anti-genre, or a parodic genre.

and renewal, what interests me is why a major writer such as Petrushevskaya reaches for the fairy-tale genre today and what implications this literary choice has in contemporary Russian culture. I argue that Petrushevskaya engages the fairy-tale genre to probe reader's narrative expectations, but also to reexamine ethical and social expectations, as these narratives naturally respond to a given socio-historical moment.[58] Since "genre appraises reality, and reality clarifies genre,"[59] the transformation of generic forms must be examined in relation to social changes. Following Bakhtin's concept of genre dialogism, genre is not to be viewed as an abstract construct but as a literary form closely influenced and determined by socio-historical factors. Genre is therefore seen as a mediating entity.

I believe that, as they tap into genre memory, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are meant to address the self-conceptualization of Russian culture today; that is, after the emerging of the 'transitory' period of the last several decades.[60] More specifically, I see Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in part as responding to the Soviet project, itself seen as a fairy tale, in that it fabricated an idealistic present and future that never happened; as well as to the horrifying aftermath of that project. In this sense, Petrushevskaya's reaching for the fantastic, to paraphrase Rosemary Jackson, betrays dissatisfaction with what is.[61]

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[58] Alexandra Smith points to the social implications of Petrushevskaya's texts by noting subversion and anarchy as the core of Petrushevskaya's novel *Malen'kaia volshebnitsa*. Smith recalls Shneidman's characterization of the younger group of Russian writers, including Viktor Erofeev, Evgenii Popov, and Vladimir Sorokin, and suggests that this characterisation can be applied to Petrushevskaya: "Russian post-modernists avoid direct didacticism, but in many instances the very nature of their subject matter may have important social significance. In most cases social meaning is not on the surface and can be discerned only through careful investigative reading." See Alexandra Smith, "In Populist Clothes: Anarchy and Subversion in Petrushevskaya's Latest Fiction," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* (1997), 118.

[59] P. N. Medvedev and M. Bakhtin, M. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert J. Wehrle (Harvard University Press, 1985), 136.

[60] Lipovetsky writes that this transitory condition has lasted for over twenty years now. See Mark Lipovetsky, "Cycles, Continuity and Change in Contemporary Russian Culture," in *Russia's New Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Birgit Beumers, Ellen Thomas, Melanie Marshall, and Tom Newman (Intellect, 2013), 42.

[61] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), 18. Zipes notes that Jackson "views the subversive capacity of fairy tales with some reserve because they belong more to the literature of the marvelous and tend to discourage reader participation: instead of transgressing the values of the

The horrifying material of Petrushevskaya's works, which largely pertains to Soviet and post-Soviet quotidian life, has been discussed in terms of the notion of trauma. As noted, closing in on the concept of *acting out* trauma in Petrushevskaya's *The Time: Night*, Goscilo's analysis reaffirms Petrushevskaya's proclivity for *chernukha* and does not allow for alternative, potentially constructive forms of expression. If Petrushevskaya is for Goscilo "the supreme Russian author of trauma [and] its narratological exponent par excellence,"[62] she is for Lipovetsky an exemplary author of *working through* trauma on the level of Russian culture at large. Lipovetsky argues that writing in the mode of *chernukha* is a way for Petrushevskaya to achieve an analytical distance from this frightening material. Petrushevskaya focuses on existential and social conditions as manifestations of an anthropological catastrophe and represents them "as a unifying cultural and social norm, albeit horrifying and tragicomic."[63] Petrushevskaya creates critical distance from traumatic life experiences in general and the post-Soviet trauma triggered by the collapse of the Soviet fairy tale in particular by way of deliberately stressing the negative. This estrangement thus allows her to work through the historical trauma of the Soviet experience.

Building on Lipovetsky's argument, I read Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as suggesting ways of overcoming cultural and social trauma. Reaching for the fairy-tale genre is for Petrushevskaya a way to gain critical distance that allows for the analysis and transcendence of the traumatic past as well as coping with the horrors of everyday life. Petrushevskaya inscribes the Soviet and post-Soviet experience into the fabric of the fairy tale. The optimism that is inherent in the genre is

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"real" world, they interrogate them only retrospectively or allegorically." However, this view of a fairy tale is static and the radical transformations of the fairy-tale genre may be overlooked. In their marvelous tendencies, the subversive potential of the genre is not necessarily lessened. The subversive impulse that fairy-tale narratives may trigger is especially prominent in the postmodern literary agora. See Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1983), 107.

[62] Goscilo, "Narrating Trauma," 186.

[63] Lipovetsky, "Cycles, Continuity and Change in Contemporary Russian Culture," 41. Lipovetsky follows Dominick LaCapra's, and Freud before him, discussion on the notions of acting out and working through trauma. As examples of the latter, Lipovetsky points to the trickster strategy as well as the Menippean satire.

thus contrasted with actual disheartening material, which creates a cognitive challenge for the reader. Petrushevskaya requires her readers to see through this game to gain distance from the social and existential problems it stands for and points to. Moreover, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales allow for emotional engagement with the characters, significant because the reader's empathy and engagement with the heroes (be they good or bad in the fairy-tale context) points to the shared experience of trauma.[64] Overcoming trauma thus involves creating the necessary space that allows one to engage in life in the present and assume responsibility for oneself and for others.[65] Throughout my study, I point to the ways Petrushevskaya's fairy tales reveal dissatisfaction with the social status quo and, in the vein of the fairy tale's utopian function, carry critical and transformative potential.[66] These narratives proffer social and political commentary and voice a desire for change.

Apart from the sociopolitical vector, another reason Petrushevskaya reaches for the fairy-tale genre is spiritual and philosophical. Petrushevskaya's fairy tales may parody the conventions of the fairy-tale genre, and, as I will elaborate below, accentuate the genre's self-referentiality in the postmodern tradition, but not with the intention to dismiss its [genre's] value. As I will argue (especially in Chapter III), in the postmodern "world as text," Petrushevskaya's fairy tales draw on genre memory to return to the Russian folktale and literary tradition, which emphasize such communal and individual values as altruism and responsiveness.[67] Petrushevskaya's

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[64] Petrushevskaya's prose has been largely discussed as alienating the reader from the character as a result of "disgust bordering on physiological loathing," to quote Lipovetsky in his account of Vladimir Sorokin's fiction. See Lipovetsky, "Cycles, Continuity and Change in Contemporary Russian Culture," 39.
[65] Ibid., 36 and 41.
[66] Bacchilega points to the changing social function of the fairy tale and advocates not seeing it as children's fantasy, and instead, following Zipes, stresses its emancipatory impulses against dominant ideologies. Postmodern fairy tales, in her view, voice a desire for subversive change by unveiling the normative, controlling magic mirror behind them. See Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*. *Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 10.
[67] More specifically, I mean the realist tradition as exemplified by Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and their, albeit differing, focus on the notion of inwardness.

"revolutionary novelty," however, includes an emphasis on such qualities as self-possession and self-awareness of the subject in the contemporary world. The seemingly simple folk wisdom embedded in the old genre that cherishes the positive in man is important for Petrushevskaya, since, in an reimagined form, her fairy tales (may) construct new signposts for coping with "being alive" today; that is, for suggesting viable ethical and social strategies for a meaningful life.

I thus see Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as inscribed in the poetics of postmodernism as they spotlight fragmentation and chaos and follow a subversive creative and critical impulse. At the same time, I see them as inscribed in the poetics of postrealism as they produce a cerrtain discomforting comfort through their ways of counterbalancing ideological and spiritual crisis. In this light, Petrushevskaya's writing approaches not postmodernism but postrealism.[68]

Building on Bakhtin's notions of dialogism and ambivalence, Leiderman and Lipovetsky refer to postrealism as an artistic phenomenon that suggests an outlook on the world as an ever-changing and fluid given (*dannost'*), with no boundaries between the top and the bottom, one's own and "the others," eternal and short-term. Postrealism allows for mastering (*osvaivat'*) the world as discrete, alogical, and absurd chaos, but also for looking for meaning in it, thus creating a certain "chaosmos." Scholars posit that the postrealist dialogue with chaos is different from the postmodern in that the existence of reality as an objective given, which to some extent influences man's fate, is not questioned in postrealism. Most importantly, postrealism does not break with a concrete measure of the human being:

[68] Also referred to as 'new realism' in Russian literature. Leiderman and Lipovetsky have considered Petrushevskaya's drama and fiction (next to the works of such other contemporary writers as Sergei Dovlatov and Vladimir Makanin) as inscribed in the aesthetics of postrealism. For a detailed account on postrealism, see, for example, Naum Leiderman and Mark Lipovetsky, *Sovremennnaia russkaia literatura 1950-1990-e gody, tom 3 (1968-1990)* (Moscow, Editorial URSS, 2001) and Naum Leiderman, *S vekom naravne: Russkaia literaturnaia klassika v sovetskuiu epokhu* (Zlatoust, 2005).

> Precisely through the human being and for the sake of the human being, postrealism attempts to grasp the chaos to find in its depth a thread, a support to which the human being could hold on, which could justify and provide meaning of a singular human fate unfolding in the "conditions" of chaos.[69]

What is equally relevant for my analysis is that the *character* in postrealism, like the *author* in postmodernism, apprehends the world as chaos, but, in contrast with the postmodernist author, the *character* takes on responsibility not for the whole world but at least for the fragment of this world closest to him. In postrealism, which increasingly comes to be read as neo-humanism, the marker of the attempt to grasp this chaos is the *character's* attaining "the connection of everything that is" (*sviaz' vsego sushchego*) at the emotional and intuitive level, which is reflected most of all through discovering personal responsibility for oneself and for the other within the chaos. If, as Sutcliffe argues with regard to Petrushevskaya's prose, the author's prose exemplifies perestroika's negation of idealism and obsession with exposure, and thus "privilege[s] material *byt* over ideational *bytie*,"[70] then this view is inverted in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. Although references to hellish everyday material *byt* are still present in her fairy tales, the possibilities of *bytie* (philosophically and spiritually meaningful existence) balance out the former. I posit specifically that Petrushevskaya's writing goes beyond the boundaries of *byt* and evokes the possibilities of spiritual *bytie*. More specifically, I see these narratives as an attempt at projecting *bytie* at the heart of *nebytie*.[71]

Equally important for my analysis is the position that while the character in postrealism seeks to build a sense of order from the chaos and within the chaos, the postrealist author's stance

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[69] "Именно через человека и ради человека постреализм пытается постигнуть хаос, чтобы найти в его глубине нить, опору, за которую человек мог бы держаться, которая могла бы стать оправданием и смыслом единственной человеческой судьбы, разворачивающейся в «обстоятельствах» хаоса" (Leiderman and Lipovetsky, *Sovremennnaia russkaia literatura 1950-1990-e gody, tom 3 (1968-1990)*, 96-99).
[70] Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life*, 61.
[71] Ermolin reflects on Leiderman and Lipovetsky's study and refers to contemporary Russian authors in general as cultivating meaning out of senselessness without any seeds, in an empty space, by self-will only. See Evgenii Ermolin, "Sobesedniki khaosa," in *Novyi mir* 6 (1996).

towards this search remains clouded in ambivalence. I thus see Petrushevskaya as neither validating nor rejecting the meaningfulness of this search but, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, as allowing her characters to speak for themselves.

Critics have referred to Petrushevskaya's writing as creating a world of voids and invalidating hope, but the same conclusions regarding the author's fairy tales would miss the mark.[72] Clowes notes that Petrushevskaya plays with closure and refuses to end her narratives in capitulation or death, which opens space for other possibilities in terms of both the act of interpreting and living. Natal'ia Ivanova argues that ambivalence, as well as Bakhtin's trait of the grotesque, are present in Petrushevskaya's works.[73] Ambivalence in her writing, as Ivanova suggests, embraces both negation and destruction (death) as an essential component inseparable from affirmation (birth). Goscilo, however, while acknowledging Petrushevskaya's two-directionality, notes that it does not allow for Bakhtinian carnival fertility. Rather, what this two-directionality generates is only a sense of destruction and psychological laceration, which leaves no room for affirmation as the balancing element. More specifically, Goscilo points to the absence of "an authentically celebratory dimension (...) plus a sense of community, of group relations cemented by shared values."[74] Dalton-Brown approaches Ivanova's stance when she argues that in the world of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, "Perhaps one finds that presence which balances absence, that sense of hope and rejuvenation which counteracts the destructive darkness embraced so wholeheartedly in her other types of texts. Perhaps the fairytale offers that carnival sense of promise which would allow one to define Petrushevskaya's work according to the

[72] See, for example: Lyudmila Parts, "Down the Intertextual Lane. Petrushevskaia, Chekhov, Tolstoy" (*The Russian Review* 64:1, 2005), 89. Dalton-Brown points to "self-cancelling contradictions" (Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 26).
[73] Natal'ia Ivanova, "Bakhtin's Concept of the Grotesque," in *Fruits of her Plume. Essays on Contemporary Russian Women's Culture*, ed. by Helena Goscilo (New York: Sharpe, 1993), 21. Also quoted in Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 12.
[74] Goscilo, *Fruits of her Plume. Essays on Contemporary Russian Women's Culture*, 141.

Bakhtinian grotesque, with its emphasis on the body, and on the 'lower' forms of truth."[75] However, as noted earlier, Dalton-Brown in the end reads Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as "voices from the void."

Conversely, I see Petrushevskaya's fairy tales precisely as providing that celebratory dimension of which Goscilo speaks: the sense of hope that counteracts the destructive darkness. I demonstrate that while, indeed, one is hard pressed to discern hope in her prose and drama, Petrushevskaya's attempts at joining communality and affirming life are anchored in her fairy tales. I examine Petrushevskaya's altered, or rediscovered, worldview, according to which negation and affirmation coexist, but this worldview suggests the need to foster human interdependence and self-reflection, as well as such objective virtues as compassion and responsiveness, as a path to a more meaningful life. Specifically this aspect of Petrushevskaya's vision of the world constitutes a powerful moment in her trajectory as a writer.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter I investigates the narrative structure of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales and the underlying principles that govern their composition. From the point of view of structure, these texts read as fairy tales insofar as they correspond to a simple plot pattern: situation of lack – villainy – lack resolved. However, these tales only create the illusion of simplicity. Within the predictable structure of her fairy tales lie conspicuous references to familiar social contexts and recognizable problems of contemporary life. Contemporary reality thus shifts the focus from the structure to the context. As a result, references to contemporary reality expand and enrich the conventional understanding of the fairy-tale plot structure, without altogether invalidating it. I analyze the extent to which Petrushevskaya retains the conventional structure as well as the extent to which

[75] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 109.

she reshapes it, to determine how and why the contemporary fairy tale parodies the genre's plot structure.

I further explore how Petrushevskaya's fairy tales revise the old genre in a new linguistic and narratorial context. I analyze the ways in which the characters and the narrators employ contemporary language to jolt the reader out of the familiar linguistic and narratorial fairy-tale setting and to further disrupt the predictability of the fairy-tale structure. Because the narrators in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales employ contemporary language and are unreliable, I view them as *skaz* narrators. I argue that specifically by way of using contemporary language the narrators produce the impression of dialogic experiences and communal culture for fellow citizens in post-Soviet Russia. Contemporary language thus, on the one hand, disrupts the reader's expectations, which further points to genre parody and, on the other, gives the impression of shared communal experiences. I further argue that the contrasts created produce a sense of indeterminacy in the reader and reveal Petrushevskaya's mechanics of producing impressions and negotiating opposites, without fully adhering to any of them, thereby invalidating certainties and simplistic true/false binary schemes. By modifying the structure and using vivid language, Petrushevskaya-the storyteller renews tradition, showcasing new developmental directions of the fairy-tale genre. Importantly, genre modifications also allow Petrushevskaya to comment on contemporary culture and social mores.

Chapter II addresses distinguishing fairy-tale elements. I analyze the categories of time and place, heroes, and magic, as recognizable fairy-tale categories that Petrushevskaya extensively modifies. More specifically, the indefinite and depthless representation of time and place, the characteristic flatness and isolation of characters, and the bountiful supply of magic undergo significant changes in Petrushevskaya's texts via an emphasis on the physical; that is, on what constitutes life outside of fictional representation. Therefore, like the alterations

Petrushevskaya makes to the conventional understanding of structure and language (Chapter I), it is the nuances and entanglements of actual life that obscure, and thus parody, the conventional understanding of what Lüthi considers the fairy tale's "form and nature." The latter is in the fairy tale averse to nuance and strives to create a heightened sense of the fictional. Conversely, via postmodernist strategies, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales revise the hard-set logic governing the genre.

Specifically, I argue that 1) representations of time and place in the author's fairy tales are not indefinite, which modifies the sense of the fairy tale. Instead, these representations acquire definiteness as they highlight everyday life: its time-specific and space-specific references. 2) In a similar vein, heroes in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales gain in realistic characterization as they shed the customary flatness of fairy-tale characters by signaling motivations behind their actions. 3) The canonical aspect of magic is especially subject to testing and acquires multiple meanings in Petrushevskaya's tales. Although her tales feature what is to all appearances the fairy-tale magic (such as shape shifting, magical agents and objects, sorcerers, and spells), that is ingrained in the fairy tale, Petrushevskaya's mechanism of emphasizing the realistic necessarily downplays magic's role and extent. As Petrushevskaya diminishes its role, she undermines the reader's total submersion into fairy-tale fictionality. Petrushevskaya's literary strategy contributes therefore to the genre's rationalization, that is, to its disenchantment.[76] The novelty this strategy presents consists in zooming in on the realistic via the fairy-tale genre, commonly understood as a genre that does not focus on realistic aspects.

In this Chapter, I further argue that Petrushevskaya broadens the category of magic to incorporate the element of mysticism, including fate, miracles, and the existence of other worlds.

[76] I discuss Petrushevskaya's fairy tales within the context of social, political, and the subject's disenchantment and re-enchantment (retrieving the sense of wonder) in Chapter III.

I refer to these aspects as constituting the meta-physical dimension of her works, which discloses the question of believability and the way it intertwines with such questions as what is (im)probable and what is (im)possible, focusing specifically on the polysemy of the word 'possible'. Finally, the fluctuating dynamic between the realistic and the unrealistic, or the physical and the meta-physical, informs Petrushevskaya's fairy tales and creates the impression of open-endedness.

Chapter III examines Petrushevskaya's fairy tales from the point of view of the fairy tale's functions. The questions I pose are the following. Given their subversive character with regard to the rationalization on the level of language and content (plots, characters, motifs, magic), can Petrushevskaya's contemporary fairy tales bring about wonder? Are they at all intended to offer hope? Finally, is Petrushevskaya interested in maintaining hope in the twenty-first century (and in post-Soviet Russia) that has become ever more cynical? I argue that Petrushevskaya's fairy tales have the capacity to activate the utopian function of the fairy tale and to be a springboard for individual, social, and cultural transformation by modeling strategies for survival and empowerment. I demonstrate the ways in which they do so and examine the rationale behind Petrushevskaya's return to the fairy-tale genre.

In the first section, I investigate Petrushevskaya's characters as *homo viators* (wanderers) in their search for spirituality and meaning of life, and study Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as shedding light on man's experience of despair and hope. The second section examines the utopian function in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales through the intertextual engagement with Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, which she revises to suggest a vision of man that explicitly contradicts her predecessor's. More specifically, I consider Petrushevskaya's position as evoking individual empowerment and self-possession, which comprises the author's opposing stance to Andersen, and as such sets up the foundations of the renascence of the fairy tale's utopian function in society

today. The third section analyzes the social aspect of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales through the notion of brotherhood as conveyed in Petrushevskaya's Christmas stories. I consider the author's emphasis on communal transformation through altruism as a further expression of the fairy tale's utopian function. Seeing Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as restoring the utopian function, most notably the author's concern with what it means to be human and with creating bonds, the concluding section situates the tales in the broader context of Russian culture today. As they reveal "a hidden desire to find metafoundations capable of uniting humankind,"[77] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales move beyond postmodernism towards the hope of re-enchanting the world.

[77] Marina Timchenko, "Transition. The State of Contemporary Artistic Culture," in *Re-entering the Sign. Articulating New Russian Culture*, ed. by Ellen Berry and Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 10.

CHAPTER I

THE STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE OF THE FAIRY TALE:

BETWEEN THE SPOKEN AND THE WRITTEN WORD

Язык – это Бог.[78]
For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories.[79]

Modifying Structure

Narrative structure and language are arguably the most genre-specific elements of the folktale, as this genre in particular relies on a fixed plot pattern and distinct linguistic features. Vladimir Propp studied the folktale structure most extensively and provided a detailed analysis of what it constitutes. In his two seminal and indispensable works, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) and *Theory and History of Folklore* (1946), he analyzed the structural similarities which underlie Russian folktales, arguing that all such stories are basically variants of a single type and employ a fixed repertory of functions.[80] Therefore, folktales may be rich in terms of plot, but in these plots we will be able to identify basic structural functions that "serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled."[81] Consequently, it is possible to create new plots with an unlimited number of elements, as all of these plots reflect the basic scheme, while the plots themselves may not resemble one another. Propp described thirty-one possible functions underlying the structure of the folktale; that is, acts spread over a fixed set of characters defined from the point of view of their significance for the course of the action. Propp's functions

[78] TV interview with Petrushevskaya, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqjuziE8NnE (Accessed August 20, 2018).
[79] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 91.
[80] Scholars argue that Propp's pattern applies to Indo-European tales. It is also important to note that the patterning of [oral] folktales is frequently applied to [literary] fairy tales as well. Propp uses the term *volshebnaia skazka*, which is closer to the English 'wonder tale' or the German 'Zaubermärchen', and he "would have preferred to use the term wonder tale rather than just folktale." See Jack Zipes, "Foreword," in *The Russian Folktale by Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp*, trans. and ed. by Sibelan Forrester (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), xi.
[81] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, ed. by Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 21.

are constants, but not every tale must contain every function (except possibly lack, villainy, and lack resolved). Following Propp, all folktales:

> Move from the group of functions that involve villainy or the introduction of a lack, through the intermediary functions IX to XVIII which involve the tests and trials of the hero, towards the functions XVIII to XXXI: the liquidation of lack, the defeat of the villain, and the marriage of the hero.[82]

The thirty-one functions are distributed over seven spheres of action spread between seven leading dramatis personae: the hero (who is the major character with whom the reader associates), the villain (who is in sharp contrast with the hero), the donor (who presents the magical gift to the hero), the helper (who provides support in critical moments), the object or reward of the quest (such as a princess), the dispatcher (who sends the hero on the mission), and the false hero (who is initially taken for the hero but turns out to be a usurper).[83] What is useful to note is that there is no specific or minimum number of dramatis personae required to constitute a folktale, and a single sphere of action may be fulfilled in many ways. Furthermore, the attributes, motivations, and intentions of characters vary, but the functions that they carry out remain constant.[84]

The analysis of the folktale's structure, the foundation of which was laid by Propp, serves as a productive matrix to study the workings of contemporary fairy tales and to understand the narrative transformations they have undergone and come to reflect. That is, the predictable structure of the folktale lends itself well to subversion and, more specifically, to parodic interpretations in contemporary fairy tales. As a rule, contemporary fairy tales written in a postmodern key do not treat the above narrative structure straightforwardly but rather work to

[82] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 92; Andrew Teverson, *Fairy Tale* (Routledge, 2013), 101.
[83] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 79-80; Teverson, *Fairy Tale*, 101.
[84] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 81.

draw attention to its textuality: to language, form, and generic conventions.[85] In this sense, postmodern fairy-tale writing is metafictional: contemporary fairy tales are self-conscious in exposing their own workings. The rationale behind these textual strategies lies in the intention to disrupt reader's expectations of fairy-tale writing.[86] Moreover, apart from destabilizing the notions of textuality, and so consciously modifying the genre, contemporary fairy tales also problematize reader's conceptions of the world of fiction and beyond, as they are always mediated by language.[87]

This is true for Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as well. Keeping in mind both the formal principles and their postmodern modifications, the questions I pose in this section are the following: To what extent does Petrushevskaya transform tradition? How do these transformations, including the metafictional drawing attention to plot structure and language, contribute to the aesthetic quality of these narratives? How and why do Petrushevskaya's fairy tales revise the structure–content opposition and context or, more specifically, the Proppian importance of form over content and context? Finally, what critical implications does such creative revision have?

I begin my analysis by examining Petrushevskaya's fairy tales that illustrate particularly well the ways and the extent to which she retains but transforms the conventional structure. For that purpose, I analyze two fairy tales from the cycle "Prikliucheniia Barbi" ("The Adventures of Barbie," 1996): "Barbi ulybaetsia" ("Barbie Smiles") and "Barbi-volshebnitsa i les" ("Barbie-Wizard and the Forest"); and one fairy tale from the cycle "Korolevskie prikliucheniia" ("Royal

[85] Stephen Benson, "Postmodernism," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales* (London: Greenwood Press, 2008), 765.
[86] For a more detailed account on metafiction as self-conscious and self-reflexive writing, which exposes its own nature as fiction rather than as reality, see, for example: Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox* (New York: Methuen, 1984); Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979). For an understanding of fairy tales as productions that destabilize the notions of fiction and reality, see Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984).
[87] Benson, "Postmodernism," 765.

Adventures," 1996) – "Glupaia printsessa" ("The Stupid Princess").[88] In these tales, we will not find all thirty-one functions Propp lists in his morphological analysis. We will also not find the exact sequence of the functions. We can, however, find common fairy-tale denominators, or a basic plot scheme, and then examine the extent of and rationale behind Petrushevskaya's metafictional strategies.

The first fairy tale, "Barbi ulybaetsia," begins with what Propp refers to as the element of lack inherent in the folktale. It is the story of a Barbie doll who once upon a time was lost in the park by her young owner. She is lying on the ground, forsaken and helpless. Suddenly, concerned with Barbie's poor state, fellow Barbie dolls approach her. With the intention of helping her, they take Barbie away in their expensive Barbie car to a lavish dollhouse where they wear luxurious clothes, eat ample food, play tennis, and, of course, watch Disney films. Barbie realizes she does not feel comfortable in such splendour and excess and so asks her new friends to bring her back to where they found her. Holding up a small sequin that her owner once attached to her dress, Barbie waits patiently to be retrieved. Indeed, the little girl finds her the next morning and Barbie greets her with a happy smile.

The conventional Proppian narrative structure is largely retained in this tale, intertwined with Petrushevskaya's authorial contribution. The structural element of lack stands for Masha Barbie being lost by her child-owner; and the element of lack is predictably resolved as the child finds Masha thanks to the tiny sequin that has magical properties. The structural element Petrushevskaya modifies is the element of the quest, which involves the doll's wish to be found by her owner. The test in the process of the quest comprises the doll's going to the palace of the fellow Barbie dolls and resisting the temptations of the lavish life in the dollhouse. Masha

[88] The tale "Barbi ulybaetsia" was first published in *Lukomor'e. Skazki russkikh pisatelei*, 1994. The other two tales were published in: Petrushevskaya, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh. Tom 4* (Khar'kov: Folio, 1996).

Barbie's test thus involves going through a social trial: to choose or to refuse the luxury (re)presented by the Barbie dolls.[89] The villain is problematized in that it is not the Barbie dolls themselves (who, after all, help Masha) but figuratively what they represent—excess and superficiality—that act as the villain. The modest Masha rejects said excess and superficiality and instead asks to be brought back to her life of relative poverty but meaningful relations. The villain as such is thus not present in this tale and so he or she cannot be punished. However, the punishment meted out to the figurative villain—lavishness and excess—entails refusing its attractions. The structure of this tale is deceptively flat in that it follows the prescribed framework of the situation of lack – villainy – lack resolved, and so lives up to the reader's expectations. Yet, the modifications Petrushevskaya introduces to the elements of the quest and villainy, which are reflected in the ethical and social questions of the world we know, destabilize the structure. Adhering to the predictable structure and apparently addressing an audience of children is thus a way for Petrushevskaya to draw attention to the latent reading, that is, to the opposition between materialism and spirituality.[90]

The second tale, "Barbi-volshebnitsa i les," describes Masha Barbie waiting for her owner, Grandpa Ivan, to return home. Grandpa Ivan headed to the forest in search of some wood to make caskets to sell at the market and make ends meet. Grandpa Ivan being lost in the forest thus stands for lack. The element of the quest involves Masha Barbie venturing into the forest in search of him and the test involves freeing Ivan from a trap, tending to his wound with a magical potion, and ensuring that he safely returns home. A new plotline unfolds within the same tale, as

[89] On a symbolic level, it is an undertaking of a journey into the world and learning from it.
[90] I refer to the modern use of the word 'spirituality', that is, not necessarily pertaining to the religious sphere but rather to a subjective experience of meaningfulness, be it in terms of one's personal growth or one's genuine relations with others.

Masha Barbie remains in the forest to confront the villain who sets the traps.[91] The villain, a young boy by the suggestive name of Plague (*Chuma*) appears in the forest. At the sight of an empty trap he lets out expletives and suddenly metamorphoses into a fox. He is then himself caught in the trap. His wailing attracts his mother-fox who approaches him and in a similarly vulgar fashion expresses her discontent about his stealing food from her. She senses the blood on his wound and is ready to eat him alive when she metamorphoses into a wolf and gets trapped as well. Eventually, they manage to help each other and get out of the trap, and both metamorphose into humans again. They vow to change their lives: the mother to stop drinking and find a job, and the son to go back to school. The plotline of the mother and the son, too, ends in a conventional fashion with the two returning home. The whole tale thus ends with a double happy ending, with the final tableau back in the small apartment of Ivan and Masha, where Ivan returns to his artisanal work and Masha, in her own secret and invisible ways, prepares dinner.

Apart from the striking element of transformation (physical and moral) of the humans/beasts, this tale largely retains a predictable structure. However, like the preceding tale, this tale problematizes the sphere of action of the villain. Although we know that it is the boy who sets the traps to torture animals, the underlying interpretation of villainy has broader ethical and social implications. The actual villain in "Barbi-volshebnitsa i les" is not straightforwardly evil in that we read the boy's behaviour as caused by the inhumanness around him, which is in itself seen as villainy. The underlying interpretation of the villain is the state of being inhuman, or forgetting how to be human, as reflected especially by the boy's drunkard mother and her bestiality. The plague here, as the boy's name suggests, are the acts of inhumanness that are like a disease: contagious and damaging. Albeit modified by way of actual social problems, the

[91] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are in general single-stranded in that there is only one sharply defined plot line. "Barbi-volshebnitsa i les" is a rare example of such multi-layered plot lines.

required sphere of action for the villain is nonetheless present in these tales and the villain is in the end defeated. That is, the parallel reading of villainy does not invalidate the conventional narrative structure. Rather, it transforms it and at the same time adds intricacy and singularity to the narrative content. In Propp's terms, such "disharmony" allows a certain presence of motivations, connections, and other auxiliary elements that do not violate the structural logic.[92]

The complexity of the plot in the third fairy tale allows for a detailed analysis of the ways in which Petrushevskaya alters plot structure and enriches content. "Glupaia printsessa" ("The Stupid Princess") tells the story of a seemingly unintelligent girl, Princess Ira, who does not seem to know what should or should not be talked about, disclosing matters the royal family gossips about at home, thereby embarrassing her parents. In this tale, Petrushevskaya retains the initial situation of lack but modifies the element of lack itself inasmuch as it is an abstract quality that is missing; namely, the heroine's lack of good judgment.

The tale also features the functions of interdiction, violating interdiction, and dispatch. Ira's parents repeatedly request her not to eavesdrop or repeat what she hears. Ira violates the interdiction and is therefore sent to have her meals in the kitchen, where she continues to eavesdrop and spread, often uncouth, gossip. As Ira does not change, she is sent even further away, to an empty lodge at the end of the park where she receives food via royal post. Eventually, her parents send her farther away to a veterinary school. Petrushevskaya further modifies the function of dispatch in that it takes the form of banishment. She thus inverts the sequence of functions in this tale. The dispatch and the subsequent departure from home, following Propp's analysis, should occur only after the encounter with the villain. However, being merely an inversion, such narrative manoeuvre does not violate the structure.

[92] Propp uses the term 'disharmony' while discussing examples of structure transformations. See Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 110 and 111-113.

As Ira is away from home, a new personage enters the scene, namely, the villain. The latter's role is, unsurprisingly, to cause some kind of misfortune, "to engage in some form of struggle with the hero."[93] Petrushevskaya modifies the functions pertaining to the villain inasmuch as the story presents not a single, but rather multiple villains. The news of Ira's notorious gullibility reaches countless villains who, having learned that she treats her animal patients along with their owners, take advantage of her. The wrongdoers thus collectively conjure the image of villainy.

In Propp's analysis, the function of identifying lack involves the appearance of another hero, which is in this tale rendered by "gloomy and wicked" (*mrachnyi i zloi)* Piotr, who one day appears with his sick donkey by the suggestive name Bride-Groom (*Zhenikh*).[94] Piotr asks Ira to promptly cure the latter, as he needs the beast to continue working for him in the field. Otherwise, he declares, he will send the beast straight to the butcher and have him processed into sausage.[95] Piotr's suspiciousness clearly opposes Ira's gullibility. He angrily accuses Ira of being too trustful and tells her that everyone deceives her, and as a result she makes a fool of herself. From the structural point of view, Piotr initially enters the sphere of action as the villain, but then takes up the role of the hero who sets himself a mission. With a view to protecting Ira, he hires himself out as a gatekeeper and decides to help her dismiss the false patients and start collecting money for the treatment she provides. The question of the hero is thus intricate, considering that Piotr changes his plot trajectory and shares multiple spheres of action. Apart from initially acting as a

[93] Teverson, *Fairy Tale*, 101.
[94] In the companion essay to *The Morphology of the Folktale*, "Fairy Tale Transformations," Propp extends his investigation of the grammar of the genre by explaining the production of variants. Propp points to the dynamic principle of tales and acknowledges that characters often merge into each other and that attributive elements as well as functions are subject to laws of transformation. In identifying the formal mechanisms involved, Propp lists twenty different kinds of transformations as well as ethnological and historical processes that give rise to them, among them reduction, expansion, intensification, and substitution.
[95] The mention of turning a magical helper into sausage features also in the traditional Russian and then Soviet tale "The Magic Ring" where the naive and altruistic character, Van'ka, who, like Ira, loves animals, sets free a cat, a dog, and a snake.

villain and then switching to acting as the dispatcher, Piotr is also the donor in this tale, as he donates the magical agent Bride-Groom, who, as we will see, fulfills its role, although unwittingly. Furthermore, Ira also shares a double sphere of action in that she is both the victim hero when she reacts to the donor, and the sought-for-object for Piotr in his role of the seeker.[96]

In one of the possible variations of the function of acquiring the use of a magical agent, Propp indicates a hero who is shown a magical agent. Namely, the donor presents the seeker hero and the victim hero with the magical agent, which permits the eventual liquidation of misfortune. As mentioned above, the donor in Petrushevskaya's tale is Piotr who gives Ira a donkey with the suggestive name Bride-Groom. However, the magical helper in Petrushevskaya's tale is mute and unaware of his role and magical properties. The magical agent is thus parodied. Nonetheless, although unaware, the donkey conjures love between the gloomy and wicked Piotr and the gullible and goodhearted Ira, and so contributes to liquidating what the reader understands as the actual lack of true love. The difference between the traditional folktale and the fairy tale in question is that the magical agent is not directly commanded by the hero, although we could say that both heroes, Piotr and Ira, subconsciously "command" love for themselves. Another important difference is the fact that in the traditional folktale, a hero is morphologically significant as his or her intentions create the axis of the narrative. Here, however, the intention to love and to be loved, as abstract categories, is not explicit and the heroes do not realize that they are looking for love and acceptance. The liquidation of lack, then, involves Ira and Piotr spontaneously liquidating the absence of love.

The modifications to the function of liquidating the initial misfortune or lack are interrelated with the motif of the quest and the hero himself. Typically, the hero joins in combat with the villain in order to achieve his ultimate goal. Accordingly, as he identifies the lack of Ira's

[96] For more details on the dramatis personae, see Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 25-65.

good judgment not as misfortune but as her strength (good-heartedness and altruism), Piotr decides to do away with all the villains who take advantage of her. He arrives with bad intentions, gloomy and wicked (*zloi*), but with the truly magical properties of Ira's unselfishness, he undergoes a spiritual transformation. The Russian adjective *zloi* has a double meaning, on which Petrushevskaya plays. *Zloi* can mean both 'angry' and 'evil', as opposed to 'good' (*dobryi*). Petrushevskaya's freedom to modify the structure and play with the meaning of words thus implicitly invokes the question of good (*dobro*) and kindness (*dobrota*) as the tale's central themes. Ira's apparent and eponymous stupidity is read as kindness, the importance of which is underlined through contrast and deliberate focus on examples of said stupidity and gullibility. The function of liquidating misfortune is therefore twofold. What is figuratively liquidated is the lack of love and acceptance that Ira initially misses. The equally implicit misfortune of Piotr is liquidated as well, as his apparent anger and wickedness are reversed and as he proves capable of love.

The complexity of sharing multiple spheres of action extends also to Ira's parents. They initially act as the dispatcher, as they send their daughter away, but then turn into the seeker hero who leaves home in the pursuit of a goal. This function is more intricate in Petrushevskaya's tale in that it is reversed.[97] It is Ira's parents who depart from home so as to look for Ira and find her a husband, which turns out to be a fairly difficult task, as there are no volunteers to marry a stupid princess who might potentially never stop embarrassing them. The departure from home in a fairy tale is a symbolic act reminiscent of the transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is thus commonly understood as a rite of passage. In this tale, however, adulthood and maturity are awarded not to the good-hearted Ira but to Ira's parents who in the end realize their mistake of

[97] The question of home is ambiguous in Petrushevskaya's oeuvre at large. I examine the archetype of home in Chapter III within the context of the characters' existential dilemmas.

sending their daughter away, and thus seek to win her back. It is Ira's parents who metamorphose in that they become mature (that is, perhaps they no longer engage in gossip and misdemeanour); something that apparently their gullible daughter should have achieved, since she was the one banished from home.

Finally, Petrushevskaya modifies the function of the rescue of the hero from pursuit. Typically, this function involves being carried away through the air or by means of rapid transformations into animals or stones.[98] In the tale in question, it is modified and achieved, with a good dose of humour, through wordplay. When Ira's parents pursue her as they try to find her a husband, Ira defends herself from her parents' intentions by stating that she is already engaged and "already has a groom" ("А у меня уже есть жених," 194). The noun 'groom', therefore, overlaps with the donkey's proper name (Groom). This way, Ira ensures she is not married to someone found by her parents and, in Propp's language, she has no intention of being devoured. In the end, she marries Piotr, not the donkey, and the tale draws to a generic happy ending.

Despite the fact that Petrushevskaya weaves new elements into the narrative fabric of her fairy tales, they become absorbed by the morphological structure. In a similar vein, the characters' spheres of action may overlap and the characters' attributes may change, as do the means and motivations of the realization of their functions, but the functions themselves remain unchanged.[99] Although they do not subvert reader's expectations, the above modifications,

[98] Interestingly, spatial transference of the hero in a fairy tale typically involves relocating to "another" or "different" kingdom. In Petrushevskaya's tale, we do not necessarily know where Piotr comes from or whether the movement is vertical or horizontal. Movement, nonetheless, is quite present in this tale. We see Piotr arriving at Ira's clinic and may safely assume that he travels with his donkey on the ground. We see Ira being placed gradually farther away from home (dining room, kitchen, lodge in the garden, veterinary school) as well as Ira's parents arriving at her clinic. The interpretation of the motif of transfer is therefore threefold: 1) Piotr-the seeker acquires Princess Ira, who in this context is read as the object of search; 2) more abstractly – both heroes are delivered toward love as the object of search; and, finally, 3) Ira's parents-the seeker arrive at the object of their search and reconcile with their daughter. This multiplicity and overlapping of functions as well as saturation of detail add to the singularity of the tale but, to be sure, do not disrupt the fairy-tale structure.

[99] As Propp posits, the motivations of characters are perhaps the most inconstant and unstable elements of a tale. It is therefore Petrushevskaya's freedom as a storyteller to add such intricacy to her tale.

including parody and wordplay, nonetheless draw attention to themselves. If, as Propp prescribes, narrative functions in the folktale exist in a linear sequence along a chronological axis, then in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales this linearity is altered by way of bundling together these narrative functions, which multiply, balance and modify one another throughout the narrative. It is as though Petrushevskaya's fairy tales were affecting the prescribed linearity of the conventional way of looking at fairy tales with the verticality of her modifications, which could give the impression of cancelling out horizontality (linearity) and accentuating verticality (modifications). Ultimately, though, such modifications produce similar effects from the point of view of the genre structure. That is, Petrushevskaya's tales present a number of substantial variations which modify the structure but which do not invalidate it, thereby producing an impression of structural simplicity.[100] Petrushevskaya thus relies on the recognizability of the genre and is clearly fascinated with the genre structure, its seeming simplicity, predictability, and security. In line with the postmodern tendency, however, such reliance serves as a means of challenging narrative systems as static and rigid, and so of parodying the genre.

Apart from the textual dimension, Petrushevskaya's creative structure modifications also implicitly touch upon social and ethical questions, and so reveal their critical dimension. Petrushevskaya thus parodies the genre to allude to such questions as the overabundance of and overreliance on material goods; alcoholism and the loss of humanness; and disregard for selflessness. She thus reveals the the socio-historical and ethical context specifically via modifications introduced to the fairy-tale structure.

From Structure to Context

[100] Some of these modifications are related to the fairy-tale functions as well as fairy-tale symbolism, as evidenced in this tale by Petrushevskaya's approach to home.

Petrushevskaya draws attention to socio-historical context also by directly inserting details that derive from contemporary reality. Apart from the examples in the tales above, such realistic details include substituting cramped apartments for fairy-tale dwellings or introducing recognizable places, as in "Sny devochki" ("A Girl's Dreams," 1996), where Girl-Princess meets an evil sorcerer at a hotel. "Glupaia printsessa" features one of Petrushevskaya's favourite topoi – – the dump. A Barbie doll as a magical helper also denotes the present day.[101] There are changes to the element of the quest, too. The element of the quest changes to plastic surgery in "Devushka-Nos" ("The Nose Girl," 1996), where a girl sets out on a quest to have her nose surgically enhanced;[102] or to begging for food in order not to starve, as in the cycle "Prikliucheniia Barbi."

Examples of details from the world of everyday reality call attention to the question of the fairy tale's relationship to everyday life. The causes of what Propp refers to as genre transformations frequently lie outside the folktale, and we will not grasp the evolution of the genre unless we consider its setting.[103] However, as he posits, even though the folktale is born out of life, it should reflect reality only weakly and "show a comparatively sparse sprinkling of elements from real life."[104] Everything that derives from reality, he continues, should be of secondary importance. Propp thus famously disregarded content, which he considered arbitrary, as it has no significance in the structure of a tale; and asserted that an understanding of content and its context are not required in the appreciation of the structure. Claude Lévi-Strauss subsequently criticized Propp's assertions and proposed instead a paradigmatic analysis and a

[101] Petrushevskaya combines contemporary reality with the supernatural elements in the vast majority of her fairy tales, but the former explicitly outweighs the latter. I study the element of magic in Chapter II.
[102] This tale was first published in the newspaper *Nedelia* 29 (1989).
[103] Vladimir Propp, "Fairy Tale Transformations," in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff (London: Routledge, 2014), 53.
[104] Ibid., 57.

more holistic approach to the genre.[105]

For the postmodern fairy tale, too, Propp's binary opposition, marked by an inherent syntagmatic (that is, linear and sequential) rigidity, precludes seeing it as a more dynamic narrative system, since the structure seen in this light overshadows, if not undermines, its paradigmatic aspect, that is, the context. The understanding of context has developed since the 1960s in folklore studies and was used as a key concept in determining the conditions in which tales are composed, transmitted, and received.[106] As the context draws attention to both a specific situation in which a text is produced as well as a broader cultural system of which it is part, it necessarily shifts the attention from function to meaning.

Direct and indirect references to material reality and ethical and social problems are the dominating element of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, and constitute the content and the context of these narratives. The references to social reality on which Petrushevskaya draws conspicuously shift the focus from the structure toward the content and the context. By saturating her plots with elements from everyday life Petrushevskaya adds colours and shades to her fairy tales' texture. The result is narrative three-dimensionality instead of prescribed flatness. Importantly, contemporary reality does not altogether invalidate conventional fairy-tale structure; neither do Petrushevskaya's structural modifications, but specific references to contemporary reality unsettle the impression of structural simplicity she creates.[107] Making explicit references to contemporary reality, and so revealing the context, allows Petrushevskaya to comment on actual social and at times political situations. The author's storytelling thus trends toward performativity, which

[105] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structure and Form: Reflections on a Work by Vladimir Propp," in *Theory and History of Folklore*, ed. by Anatoly Liberman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 167-188.
[106] For the notion of context in anthropology, see the works of Bronisław Malinowski. For the notion of context in folklore studies, see, for example: Dan Ben-Amos, "Context in Context," *Western Folklore* 52 (1993), 209-226; Alan Dundes, "Texture, Text, and Context" (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Mark Azadovsky, *A Siberian Tale Teller*, trans. by James R. Row (Austin: University of Texas, 1974).
[107] I investigate the category of the real and unreal in Chapter II.

places emphasis on the communicative context in which tales are performed, communicated, recounted, or used for a range of social and individual purposes.[108] Petrushevskaya's storytelling, which turns attention to said context, is thus read as performative communication that comments on ethical, social, and cultural situations in contemporary Russia.

The focus on social and ethical context is most explicit at the level of language, as it is the contemporary language Petrushevskaya's characters and narrators speak that further highlights the (over)representation of contemporary reality, including the quasi-naturalistic portrayal of everyday ugliness. Furthermore, the implications of language are more extensive. First, in line with the workings of metafiction, language draws attention to itself for the sake of highlighting its playful side. Second, through a specific manipulation, the narrator's language dissociates from the implied author's position, thereby disclosing the social and ethical context. Finally, what the linguistic and ensuing narratorial techniques create for the implied reader is equally complex, for although they destabilize reader's expectations and conceptions of the world in fairy-tale fiction, they create a sense of shared communal experience. In the following part of the chapter, I thus analyze the language of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in terms of both its creative and critical possibilities. I begin by examining the range of implications of use of language by the characters and then by the narrators.

Contemporary Urban Folklore and the Creative Qualities of Language

As Alexandra Smith points out, "Petrushevskaya subverts the standard form of the Russian language imposed on people through education and the mass media, by contrasting or

[108] Kimberly Lau, "Folklore," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales* (London: Greenwood Press, 2008), 362.

juxtaposing it to broken Russian and social dialects, especially contemporary slang."[109] Sigrid McLaughlin arrives at similar conclusions when she posits that coming from all walks of life, Petrushevskaya's characters use language that discloses their personality, level of education, and social class.[110] The uniqueness of Petrushevskaya's language has also been addressed by Victoria Vainer who argues that "somebody even coined the term 'tape recorder effect' to describe her plays. It was as if we were hearing ourselves thinking aloud."[111] Indeed, Petrushevskaya underscores in her interviews that the modus operandi in all of her works comprises collecting stories and eavesdropping on people's conversations. As a collector of urban stories, Petrushevskaya describes herself as a journalist of the day-to-day reality of the urban folk:

> Many people have told me stories of their lives—on trains, in queues, in hospitals, at bus stops. People are forever telling each other stories, but not many set store by them and not many people have tried to write them down. I carry these endless monologues around inside me and I remember them forever.[112]

The street for Petrushevskaya, about a hundred years after Vladimir Mayakovsky, who famously claimed that the street squirms without a tongue and it has nothing with which to shout and talk, seems to be precisely where her plots and language come from.[113] Although it is thought of as being immersed in the non-realist mode, Petrushevskaya treats the fairy tale as a realistic form.[114] The author's fairy tales rest on a solid foundation of reality, which is palpable especially through language and the emphasis on its oral qualities.

The language in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales may be described in the context of

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[109] Smith, "In Populist Clothes: Anarchy and Subversion in Petrushevskaya's Latest Fiction," 116.
[110] Sigrid McLaughlin, "Contemporary Soviet Women Writers," *Canadian Woman Studies* 10:4, 80.
[111] Victoria Vainer, "An Interview with Liudmila Petrushevskaya," *Theater* 20:3 (1989), 62; Tatiana Keeling, *Surviving in Post-Soviet Russia: Magical Realism in the Works of Pelevin, Petrushevskaya, and Ulitskaya* (Doctoral dissertation), 133.
[112] Sally Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature: Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45.
[113] "Улица корчится безъязыкая, ей нечем кричать, разговаривать" ("Облако в штанах," 1918).
[114] I discuss the realist and non-realist modes of representation in more detail in Chapter II.

contemporary urban folklore. According to Aleksandr Panchenko and Sergei Nekliudov, contemporary folklore studies are in essence studies of urban folklore: contemporary mass orality and urban anthropology.[115] In this respect, Nekliudov writes, we have now entered the era of post-folklore, or its new phase – urban folklore. Related to urban communities and largely interested in the urban street, post-folklore explicitly makes use of orality and is seemingly crude, stylistically sloppy, and created hastily. Petrushevskaya herself describes her language precisely along the lines of contemporary folklore:

> But when I started writing properly I stopped trying to imitate and wrote just as simply as I could, without metaphors or simile, in the voice people use to tell their story to another person on the bus—urgently, hastily, making sure you come to the point before the bus stops and the other person has to get off. And when you know that the story will get passed on, and that's the beginning of folklore—not traditional folklore, with all its embellishments and repetitions, but city folklore, that unrecognized murmur of city people that goes on all the time—the folklore of chance encounter. Such stories have to be told at speed, and the plot is never the point—sometimes they begin at the end, and the story consists in explaining how the end came about. Sometimes there can be no end in the traditional sense...[116]

Alluding to anecdotes, gossip, and urban legends, the language of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is colloquial, at times vulgar, and rich in "stylistic malapropisms and incongruities as well as substandard and hyper-correct phrases."[117] Owing to its visible resemblance to the [oral] voice of the contemporary streets of Moscow and its suburbs, the language in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales jolts the reader out of the expected fairy-tale linguistic setting. The latter is characterized by extravagant similes, flowery metaphors, and fanciful epithets; or, as Petrushevskaya herself posits, it is often decorative, "with all its embellishments and repetitions."[118] By employing everyday

[115] Sergei Nekliudov, "Posle fol'klora," *Zhivaia starina* 1 (1995), 1-5; Aleksandr Panchenko, "Folkloristika kak nauka," in *Pervyi Vserossiiskii Kongress Fol'kloristov: Sbornik dokladov, Vypusk 1* (Moscow: State Centre for Folklore, 2005), 72-95.
[116] Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature*, 46.
[117] McLaughlin, "Contemporary Soviet Women Writers," 80.
[118] Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature*, 46.

parlance, Petrushevskaya subverts the decorum of fairy-tale delivery. The author unearths everyday reality, as it were, without disguising it in stylistic ornamentation. Such expressive and excessive spoken language thus clashes with established fairy-tale language. Lüthi's argument is useful in understanding Petrushevskaya's style. The scholar argues that long and playful descriptions are attributes of the literary fairy tale, and violate the concise style of the folktale.[119] In this light, Petrushevskaya's succinct style and the apparently unadorned language her characters speak give the impression that her fairy tales approach oral post-folktales. The succinct and vivid telling of folktale is at the same time conveniently suited to Petrushevskaya's narrative style in general. The aforementioned linguistic lavishness of the fairy tale is at odds with Petrushevskaya's self-label as a writer of the "male mode." The latter focuses on the essentials of plot and character, as opposed to wallowing in the ornateness that Petrushevskaya, like many others, associates with women's style.[120]

Good cases in point reflecting post-folklore and its use of colloquial language are the tales quoted earlier, in which the use of everyday language, including slang and vulgarisms, pervades conversations between the characters. For example, having been confronted by her mother to explain why she is asking if papa has another "mom" ("А правда, что у папы есть еще одна мама?" 189), Ira answers that she heard it from their female cook who in turn had heard it from a woman at a tram stop ("Одна *тетя* на остановке трамвая," 189). After she is banished and sets up her veterinary clinic, Ira meets Piotr who confronts her gullibility, saying rather matter-of-factly: "*Ну* и *дура* ты! (...) А когда ты станешь королевой? Ведь любой аферист женится на тебе, если сочинит сказочку о своей любви к тараканам, а ты поверишь!" ("See how dumb you are! (…) And when you become a queen? Any crook will marry you if he only makes up a

[119] Lüthi, *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, 19.
[120] Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, 16.

fairy tale about his love for cockroaches, and you'll believe him!" 193). At the end of the tale, Piotr declares: "Как все-таки хорошо, что ты такая *дура глупенькая*! Тебя можно *облапошить*, как малого ребенка! И хорошо, что это именно я тебя *облапошил*, а не какой-нибудь *проходимец*, и я теперь твой муж, а не какой-нибудь мошенник! И как хорошо получилось, что я тебя давно люблю *и никому тебя не отдам*!" ("How good it is, all in all, that you're such a silly fool! You get bamboozled like a kid! And it's good that it's actually me who bamboozled you and not some crook; and I am your husband now, and not some rogue! And it has turned out so well, I've loved you for a long time now and I won't give you to anyone!" 195). This tale is an example of the everyday, corporeal nature of language that describes trivial circumstances. Stylistically, this language is apparently flat and unadorned, and tends towards simple statements. At the same time, it is uncensored, concrete, and richly visual.

Another tale from this cycle, "Printsessa Belonozhka, ili Kto liubit, nosit na rukakh" ("The Princess with the Lily-white Feet," 1996), is equally replete with everyday speech and stylized in the language of adolescents. It is a story of an exceptionally delicate and sensitive young princess who easily breaks into tears—"*чуть-что* – она плакала"—and is thus nicknamed by her family as "*плакса вакса гуталин, на носу горячий блин*" ("a crybaby and a wet noodle").[121] She falls in love with the prince, but the prince leaves, reducing the young princess to tears. She also needs to tend to the wounds caused by dancing and strolling with him. The princess is visited by a doctor, who quotes a popular saying: "*все до свадьбы заживет*" ("everything will heal up before the wedding"). Her old nanny takes the matter especially seriously as she decides to seek recourse from a wizard, who enigmatically announces that, "if someone loves you, he carries you in his arms." The whole court literally follows his words and carries the princess in their arms. The

[121] Petrushevskaya, "The Princess with the Lily-white Feet," trans. by Joanne Turnbull (not paginated, available only online), https://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-Literature/fairytale_3353.jsp (Accessed April 14, 2019).

nanny does it for especially long periods, which makes her grumble, as the narrator quotes her in direct speech: "Повар на кухне оставил ей не куриную ножку, а какой-то *волосатый куриный локоть* и что внуки одни бегают без присмотра, а *тут* живешь, выкладываешься, *как потный индюк, безо* всякой благодарности." ("Instead of a drumstick, the cook had left her some kind of hairy turkey elbow, and her grandchildren were running around the village alone without anyone looking after them. You live here, and you put yourself out like a plucked chicken, and you get no gratitude"). The use of simile and the choice of adjectives add especially to the everydayness of the language and its expressivity.

It turns out the princess is not always appreciative of the nanny's efforts, as the latter complains in the kitchen: "Принцесса только лила слезы, не отвечая ни 'спасибо', ни '*начхать*' ("With a downpour of tears, managing neither a 'thank you' nor an 'I couldn't care less'"). The doctor prescribes medicine for her ailments, but when it does not prove to be effective and the doctor conveniently leaves, the nanny's discontent becomes explicit: "'Уехал и уехал!' говорила няня после трех досрочных рюмочек. "Теперь он нам ни на что не нужен, *тьфу*! Это был врач? Любой санитар даст таблетку после еды три раза в день, и я не хуже могла бы за такие деньги." ("Good riddance to bad rubbish!" said the nurse, savouring her victory by tossing down, somewhat ahead of schedule, three shots of vodka. "What do we need him for? Feh, you call that a doctor? Any orderly can give you a pill three times a day after meals, and I could have done just as well for the money he got"). As it happens, the most effective cure for the princess' ailments is the prince himself who, magically, makes her forget about them. The prince comes to see the princess at her alleged deathbed, and greets her in an unliterary fashion: "*Привет*! Вот я и выздоровел! А ты что *валяешься* притворяешься? А *ну* вставай, тебя тут держат как больную." ("Hey, there! So I'm all recovered! What are you doing lying there, malingering? Come on, get up, they're treating you like some kind of invalid"). In the finale, the

prince takes her in his arms and kisses her, for, as the narrator tells us, he has read somewhere that this is indeed the way to awaken a princess; and the old nanny finally understands the meaning of the wizard's words.[122] Such often ludic use of orality influences the literariness of the tale, thereby contributing to genre parody and calling forth the reader's response to (fairy-tale) writing.

Other examples of Petrushevskaya's experimentation in storytelling via colloquial language, which feels experimental specifically as it features in [literary] fairy tales, include the aforementioned tale "Barbi ulybaetsia" ("Barbie Smiles") as well as "Barbi i kukol'nyi dom" ("Barbie and a Doll House," 1996), which showcase English borrowings that punctuate contemporary Russian language. For instance, when a Barbie doll asks the main Barbie heroine: "Это ты, Барби? *Хэлло*!" ("Is that you, Barbie? Hello!" 84). These tales display examples of everyday speech. As the Barbie doll realizes that she does not belong to the material world, she comes up with an ostensible reason for the dolls to bring her back where they found her. She claims that she was absent-minded that day because she matched a silver purse to white shoes: "Но я в тот день была такая *растеряха*" ("I was such a daydreamer that day," 85). The tale "Barbi i kukol'nyi dom" is replete with colloquialisms as well as mass media language. One day, pensioner Ivan who lives with a Barbie doll (takes care of her, makes a dollhouse and clothes for her) receives a phone call from a TV host looking for talented people: "*Алло*! Я ищу таланты!" 94. Ivan's talent indeed wins the public vote: "*Але*! Это телевидение? Мы, врачи скорой помощи, решили присудить приз кукольному дому!" ("Hullo! Is that TV? We, paramedics, have decided to award the prize to the dollhouse!" 98). Importantly, behind the playful

[122] This is Petrushevskaya's humorous sublimation of one aspect of the motif of love; that is, suffering from lovesickness and pining for the loved one as a common adolescent "disease." NB 'Sublimation' here is not a psychoanalytic term. Rather, it is a term Lüthi uses to describe the lightness and transparency after the folktale empties the motifs of their usual substance. See Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, 73.

experimentation with language lies an authorial critique, as the reader's attention is also directed to social background: the loneliness and frightful living conditions of the elderly as well as the impoverished condition of contemporary Russian language use.

The micro-stories of the cycle "Pus'ki biatye" (2003) constitute a separate example of Petrushevskaya's linguistic play. Owing to the language in which they are written, which is at the same time highly untranslatable, the tales in this cycle appear to be dedicated to children. They are phonetically innovative in that they mimic the way children speak (or the way one speaks to children). They are also lexically innovative in that they are assembled from new and seemingly incomprehensible words. These tales can still be decoded in terms of syntax in that they retain case agreement, number, tense, and gender. For example:

> Сяпала Калуша по напушке.
> А по напушке - оее! - Ляпупа хвиндиляет.
> Дохвиндиляла до Калуши, клямсы ако разбызила и волит:
> Киси-миси, Калушечка! Киси-миси, кузявенькая! (...)[123]

And:

> У Калуши — калушата: Канна, Манна, Гуранна и Кукуся.
> У Бутявки — бутявчонок: Гага Прюшка.
> И огды-егды бутявчонок Гага напызявил и-пызяву и оттырснул Кукусе:
> Кукуся@пуськи.ru
> О Кукуся! Шошляю Кукусю зюмо-зюмо!
> Кукуся+Бутявчонок =; ^)(^; Кукуся и Бутявчонок — бдан-бдан! Шошляю Кукусю!
> С шошлью — Бутявчонок, кукусин на обагды! Чмяк! Кукусин Гага П.:))[124]

Visually and aurally alike, they resemble *zaum* and bring to mind Velimir Khlebnikov's poem "Zakliatie smekhom" ("Incantation by Laughter," 1908-1909):

> О, рассмейтесь, смехачи! О, засмейтесь, смехачи! Что смеются смехами, что смеянствуют смеяльно. О, засмейтесь усмеяльно! О, рассмешиц надсмеяльных — смех усмейных смехачей! О, иссмейся рассмеяльно, смех надсмейных

[123] Petrushevskaya, *Dikie zhivotnye skazki. Morskie pomoinye rasskazy. Pus'ki biatye* (Moskva: Eksmo, 2006), 414.
[124] Ibid., 422.

> смеячей! Смейево, смейево, Усмей, осмей, смешики, смешики, Смеюнчики, смеюнчики. О, рассмейтесь, смехачи! О, засмейтесь, смехачи!

For the Russian Futurists, *zaum* was the trans-rational language that was to reunite all speakers beyond the bounds of ordinary parlance and serve as the foundation for a universal language. Khlebnikov's, and the Futurists', motive was to revitalize the lost contact between the signifier and the signified and recover the non-arbitrary relation between the two. They believed in the power of the word to create a new, universal language. Petrushevskaya's breaking away from mimetic conventions by using such *zaum*-like language, or semi-nonsense, is an attempt to parody but also to revitalize the word itself (the signifier). Admittedly, this linguistic manoeuvre might not necessarily be aimed at reclaiming the lost (unfinished?) project of bringing together the signifier and the signified. Petrushevskaya, after all, is all too aware of the opposite side of the spectrum; that is, of the fragmentation of today's world and language so as not to claim any illusion of restoring or evoking any universality or absolute categories. However, it is possible to suggest that children's language and language experimentation of this kind is a way to return to the basics, to the kind of primordial past contained in glossolalia and the fantastic lore of the spoken word, which has its roots in folklore. Thus, Petrushevskaya's language should not be reduced to the assertion that it is for her merely "a meaningless collection of sounds."[125] Quite the contrary, language in her fairy tales is a fertile ground for linguistic play and seemingly a revitalizing and joyous act for the author herself.[126] Finally, Petrushevskaya's linguistic play discredits fairy-tale writing—which, as noted earlier, is conventionally appreciated through its codified poetic language—and mocks its prescribed beauty by way of unceremoniously

[125] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 133.

[126] Petrushevskaya says: "У каждого слова своя энергия. Она никогда никому не подчинялась, сумела сохранить себя вопреки любым давлениям и указам. Это и есть, наверное, настоящее счастье" (Interview, Channel Moskva24, 2014), http://www.m24.ru/videos/38985). And elsewhere: "Мое божество — это русский язык. Язык это Бог, потому что он не имеет лица, не имеет ничего телесного, но он живой" (TV interview with Petrushevskaya, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqjuziE8NnE, Accessed April 14, 2019).

employing colloquial language. It is as though Petrushevskaya's fairy tales demolished the protective wall of poetry and beauty of the fairy tale by vulgarizing everyday speech. The corporeality of everyday language in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is in this sense self-referential and brings attention to itself as part of the author's play.

Broader Implications of Orality and Textuality

In Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, the spoken word of oral tradition and the written word of literary forms are intertwined, which points to Petrushevskaya's blurring of lines between the folktale and the fairy tale, and by extension between orality and textuality. The case of her fairy tales testifies to the ongoing vibrancy of the interplay between the written and the spoken word, even if it is urban legends that become the contemporary man's folktales. Petrushevskaya's resting on both of these anthropological bodies reflects contemporary transformations of oral folklore and literary fairy tale alike. As Bacchilega observes, the fairy tale in the first place is a "borderline," or transitional genre, for it bears the traces of orality, folkloric tradition, and sociocultural performance. Even when it claims to be folklore, the fairy tale is shaped by literary traditions with different social uses and users.[127]

Petrushevskaya's narrative strategies produce the sense of going beyond the literariness of the written medium toward the sound of contemporary speech, thereby breaking the confined space of visuality created in the act of reading. Ultimately, literariness is pushed away from its conventional form and acquires new dimensions. The characters' and, as we will see, the narrators' colloquial speech (orality) becomes suited for listening rather than reading and disrupts

[127] Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 3. For the question of the relationship between the folktale and the fairy tale, see, for example, Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, "Folklore as a Special Form of Creation," trans. by John O'Hara, *Folklore Forum* 13 (1980).

the linearity and sequentiality of the traditional written fairy tale.[128] Even though these tales unfold sequentially, the oral component gives the impression of breaking the flow of the narrative. It could be said, therefore, that the palpability and expressivity of everyday language brings life to the narrative and at the same time creates the impression of narrative disruption. The effect of this double mosaic is the switching back and forth between two simultaneous activities, listening and reading. For sound—the attribute of the oral narrator—puts the audience "in contact with the personal grounds of actuality"[129] and situates the listener "in the middle of actuality and of simultaneity," which is something the writer cannot do, since he or she "situates man in front of things and sequentially."[130] The immediacy of the spoken word, and the fluidity of its aurality, thus accentuates the tales' oral experience. In this light, then, Petrushevskaya undermines (parodies) textuality and from this perspective her fairy tales become subversive. Conversely, however, it could be stated that it is only a device for Petrushevskaya, since the complex role of language as used by the characters and narrators in her fairy tales may ultimately owe more to literature than to oral tradition.

The Critical Qualities of Language

Apart from having a metafictional effect, the use of language in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales also discloses the social and ethical context of everyday reality. Examples of this aspect evoke a critique of today's Russia and a poignant message about the brutality of everyday life, and are conveyed by such devices as wordplay, humour, and irony. The tale "Osel i kozel" ("A Donkey and a Goat" but also "An Ass and an Asshole," 1996) is a case in point. It tells the story of a city dweller who returns home by bus and does not notice an older lady standing next to him. Like a

[128] Bruce Rosenberg, *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 13.
[129] Rosenberg, *Folklore and Literature*, 174.
[130] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (Routledge, 1982), 128.

number of other Petrushevskaya's stories, this story opens up to more than one interpretation: it is both humorous and distressing. It is only as the hero is about to get off the bus that he offers his seat to the lady who in turn answers him, rather sarcastically: "Раз ты такой вежливый, то пусть все, что тебе сегодня пожелают, исполнится!" ("Since you are so polite, then let everything that others wish for you today come true!" 131). The play on language is evident in that it alludes to the role of the lady as a witch who, following folklore, puts a spell on the man; or a witch in a more figurative sense, that is, a grumpy older lady seen frequently on public transportation in Moscow. As he believes the lady cast a spell on him, he grows concerned with what others say to him later in the day. For example, what his "witty" ("остроумная") wife says: "Да чтобы духу твоего здесь не было вообще и на веки веков" ("That you get out of my sight at all and for all time," 131) and "Да чтоб ты сдох!" ("I want you to die!" 133); and another fellow city dweller in the bus: "Сойди с моей больной ноги, *осел*!" ("Get off my sore foot, you ass!" 133); or a group of children he meets on his way back from work who, drinking beer, ask him for a cigarette and express their discontent at the negative answer: "*Ну* и *рой* отсюда, *козел*, *пока рога тебе не порюхали*!" ("Beat it, you asshole, before you get whupped!" 133). In the end, the man is relieved that the spell the older lady from the bus put on him was to take effect only one day: "И, счастливый и *спокойный*, он схватил со стола кусок хлеба, со сковородки хвост рыбы и пошел смотреть телевизор, все равно что." ("And, happy and peaceful / carefree, he took a piece of bread from the table, a fish tale from the frying pan, and went to watch TV, didn't matter what," 133). However, the ending merely gives an impression of being happy. Although the narrator states that the man is relieved that the spell was to take effect for one day only, the reader realizes that such situations are disturbingly common in everyday life. Thus, the underlying meaning of the wordplay behind the title ("A Donkey and a Goat") de-emphasizes the innocuous folktale title and instead emphasizes the crudeness and hostility of people's behaviour ("An Ass

and an Asshole"). This crudeness pertains to the hero in question as well, as is concealed in another wordplay. The word *spokoinyi* has a double meaning: it can mean both 'peaceful' and 'carefree', in the sense of being free from responsibility (*lishennyi zabot, trevog*). The ironic wordplays thus implicitly communicate a critique of social mores and contemporary man's lack of self-will that makes life undemandingly easy for him.

An interrelated and relevant question appears, which pertains to the agency behind this irony and wordplay. This question requires a close examination of the narrator and her relation to the text, the implied author, and the implied reader.[131]

The Narrator

Commentators have considered Petrushevskaya's prose narrators as driving the reader away from the text. Olga Slavnikova, for example, suggests that the reader feels insulted by such narrative distance: "Petrushevskaya maintains a distance between herself and what she is describing, and the quality of that distance is such that the reader senses him—or herself being subjected to a scientific experiment. For the reader, Petrushevskaya is out of bounds."[132] Similarly, Nina Kolesnikoff, while analyzing Petrushevskaya's *Pesni vostochnykh slavian* (*Songs of Eastern Slavs*), suggests that the author's narrators reduce the interaction between the reader and the text:

> Instead of having a personalized narrator, relating personal experiences in the first person singular, the tales are written by an unidentified third person who resembles an omniscient narrator. This quasi-omniscient narrator stands totally apart from the events narrated and offers little commentary on or evaluation of the story. As a dispassionate and uninvolved storyteller, the narrator of the tales never enters into a direct dialogue with the reader. The tales avoid any direct appeal to the reader, never soliciting his/her response. As a result, there is no exchange of

[131] Petrushevskaya's scholars refer to her narrator's voices as female. Examples include Lyudmila Parts, Benjamin Sutcliffe, and Helena Goscilo. For the sake of consistency, I also refer to them as women.
[132] Olga Slavnikova, "Petrushevskaia and Emptiness," *Russian Studies in Literature* 37:2 (2001), 51-71.

> roles between the speaker and the addressee as required by the oral story. The dialogic structure of the oral story is replaced by a monologic narrative.[133]

Lyudmila Parts has also remarked the narrator's lack of compassion and overwhelming indifference, and referred to her as unreliable, since the reader cannot trust her voice:

> (...) While the narrator condemns the Lady with the Dogs, the reader is free to condemn the narrator for her refusal or inability to empathize. Her meanness and cruelty make her suspect. This reaction on the part of the reader would therefore be produced by the absence of the conventional way of affecting the reader through the unmasking of the narrator. She unmasks herself by being given unlimited freedom to judge, but then there are also those who might agree with her. The author's virtual absence allows for this alternative as well.[134]

Moreover, Petrushevskaya's unorthodox ambivalence has been criticized along the lines of endorsing a moral vacuum of impartiality.[135]

My argument pertains to the aforementioned interaction between the text, the implied author, and the implied reader and rests on the assumption that the narrators in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales only partly fit the interpretation of her prose narrators. By citing examples of different tales taken from the fairy-tale cycles quoted earlier, I argue that by using the same colloquial language that the characters speak the narrator is on the one hand unreliable and disassociates from the implied author and, on the other, creates the impression of participating in the shared communal experience for the reader. First, I establish that the reader is jolted by the quality of the everyday orality of the *skaz* narrator. The *skaz* narrator's voice creates a gap between genre expectations and, to paraphrase Kolesnikoff, may be seen as reducing the interaction between the

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[133] Nina Kolesnikoff, "The Generic Structure of Ljudmila Petruševskaja's Pesni Vostochnyx Slavjan," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 37:2 (1993), 220-230. Quoted in Keeling, *Surviving in Post-Soviet Russia*, 131.
[134] Parts, "Down the Intertextual Lane: Petrushevskaia, Chekhov, Tolstoy," 77-89. Quoted in Keeling, *Surviving in Post-Soviet Russia*, 132.
[135] Quoted in Sutcliffe with regard to Stephen Hutchings' distinction between Russia's cultural binarism and European dualism. Sutcliffe, *Engendering Byt: Russian Women's Writing and Everyday Life from I. Grekova to Liudmila Ulitskaia* (Doctoral dissertation), 12.

reader and the text. Furthermore, building on Parts's argument, I demonstrate that the reader's attention is also drawn to the unreliable narrator's judgmental and/or sarcastic comments and wordplay, which at the same time unveil the implied author's social and ethical critique. Finally, I argue that the narrator's emotiveness (and to some extent excessive emotionality) brings the implied reader closer to those characters whose actions point to what is good (*dobro*) and kindness (*dobrota*), thereby creating a certain bond between the reader and the text. The narrator's focalizing techniques of identifying with the good, often suffering and marginalized characters, as well as the way the narrator allows the characters to speak for themselves, produce an emotional effect in the reader.

The *Skaz* Narrator as an Unreliable Narrator

Skaz as a narratorial technique dates back to oral folklore traditions. It has been described by Boris Eichenbaum and further analyzed by such scholars as Viktor Vinogradov, Yury Tynyanov, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Boris Uspensky.[136] Eichenbaum, who pioneered the field in his work on Nikolai Gogol and Nikolai Leskov, considered *skaz* a form of stylization oriented toward oral speech and used for the purposes of defamiliarization. In a related vein, Vinogradov saw *skaz* as "a self-willed literary, artistic orientation toward an oral monologue of the narrative type; [as] an artistic imitation of monological speech that contains a narrative plot and is constructed, as it were, as if it were being directly spoken."[137] The *skaz* narrator appears to be unaware of his or her literary function and therefore transmits the story in the form of colloquial speech that carries elements of improvisation and spontaneity. However, as Vinogradov and Bakhtin commented,

[136] Boris Eichenbaum, *Literatura* (Leningrad: n.p., 1927); Vinogradov, "Problema skaza ν stilistike," 27 and 33; Vinogradov, *Stilistika; Teoriia poeticheskoi rechi; Poetika* (Moscow: USRR Academy of Sciences Peess, 1963); Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of The Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1973); Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1984.
[137] Victor Vinogradov, "The Problem of *Skaz* in Stylistics," trans. by Martin P. Rice, *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 12 (1978), 244.

Eichenbaum considered *skaz* as oriented toward oral speech without considering it first and foremost as oriented toward the other's speech, since an orientation toward oral speech is necessarily inherent in any narrated story. Accordingly, in his analysis of points of view, Uspensky asserted that *skaz* occurs when the author constructs the narrator's speech in such a way that the author's and narrator's voices do not overlap.[138] It follows that orality, spontaneity, and colloquialisms are only one, aesthetic, side of *skaz* narration. The other side constitutes its inherent double-voicedness, that is, the interaction between the narrator and the implied author, who have a different evaluative position.

My understanding of Petrushevskaya's *skaz* narrator largely draws on the aforementioned findings and includes understanding her [the narrator] first of all through the defamiliarizing technique of linguistic discrediting. The narrator's voice in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is socially distinct, as it is verbally associated with the urban folk. Just as Petrushevskaya's characters examined in the preceding section establish a low colloquial tone by employing idioms and hyperbolized exclamations, so too do her narrators. This reinforces the impression of the roughness of contemporary reality. The impression that Petrushevskaya's narrators are our fellow city dwellers, together with the un-literary language they speak thus takes the reader out of the fairy-tale setting, since this colloquial tone adds to the sense of absence of literary flavour. The narrators' speech deviates from the literary norm on various levels: phonetic (such as variant accents and verbalization of gestures), morphologic (obvious deformations or the lack of literary flavour), lexical (deformations, particles), and syntactic (simplified or improper syntax). This apparent dissociation from the literary standards and this specific kind of orality thus allow for an

[138] Uspensky*, A Poetics of Composition*, 11 and 103.

interpretation of Petrushevskaya's narrators within the context of *skaz*.[139]

For example, in the tale "Schastlivye koshki" ("Happy Cats," 1996), a young girl desperately wants to live the life of a cat, being certain that cats lead much happier lives than hers, since they do not need to go to school.[140] She encounters an alcoholic wizard who fulfills her wish and turns her into a cat. It turns out, however, that her life as a cat is miserable and finding food is rather difficult. The narrator, using familiar everyday language, describes a scene from her new life thus: "Кошка, *голодная как волк*, выбежала на улицу (...) и *полезла* в близлежащую помойку, но там хозяйничали жуткие вороны с огромными, как ножницы, клювами, и пришлось опять сидеть под машиной в ожидании ночи." ("The cat, as hungry as a wolf, ran out to the street (…) and clambered to the nearby dump, but horrible crows with beaks huge as scissors were bossying up, so she had to again sit under the car awaiting the night," 135). The use of the unsophisticated simile "as hungry as a wolf" is stylized precisely to resemble everyday language.

The narrators use popular proverbs and sayings, which are often casually affixed as the moral at the end of the tales, and which further highlight the everydayness of language. For example, in the tale "Volshebnaia ruchka" ("A Magical Pen," 1996), the patience of a wizard waiting in line in a stationery store reaches its limit ("терпение у колдуна *лопнуло*," 127) and he presents an annoying child with a magical pen that is then stolen from the child by a family of pickpockets.[141] In the end, the pickpockets metamorphose and turn towards the good, with the following, rather straightforward moral of the tale: "Бесплатное обходится иногда дороже,

[139] Petrushevskaya's use of narration has been commented upon with regard to her short stories within the context of *skaz*. Kolesnikoff, for example, brings attention to Petrushevskaya's use of the *skaz* technique to create dramatic tension in her stories by producing incongruity between the authorial voice and the "fabula." On the other hand, Elena Nevzgliadova asserts that there is no "fabula" but a lyrical voice that transmits several things simultaneously and produces a strong emotional impact on the reader. Nevzgliadova thus reads Petrushevskaya's stories as a synthesis of prose and poetry.
[140] This tale was first published in the journal *Novyi mir* 8 (1993).
[141] This tale first appeared in the journal *Oktiabr'* 4 (1996).

особенно ворам!" ("What is free sometimes costs more, especially for thieves!" 130).

Additionally, the narrator refers to the family of pickpockets as "good" ("добрая семья," 128) and "celebrated" ("знаменитая семья," 128), which is sarcastic, and thus seen by the reader as judgmental. The reader is forced to interpret the story on his or her own and not rely on the narrator because the family in fact abandons their disreputable trade and starts doing honest work. The narrator's critical stance thus increases the tension between the reader and the narrator because this stance is incongruous with the text, in which the characters, again, actually do become honest.

This observation prompts the question of the narrator in the folk and fairy tale, which will help us better understand Petrushevskaya's narratorial strategies. A conventional fairy-tale narrator, an important narrative element of fairy-tale production, is external and impersonal and his or her straightforward statements carry no explicit mark of human perspective—gender, class or individuality.[142] It is an omniscient third-person narrator who is presumed to be objective thanks to the predictable "once upon a time" frame. Similarly, the storyteller in the folktale is withdrawn and the situations and actions are left to speak for themselves. The folk storyteller is typically reluctant to offer the listeners the freedom to experience emotions, such as fear, for themselves. Conversely, Petrushevskaya's narrators do not correspond to narrators in the conventional understanding of the folktale and the fairy tale, as they visibly acquire the qualities of *skaz* narration and, as we will further observe, do not shy away from passing judgment. The latter quality moves them closer to the category of unreliable narrators; that is, untrustworthy voices who, via such devices as humour, irony, and wordplay, overstate, misreport, misinterpret,

[142] Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, 34.

and/or misevaluate the characters and events described.[143] Moreover, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in particular have narrators who understate or ignore the social and ethical context of those fairy tales.

Textual evidence of the *skaz* narrator's unreliability is copious. The tale "Barbi volshebnitsa" ("Barbie the Wizard," 1996) begins laconically, pointing to the narrator's quasi-omniscience: "*Так получилось*, что Барби осталась одна" ("It so happened that Barbie was left alone," 87). At the same time, with the initial "it so happened" the narrator understates the negative social aspect;[144] namely, the fact that Barbie was found in a dump by a poor old man who once was a carpenter. Grandpa Ivan initially wants to sell the doll at the market. In the end, though, he decides to keep it. The implied reader senses that the hero does so because he wants to be useful to someone and to have someone of whom he can take care. This tale also features addresses to the listener/reader, one of the characteristics of *skaz* narration, which, to some extent corresponds to the folktale: "Барби подобрала пуговицы и быстро их пришила, *а как – не спрашивайте*, ведь она была волшебная!" ("Barbie picked the buttons and quickly sewed them on. How – don't ask; she was magical after all," 88). And: "Затем Барби зашила пиджак на локте, под мышками у карманов, подмела пол (*как – не спрашивайте*, *это секрет, который мы когда-нибудь откроем*)." ("Then, Barbie sewed elbow, underarm and pocket patches on the jacket, and swept the floor (how – don't ask, it's a secret we will reveal one day)," 88). In the folktale, though, direct addresses typically appear only at the very end of the story as stylistic fixtures that create a sense of subjectivity. For example, "I was there, I drank wine and

[143] According to Wayne Booth, a narrator "is *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not." Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 158-159. For the notion of unreliability, see, for example: Ansgar Nünning "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration: Synthesizing Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches," in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by J. Phelan and P. J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 98-107; James Phelan, "Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of Lolita," *Narrative* 15 (2007), 222-238.
[144] Phelan refers to the situation when the narrator is deliberately not sufficient as underinterpretation and underevaluation.

beer, but now we must leave the tale..." In this case, the direct addresses are intended to offer humour but also parody the improbable properties of magical helpers in folktales and fairy tales.

In the tale "Sekret Marileny" ("Marilena's Secret," 1996), a wizard, unable to stomach rejection, takes his vengeance on two ballerina sisters and turns them into a single obese girl.[145] The narrator unorthodoxly explains the reason for the wizard's hostility as the following: "Никто его не любил, даже папа с мамой (...) Колдун мстил всем, кто его не любил, он буквально смеялся над бедными, бессильными человеческими существами, а они платили ему страхом и ненавистью." ("No one loved him, not even his dad and his mom (...) The wizard was vengeful toward everyone who didn't love him, he literally laughed at poor, helpless human beings, and they paid him back with fear and hatred," 147). With some arguably reasonable insight into psychology, albeit with a peculiar simile, the *skaz* narrator suspects the wizard is a sad, unloved person: "*Может быть*, если бы нашлась душа и позаботилась о нем, *он бы и засиял, как медная сковородка у заботливой хозяйки*." ("Perhaps if there were one soul who would take care of him, he would shine up like a caring housewife's copper frying pan," 147). It is important to note that the narrator again hides behind the uncertain "perhaps," shying away from omniscience that pertains to the serious question of man's psyche and morality. At the same time, the explicitly colloquial tone of the simile may strike the reader as inappropriate next to such weighty questions. This is thus another example of tension that is consequently instilled in the reader.

Apart from concealing information, which creates the sense of quasi-omniscience that borders on misinformation, the narrator also adds personal remarks, which creates a sense of omniscience that borders on overstatement. For example, when she claims that obesity is a kind of wizardry: "*Кстати*, многие полные люди, похоже, заколдованы: как бы они не голодали,

[145] This tale was first published in the journal *Oktiabr'* 4 (1996).

все равно вес возвращается, *словно* по волшебству." ("Actually, many overweight people are under the spell in just this way: no matter how much they diet, the weight comes back just the same; as if by magic," 148). The narrator creates a similar effect by producing emotionality that is sensed as sarcastic or demeaning, and inspires the reader's affection for the character at the same time. For example, direct reference to the obese character as "our fatty" ("наша толстуха," 147) or her description as "a cheerful fatty with a pretty face" ("веселая толстуха с хорошенькой мордочкой," 149). Such colloquial and familiar language is meant to create an emotional reaction from the reader.

As the former ballerina sisters switch to a new lifestyle of weight-lifting and eating a fried bull at the circus, the narrator directly addresses the reader with a dose of irony: "В искусстве надо сильно удивлять публику, иначе *подохнешь* с голоду." ("In art, you have to give the audience a mighty shock, otherwise you will starve to death," 149). In the happy ending of the tale, the *skaz* narrator directly addresses the listener/reader again: "Да, *помнишь*, в сказке о Золушке Евгения Шварца? Во всех затруднительных случаях надо танцевать!" ("You remember, in the tale 'Cinderella' by Evgeny Shvarts? Whenever life gets difficult, you have to dance!" 157). The alternating examples of omniscience and shying away from it have a twofold effect in this tale: they manifest the narrator's unreliability and create uncertainty in the reader, for he or she must look for his or her own answer by decoding the narrator's understatements and overstatements.

In the tale "Prints s zolotymi volosami" ("The Prince with Golden Hair," 1996), too, the narrator is unreliable.[146] She recounts the story of the eponymous prince, who, as she adds, was actually born bald ("*вернее*, он родился-*то* лысым," 217). Such prosaic detail creates a sense of omniscience but interrupts the narrative and the interaction between the reader and the text.

[146] This tale was first published in the journal *Novyi mir* 8 (1993).

Furthermore, Petrushevskaya's *skaz* narrator uses explanatory or qualifying words and phrases (*vvodnye slova*), such as "actually," "needless to say" or "of course," as well as interjections and modifiers when she provides personal explanations or remarks. These are characteristic of oral speech but also produce a sense of subjectivity that is masked under the attempt to be objective and omniscient.[147] What we observe, then, is the shifting stance between omniscience and a kind of quasi-omniscience that produces indeterminacy, and thus unreliability.[148]

The problem ascribed to the boy in this tale is the questionable status of his father. The royal court suspects that the boy's father is not the king but a red-haired messenger who once visited the boy's mother. The narrator conveys the crudeness of everyday language, and at the same time the social mores of the judgmental characters, by cautiously hiding behind reported speech. When the mother is banished from the kingdom, the narrator says: "*Короче*, никто не стал ничего скрывать, дамы сказали свое слово, что *черного кобеля не отмоешь добела* и (...) ее вытолкали взашей вместе с ее *пащенком* из дворца и из города, хорошо не казнили, сказали дамы." ("Long story short, no one was hiding anything, the ladies chimed in to say wash a dog, comb a dog: still a dog, and (...) they chucked her along with her whelp out of the castle and away from the city; at least they didn't lynch her, said the ladies," 218). Such hiding behind reported speech is meant to convey the narrator's apparent objectivity.

The journey to the mother's hometown is replete with danger. On this journey, the boy is taken for a saint and an incarnation of Jesus, especially as his hair turns into gold. The mother and the child thus become objects of monetary gain. As the narrator suggests, offering a pseudo-

[147] The comments of Petrushevskaya's narrators are superfluous, since the characters in the folktale act in isolation and the basis and nature of their existence should not be unveiled. See Lüthi, *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, 45.

[148] My working definitions largely correspond to what Genette termed as 'zero focalization', which involves an omniscient narrator who knows and says more than the characters; and 'internal focalization', which involves a narrator who says only what the characters know. On the notion of focalization, and the related 'perspective' and 'point of view', see Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

generalized statement with a sense of bitter irony towards man's dishonourable side: "Люди *ведь* гораздо умней, чем мы о них думаем, особенно когда речь идет о деньгах." ("People are after all much smarter than we think, especially when it comes to money," 221). At some point, they both work in a circus as the main attraction, and the audience, according to the narrator's subjective evaluative opinion, anxiously awaits their appearance: "Они не обращали внимания на танцы обезьян и шутки клоунов, не смеялись, не покупали мороженое, никому, *идиоты*, не хлопали, а только ждали момента, когда вывезут повозку с матерью и ребенком." ("They weren't paying attention to the monkeys' dances and clowns' jokes, they were neither laughing nor buying ice cream, they didn't, the idiots, applaud anyone but were only waiting for the moment when the cart with the mother and the child was to be rolled out," 223). As she does not relate the events routinely but in a voice replete with commentaries and evaluative remarks, she gives the impression of being almost directly involved in the tales she tells. Such directness on the part of the narrator thus necessarily precludes objectivity. Petrushevskaya's narrator is in this sense unreliable, for, even in the third-person, she is overly subjective and emotional, coming close to a first-person narrator instead.

As the mother-princess reminisces about her hometown and her parents who wanted their beautiful daughter to be happy, the narrator adds another pseudo-generalized statement, which causes further ambivalence in the reader, since it may also be read as mocking: "*Правда, по справедливости надо сказать,* что к этому стремится весь человеческий род, все семьи надеются на выведение особо ценной породы детей." ("Indeed, in all fairness, one must say that all of humankind aims for this; every family hopes to produce a particularly valuable breed of children," 224). The mother and the child finally reach her hometown, which is meanwhile undergoing a "hullabaloo" ("в городе происходил *полный тарарам*," 231) and kingdoms seem to be at war, creating the sense of the end of the world according to the prophecy of Sodom and

Gomorrah. The narrator's invocation of Biblical towns is a latent social critique when the reader recalls that these towns were destroyed for the wickedness of their inhabitants. Meanwhile, everyone is waiting for the saviour, and the saviour finally appears: "Шлюпка привезла на берег *знаете кого*?" ("The dinghy brought to the shore, you know who?" 232). Ironically, the saviour is the child's father who has come to retrieve his family. The tale draws to its happy ending as the reunited family travels back home, even though the home has been captured by certain young people in leather jackets: "*Надо ли говорить*, что, *разумеется*, вся эта компания, приехав в королевство, не была допущена сойти на берег (...) Всем управляли уже новые молодые люди, быстрые, в кожаных куртках, и бывшие король с королевой были счастливы, что удалось уплыть и никого не арестовали." ("Needless to say that, of course, this entire lot, having arrived at the kingdom, was not allowed to come to the shore (...) Everything was already under the control of young fast people in leather jackets; but the former king and queen were happy that they managed to sail away and no one was arrested," 233). The king and queen's happiness offers another portion of mixed feelings for the reader, since that happiness involves escaping persecution and prosecution just to end up in another presumably sinister place governed by the "young people in leather jackets." The reference to the mysterious young men in leather jackets is thus another example of understatement that is camouflaged by the narrator's apparent omniscience.

One conclusion that becomes apparent is that the unreliability of Petrushevskaya's *skaz* narrators reflects Bakhtin's position regarding *skaz*; namely, that this technique is not only pointed toward the stylization of orality and colloquialism but it is also inherently double-voiced. The reader senses that Petrushevskaya's *skaz* narrator is the bearer of an evaluative position different from that of the implied author and reader. Specifically, by way of irony, sarcasm, and humour as well as understatements and overstatements both figures express themselves at the

same time, and prove to be dissociated, which in turn produces tension and ambiguity for the reader. While discussing Petrushevskaya's short stories, David A. Lowe, whose premise corresponds to Bakhtin's assertion, arrives at similar conclusions, suggesting that Petrushevskaya's *skaz* narration strives for the illusion of orality and the complete distancing of narrator from author.[149]

Another conclusion that transpires from the above examples resounds with Parts's argument. Although the narrator in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is not indifferent and callous as she is in the story "Dama s sobakami" ("The Lady with the Dogs," 1993), and arguably in Petrushevskaya's prose in general, her unreliability stimulates (but does not preclude, as Kolesnikoff posits) significant interaction between the reader and the text. The indeterminacy produced by way of creating the sense of omniscience and quasi-omniscience, which entails negotiating between the narrator's superfluous and biased comments and understatements, and "forces the reader to become the missing counterpart to the narrator's voice."[150] In this sense, the *skaz* narrator in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales dialogically directs attention to the reader's response.

The Bonding Qualities of Language

Lowe's conclusion about the complete distancing of the narrator from the author in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is not altogether apt with regard to all of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. I argue that unlike Petrushevskaya's prose, the narrators in her fairy tales are not dispassionate and uninvolved; and demonstrate that the *skaz* narrator, the implied reader, and the implied author do not always have a different evaluative position. My understanding of the narrator in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales resembles that of Alexandra Smith. The scholar concludes her

[149] David Lowe, *Russian Writing Since 1953: A Critical Survey* (New York: Ungar, 1987), 195-197.
[150] Parts, "Down the Intertextual Lane," 79.

analysis of Petrushevskaya's novel *Malen'kaia volshebnitsa. Kukolnyi roman* (*The Little Witch: Doll Novel*, 1996) thus: "The gap between narrating voices (among them Petrushevskaya and on some occasions Val'kiria, the evil Sorceress) and popular voice are almost non-existent. Petrushevskaya recognizes their [the "poor people's"] distinctive identity and cultural autonomy by making their voices heard and through her personal sympathy to their problems."[151] Following Smith's cue, I suggest that Petrushevskaya's narrators are unique specifically in her fairy tales, as they emotively direct the reader's attention to the plot characters, namely the poor, the marginalized, as well as those characters who choose what is good (*dobro*) and kindness (*dobrota*). The quality of the narrators' tone is markedly different in this segment of Petrushevskaya's oeuvre, as it expresses emotional partiality that is not felt by the reader as irony or sarcasm. To be sure, the narrators continue to be unreliable, but by identifying with the characters' suffering, they create a melodramatic emotional effect in the reader, and so build a certain bond between the reader and the text, and by extension between themselves and the implied author.

For instance, with the little money that he earned by selling his handmade box, the old man buys bread and milk and shares this modest meal with his Barbie doll: "Наевшись, он отнес *кусочек* хлеба и чашку молока *куколке – почему, неизвестно*. Ему, *наверно*, было приятно о ком-то позаботиться, о каком-то еще более слабом существе." ("Having eaten his fill, he took a little piece of bread and a cup of milk to the little doll – who knows why. He was probably pleased to take care of someone, of some even weaker being," 89). Although the narrator claims that who knows why the man shares some bread with the doll, the reader interprets this situation from a social perspective. What the narrator hints at is loneliness, especially the loneliness of the elderly. In this example, Grandpa Ivan and the doll are presented through the subjective

[151] Smith, "In Populist Clothes," 122.

perception of the narrator who tends to understate the negative social background, even though she points to it. The reader senses, however, that the narrator is empathetic and compassionate toward fellow ordinary people who are struck by loss and face acute misery. This feeling is conveyed particularly through the diminutives "кусочек" and "куколка."

The tale "Barbi-volshebnitsa i les," analyzed in the section on structure, gives a full picture of the vulgarity of contemporary language and at the same time proffers a powerful social critique. The narrator in this tale draws back from personal over- and understatements and instead tells the story via reported speech, thus letting the characters speak for themselves. When Masha Barbie ventures into the forest to look for Grandpa Ivan, she overhears a conversation between two dogs: "А чтоб ты оказалась в капкане, *сука*, где подох твой седьмой муж дядя Тузик!"[152] ("You should get caught in a trap, you bitch, where your seventh husband, good ol' Tuzik, croaked!" 101). Consequently, as she is waiting for the culprit who had set the trap, Masha overhears a conversation between him and his mother, who is unhappy about her son stealing food from her: "Есть он хочет! Я *т-тебе* дам воровать у матери!" (...) "*Ща* я тебя поймаю... Шкуру сворочу... Мясо сварю..." (...) "Одна кожа да кости! *Че* тут варить! Шкура драная и все!" ("He's hungry! I will show you, stealing from your mother! (...) I'll catch you... Skin you alive... Cook you alive... (...) Nothing but skin and bones! What's there to cook! Ragged skin, that's all!" 103). The quality of language the characters speak reflects the extent of their inhumanity. The narrator conveniently hides behind the direct speech of the characters, and thus allows them to express themselves.

Although the bitterly ironic reference to human relations in post-Soviet Russia is sombre, a glimmer of hope appears. As the characters begin to transform into humans again, their

[152] It is important to note that there is a sense of ambiguity, since apart from the derogatory meaning of the informal usage of the word *suka*, it also refers to a female dog, fox, or wolf.

language becomes more tender, supplied with diminutives: "Не бросай меня, мама! У меня льется кровь! Я подохну здесь!" ("Don't leave me, mom! I am bleeding! I will die here!" 104). "Мама, мама, ты меня не узнала? Мама, я погибаю." ("Mom, mom, you didn't recognize me? Mom, I am dying," 104). "И я погибаю, *сынок.*" ("I am dying, too, sonny," 104). "Помоги, помоги маме, *сыночка*." ("Help, help your mom, sonny," 104). "Мама, как бы я хотел снова стать человеком, *мамочка*!" ("Mom, how I would like to become a human again, mommy!" 105). "Я бы тоже хотела стать человеком, но я уже не человек, *сынок*! Я зверь, *сынок*. Прости меня, *сынок*." ("I would also like to become a human, but I no longer am a human, sonny! I am a beast, sonny. Forgive me, sonny," 105). The tale, albeit replete with violence, ends happily, therefore suggesting faint hope. The sudden change of language that the characters speak coincides with their moral metamorphosis, and is at the same time accompanied by the physical metamorphosis common in folk and fairy tales. The moral transformation is by no means sentimental especially as the reader senses such inhuman interaction as dreadfully realistic. Rather, it indicates the author's examination of what it means to be human and at the same does not preclude the author's belief in man. Through the characters' language, Petrushevskaya thus creates certain indeterminacy between the dark visions of the material world (*byt*) and the elevating and emotional moments of man's spiritual world (*bytie*).

The narrator's use of language changes accordingly. The narrator employs an emotional style by manifesting her disapproval of the negative events described and then by changing her approach as the characters morally transform. For instance, when the Barbie doll overhears the conversation between the inhuman humans who turn into animals: "*К сожалению*, Барби понимала язык собак и смутилась." ("Unfortunately, Barbie understood the language of dogs and was embarrassed," 101). The narrator takes the liberty to describe the culprits by using augmentatives and adverbs that indicate her disapproval of the culprits' actions: "У парня три

рогатки, капкан и *мама-пьяница*, которая одобряет поведение сына и *охотно* варит суп из голубей, а то из собак, так как в доме нечего есть, она все пропивает." ("The boy has three slingshots, a trap, and a drunkard mom who endorses her son's behaviour and readily makes pigeon or even dog soup since there is nothing to eat at home, and she spends all her money on booze," 102). The boy, Plague, at the sight of an empty trap "loudly swore" ("*громко* выругался," 103); and, angry, the mother "threw the fox-cub to the ground (the fox-cub squealed)" ("бросила лисенка оземь (лисенок взвизгнул)," 103) and "at the top of her voice swore and spat (...) but then turned into a large she-wolf, dirty and ragged" ("*громогласно* выругалась и сплюнула (...), но тут же превратилась в большую волчицу, *грязную* и *драную*," 104). However, from the moment both characters transform and re-acquire human traits, the narrator's language re-acquires diminutives and emotive words to underscore a positive relationship to the pitiful characters: "А *лисенок* отвечал жалобным визгом" ("And the fox-cub answered with a sorrowful yelp," 104), "волчица плакала" ("the she-wolf was crying," 104), "*лисенок* подполз к волчице и уткнулся в ее *теплый* бок, а она, плача, стала вылизывать его *больную*, *раненую ножку*" ("the fox-cub crawled to the she-wolf and nestled in her warm flank and she, crying, started licking clean his sore, wounded little leg," 104).

Using such an emotional style is meant to direct attention to the suffering characters and evoke their perspective. Thus, identifying with them is meant to produce the effect of empathy in the reader. What is equally important, the examples above manifest a different approach to human communication in Petrushevskaya's writings. The reader does not always hear the ironic or sarcastic echo of the narrator's largely monologic comments prevalent in Petrushevskaya. Characters finally speak for themselves and listen to one another. This perspective switches through the narrator who shifts the point of view to the characters. The characters can thus express themselves. Petrushevskaya's reader does not have to rely only on the unreliable narrator

who either understates or overstates. If solipsistic egoism and the human desire for survival destroy communication in Petrushevskaya's prose, the basis for communication is in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales reconstructed.[153] Petrushevskaya's personae are not always immured in a self from which they seem incapable of escaping.[154] Finally, Petrushevskaya's focus extends the narrator's monologue and turns to the dialogue of the characters, a form of actual communication.

Petrushevskaya the Storyteller, or Storytelling as Performativity

As established earlier, breaking textuality standards problematizes the narrator-text-reader relationship within the context of the fairy tale, but establishes this relationship within the context of the folktale; that is, a genre guided by orality. That is to say, expressions of everyday parlance, even in their coarse form and the at times un-fairy-tale-like context of post-Soviet Russia, nevertheless create the sense of an unmediated experience of shared culture and bring the reader closer to the narrator and the text when she alludes to cultural and social problems. This kind of experience is conventionally created by the folktale in the first place, as folktales—which are characterized by oral performance—traditionally draw the teller and the audience closer together.

Smith's approach is especially helpful in understanding the aspect of such dual workings in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. Smith points out that the author's fiction presents the reader with yet another type of narrator. This figure's "voice merges with various voices of the crowd; the narrator is not an external observer any more but a mouthpiece of populist culture – with its

[153] Dalton-Brown analyzes the opposite on the example of Petrushevskaya's prose (*Voices from the Void*, 62-71). Dalton-Brown sees Petrushevskaya's *skaz* as "draw[ing] the reader into a conversational mode while simultaneously reminding him or her that communication is in short supply in Petrushevskaya's world" (*Voices from the Void*, 63).
[154] Helena Goscilo, *Balancing Acts* (Indiana University Press, 1989), 331. Quoted in Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 63.

strong sense of identity in spite of an appearance of anarchy and subversion."[155] Similarly, Petrushevskaya's contemporary fairy tales, infused with everyday language and motifs, thus give the impression of serving the suffering "folk" of post-Soviet Russia. Petrushevskaya's narratorial strategies manifest her objective in serving as a writer implicated in the everyday world: "I've been writing, as I say, for as long as I can remember, but all of it was worthless until I was overtaken by ordinary life, until I joined the ranks of the millions of ordinary people who know the meaning of loss and suffering."[156] Considering the narrator's bias toward suffering characters and those who choose the good (*dobro*), it can be argued that the narrator's stance merges with that of the implied author's. As Smith observes, the gap between the narrative voice as well as Petrushevskaya's voice and the voice of the "poor people" is almost non-existent. Smith also points to Petrushevskaya's personal sympathy for their problems, who "clearly gives her preference to the populist demands for more freedom, to the desire to break out of deadening restraints."[157]

If context lies at the heart of performativity as it carries socio-historical messages, as established at the beginning of this Chapter, Petrushevskaya's role of the storyteller is conscious. As she is immersed in the context of the social life of Russians, and Muscovites especially, Petrushevskaya engages in storytelling as a social act. Petrushevskaya-the storyteller follows the path of human experience: a phenomenon of which she is aware when she claims that "Russia is a land of women Homers—women who tell their stories orally, just like that, without inventing anything. They're extraordinarily talented storytellers. I'm just a listener among them."[158] As she is drawn to the experience of Muscovites, Petrushevskaya allows her narratives to be what they

[155] Smith, "In Populist Clothes," 107.
[156] Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature*, 45.
[157] Smith, "In Populist Clothes," 122.
[158] Ibid., 39.

naturally are—an exchange, a communication, a transfer of signals from speaker to listener.[159] It can be said that her fairy tales come full circle in that they return to their "vulgar" origins, to the allegedly lower classes and oral practices. After all, the foktale, as its very name implies, belongs to the traditional culture of a people and is the imaginative expression of beliefs and ideas of a people. Petrushevskaya creates the impression of the reader's involvedness in the community and society in order to share anguish, happiness, and despair alike. Seen in this light, she may be likened to a Benjaminian storyteller, one who has the ability to exchange experiences, and revives the communicability of experience.[160]

Mechanics of Ambiguity

What Petrushevskaya's fairy tales produce is a sense of indeterminacy, and what they reveal is the authorial mechanics of creating impressions and negotiating opposites, without fully adhering to any, and so deliberately invalidating certainties. This ambiguity is evident within the context of

[159] Petrushevskaya thus moves away from her avowed technique of monologue toward a dialogue. In her fairy tales, Petrushevskaya-the writer resembles also a Bakhtinian prose artist, for whom "the world is full of other people's words, among which he must orient himself and whose speech characteristics he must be able to perceive with a very keen ear. He must introduce them into the plane of his own discourse, but in such a way that this plane is not destroyed. He works with a very rich verbal palette, and he works exceptionally well with it." The word, Bakhtin continues, is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. This description, however, may as well apply to the spoken word, where the dialogic interaction lives arguably a truly authentic life. At that, the word's life is contained as a rule in its transfer from one mouth to another. The image of a prose writer overlaps with the image of a folk storyteller who tells and retells stories among and for the *narod*. Thus, Petrushevskaya-the storyteller's real-life orality (conversations, gossip, and anecdotes) overlaps with Petrushevskaya-the prose writer's preoccupation with real life, speech nuances, working skilfully with all the aural colours on the verbal palette.

[160] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 83. Benjamin's view of the storyteller, which he shapes on the analysis of Nikolai Leskov, is similar to Petrushevskaya's self-description as a writer, one avowing the type of experience that is passed from mouth to mouth. As Benjamin writes: "And among those who have written down tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers" (*Illuminations*, 84). And: "As opposed to an isolated novelist, the storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (Ibid., 87). Petrushevskaya's stance reflects Benjamin's words almost verbatim when she discloses that her writing is a certain kind of documentary, as what she engages in is recounting of what she hears from others: "Мои рассказы это документ. Для того, чтобы, допустим, никто не узнал, о чем идет речь, потому что это круг твоих знакомых, которые рассказывают тебе о своих знакомых. Вот как рождается фольклор. Один человек рассказывает не о себе, а о другом," TV interview with Elena Khangi, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xnr5FHJwpCM (Accessed June 26, 2019).

the structure (retaining and modifying it), within the question of the spoken word and the written word, as well as the ensuing interrelatedness of the folktale and fairy tale. Finally, it is also evident at the level of the narrator who is both judgmental and compassionate. That is, what we get is the impression of two colliding voices within one persona (narrator), which produces uncertainty. On the one hand, by being partial to those characters who choose the good, the narrator conveys the message of the importance of reviving universal humanity; on the other hand, the suspicious verbal excess of the narrator and the overtones of unembellished reality and inhuman relations seem to cancel out the former. Such conflicting stands—depicting the negative status quo and the hopeful aspect suggested by moral progress and social remedy in these stories—are what comprise Petrushevskaya's mechanics of ambiguity.

Bacchilega's analysis of postmodern fairy tales is useful in understanding the rationale behind the narrative strategies in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. According to the scholar, complex narrative strategies in contemporary fairy tales are meant to unmake the coherence of textual production and interpretation.[161] Any immediate coherence, after all, is precluded if two opposing interpretations, and thus ensuing contradictions, are allowed. The approach to unmaking coherence exhibits Petrushevskaya's disregard for, or suspicion of, certainties and simplistic true/false binary schemes.[162] Petrushevskaya's works therefore cannot be interpreted as, or reduced to, the battling field of polarities but should rather be seen as intermediate zones more fertile in terms of productive interpretation. More precisely, the author's employment of irony, parody, and humour, and her ambivalent straddling of opposite stands both indicates and results

[161] Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, 18.
[162] Including the binary structure attributed to Russian culture. This is also what Lipovetsky seems to be signalling when he calls for the hybridization or a dialogue of opposing discourses as a way to continue a cultural hermeneutics and its urgency in terms of collective identities with regard to Russian culture in the twenty-first century. See Lipovetsky, "Contemporary Culture Between Past and Present," 31-42; Caryl Emerson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 76. See also Lotman and Uspensky, "Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture," 1985. I discuss the possibilities of altering destiny in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in Chapter III.

in an inconclusive dialogue that enables the reader to read and understand her fairy tales in multiple ways. Furthermore, the strategies of ambiguity also manifest Petrushevskaya's authorial disregard for or suspicion of taking the genre for granted. In this way a genre is constantly subjected to (re-)examination. As rationale behind the ambiguity in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, one may also think of the author's reflection on the split between idealism, such as moral progress, and the crude ways of the material world. As Parts concludes elsewhere, this narrative strategy calls for an active reader who must overcome the apparent immediacy of either interpretation and rather walk through the interpretative thicket to negotiate both possibilities. Finally, this game highlights the playful side of language that draws attention to itself.[163] This game also reflects Petrushevskaya's ingenious storytelling that refreshes the understanding of the genre(s), rejects any unitary truth, and calls forth the reader's response to writing and to life in fiction and beyond.

[163] In this sense, the postmodern concept of metafiction and language that draws attention to itself corresponds to the Formalists' concept of *skaz* as defamiliarization, that is, devices that make language perceptible and emancipated from literariness.

CHAPTER II

THE DISTINCTIVE CATEGORIES OF THE FAIRY TALE:

BETWEEN THE IMPROBABLE AND THE POSSIBLE

The glass beads of the folktale mirror the world.[164]

The real goal of the marvelous journey is the total exploration of universal reality.[165]

The Question of One-dimensionality

In his examination of "the form and nature" of the folktale, Lüthi identifies the genre's defining features. These features, which have been applied repeatedly in the definitions of the fairy tale as well, include the folktale's abstract style, indefiniteness, depthlessness, and one-dimensionality. As the foundational element, Lüthi observes a conflation of the realm of the everyday world and the supernatural, to which he refers as one-dimensionality. According to this concept, the supernatural is not experienced as something extraordinary vis-à-vis the quotidian in that everyday characters do not feel that an encounter with a supernatural being is an encounter with an otherworldly sphere. For example, the hero's encounter with loquacious animals, enchanting spells, or fantastic objects does not excite his fear or curiosity, as both belong to the same dimension.

Lüthi's observations regarding this concept reverberate with Todorov's category of the marvelous, which is a type of fantastic that is typically linked with the fairy-tale genre and arises when "the supernatural events provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the

[164] Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, 80.
[165] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Cornell University Press, 1975), 57.

implicit reader."[166] In other words, no rational explanation for the supernatural events represented is needed, since normal rules do not apply with regard to the supernatural.[167] Kurt Ranke defines the fairy tale in a similar way; namely, as "a magic narrative that is independent of the conditions of the real world with its categories of time, place, and causality, and which has no claim to believability."[168] Fairy-tale magic, it follows, demands that the reader accept the fact that magic is normative and that rational rules have been suspended. The accounts above also reverberate with what Anne Wilson calls magical thought. As she notes: "Magical thought is the level of thought we all engage in when we are not making the effort to think rationally and imaginatively so as to deal effectively with the external world. It is effortless, spontaneous and solipsistic, wholly free from the laws and realities of the external world."[169]

Magical thought implies also special delight in the unusualness of events and images that readers take while reading fairy tales. This magical thought-cum-unusualness thus necessarily involves the question of what is probable and improbable from the point of view of the fairy tale and actual reality. For example, it is probable in a fairy tale that a woman is so jealous of her stepdaughter that she orders a huntsman to have her killed.[170] Conversely, the same situation is possible but *not* very probable in everyday reality. Thus, readers of fairy tales do not question what is otherwise improbable in everyday reality. As Propp remarks, the events in the fairy tale are so unusual that "they could never have occurred in reality and that is what makes them so interesting."[171]

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[166] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 54.
[167] What I understand as "normal" rules here is what Todorov means by saying that they derive from "reality as it exists in the common opinion."
[168] Jack Zipes, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 203.
[169] Anne Wilson, "Magical Thought in Story," *Signal* 36 (1981), 139.
[170] Joosen, "Disenchanting the Fairy Tale: Retellings of Snow White between Magic and Realism," 229.
[171] Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 19.

At first glance, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, too, unfold in the prescribed one-dimensionality insofar as her characters from the realm of everyday life do not question the supernatural characters and phenomena, thus generating the sense of an unproblematic movement between the everyday and the enchanted realms. For instance, Stupid Ira marries an ass ("Glupaia printsessa"). A pensioner, Grandpa Ivan, interacts with a Barbie doll, who fills the sphere of action of a magical helper (the cycle "Prikliucheniia Barbi"). The Nose Girl, Nina, sets off to see a sorcerer to reduce the size of her nose ("Devushka-Nos"). A young girl encounters an evil sorcerer who intends to abduct her ("Sny devochki"). Both realms in these fairy tales overlap, as the characters neither question the supernatural events and phenomena nor are they surprised by them.

However, the assertion of one-dimensionality is true only partly and only after a perfunctory reading of these fairy tales, since it is true only from the point of view of the characters. From the reader's point of view, the realm of the supernatural is often either subject to interpretative ambiguity or altogether rationalized. For example, Stupid Ira does not marry the mute animal as she initially intends to but rather, through humorous wordplay, dubs her future *human*-husband "an ass." Grandpa Ivan and Barbie doll's interaction exists but it is not direct or verbal, as is the case in folktales and traditional fairy tales. Moreover, it is mutual need and mutual help that are figuratively read as working wonders, whereby the element of fairy-tale magic is relegated to a secondary role. Another example is the sorcerer whom Nina, the Nose Girl, visits. He resembles an ordinary doctor, and magic performed by him is "magic" achieved through plastic surgery. Finally, the evil sorcerer who intends to abduct the girl in the tale "Sny devochki" turns out to be a nightmare, and so the girl's experience is accounted for in a rational way. Such maneuvers directed at realistic explanation thus create the sense of plausibility, or

quasi-one-dimensionality, marking the foundation of Petrushevskaya's revision of the fairy-tale genre's laws of composition.

This *quasi*-one-dimensionality affects the reader's sense of magical thought, which, as noted earlier, we adopt while reading fairy tales. In the case of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, then, entering magical thought is not fully possible, since her fairy tales do not fully allow for the suspension of disbelief. Because of the realistic setting as well as explanations and general correspondence to social reality, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales impede the reader's complete plunging into the world of the improbable.[172] As the events represented are true to everyday life, they also significantly weaken the sense of unusualness. Finally, as they shed unusualness for the sake of being ultimately interpreted as something possible and probable, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales at times approach the Todorovian uncanny. Following Todorov, "If the reader decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny."[173] In this light, as Propp would maintain, Petrushevskaya's stories become "true," since when the unusual is depicted as something plausible, it leaves the domain of folktale and approaches literature.[174]

What Petrushevskaya engages in is a play with reader's expectations of what constitutes a literary genre or a literary mode along the lines of the Todorovian marvelous and uncanny;[175] as well as what is (un)real, what is (im)probable, and what is (im)possible in fiction and beyond. My analysis of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is thus rooted in the author's shift of boundaries between

[172] What I understand as "reality" is conditioned by objective rather than subjective factors. It points to the everyday reality of contemporary Russia and contemporary world. In Chapter I, I discussed it with reference to the context, or the paradigmatic aspect.
[173] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 41.
[174] Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 19.
[175] Although by testing the boundaries of the realm of the everyday and the supernatural (including along the lines of Todorov's uncanny and marvelous) Petrushevskaya plays on genre expectations, I nonetheless read her narratives as fairy tales. After all, following Todorov, "What distinguishes the fairy tale is a certain kind of writing, not the status of the supernatural" (*The Fantastic*, 54). Todorov does not elucidate on what exactly constitutes this certain kind of writing. I base my analysis on the well-established distinguishing fairy-tale elements.

the realm of the supernatural and the everyday. This shift is best reflected in the genre's fundamental narrative categories, namely, the fairy tale's representation of time and place, heroes, and magic. My choice of the above categories is dictated by their genre-specific and distinguishing representation in the fairy tale. Precisely at the level of the chronotope, heroes, and magic we observe Petrushevskaya's questioning approach to what is (im)probable and what is (im)possible in the fairy tale and in life. More specifically, I examine the implications of these shifting boundaries: how they reflect contemporary fairy-tale writing and how they reflect on metaphysical questions.

TIME AND PLACE

The Question of Depthlessness

According to Lüthi, time in a fairy-tale reality is perceived differently from the way we perceive it in our reality.[176] This is because the fairy-tale style dictates its own specific rules. Lüthi refers to these specific temporal rules as depthlessness and considers indifference to the passage of time the way we know it (that is, to the chronological passage of time) as its central attribute. Sleeping Beauty, for example, awakes after a hundred-year sleep just as young and beautiful as she was before. Another attribute of temporal depthlessness is its indefiniteness, that is, absence of references to the material here and now (the reality we know). Temporal indefiniteness is best exemplified in the vagueness of the conventional opening formulas (in the vein of "once upon a time"). As it is represented in an indifferent and indefinite way, time in the fairy tale is thus flat, or depthless.

[176] Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 40-41 and 49-51. Similarly, time as a form of thought does not exist in a fairy tale. See Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 25.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,[177] Petrushevskaya's contemporary fairy tales revise the above representation of time as they acquire an unorthodox three-dimensionality and definiteness, which occur by accentuating the here and now through the references to both chronological and historical time. The first example of Petrushevskaya's revision of time is the lack of indifference to the passage of time. While fairy tales feature young and old people alike, as well as younger and older brothers and sisters, there are no aging persons and no suggestions of the very process of aging. Conversely, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales do not portray worlds where time stands still, where no one ages or dies, but rather make physically visible the process of aging and the lapse of time, which is customarily imperceptible. The passage of chronological time is especially evident in the tales featuring the elderly. For example, Grandpa Ivan's overall physical weakness and deteriorating health: he loses sight in the tale "Barbi volshebnitsa;" the narrator describes him as "deaf as a doornail"[178] in the tale "Barbi i kukol'nyi dom." Grandpa Ivan's bent posture and grey hair further intensify the depiction of the passage of time. In "Barbi-volshebnitsa," too, examples of time change are evident. The Barbie doll ends up at the dump when her owner grows up and no longer needs her. An old man, who is equally lonely and abandoned, finds her. His own children have grown up, married, and left him, and "perhaps have themselves become old men now."[179] Petrushevskaya's depiction of the lapse of time not only adds to the realism of her fairy tales but also to the individuality of her characters and especially their personal experience of the passage of time. The effect is that the all-too-realistic inevitability of the passage of time enters into the reader's consciousness in a literary form that traditionally spares such graphic reminders of mortality. At the same time, as noted in Chapter I,

[177] Petrushevskaya started publishing her fairy tales in the 1970s.
[178] "Дед Иван был глухим как пень" (SS, 94). Given the considerable length of the present Chapter, the original Russian quotations will appear in the footnotes.
[179] "Когда-то у него росли свои дети, сыновья, драчливые, как щенята, потом сыновья женились и уехали в другие страны и там уже, наверно, стали сами стариками" (SS, 88).

the fact that an old man's only company is a Barbie doll reflects the sociopolitical context of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, that of the omnipresent neglect and solitude of the elderly in contemporary Russia.

We observe further implications of Petrushevskaya's approach to the category of time in the opening formulas. While, as the conventional opening formulas indicate, a fairy tale unfolds in a magical world, detached from our own in time (and place), Petrushevskaya's fairy tales do not. While timelessness and indefiniteness supply the traditional fairy tale with utopian connotations, Petrushevskaya's tales designate recognizable places, close to home.[180] Admittedly, her fairy tales begin with a hint of the indefiniteness of "once upon a time," "in a certain kingdom," and "beyond thrice three realms." But while the opening statements conventionally signal the anticipation of some unusual events to come, Petrushevskaya's opening statements undermine the fairy-tale mood and bring the reader to rather plausible settings instead. Some of her opening statements read: "*There once lived* a little girl who went and bought herself very cheap *sunglasses* instead of buying *notebooks*;" "*Somehow*, *one day, a boy* by chance went to the airport and got on a *plane* while no one was around;" "*There once lived* a servant. And there is nothing bad in such a title at all, a *job* like any other;" "*One evening*, Barbie was sitting and playing her *toy piano* that Grandpa Ivan had bought her at a *used toy sale*;" "*One day*, a mom with a child appeared in a *stationery store* to buy a *pen*."[181] Petrushevskaya, it follows, retains the markers of the conventional timelessness in her "one day," "one evening," "once upon a time," while introducing specific elements and details from everyday life, thereby creating a sort of *quasi*-indefiniteness.

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[180] Utopian in the sense of 'no place' (*eu topos*), and not necessarily 'good place' (*ou topos*).

[181] "Жила-была девочка, которая пошла и купила себе очень дешевые черные очки, вместо того, чтобы купить тетради" ("Volshebnye ochki" – "The Magical Glasses," SS, 276). "Как-то однажды один мальчик случайно зашел в аэродром и сел в самолет, когда там никого не было" ("Chto govoril samolet" – "What the Plane was Saying" SS, 288). "Жил-был один слуга. И ничего плохого в таком звании нет, работа как работа" ("Verba-khlest" – "Willow Whip," SS, 233).

Accordingly, the opening frame of a number of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is a contemporary urban milieu. "From the windowsill, the Barbie Doll watched *the city life*, with the passers-by, dogs and cats running past;" "*One* man was returning home *by bus*;" "*One* very fat girl would not fit in *a cab*, and in *the subway* she would take up the whole width of *the escalator*."[182] We also find indications of contemporaneity in the cycle "Prikliucheniia Barbi" ("Barbie's Adventures"), with references to Saturday as the market day or the topos most recurrent in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, the dump. The *quasi*-indefiniteness of "one evening" notwithstanding, the setting in "Barbi-volshebnitsa i les" ("Barbie Magician and the Forest"), too, becomes realistic as Masha Barbie plays "a toy piano that Grandpa Ivan bought her at a used toy sale."[183] Similarly, the *quasi*-indefiniteness of "one day" clashes with the realistic description of a mom and her child who "one day come to the store to buy a pen" in "Volshebnaia ruchka" ("The Magical Pen").[184]

We further observe Petrushevskaya's revisionist attitude to magical thought by way of a realistic approach to the category of place. While in traditional fairy tales the horizon of expectation with regard to the construction of fictional place construes the lattter as beyond the reader's reach,[185] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales revise this category. As the plots in her tales unfold in concrete contemporary settings, including historical names and events, specific places, and

[182] "Кукле Барби с подоконника была видна жизнь города, мимо бегали прохожие, собаки и кошки (...)" ("Barbi i kukol'nyi dom" – "Barbie and the Doll House," SS, 91). "Одни человек возвращался домой в автобусе (...)" ("Osel i kozel" – "A Donkey and a Goat," SS, 130). "Одна очень толстая девушка не умещалась в такси, а в метро занимала собой всю ширину эскалатора" ("Sekret Marileny" – "Marilena's Secret," SS, 144).
[183] "Однажды вечерои Барби (дед назвал ее Машенька) сидела и играла на своем игрушечном рояле, который ей купил дед на распродаже старинных игрушек (...)" ("Barbi volshebnitsa i les" – "Barbie Magician and the Forest," SS, 99).
[184] "Однажды в магазин явилась мамаша с ребенком купить ему ручку" ("Volshebnaia ruchka" – "The Magical Pen," SS, 127).
[185] Maria Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 122.

references, the chronotope shifts to the everyday.[186] The action of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales does not always reach out resolutely toward the distance, "over great expanses to faraway realms,"[187] but often takes place in a circumscribed, often domestic, environment; as in "Volshebnaia ruchka" ("The Magical Pen"), in a store and in an apartment, and "Dve sestry" ("Two Sisters," 1997) in an apartment. In numerous other fairy tales, the plots do reach farther physical distances but they are not imaginary loci, as they refer to specific places such as India, Nepal, and Goa, as in "Podarok printsesse" ("The Princess's Present," 2012) and "Chariti" ("Chariti," 2009), or towns – as in the tale "Sem' chasov" ("Seven O'Clock," 2008).[188] As in the case of Petrushevskaya's modifications of the plot structure, then, it is the realm of the everyday world that marks the author's revision of fairy-tale time and place, so that the contact with "our own world" increases exponentially.

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales also portray objects realistically, manifesting further tangible connections to the realm of the everyday world. The objects in her fairy tales have physical dimensions and are often the paraphernalia of contemporary daily life: pens, kettles, pianos, sunglasses, shoes, cars, and glasses, that is, objects of "pronounced spatial depth,"[189] which conjure the perception of three-dimensional space. A traditional fairy tale, in contrast, portrays objects without depth, devoid of three-dimensionality, which remain "as rigid and unchanging as metal"[190] (such as rings, keys, and feathers).[191] Objects in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are

[186] Interestingly, Petrushevskaya's depictions of time and place are in general not as dark as they are in her prose and drama. Scholars who have analyzed the chronotope in Petrushevskaya's prose and drama include Dalton-Brown ("The Time is Always Night"), Goscilo (in *Dehexing Sex*), and Woll ("Minotaur in the Maze").
[187] Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, 28.
[188] In terms of the category of place, it is especially the contrast between a house and a home that is striking in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales and worth a separate study.
[189] Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, 11.
[190] Ibid.
[191] On an interesting note, given such impression of three-dimensionality, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales approach Lüthi's description of legends. Pronounced relations with reality characterize the latter. From the point of view of the relation to reality, some of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales may also be interpreted as fantasy and not fairy tales as such.

displayed in repeated use as they bear the signs of active daily use and are not isolated in themselves.[192] In fact, some of these fairy tales revolve around animated objects from everyday life, especially the tales from the cycle "Nechelovecheskie prikliucheniia" ("Non-human Adventures," 1996), such as "Budil'nik" ("Alarm Clock"), "Parovoz i lopata" ("A Locomotive and a Shovel"), "Samovar" ("Samovar"), "Prikliucheniia utiuga i sapoga" ("The Adventures of an Iron and a Boot"), and "Staraia druzhba" ("An Old Friendship") – a tale about a globe and a radio. The above examples point to the disproportionate focus on the realistic, which reduces the fairy-tale unusualness that the reader intuitively expects, thus further contributing to genre parody.

As a result, it is as though the reader does not have a chance to leave the realm of the everyday to enter the otherwise expected fictional marvelous of the fairy tale. Instead, Petrushevskaya's readers remain in the realm of the usual. Indeed, they may in fact be under the impression of a kind of perpetual present, or perpetual usualness, while reading her fairy tales. The often-unpleasant sociopolitical and moral status quo that transpires in the background gives the impression of an impasse or of being locked in the present. Petrushevskaya's approach to the representation of time (the focus on chronological time and sociopolitical indications of actual, historical time) thus revises the expected depthlessness and instead manifests definiteness and three-dimensionality. Such revisions of magical thought in the fairy-tale genre are in fact prevalent in contemporary literature. As Joosen argues, many contemporary authors consciously depart from magical thought and confront the genre with a realistic setting either in favour of either greater realism or greater ambiguity.[193] This kind of complexity is installed with a view to challenging the fairy tale's fictive status, and thus symbolically disenchanting it.

[192] Gifts, which straddle both the everyday and the supernatural realm, are a separate category of objects, which I discuss in the section on magic.
[193] Joosen, "Disenchanting the Fairy Tale: Retellings of 'Snow White' between Magic and Realism," 236.

I read Petrushevskaya's fairy tales within the context of ambiguity. Via said *quasi*-one-dimensionality and *quasi*-depthlessness, Petrushevskaya impedes but does not entirely preclude the fairy-tale effect, and yet impedes the reader's plunging into the magical world, thereby revealing ambiguity. That is to say, her fairy tales do not fully adhere to the genre's foundational elements; nor do they completely dismiss them, thereby creating potent open-endedness. Petrushevskaya's fairy tales display such ambiguity at the level of temporal relations.

Cyclical Time, the Motif of Transformation, and the Absence of Finalities

As noted earlier, by portraying the passage of time Petrushevskaya invokes chronological temporality. At the same time, though, the author's fairy tales signal cyclical temporality as well. That is, chronological time, with its clearly defined beginning and end which goes from birth to inevitable death, interlocks with time that is vaster than chronological time; that is, with time that does not have any definitive beginning and end and involves cyclical destruction and renewal. This cyclicity in the fairy tale reflects the motif of transformation, seen as symbolic death and rebirth. Such interlacement of temporal relations is evident in the tale "Skazka o chasakh" ("The Fairy Tale of the Watch," 1996).[194] With Petrushevskaya's characteristic *quasi*-indefinite opening statement, it tells the story of a poor woman whose husband died a long time ago and whose daughter was growing up smart and beautiful. Having returned home from school one day, the girl rummages up an old watch in her mother's scant belongings. The watch had stopped at the time of her grandmother's death, and the grandmother's ghost admonishes the girl that under no circumstances should it be wound up again. Because of the girl's disobedience and vanity, the magical watch makes both women captives of time. They are condemned to wind it; otherwise

[194] This tale was first published in the newspaper *Nedelia* in 1989.

her mother will die. In the end, the girl, who at this point has herself become a mother, sacrifices herself and finds a way to wind the watch at regular intervals in order to keep her mother alive.

On the one hand, the characters in this tale experience time profoundly: birth, illness, maternity, and imminent death. The substantiality of chronological time unfolds in all its depth-creating reality as it gives rise to a deepened awareness of its passage: "The time of my life is about to end. The watch works faster and faster, and the moment will come when it will stop working when I wind it. My mother died the same way (...) Now I am dying. Bury this watch with me (...) Three minutes later the mother started dying."[195] On the other hand, this tale also has an underlying, vaster meaning in that the process of aging (chronological time) mirrors the process of becoming (cyclical time). The girl moves from carefree and egotistical adolescence toward adulthood and maturity as a daughter and as a mother when she resolves to wake up every hour to wind the watch and to tend to her child.[196] Becoming capable of self-sacrifice speaks to the girl's maturation, in that she consciously changes her attitude, and suggests her spiritual awakening: "Why? Why did you wind the watch again? What will happen to your daughter now? Nothing, mom, I have learned not to sleep. The baby cries at night, I'm used to waking up at all hours now. I won't sleep through my life. You're alive, and that's what matters most."[197] Awakening acquires spiritual connotations. In the fairy-tale context, such spiritual awakening may be interpreted an initiation rite through which one figuratively transforms and so enters a new stage of existence.

[195] "Время моей жизни кончается. Часы идут все быстрее и наступит момент, когда они остановятся сразу после того, как я их заведу. Когда-то вот таж ке умерла моя мама (...) Теперь я умираю. Похорони эти часы вместе со мной (...)" "Прошло три минуты и мать стала умирать (...)" (SS, 170).
[196] Compare the entirely opposite mother-daughter relationship in Petrushevskaya's *The Time: Night*.
[197] "Зачем? Зачем ты снова завела эти часы? Что будет теперь с твоей дочерью? Ничего, мама, я научилась теперь не спать. Ребенок плачет по ночам, я привыкла просыпаться. Я не просплю свою жизнь. Ты жива, и это главное" (SS, 339).

The underlying theme of the tale is the fear of death, symbolically expressed by the appearance of the grandmother's ghost.[198] As the two temporalities interlock, we observe an interesting in-between maneuver: the mother does not actually die. She is in the process of dying, but her death as a prelude to a new beginning is not complete, since the girl manages to outsmart the course of chronological time by postponing her mother's death. Following the fairy-tale code, it is specifically because of the postponement of death that the initiation rite signifying transformation, in which the initiate is reborn into a new identity, is undercut. A Freudian interpretation would suggest that self-affirmation and an independent existence requires a painful separation from the parent. Separation (a symbolic death), then, is an inevitable and crucial step towards moving beyond a child's dependence on its parents. As Bruno Bettelheim asserts, self-realization requires leaving the orbit of home, which may be an excruciatingly painful experience.[199] In this light, the girl's maturation process would be complete if her mother actually died. That is, the girl would then gain true independence and psychological maturity on her own. However, this incomplete death is enough for Petrushevskaya to suggest a new beginning, and so a higher dimension of being: the girl realizes an important fact and only then creates a genuine relationship with her mother.[200] Therefore, the inconclusiveness of the initiation rite in the manner of the psychoanalytical reading does not have to be read as a sign of the girl's dependency on her mother or her separation anxiety, but rather as a conscious act of sacrifice that

[198] It is no coincidence that the tale involves three women: grandmother, mother, and daughter. This tale foregrounds the theme of the fear of death in the experience of motherhood. A reading of femininity in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales deserves a separate analysis.
[199] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 78-86.
[200] Another interpretation is possible. The girl desperately clings to her mother and thus cannot venture into the world to live separately. The question of the father's child is also not mentioned. The Freudian question of separation anxiety is not resolved.

helps to build a bond with her mother. Specifically through the creation of bonds the fear of death is temporally dispersed: "Well, the world remains alive for now."[201]

Petrushevskaya does not conclude the initiation rite because she is averse to any ultimate ends, including death.[202] For example, the notion of an ultimate ending, as synonymous with destruction or catastrophe, is in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales often implied or imminent, but not completed. A good case in point is "Prints s zolotymi volosami" ¯ a tale with eschatological overtones. Having been accused of adultery and consequently banished from the city of N. along with her allegedly bastard son, a young mother goes through a journey of trials and tribulations.[203] Before reaching her hometown, mother and child are imprisoned, taken captive in a circus and the child's golden hair is cut for monetary gain. As their presence spurs violence and a sense of threat, people inform on them to the police, worrying that the pair will cause riots, as the Prince with the golden hair may be a portent of the Last Judgment. The imminence of the Last Judgment and the end of the world turns the kingdom into a place of violence and chaos. A priest comes to the crowd and reads the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, prophesying that wickedness will be punished. Moreover, the portrayal of a destructive star fast approaching further intensifies the eschatological overtones. However, Petrushevskaya does not allow for any ultimate end in this tale either. The destructive star, which ominously grows in size throughout the tale, brings salvation instead. It turns out to be the Prince's father who comes from the sea. The father asks for the young mother's forgiveness and embraces his son, explaining that he had been searching for them. As they return home reunited, what used to be their home no longer

[201] At the end of the tale, the ghost of the young woman's grandmother says with relief, "Ну что же, пока что мир остался жив" (SS, 171).
[202] As noted in the Introduction, Edith Clowes arrives at similar conclusions in her account of the short story "Novye Robinzony."
[203] In terms of the plot, this tale reveals intertextual links with Pushkin's fairy tale in verse, *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* (1831) and Brothers Grimm tale "The Gold-Children" (1812).

exists, for it has been captured by the mysterious "young and fast men in leather jackets."[204] The newly united family sails off, then sells their yacht and buys "an apartment in a green area,"[205] where they crown the child with a crown made of chocolate foil wrappers.

Petrushevskaya's approach to destruction and renewal in this tale is multi-layered. The abovementioned star may point to a natural end of the world, perhaps comparable to the summer or winter solstice, and thus forming an integral part of the cosmic cycle. The catastrophe can also be read as brought on by human wickedness and war, symbolic of the reign of the Antichrist. However, there is no textual evidence of any punishment of sins by any Divinity, which usually implies the subsequent creation of a new humanity or a new, finite, fabulous order.[206] If we follow the Biblical cues in this tale, the end of the world and the Last Judgment are signalled but do not take place; and the person who returns is not the Prince, following the prophesied return of Christ at the Last Judgment, but the Prince's father who comes from the sea. In other words, Petrushevskaya allows neither an ultimate end of the world nor a thousand-year age of blessedness; neither an ultimate catastrophe nor an unambiguous universal sense of renewal. Being suspicious of any grand narratives, Petrushevskaya thus avoids portraying ultimate death and eschews any ultimate perfection that is to come in the future. As I shall argue, this open-endedness allows for an optimistic reading.

The Biblical account of destruction and renewal is contrasted with a more immediate, earthly setting. The family is reunited and the child, the prince, is crowned. At the same time, however, his coronation may seem ironic, since it bears no specific signs of a major societal transformation and a subsequent fabulous future. In fact, it points to the exact opposite, since

[204] "Власть давно переменилась, всем управляли уже новые молодые люди, быстрые, в кожаных куртках, и бывший молодой король был счастлив, что удалось уплыть и никого не арестовали" (SS, 233).
[205] "Купили квартиру в зеленом районе" (Ibid.).
[206] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (Harper & Row Publishers, 1963), 57.

what used to be the family's home has been captured by the "young and fast men in leather jackets." The crown is diminished too, as it is made of mere chocolate foil wrappers. Yet, as in the tale "Skazka o chasakh," the reader senses a more tangible possibility of renewal as compared to the arguably unattainable universal redemption. The father's lack of trust in his wife symbolizes destruction within the context of the family. The renewal is in turn fostered when he overcomes his mistrust and the rumours of his wife's infidelity, and reunites with his family. Although this renewal occurs on a smaller scale, it acquires certain pathos and a monumentality of a different order, and as such has a potent transformative effect.

As the two temporalities (linear and cyclical) inform both tales, they pointedly return to the present of everyday reality. This suggests that it is in the same, often negative ordinary life that actual—less abstract and more immediate—possibilities of awakening and transformation occur. More specifically, transformation in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales occurs thanks to humaneness, that is, universal virtues and better qualities as well as the capacities for reflection that her characters evince: the love of the Prince's father who searches for his son's mother and asks her for forgiveness and the self-sacrifice of the young woman.[207] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales suggest that what redeems human beings is solicitude for the other. Rather than focusing on millenarianism and eschatology (or utopia and apocalypse, for that matter), Petrushevskaya alludes to the motif of transformation: the continuous cycle of internal, symbolic renewals and deaths, but ones written in lower case rather than capital letters, and ones that are achieved in the here and now (not after death).[208] Echoing the postmodern fascination with the present (while

[207] As noted earlier, at the end of the tale, the ghost of the young woman's grandmother says with relief, "Ну что же, пока что мир остался жив" ("Well, the world remains alive for now," SS, 171), thus with a calculated dose of relief bringing the focus to the present.

[208] This points to Petrushevskaya's interest in the concept of eternal return and her interest in Eastern philosophies, especially Buddhism. This also suggests Petrushevskaya's questioning stance on the Russian literary tradition represented by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

rejecting its utopian obsession with the future and nostalgic obsession with the past),[209] Petrushevskaya's zooming onto the present may be read as a missing element that has been ignored in Russian culture. Petrushevskaya's reflections on the present, on the other hand, are more optimistic compared to the postmodernist "dematerialization of the present."[210] Rather, along the lines of postrealism, the present is for Petrushevskaya valuable, as it represents one's own fragment of the universe, whereby the void may be filled up with one's own *bytie*.

The Difficulty of Narrative Endings

Apart from chronological time, the concept of the end is in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales also traceable at the level of narrative structure. In terms of temporal relations, a fairy tale as a narrative unfolds along the axis of a clear beginning and an equally clear end. A conventional fairy tale is an example of what Yury Lotman would refer to as a closed and linear narrative in that it has strict internal boundaries, a clearly marked beginning and end that confine the narrative, limiting it in length, and lending it a measure of unity, and so a sense of wholeness. For a fairy tale, such markers of beginnings and ends are the opening and closing formulas (from "once upon a time" to "and they lived happily ever after"). If Petrushevskaya's opening formulas are only *quasi*-indefinite, as demonstrated earlier, her closing formulas are only *quasi*-definite. Unlike the conventional decisiveness in affixing an end to a fairy tale, and so hermetically sealing the plot, her fairy-tale endings often produce mixed feelings. Some of the closing statements read: "*Of*

[209] I return to the question of the present in terms of the fairy-tale functions in Chapter III. For more details on anomalies of time, see Mikhail Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 43-48; Lotman and Uspensky, "Binary Models in Dynamics of Russian Culture," 1985.

[210] "В постмодернизме время исчезает: все растворяется в надвременном универсуме культурных знаков разных эпох. В постреализме, напротив, передний план конкретного времени, среды, ситуации и т. п. ничуть не дематериализован, он интересен, он тщательно выписан. Он дорог автору как его родная современность, его, изнутри освоенный, фрагмент вселенной, его, только ему принадлежащий отрезок Вечности. По Мандельштаму, современность — это ценность." Naum Leiderman and Mark Lipovetsky, "Zhizn' posle smerti, ili Novye svedenia o realizme," *Novyi mir* 7 (1993), http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1993/7/litkrit-pr.html (Accessed June 25, 2019).

course, they got married in the evening (...)," [211] "And so our story has come to its happy ending, *as it should*;" [212] thereby adding ironic or sarcastic emphasis, as though interrogating the happy ending, which also signals the incredulity of the narrator and marks another example of Petrushevskaya's revision of the genre. From the point of view of sealing the plot, these closing formulas do bring the narrative to a close in that they retain the conventional and linear frame of opening and closing, but at the level of the reader's impressions, the narrative unity is undermined by way of such incredulity that breeds inconclusiveness.

This inconclusiveness is visible not only in the closing formulas but also in the actual endings of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. It is important to note again that all of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales end happily. Yet, in a large number of her fairy tales any possibility of a happy ending that her endings (may) suggest clashes with the same tangible temporality of the (often dreary) present that they portray. Petrushevskaya's happy endings are therefore not fully credible from the perspective of the fairy-tale genre, but rather bittersweet, given the fact that much more in the text is palpably gritty.

A good case in point is the tale "Dve sestry" ("Two Sisters," 1997), which features two impoverished elderly sisters who live together. [213] By way of a magical cream, the sisters become adolescents again, but this turn of events is not as rosy as it may seem since they now face a different set of hardships: how to continue to collect their pensions, and how to ensure that no one snatches their apartment? [214] In what comprises a happy ending of this tale, an elderly neighbour, a former pediatrician, saves their lives and shelters them. The juvenile seniors now go to school and sell socks and mittens at the metro station on Saturdays. The tale ends with an

[211] "Разумеется, вечером сыграли свадьбу, на балу принцесса танцевала (...)" ("Printsessa Belonozhka" SS, 202).
[212] "Так что наша история пришла к своему счастливому концу, как и полагается" ("Glupaia printsessa" SS, 195).
[213] This tale was first published in the journal *Oktiabr'* in 1993.
[214] "Они нас выкинут из квартиры и начнут вести следствие (...) Да! А как теперь почтальон нам отдаст старушкины пенсии?" (SS, 310).

address to the reader typical of the genre: "Perhaps you have seen them there..."[215] It is as though it is unusual in today's Russia to see the elderly sell whatever they can to make ends meet. The tale's ending thus returns to the non-auspicious present and reference to contemporary Russia, and thus may create a false sense of the otherwise expected better future. As a result, the reality-effect obstructs the immediate fairy-tale-effect again. However, the ending also communicates possible optimism, as one of the sisters concludes that one may always come up with a solution of some sort and get used to anything.[216] In the end, the pessimistic reading stands in an unresolved negotiation with the affirmative reading. Petrushevskaya lets her reader choose his or her own interpretation.

Such deliberate inconclusiveness is also at the heart of the tale "Myrka i ieie smekh" ("Myrka and her Laughter," 2012) which depicts two elderly sisters who live together and who constantly quarrel. The lonely and unhappy older sister insults her younger sister, who has been labeled the less intelligent one and who patiently tolerates the mockery. Myrka is good-hearted, like the Stupid Princess Ira, and others take advantage of her. Gradually, throughout the tale, Myrka becomes stronger. For example, she is no longer afraid of announcing to her sister Shusha that she intends to go on vacation. Myrka's growing self-confidence, internal strength, and courage manifest optimism. Her budding self-affirmation overlaps with her natural affirmation of life and optimism even in the face of deepest misfortune. In the end, her travails are rewarded, as she turns out to be lucky. Having endured distress during her long-awaited vacation, she finds valuable jewelry that literally saves her from being penniless and helps her return home. The return home, though, which should entail a happy ending, might not be so fortunate, since it means a return to the same problems. Myrka is distressed, wondering how she will hide the

[215] "А по субботам они ходили к метро продавать носки и варежки. Может быть, вы их там видели..." (SS, 331).
[216] "Все можно устроить, ко всему привыкнуть, говорила Лиза (...)" (SS, 314).

jewelry from her exploitative sister: "How will she now hide the treasure from Shusha? Carry it with her? Sell it and put the money in the bank? But what about inflation and economic collapse?"[217] The ending is thus inconclusive. Shusha's negativity will likely continue, but as Myrka's growing sense of independence breaks through, her defense against mistreatment might change.

As argued in Chapter I, Petrushevskaya disrupts the linearity and sequentiality of her fairy-tale plots by way of details that derive from the familiar world at the level of language as well as her narrators' everyday orality, which create vertical interruptions. In a similar way, such devices and strategies as irony and inconclusiveness obstruct the temporal linearity of her fairy tales' narrative structure. Even though the action progresses and has an ending, and so indicates that a closed, and thus easily surveyable string of events is to be described, such unexpected obstructions affect the temporal order and reader's interpretation. If we were to draw a temporal line of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, simultaneous movement forward and backward would mark this line, causing interruptions. Petrushevskaya's fairy tales apparently take the reader away from everyday reality with their conventional "once upon a time," but only to take a step back since the reader in fact remains in the here and now. Similarly, her plots arrive at the conclusion with their conventional happy endings and closing formulas in the vein of "and they lived happily ever after," but only to take a step back, since these happy endings are not readily credible and the closing formulas are ironic. As a result, these interruptions imbue Petrushevskaya's fairy tales with certain open-endedness instead of a clearly marked unity and wholeness.

It can be concluded that temporal and spatial relations in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are marked by a twofold strategy. First, the effect of everyday reality reduces the fairy-tale effect and

[217] "Ее одолевали заботы, как теперь прятать сокровища от Шуши. Носить с собой? Продать и положить денежку в банк? А ну как инфляция или кризис?" (NSvMgD, 422).

the reader's expectations of unusualness. More contact with the familiar everyday world and realistic temporal order leads to rationalization, and thus parody, of the fairy tale as a genre and its subsequent disenchantment in contemporary literature. Disenchantment here implies erasing any illusions of straightforward unalloyed happiness, and so challenging the genre's inherent fictional nature. Second, everyday reality is also the plane where symbolic transformations that showcase man's potentialities take place. There occurs therefore a different perspective on the same present. Petrushevskaya's fairy tales emphasize the present to subvert the genre in favour of greater realism but also to point to the possibilities of that same present.

This is not to say that the author's insistent return to the present does not serve to suggest that we live in Leibniz's best of all possible worlds, but rather that ours is perhaps the only world where one can work on his or her self. That is, the importance of the question of what is improbable as a marker of the fairy tale shifts in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales to the question of what is possible for a human being, thus stressing the very word 'possibility'. Apart from rationalizing the genre and reducing the notion of unusualness, Petrushevskaya stresses not what is probable in the fairy tale but what is possible in everyday reality, namely, what can realistically be achieved. At the same time, the word 'possibility' also reflects Petrushevskaya's literary strategies, as it implies the hermeneutic possibilities that open-endedness as a narrative strategy presents.

HEROES

Apart from revisiting the fairy-tale genre with regard to temporal and spatial relations, Petrushevskaya revises the category of the fairy-tale hero as well. To begin, the classification of Petrushevskaya's dramatis personae, as studied in Chapter I, is not explicit in terms of their

moulds insofar as there are often no clear-cut villains and certain characters' spheres of action overlap with the spheres of action of other personae. Nevertheless, Petrushevskaya's heroes formally meet genre expectations in that the tales feature both positive and negative characters who move along the Proppian trajectory of plots: accomplish the quest and arrive at a happy ending. Yet, the motivations behind their actions and the way they arrive at happy endings increasingly reveal Petrushevskaya's revisionist approach to the genre and mark her authorial style.

The author's fairy tales showcase all dramatis personae (including the hero, the villain, the princess, the donor, the helper, and the dispatcher), as well as types representing typical social positions (a tsar, a king, a prince, and a landowner). Following the folktale tradition, Petrushevskaya also introduces easily identifiable characters who are linked with particular tasks and settings. For example, the power-hungry and cruel king (e.g., "Verba-khlest," "Master," 1996), the simpleton who is rewarded with success (e.g., "Glupaia printsessa," "Myrka i ieie smekh"), and the evil witch or wizard (e.g., "Mal'chik bubenchik," "Chemodan chepukhi," "Volshebnaia ruchka," "Krapiva i Malina," 1996). But as they move away from folklore and display their rootedness in literature, Petrushevskaya's characters acquire individuality. They possess their own proper names. Faced with particular situations from everyday life, they often go through psychological processes (such as anxiety, fear, desire, and jealousy), acquire substance, and lose traditional weightlessness and abstraction. Moreover, their particular life situations indicate a specific historical period and social milieu that turns them into actual people, fellow men and women with problems in everyday life, which further contributes to genre rationalization.

As I turn to the analysis of Petrushevskaya's heroes, I divide them into two sets: passive and active. Following tradition, the solutions and happy endings in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales

are offered to the passive characters in a fairy-tale fashion; that is, passively by external help, lucky chance, or a lesson learned. However, what comprises a significant genre revision is these characters' internal strength that reveals itself through their seeming passivity. Meanwhile, the active characters in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales consciously change their lives and individually secure a happy ending, which further marks the revision of the genre and at the same time comprises a striking novelty vis-à-vis Petrushevskaya's prose and drama. My examination of the meaning of 'possibility' within the notion of individual agency implies the characters' motivation for their actions. Although any bona fide psychologism that would reveal their inner life is absent, Petrushevskaya's active characters are nonetheless spurred to action by increasing will power.

The Passive Hero

A quintessential fairy-tale hero is one who exhibits passivity and nonetheless arrives at a happy ending. In Russian folk tradition, this character is typically the good-natured simpleton, or the fool. As Andrei Sinyavsky observed, God loves the fool (as demonstrated in such folk expressions and proverbs as "Fools have all the luck" and "Ignorance is bliss")[218] because he is powerless: no one can help him, and he cannot help himself either. The fool does not trust reason, his senses, or life experience. Nor does he learn from his own mistakes. As Eleazar Meletinsky noted with regard to the passivity of Ivanushka the Fool: "From the point of view of his practical, egotistical, and sober-minded brothers, Ivanushka the Fool is stupid, but he possesses a wisdom which, in the final analysis, gives him an advantage over his brothers."[219] He is guided by a

[218] Andrei Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool. Russian Folk Belief*, trans. by Joanne Turnbull and Nikolai Formozov, *Glas* 41 (2007), 26. One may also think of the philosophical discussion of chance (or a stroke of luck) versus destiny.
[219] Elezear Meletinsky, "The 'Low' Hero of the Fairy Tale," in *The Study of Russian Folklore*, ed. by Felix J. Oinas and Stephen Soudakoff (Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1975), 238.

certain higher power and is open to life. Thanks to precisely this state of passivity, the fool wins with the help of magic powers.[220]

The fool, or the good-for-nothing hero, features in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, but in an altered form. At first glance, an illustrative example of the fool hero is Stupid Ira ("Glupaia printsessa") who triumphs over the villains who take advantage of her. The villains are indeed defeated without her conscious or active resistance (since it is Piotr who defeats them). In this light, then, Ira exists in a state of receptive passivity—without any active effort on her part. Admittedly, as in the case of the folktale fool hero, Ira's luck changes not exactly because she becomes wiser, but somewhat unwittingly, without her having a precise agenda and goal to achieve. To paraphrase Lüthi, Ira resembles those who find the Grail precisely because they do not search for it and at the same time remain open and guided by life itself.[221]

She is, however, an example of a conventional fool hero only partly, since she triumphs over her parents by her own efforts. Albeit in a humorous fashion, she resists the will of her parents to marry the perfect prince since she marries "a donkey," a stupid or foolish person, apparently like herself. Moreover, despite her alleged stupidity, she becomes who she wants to be, sets up a veterinary clinic, and lives a fulfilling life as she tends to animals. She must have set her own goal of setting up a veterinary clinic, and attained it through her own efforts and accomplishments.[222] As the persistence of her own will is implicit, Ira cannot be seen as a typical passive fool hero.

Ira's nickname (stupid, as in the tale's title) is in fact ironic. It expresses the unfair opinion of Ira's parents and the court who consider "stupid" even such good deeds as her readiness to help

[220] Sinyavsky, *Ivan The Fool*, 36-45.
[221] Ira follows fairy-tale logic as she unwittingly gets hold of a magic means (the donkey as the portent of love) and arrives at a happy ending. However, Petrushevskaya revises this logic somewhat, since love does come to Ira by way of magic per se. More specifically, love is sparked naturally and spontaneously, as it often happens in life – therefore marking the author's accentuation of life forces and not fairy-tale magic.
[222] Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, 58.

others and her treatment of animals. Naiveté, then, overlaps in Petrushevskaya's tale with good-heartedness, disinterestedness, compassion, and magnanimity—virtues which acquire magical properties and replace the element of magic.[223] As such, the preservation of altruism is encouraged, as it is perhaps becoming a relic in an otherwise cruel contemporary life. Passivity has been criticized as an inherently Russian approach to life: intellectual sloth, trusting in luck, counting on someone else, ignoring personal responsibility, and hoping for miracles.[224] Revising somewhat the essence of the fool hero, Petrushevskaya's fairy tale suggests that not everything depends on one's intellect or erudition, for all this may be secondary and indeed not the main aspect in life. Ira's naiveté is by and large misleading, then, since she proves to be able to exercise her will.[225]

The tales from the cycle "Korolevskie prikliucheniia:" "Printsessa Belonozhka, ili Kto liubit, nosit na rukakh" and "Prints s zolotymi volosami," also spotlight apparently passive characters whose deeds do not depend on cunning or intelligence, but rather to whom things happen serendipitously, although only when they evince humane qualities. The eponymous Printsessa Belonozhka as well as the young mother of the Prince with the golden hair are guided by instinctual self-sacrificial love; this is at the same time what makes them quintessentially good characters. Belonozhka sacrifices her frail health for her beloved and the young mother protects her son against the wickedness of people who want to exploit him. These characters' good-heartedness, and not external magic, subsequently helps them attain happiness. Belonozhka recovers from illness and reunites with her prince; and the mother of the Prince with the golden

[223] I return to the question of magic and the rationalization of magic in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in this Chapter.
[224] Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool*, 39.
[225] Ira bears a certain resemblance to Dostoevsky's Myshkin. Like the Idiot, Ira is altruistic and naive; but unlike her literary predecessor, she has free will, and can thus stand up to reality.

hair heroically saves her son and reunites with her husband.[226] Their happiness, then, depends on the extent of their humaneness. As such, these characters reflect the conventions and spirit of Russian folklore, which has been preserved in Russian culture and ensured the longevity of the spirit.[227] As in the Russian folklore tradition, the clue to the passive heroes' strength is their love, truthfulness, and unselfishness.

Furthermore, these capacities are the interior motives for the characters' actions. For example, the guiding principle of the Prince's mother is unconditional love for her child, but she also demonstrates great physical strength and perseverance on her quest to safely bring her child home. Belonozhka, too, is a complex character. Although the Prince kisses her and brings her back to life, and although she is portrayed as an overly sensitive person, Belonozhka's role is more intricate than being a passive princess whose comportment is governed by self-abnegation. She transforms into a strong woman who is equally capable of both physical strength and courage. What marks Petrushevskaya's novelty in relation to the folktale and fairy-tale tradition is also the fact that both Belonozhka and the Prince's mother defy gender stereotypes. Moreover, Petrushevskaya evokes not only women's but also men's strength for the sake of gender equality

[226] As opposed to *Snow White* or *Sleeping Beauty*, the tales from which Petrushevskaya borrows the motif of the kiss in "Printsessa Belonozhka," Belonozhka's sleep is not enchanted in that no one puts a spell on her. Rather, the element of magic, or sorcery, is absent. Illness causes Belonozhka's sleep, which accentuates real life and thus rationalizes the element of magic.

[227] George Gibian writes: "The folktales of Russia form one of the most extensive bodies of popular literature that has been preserved. In a country where the life of the spirit was for a long time largely in the hands of the church and where secular influences of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment came late or not at all, the folk literature provided a greatly needed medium for the independent self-expression of the people's imagination." See George Gibian, "Dostoevskij's Use of Russian Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 69: 273 (1956), 239.

as well as universal human equality.[228] What remains unchanged with regard to tradition is that the above characters' low appearance camouflages their lofty essence.[229]

The Fool Hero

A special case of the passive hero in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is the fool hero as jester. The eponymous hero of the tale "Koroleva Lir" ("Queen Lear," 1997) serves as an apt example. Resonating with the Fool and with Cordelia from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Koroleva Lir reverses her role as queen to that of a jester. She takes off the social mask of a queen and exhibits the foolishness (or childishness) that in fact protects her throughout the tale. For example, she sets out to seek adventure in the city and ends up not paying for food and goods, conveniently not realizing that she should pay for them. After a frantic bus trip and a police chase, the exhilarated Koroleva Lir returns to her palace, and already looks forward to another adventure outside of the palace gates.

Koroleva Lir may be read as someone from everyday life, namely an unorthodox older woman, full of vigour and vivacity, whom people might consider mad. As there is always the possibility of an alternative reading with Petrushevskaya, such uninhibited behaviour that is not accounted for by everyday life standards may be read as wise by spiritual standards, for Koroleva Lir possesses the wisdom of heart of which Sinyavsky speaks. She shows her true nature as an individual, without concealing it under the social mask of a queen.[230] Inspired by Shakespeare,

[228] The Prince's father manages to deal with his own lack of trust and apologizes to the Prince's mother. Thus, his reclaimed trust and her love stress their mutual contribution to their family's reunion. Belonozhka's Prince and Ira's Piotr also undergo spiritual transformation: the former realizes his mistake and retrieves the girl, and the latter changes his initial motivation to take advantage of Ira and ends up helping her. The result is that their happiness depends on their own capacities and mutual willingness for self-sacrifice.

[229] As Meletinsky notes in his analysis of the "good-for-nothing hero," the low consciousness of Ivanushka the Fool, the peasant's son, turns into the lofty consciousness of Ivanushka the Fool, the king's son-in-law (Meletinsky, "The 'Low' Hero," 242).

[230] A Jungian analysis of Petrushevskaya's fairy tale characters is worth a separate study.

Petrushevskaya revisits the theme of madness. Her heroine is an individualized character who shuns being smothered by social constraints, which comprises her version of reason in madness, or wisdom in folly. She can be read as a Bakhtinian "wise fool" if the reader decides to read her behaviour not as naiveté but as self-awareness.[231] That is, Koroleva Lir exalts foolishness as a counterpoise to adapting to the constraints of adult life in the social world, and points to individuation and non-conformism.[232] A fool hero, then, is an example of Petrushevskaya's escape from the otherwise constructed and constraining, but also often negative world.

Just as in the preceding tales the passive heroes fight off the conditions of cruel reality through being humane, Koroleva Lir is an example of achieving similar ends by way of clownery. In personifying a jester, Koroleva Lir reveals a special kind of wisdom – preserving and exhibiting unalloyed freedom in an otherwise alienated world. Her clownery and tricks bear resemblance to the actions of a jester and the carnival magic they create, rendering the real world Koroleva Lir's amusing playground.[233] Most of all, however, Koroleva Lir's unsettling of order is human; it brings humour and comic relief. Ultimately, as usual with Petrushevskaya's inconclusiveness, it is up to the reader to decide whether Lir's behaviour marks her inability to face and adapt to reality (after all, King Lear fails) or serves as her weapon against its constraints.

Petrushevskaya's Koroleva Lir can be also read as a variation on the theme of the holy fool (*iurodivyi*) from Russian folk belief. More specifically, Koroleva Lir parodies the *iurodivyi*. Persons of unusual or eccentric behaviour were believed to be touched by the hand of God, and so entitled to special reverence. From the point of view of the world, Koroleva Lir, too, is

[231] In this light, Koroleva Lir is alone in her knowledge of unconventional truth, and society considers her way of life insane or stupid. For details on the wise fool, see Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 150-151.
[232] For an account of the figure of a jester who sees unconventional truth and believes in it despite misunderstandings and direct pressure, based on the example of Grigory Gorin's play *That Very Munchausen* (1976), see Lipovetsky, *Politicizing Magic. An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, 246-248.
[233] Clownery here replaces the element of magic. I read Petrushevskaya's laughter and comic effect (along with the rationalization of magic and bringing contemporary life to the fore) as an example of a deliberate parody of magic, and so a significant revision of the genre. I return to this question in this Chapter, in the section on magic.

considered mad, as she disregards social conventions. Her actions, although in a more humorous rendition, may be likened to the holy lunatics, or wise fools, who spoke the uncomfortable truth to the rulers, for which they were often martyred. Koroleva Lir's martyrdom, though, is parodied by her being chased by the police.

The Active Hero

If the passivity of the folktale hero is a reflection of the objectively hopeless situation of the folktale audience,[234] Petrushevskaya's stance defies hopelessness. By introducing active heroes, Petrushevskaya suggests ways of resistance, be they social or moral. The capacity to consciously and actively choose good (*dobro*); that is, to uphold universal human virtues, oppose all forms of abuse, and tap into the possibilities of life in the present, characterizes a separate set of the author's characters. This fact alone makes these characters noteworthy in that they comprise a novelty among Petrushevskaya's characters at large, including those of her prose and drama. From the point of view of the genre, these characters challenge the folktale's proclivity for passivity in the hands of life's forces. Some of Petrushevskaya's active characters disclose the genre's penchant for ingenuity, but Petrushevskaya extends this notion to include characters who are not clever or sly in the folktale fashion but rather whose originality is manifested in active learning and coping with life's adversities, including distress and suicidal thoughts, as well as resisting the temptations of vice, such as vanity. They are active and take their lives into their own hands as they demonstrate the courage to change. Both active and passice characters also show humaneness; for example, by being kind to animals and to the elderly, or by sharing and being concerned with others. Petrushevskaya's active characters share their low social status (as

[234] Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell. Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 9.

defined by Meletinsky's classification) with Petrushevskaya's passive characters.[235] While both the passive and the active heroes are underestimated, treated unfairly, and undergo substantial hardship, the latter heroes' transformation is more pronounced in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. Their transformation is emblematic in that it occurs without the help of magic, whereby their individual agency is brought to the fore.

"Sny devochki" ("A Girl's Dreams," 1996) is a tale about ingenuity that extends to and stands in for courage. One day, a girl receives a phone call from a sorcerer's servant who orders her to go to a hotel, for his master wants to marry her. Otherwise, he announces, her parents will die. The girl initially refuses but as her father dies the same night, she sacrifices herself and, after announcing her intentions to her mother, sets off on a quest to meet the evil and whimsical sorcerer. Belittled by the sorcerer for whom, as it turns out, she is only one of many victims, and determined to bring her father back to life, she devises a plan. The girl wittingly engages in a conversation with the sorcerer and outsmarts him. He provides the answer to the secret question of how to free her from nightmares: "'Oh, you're in the land of idiots', calmly answered the sorcerer. 'I forgot. Where we live, any fool knows how. When someone has a terrible dream, well, about your cherry orchards, wheat fields, creeks in the forest, or sea waves here, on your earth, one must immediately ask the first met passerby, 'Who are you?' And the dream will end.'"[236] And true enough, the girl asks the magical question, and her nightmare ends.[237] The image of the evil sorcerer merges with the common unpleasant experience of bad dreams to which the girl is

[235] In that they resemble the little man (*malen'kii chelovek*) from the nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition.
[236] "О, вы же земля идиотов, – мирно ответил колдун. – Я забыл. У нас каждый дурак умеет. Как ему приснится страшный сон – ну, про ваши вишневые сады, про пшеничные поля, про ручьи в лесу или про морские волны тут, у вас, на земле – надо сразу спросить у первого попавшегося прохожего: 'Ты кто?' И сон кончится" (SS, 188).
[237] The ending is uncanny in a Todorovian sense, since there is an explanation for the supernatural elements in the tale – it is a nightmare. As described in the first part of this chapter, the reader gathers that the tale follows rational thought, which reduces magical thought. Another example is "Ostrov letchikov" ("The Pilots' Island," 1997), where the magical island turns out to be the pilot's dream. Petrushevskaya in fact blends two Todorovian categories in her fairy tales: the marvelous and the uncanny, wherein the latter especially reveals Petrushevskaya's reduction of magic.

subjected, thereby increasing the tale's realistic frame of reference. In this tale, the girl is alone in fighting off her nightmares, and she suceeds without the help of magic or her parents: "And I woke up and asked my family how I could save myself from nightmares. They stroked my head and kissed me. They don't know."[238] Love for her father is her only weapon against the evil sorcerer. The girl finds the courage to oppose the sorcerer, and at the same time to conquer her nightmares, which stresses the fact that the strength resides within the heroine herself and at the same time underlines her control.

The tale "Volshebnye ochki" ("The Magical Glasses," 1996) also evokes strength on the part of the hero.[239] It is the story of a girl who one day bought a pair of magical glasses: "Well, as can also happen, the glasses turned out be magical, a second pair of eyes that see that which escapes ordinary sight."[240] She can zoom out to see faraway planets and stars, which fascinate her, but also, as she zooms in, she sees microbes and bacteria, which petrify her. She is Petrushevskaya's preferred character type in that she is an outcast, not understood by her peers and teachers and considered "a psycho," causing her suicidal thoughts. One day, as she is about to jump from the roof to end her life, she sees someone kidnap a child and run away. The girl figures the culprit is a blind older lady whom she often sees begging for money at the entrance to the subway station, and, as it soon becomes clear, only pretends to be blind. Thanks to her magical glasses, she tracks down the old lady and confronts her. It turns out that, suffering from the housing shortage, a perennial problem in (post-)Soviet Russia that is reflected in Petrushevskaya's works at large, the old lady intended to use the kidnapped child to apply for a bigger apartment. Utilizing an ingenious plan, the girl manages to outsmart the kidnapper and

[238] "И я еще проснулась и спросила у родных, как мне спастись от страшных снов. Они погладили меня по голове и поцеловали. Они не знают" (SS, 187).
[239] This tale was first published in the journal *Novyi mir* in 1993.
[240] "Что же, и так бывает, но очки оказались волшебные, как вторая пара глаз, которые видят то, что обычным взглядом не ухватишь" (SS, 276).

return the child to its mother. In the end, having learned how difficult adult life can be, the girl realizes she wants to live and help others. As she overcomes her fear of life, she realizes that "one must live with germs."[241] In the telling gesture of putting her magical glasses in her pocket, she concludes that although not everything is ideal, one can still find the courage to live: "It's better not to notice some things, not everything in this world is perfect."[242] With her mental strength and sense of justice, she actively makes the decision to change on her own; and, forsaking suicidal thoughts, becomes stronger in her new, second-chance life. Crucially, her transformation is founded not on magic but on will power and individual, conscious internal struggle.

Another story with a similar outlook is "Devushka-Nos" ("The Nose Girl," 1996). It features a girl by the name of Nina who works as a hairdresser and who has an unusually large nose. Nina was bewitched by a sorcerer who acted in vengeance when Nina's parents did not invite him to the celebration of her birth. Nina turns to a medical doctor who in turn sends her to see a sorcerer outside of the city. On the train, she falls down on the lower bench where a young man sits, and falls in love with him. The train arrives at its destination and Nina sets off to meet the sorcerer. The latter corrects her nose but takes away the middle finger on her right hand in return. By magic, Nina instantly draws the attention of everyone around her, including one fabulously rich count. Nina, however, rejects his advances, as it is the young man from the train whom she loves. She therefore returns to the sorcerer for assistance to find her beloved. The sorcerer agrees but this time takes away her index finger. Nina gets the address of the young man and goes to visit him, but he does not recognize her, as he remembers one "funny-looking" girl instead. Nina accidentally discovers that the young man is seriously ill. In order to help him, she goes to the sorcerer for a third time and this time around asks to have her large nose back. She

[241] "Приходится жить с микробами" (SS, 284).
[242] "Некоторые вещи лучше не замечать, не все в этом мире совершенно" (SS, 284).

sacrifices her long-awaited beauty and turns back into the person she has always been. The young man proposes to her, and as it turns out he is a medical doctor, he gives her medication for her mutilated hand to return it to its initial state.[243] The tale ends with the two getting married and raising a number of funny-looking children. Nina realizes the superficiality of external beauty when her inner beauty is appreciated. It is her conscious choice to ignore physical appearance, which is projected as her strength. The happy ending is brought about by ugliness ("looking funny"), and as such opposes the fairy-tale canon as well as the superficial beauty of contemporary culture, embodied in the tale by the image of the count's wealth and luxury and Nina's initial preoccupation with becoming beautiful. In a strategy of reversal, then, Petrushevskaya's heroine understands the futility of trying to become someone other than her true self.[244] Instead, individualization, or being one of a kind, is emphasized.

Both passive and active characters in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are "good-for-nothing" heroes, underdogs. Their lowliness, however, hides their potential, since they are equally capable of courageous feats. At the same time, the elimination of external beneficial magic suggests that the characters do not need magic to live happier lives. That, of course, does not mean that the characters' reality is a fulfilled utopian dream, but rather that it may become fulfilled against all odds thanks to the strength that resides within them. What comes to the fore, therefore, is these characters' individual agency. By underlining her heroes' control over and active intervention in their own lives, Petrushevskaya revises the folktale and fairy-tale programmed readings, and suggests these qualities as foundations of civil society. Attributing agency to the passive fairy-

[243] This tale is another example of reducing the element of magic. At the same time, love as well as man's actual potential are read as having magical properties.

[244] Petrushevskaya borrows the motif of exchanging body parts to gain something in return in this tale from Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, where the Sea Witch takes away the heroine's tongue and tail in return for giving her human legs, which the Little Mermaid wishes to have so as to be with her beloved. As opposed to Andersen's tale, Nina reunites with her beloved thanks to mutual love. I discuss this tale in detail in Chapter III.

tale hero is, after all, a telling sign of empowerment and encouragement to better explore society's flaws and weaknesses.

Wish Fulfillment

Petrushevskaya's revisionist approach to well-established folktale and fairy-tale categories is also evident in her rendition of the theme of wish fulfillment. The heroes analyzed below are revised fool characters who are distinguished by being lazy. In conventional folktales, such idle characters use the fulfillment of wishes to avoid doing anything, which stresses their passivity. While in the traditional folktale canon Ivanushka's passive wishful thinking is projected as his eccentricity and helps him become prosperous,[245] the theme of wish fulfillment in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is presented as mere illusory optimism that subsequently leads to the heroes' learning a lesson, and so has a didactic foundation.

"Schastlivye koshki" ("Happy Cats," 1996) is the story of a young girl who one day decides to find a sorcerer to turn her into a cat, as she believes cats are happy because they do not need to go to school.[246] The sorcerer agrees, turns the girl into a cat and then turns himself into the girl. He then ousts the cat-girl from home, first to the stairs and then to the street. While the girl-sorcerer engages in organizing debaucheries, the cat-girl is cast away, leading a miserable life on the streets, fighting for scraps of food, and trying to stay alive in the rough urban milieu. She also barely escapes being skinned. All these negative experiences make her reminisce about her comfortable but unappreciated life. In the end, as a result of an accident that the sorcerer causes because of his insobriety, the girl metamorphoses into her old self. She then apologizes to

[245] Meletinsky, "The 'Low' Hero," 239-243.
[246] This tale was first published in the journal *Novyi mir* in 1993.

her parents and asks them to give shelter to the four cats she saved from being skinned, the truly "happy cats." The girl learns a lesson: be careful what you wish for and appreciate what you have.

The tale "Koshkin gorodok" ("Cats' Town," 2001) also tells the story of a lesson learned in a humourous fashion. The beautiful and sleek black and white cat Misha is pampered by his masters, but he craves more appreciation. Bored at home and attracted by female cats, he wishes to venture into Cats' Town to quench his carnal desire. He is duly reminded that he needs to have gold to pay for such pleasures. Serendipitously, he finds "zolotko," a chocolate foil wrapper, with which his owners planned to decorate the Christmas tree. Although he has fantasized about beautiful kittens, his feline company turns out to be rather ghastly: "Truth be told, the beauties turned out to be not at all how Misha imagined them in his dreams, their eyebrows and whiskers had some acidic hues, violet, green, and bright pink."[247] The ugliness of street life makes him regret having abandoned his previous life. In the end, his owners find him. Back home, safe and sound and pampered again, he concludes that it is not worthwhile to think of having something better while he already has something good: "Enough is as good as a feast."[248]

While in the folktale magical forces act in favour of the hero on the basis that he is either deprived or treated unfairly, the magical forces in Petrushevskaya's tales do not act in the characters' favour. The drunkard sorcerer sends the girl to the street, and the chocolate foil wrapper that is supposed to have magical properties merely causes the cat's suffering. Petrushevskaya's revision of the folktale tradition is apparent. Unlike Ivanushka the Fool, the characters in the tales above are not in any way deprived or treated unfairly: the girl is loved by her parents and the cat is loved and pampered by his owners. Thus, the desire for external, magical help, upon which the happiness of the folktale hero depends, is not applicable in

[247] "Правда, красавицы оказались не совсем такими, какими их вообразил в своих мечтах Миша, брови и усы у них были каких-то кислотных оттенков, лиловые, зелёные и ярко-розовые" (KMZZh, 334).
[248] "От добра добра не ищут" (KMZZh, 335).

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, and, more importantly, not required. Petrushevskaya's message is simple: satisfaction is available in and from life in the here and now.

The characters' desire for wish fulfillment in these tales is informed by their drive toward instantaneous gratification and self-interest, and tellingly punished.[249] Both the girl and the cat are subject to suffering because of their selfish desires, and in the end learn a lesson. The conclusion of the tales, however, has a productive aspect in that it accentuates the heroes' self-reflection. Their thought process therefore emerges as a more crucial aspect than the fulfillment of the wishes that leads to their punishment. The characters in these tales are tested and to some extent, like the young girl from the tale "Skazka o chasakh," undergo unpleasant experiences that represent initiation rites, and so a learning process. That is, they depict "some essential threatening transitional episode in personal growth and socialization."[250] The moralizing aspect is thus tempered but nonetheless present. In other words, even though didacticism is not explicit, it nonetheless becomes clear what kind of behaviour and attitude may lead to a happy conclusion for the character and for the reader alike.

However, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales that end with a lesson learned are not "cautionary tales" like tales with an unpleasant end intended to make children conform to rules (e.g., don't play with matches). They also should not be considered as merely depicting what is right and what is wrong. The freedom both characters are magically given is rendered in a humorous fashion. The tales parody the question of freedom that man, as a limited being, can misuse, which can in turn lead to selfish willfulness. The wishful thinking in which Petrushevskaya's characters engage is quite human in that it points to rather common wishes and yearnings of human beings, including the desire for carefree and contented life. In invoking and parodying the question of

[249] This may point to Petrushevskaya's reflection on the concept of utilitarian ethics, according to which human beings pursue pleasure, strive to avoid pain, and are motivated by self-interest.
[250] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time. On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, 70, 109-119, and 139.

human nature, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales ultimately reveal a magnanimous approach to man that is marked by understanding and forgiveness. The author's objective is not to punish her characters and moralize but rather to counterbalance moralizing with a more positive and productive approach—by making them aware. The accentuation of good and the contextualization of evil thus reveal the author as a moralist (that is, promoting morality while not giving lessons), but not a moralizer, and her fairy tales as not explicitly didactic literature.

The Motif of Good and Evil

Although Petrushevskaya neither engages in lecturing nor assumes the role of a moralizer, the fairy-tale genre, with its inherent motif of the struggle between good and evil, allows her to address questions of morality—a system of values and principles of conduct, as well as questions of human nature—the fundamental dispositions and traits of human beings.

As noted in the analysis of heroes, the good in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is comprised of universal human qualities and virtues, including selflessness and compassion, but also such capacities as self-reflection and will power. Evil, on the other hand, largely stems in her fairy tales from human vices (including boastfulness, cowardice, envy, greed, impatience, jealousy, sloth, or vanity).[251] Evil is corrected—and not necessarily severely punished, as is the case in folktales and didactic fairy tales. This fact alone thus affects the binary opposition of protagonism and antagonism, or good and evil, inherent in the fairy-tale genre, which Petrushevskaya decidedly challenges. Her tales do not follow the tradition of portraying stark contrasts between good and evil, nor do they insist on punishment for wrongdoing. As I turn to the examination of

[251] Conversely, irreparable evil seen as human cruelty and insensitivity transpires from the background in Petrushevskaya's tales through the characters who do not constitute the conventional folktale and fairy-tale personages but who appear in the text as contemporary people. They include the brutish count in "Devushka-Nos" who flaunts his prosperity, the prison cleaner who helps the mother of the Prince with golden hair escape the prison not by any moral imperative but by the thought of material gain; the cruel adolescents who torment Little Man; or the group of adolescents who sexually assault Anya in "L'vinaia maska." I return to this question in Chapter III.

the author's rendition of this well-established category, I will stress especially her approach to evil and the application of this approach outside of the fairy-tale context. Finally, these strategies further reveal Petrushevskaya's revisionist attitide to the fairy-tale genre, and her proclivity for open-endedness.

In the tale "Chemodan chepukhi" ("The Suitcase of Nonsense," 1996), an absent-minded tailor accidentally sews both sleeves of an evil sorceress's dress together.[252] In an act of vengeance, the sorceress puts a spell on him and makes him wear the dress himself. The tailor's cunning wife suggests that he might not necessarily have to wear the dress so much as carry it with him in a suitcase.[253] The luggage that he carries around him everywhere catches the attention of thieves. Unaware of the evil spell, the thieves steal the luggage and are then themselves bound to carry the ill-sewn garment. The luggage finds its next owner in the person of the "worst villain in town" who takes it away from the now-contented thieves. The last owner of the luggage is the evil sorceress herself who in the end learns a lesson too. From that time on, "the sorceress no longer practices evil sorcery, the thieves no longer steal, and the villain no longer engages in villainy. It has become quiet and peaceful in the city."[254] Evil here stands for ill will and thievery, and is defeated. The sorceress and the thieves are punished, as they learn a lesson and no longer engage in malevolence. This tale is an example of foregrounding the good: "And the tailor sews all sorts of things and glances through the window. And when he sees the sorceress who carries the suitcase everywhere with her, he bows to her every time and says: After

[252] This tale was first published in the journal *Pioner* in 1971.
[253] Note the wordplay based on the polysemy of the verb *nosit'* in the Russian language, which means 'to wear' and 'to carry'.
[254] "С тех пор волшебница не колдует, разбойники не разбойничают, хитрец больше не хитрит. В городе стало тихо и спокойно" (SS, 117).

all, I was right to have sewn such a dress! You are very kind in this dress!"[255] On the other hand, their transformation, albeit positive, is not anticipated. That is, the villains' learning a lesson is not a conscious process in that it is not their own choice to change. Rather, in a conventional fairy-tale fashion, external circumstances force them to change. This fact points to the author's posing the question of the possibility of moral progress outside of the fairy-tale setting, which is not answered.

Petrushevskaya poses a similar question in the tale "Volshebnaia ruchka" ("The Magical Pen," 1996). A sorcerer loses his patience while waiting in line at a stationery store and presents the cause of his irritation, an annoying child, with a magical pen. The pen is consequently stolen from the child by a family of pickpockets. In the end, the pickpockets metamorphose and turn good, although this happens by chance, as in the tale above, rather than by conscious resolution. The pen's magical property is that it makes those who useit forget everything they used to do. Thus, the thieves become virtuous and start working honestly in a grocery store. The following, rather straightforward message concludes the tale: "What is free sometimes becomes more costly, especially for thieves."[256] Although the positive aspect generated from the negative is underscored (namely, the fact that the villains drop their villainous), the message has another layer. The villains' transformation unearths the ubiquitous dishonesty of others (the former thieves lose their job because they become uncomfortably honest). The reader may thus question the author's actual stance on man's moral progress and the possibility of eradicating man's disposition toward wrongdoing.

[255] "А портной шьет всякую всячину и поглядывает в окошко. И когда он видит колдунью, которая всюду ходит с чемоданом, он каждый раз ей кланяется и говорит: Все-таки я был прав, что сшил вам такое платье! В этом платье вы очень милы!" (SS, 117).
[256] "Бесплатное обходится иногда дороже, особенно ворам" (SS, 130).

Another example of contextualizing fairy-tale evil is the tale "Mal'chik bubenchik" ("The Bell Boy," 1996), in which a boy is discontented as his mother makes him wear a bell around his neck so she can always hear him and ensure he does not get lost.[257] Tired of being laughed at, he decides to take the bell off and hangs it on the neck of a random dog. As it happens, an evil sorcerer who lives in the forest finds the sound of the bell especially irritating and thus throws the dog into a dry well. Meanwhile, alarmed by the absence of her son, the mother sets off to the forest in search of him. Catching the sound of the bell, the mother follows it but in the end falls into the well. As he realizes that his mother has probably been searching for him, the boy sets off on a quest to look for his mother in the forest. The boy's cries for his mother and the incessant sound of the bell decidedly irritate the evil sorcerer. The very thought that this cacophony might continue scares the sorcerer enough to realize that it is better to simply help the mother and dog out of the well. The evil character is clearly the bad-tempered sorcerer, and he learns a lesson. Letting out expletives while operating a bulldozer, the sorcerer unwillingly accepts his defeat as he resolves to seal the well. His initial act of ill will, then, turns against him, since in the end he is the one who actually helps his oppressors/victims. Petrushevskaya, though, does not present one ultimate culprit who deserves to be punished, which speaks to her reluctance to moralize. Instead, all the characters learn a lesson: the boy – to listen to his mother, and the mother – that perhaps it is not best to hang bells on her son's neck.

The above tales demonstrate Petrushevskaya's complex approach to the motif of good and evil. While broadly conceived kindness (*dobrota*) and internal strength constitute good in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, evil sorcery and evil actions in general allude to man's vices, including contemporary man's vices, and so the destructive side of human nature. Furthermore, if the question of good is largely unambiguous, the question of evil is less straightforward, for it is

[257] This tale was first published in the journal *Krest'ianka* in 1989.

often contextualized and justifiable (though not necessarily justified). Villains in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, often personified by evil sorcerers, are contemporary ordinary people acting out such traits as impatience, jealousy, vengeance, and irritability. Hence, they often personify what is largely considered universally ignoble in man. For example, all three sorcerers from the tales above act out of irritation caused by an ill-sewn dress, a child's temper tantrum, and persistent noise, respectively. Other examples include the tale "Devushka-Nos," in which a sorcerer acts out of vengeance and puts a spell on Nina because her parents forgot to invite him to the celebration of her birth. The sorceress in "Osiel i koziel" is an embittered lady one often meets on public transportation. The neighbour-witch who puts a spell on the twin sisters in the tale "Krapiva i Malina" ("Nettle and Raspberry," 1997) acts out of malice.

Crucially, apart from disclosing the underside of human nature, the evil sorcerers' behaviour is often somewhat understandable, pointing again to Petrushevskaya's eschewal of moralizing and her dislike of certainties. For example, the sorcerer from "Mal'chik bubenchik" is a grumpy man but perhaps justly and unsurprisingly annoyed by the consistent noise in the forest where he happens to live. In the tale "Volshebnaia ruchka," the sorcerer's frustration is caused by a child throwing a tantrum in a store, and so is somewhat justified. The sorceress' irritation at the sight of a poorly tailored dress in "Chemodan chepukhi" is also somewhat justified, although perhaps not praiseworthy. The embittered lady from "Osiel i koziel" would likely appreciate it if someone offered her a seat on the bus. The examples above demonstrate that evil sorcery is quite simply a reflection of the less noble side of human nature that is rather typical among people, and thus often humorously contextualized and relativized by Petrushevskaya.

Furthermore, evil in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales unveils shared human behaviour that people exhibit without any particular effort on the part of evil sorcerers. Evil points to deeper psychological characteristics and behavioural traits: sibling rivalry ("Krapiva i Malina"), rivalry

among women ("Novye prikliucheniia Eleny Prekrasnoi"), children disobeying their mothers ("Mal'chik bubenchik"), vain daughters and difficult mother/daughter relations ("Skazka o chasakh"), failing to appreciate what one has ("Schastlivye koshki," "Koshkin gorodok"), and vengeance ("Devushka-Nos"). Petrushevskaya's fairy tales assist the reader in coming to grips with the less glorious side of human nature as he or she realizes that this side of human nature cannot be uprooted, but it can be avoided.

Evil is further contextualized and accounted for in terms of psychology and tangible sociopolitical problems of contemporary life in such tales as "Barbi-volshebnitsa i les," where the young boy's misconduct can be explained as a result of the absence of love from his mother, and the mother's inhumanness in turn as the result of her alcohol abuse. In "Verba-khlest" ("The Willow Whip," 1996) too, evil may be justifiable, but not justified by the fact that the main protagonist, the evil Queen, was physically abused by her parents when she was a child. In both tales, then, it is lack of love that stands in for evil. In the tale "Volshebnye ochki" analyzed above, the old lady's wrongdoing (kidnapping the child) is also not justified but has a valid explanation in that the lady acts within the miserable social context of a perennial housing shortage, which comes to be read as actual evil.

Indeed, there are few examples where evil and explicitly villainous characters are severely punished in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. One example comes from the tale "Master" ("Master," 1996). "Master" tells the story of a dispirited painter who only talks to his daughter and who, while respected for his work, is not liked in the town because of his mysterious visits to a local wealthy man, the town's owner. The tale touches upon the clash between professional ethics and moral principles, as the painter is asked by the wealthy man to paint an apple tree bearing golden fruit in order to embellish the town and sell it to an ogre. Staunchly following his principle of professionalism at work, as well as his vanity, the painter initially agrees. However, having

realized that his decision might be in disagreement with his conscience, he devises a way to save his daughter and the town. Instead of painting the town with gold paint, as he is asked by the ogre, he pours water over it to uncover its actual, decrepit state: cracking walls, fences turned black with time, rusting roofs. As he pours water over the wealthy town owner, the latter turns into a spider and ends up in the gutter. While the painter is capable of overcoming his overweening pride in his artistic skill and finding the courage to defend his moral code, and so to return to the path of self-knowledge, the unambiguously evil landowner-cum-spider is punished. Guided by his own conscience, the painter, then, is an example of a hero who learns his lesson and is able to correct his mistakes. In terms of Petrushevskaya's strategy, this is also a way to emphasize the positive potential of man, man's disregard of authoritarianism (the town owner's order) and regard for natural value judgments.

This analysis of Petrushevskaya's heroes can be concluded by arguing that, passive or active, the author's characters are not conventional flat figures, cut out of paper, as it were. Rather, they are human beings of flesh and blood, with active inner lives and vital relationships to others, which precludes them from being prescribed, isolated and weightless figures. Just as much as they are guided by the promptings of their hearts and the magnanimous side of human nature, they are also guided by man's mean-spirited and destructive tendencies, which disclose human beings, their universal dilemmas and contemporary problems alike. Thus, not only are the plots and heroes transferred to updated, realistic settings but the approach to the heroes themselves is also realistic.

Whether passive or active, Petrushevskaya's characters achieve happiness either when they nourish their better qualities, such as kindness and sensitivity, or when they take conscious action to make their lives more fulfilling. These characters manage to master life's difficulties and to learn, and so to achieve a more satisfying and productive existence. In this regard,

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales revise tradition to the extent that they focus on what is possible for the characters to do with their own means. The heroes' tasks in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are possible to complete, and the heroes' feats are heroic from the point of view of an ordinary human being. Through the category of the heroes, then, we observe Petrushevskaya's suggestion that life as we know it is not a fairy tale but that it can be nonetheless bearable, if not gratifying. In this way, the fairy-tale world overlaps with the actual world in Petrushevskaya's tales, and the boundaries between them merge: for even though the plots return to the ostensibly non-radiant present, the heroes' transformations mark a new, qualitatively better, stage of life. That is, even though the protagonists' social status does not change (they do not marry princes and princesses but rather are all post-Soviet everymen), their reward consists of becoming contemplative and appreciative of present reality.[258] In the category of the hero, then, the question of what is improbable gives way to the importance of the question of what is possible, thereby blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality and further revising the folktale and fairy-tale tradition.

MAGIC

The category of magic is distinguished in a variety of ways in the fairy tale. It comprises such features as magical helpers and objects, sorcerers, talking animals, wishes and spells as well as shape shifting and physical metamorphoses. All of the above attributes feature in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, but the element of magic on the whole has a special status in that, as usual with Petrushevskaya, it is marked by subversive inconclusiveness. First, magic in these

[258] A dialogue with the Soviet fairy tale in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales deserves a separate study. For an account on the Soviet fairy tale, see Marina Balina, "Introduction," in *Politicizing Magic. An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, ed. by Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 105-121.

fairy tales is largely explained, which naturally leads to the reduction of its status. This in turn weakens the sense of unusualness and the reader's plunging into the "what if" mode. Because of the rationalization of magic, the reader remains fastened to the realm of everyday life. Second, the notion of magic in Petrushevskaya's tales expands to encompass such categories as fate, miracles, and metempsychosis, which counterbalance the realm of everyday life. Petrushevskaya describes arcane occurrences as natural and inherent to man's life, thereby claiming that not everything can be interpreted and understood through the tangible aspects of life. It is as though two interconnecting mechanisms were at work: one which spotlights the historical world; and another which offers a glimpse at the mystery of life and approaches the sphere of metaphysics, thereby presenting an alternative to the former. This interconnectedness of both realms in some of Petrushevskaya's tales thus reestablishes the relevance of the notion of what is improbable for the reader, as well as the question of what is real. The questioning of what is real in turn spotlights alternative, and alternating, interpretations, thus affecting the meaning of the word 'possibility', since the metaphysical opens further possibilities of comprehending life as well as the underlying issues pertaining to man and society.

Thus, in this part of the chapter I analyze two strategies Petrushevskaya applies in her fairy tales: rationalizing and so limiting magic, which further foregrounds genre disenchantment; as well as extending the magical to the all-encompassing metaphysical, which in turn foregrounds enchantment in the sense that it involves hesitation between the belief and disbelief inherent in the fantastic. These two strategies are seemingly disjunctive, which is hardly surprising considering Petrushevskaya's proclivity for ambiguity, but ultimately disclose a coherent substance, on which I elaborate in the conclusion.

Rationalizing Magic, or toward Disenchantment

As examined thus far, we observe in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales a departure from magical thought that pivots on a realistic setting: references to everyday life (including *byt*, the often crude aspects of everyday life), historical and geographical descriptions, implicit sociopolitical issues, chronological time, and life-like, psychologically grounded characters.[259] That is, the setting in Petrushevskaya's narratives explicitly shifts from the traditionally unspecified "one upon a time in a faraway land" to the setting of contemporaneity, which leads to a certain disenchantment of the genre. This phenomenon is arguably most expressly traceable within the constitutive element of magic. While traditional fairy tales consist of a balance between magical and realistic elements, contemporary fairy tales weaken the accentuation of magic or give it new guises and dimensions.[260] The case of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is similar. Although they feature sorcery as well as magical helpers and objects, a general decline in conventional magic is explicit, thereby contributing to the genre's rationalization, or literal disenchantment (that is, lessening specifically the element of magic).[261]

The decline of magic is evident in the cycle "Prikliucheniia Barbi," which features a magical helper, Barbie doll Masha, who readily helps the protagonist, Grandpa Ivan. She secretly stands by Grandpa Ivan and tends to him, not to mention that she is his only company. For example, she calls a fellow Barbie doll whose owner is a medical doctor to help restore Grandpa Ivan's sight; she searches for him in the forest; she sews on the buttons of his shirt. Like the doll that Vassilissa the Beautiful receives from her dying mother in the Russian folktale, Barbie doll Masha is a magical helper, a saviour, who helps the hero in his misery and protects him from

[259] For an account of *byt* in Petrushevskaya's prose, see Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life: Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev to Putin*, 58-99.
[260] Joosen, "Disenchanting the Fairy Tale: Retellings of 'Snow White' between Magic and Realism," 228-239.
[261] A clear case in point is a small sequin in "Barbi ulybaetsia" ("Barbie Smiles") that serves as a magical object which helps Barbie's little owner find the abandoned doll.

danger. In Petrushevskaya's revision of the traditional paradigm, though, it is also the hero, Grandpa Ivan, who helps Masha by tending to her.[262] By introducing Masha Barbie Petrushevskaya emphasizes the loneliness of the elderly, who are often neglected by their own families, thereby underscoring sociopolitical problems in contemporary Russia. Magic performed by the helper represents and is replaced by humane deeds. Introducing Masha, therefore, stands in for the call for meaningful relationships. What we observe, then, is that fairy-tale magic acquires a new guise by being replaced by mutual help. Receiving help from a doll and not a fellow human being is a telling sign of Petrushevskaya's distress about man's condition.

Sorcerers in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are not always unambiguously positive and negative, or good and evil, as they otherwise are in traditional fairy tales, which, as noted earlier, are marked by stark divisions and contrasts. Rather, Petrushevskaya's sorcerers are often neutral, as it were. They contribute to creating good when they assist the heroes in making the right decisions—either to follow their fate or to change their lives for the better—but they do so accidentally. For example, the sorcerer in "Devushka-Nos" takes away the heroine's finger, and so mutilates her, but in so doing he implicitly disapproves of her wish to become physically beautiful. The sorcerer is Nina's symbolically expressed conscience; that is, it speaks to the rightness or wrongness of her behaviour. In the end, Nina realizes that her wish was superficial. In "Skazka o chasakh", too, the sorceress is the apparition of the girl's grandmother who admonishes the girl and contributes to her learning to respect and appreciate her mother. This sorceress, then, who can be symbolically read as the fear of death, only assists in the heroine's transformation, for in the end, the girl learns on her own and sacrifices herself for her mother. Similarly, in "Printsessa Belonozhka," the sorcerer, whose solution is a riddle that is not

[262] Dalton-Brown's observation is not accurate when she argues that Masha Barbie helps everyone but herself. The magical helpers' role in fairy tales is not to help themselves but others. See Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 124.

understood by the court, rightly foretells that "if someone loves you, he carries you in his arms." In the end, the characters find happiness on their own; the sorcerer only points them in the necessary direction.

Additionally, magical helpers and objects unintentionally help Petrushevskaya's heroes. A quintessential example is the donkey in "Glupaia printsessa" who unwittingly serves as the portent of love. Ultimately, though, the heroes' love does not require any magical help, since it arises spontaneously. In the tale "Volshebnye ochki," too, the magical glasses that the girl finds on the one hand add to her anguish as they magnify the negative, but on the other hand save her from committing suicide and help her realize her vocation, namely, to help others. The magical glasses thus help her gain an appropriate distance before approaching problems in life, especially as she realizes that one has to learn how to live with the negative in life. The heroine of "Podarok printsesse" ("A Gift for the Princess," 2012) believes it is thanks to her grandmother's love that she at last feels happy. The grandmother acts as a good fairy and the cell phone she presents to her granddaughter is a magical object. The girl believes she would not be able to attain happiness without the cell phone she received from her grandmother. It is fairly dubious that a cell phone could secure happiness, but the fact that it comes from a person who deeply cares for her (her parents do not) gives it such magical properties. In the end, it is through her own courage and openness to the world that the young woman finds happiness in remote Nepal. Finally, in "Volshebnaia ruchka," the eponymous magical pen that the family of thieves happens to steal initially causes commotion in their life, but is in the end an instrument for their moral change.

The sorcerers and magical objects and helpers, then, do not miraculously help the characters in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales achieve their goals or complete their quests, as they do

in conventional fairy tales.[263] Rather, they are parodied, since they assist the characters accidentally or merely happen to be present at crucial situations in the characters' lives. These sorcerers and magical objects symbolically point to the necessity for the characters to activate their own effort in the transformations they undergo. The examples above thus speak to a reductionist approach to the figure of the sorcerer and the magical object so as to replace them with the actual potential of the characters and to suggest that it is human beings themselves who are capable of change without the need for any fairy-tale, or external, magic.

The role of fairy-tale magic is further de-emphasized in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales by way of a kind of intelligible magic that represents contemporary man's "magic," which is implicitly evil (or superfluous, superficial, and problematic), and subject to irony. Contemporary "magic" described in the narrators' wry and often plaintive style includes plastic corrective surgery ("Devushka-Nos"), cosmetology and the use of photoshop ("Podarok printsesse"), TV and advertisement ("Zolotaia triapka") as well as credit cards ("Koroleva Lir") photography, and diets ("Sekret Marileny").

Other strategies of de-emphasizing magic include broadening its interpretation. In "Koshkin gorodok," for instance, chocolate foil wrapper (*zolotko*) functions as a magical object in that it is used for the gold that the cat needs to pay for the pleasures in Cats' Town. In "Krapiva i Malina," fairy-tale magic is broadened, too. Krapiva is in love with a school teacher and attempts to win his heart with cunning. Malina, her timid twin sister, secretly loves the teacher as well, and shares his love for plants and flowers. It is the love for plants and flowers that acquires magical properties: ("Flowers, after all, are pure love, and there is no wizardry behind it").[264] It is specifically a plant that makes the teacher realize what is important for him and to take care of

[263] On donors, magical agents, and the role of the hero, see Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 39, 43-44, 44-46, and 50.
[264] "Цветы ведь – это живая любовь, и никакого колдовства здесь нет" (NS, 114).

the ailing Malina. The natural beauty of plants produces magic, which stands in for love in this tale. Fairy-tale magic can be thus successfully and quite simply replaced with sacrifice and love. In "Ostrov letchikov" ("The Pilots' Island," 1996), it is in turn fragrances that acquire magical properties. The description of the magical island that attracts a young pilot with its magnificent scent of flowers is impressionistic in that the pilot's reaction is subjective, and acquires magical attributes:

> In the darkness below a small light glowed in a palace (apparently from a window under its roof), and the pilot found himself in a cloud of fragrances which he had not known – the night smelled not of laurel and lemon, not of honey and tea, not of jasmine and white lilacs, and not like a new kidskin glove, like a red mushroom in the moss, like a wild strawberry at noon on the glade, like a warm vanilla bun on a cold morning, and not like your mother's palm on your forehead, and not like a pansy the nocturnal beauty among the ferns – it was something else, delicate, strong, but intangible.[265]

In the last two tales, the word 'magical' is not used in its primary meaning as referring to fairy-tale magic but rather to signify something beautiful or delightful that is produced or works *as though* by magic, which comprises another instance of Petrushevskaya's parodying the category of magic.

Laughter as Magic

Replacing magic with laughter and nonsense is another way for Petrushevskaya to give magic a new dimension. In line with my analysis of Petrushevskaya as a contemporary storyteller (a storyteller of contemporary urban life who employs contemporary orality), Petrushevskaya could be read as a contemporary *balagur* (joker) from the Russian folk tradition. As examples of

[265] "Внизу, во тьме светился маленьким огоньком дворец (видимо, окно под крышей), а сам летчик оказался в облаке запахов, которых он никогда раньше и не нюхал -- ночь пахла не лавром и лимоном, не медом и чаем, не жасмином и белой сиренью, и не так как новая лайковая перчатка, как рыжик во мху, как земляника в полдень на поляне, как тёплая ванильная булочка зимним утром, и не как мамина ладонь у тебя на лбу, и не как фиалка ночная красавица среди папоротников — это было что-то еще, нежное, сильное, но неуловимое" (SS, 342).

contemporary *balagurstvo*, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales point to the restorative role of laughter. The absurd, including the linguistic absurd, of her drollery consists of playing linguistic games and turning words into humorous nonsense.[266] As Dmitry Likhachev has underlined, *balagurstvo* is "a national Russian form of laughter, a significant share of which belongs to its 'linguistic' component."[267] Deliberate violations of common sense, whimsical language, and humour are especially discernible in the untranslatable cycle "Pus'ki biatye" as well as "Lingvisticheskie skazochki" ("Linguistic Fairy Tales"), "Nechelovecheskie prikliucheniia" ("Non-human Adventures"), and "Prikliucheniia liudei" ("Adventures of People"). In "Budil'nik" ("Alarm Clock"), for example, the eponymous alarm clock decides to get married to a pitcher of water at exactly 8:45 ("There once lived an alarm clock. He had a moustache, a hat, and a heart. And he decided to get married.")[268] The pitcher accepts the proposal but is unfortunately taken away and instead gets married to a faucet. ("The water pitcher immediately said yes, but at 8:15 they took him away and married him to the faucet.")[269] The alarm clock then proposes to a pair of eyeglasses. The eyeglasses are somewhat aged and have married ears on a number of occasions, but nonetheless accept the proposal. Again, the alarm clock remains lonely when the eyeglasses get married to the ears. The alarm clock then proposes to a book, but suddenly the latter is covered with a pillow as the children are going to bed. Before he knows it, the alarm clock marries a pillow. The sequence of steps leading to putting the eponymous alarm clock to bed is

[266] This approach to language and the absurd features in Russian literature, most notably in the works of Daniil Kharms.
[267] Dmitry Likhachev, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi. Sbornik* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), 21. Quoted in Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool*, 77.
[268] "Жил-был будильник. У него были усы, шляпа и сердце. И он решил жениться" (SS, 8).
[269] "Графин с водой согласился немедленно, но в пятнадцать минут девятого его унесли и выдали замуж за водопроводный кран" (SS, 8).

marked by lightness and humour, which, as Petrushevskaya suggests, should open the reader's soul.[270]

Similarly, the tale "Diadia Nu i tetia Okh" ("Uncle Well and Aunt Oh") is an example of replacing magic with nonsense and restorative laughter. There once lived Aunt Oh who would always say "Oh" and Uncle Well who would always say "Well." Whenever a neighbour would come to borrow some salt, Aunt Oh would say "Oh" and give away all the salt she had. The neighbour would ask "All this is for me?!" and Uncle Well would respond "Well." As others take advantage of the couple, their niece "Fat Chance" ("eshche chego") appears in a *deus ex machina* fashion and shoos away all the malevolent characters. After a series of humorous adventures, the niece gets married to a young man. Another example is the tale "Chelovek" ("Man"), which starts with the sentence: "There once lived a man and everyone made fun of him."[271] For example, he would walk up the street and everyone would point fingers at him and laugh. He would enter a store or a cafeteria and the same thing happened, preventing him from eating and so making him constantly hungry. He then decides to change clothes so that no one recognizes him. No sooner said than done, as the narrator tells us: he takes a bucket off his right foot and a can of Atlantic herring off his left foot. He then pulls a rubber boot off his head, takes a scarf out of his mouth (which he had wrapped around his ailing tooth), reaches for a key and a spare toothbrush from his nostrils, takes a bicycle wheel off his right arm and a felt boot off his left arm. From the latter arm he takes a stocking, from the stocking – a hat, from the hat – a match box, from the match box – all the money he kept there, and then puts on his best suit, goes to the store, buys some potatoes, and finally eats properly, except that he did not think to boil the potatoes beforehand.

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[270] Petrushevskaya, "What's so Funny: The Use of Humor, Comedy, Satire," in *International Women Playwrights. Proceedings of the First International Women Playwrights Conference*, October 18-23, 1988, ed. by Anna Kay France (Buffalo, N.Y., 1993), 97.
[271] "Жил-был озин человек, и все над ним смеялись" (SS, 259).

On the one hand, the above tales are designed for comic effect, and on the other the narrative games that are created by virtue of humour and the subversion of logic at the same time subvert magic in that the comic effect destabilizes the aspect of magic. Petrushevskaya engages in what Sinyavsky observed with regard to *nebylitsy*, or tall tales, a variation of the folktale genre based on drollery.[272] As such, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are tales about improbable occurrences, made up of absurd situations. Tall tales devalue the supernatural and the miraculous for the sake of the absurd, thereby parodying the folktale itself. To this extent, Petrushevskaya ridicules magic for the sake of comic effect and at the same time renews it; that is, gives it a new face.[273] Laughter, then, to paraphrase Propp, emerges as a magic means for creating life.[274]

The Magic Mirror

Of all magical objects, it is the magic mirror that deserves a separate study, especially as it has a special status in fairy tales. Mirrors are literary symbols of truth and insight and often provide a glance at worlds different from our own. As Christine Mains observes, magic mirrors reflect both the surface appearance and the inner soul of the person looking into them.[275] Mirrors in Petrushevskaya's tales reflect precisely these two aspects, but in a Petrushevskian, questioning fashion.

The tale "Skazka shkafa" ("The Wardrobe's Tale," 2005) is a story that reverberates with the classic tale "Cinderella" and Andersen's tale "The Emperor's New Clothes," and portrays a girl who wishes to go to a ball to meet her Prince Charming. As she does not have a beautiful

[272] Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool*, 77-82.
[273] A testimony to Petrushevskaya's high esteem for laughter is her slogan "Laughter will save the world," challenging Dostoevsky's claim that beauty will save the world. Petrushevskaya says: "A person should laugh at himself; it has to be a laughter of understanding and reason." See Petrushevskaya, "What's so Funny: The Use of Humor, Comedy, Satire," 96-97.
[274] Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 135.
[275] Christine Mains, "Mirrors," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, vol. 2 (London: Greenwood Press, 2005), 528-530.

dress, she ingeniously decides to make one from newspapers. In a magical house that she sees in the forest, she notices a wardrobe where she finds a beautiful dress as well as an old casket where she stashes her newspaper dress. The girl loves to see herself in the beautiful dress but cannot wear it to the ball, for there is a caveat – the beautiful dress becomes invisible once one leaves the house. As she tries on a number of dresses, the mirror smiles at her. But at some point the girl stops looking in the mirror so as not to become more upset. At odds with Andersen's tale, the girl is one of Petrushevskaya's active characters in that she makes a conscious decision to overcome her vanity (she puts on the dress she made from the newspapers) and thus proves to be capable of *self*-reflection. Her nudity unveils her courage to be who she truly is, the ability to be herself.

Petrushevskaya investigates the accepted and endorsed view of what constitutes beauty.[276] The heroine defies the symbolic mirror when she realizes that she does not need to have a beautiful dress to make the prince fall in love with her. She defeats the power of the mirror as one reflecting appearances and not depth. The mirror becomes a symbol of insight for Petrushevskaya's character, then, but only when its deceitful reflection is deflected. The superficiality of mirror reflection is thus deflected by self-reflection, which awakens individual agency. Courtship dynamics and gender politics are also investigated in this tale. Unlike the normative gender role of a heroine like Cinderella, whose external beauty is enough to win her prince's heart and who is portrayed as a passive character, the girl in Petrushevskaya's tale is not passive. Even though she does receive help from the prince's horse, it is largely thanks to her creativity and courage that she wins the prince's heart. This tale thus reflects broader representations of femininity, which go beyond the stereotype of passive femininity.

[276] Petrushevskaya's approach to beauty and ugliness and, more precisely, her re-examination of physical and inner beauty deserves a separate study. Other tales with the underlying theme of beauty include "Devushka-Nos," "Novye priklucheniia Eleny Prekrasnoi," "Podarok printsesse," or "Dus'ka i Gadkii utienok."

Equally crucial, as in other Petrushevskaya's tales (including "Printsessa Belonozhka" and "Podarok printsesse"), is that the creation of bonds and formation of meaningful relationships is mutual. In this respect, Petrushevskaya's plots like the one in "Skazka shkafa" revise the prescribed gender roles that classic fairy tales have perpetuated, and underline instead the characters' growth in relation to one another.

Mirrors as magical objects also feature in the tale "Novye prikliucheniia Eleny Prekrasnoi" ("The New Adventures of Helen the Beautiful"). This tale intertextually alludes to the story of Helen of Troy and Aphrodite as well as the Russian folktale of Elena the Fair.[277] Like the Greek goddess of beauty and fertility Aphrodite, Petrushevskaya's Helen is born from the sea. In order to avoid war (Helen of Troy's outstanding beauty and Aphrodite's jealousy led to the Trojan War), a sorcerer presents Helen with a magic mirror as an antidote to her dangerous beauty that itself performs the function of sorcery. As a result, as she looks at herself in the magic mirror and sees her own image, she disappears. Deprived of magical help, Helen is doomed. The sole powers she can count on are her feminine wiles (something inherent in women, as the narrator suggests). Feminine tricks become especially handy when she falls in love with a man and does everything to ensure that he stays with her. At the end, Helen and her beloved multimillionaire look into the mirror, as they wish to disappear, not to be seen and bothered by others. Helen carries the mirror with her so that perhaps one day she can break it to return to this world from the world of the unseen.

The heroine has passed through the mirror and now lives on the other side of things. Her decision resembles a deliberate withdrawal from a world preoccupied with external beauty. It is on the other side of the mirror, after a symbolic death, that the couple finds a new beginning. This

[277] Petrushevskaya readily revisits other fairy tales or certain elements of traditional fairy tales. She is especially interested in redefining Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. I analyze Petrushevskaya's intertextual links with Andersen in Chapter III.

tale is a bitter-sweet commentary on the nature of women, jealousy and vanity, as well as a contemporary image of what constitutes beauty. In Petrushevskaya's inversion of the image of the archetypal Woman and in her acute satire, it is a prostitute whom the newly-born Helen considers most beautiful.[278] Petrushevskaya here subverts prescribed norms and stereotypes with regard to archetypes, gender, and the social roles of women. By not representing a passive female waiting to be brought to life by Prince Charming, Petrushevskaya questions traditional gender roles and reflects social changes in women's comportment. At the same time, subverting the mythological ideal, Petrushevskaya's contemporary Helen, albeit not evil-intentioned, is portrayed as someone unintelligent but cunning enough to win a man.

Finally, "Skazka zerkal" ("The Mirrors' Fairy Tale," 2007) is an example of a tale where the hero becomes aware of a common plight, perceives the similarity of his predicament with that of others, and defines it as shared. Once upon a time, there was a window case with a variety of mirrors in it. For example, Psyche – the oldest of mirrors in the window case, Crooked Mirror, and Genii (Genius) – the smallest mirror. Among them, unseen by passers-by, lived Solitude. With their mirror attributes, as a mirror to the soul and as a distorting mirror, they observe the passers-by immersed in their everyday life, and reflect machine-like, faceless, and violent people. In the end, the smallest of them reverses the image of an unknown evil force which intends to annihilate the mirrors' beloved object of reflection, the young girl Ryzhaia Kroshka. By a sacrificial reversal of the unknown force's image, Genii saves the girl, suspends the destructive force, and then breaks into pieces and is forgotten. His fellow mirrors do not understand his act, nor are they willing to believe in his heroism, thereby exposing the negative side of human nature and its ignoble acceptance of oppression. This tale echoes Andersen's tale "The Snow Queen,"

[278] The way Petrushevskaya's fairy tale characters mirror such archetypal figure as the Great Mother or nurturing Mother, Whore, Lover, and Destroying Angel deserves a separate study.

more specifically the first story of the tale (about the mirror and its pieces), but Petrushevskaya inverts it. While the splinters of the distorting mirror morally corrupt people in Andersen's tale, the characters in Petrushevskaya's tale are already corrupted, and the small mirror Genii attempts to reverse their condition. At the end of the tale, one last shard of Genii falls into a new mould and is then used in a place full of children: "Strangely enough, one stern old man, chief doctor by profession, bought it [the mirror], and hung it in the cloakroom in his clinic for children. There it reflects the running children and solid adolescents as well as babies (...) And one day certainly one red-haired young mother with a baby will come..."[279] That is, the small mirror's potential to demystify does not perish; neither does the courage to oppose negativity. It is poised to be used by the next generation, which points to the hope of rebirth, and which is underlined in the tale through the invocation of Christmas: "The mirror knew that this meeting will take place in winter, at Christmas (...) And the mirror will light up with joy."[280] The broken mirror's new life therefore creates new possibilities.

The above confrontation of the evil force is a way to project hope for the human collective. The evil force in this tale can be interpreted along the lines of Jung's concept of the shadow which, in order to be resisted, must be first acknowledged and then confronted. The mirrors at the beginning of the tale are aware of the existence of the shadow, but do not have the courage to oppose it (except for Genii). The mirrors themselves reflect the corruptive shadow, since they are malicious to one another and since they passively accept the shadow's threat. Genii's sacrificial deed suggests the urge for a second stage, one that requires "much painstaking work over a long

[279] "Его непонятно почему купил один суровый старик, по профессии главный врач, и повесил в раздевалке своей детской поликлиники. Там оно отражает бегающих детей и солидных подростков, а также младенцев (...) И когда-нибудь туда обязательно придет одна рыжая молоденькая дама с младенчиком..."(KMZZh, 377).
[280] "Зеркало знало, что эта встреча прозайдет зимой, на Рождество (...) И зеркало радостно засияет" (KMZZh, 377).

period."[281] Genii's new life in a place filled with children also evokes hope that "people in reality, perhaps with some exceptions, are worth careful cultivation."[282] Losing wholeness, breaking into fragments, and so sacrificing oneself, are the conditions for the (re)birth of a keener self-awareness and the sharpening of the ability to perceive, distinguish, and judge one's self and the world: "And a new mirror lit up. It was a new mirror, of course. But it was somehow strange. Dark and profound, as though it was old."[283] References to (the negative) shadow, therefore, work in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as hope for both individual and collective (social) transformation. In such a way, this tale invalidates the fairy-tale decorum of effortlessly achieved happiness and foregrounds the rebirth of a keener awareness as the prerequisite for displacing the collective shadow.

It can be concluded that Petrushevskaya's strategy for revising the category of magic includes its rationalization: its new guises, contextualization, and de-emphasis, by way of emphasizing humaneness, the process of self-reflection, laughter, and nonsense. Yet, the question remains as to why Petrushevskaya departs from magical thought. Joosen's assertion about the contemporary fairy tale may be helpful in answering this question:

> As the genre of the fairy tale has moved into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many readers and critics no longer seem willing to 'suspend their disbelief'. Moreover, when authors retell traditional fairy tales in contemporary adaptations, a decline in magical features becomes apparent, either in favor of a greater realism or in favor of greater ambiguity.[284]

[281] Jung quoted in Mark Lipovetsky, "Introduction," in *Politicizing Magic. An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, ed. by Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 239. In this regard, Petrushevskaya's tale echoes Evgeny Shvarts' play *The Dragon* (1943).
[282] Ibid.
[283] "Вот и засияло новое зеркало. Это было новое зеркало, разумеется. Но оно было какое-то странное. Темное и глубокое, как старинное (...)" (KMZZh, 377).
[284] Joosen, "Disenchanting the Fairy Tale," 236.

Joosen suggests three possible explanations for the rationalization of magic in contemporary fairy tales: first, magic has declined in favour of a more comfortable reality; second, magic has declined because fairy tales are judged by realistic standards; finally, magic has declined because of the influence of the novel; that is, by way of a certain novelization of the genre. Quoting Bakhtin, Joosen posits that contemporary fairy tales acquire novelistic attributes, such as intended indeterminacy, open-endedness, humour, and irony.[285]

In my understanding, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales undergo a related process. Disenchanting the genre by de-emphasizing magic leads to genre parody and suggests that the fairy-tale world and the actual world are in fact the same and the boundaries between them disappear. At the same time, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales depart from magical thought to increase contact with the same "concrete reality." I believe this increase in references to contemporary reality occurs not necessarily to lament it or criticize it. The author's objective is also not (or at least not only) to unmask and mock the illusions of any beneficial, effortlessly received magic. Rather, Petrushevskaya's disenchantment happens for the sake of bringing the reader even closer to the actual world, for although devoid of fairy-tale magic, murky and at times difficult to live in, the actual world does not have to be fled. It is in the actual world where her characters can reach veritable heights, and so where they figuratively enchant their lives.

Magic Extended, or toward Enchantment

The question of what is (un)real and (im)probable, along the axis of two realms—the everyday and the supernatural—reappears in those of Petrushevskaya's tales where the magical stretches beyond fairy-tale magic toward the meta-physical; that is, unexplainable or arcane phenomena, including the notion of fate and being in contact with the dead, as well as miracles and

[285] Ibid., 236-237.

metempsychosis (transmigration of the soul). This complexity becomes apparent as the tales open up for the reader a decidedly more labyrinthine and enchanted world when compared to the author's (largely realistic and rationalized) fairy tales. Considering that Petrushevskaya broadens the spectrum of magic to the point that we may no longer consider it fairy-tale magic, I collectively refer to the above elements as the metaphysical, that is, transcending physical matter and the laws of nature; and to those tales that foreground the Todorovian hesitation between reality and the supernatural.[286]

In this section, I focus on the instances when metaphysical forces participate in everyday life, giving the latter an alternative substance. What unfolds in the metaphysical tales is the effortless transfer between the two realms, the everyday and the metaphysical. By approaching Petrushevskaya's metaphysical tales, I examine how the metaphysical aspect touches upon the question of alternative world(s) and generates enchantment, or wonder, by pointing to life's complexity and raising the question of how to comprehend life. The unobstructed transfer between the everyday and the metaphysical as well as between life and death sheds light on everyday reality and at times camouflages it to suggest broader interpretations. The metaphysical aspect in Petrushevskaya's tales also betrays dissatisfaction with "what is," to borrow the term from Jackson, and as such serves to convey social and cultural messages.[287]

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[286] Todorov refers to the supernatural as the fantastic. Following Todorov, the fantastic "lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from 'reality' as it exists in the common opinion. At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic" (Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 41).

[287] Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 18.
Petrushevskaya's leaving the everyday frame of reference as the only way to depict life may be quite unexpected for those readers who know her only as the writer of *byt* and social and political *chernukha*. Yet, within the context of her metaphysical tales, Petrushevskaya's label as a quintessential writer of *chernukha* is quite apt insofar as *chernukha*, in the sense of darkness, may (as Petrushevskaya reveals in one of her radio interviews) indeed refer to *literatura uzhasov*; that is, to horror and mysticism, in which Petrushevskaya engages. Thus, ironically, the *chernukha*-like Russian *byt* merges with mysticism, the arcane, and the supernatural.

Fate and the Question of Labyrinth

Lipovetsky considers Petrushevskaya's short stories as concerning fate and as having a mythological dimension:

> Here, it is as though the layer that has always been present in the subconscious of her poetics has been sublimated. This layer is mythological. It is strange that no one has noticed that with all of her 'vraisemblance', there are in fact no personalities in Petrushevskaya. Individuality, "dialectics of the soul," all other attributes of realistic psychologism are entirely replaced by one thing – *fate*. Man in Petrushevskaya fully equals his destiny, which in turn encompasses some utterly important plane of the cosmos—not the historical but precisely the eternal, primordial destiny of mankind.[288]

And elsewhere:

> Essentially, Petrushevskaya is interested in one thing – the vagaries of primordial natural dependencies in man's contemporary life.[289]

I believe Lipovetsky's assertion is partly applicable with regard to Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. Lipovetsky discusses the notion of fate as something beyond human control, beyond the will or intention of the individual. As argued earlier, however, a number of Petrushevskaya's active characters take conscious action to introduce positive changes in their lives, and so actively participate in determining their fate.[290] Moreover, as established earlier, their thought process reveals more complex psychological traits and individuality. In her metaphysical tales, though,

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[288] "Здесь как бы сублимирован тот пласт, который всегда присутствовал в подсознании ее поэтики. Этот пласт — мифологический. Странно, как до сих пор никто не заметили, что у Петрушевской при всем ее "жизнеподобии", фактически нет характеров. Индивидуальность, "диалектика души", все прочие атрибуты реалистического психологизма у Петрушевской полностью замещены одним — роком. Человек у нее полностью равен своей судьбе, которая в свою очередь вмещает в себя какую-то крайне важную грань всеобщей — и не исторической, а именно что вечной, изначальной судьбы человечества," Lipovetsky, "Tragediia i malo li chto eshche" (*Novyi mir* 10, 1994), http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1994/10/knoboz01.html (Accessed December 5, 2018).

[289] "По сути, Петрушевскую все время занимает лишь одно — перипетии изначальных природных зависимостей в сегодняшней жизни людей" (Leiderman and Lipovetsky, *Sovremennaia russkaia literatura*: *1950-1990 gody*, 618).

[290] Although I allude to it throughout the chapter, a discussion of determinism and indeterminism in Petrushevskaya's characters is worth a separate study. Petrushevskaya's approach to magic at large considers the question of man's free will versus chance and higher determining forces.

the workings of fate, that is, the hidden, supernatural powers that determine an individuals' life, are indeed explicit.

Inasmuch as the world of the folktale hero is "emancipated from the gods,"[291] underlining the genre's secular dimension, the element of fate foregrounds an environment with a magical worldview, in which human beings see themselves as vulnerable in the face of the natural world over which they have little control.[292] According to Sinyavsky, man's fate reflects the mythical Ariadne who famously helped Theseus to escape from the labyrinth by giving him a ball of thread, which he unraveled as he went in and used to trace his way out again after killing the Minotaur. As Sinyavsky observes, Ariadne's ball of thread is symbolic of human fate woven by means of a mysterious ritual.[293] In folk belief, he continues, "Man's fate is spun, woven or sewn not by man himself but by some primordial and eternal deity at the roots of the universe."[294] As Petrushevskaya's ordinary characters are enmeshed in the workings of fate, the boundary between the two realms, the everyday and the metaphysical, becomes porous.

The intertwinement of fate and everyday life is the theme of "Sem' chasov" ("Seven O'Clock," 2008). This tale depicts an artist, Aya, who as a young girl traveled with her parents to the coastal town of N., a city known for a temple erected on the top of a mountain. The temple is said to be magical in that it houses the tomb of a young Christian girl, Euphemia, who did not renounce her faith and was martyred.[295] Her tomb became a pilgrimage site. Young girls are said to find their fate and love upon ascending the mountain. During her stay in the town, Aya meets a young man and indeed falls in love with him. The man's watch stands still at seven o'clock. He

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[291] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 199.
[292] Faith Wigzell, "Folklore and Russian Literature," in *Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (London: Routledge, 2002), 37.
[293] Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool*, 95 and 96. On a parallel note, the motif of weaving, as typically associated with women and women's telling tales, is another aspect of Petrushevskaya's writing and should be studied separately.
[294] Ibid., 96 and 97.
[295] Petrushevskaya names the person in the sarcophagus Euphemia. St. Euphemia is venerated among Eastern Orthodox Christians for her virginity and martyrdom.

does not wind the watch, as someone once predicted that an important meeting in his life would happen exactly at seven o'clock. As soon as she returns home, Aya learns that she is pregnant. Clearly still in love with the man, many years later she decides to return to the town where they met, and takes her daughter with her. A shiny watch wedged in between the rocks catches her attention and she realizes it is the same watch her beloved had when they met. Mysteriously guided by life forces, Aya meets the man the following morning at exactly seven o'clock. As the narrator notes, the prediction given to the young man came true. The story draws to an end with a telling image of the couple and their daughter climbing up the mountain to visit the famous tomb.

The element of fate informs the realm of everyday reality, creating the labyrinth-like structure which Sinyavsky describes. Aya is guided by the workings of fate and is part of the invisible interrelationship of life and the cosmos, which points to her life as extending beyond material boundaries. She reflects Sinyavsky's definition of the quintessential fairy-tale hero who "somehow believes in life."[296] It is as though invisible ties link her with the secret powers or mechanisms that shape the world and fate.[297] From Sinyavsky's point of view, Aya trusts in fate and triumphs. That is, she lets herself be sustained by these interrelationships and thus attains happiness. On the other hand, though, it is her peaceful affirmation of life, powerful intuitive force, and faith in the positive that acquire mystical properties, thereby neutralizing the apparently predominant element of fate. Although she is invisibly linked with the whole cosmic system, propelled by forces that are superior or that serve a superior plan (without, of course, being aware of it), in the end it is her intuition and faith that determine her future.

The mysterious workings of fate are also the theme of "Anna i Maria" ("Anna and Maria," 1996), a tale about a man who one day by chance helps a sorceress retrieve her hat which blew

[296] "Ая как-то доверяла жизни" (KMZZh, 484).
[297] Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, 57

away in the wind. As an unsolicited reward the sorceress turns him into a sorcerer. He may help anyone with the exception of those whom he loves. Soon, his beloved good-hearted wife Anna falls ill and is on her deathbed. In an act of desperation to save his wife, but also in an attempt to outsmart fate, the man-magician pretends to be a doctor and changes the body of his wife for the body of another woman who has been brought to the same hospital. The change brings more exasperation and identity confusion to the random woman Maria and her family as well as to Anna. Both are tormented by nightmares and sadness. The man-magician realizes he has gone against fate and against the sorceress' admonition, as "You can't outwit fate."[298] As he challenges fate, then, he is punished. Overwhelmed by his predicament, he decides to visit the sorceress. She opens a door, and the man mysteriously finds himself going toward a mountain. When his spiritual journey is complete and he finds his answer, he runs to the hospital to take care of the stranger (his wife Anna in the body of Maria). The dream-like crossing of realms helps him realize that he can be redeemed only by selfless love for someone who is in distress and need. The aspect of the man's walking through the door and journeying into another dimension to find the solution to his predicament merges with the realm of the everyday, to which he returns at the end of his journey. That is, the spiritual journey he makes between actual reality and the metaphysical realm presents him with possibility in the present. Although Anna is not able to recognize her husband, the tale revealingly ends with the couple returning home, an earthly locus, which also signifies finding the exit out of the labyrinth.

Similar mechanics shape the tale "Matushka-kapusta" ("The Cabbage Mother," 1996), the story of a woman who imagines that she has a daughter, a tiny cabbage, whom she found: "This child hasn't been born – the unhappy mother would answer – I found it in a cabbage patch, in a

[298] "Не обманешь судьбу-то" (SS, 177).

young cabbage patch."[299] Fantasizing about becoming a mother, the woman turns to the doctor and the monk for help but they consider her mentally unstable and sinful, respectively. We gather that this woman is haunted by the fact that she has had an abortion. As neither man helps her, dejected, she brings some soil and sows cabbage at her windowsill. Years pass by and the woman lets the cabbage grow until one day she hears a baby squealing. She opens the balcony door and sees a newborn. Guided by maternal instinct, she starts breastfeeding the baby and begins her journey into motherhood.

Although cloaked in the workings of fate and prayer, these mysterious occurrences are in fact not portrayed as beyond the realm of the probable. Rather, they have a realistic explanation in that they speak to the woman's psyche, namely, her troubled conscience and subsequent post-abortion trauma. The realm of everyday life therefore overlaps with the unconscious—the realm of dreams to which the heroine refers as a result of the trauma she experiences: "And the story is that my husband left me, and I was supposed to have a child, but I didn't give birth to it... It was difficult for me... I went to the doctor's, they sent me to the hospital, and they killed my child in my belly. Now I pray for him... Maybe he is there, in the land of dreams?"[300] The labyrinth-like structure of this tale arises from the tension between the meta-physical occurrences and the realistic explanations for those occurrences. This tale reflects on meandering through the labyrinth of life and negotiating between reality and subjective reflections of lived trauma.

The characters in the tales "Matushka-kapusta," "Anna i Maria," and "Sem' chasov" resemble Theseus in that they are caught in the symbolic labyrinth of life with its unknown

[299] This tale was first published in the journal *Oktiabr'* in 1993. "Ребенок этот не родился, – отвечала несчастная мать, – я нашла его а капусте, в ранней капусте" (SS, 299). It is interesting to note that Petrushevskaya retains an element of folk tradition, following the common explanation that adults give to small children in answer to the question where do babies come from (children come from cabbage patches).

[300] "А история такая, что меня покинул муж, а должен был быть ребенок, но я не родила его... Мне было тяжело... Я пошла к врачу, меня направили в больницу, и там моего ребеночка убили у меня в животе. Теперь я молюсь о нем... Может быть, он там, в стране снов?" (SS, 301).

factors and at times relentless suffering. The meta-physical dimension is thus linked with the existential component. The mystical occurrences in these tales point to the symbolism of struggling with painful emotions, loneliness, and longing for and nurturing meaningful relationships. Blurring the boundaries between both realms, these tales suggest that living through an encounter with the metaphysical (whether through intuition and faith, dream, or the unconscious) has a powerful impact on the realm of the everyday.

What marks the tales above is their concluding image of home. As opposed to the customary horridness of the chronotope of home in Petrushevskaya's prose and drama, which embodies mainly cramped and overpopulated spaces,[301] Petrushevskaya's tales contain hope for creating homes where meaningful relationships may flourish. The metaphysical aspect in this sense merges with the chronotope of home in the sense that the latter carries intangible meaning and certain mysticism, which places it in between the material and the mystical. Home in these tales may also be read as a *eu-topos* (a *good place*) that yields possibilities in the realm of everyday life. The tales above tellingly return to the realm of the everyday, where a new life awaits the reunited families (Aya, her daughter, and the retrieved father; Anna-Maria and her husband; the Cabbage Mother and her child). That is, the overlapping of the two realms, so tangible throughout the tales, is ultimately resolved in the earthly chronotope of home as a unifying place that the heroes find at the end of their labyrinths.

Mystery, Miracles, and Metempsychosis and the Question of Home

As concluded earlier, while in traditional fairy tales the magical realm sits side by side with the realm of the everyday to create the impression of unusualness or improbability for the reader,

[301] Woll observes Petrushevskaya's isolated microcosms and states that Petrushevskaya's characters inhabit spaces that steadily shrink. See Woll, "The Minotaur in the Maze. Remarks on Lyudmila Petrushevskaya," 25-30.

Petrushevskaya's subversive strategies of rationalization often produce the opposite effect. However, in her metaphysical tales Petrushevskaya's strategy is different in that it combines the quotidian and the metaphysical in such a way that the metaphysical is not only (temporarily) sensed by the characters and the readers as a natural part in an otherwise realistic environment but is also rooted in it. Unlike Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, which from the beginning insist on the realistic "as if" modality, and so prevent the reader from the immersion into the "what if" modality,[302] Petrushevskaya's metaphysical tales generate suspense between both modalities. Although these tales unfold in a world that resembles ours, the reader's sense of reality is disrupted, as it becomes difficult to distinguish where reality ends and the arcane begins. That is, if in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales the boundary between the supernatural and the everyday disappears, or is illusory, the boundaries between the real and the supernatural in her metaphysical tales dissolve. The metaphysical tales embody otherwordly phenomena, such as ghosts and contact with the dead as part of everyday life, and as such provide the ground to address the notion of the improbable and the question "What is *real*?"[303]

Petrushevskaya's metaphysical tales interrogate (at least) two realms that guide life: the rational and material "what we can see" and the irrational and supernatural "underneath." The elements of the "underneath" are explicit in such tales as "Dedushkina kartina" ("Grandpa's Painting," 1997), where the heroine, a young girl, is mysteriously saved by the ghost of her grandfather. The story begins with the universal threat of the Great Winter (*Velikaia Zima*), an apocalyptic vision of eternal winter and a permanent solar eclipse. According to the girl's grandmother, the Great Winter is caused by human hatred and jealousy as well as lack of

[302] Eugenio Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino and the Compass of Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 66.
[303] For accounts of what is considered "real: in literature, see, for example, Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 141-148. Barthes focuses on narrative descriptions, or what he refers to as "details" As he points to the break between the ancient mode of verisimilitude and modern realism, he suggests the fragmentariness of "details" as a new form of verisimilitude.

compassion and forgiveness, implicitly alluding to the history of the twentieth century. In the story she tells her granddaughter, the grandmother recalls an explanation of the meaning of eternal life that a sorcerer once offered to the girl's grandfather; namely, that it constitutes anonymous self-sacrifice. Self-sacrificial individuals may be the only way to counteract the Great Winter. The girl attentively listens to the story, and with a view to sacrificing herself for humanity she descends to the damp and cold basement, where she apparently crosses the threshold of death. When she meets her family again, they let her know that she had been in a coma for half a year when her grandfather's painting fell and broke into pieces, and she miraculously regained consciousness. This coincides with the revocation of the prediction of the Great Winter and the coming of spring.

In the vein of the traditional fairy tale, the end of this tale is happy and evokes a rebirth after a period of destruction. The girl's miraculous survival thus invokes customary fairy-tale magic. The grandfather's painting is replaced by a bucolic picture of hares and the forest, and as such invokes the image of heaven.[304] The wall on which the painting hangs comes to life and suggests the afterworld, the late grandfather's presence: "It is as though the wall was alive, breathes and laughs with joy."[305] The sensation of the otherwordly merging with everyday reality, which gives the sense of a certain fluidity between the two realms, is further evident in the threshold situation between life and death experienced by the girl: "Shivering, the girl walked through the basement (...) Shivering, she was lying down and suddenly noticed a subtle ray of

[304] Petrushevskaya provides an analogous image of heaven in her short story "Vozmozhnosti menippei: "Я соображала себе почему-то рай. Рай в той простой форме, которая много раз была уже изображена, допустим, маленькими голландцами: овечки, олени, кусты, реки и горы в кудрявых деревьях и ни одного человека," quoted in E. Prokhorova and T. Sorokina, "Interpretatsia zhanra menippei v proze L. Petrushevskoi," in *Postmodernizm v russkoi proze*, ed. by T. Prokhorova, Kazan', 2005), 72.

[305] "А на стене, где раньше висела картина, шевелились солнечные зайчики и тени зеленых листьев, и казалось, что стена живая, дишит и смеется от радости" (NS, 291).

light, as though a crack opened up in the wall."[306] As she walks through a small window, she enters paradise: "She then realized that she had arrived in paradise, and the paradise pleased her very, very much, especially as here in paradise was her native home."[307] The return home, to actual reality, is presented as a journey to paradise, which may be understood as entering the afterlife. The inversion of the customary understanding of movement is thus remarkable in this tale. The girl enters heaven through the underground, as she descends to the basement, and emerges in heaven—at home. Symbolically, this speaks to the movement away from Dostoevsky's underground. Importantly, portrayal of paradise as the ultimate better life is absent, which is hardly surpising for a writer like Petrushevskaya who methodically eschews ultimates or any fabulous future. In the end, paradise is earthly and synonymous with home. Home for the girl is in this tale tangible, as it is a happy and secure place for her among those who love her. The significance of home, then, increases here to the size of a utopia in the sense of a *good place* (*eu-topos*). Furthermore, while it is up to the reader to decide whether it is thanks to the active presence of her late grandfather that the girl wakes up from the coma, there is textual evidence to suggest otherwise. The incredulity of any metaphysical occurrences is suggested by the use of such words as 'as though' (*as though* the wall was alive, *as though* a crack opened up in the wall). As the tale returns to present reality, with its portrayal of home, the tension is thus resolved and the ensuing hesitation reduced.

"Spasiennyi" ("The One Who was Saved," 2002) is one tale in which the metaphysical resembles a ghost story, due to the specific sense of suspense it conjures.[308] It has a telling introduction that arouses uncertainty as to what may happen: "Only on *moonlit nights* do such

[306] "Девочка шла по подвалу, вся дрожа (...) Она лежала, вся дрожа, на спине, и вдруг заметила тонкий лучик света, как будто в стене открылась щель" (NS, 292).
[307] "Тут же она поняла, что очутилась в раю, и рай ей очень-очень понравился, тем более что тут был ее родной дом" (NS, 293).
[308] This tale was first published in the journal *Oktiabr'* in 2000.

occurrences happen. But in a tiny seaside village *strange things started happening* in the dead of darkest night. It is *as though a house* made of crude stone *was rising up by itself*, resembling a fortress, and gaping with black troughs where the windows and doors should be, three-stories high and with a solid roof – *the house stood in the moonlight, and disappeared like a ghost with the first signs of the dawn.*"[309] The main character, Kit, is a boy who lives with his mother in a cursed house. Kit had been miraculously saved from an earthquake and subsequently becomes a saviour and witnesses supernatural occurrences as he comes into contact with the ghosts of the late inhabitants of this mysterious house. A hand in the haunted house shows the boy the way to save an unknown girl: "A bright white arm seen up to the elbow was lying on the windowsill (...) The arm emerged from the darkness and shone in the moonlight up there, high up, under the very roof of the window on the third floor. It looked as though it was sparkling, as though it was made of polished marble."[310] "The arm was now hanging in the empty and dark space, its finger was pointing somewhere."[311] Material reality merges with the metaphysical realm, which Kit does not question: "No detached arm scared him."[312] As it turns out, the arm belongs to the deceased mother of a girl who wants to save her daughter from imminent danger. After a series of mysterious happenings (the puzzling death of the young men who torment Kit because he is a foreigner, the equally puzzling death of his devilish stepmother who perishes thanks to a cross on

[309] "Только в лунные ночи случаются такие происшествия, и в маленьком приморском поселке стали происходить в самую глухую пору странные вещи – вроде бы вырастал сам собой дом из дикого камня, почти крепость, зияющий черными провалами вместо окон и дверей, но высотой в три этажа и под крепкой крышей – он стоял освещенный луной, и исчезал как призрак с первыми волнами рассвета" (KMZZh, 457).
[310] "На подоконнике лежала ослепительно-белая рука, видная по локоть (...) Рука выступала из тьмы и сияла в лунном луче там, высоко, под самой крышей, в окне третьего этажа. Она выглядела сверкающей, как будто была сделана из отполированного мрамора" (KMZZh, 460).
[311] "Рука теперь висела в пустом и темном пространстве, она указывала куда-то пальцем" (KMZZh, 461).
[312] "Никакая отдельно лежащая рука его не пугала." The fact that the arm the boy sees does not startle or disturb him indicates both magical realism and the folktale in that such events are not considered by the characters as extraordinary – both realms overlap.

Kit's neck, and a girl who is miraculously saved), the tale ends happily and the plot returns to everyday reality.

Various voices integrated in this tale suggest that there is no resolution of contradictions, which intensifies the sense of mystery. Nevertheless, the reader does ascertain possible ways of deciphering the mysterious events. For example, we comprehend that the sudden death of Kit's offenders is not necessarily cloaked in mystery but is rather the natural result of ingesting toxic fish, which happens after they seriously assault the boy and may thus bring to mind divine retribution. We also gather that the supernatural occurrences regarding the girl and her stepmother conceal a realistic reading: the former's enigmatic behaviour stems from her suicide attempts as well as the fact that she sleep walks; and the devilish stepmother is evil because, rather predictably, she plots ways to disinherit her stepdaughter. That is, her actions are the result of scheming rather than any supernatural forces. On the other hand, the stepmother mysteriously perishes thanks to the reflection of a cross that Kit wears on his neck, thereby implying her devilish origin.

The labyrinth-like structure of this narrative moves back and forth between multiple possible readings. Further ambiguity emerges in that the rationalistic interpretation is undermined by the metaphysical account. More specifically, Kit does not confirm what the girl gathers to be a figment of her imagination and the result of her dreaming. More specifically, he confirms the supernatural nature of the events in which she has participated, since he has witnessed them himself: "I dreamed that mom stretched out her hand to me and saved me. – That's precisely what happened – said Kit."[313] Kit's witnessing of the supernatural events, however, may stem from his own trauma caused by the earthquake that he and his mother survived. The arm on the windowsill

[313] "Мне снилось, что мама протягивает мне руку и спасает меня. — Так оно и было, — сказал Кит и принес ту самую картину" (KMZZh, 471).

thus corresponds to the image of his own mother's hand joined with his in a desperate attempt to survive the cataclysm that is etched in his memory. As in the tale "Matushka-kapusta," this traumatic experience and the ensuing recurrent image of the hand and arm bring the interpretation back to explicable terms. That is, Kit experiences through his own eyes the metaphysical event that is experienced by the girl, as his unconscious reflects his own traumatic experiences. The effect it produces thus comprises the metaphysical as both strange and familiar, plausible and defying explanation, thereby intensifying ambiguity and narrative instability.

This tale serves as another example of the hopeful return to everyday reality and the image of home, which is rendered in this tale by way of contrasting colours. The tale begins with descriptions of darkness, in which supernatural occurrences are veiled, and gradually moves toward brighter colours. As Kit defeats the evil stepmother and the mystery behind the story is clarified, and as the girl is saved, the colours change accordingly: the moonlit night (*lunnaia noch'*), black chasms (*chernye provaly*), and nocturnal toursists (*nochnye turisty*) gradually change to white walls (*belye steny*), a small lamp under an icon (*lampadka pod ikonoi*), and a bright white arm (*oslepitel'no-belaia ruka*). The story thus leaves the confines of the mysterious, complex and enchanted world, and returns to the present. Unlike the multi-layered narrative structure of this tale, the plot arrives at an unambiguously happy ending that culminates in tangible reality: evil is defeated (the stepmother vanishes) and good installed at home (the girl is saved and cured, and becomes a new family member for Kit and his mother).

The tale "Zolotaia triapka" ("A Golden Rag," 1997) features supernatural occurrences and a miraculous salvation that could be read as the supernatural making inroads into the secular world.[314] It is the story of a professor who researches the lives of mountain people in a remote land. While he is in the mountains with his guide, an earthquake occurs. He survives thanks to a

[314] This tale was first published in the journal *Oktiabr'* in 1996.

precious golden cloth that "any museum would pay good money for."[315] The cloth has magical properties, as it heals his wounds. As he cleans a dusty window with it, another supernatural event occurs. The rock opens up, and as he enters the cave, he sees miserable-looking people: "People, sort of tired and wrinked as refugees, were lying or sitting everywhere."[316] When everyone gathers around the researcher, his cloth flares up, but when he inadvertently touches them with it, they disappear. He leaves the cave and appears in a different place, and suddenly does not need an interpreter to help him understand the local language. Along with his guide, he manages to find a way out. Back home, he reads news reports of an earthquake and finds out that the whole city was buried under falling rocks. The metaphysical occurrences are explained when he learns that the following night another earthquake occurred but as a result it saved the people who were buried under the rocks. Because of this tragedy, the faraway land becomes popular with tourists and TV. When the researcher returns bringing consumerism (TV, cameramen, soap operas), he is greeted by the local people with bitterness. It is only when he leaves the cloth in the mountains, where he found it, that the local people become relieved and serene again. Through his sacrifice in giving up fame, the professor respectfully returns to the people what belongs to them, and returns home where he takes up the job of a museum guard.

In this tale, the amalgamation of possible realities makes up layers of possible interpretations. First, the world of the researcher, which largely resembles reality; for example, via the familiar element of consumerism. Second, the world of the people in the remote land, which becomes involuntarily infested with said consumerism. Third, the supernatural occurrences related to the earthquake that the researcher experiences, which may be explained as the hero's traumatic experience and fragments of memory of the cataclysm. The realm of everyday life

[315] "Любой музей мира дал бы за такую тряпку большие деньги, но ученый об этом не думал" (NS, 165).
[316] "Везде лежали или сидели люди, какие-то усталые и помятые, как беженцы" (NS, 166).

interlocks with the realm of the supernatural in a different way from fairy tales in that the character (and the reader alike) is perturbed by the occurrences and phenomena and likely poses the question: What is *real*?

What emerges is the realistic situation emphasized by the metaphysical: social and political issues including consumerism and exploitation. Petrushevskaya here raises significant social and political questions about destruction as the aftermath of colonization. The researcher manages to oust the outsiders who plan to capture the land with TV, but is punished by being left on his own in the exotic land. The ending is only partly optimistic. The optimism is not complete, as in other tales, because the researcher, who understands and opposes the destructive effects of colonization and consumerism (since he returns the cloth), is in the minority. This is not a collective opposition. Petrushevskaya's happy ending is therefore debatable or not full-bodied, but it is also not precluded, since the researcher's action provides the possibility for the reader to comprehend the importance and urgency of opposing this social and political condition. The metaphysical, then, allows us to view realistic matters from a different standpoint, and is thus a way for Petrushevskaya to respond to the ills of the contemporary world. The element of the metaphysical serves to return reader's attention to reality and to a larger picture of humanity today.

While in the preceding tales miracles represent an incursion of the supernatural into the secular world, in the tale "Zaveshchanie starogo monakha" ("The Old Monk's Last Will," 2002) the miracle has a religious foundation.[317] The tale resembles hagiography in that it alludes to prophecy and miraculous healing, which here, as in other tales analyzed in this section, replace the element of magic. This story tells the tale of a monk who, although poor and tormented by others, remains faithful to God. A group of local thieves steals the few coins he owns and brutally

[317] This tale was first published in the journal *Oktiabr'* in 2000.

assaults him. As he receives help, he learns the story of a young woman whose husband has been murdered and whose child is ill. The monk meets the grieving woman and prophesies her future. He predicts that he will be murdered and asks that she and the child meet him at the murder scene and spend a month next to his dead body. After that, the child will be healed. The monk's prophecy materializes: he is murdered and the child is healed. The miracle in this tale may be read as a religious act, an unconditional gift that constitutes a voluntary sacrificial offering, in the same way Jesus is thought to have saved sinners and died for them.[318] The miracle in this tale can also be read differently. It can be read figuratively as the murderers' self-awareness and courage to admit to their sins, as well as their subsequent spiritual rebirth. They repent and become monks, which is a veritably miraculous change. The question of the (im)probability of the miracle, then, gives way to the arguably more relevant question of possibility—in this case, the possibility of man's spiritual transformation.

A separate example of Petrushevskaya's experiments in broadening of the category of magic and extending it to metaphysical phenomena is metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the soul upon death.[319] In the tale "Chariti" ("Chariti," 2011), the heroine, a transmitter, finds herself in a remote land, Chariti, along with a mysterious group of companions who discuss secret matters.[320] It is not a simple story, compared to Petrushevskaya's cycle "Prikliucheniia Barbi" which features predictable fairy-tale elements. Here, the two realms that in the fairy tale comprise the supernatural and the everyday become the realms of life and death. Transmigration of the soul as well as a smooth shift between the afterworld of the soul and physical reality are

[318] Emerson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature*, 76.
[319] Petrushevskaya is interested in metempsychosis also in her novel *Nomer odin, ili v sadakh drugikh vozmozhnostei* (*Number One, or in the Gardens of Other Possibilities*, 2004) and in her story "Tri puteshestviia, ili vozmozhnosti menippei" (2000). For metempsychosis, see Blackley, "Reading the Genres of Metempsychosis," 12-20; and Rowe, "Poe's Use of Ritual Magic in His Tales of Metempsychosis," 41-51.
[320] This tale was first published in the journal *Snob* in 2009.

especially evident in this tale, thus erasing the boundaries between both realms, and so intensifying the question as to what constitutes the (im)probable.

As in Petrushevskaya's other metaphysical tales, the supernatural ultimately serves to spotlight alternative readings and social commentaries, thereby leaving behind the urgency of the question of the improbability of events. For behind the arguably improbable journeying between life and death lies the question of an alternative meaning of being alive and dead. The remote land of Chariti is a place where the question of the condition of contemporary society arises. As the heroine discusses the world of contemporary Russia and the world of the remote land Chariti, the question of the duality of realms (life and death) merges with the duality of the two geographical realities (the familiar, contemporary world and the remote land).

> People out there, at home, generally claim that in Chariti there are only dead people. After all, what is life? To have a goal (that's the most important thing) and achieve it.[321] Question from Chariti: but don't you smoke a cigarette after a cigarette? Don't you drink vodka till you puke? Don't you eat like pigs when you're at someone else's place, putting on an extra three kilos in one evening? Isn't that intoxication, dependence? How are you better? Answer: you're considered dead as far as life is concerned. Question from Chariti: and you think you're not dead?[322]

The exchanges the heroine registers from her objective point of view as an observer offer a poignant picture of contemporary man who searches for himself and for the meaning of life, and who is rather lost in the process. The Russians in Chariti unsuccessfully aspire to live a spiritual life and are not understood by Russians back home in Russia. Both groups accuse each other of not being able to be alive. It is in fact the heroine, who is forever bound to be on the threshold between life and death, who proves able to be alive, which comes to be understood as the capacity to voluntarily offer help (charity). Even though it is dangerous for her to become visible

[321] "Народ там, дома, вообще считает, что в Чарити одни мертвые. Ведь что есть жизнь? Иметь цель (что самое важное) и ее достигнуть" (NSvMgD, 351).
[322] "Вопрос из Чарити: вы же курите сигарету за сигаретой? Пьете водку до блева? Обжираетесь в гостях, три кило прибавки за вечер? Это же тоже наркота, привыкание. Чем вы лучше? Ответ: вы для жизни мертвы. Вопрос из Чарити: вы-то не мертвы?" (NSvMgD, 352).

and expose herself, the heroine helps a local child who would otherwise likely drown in the sea. Responsiveness to suffering and the capacity for self-sacrifice is therefore figuratively read as the capacity to be alive.

What transpires from the tales in this section is that venturing into the metaphysical realm and exploring alternative, or parallel, worlds is for Petrushevskaya a strategy for unveiling the patent inhumanity of everyday reality. For what is camouflaged behind the question of the improbability of events as a result of the workings of the metaphysical is a profound social commentary. Even though the all-encompassing metaphysical realm produces incredulity, thereby intensifying the open-endedness of Petrushevskaya's tales, reality is indelible and arguably more striking than the metaphysical. This is because the realistic foregrounds moral and sociopolitical negativity: the universal threat of apocalypse caused by human malice ("Dedushkina kartina"), readily inflicting harm on the weak and rejection of alterity ("Spasiennyi"), infecting unspoiled lands with superfluous consumer products ("Zolotaia triapka"), severe cruelty and mutual suspicion ("Zaveshchanie starogo monakha"), or indifference to suffering and the division between the Western and the Eastern world ("Chariti"). Locating the metaphysical in the fabric of the physical is a way for Petrushevskaya to address the problem of social transformation. The metaphysical reflects the alienating strangeness of the everyday world; that is, inhumane acts as well as sociopolitical inadequacy. In addition, it is this inhumanity and inadequacy that could be figuratively read as irrational or surreal in that human beings find themselves in the grip of incomprehensible forces in their lives and in the world at large. This remark reflects what Irina Prokhorova observes with regard to Petrushevskaya's fairy tales:

> But the wondrous in Petrushevskaya often appears as ordinary and unremarkable, and simple human happiness as a veritable miracle. What is sensed in her fairy tales, as in her stories, is a deformation of life in which normal human relations are distorted or altogether lost. And yet specifically in these "real fairy tales" longing for harmony,

> yearning for ideal, which is present throughout Petrushevskaya's writing at large, becomes apparent.[323]

The metaphysical element in Petrushevskaya's tales is arguably meant to horrify the reader.[324] Genre syncretism in them certainly amplifies that impression, as they invoke such genres as legend, ghost story, *strashilka*, and *bylichka*. Including elements of these genres certainly helps Petrushevskaya explore other, or parallel, world(s), and more exhaustively at that, and opens up for the reader a complex and enchanted world. But the metaphysical, I believe, arouses not only the reader's horror but also rapture and amazement, thereby generating a sense of enchantment, or wonder, which "both opens our eyes wide and plunges us into the dark."[325] The enchantment thus created opposes a Cartesian search for certainties and reminds the reader to accept the presence of an obscure system of symbols, to live with the difficulty and/or impossibility of reaching certainties, and to value a certain form of doubt which does not necessarily need to be overcome or explained. The metaphysical also generates a sense of enchantment in that it expands one's outlook on life in general, and the meaning of the words 'possible' and 'possibility' in particular. 'Possibility' may refer to the possibility that the phenomena described in this set of tales occurred, and to the possibility of viewing matters differently. Petrushevskaya's venturing into the metaphysical may thus defy logic, but it also expands the reader's universe through expanding the realm of possibilities.

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[323] "Причем чудесное у Петрушевской часто предстает как обыкновенное и заурядное, а простое человеческое счастье — как настоящее чудо. В ее сказках, как и в рассказах, ощущается деформация жизни, в которой нормальные человеческие связи искажены либо вообще утрачены. И все же именно в этих 'настоящих сказках' ясно проявляется тяга к гармонии, тоска по идеалу, пронизывающая все творчество Петрушевской." See T. Prokhorova, "Rasshirenie vozmozhnostiei kak avtorskaia strategiia," *Voprosy literatury* 3 (2009), http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2009/3/pro7-pr.html (Accessed April 10, 2019).

[324] Kolesnikoff quoted in Keeling, *Surviving in Post-Soviet Russia*, 146.

[325] Wonder in the sense of the Greek *thaumazein*, from which philosophy (reflection) begins. For an interesting account on wonder/thaumazein, see, for example: John Llewelyn, "On the Saying that Philosophy Begins in Thaumazein, "*Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 4 (2001), 48-57.

Between the Supernatural and the Everyday

Petrushevskaya follows the seemingly disjunctive strategies of rationalization and disenchantment on the one hand, and broadening the magical perspective and enchantment on the other. Petrushevskaya's heroes are on the one hand linked with everyday life, with its linearity of time and realistic settings, and to a magical worldview, with its circular time and inexplicable phenomena and events, on the other. Within the context of genre disenchantment, Petrushevskaya's tales invalidate magical effortless intervention and instead emphasize active struggle. While within the context of genre enchantment, they remind the reader of the uncanny in life, including our dependence upon the forces of nature. This strategy thus shapes the understanding of the two realms: the everyday and the intangible. Within the context of genre disenchantment, the boundary between the two realms disappears in that the rationalization or veritable disqualification of fairy-tale magic inevitably locks the reader in reality. Within the context of genre enchantment, however, the boundary between the two realms conflates in that throughout the narratives we continue negotiating possible interpretations. This aligns Petrushevskaya's tales with Todorov's fantastic, marked by a hesitation common to reader and character. What binds this apparently incompatible twofold strategy is the emergence from the marvelous and from the fantastic and the focus on the present. Petrushevskaya's heroes may indeed see themselves as vulnerable in the face of a natural world over which they have little control, but they are not necessarily so helpless in the everyday world once they decide to exercise their potential. It is in the present that the folktale's and fairy tale's most essential motif that Petrushevskaya investigates—transformation—can be made possible.

What becomes clear is an idea of an implicit array of possibilities. In this light, the word 'possibility' has a transformed sense, which Petrushevskaya explores. It pertains to the potential of individual and social transformations (possibilities within oneself and with others); to the

multiplicity of available interpretations (narrative possibilities); and to the potential of seeing otherwise, against preoccupation with certainties and probability. Petrushevskaya evades the *possibility* of any hard-set interpretation.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FAIRY TALE:

BETWEEN DISENCHANTMENT AND RE-ENCHANTMENT

> The wonder tale is a remnant of miracles past
> in which the storyteller himself does not believe,
> but for whose reign he nevertheless longs.[326]

At present, as Lüthi asserts, it is not possible to offer a comprehensive answer to the question of the folktale's function and exactly what the folktale gives its audience.[327] As Zipes notes, folktales used to be told primarily by peasants for wish fulfillment, desire to improve their lot, compensation for misery, and celebration of community. It was through tales that one gained a sense of values and one's place within the community.[328] It was also the folktale that "projected the wish and possibility for human autonomy and eros and proposed means to alter the world."[329] As oral tales were increasingly written down in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries—thus creating the literary fairy tale—they subsequently began to serve different functions. The fairy tale's function, like the genre as a whole, has thus undergone substantial changes. According to Zipes, in their written form, fairy tales have been affected by conventionalism, political power, and rationalism. Starting in the seventeenth century, fairy tales were used as tools in the civilizing process; that is, they illustrated correct behaviour for their readers and what constituted noble feelings. Their function was thus to entertain, moralize, and normalize.[330]

In the twentieth century, the fairy tale was "Disneyized" in the Western world; that is,

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[326] Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool*, 73.
[327] Lüthi, *The European Folktale*, 81.
[328] Jack Zipes, "The Changing Function of the Fairy Tale," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 12:2 (1988), 13.
[329] Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale*, 142.
[330] Jack Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment. The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture* (Penguin Books, 1991), x, xii.

"subjected to saccharine sexist and illusionary stereotypes of the Disney culture industry."[331] As a result, the power of commercialization has distracted readers and not helped them focus on social problems and issues in their respective societies. The fairy tale has been increasingly used "to produce a sense of happy end and ideological consent and to mute its [fairy tale's] subversive potential for the benefit of those social groups controlling power in the public sphere."[332] Most importantly, fairy tales have been routinely intended to provide escape from the difficult realities of the present, and thus have been associated with entertainment and wish fulfillment.

The fairy tale's functions in twentieth-century Russia took a particular turn as the tales started serving the Soviet utopia. With the intention of erasing the distinction between ordinary reality and fiction, the fairy tale was subordinate to ideological purposes while emphasizing didacticism and normativity. The Soviet utopia needed the fairy-tale mentality to "translate its [utopia's] abstract premises into comprehensible and tangible images, accessible to uneducated adults and to new generations of the Soviet people."[333] Producing a distinct *lakirovka* (embellishing) of actual reality, miracle and magic transformation were projected as a natural and expected part of Soviet life. This way, in keeping with the Stalinist formula, Soviet life became "the embodiment of the fairy tale utopian dream that finally comes true."[334] Reality itself, then, to quote Mikhail Epstein, disappeared, yielding to the Soviet "fairy tales" (utopian, or idealistic, ideas and ideology) intended to produce a particular sense of reality.[335]

Zipes uses the word *utopia* in a distinctively different meaning as compared to the utopia of the Soviet project. Namely, the scholar mourns the disregard for what he, after Ernst Bloch, refers to as the fairy tale's utopian purpose, which has its roots in oral tales. Building on Bloch's

[331] Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment*, xxvii.
[332] Ibid., xxix.
[333] Lipovetsky, "Introduction," 233.
[334] Balina, "Introduction," 118.
[335] Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 190.

concept of the utopian function of literature, Zipes observes that tales were told to create communal bonds in the face of the inexplicable forces of nature.[336] These tales "fostered a sense of belonging and the hope that miracles involving some kind of magical transformation were possible to bring about a better world."[337] He contends that generating wonder in folktales, that is, awakening regard for the miraculous condition of life, has been largely undermined in literary fairy tales over the course of the centuries. More specifically, what has been missing is seeing life through fairy-tale wonder as a process that can be altered or changed; and the difficult realities of the present faced, not escaped. What is important today to writers and readers alike, then, is to re-discover the utopian function of fairy tales. This function comprises the "original impulse of hope for better living conditions as it was formed in the oral tradition."[338] It also empowers man and nurtures his hope to holding a cracked mirror up to the ossified reality, as it suggests ways to transform his life and the world.[339] Zipes concludes that fairy tales, including contemporary fairy tales, succeed at reviving the crucial utopian function when they are self-reflective and experimental; that is, when they question the forms and themes that the folktale and the fairy tale have developed, and when they project the possibility for human autonomy and offer means to alter the world.

In light of the changes that the fairy tale's functions have undergone, the questions I pose in this chapter are as follows. Given their subversive character with regard to explicit references to social reality and rationalization on the level of language and content (plots, characters, motifs,

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[336] In *The Spirit of Utopia*, Bloch signals that the time has come for human beings to take life into their own hands and shape their destiny. It is through the utopian function of literature, including fairy tales, that human beings learn and analyze themselves and their goals. The utopian quality of literature is determined by its anticipatory illumination, or an image closely linked with the possibility of rearranging social relations, which engenders "home we have all once sensed but never experienced or known" See Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Jack Zipes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), xxxii.
[337] Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment*, x, xii.
[338] Zipes, "The Changing Function of the Fairy Tale," 29.
[339] Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale*, 154 and 159.

and magic), can Petrushevskaya's contemporary fairy tales bring about wonder? Do they have the capacity to activate the utopian function and to be the springboard for individual, social, and cultural transformation? Are they intended to offer hope at all? Finally, is Petrushevskaya interested in maintaining hope in an ever more cynical, twenty-first century post-Soviet Russia?

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales do not depict a soothing vision of the world, nor are they written for wish fulfillment or as compensation for misery. Quite the opposite, they expose the bleak truth behind the Soviet "fairy tale;" that is, behind the delusive scenarios of reality as well as the ever-postponed vision of the coming of a golden age. In her bitter irony, Petrushevskaya exposes the falseness of Soviet ideological discourse and challenges its cheerful image and extreme optimism with her depictions of social gloom as the traumatic aftermath of this failed system.[340] Understandably, one may be thus tempted to conclude that the allusions to a dreadful social reality not only mock the fairy-tale genre but also preclude all possibility of happy endings. Such a conclusion, however, would not do justice to Petrushevskaya's less one-sided fairy tales; most of all, those published in the 2000s, which address traumatic experiences and suggest viable ways of coping with them. Thus, in this chapter I center on Petrushevskaya's irony and her dark vision of the world but also on the "ray[s] of light in the kingdom of darkness."[341] To this end, I examine Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as reflecting the fairy tale's utopian function. Indubitably veiled in Petrushevskaya's customary grim vision, which includes social instability and existential meandering, her fairy tales at the same time communicate the urge for the "human autonomy and eros" of which Zipes writes.

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[340] As Petrushevskaya reveals, Konstantin Chernenko, a general secretary of the Communist Party, labeled her a black writer (*chernushnitsa*) in Soviet times. "Он назвал меня «очернительницей советской действительности.» "He called me "the one who blackens the Soviet reality," (Petrushevskaya, *Ot pervogo litsa*, 314).

[341] Referring to Nikolai Dobroliubov's essay, "A Ray of Light in the Kingdom of Darkness" (1860), offering a bitter account of Russian life, Goscilo argues that Petrushevskaya's *Time: Night*, a "bleak tale of lacerated psyches," does not envision any ray of light. See Goscilo, "Narrating Trauma," 175.

The first section investigates Petrushevskaya's characters as *homo viators* (spiritual wanderers), individuals in search of the meaning of life. As Petrushevskaya's fairy tales shed light on man's harrowing experience of despair and hope, they fundamentally present life as a process that can be altered or changed. The second section examines a further reflection of the utopian function in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales through their intertextual engagement with Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. More specifically, I consider Petrushevskaya's invocations of individual empowerment and self-reflection as her overtly oppositional stance to Andersen's portrayal of man. In the third section, I analyze the social aspect of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales through the notion of togetherness as conveyed in her Christmas stories. Finally, the concluding section situates Petrushevskaya's tales in the broader cultural context of contemporary Russia by considering the role of the tales in restoring the utopian function, most notably through Petrushevskaya's concern with what it means to be human and the importance of a sense of community and shared values. I flesh out the rationale behind Petrushevskaya's return to the fairy-tale genre in its new guise and situate it in the current debate on the fairy-tale genre in Russia and in the West.

Despair and Hope

As noted in the introduction to this work, Petrushevskaya is primarily thought of as a writer of *chernukha*, the bleakness of the post-Soviet moral and sociopolitical circumstances. *Chernukha* is especially palpable in her prose and drama through the motif of domestic hell, which in her customary writing materializes in the tight and confined spaces of *kommunalka* apartments. The overall atmosphere of gloom is deepened in the plots of the author's short stories, and especially in the short novel *The Time: Night*, in which the narrator does not display emotions and offers ironic and downright malicious comments on the characters and their lives. As discussed in

Chapter I, Petrushevskaya's narrator thus leaves the readers hermeneutically perplexed. In analyzing Petrushevskaya's intertextual links with the classic texts of Tolstoy and Chekhov, Parts notes that the only counter-perspective the reader can count on is his or her own experience of the Russian literary tradition, with its emphasis on humanist values, psychological depth, and compassionate lyricism that otherwise contradict the unreliable narrator's coarse position on man and life.[342] The narrators in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are unreliable as well. As studied in Chapter I, they proffer ironic comments on the characters and sarcastic closing formulas, and offer significant philosophical conclusions in either crude speech or children's language, thereby widening the gap between the elusiveness of the fairy tale and the actuality of man and life.[343] Furthermore, as noted throughout Chapter II, Petrushevskaya implies the un-ideality of reality and man but her plots end happily, deepening reader's mixed feelings. It seems that an unreliable narrator may lead to the conclusion that Petrushevskaya laughs at the reader's belief in miracles and their love for predictable fairy-tale endings, thus pointing to the sad truth of the impossibility of any fairy-tale scenario in everyday reality. A parallel interpretation is nevertheless possible.

First, it should be underscored that the narrators in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are markedly less unreliable in comparison with the author's prose. As noted in Chapter I, and as I will emphasize in this chapter as well, the narrators often take the side of the suffering characters and sympathize with them. The gap between the narrator, implied author, and "the poor people" is thus markedly smaller in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. This is not to say, however, that the narrators in these fairy tales are squarely reliable. Nevertheless, they change in quality in that their sense of values does not necessarily collide with that of the implied author and the reader.

[342] Parts, "Down the Intertextual Lane," 2005.

[343] I have also argued that this gap disappears from the point of view of Petrushevskaya's characters as they tap into the possibilities of the present, thereby enabling the reader to realize that ordinary reality and the magical are on the same plane and that happy endings are possible in the everyday reality.

Without denying their irony, I consider Petrushevskaya's narrators as not necessarily suggesting the outright pessimism of the author's worldview or of her fairy tales.

Second, the counter-perspective to the narrators' irony lies precisely in Parts's observation of the humanist values that emerge from the plots, and that at the same time constitute the core of the Russian folktale. More specifically, the unreliable narrators' stance is often counterbalanced by the ability of the characters to face the ugly reality with humaneness. The impression is that the characters' actions increasingly speak for themselves, and the voice of the narrator, even if derogatory, is thus balanced out. Petrushevskaya's characters present a wider range of perceptions, attitudes, and emotions, thus tempering the narrator's attitudes. This produces for the reader the effect of experiencing the events with the characters rather than with the narrator, which markedly changes the experience of reading Petrushevskaya's fiction. My analysis is informed by the assumption that the narrator does not necessarily, at least not always, distort the events and intentionally give false impressions and inaccurate accounts of the events to the reader. Rather, I believe the attitudes, inner views, and actions of the characters themselves in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales carry more weight, which help the reader directly identify himself or herself with the characters. Ultimately, of course, the readers must do the interpretative arithmetic for themselves as the resolution of both positions, the ironic narrators' and the positive characters', is not made explicit.

The shifting negotiation between two opposing stances points to Petrushevskaya's awareness of the futility and/or the impossibility of any bona fide happy ending, but I argue that the very return to the fairy-tale genre is a way for Petrushevskaya to attempt to affirm rather than to negate. This dialogue of both vectors is not resolved in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, nor is it meant to be resolved. Nevertheless, the sense of hope that breaks through is significant, thus constituting the other voice, or the counter-perspective, in this dialogue. I demonstrate that even

though the narrators' comments and the closing statements appear ironic, thereby emphasizing indelible negativity, they do not contradict the possibility of a positive scenario. This outlook is evident in Petrushevskaya's approach to the notions of despair and hope. In the analysis that follows, I thus examine the ways in which Petrushevskaya's characters move from despair toward hope, which underlines their capacity for transformation: to change themselves and their lives. Petrushevskaya's approach to the genre is understood through her choice of referring to the two characteristic motifs of the fairy tale: loss and transformation.

As I approach the notions of despair and hope, I rely in part on the existentialist understanding of an individual in his pursuit of meaning.[344] As Thomas R. Flynn summarizes, "Existentialism is a person-centered philosophy. Though not anti-science, its focus is on the human individual's pursuit of identity and meaning amidst the social and economic pressures of mass society for superficiality and conformism."[345] The question of finding meaning and purpose in life, according to existential thought, pertains largely not to collectivity but to an individual. As Flynn notes,

> It is commonly acknowledged that existentialism is a philosophy about the concrete individual. This is both its glory and its shame. In an age of mass communication and mass destruction, it is to its credit that existentialism defends the intrinsic value of what its main proponent Sartre calls the 'free organic individual', that is, the flesh-and-blood agent. Because of the almost irresistible pull toward conformity in modern society, what we shall call 'existential individuality' is an achievement, and not a permanent one at that. We are born biological beings but we must become existential individuals by accepting responsibility for our actions.[346]

[344] I do not argue that Petrushevskaya's fairy tales can be fully interpreted through the lens of existential thought. For example, the author's return to objective virtues (such as good, justice, and virtue) discourages such an exercise.
[345] Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8.
[346] Flynn, *Existentialism*, 8. See also Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. *Expanded Edition* (Penguin Books, 1975), 12-22.

The main questions of existentialist thought have reverberated in Russian literature, and were especially prominent in the nineteenth century in the works of Dostoevsky. As Kaufmann observes: "It sometimes happens that one single man towers above the rest and says more adequately what others say less well. In Italy around 1380 Dante was that man. In Dostoevsky's Russia it was the novel. In Denmark around 1850 it was Kierkegaard and Andersen. In Nietzsche's Germany there was no one to rival him."[347] Petrushevskaya, "a recognized daughter of Dostoevsky,"[348] continues to pose questions regarding man and his often excruciating experience in pursuing identity and meaning in the light of overarching despair.

Petrushevskaya's prose and drama have been analyzed as informed by the conviction that life means condemnation to existence. Goscilo, for example, examines *The Time: Night* through the concept of trauma and her character's permanent inability to work through that trauma.[349] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales, however, often expose the brighter side of human nature and, as noted throughout this work, man's strength and capacity for humane action. Therefore, the naturally irrevocable condemnation to existence of which Goscilo writes may be interpreted with a glimmer of hope and not a sense of defeatism. Furthermore, despair and trauma in Petrushevskaya's prose have been closely associated with a claustrophobic atmosphere. Woll describes such confines of cramped spaces in detail, arguing that:

> (...) All of Petrushevskaya's characters inhabit spaces that steadily shrink (...) The cramped, overcrowded spaces in which Petrushevskaya's characters reside are at once ark, fortress, and prison. They are safer than the world outside, where characters are at best helpless ("Night Time") and at worst menaced by natural perils (an icy roof in "Elegy") and human threats (lurking cutthroats in "Uncle Grisha"). Doors can be locked, yet what lies behind the locked doors is often

[347] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 49.
[348] Helena Goscilo, "Book Review: Sally Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void: The Genres of Liudmila Petrushevskaia*," *Slavic Review* 61 (2002), 655.
[349] Goscilo traces the etiology of Petrushevskaya's negative worldview through the concept of trauma in *The Time: Night*. See Goscilo, "Narrating Trauma," 2005.

> unendurable: negative force fields that repel other human beings, battlefields for the family wars that rage throughout Petrushevskaya's work.[350]

This shortage of space deepens the agony and the sense of despair her characters go through. Yet, as Lipovetsky suggests, the same agony and despair as well as eschatological overtones are for Petrushevskaya necessary elements of life, since, for her, life is tragic by definition. As he argues, Petrushevskaya's writing is didactic in the sense that it teaches one to understand life as a tragedy but also to live with this realization. Although despair and the absurd are part and parcel of life in its eternal and natural cycle, man's choice and solution is to find strength by taking responsibility for himself and for others. Lipovetsky concludes his study of Petrushevskaya's short stories by noting their cogent message:

> One has to toughen up...? But how? Only with one thing – mutual responsibility. For the person who is weaker and whose situation is even worse. For a child. For a beloved. For someone in misery. That is the eternal solution to tragedy. It does not promise happiness. But it contains the possibility of catharsis. That is, I remind you, purification without which this insurmountable circle of *bytie* [existence] would be meaningless.[351]

I posit that the pursuit of meaning in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales invariably involves overcoming traumatic experiences and despair. The theme of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales at large could be likened to the theme of loss followed by a long and hard road toward recovery.[352] Petrushevskaya's approach to the genre is understood through her choice of referring to the two characteristic motifs of the fairy take: loss and transformation. Whereas fairy-tale heroes always

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[350] Woll, "The Minotaur in the Maze," 125.

[351] "Надо укрепиться...? Но чем? Только одним – зависимой ответственностью. За того, кто слабее и кому еще хуже. За ребенка. За любимого. За жалкого. Это и есть вечный исход трагедии. Он не обещает счастья. Но в нем – возможность катарсиса. То есть, напоминаю, очищения, без которого этот неодолимый круг бытия был бы бессмыслен" (Lipovetsky, "Tragediia i malo li chto eshche," http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1994/10/knoboz01.html (Accessed July 18, 2018).

[352] As Anna Summers, Petrushevskaya's translator, notes: "Loss followed by a hard road toward recovery is very much part of Russian mentality." Interview with Anna Summers and Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, https://pankmagazine.com/tag/ludmilla-petrushevskaya/ (Accessed May 30, 2019).

go through trials and overcome obstacles, Petrushevskaya's characters' trial is to overcome despair, which is achieved by such universal virtues as love and altruism, compassion, and sacrifice as well as family intimacy and the sense of security it creates.

In his *Metaphysics of Hope* (1951), Gabriel Marcel, a French existentialist philosopher, introduces the concept of hope as it emerges within the context of an ordeal. He describes the experience of an ordeal as enduring a form of captivity or imprisonment that restricts one's agency and results in a sense of deprivation. Confinement to the limitations of one's ordeal can give rise to a sense of despair. Shrouded in the darkness of an ordeal, hope represents a light, a yearning to be delivered from the ordeal. Marcel argues that only when the temptation to despair is present can hope emerge. In his subsequent work, *Homo Viator* (1965), Marcel further describes despair within a spatial-temporal depiction of experiencing despair as "closing or (...) the experience of time plugged up. The man who despairs is the one whose situation appears to be without exit."[353] Feeling fractured and powerless, the despairing person often withdraws from life into isolation and alienation from others.

To borrow Marcel's terms, in the vortex of the absurdity of life and the indifference of the universe, Petrushevskaya's characters, realizing the omnipresent bankruptcy of values and with little to cling to socially, spiritually, and morally, often attempt suicide, "an act of a self-directed disposability."[354] Already mentally dead, her characters are held captive by despair that leads them to attempt physical suicide. Yet, one of the stopovers on their existential journey as *homo viators* is hope. Coming to the rescue, as it were, hope appeals to a creative power to find a way. By engaging with this creative process, the hopeful person overcomes the stagnation of despair by moving forward as new possibilities unfold. From this perspective, hope refers to the hope of

[353] Albert Randall, *The Mystery of Hope of in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 331.
[354] Ibid., 8.

returning home, of finding one's own way again. What is important with regard to Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is that this creative process is not a solitary act. For hope aims "at reunion, at recollection, at reconciliation."[355] It draws people together and reinforces a sense of strength in living a meaningful and valued life. Petrushevskaya's fairy tales make evident this movement from despair, including suicide, to hope as fostered through meaningful human relationships.

While practically all of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales analyzed so far feature despair to a larger or smaller extent, some specifically touch upon suicide. Examples include the tale "Volshebnye ochki," studied in Chapter II while examining Petrushevskaya's active characters. The latter are relevant to the questions of despair and suicide in that they are prime examples of having the capacity to withstand despair. Unlike the characters from Petrushevskaya's prose, the girl from "Volshebnye ochki" is capable of coming to terms with who she is and finding the inner strength to abandon suicidal thoughts and channel them in such a way so as to enrich her life. The heroine of this tale, as well as the other tales I discuss in this chapter, corroborate Lipovetsky's observation with regard to Petrushevskaya's short stories; namely, that acts of humaneness, including compassion and love as well as responsibility for the other, are a way to counterbalance despair.

Another example involving suicide is the tale "Chernoe pal'to" ("The Black Coat," 1995). The tale begins with "a certain girl," literally at the end of the road and allegorically at the end of her life's journey, in an unknown place. The dark atmosphere is deepened by the image of a somber forest in the winter and by her wearing someone else's black coat. Neither remembering nor understanding why she happens to be there and where she is going, she is led by unknown

[355] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator. Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*. trans. by Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2010), 53.

forces. She experiences further mystical occurrences as she meets a woman who holds a burning match, and whom she asks for help. As the image of the woman indubitably echoes Andersen's *The Match Girl*, we gather that the woman is in the in-between space of her journey: neither alive nor dead, or, in Marcel's terms—without exit. The woman tells the girl that she does not have many matches left before she crosses the threshold between life and death. We gather that the woman committed suicide after her husband left her and her children, but she now realizes that she should not have done so. This realization is what constitutes Marcel's glimmer of hope, as she understands that she is actually loved and needed: "I still think that my children love me. That they will cry. That they will not be needed by anyone in the world, neither by their father nor his new wife."[356] The girl, too, realizes that she wants to wake up from what she thinks is a nightmare, but does not know how. In a common effort, they realize they have to take off the black coat to set themselves free. In the end, the girl wakes up at her home and we then learn her story: her boyfriend left her when he found out that she was pregnant. As she realizes her mistake, we gather that she intends to keep the child. The woman is saved from death as well. As she finds herself back at home, she sees her two children sleeping and falls on her knees to ask for forgiveness.

What becomes clear in this tale is that the glimmer of hope and the strength to begin again appear only when the women realize they are still loved and needed by their families, and when they help each other in this realization. The woman's falling on her knees is a symbolic act of repentance; that is, the regret she expresses after her suicide attempt and forsaking her children. This new life does not have to be read as a divine miracle, since she realizes her mistake by herself, and with the help of another. Petrushevskaya keeps both women on the threshold and it is

[356] "Мне еще кажется, что мои дети любят меня. Что они будут плакать. Что они будут никому на свете не нужны, ни их отцу, ни его новой жене" (NS, 252).

here that spiritual life opens up for them both. The threshold is thus the turning point in both women's lives or, as Bakhtin would put it, the turning point of their souls.[357] Petrushevskaya brings both women to life, and the story returns from the supernatural to reality, as the heroines respond to each other, realize the importance of their lives and the reason for living. Both women return to the same gloom of their material lives: cramped apartments, illness, betrayal, and single motherhood. They do, however, return to the same reality changed and stronger in their capacity to face life, which implies a renewal. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to decide whether the ending sparks any hope.

Despair and its mitigation are also at the heart of the tale "Strogaia babushka" ("The Harsh Grandmother," 2008). This story depicts a woman, the grandmother of a young girl, whose harshness echoes another grandmother from Petrushevskaya's oeuvre, namely, Anna from the oft-quoted *The Time: Night*. The narrator revealingly suggests that she is the kind of grandmother who resembles a wicked witch who at some point in life became a mother and then a grandmother, and who is convinced that her children ruined her youth and her grandchildren continue to do so. The granddaughter, Lena, and her mother, Tania, live at the mercy of the abusive grandmother under the same roof. The grandmother is also the neighbours' nightmare, calling the police at the slightest noise they make. The sole purpose she has in life is taking pains to secretly secure the money she keeps in a bank. Her cruelty deepens when the bank goes bankrupt and she loses her savings. Almost *en passant*, in Petrushevskaya's narrators' customary style, we learn that the grandmother's husband left her for one of his students, and realize that this might be the reason for her malevolent actions.

The abuse both women are victim to deepens the sense of hopelessness in the tale. As the mother is unemployed, the grandmother makes both her and her daughter sew napkins and sell

[357] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 61.

them at the market. We also learn that Tania's husband has disappeared and the grandmother subsequently made the abandoned women live with her. Only at the end of the tale do we gather that it was the grandmother's scheme to have her son-in-law kidnapped and freed only when ransom for him was paid. While the narrator reveals the grandmother's plan to rent the couple's apartment for her own monetary gain as the motivation behind this act, it might in fact speak to her own traumatic experience and her own ways of making sure that no one else would ever abandon her again. Instead, in her angry rants and likely acting out her own trauma, to borrow Freudian terms, she insults her daughter and granddaughter, pronouncing them the reason for her son-in-law's departure: "He ran away from you, you were real pains in the neck to him, said strict grandma. And even though I couldn't stand him, I knew what kind of guy he is, and always told him beat it, he abandoned you all of his own! You were good for nothing even for such a schmuck! Not to mention for me! You're your father's daughter! And you - your grandfather's granddaughter! Both of you are his clones!"[358] The psychological pattern of the grandmother in this tale resembles Anna's in *The Time: Night*. Both heroines' cruelty is embedded in the unconscious destructive drives and forces of their actions as well as their extreme unhappiness and dependence on those they torture.

The granddaughter's life is equally hopeless. Lena does not manage to make friends. Ostracized because of her poverty, she is subject to cruelty from her peers and her teacher alike. Distressed, the girl leaves school and, afraid of coming back home, she roams the streets. Hungry and aimless, she becomes the target of kidnappers who intend to abuse her sexually. The evil is offset by evil characters themselves: the kidnappers begin to argue with one another, thus

[358] "Сбежал он от вас, надоели вы ему как горькая редька, – сказала строгая бабушка. – И хоть я его терпеть не могла, знала, что он за фрукт, и всегда ему говорила, катись отсюда, чтобы духу твоего тут не было, но он-то вас бросил! Даже ему, такому прощелыге, вы не понадобились! А уж мне тем более! Дочь своего отца! Внучка деда! Обе в него пошли рожами!" (ChB, 249).

facilitating the girl's escape. Although she finds her way back home, her distress continues. The bookshelf where her grandmother hides her savings falls to the ground with an ear-splitting crash. While manically picking up the banknotes, the grandmother suffers a stroke.

Despite its distressing content, the tale's ending is starkly different from Petrushevskaya's short novel. If in *The Time: Night* we suspect that the abusive grandmother Anna commits suicide, in "Strogaia babushka" the abusive grandmother is saved and supported by her daughter. Tania mercifully collects her mother from the hospital and takes her home. The grandmother is now like a child, speechless, barely mobile, eliciting her daughter and granddaughter's pity. If everyone in the short novel ends up in dire consequences (Anna's daughter Alena and her children as well as Anna's son), the tale concludes with a humane approach to the other and a conscious resolution to be responsible for the other. Furthermore, in comparison with Petrushevskaya's short novel, the girl, Lena, becomes stronger. As the whole family returns to their previous apartment and as Lena returns to her old school, she is now warmly welcomed by others: "All four moved back to their previous house, the girl went to her old school, where she was joyfully greeted: how she had grown, how smart she had become. Her peers respect her, perhaps because *severe* Lena is not afraid of any of them, but she treats all of them well. She does not want to turn into what her grandmother had been."[359] Having lived through distress, the girl has become "severe," with her psyche undoubtedly damaged. The adjective *surovyi* that now describes a girl who has gone through an ordeal, and the word *strogii* that refers to the grandmother is now in fact synonymous, thus making the destructive aftermath of trauma all the more evident. Ordeal, however, breeds different consequences for both heroines. The girl does

[359] "Они вчетвером переехали обратно, в свой прежний дом, девочка пошла в старую школу, где ее радостно встретили: да как выросла, да какая стала умная. Одноклассники ее уважают, может быть, потому, что *суровая* Лена никого из них не боится, но ко всем относится хорошо. Она не хочет стать такой же, какой была бабушка" (ChB, 269).

not collapse; nor does she take revenge on the offenders. What constitutes most crucial difference between both works is that both Tania and her daughter manage to break the cycle of destructive repetition. The forgiveness and compassion they express toward the cruel grandmother therefore speaks to the attempt to break the vicious cycle of mutual torment. Compared to Goscilo's analysis of *The Time: Night*, the tale "Strogaia babushka" does envision a "ray of light in the kingdom of darkness."[360]

The movement from despair to hope is also at the heart of the tale "L'vinaia maska" ("Lion's Mask," 2011). The first part of the tale is a critique of a superficial understanding of spirituality and wisdom: both seeking it and teaching it. In it, a trendy guru gathers followers who desire meaning in their lives. His acclaim, however, arises from his popularity rather than wisdom, as his followers are not truly interested in the search for knowledge but rather in capturing "moments of ecstasy" (*mgnoveniia ekstaza*). The second part echoes the classic tale "Beauty and the Beast." However, reversals and a more intricate psychological underpinning mark Petrushevskaya's rendition of this classic.

The protagonist, M. is a man of extraordinary wealth who engages in philanthropic work in women's prisons and for the homeless, and whose readiness for sacrifice points to Beauty, since sacrifice is her attribute. The unreliable narrator, though, presents M.'s philanthropy as pointless, as he is taken advantage of: "But these attempts came to the point where before M. yawned an abyss of insurmountable social ills, foremost among them drug addiction."[361] The portrayal of those living on the margins of society extends to contemporary Russian society at large when the narrator bluntly proclaims: "M. couldn't do much about it. And who could, in a bankrupt country that willingly moves toward neglect and the gradual bestialization of the

[360] Goscilo, "Narrating Trauma," 175.
[361] "Но данные попытки кончались тем, что перед М. разверзалась пучина непревозмогаемых народных бедствий, среди которых первенство можно было отдать всеобщей наркомании" (NSvMgD, 379).

country as a whole. Russia was emptying out right before M.'s eyes."[362] M.'s attempts at civilizing and enlightening others, the narrator suggests, are just one more example of the futility of his actions: "Later on the hungry artists whom he educated could earn their living only one way, by selling drugs..."[363] Contrary to the insensitive narrator's position, M. sacrifices himself and continues to finance numerous social initiatives. As he falls ill with leprosy, he turns into a "beast," his face resembling that of a lion. In the psychiatric institute that he funds, he meets Anya, a shy and taciturn young woman who helps disabled children, and with whom he falls in love.

Anya is loosely modeled on Beauty, and, like her predecessor is loving and caring. However, her ordeal is arguably more acute. Anya's story becomes one more portrayal of human misery when we learn that she was raped at a young age and is now ostracized along with her parents who managed to have the perpetrators put in jail. As soon as he learns about Anya's trauma, M. secretly helps both her and her parents. Like the Beast, he also secretly hopes to become closer to her. Indeed, as in the classic tale, Anya gradually falls in love with M. In *Beauty and the Beast*, however, Beauty realizes her love for the Beast as she sees him helpless, nearly dying of a broken heart as he waits for her to return. In Petrushevskaya's tale, the truly helpless being is Anya as she must live with the aftermath of her traumatic experience. Her gradual falling in love with M. turns out to have healing properties for her personal suffering, and so the classic situation is turned inside out.

The final paragraph of this tale is another example from Petrushevskaya's fairy-tale repertoire that evokes the capacity to work through personal trauma. "And the tears poured down

[362] "М. ничего не мог с этим поделать. Кто бы что мог поделать с бедняцким краем, который самопером шел к заброшенности и постепенному освобождению дичающей территории. Россия на глазах М. пустела." (NSvMgD, 379).
[363] "Далее обученные им голодные художники могли прокормиться только одним, сбывая наркоту..." (NSvMgD, 381).

his throat, he swallowed them, and his wet eyes, his almost nonexistent eyes, looked from beneath his furled brow at Anya who at that moment also burst into tears for the first time in many years. But then she pulled herself together."[364] Having unblocked her feelings, symbolized by her crying "for the first time in many years," Anya is on the way to regaining internal strength and self-worth.

It is no coincidence that Petrushevskaya approaches such a traumatic experience as rape and at the same time alludes to the tale *Beauty and the Beast*, which has been interpreted in psychoanalytical terms as speaking to female sexuality—more specifically, to detaching from one's parents and approaching a sexual partner. As Bettelheim argues in his seminal psychoanalytical analysis of fairy tales, *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), "Only after Beauty decides to leave her father's house to be reunited with the Beast—that is, after she has resolved her Oedipal ties to her father—does sex, which before was repugnant, become beautiful."[365] The main difference between the two tales, the classic and Petrushevskaya's revision of it, lies specifically in the nature of sexuality. While Beauty overcomes "natural," Oedipal, psychic conflicts and in the end accepts her sexuality; Anya comes to terms with her sexuality after an "unnatural" act of physical assault that causes her trauma. In Beauty's case, "what was feared to be a beastly experience turns out to be one of deep humanity and love."[366] Conversely, in Anya's acute case, an actual beastly experience is alleviated by deep humanity and love. In Petrushevskaya's contemporary rewriting of the story, then, Anya does not merely manage to resolve Oedipal ties to accept her sexuality, but arguably undergoes a more complex and severe experience. Ultimately, though, what binds Beauty and Anya together is their growth in the

[364] "И слезы полились у него внутри горла, он их глотал, а мокрые глаза, его почти спрятавшиеся глазки, смотрели из-под нависщшего лба на Аню, которая в этот момент тоже заплакала, впервые за много лет. Но потом взяла себя в руки." (NSvMgD, 395).
[365] Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 307-308.
[366] Ibid., 306 and 307-308.

respective processes they undergo.

What these two tales indubitably share is the theme of sacrifice. In the classic tale, Beauty displays this virtue, although with a rather patriarchal overtone, which entails self-denial: sacrifice for her father and for the Beast. Petrushevskaya revises the classic by having both characters capable of mutual sacrifice, thus striking out any contrast between man and woman and instead placing both on par, as equal human beings. Unlike the classic, both characters in Petrushevskaya's tale are wounded and both undergo transformation. If Anya's transformation refers to her coping with the past, M.'s metamorphosis is different in that it is inversed compared to that of his predecessor. While the Beast is delivered from an animal-like appearance, M. turns into a beast as he is struck with leprosy. In the classic tale, Beauty's transference of her original Oedipal love for her father to her future husband helps restore the Beast to his humanity.[367] This movement in Petrushevskaya's tale is reversed. M.'s humanity does not need to be restored, for it has been measured by his charitableness.[368] He realizes the purpose of his life, or rather re-discovers what it has always been. Without the need of any (ostensibly omniscient and illuminating) authority like that of guru, he realizes his philanthropy is fundamentally not futile. As in the classic tale, the higher aspect of man is measured by his capacity for selfless love.

What transpires from the tales analyzed in this section is that such notions as suicide, violence, illness, and trauma—although omnipresent—become decidedly more reparable in Petrushevskaya's texts than her readers are thought to believe. The possibility of spiritual transformation through humane acts suggests ways of coping with (not eradicating) oppressive social and existential realities. This also echoes Marcel's stance and Lipovetsky's understanding

[367] Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 308.
[368] In the example of the Beast Petrushevskaya thus reflects on the transfer between the animal and the higher aspects of man. The animalistic state is not a matter of physical appearance but portrayed through the bestial act of rape, that is, aggressive and destructive sexuality.

of Petrushevskaya's works in that catharsis is possible when the reader realizes that one possible solution to the tragedy and absurdity of life is mutual responsibility. In that sense, Petrushevskaya offers her implied readers a sense of comfort and consolation. She puts it directly in an interview with Sally Laird: "I've always wanted my work to shock, to strike, to wound the spiritual users of my work – to set in motion the process of forming the pearl inside them. A pearl's life can only begin with trauma, a blow."[369] The disillusionment she comments on engenders similar conclusions: "Disillusionment is an essential part of human existence; without it there's no movement forward. Success weakens the muscles – whereas disappointment, the tragic perception of how one can fail or not get there in time – is the most powerful motivator to action."[370] A world without the possibility of despair, in essence, would be for Petrushevskaya a world without hope. This conviction reverberates with Marcel's words: "The more desperate the despair, the more 'unconquerable' the hope that can emerge."[371]

Significantly, this existential stance corresponds to the traditional understanding of the folktale as well, wherein the departure from home and a symbolic journey to the land of the dead points to life lessons: through the struggle with hostile forces one may overcome the fear of death, and thus begin to live.[372] In the folktale, too, negativity at large is inescapable on the road to maturation and awakening. The solutions Petrushevskaya suggests are seemingly simplistic, since they gesture toward universal, humanist virtues, and yet prove to be both timely and valuable in today's post-theological world. The universal values that emerge from Petrushevskaya's fairy tales have restorative properties, for applying them invokes the possibility of attenuating the tragedy of life.

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[369] Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature: Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers*, 35.
[370] Ibid., 38
[371] Randall, *The Mystery of Hope of in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 9.
[372] Haney, *An Introduction to the Russian Wondertale*, 103.

Andersen in a Skirt,[373] **or "Andersen forever"**[374]

The intertextual links in Petrushevskaya's prose have been previously discussed. Parts, for example, analyzes Petrushevskaya's short story "The Lady with the Dogs" ("Dama s sobakami," 1993) as entering into dialogue with Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. As a rule, Parts contends, "Intertextual elements signal the author's intent to respond to an earlier text. The effect of such linkage is twofold: as the new text encapsulates the older one's themes and images in order to use them for its own starting point, the older text is reread through the prism of the new one. The new text, meanwhile, establishes its place in the tradition, capitalizing on its relationship with those texts already sanctified by cultural memory."[375] Parts asserts that Petrushevskaya picks up the main issues addressed by the classics, and by relocating the classic characters to contemporary Russia, she makes her own statement with regard to sexual passion, social decline, divorce, and suicide. In a world devoid of feeling, Petrushevskaya shows the end not only of the love story and the life of her contemporary heroine but of the whole cultural tradition that elevated such concepts and qualities as love, morality, family, compassion, "and other axioms of meaningfulness in human existence."[376] Petrushevskaya's fairy tales depict man differently in that they suggest hope while re-establishing the importance of the above notions and qualities. Apart from undeniably acknowledging man's wretchedness, this vision speaks to man's strength as well. This significantly different quality of Petrushevskaya's vision of man is projected in her fairy tales through another intertextual dialogue with the nineteenth-century tradition; namely, with Andersen's fairy tales.

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[373] Petrushevskaya has been dubbed "Andersen in a skirt" by the Russian scholars and readers. Apart from Bykov, below, see Ol'ga Lebedushkina, "Shekherezada zhiva, poka... O novykh skazochnikah i skazkakh," *Druzhba narodov* 3 (2007). She has also been dubbed as "Dostoevsky in a skirt," "Chekhov in a skirt," and "Zoshchenko in a skirt" with regard to her prose and drama.

[374] This is how Petrushevskaya concludes her essay "Tili bom, ili Skazka o skazke" in *Istorii iz moiei sobstvennoi zhizni* (Sankt-Peterburg: Amfora, 2009).

[375] Parts, "Down the Intertextual Lane," 77.

[376] Ibid., 89.

While a number of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales draw on the tradition of Russian folklore as well as well-known fairy tales and fairy-tale motifs from Western culture, in her intertextual engagement with folklore and literary predecessors Petrushevskaya is clearly fascinated specifically by Andersen.[377] Along with Kierkegaard, the Danish fairy-tale writer has been regarded as Denmark's most influential existential writer.[378] Having a ubiquitous cultural presence, Andersen's tales, along with their adaptations, reconfigurations, and reinventions, abound in literature and film. In Russia, Andersen's tales proved especially appealing in the Soviet era, arguably because of the theme of social inequality that he explores. Andersen's writing conjures images of child abuse, the misery of the elderly, the downtrodden, and the marginalized. He is also (in)famously thought of as striving to describe acute suffering.[379] For example, in his oft-quoted tale *The Red Shoes* (1845), the heroine is subjected to agonizing pain and public humiliation for her vanity, a sign of her moral degradation. Unable to take off her shoes, the girl is forced to dance and in the end her feet are cut off. Only then is she offered the hope of redemption. She serves at the church until the end of her life, and upon her death "her soul flies on sunshine up to God."[380] As Maria Tatar observes with regard to this tale: "Much of

[377] Intertextual links with the fairy-tale tradition in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales deserve furher exploration. I point to some of them in Chapter II as well as Chapter III. T. Prokhorova briefly mentions Wilhelm Hauff and E.T. Hofmann as well. See Prokhorova, "Rasshirenie vozmozhnostiei kak avtorskaia strategiia," http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2009/3/pro7.html (Accessed May 29, 2019).
[378] See, for instance: Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 1975.
Examples include such films as Vladimir Degtiarev's *The Ugly Duckling* (*Gadkii utenok*, 1956), Leonid Amalrik's *Thumbelina* (*Diuimovochka*, 1964), Ivan Aksenchuk's *The Little Mermaid* (*Rusalochka*, 1968) as well as the works of the playwright Evgenii Shvarts. See Marina Balina and Birgit Beumers, "To Catch up and Overtake Disney? Soviet and Post-Soviet Fairy-Tale Films," in *Fairy-Tale Films Beyond Disney: International Perspectives*, ed. by Jack Zipes, Pauline Greenhill, and Kendra Magnus-Johnston (London: Routledge, 2016), 124-138.
[379] For a detailed description of Andersen's style, see, for instance: Maria Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, ed.by Maria Tatar (W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), 212-216; Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1983), 71-96.
[380] Hans Christian Andersen, *Fairy Tales*, trans. by Reginald Spink (New York, London, Toronto: Everyman's Library, 1992), 87.

the representational energy of the text is channelled in the direction of portraying anguish and pain, transforming mortal agony into transcendent beauty."[381]

Andersen's graphic descriptions of suffering and his concern with social inequality and misery correspond to Petrushevskaya's penchant for *chernukha*, the underside of the rosy image of reality. Petrushevskaya (in)famously exercises her keen awareness of the terrors and horrors of existence. In *The Time: Night*, to return to the most quoted example of her oeuvre, the world of her characters is a world of conflict and suffering, and the impression that might come to mind is that the best thing for man is either not to be born or to die soon, to paraphrase Goscilo. It is thus Petrushevskaya's propensity for negativity, for showing the dark side of human nature and suffering, that draws her nearer to the Danish writer; and in this sense Petrushevskaya could be considered as being under his spell.

Another characteristic the two authors share is their invocation of relief and hope as emerging from overarching gloom. As Dmitry Bykov observes with regard to Petrushevskaya:

> She is such an Andersen. Of course, she tells fairy tales, but they are dreadfully brutal, physiological, Andersenian fairy tales. Andersenian fairy tales are also terribly brutal—recall *The Red Shoes*. Yet, she always paints rose bushes in her watercolours, and, indeed, Andersen, too, really likes rose bushes because when they grow out of blood, pus, and manure, they create a huge, ever intensifying impression.[382]

The rose bushes that grow out of "blood, pus, and manure" suggest instances where downtrodden, oppressed, and suffering characters attain happiness against all the domestic and social odds in both authors' fairy tales. However, upon close reading it becomes evident that both authors'

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[381] Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 214.

[382] "Она такой Андерсен. Конечно, она рассказывает сказки, но это страшно жестокие, физиологические андерсеновские сказки. Андерсеновские сказки же тоже ужасно жестокие, вспомните «Красные башмаки». И при этом она все время рисует розовый куст на своих акварелях, и, действительно, Андерсен тоже очень любит розовый куст, потому что, когда он растет из крови, гноя и навоза, он производит огромное, еще усиливающееся впечатление" Dmitry Bykov, "A 100 Lectures with Dmitry Bykov," 2017, https://ru-bykov.livejournal.com/3121600.html (Accessed August 20, 2018).

fondness for rose bushes is, in fact, rather dissimilar. While in Andersen happiness (represented by rose bushes) either involves divine salvation or is brought about by reaching the upper echelons in society, in Petrushevskaya it is the result of increasing autonomy and self-reflection as well as building meaningful earthly relationships.

The common denominator to which both authors refer in their respective fairy tales is the notion of humaneness, salvation, and suffering. Yet, Petrushevskaya and Andersen understand and convey these notions differently. Humaneness—man's noble and gentle aspects such as kindness and sensitivity, is a key attribute of both authors' suffering characters. However, the role played by humaneness is what sets them apart. For Andersen, it presupposes self-debasement and is a foundation for, or a means of, possible divine deliverance. As Zipes remarks, Andersen's perspective focuses on torture and suffering before establishing true, divine, nobility.[383] Whereas for Petrushevskaya, an "earthly" humanist, humaneness is not a means to achieve divine deliverance but an end in itself, and constitutes man's sole lifeline in the present. Consequently, salvation in the context of Petrushevskaya should not be interpreted along the lines of the Christian faith (Andersen was a staunch believer), to denote deliverance from sin brought about by faith in Christ, but rather as preservation from harm. While negativity including suffering is irrefutable for Petrushevskaya, earthly salvation is nonetheless possible. It is, in fact, humaneness, those simple norms of ethical life that comprise the core of values in a Russian folktale, that acquires divine and redemptive attributes in Petrushevskaya's revisions of Andersen's tales. Finally, just as humaneness is not a means to an end, suffering is not an essential condition for achieving divine deliverance, as in the case with Andersen. Instead, Petrushevskaya's contemporary stance is an attempt to find salvation and faith in the midst of worldly, post-theological life. At the same time, the revived image of humaneness as well as active earthly

[383] Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 84.

struggle for self-awareness—individual and social alike—speak to the revival of the fairy tale's utopian function.

In the comparative analysis that follows, I examine Petrushevskaya's dialogue with Andersen's fairy tales, especially with regard to the notions of suffering and salvation, as well as differing interpretations of such humane acts and feelings as sacrifice and compassion. I intend to demonstrate how Petrushevskaya's dialogue with Andersen activates the fairy tale's utopian function. In my examination, I fall back on Zipes's understanding of fairy-tale revisions, which incorporate critical and creative thinking and alter the reader's views of patterns, images, and codes featuring in the original work.[384] I analyze Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as offering a qualitative re-examination of the meaning of Andersen's tales, thus addressing concerns pertaining to the cultural situation in Russia today.

"Tili bom, ili Skazka o skazke" ("A Fairy Tale about a Fairy Tale," 2009) serves as the foundation of this intertextual dialogue. In this essay, Petrushevskaya describes her journey to Denmark in the footsteps of the Danish writer in the hope of visiting his museum in Copenhagen. Upset at being unable to visit the museum, disheartened and on the verge of tears, she started writing a story about a young girl who constantly cried: "The museum was closed, of course. I wandered around, sat on a stone, above a wild, sparkling canal. The sea wind smelled strongly of herring and sliced watermelon. I almost burst into tears. I didn't feel like going back. Life had offended me again, it would't let go."[385]

On the road to another Andersen museum, in Odense, Petrushevskaya continued writing the story, which subsequently came to be entitled "Printsessa Belonozhka, ili Kto liubit, nosit na

[384] Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale*, 9.
[385] "Музей был закрыт, разумеется. Я шаталась вокруг, села на камень над взъерошенным, сверкающим каналом. Морской ветер крепко пах селедкой и вскрытым арбузом. Я чуть не плакала. Возвращаться не хотелось. Жизнь меня опять обидела, не пустила" (IiMSZh, 515).

rukakh" ("The Princess with the Lily-white Feet"), in tribute, as she reveals, to Andersen's "The Little Mermaid:" "In the display case was a chequered notebook, open in the middle. It was "The Little Mermaid." I laughed and pulled out my notebook, opened it in the middle. There was the half-way point of the tale "Printsessa Belonozhka."[386] She describes the tale: "It was a tale secretly dedicated to another tale – *at first glance*, about a capricious adolescent girl who would continuously cry from being hurt."[387]

Apart from autobiographical references, Petrushevskaya's tale displays similarities with Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" (1836) on the level of plot and style, especially with what pertains to graphic descriptions of physical and psychological pain and salvation. I have provided a summary of this tale in Chapter I, but expand it here with details relevant to my argument at hand. Belonozhka is an exceptionally delicate and sensitive young princess who easily breaks into tears (hinting perhaps at Petrushevskaya's self-criticism at the time of writing this tale). One day, a prince appears and they become inseparable, often strolling and dancing together. Just as he suddenly returns home, the princess starts crying inconsolably. Her grief doubles, as she also needs to tend to the wounds caused by dancing and strolling with the prince. Suffering physically and psychologically, Belonozhka falls into utter despair. As it happens, the most effective cure against the princess's ailments is the prince himself who, magically, makes her forget about her pain when he finally calls her on the phone. He then comes to wed her, but Belonozhka's health is so frail that everyone in the court is afraid she will not be strong enough to endure another walk before the wedding ceremony. The couple instead goes horse riding and it is here that the prince finds his future wife overly sensitive and capricious. At the gory sight of her wounds, he takes off

[386] "В витрине стояла тетрадка в клеточку, раскрытая на середине. Это была 'Русалочка'. Я засмеялась и вытащила свою тетрадку в клеточку, раскрыла ее на середине. Там была та самая половина сказки 'Принцесса-белоножка' (IiMSZh, 517).
[387] "Это была сказочка, тайно посвященная другой сказке – *на первый взгляд*, о капризной девочке-подростке, которая все плакала от обиды" (IiMSZh, 516).

in such a rough manner that he falls from the horse and loses consciousness. The princess sacrifices herself to save his life and carries him to the castle, where the guards separate them. Once recovered, and unaware of Belonozhka's feat, the prince thinks he has been deceived by her and that he almost married an undeserving princess. As he learns that Belonozhka saved his life and is now on her deathbed, the prince apologizes: "He entered the bedroom of his former fiancée, looked at her, and his heart quivered with pity."[388] In the finale, the prince takes her in his arms and kisses her, for, as the narrator ironically reminds the reader, he had read somewhere that this is indeed the way to bring princesses back to life.

Andersen's Little Mermaid, too, falls in love with a handsome prince whom she sees on a faraway ship. As the ship sinks, the heroine saves the prince's life and carries his unconscious body to the shore, where a young woman from his entourage finds him. As in Petrushevskaya's tale, the prince is not aware of the heroine's self-sacrificial deed (both heroines bring the male figure to a safe place and both leave this place: Belonozhka is taken away by the guards and Little Mermaid, unable to unveil her non-human identity, leaves the scene). From this point, the plots of the two tales diverge, although what binds them together is the theme of sacrifice and suffering. Dispirited and longing for the prince, Little Mermaid tries to become human for the sake of winning him over. She thus visits the Sea Witch who, in exchange for giving Little Mermaid human legs takes away her tongue and her tail. However, as Little Mermaid walks or dances, her legs give her piercing pain, as if she were walking on sharp knives. Overcoming excruciating pain, she continues dancing for the prince on her sword-like legs. As he mistakenly thinks that the person who saved his life is the young woman who found him unconscious, the prince abandons Little Mermaid. Having realized what she has sacrificed and endured for him at

[388] Translated by Joanne Turnbull, not paginated, accessible only online, https://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-Literature/fairytale_3353.jsp (Accessed August 20, 2018).

the expense of her life, Little Mermaid falls into despair again. The Sea Witch then offers her a knife with which she may kill the prince to take her revenge, return home to her family and end her misery. Little Mermaid, however, shows magnanimity as she saves the prince's life a second time, and instead throws herself to the sea and dissolves into sea foam. Instead of ceasing to exist, however, she becomes an ethereal figure blessed by God, and she may in three hundred years gain divine recognition by serving in God's name.

While both heroines sacrifice themselves for the ones they love and are subject to suffering, they are markedly different. Andersen's heroine suffers significantly more (and in more grisly detail) in order to establish her nobility and worth, and she achieves hope for divine salvation in the very distant future. She is voiceless and mutilated; and, as Zipes observes, being "deprived physically and psychologically, the mermaid serves a prince who never fully appreciates her worth."[389] While Petrushevskaya's Belonozhka and Andersen's Little Mermaid are peers (they are both fifteen), the story of the former is written in a much lighter way (largely by way of everyday language and humour) as compared to the morbid atmosphere of pain and torture of the latter. Admittedly, Petrushevskaya's Belonozhka suffers physically (the lingering wounds on her hands and feet, and her illness) and psychologically (she is love-sick for her prince, which at the same time makes the tale more apt in terms of the everyday problems adolescents face), but she is spared suffering at the end of the tale as she reconnects with her beloved. Suffering in this tale is attenuated, and since it reflects adolescent love sickness—is also subject to parody.

[389] Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Act of Subversion*, 84.

Thus, the heroines' self-sacrifice and to some extent their suffering binds them together, but what decidedly sets them apart is their salvation.[390] Little Mermaid's self-sacrifice turns into self-debasement and self-denial in the name of stronger powers (human, for the prince; and divine, for God). According to Zipes, she thereby loses her identity; and by forsaking the chance to return home to her family, she forfeits her own life as she is subordinated to divine power.[391] While it is possible that she acquires a new identity and happiness as an ethereal figure serving God, it is nevertheless clear that her alleged happiness involves self-denial and is postponed until the very distant future.

If Andersen does not readily give fairy-tale happiness to his heroine, Petrushevskaya is more generous in this regard, since her couple is reunited. Significantly, both Belonozhka and her prince undergo transformations into maturity, lessening the irony. Belonozhka is capricious indeed, but only "at first glance," as Petrushevskaya notes in her essay, for at the end of the tale she turns into a mature woman, capable of turning her tears into internal strength (just as Petrushevskaya did during her trip to Denmark). Equally important is the fact that Petrushevskaya's prince, after his initial immaturity and fear, turns out to appreciate Belonozhka's worth, apologizes to her, and wins her back. While Little Mermaid's prince leaves the scene, leaving the heroine in despair (pointing to Andersen's dark vision of the world), Petrushevskaya's prince takes conscious action. The Prince pretended he knew nothing, "strode decisively to the bier," and kissed the princess. It is here a game of equals, where both emerge victorious and stronger as a couple. Self-sacrifice in Petrushevskaya's tale is thus an "earthly," altruistic act, and as such it is also awarded with an "earthly" salvation: forging genuine relations in the present.

[390] Sacrifice and disinterested help for the other is also what marks Petrushevskaya's friend, Slavist Helle Dalegord, who volunteered to smuggle Petrushevskaya's (and other writers') short stories to the West in the Brezhnev era, and whom Petrushevskaya mentions in the given essay.
[391] Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Act of Subversion*, 85.

We observe a similar dialogue between Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" (1843) and Petrushevskaya's "Dus'ka i gadkii utienok" ("Dus'ka and the Ugly Duckling," 2001), where the intertextual links are explicit right from the title. As symptomatic of Andersen's style, his Ugly Duckling is miserable and goes through hardships as an outsider. In this tale, "The poor duckling was pushed around by every one of them. Even his brothers and sisters were unkind to him, and they would say: 'If only the cat would get you, you ugly thing!' And his mother said: 'I wish you were far enough away!' And the ducks bit him and the hens pecked him and the maid who fed the poultry let fly at him with her foot."[392] He is surrounded by and subjected to hatred, vengeance, cruelty, and exploitation: including by other ducks in the pond and wild duck hunters. After a string of anguish and silent suffering, his transformation begins with the coming of spring. He has now become a beautiful swan and is physically stronger. Surprisingly for him, the swans suddenly notice him and take him in, and children now feed him bread and cakes. As we will see, this detail acquires a different meaning in Petrushevskaya's tale. The tale ends with an unspoiled picture of the now-swan who is thankful for the sudden happiness that has descended upon him.

The Ugly Duckling's fate suddenly changes from disdain and rejection to admiration. The metamorphosis, however, is not qualitative but rather, as it were, skin-deep, since it is based mainly on his outer beauty and not inner strength and self-consciousness. His transformation therefore is not a process of genuine liberation. As Zipes remarks, "In 'The Ugly Duckling', the baby swan is literally chased by coarse lower-class animals from the henyard. His innate beauty cannot be recognized by such crude specimens, and only after he survives numerous ordeals, does he realize his essential greatness. But his self-realization is ambivalent, for right before he perceives his true nature, he wants to kill himself."[393] His coming into his own is superficial and

[392] Andersen, *Fairy Tales*, 205.
[393] Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Act of Subversion*, 87.

thus not necessarily admirable, since "[t]he swan measures himself by the values and aesthetics set by the 'royal' swans and by the proper, well-behaved children and people in the beautiful garden."[394] This points to his dependence on and esteem for others; namely, those who are more privileged and in a position of power.

If the tale "Printsessa Belonozhka, ili Kto liubit, nosit na rukakh" is written in a light and humorous tone compared to Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," the opposite is true in the case of "Dus'ka i gadkii utienok" and its Andersenian prototype. While the latter begins with an idyllic scene in the countryside, Petrushevskaya's tale is set in Moscow's Patriarch Ponds and is decisively more sombre, bringing into focus the omnipresent *byt*, including the de-idealized life of the swans, which contrasts with Andersen's glorification of the royal birds: "But the swans lived their fairly crude everyday life, groomed themselves by plunging their whole heads into another's armpits with their whole head, dove and showed their dirty tails, loudly shouted at one another, shamelessly threw themselves at the food when the worker came with the bucket."[395] While in Andersen's tale the swans and the beautiful garden are placed in opposition to the ducks and the henyard, in Petrushevskaya's tale the swans are not particularly interesting or exceptional. Since "it was all a lie"[396] in the previous tale, the ducks should therefore not feel inferior to "the squeaky-voiced" (*skripuchii golos*) swans with "awkward necks" (*neudobnaia sheia*). Pointing to the imperfections of the swans and noticing their similarities with ordinary geese thus effaces divisive differences, thereby unceremoniously invoking equality in their common, sad lot.

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[394] Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Act of Subversion*, 88.
[395] This fairy tale appears in the cycle *Schastlivye koshki* (2001). I will be referring to the online text: http://www.belousenko.com/books/Petrushevskaya/petrushevskaya_cats.htm (not paginated).
"Но лебеди жили своей довольно-таки грубой бытовой жизнью, чистились, залезая себе под мышки всей головой, ныряли, показывая несвежие гузки, орали друг на друга диким голосом, бесстыдно кидались за кормом, когда приходила работница с ведром."
[396] "В знаменитой сказке все было наврано."

The theme of alienation connects both tales. Andersen's duckling is an outsider because of his different origin, but in the end he turns into a beautiful bird and joins the swans. Petrushevskaya's hero is an old duck who is also considered an outsider and is rejected even by his fellow ducks. Parodying the Andersenian duckling, Petrushevskaya's Ugly Duckling is old and lonely, and no one in the whole world believes that he could one day turn into a beautiful white swan who will be welcomed by the beautiful swans as one of them. No one believes the other swans will eventually admire him, bow before him and pepper him with compliments.[397] Old Ugly Duckling is one of Petrushevskaya's misfit characters. Like his literary predecessor, he initially longs for the swans' acknowledgment and appreciation, and is especially fond of one young female swan by the coarse name of Dus'ka whom he affectionately and secretly calls Dushen'ka. The hero likens her to a beautiful delicate flower and a ballerina and thinks of her as his granddaughter. This idealized image echoes Bogdanovich's poem under the same title (1783), and thus sheds further light on Petrushevskaya's tale.[398] Old Ugly Duckling believes Dus'ka to be like Dushen'ka, who in Bogdanovich's tale was abandoned, subject to trials, and turned ugly because of Venus's vengeance. His idealization of Dus'ka is in fact a mental reflection of what he undergoes: ostracism and victimization. Old Ugly Duckling has no self-worth, which gives rise to his suicidal thoughts, and feels he is misunderstood. He mistakenly believes that he shares this feeling precisely with Dus'ka. The narrator's opinion, however, is more realistic, as is Dus'ka's parents' complaint about her objectionable behaviour.

What significantly distinguishes Old Ugly Duckling from the other birds at the pond, and especially from his literary predecessor, is his analytical and wise outlook on the birds, ducks and

[397] "(...) Никто в целом мире не верил, что из пожилого Гадкого Утенка может когда-нибудь образоваться Прекрасный Белый Лебедь, которого примут как своего прекрасные Лебеди, и будут им любоваться, будут перед ним кланяться и шипеть приветственные слова."
[398] This poem echoes Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche.

swans alike, including Dus'ka, whom he sees as dangerously dependent on the white bread that is thrown to them. "Old Ugly Duckling saw, however, that even the swans peck at the white bread and literally lose all their royal dignity, rush to the shore, limp upward, extend their flexible necks and hunt for the alms, resembling poor beggars who shake their one and only hand."[399] While the bread and cakes that people throw to the Ugly Duckling in Andersen's tale are the reward for his blossoming beauty, in Petrushevskaya's tale they are the source of the birds' dependence and servitude, which is something Old Ugly Duckling comes to realize.

Like Andersen's duckling, Petrushevskaya's Old Ugly Duckling experiences suffering and witnesses death, albeit in the guise of images more contemporary for Petrushevskaya's reader: cruelty to ducks is caused not by hunters as in Andersen's tale but by the homeless who entice the birds with bread and ambush them in order to satisfy their own hunger. The culmination point occurs when Dus'ka, attracted by the white bread, is about to be caught. Old Ugly Duckling, the only one who realizes the danger, devises a way to resolve the situation by attacking the perpetrator and sending him off, then giving the bread to the ducks and having them fight over it among themselves so as to ensure that his rescue plan is successful. The picture that emerges re-establishes the ducks' dependence, and their actions embody the proverb "man is wolf to man," or, in this case, duck.

While the ducks fight over the bread and while Dus'ka safely returns to her family, Old Duckling (notice how the narrator drops the unkind epithet "ugly" at the end of the tale) has a moment of epiphany and understands his idealization of Dus'ka. "In the end, old Duckling calmly, with no rush, had duckweed and small pond oysters for dinner, and in the meantime, glancing at the swan's lodge, he mumbled: How can such a beauty... How can such a delight... be such a

[399] "Пожилой Гадкий Утенок видел, однако, что и лебеди клюют на белую булку и буквально теряют все свое царственное достоинство, спешат к берегу, ковыляют вверх, вытягивают свои гибкие шеи и охотятся за подачкой, похожие на убогих нищих, которые трясут своей единственной рукой."

fool... Ballerina and a cloud... Blithering idiot... Dus'ka..."[400] The recurring references to Bogdanovich's "Dushen'ka" clarify the essence of Petrushevskaya's tale. The meaning of Dus'ka's "stupidity" and "idiocy" refers back to Bogdanovich's poem where, avenged by Venus, Dushen'ka must die or at the very least grow ugly—*podurnet'*. At the same time, the verb *podurnet'* contains the noun 'dura', which means 'fool'. Dushen'ka indeed becomes ugly, as her face is covered with a black substance that she cannot remove. Her beloved, however, loves her beautiful soul and not her passing physical beauty. Petrushevskaya's Old Duckling thus understands his illusion, as he sees Dus'ka eagerly running for the enslaving white bread and forsaking her sense of autonomous identity, and thus figuratively turning ugly. This also explains why he no longer affectionately refers to her as 'Dushen'ka' but changes the register into the cruder 'Dus'ka'. The image of his own choice of food and his tranquility in the fragment above is telling and contrasted with the lamentable fate of his fellow birds. The white bread is juxtaposed with the more banal and appropriate food that pond birds eat, and the peacefulness of the scene reflects the hero's own peace of mind as well as his sad realization.

Andersen's Ugly Duckling and Petrushevskaya's Old Ugly Duckling are not rewarded in the same way at the end of their respective tales, and what emerges from this difference pertains to the question of power and beauty. Andersen's hero gains security while emulating and paying reverence to those with power, whereas Petrushevskaya's hero gains power over his own life by opposing the status quo and realizing his own strength. He has learned from his weak literary predecessor. His old age speaks to his transformation toward wisdom, and as such helps him achieve freedom. The latter, however, will deepen his alienation. The question of beauty is also posed differently in both tales. If Andersen's Ugly Duckling's is rewarded with outer beauty at the

[400] "Наконец пожилой Утенок спокойно, не торопясь, ужинал ряской и закусывал мелкими прудовыми устрицами, а в промежутках, глядя на лебединый домик, бормотал: Чтобы такая красота... Чтобы такая прелесть... была такая глупая *дура*... Балерина и облако... Набитая идиотка... Дуська..."

end of the tale, beauty in Petrushevskaya's tale is mocked (Dus'ka is beautiful but only externally), and a less superficial form of beauty is figuratively demonstrated through Ugly Duckling's inner strength and courage. Psyche, or the word 'soul' (*dusha,* and thus the diminutive Dushen'ka and vulgar Dus'ka), after all, refers to the spiritual part of a human being as well as a sense of identity. If Andersen's Ugly Duckling suffers and survives a period of "ugliness" to be recompensed with physical beauty, Petrushevskaya's old Ugly Duckling remains physically ugly but stands on his own and attains autonomy. Ugliness, however, is something with and in which he will continue to live, for there is no hope of changing the birds at the pond. The acceptance of not belonging and choosing non-conformity may be read as his strength on the one hand and, on the other, as his curse, for he must now live with the sad truth about his fellow man, or rather, duck, and continue to be ostracized. By bringing the reader's attention to the sociological problems of her times on the one hand and by challenging Andersen with the question of autonomy on the other, Petrushevskaya implicitly applies the fairy tale's utopian function of man's emancipation.

Another case that illustrates the struggle of the oppressed and their liberation that further reflects the fairy tale's utopian function is Petrushevskaya's tale "Malen'koe i eshche men'she" ("Small and Even Smaller," 2007), which echoes Andersen's "Thumbelina" (1835). The theme of compassion, alongside the theme of suffering, is at the core of both tales. In Andersen's tale, Thumbelina helps a dying swallow and, having experienced an ordeal with a despicable mole, flies off to the warmer climes with the help of the swallow who now returns the favour; then marries a prince, and becomes a queen. In Petrushevskaya's appropriation of the prototype, the protagonist, Little Man, finds Thumbelina (*Diuimovochka*) distressed as she is waiting for the swallow to notice her and take her away to bring the original story to a conclusion. Petrushevskaya's Thumbelina does not resemble her literary forerunner in that she does not display any kindness. Rather, she is interested only in sitting on the bird's back and flying off to

the elf-prince to obtain wings and become the elf-queen. Although Little Man realizes the unlikelihood of the swallows noticing someone as minuscule as Thumbelina, he wants to help, the same way she helped the swallow in Andersen's tale. He thus puts extraordinary effort in helping her climb the swallow, even though this proves to be a daunting task, as he is spotted by a group of adolescents who regularly torment him because of his otherness.

Little Man is another example of Petrushevskaya's marginalized characters, ostracized and burdened with suicidal thoughts. Physically frail, he is tormented and rejected (except by his own mother). His story is told from the point of view of the Andersenian swallow, whom the cruel mole and the indifferent mouse disregard, whereby Petrushevskaya's focus shifts to the suffering hero. Resembling Andersen's swallow lying dead on the floor, "its beautiful wings pressed tightly and its legs and head drawn up under his feathers,"[401] Little Man "closes his eyes and lies down as though he were dead."[402] The narrator describes the insensitive children who torment Little Man in the following way:

> Little Man was afraid of them. They teased him and sometimes threw stones at him. Some children, Little Man thought, do not understand the suffering of others, those who limp, those who are missing arms, the blind and chairbound, they find it funny when they see others' illness, they feel much stronger when they see the weak and bereaved, and they feel like testing the limits of their strength. That is, it sometimes happens that they feel like destroying everything that is different, everything that is helpless. At any rate, at least staring, pointing at, and laughing.[403]

Even though he does not manage to protect himself physically from the cruel teenagers, he is courageous enough to oppose them. As Old Ugly Duckling does with the homeless person who

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[401] Andersen, *Fairy Tales*, 42.
[402] "Он закрыл глаза и лежал как мертвый" (KMZZh, 382).
[403] "Маленький человек боялся их. Они его дразнили и иногда швыряли в него камнями. Некоторые дети, думал маленький человек, не понимают страданий других людей, хромых, безруких, слепых и неходячих, им смешно при виде чужих болезней, они чувствуют себя гораздо сильнее при виде слабых и обездоленных, и им хочется проверить границы своей силы. То есть иногда бывает, что им хочется уничтожить все непохожее, все беззащитное. Во всяком случае, хотя бы поглядеть, показать пальцем и посмеяться" (KMZZh, 380).

attacks the ducks, Little Man manages to outsmart his tormentors and makes them fight among themselves, just as the ducks had fought at the sight of bread. The sense that his torment will likely continue nonetheless haunts in Petrushevskaya's tale. While Andersen's Thumbelina escapes misery as she is transported to the land of fairy-tale bliss, Little Man remains on his own, and will likely be subject to more maltreatment. The foreseeable continuation of his suffering arguably points back to Petrushevskaya's poignant vision of man's despondency and readiness to afflict pain. Yet, a parallel reading transpires from the end of the tale.

Although both characters emerge triumphant despite the forces of adversity, they are rewarded differently. Andersen's Thumbelina suffers but as she remains pure-hearted and compassionate, she is granted happiness at the end of the tale. Little Man, small in size and oppressed, finally succeeds in helping Thumbelina climb onto the swallow. However, once again the difference in both tales is qualitative. As Andersen's Thumbelina (like the Ugly Duckling) merely joins a new group, her self-fulfillment is dubious. In the original story, Thumbelina is first humiliated and then rewarded with wings from the elf-prince to become similar to him and his cohort and to gain security. Petrushevskaya's Little Man, who is portrayed from the position of Andersen's swallow, comes into his own as the forces of adversity that cause his suffering as well as the urge to help others empower him. As he gains confidence in himself, he takes action. The following day, he decides to fulfill his dream of working at the circus, and sets off to ask to be hired: "Good for me, thought Little Man for the first time in his life"[404] That is, while Andersen's Thumbelina does not change qualitatively (she is quite simply rewarded for having undergone trials and tribulations), Little Man's budding self-worth helps him abandon suicidal thoughts and galvanizes him to make further plans for the future. Given Petrushevskaya's shift in the point of view of characters, there is no coincidence Little Man wishes to become specifically a bird doctor.

[404] "Вот я молодец, думал маленький человек первый раз в жизни" (KMZZh, 387).

> He who helps others becomes bigger and stronger. It has been proven. I'll finish school and become a bird doctor, thought Little Man, and I will be a doctor. I will treat eagles and owls, and even crows, not to mention parrots and nightingales, and especially swallows! And the tiny hummingbirds, the hummingbirds![405]

In Petrushevskaya's tale, the message of social Darwinism; that is, the survival of the fittest, which she is said to portray in her prose and drama, is therefore reversed. The fittest is not the physically strongest or most cruel, but the one who opposes domination via sensitivity toward the other, and self-acceptance. This character is Petrushevskaya's version of a contemporary Russian "little man" (*malen'kii chelovek*). Unlike his nineteenth-century prototype, however, he is capable of opposing adversity and gaining power over his life.[406] Although he continues to be kind and harmless, but also harmed, Petrushevskaya's Little Man's personality grows in size and strength. His growing self-awareness at the same time reflects Petrushevskaya's message of the worthiness of non-conformity and autonomy as an alternative to indelible alienation and insensitivity. Even if Little Man's attempt at non-conformity and autonomy is for the reader illusory or implausible, Petrushevskaya offers an alternative that reflects the fairy tale's utopian function; at precisely the moment, however fleeting, of self-empowerment or acquiring the will power to face life head on. Ultimately, time and again in Petrushevskaya's work, it is up to the reader to ponder the quality and value of both characters' rewards.

A revision of the theme of suffering marks another tale, "Mal'chik Novyi god" ("The New Year Boy," 2008), which is in dialogue with Andersen's "The Match Girl" (1845) (and at the

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[405] "А кто помогает другим, становится больше и сильнее. Это проверено. Надо стать птичьим доктором, решил маленький человек. Вот закончу школу, думал маленький человек, и буду врачом. Буду лечить орлов и сов, и даже ворон, не говоря о попугаях и соловьях, а уж ласточек особенно! И маленьких колибри, колибри!" (KMZZh, 387).

[406] As Lipovetsky argues, the difference between the "little man" in Russian realism and the "little man" in post-Soviet hyper-naturalism lies in representing the world of the latter as a concentration of social horrors including scenes of everyday violence. "Tellingly, violence in this writing comes not from the authorities, but rather is inflicted by victims of social injustice upon each other, or those not much different from them and, most importantly, is accepted as a 'normal' social interaction" (Lipovetsky, "Post-Soviet Literature between Realism and Postmodernism," 179).

same time with Dostoevsky's *The Beggar Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree,* 1876).[407] Andersen's tale is exceptionally short and at the same time outstandingly upsetting. On literally two pages, Andersen evokes silent suffering and the dreadful death of a beggar girl trying to sell matches on New Year's Eve. What is striking is the public's indifference to the girl's physical and social condition, acutely underscored by the festivities of the coming of the New Year. Hungry and shivering in the cold, the girl sees holiday festivities in the windows of the merrymakers' homes. Even though she has a home, she does not intend to return to it, since she did not manage to sell any matches and her father would thus most likely beat her. Longing for warmth, she starts striking the matches until, in the last tableau, her dead grandmother, already joined with God, greets her. In answering the question "What makes us read a story that ends in a child freezing to death to children," William Bennett suggests: "To feel another's anguish—this is the essence of compassion. Here is a Hans Christian Andersen masterpiece, a simple, tragic story that stirs pity in every child's heart."[408]

Although Andersen's "beautiful death" stirs pity, it creates compassion by causing the reader to identify with the victim.[409] This is precisely what distinguishes Petrushevskaya's appropriation of this story in a distinctly more altruistic direction toward collectivity, and explains the measured relief it offers.[410] Set ostensibly in 1990s Russia, the tale begins with the main heroes, clown Senia and mime Arisha, rushing to a New Year's Eve party where they are

[407] Petrushevskaya's intertextual dialogue with Dostoevsky deserves a separate analysis. For an analysis of the links between Andersen's *The Match Girl* and Dostoevsky's *A Boy at Christ's Christmas Party*, see Robin Feuer Miller, "A Childhood's Garden of Despair: Dostoevsky and A Boy at Christ's Christmas Party," in *Russian Writers and the Fin de Siècle: The Twilight of Realism*, ed. by Katherine Bowers and Ani Kokobobo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 52-68.
[408] William Bennett, *The Book of Virtues*, *A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 124. Quoted in Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 213.
[409] Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 213.
[410] The tale echoes Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, especially the category of the familiar and free interaction between people (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 122-123 and 130). Including such characters as a mime and a clown as well as *khorovod* is intended to release the atmosphere of gloom.

hired to perform. As they finally get to their destination (obstructed by the notorious traffic jams of Moscow), they meet a young boy silently sitting on the stairs, whose dire look stirs their pity. As they are late for their performance, they decide to take the boy with them. With the sound of the merry *khorovod* we learn that the boy's mother attempted to commit suicide. The parents of the children for whom Arisha and Senia perform decisively rush to save the boy's mother and successfully save her from death. In the final paragraph, while Arisha and Senia perform and merrily socialize with others, the boy and his mother are depicted as especially hopeful.

The first impression of the tale may be sorrowful not only because of the distressing picture of the boy and his suicidal mother, but also from a sociopolitical standpoint. The clown and the mime are former actors and the parents who save the suicidal woman's life are a former medical doctor and a teacher, respectively, who are now all degraded to less dignified jobs. Ultimately, however, the tale conjures a sense of collective equality, social sensitivity, and joy despite ubiquitous gloom. While Andersen's tale is marked by a sharp contrast between poverty and abundance, Petrushevskaya's tale foregoes such definitiveness and fixed duality. Just as in the previous tale all the birds in the pond, including the swan, are equal, everyone suffers in post-Soviet Russia. Arisha has lived through bereavement; Senia takes care of his incapacitated mother; they both accept menial jobs to survive. But what sets them apart is that they do not lose sensitivity or become disinterested, neither do they fall into despair: "Arisha wasn't interested in gossip, she smiled at everyone, everyone adored her."[411] While Andersen's tale does not offer any hope in man and in life (apart from, of course, reunion in the afterlife), Petrushevskaya's tale brings a sense of relief in that it points to an "earthly" salvation brought about by humane values and affirmation of life even in the face of overwhelming difficulty. The critique of social indifference explicit in Andersen's tale is therefore revised in Petrushevskaya in that fellow

[411] "Ариша сплетнями не интересовалась, всем улыбалась, все ее обожали" (KMZZh, 474).

Russians affected by sociopolitical changes and suffering in every aspect of life nonetheless show sensitivity and benevolence.

While in her short stories and drama Petrushevskaya would likely conclude a similar plot with a scene of piercing dehumanization and/or suffering, she more readily addresses the good in man in her fairy tales.[412] What unfolds at the end of the tale is the ultimate opposition of the view of suffering as a means of salvation. Unlike Andersen's heroine who is left on her own, experiences acute suffering, and dies, Petrushevskaya's child hero, having experienced trauma—is saved. The important difference lies in the tales' finales. Andersen's heroine ultimately escapes poverty and gains happiness by joining God; Petrushevskaya's hero not only does not die but also, in a telling authorial statement, joins his mother. His mother therefore replaces God and thus turns into Mother. That is, the Mother emerges as more powerful than God, which points to another "earth-bound" shift performed by Petrushevskaya: to human bonding that the fictional universe of Petrushevskaya's prose and drama otherwise lacks.[413]

The boy's mother intends to commit suicide before realizing that the tragedy of life does not have to be escaped. So too do other post-Andersenian characters, such as Little Man and old Ugly Duckling as well as the despairing characters studied in the first part of this chapter. Petrushevskaya's tales thus intimate the importance on facing life irrespective of negativity. While agonizing pain that purportedly leads to a "beautiful death" is required to achieve divine providence and transcendent meaning in Andersen's tales, the same pain can be attenuated in

[412] A good example is the story "Svoi krug" ("Our Crowd," 1988). A man abhors his girlfriend's child. The child is forced to travel outside of the city on his own so as not to get in his way. Upon the child's return, his mother slaps him in the face, and he is taken in custody by the witnesses of the scene. The sense of inhumanity turns into a keen sense of sadness when we realize that the mother struck the boy in order to save his life, as she knows she is terminally ill and she will be separated from the child. The mother knows her act will cause witnesses to take pity on the boy. On an interesting note, the act of the witnesses who take the boy in signals humaneness but is typically overlooked in similar stories by Petrushevskaya's commentators, as it is the sense of dehumanization that outweigh humaneness.

[413] This portrayal of a mother is markedly different from Petrushevskaya's violent and insensitive mothers in her prose and drama. See, for example, Goscilo's analysis in "Mother as Mothra."

Petrushevskaya's tales. Moreover, salvation does not descend upon the heroes from an abstract, transcendent being but—if at all attainable—from the heroes themselves and from the benevolence of others. Old Ugly Duckling's (self-)reflection helps him embrace the irrefutability of negativity. Little Man's sacrifice and altruism for the sake of the other empowers him with more confidence to face life. In "Mal'chik Novyi god," too, togetherness and responsiveness help the characters endure the tragedy of everyday life.

Suffering in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is an inherent and irrefutable element of life. Petrushevskaya is well aware that neither individual suffering in the vein of Andersen's figures (Little Mermaid or Ugly Duckling) nor individual triumph and awakening in the vein of her own characters (Old Ugly Duckling or Little Man) are sufficient to eliminate poverty, injustice, or exploitation. After all, characters like Old Ugly Duckling and Little Man are often the only ones who demonstrate the capacity for transformation. By not having other characters learn from these strong figures to follow the path of individual and social change, Petrushevskaya's stance regarding genuine possibility of an ultimate social rebellion and transformation remains unresolved.[414] Petrushevskaya, an earthly realist—or a neo-traditionalist, as Lipovetsky might say—does not moralize to overthrow these conditions or to purge the world of suffering; neither does she believe that they can ever be fully eradicated. Examples include the birds at the Patriarch Ponds and those who ambush them, the insensitive and violent adolescents who afflict Little Man, as well as the social horrors of contemporary Russia. Rather, what Petrushevskaya stresses as more productive in her fairy tales is the question of how to approach these conditions. By eschewing grandiose solutions and instead stressing individual agency, reflection on one's self

[414] Except perhaps redeemable murderers. One such example is the tale "Zaveshchanie starogo monakha," where the Christ-like figure's self-sacrificial death makes the wrong-doers repent, as they change their path and themselves become monks. Here, Petrushevskaya's stance corresponds to what Robert Belknap said with regard to Dostoevsky in that suffering leads to redemption and freedom for redeemable murderers. See Robert Belknap, *The Didactic Plot: The Lesson about Suffering in Poor Folk*, ed. by Robin Feuer Miller (Boston: G.K. Hall and Company, 1986).

and the world, as well as courage in the face of the chaos of existence, Petrushevskaya further evokes the fairy tale's utopian purpose. It is also here that a sense of hope emerges even in the thick of inescapable negativity.

Revolutionary Hope

As argued above, Petrushevskaya's contemporary "common people" alter their lives on an individual and interpersonal level: within the family, when they learn love and compassion for the other; and on the broader, communal level, when they sacrifice themselves for a higher cause. In this section, I draw further on Bloch's (and Zipes's after him) concept of the utopian function in literature and set it side by side with Petrushevskaya's Christmas stories, which are particularly apt examples of Petrushevskaya's conveying hope and the significance of togetherness.[415] I define Petrushevskaya's hope as revolutionary; that is, as portraying and conveying not only the possibility of but also the need for change and the urge for better interhuman and broader social relations.

It is likely surprising to see Petrushevskaya's name compared to Marxist scholars such as Bloch, since her fiction emerges as a grotesque and mocking discreditation of the actual aftermath of the Soviet ideology in contemporary Russia, and also since her works are not marked by straightforwardly political implications. They do, however, envisage better scenarios, which, as Bloch suggests, "we are capable of realizing with our own powers."[416] The emphasis on "our own powers" is especially relevant to my analysis, as it views the driving force of change in the collective, common people, which for Petrushevskaya are her preferred downtrodden "little men." The common people for Bloch, the Marxist, are "the lower-middle class, youth and

[415] In Russian: *rozhdestvenskie rasskazy*. Dickens' *Christmas Carol* is a common example.
[416] Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, 154-159.

marginal groups whom he considered pivotal for bringing about socialism."[417] For Petrushevskaya, they are fellow post-Soviet city dwellers, the elderly poor, people deprived of their families and belongings in the 1917 Revolution, the Second World War years, as well as those who suffered during the turmoil of the 1990s. Finally, Petrushevskaya's "little men" are also psychologically and socially entangled individuals living in the contemporary world: looking for the meaning of life, affected by its superficiality, conformism, and consumerism. While Bloch's writing is informed by a critique of capitalism, Petrushevskaya's stories are written in the post-capitalist era and implicitly comment on appalling social conditions as well as such phenomena as materialism and the desire for immediate gratification. As in Bloch, Petrushevskaya's "common people" are propelled to action by discontent and dissatisfaction with current sociopolitical conditions as well as with individual awakening and the desire to strengthen human relations.

The Christmas story or, as it has become known in contemporary literature, the New Year's Eve story, offers hope. It is distinguished by the following elements: the story is set around the time of Christmas or New Year's Eve and contains miracles, moral lessons, spiritual transformations, and happy endings.[418] The Christmas story encompasses a tripartite transition: hell – earth – heaven, and concludes with a miraculous change of the world or of the hero. As Tat'iana Kozina argues, one of the main reasons for the revival of the Christmas story in contemporary Russian literature is the destruction of the calendar cycle of Soviet holidays. Contemporary holidays, she clarifies, destroy the canons of the Christmas story, thereby creating

[417] Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 157.
[418] In her analysis of Petrushevskaya's tale "Chernoe pal'to" and Andersen's *The Match Girl*, Danilenko offers an analysis of the changes Petrushevskaya introduces to the conventional understanding of the Christmas story. See Danilenko, "Transformatsiia zhanra rozhdestvenskogo rasskaza v sovremennoi literature (D. Bykov i P. Petrushevskaya)," *Literatura. Literaturovedenie. Ustnoe narodnoe tvorchestvo* (2014), 594, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/transformatsiya-zhanra-rozhdestvenskogo-rasskaza-v-sovremennoy-literature-d-bykov-l-petrushevskaya (Accessed August 27, 2018).

a new chronotope.[419] Another reason for the renascence of the Christmas story that Kozina suggests lies in the renewed appeal of religion. Drawing on Kozina's analysis, I read Petrushevskaya's return to the Christmas story (and, by extension, to hope) as marked by secular, post-theological, rather than strictly religious implications. That is, I see the genre of the Christmas story as a way for Petrushevskaya to indicate earthly transformations (individual and collective) rather than to return to any absolute divinity or ideal(ized) and mythic past. Their earthly, secular vector in turn corresponds to the revolutionary social potential her characters either have or seek ways of fostering.

As an example of Petrushevskaya's Christmas story Kozina sees the tale "Mal'chik Novyi god" analyzed in the preceding part of this chapter. Kozina asserts that the sense of compassion and benevolence that the characters display in this tale acquires a Christmas-like quality in Petrushevskaya's contemporary tale, and as such replaces the element of miracle inherent in the genre.

> Not all the miracles described in the story have a fairy-tale origin. The miracle of saving the boy's mother is explained by the heroes' concern, their readiness to respond to someone's distress. The story's affiliation with Christmas prose is also indicated by its ending. "... Two people that night were full of hope, looking outside through the windows where it was glittering and fireworks were cracking – the New Year boy and his mom.

And:

> In this 'real fairy tale', fireworks stand for the shining of the Christmas star.[420]

More specifically, drawing on Kozina's conclusion, I see the element of miracle in this tale as pointing to ways of opposing hardship via togetherness. Togetherness in this tale is capable of

[419] Kozina, "Tema Rozhdestva v sovremennoi proze," *Izvestiia Penzenskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta imeni V. G. Belinskogo* 27 (2012), 295.
[420] Ibid.

altering the world around the protagonists, and this change is readily available in the present. Although despair is sensed in the background as omnipresent (veiled in the depictions of such everyday, *byt*, occurrences as traffic jams), the sense of communality prevails.[421] Kozina's observation in her analysis of "Mal'chik Novyi god" offers a good conclusion to my argument:

> Good, responsive people, ready to offer help to anyone who needs it, lived in this apartment. Every one of the adults suffered from the loss of a relative, humiliation; but having gone through life's trials, they retained the sense of goodness, compassion, and forgiveness. The grandma, when she was a child, was taken in by her uncle and aunt, when her mother and father were taken away by the authorities. She tells Arisha not to worry about the boy's fate: "where there are two, there are three.[422]

Apart from the social importance of community bonds in the vein of Bloch, my understanding of togetherness in Petrushevskaya's Christmas stories thus comprises a rediscovered idea of brotherhood famously explored by such writers as Dostoevsky, and so has a spiritual foundation. In the latter sense, the idea of brotherhood to which Petrushevskaya returns has its roots in the old religious idea of *sobornost'* (the spirit of communality). However, she de-emphasizes the concept of Christian brotherhood, atonement, universal guilt and responsibility (carrying one another's burdens), and stresses the attempts to find and/or create brotherhood and solidarity in the midst of mundane, everyday life.[423] When Petrushevskaya's characters manage to

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[421] The everyday situations unveil despair. In the traffic jam, the clown and the mime observe a couple arguing in the car and amuse the child who sits in the back and witnesses his parents' argument; the New Year boy's mother works at the market where the deplorable working conditions drive her to attempt suicide.

[422] "В этой квартире жили добрые, отзывчивые люди, готовые оказать помощь любому, кто в ней нуждается. Каждый из взрослых перенес потерю близких, унижение, но, пройдя через жизненные испытания, сохранил чувства доброты, милосердия, всепрощения. Бабушку, когда она была ребенком, взяли в свою семью дядя с тетей, так как ее мать с отцом увели органы. Она просит Аришу не беспокоиться о судьбе малыша: "где двое там трое" (Kozina, "Tema Rozhdestva v sovremennoi proze," 294).
These words refer to the Gospel of Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

[423] Petrushevskaya's approach to brotherhood at the same time echoes Bloch's position, according to which "[m]eaning cannot be achieved by a human being alone. The dependence on other beings must be acknowledged if the individual is to raise himself up and to stride forward in an upright posture toward home, which, as we know, is the beginning of history, a realm without alienating conditions" (quoted in Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 167).

forge communal bonds, these bonds are not so much a source of moral value for them as they constitute support and alleviate suffering.

The tale "S Novym godom, prestupnik!" ("Happy New Year, Criminal!" 2010) evokes togetherness while offering a spiritual and sociopolitical reading. That is, the notion of togetherness in this story points to developing bonds on the familial and social level. This story is one of the most explicitly political tales in Petrushevskaya's literary repertoire, given not only its implicit sociopolitical background but also outright name-dropping: mentioning by name those who subvert the status quo and fight for human rights. The story is set on New Year's Eve and begins with a reference to *Anna Karenina*. Alluding to the famous opening sentence of Tolstoy's novel about the ordinariness of all happy families, Petrushevskaya's family in question is, as the narrator claims, not ordinary: "However, as was said in classical literature, this ordinariness is inherent only in happy families. Whereas we will talk about an unordinary family."[424] However, it certainly does not seem like this family is unordinary, since they are a fragmented family rather typical of Petrushevskaya's prose and resemble a number of similar families in contemporary Russia. Varvara is left by the father of her three young children with whom she did not have much in common after he fell in love with someone else. "It has to be said that Varvara and Oleg did not really have much to talk about – only about specific things, who should go to the store and what to buy, and who will go out with the kids today."[425] The fact that Varvara is deft, fearless, good-natured, and capable of enduring life's burdens draws a number of people into her life. One of her admirers, Ivan, is shy and rather silent but respected by everyone in their entourage. As Varvara is on her way to buy mayonnaise for her unfinished herring salad, a dish

[424] "Однако, как было сказано в классической литературе, эта одинаковая обыденность свойственна только счастливым семьям. А мы приступаем к рассказу о семье не такой, как у всех" (KMZZh, 501).
[425] "И надо сказать, что вообще-то разговоров у Варвары и Олега почти не завязывалось – так, все по делу, кому в магазин и что купить и кто с детьми сегодня гуляет" (KMZZh, 503).

so common it evokes the ordinariness of all families, especially around New Year's Eve, Ivan calls to tell her he has been arrested.

The story then moves to the police station where Varvara meets Ivan's family: his parents and his younger sister. The scene she witnesses when she arrives depicts Veronika, Ivan's sister, loudly declaring her disgruntlement over her brother's detainment:

> What – right – do you – have –to arrest – people – on the thirty-first of December? Because the right for meetings and gatherings is written in the thirty-first article of our Constitution? Is that the only reason? Unsanctioned meeting – this is some kind of nonsense! How can a meeting be forbidden! Meeting in English simply means a meeting![426] To meet friends on the street! Everyone can meet up and speak on the street![427]

Veronika, as the narrator suggests, resembles Valeriya Novodvorskaya, who was a Soviet dissident and political activist: "Veronika was a fairly large girl with glasses and when she smiled so cordially, she subtly resembled Valeriya Novodvorskaya. One could say her firm future peeked out the soft traits of youth."[428] Ivan's parents display equal courage and civic awareness. While his father manages to speak with the chief of the police station, Ivan's mother demonstrates her diplomacy and good-heartedness as she offers the police officer homemade food in a simple act of kindness. As the whole company enjoys a modest New Year's Eve supper at the police station, we learn further details about the reason for the mass arrests, which resemble the factual sociopolitical situation in contemporary Russia. More and more participants in the "unsanctioned meeting" are brought to the police station; some of them are wounded and assaulted: "Many

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[426] The Russian word *митинг*, even though a borrowing from English, is in Russian not understood as a meeting but as a rally.

[427] "Какое имеете – вы – право – арестовывать – людей – тридцать первого числа? Потому что право на митинги и собрания записаны в тридцать первой статье нашей Конституции? Только поэтому? Несанкционированный митинг – тут какой-то бред! Как можно не разрешать встречу! Митинг – это по-английски просто встреча! Друзей на улице! На улице каждый может встретиться и говорить!" (KMZZh, 505).

[428] "Вероника была довольно крупная девочка в очках и, когда она так приветливо улыбалась, то неуловимо напоминала Валерию Новодворскую. Как говорится, сквозь мягкие черты юности проглядывало ее твердое будущее" (KMZZh, 505).

people were packed into the police station. Judging by the quiet conversations, there were already experienced activists among them, many of them having gone through previous arrests and beating."[429] The measures against dissidents have changed. While Novodvorskaya was arrested, imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital, and falsely diagnosed with schizophrenia (like members of Petrushevskaya's own family), today "dissidents" are arrested for interdicted rallies and protests.

Finally, Ivan's father manages to have his son released. In the last paragraph, as Varvara, Ivan, and the children are returning (to what will be their) home, they see other protesters and remark on the fraternity between them:

> They were walking kind of apart – you got the impression that in this flow walked predominantly loners as though they had spent New Year's Eve where they wanted – not on their own, in dens, but with people, where they fraternized, poured their fellow protestors drinks from the bottles they had stocked up, all together and, to their hearts' content, they shouted "hurray," standing right in the centre of Moscow, at the heart of Russia, by the Kremlin gates, bells chiming, shoulder to shoulder, in joy.[430]

This scene is especially evocative and conjures a sense of togetherness and the participants' shared civic cause, and as such has a potent message: ordinary people should join together for a common social objective. Petrushevskaya's depiction of the dissidents as loners suggests that genuine togetherness and spirituality is necessary to face oppression. Petrushevskaya's insistence on communal bonds reverberates with Bloch's revolutionary hope and his advocacy of releasing "the resilient latent qualities of humankind manifested in the struggle for a better world"[431] so as to become makers of our own history. From the point of view of its content, and in line with the

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[429] "Народу в отделение набилось много. Судя по тихим разговорам, там стояли уже опытные бойцы, многие прошли через аресты и мордобитие" (KMZZh, 509).
[430] Причем шли они как-то порознь, не компаниями – создавалось такое впечатление, что в этом потоке брели преимущественно одиночки и что они справили Новый год где хотели – не сами по себе, по норам, а на людях, там они братались, наливали из припасенных бутылок соседям, все вместе и всласть кричали свое "ура", причем стоя в самом центре Москвы, в сердце России, у кремлевских стен, под звои курантов, плечом к плечу, в восторге" (KMZZh, 510).
[431] Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 146.

utopian function of literature, this tale may be compared to what Jean-Paul Sartre once called committed literature ('littérature engagée'); that is, literature involved in the historical and political situation of the day that aims to change the world not by disclosing but by making aware; and, finally, literature that reveals the urge for change. What is necessaru, though, is also the aspect of spirituality.

The need for togetherness in terms of fraternal bonds is set side by side with creating bonds at a micro-stratum; namely, at the family level. The focus thus turns into creating family ties, which have the capacity to alleviate individual alienation and acquire the sense of revolution. The gesture toward Tolstoy at the beginning of the tale is not accidental and becomes more comprehensible at the end of the tale. Petrushevskaya's interest is in fact not unlike Tolstoy's in that it lies in family happiness or, to be more specific, in family unhappiness turning into happiness, or in the movement from disintegration to re-integration. Petrushevskaya's contemporary family continues to search for the traditional ideal of home as safe harbour, albeit in a very mundane setting. Varvara realizes she loves Ivan, whose devotion she has overlooked. She communicates this in the final paragraph when she finds Ivan sleeping on the floor in her bedroom and covers him with a warm blanket. The message of the tale is clear: it is togetherness, above all, that is understood as the missing home for unhappy families, and societies, in Petrushevskaya's tales. It is no coincidence that Petrushevskaya refers to this tale as a Christmas story. The coming of the New Year symbolizes the hopeful possibility of forging genuine interhuman and broader social relations.

The tale "Skazka zerkal" ("The Mirrors' Fairy Tale," 2007) leads to similar conclusions.[432] It evokes sacrifice for the other and at the same time for society and humanity at large. I provided

[432] Depending on the edition wherein it appears, this tale is sometimes titled "Malen'koie zerkalo" ("The Small Mirror").

a summary of this tale in Chapter II where I examined it with regard to its mirror mechanics. This tale interests me here in terms of its sociopolitical reading, in line with the other tales I analyze in this section. The protagonists are the eponymous mirrors and include Soul, Crooked Mirror, Large Mirror, and Small Mirror. The latter—much like old Ugly Duckling or Little Man—is largely belittled by others. Because of his exceptional and arcane ability to reflect not just surfaces but depth, the other mirrors in the window case call him Genii (Genius). Because he differs from his fellow mirrors, Genii is said to know about murders, conspiracies, the dead, and secret agents. He also enigmatically pronounces that he is able to stop "something imminent" (*to chto nadvigaetsia*). The imminent destructive force in the tale is called Solitude and conjures associations of death and oppression. Solitude has as its victim the owner's granddaughter, beloved by all the mirrors, Ryzhaia Kroshka. As the sinister force is about to capture the girl, Genii sacrificially reverses its image and consequently breaks into pieces: "Genii stopped it. And died. He became as tiny as a dot."[433] In the end, the last remaining shard of him serendipitously falls into a new mirror mould and is then used at pediatrician office; a place, as Genii predicts, where Ryzhaia Kroshka will likely at some point in the future, precisely at Christmas time, come with her own children.

This tale comprises another example of the fairy tale's utopian function, where the capacity to change circumstances and the power of transformation are evocative. The protagonist in this tale does not passively undergo change; that is, change does not happen to him as it conventionally does in folktales and traditional fairy tales, but rather he has the individual capacity to change the world. Genii is galvanized into action by the sight of oppression, and it is through the latter, to paraphrase Bloch, that the awakening to a coming-to-order surfaces and hope for a qualitative change appears. Genii's self-sacrificial and courageous holding up the

[433] "Гений остановил его. И погиб. Уменьшился до точки" (KMZZh, 375).

mirror to the invisible destructive force leads to refracting it.[434] Genii breaks into pieces but does not cease to exist, for he is given a transformed life. After her sacrificial deed, Andersen's Little Mermaid ceases to exist physically and becomes an ephemeral being working in the name of God. Genii, too, ceases to exist physically but transforms into a new mirror whose capacities will physically continue to benefit another generation. That is, his potential to demystify the negative, and with it the courage to face ordeals and to change the status quo, does not disappear. From this perspective, this tale provides a social message: an active stance is necessary to change the status quo, as opposed to passivity in the name of a higher power. At the level of the reader, it proffers the hope described by Bloch, and Zipes after him, that if people are courageous enough and stand by one another, they can change or reduce (but not necessarily eradicate) oppression. The importance of this tale is thus found not in annihilating Solitude, which would give an illusion of actually effacing death or oppression, but rather in underscoring the very movement toward collective action set about by an act of self-sacrifice. Genii is poised to be used by the next generation, which points to the hope of rebirth, and which is tellingly underlined in the tale through the reference to Christmas. At the same time, however, he is depicted as the only one capable of realizing this rebirth, which counterbalances the actual plausibility of any lasting victory, thereby also pointing again to Petrushevskaya's authorial ambivalence.

While the preceding tales constitute Petrushevskaya's most explicitly politically-engaged works; that is, those marked by the sense of and the need for building communal relations, her other Christmas stories focus on building bonds and individual finding meaning in private life. The tale "Podarok printsesse" ("The Princess's Present," 2012) concerns specifically these themes

[434] The mirror technique is indicative here of Petrushevskaia's own take on reality, which largely reflects the postmodern desire to demystify any absolutes, including the notion of reality: "Я спрячу ирреальное в груду осколков реальности" ("I will hide the unreal in the pile of the broken glass of reality"). See Petrushevskaya, "Tri puteshestviia, ili Vozmozhnosti menippei" in *Chernoe pal'to*, Moskva: Vagrius, 2002).

while touching upon a critique of contemporary society. Petrushevskaya's readers are familiar with her repertoire of social ills through most of her writing during the Soviet era (including housing shortages, alcoholism, and moral bankruptcy). In her recent tales—composed in the 2000s— Petrushevskaya deftly observes contemporary society (the dominance of and excessive interest in the yellow press along with the exaggerated importance of the paparazzi, middle-life crises, idleness and vanity, excessive displays of wealth, and the search for immediate gratification) and suggests that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds. The family members of the heroine of this tale, Princess Yael', reflect these social ills. Yael' is supposed to be different. As the narrator tells us, her name means 'decisive' and 'strong' in Hebrew, and although she learns about these qualities only at the end of the tale, for most of the tale we see her as a contemporary dispirited and lonely young woman. As she is affected by family conflict, the narrator sarcastically likens her to Job. However, as opposed to the Biblical Job, whose patience and piety were tried by undeserved misfortunes, and who despite his grief remained confident in the goodness and justice of God, Yael's misfortunes are limited to the fraudulent genetic testing her evil aunt, whose name alludes to Voltaire, makes her undergo so as to dispossess her. Unlike Job, Yael', a modern being, is presented as not believing in anything, not to mention a transcendent being. Rather, as the narrator suggests, although physically beautiful and successful, she is lonely and does not have a higher purpose and meaning in life.

The change comes when Yael' finds a cell phone given to her by her grandmother who, having abandoned her alcoholic husband, subsequently left for India to start a new life. Remembering that her grandmother was likely the only person who truly loved her, Yael' finally acts upon the meaning of her name and decisively resolves to join her grandmother in the faraway land. Not knowing exactly where to look for her grandmother, Yael' in fact does not manage to find her and eventually learns that she died in the mountains. What she does find,

however, is the urge to look for her own self. As she shares lodging with fellow lost souls "at the end of the world," she finds a sense of belonging: "It was a fairly large room with a low ceiling and with a bar counter and an open fireplace. Everywhere on the floor were people enjoying leisurely conversations. Everyone was dressed like Yael' and she probably also looked like them. At any rate, she did not stand out – and no one paid attention to her."[435] Her stay in the remote land also reveals her yearning to become part of a community: "Even if it's just here, I have arrived. And even like this, it's still Christmas. And I'm not alone. There are people around," – Yael' was touched. Even some kind of sense of fraternity occurred to her for the first time in her life."[436] At the same place, she also finds love – someone like her, "without a harbour" with whom she subsequently founds a yoga school and a massage studio, and with whom she travels around the world.

As Petrushevskaya observes contemporary man's spiritual condition in her tale(s), she portrays his longing and struggle to find said "harbour," which translates in essence to finding oneself. It follows from the tale that this individual discovery may be more productive when it occurs with the help of one's beloved. Arguably, Petrushevskaya is sceptical about the genuine benefits arising from the somewhat trendy and excessive ways of looking for spirituality in the post-theological world (yoga, meditation, journeys to faraway lands). That is, the reader senses the illusion and elusiveness, and perhaps superficiality, of such attempts at spirituality that replace God. But what is stressed is not a critique of the godlessness of today's society but rather man's ever searched for need to meaningfully be with oneself and with another person. Forming interhuman relationships and attempting to see oneself in the other thus underscore man's

[435] "Это была довольно большая низкая комната с барной стойкой и открытым очагом. Повсюду на полу сидели люди, велись неспешные разговоры. Все были одеты, как Яэль, и, наверно, она тоже выглядела как они. Во всяком случае, ничем не выделялась – и никто не обратил на нее внимания" (KMZZh, 498).
[436] "Ну вот я и пришла, хоть сюда. И хоть такое, но Рождество. И я не одна. Кругом люди, – подумала растроганная Яэль. У нее возникло даже какое-то чувство братства, первый раз в жизни" (KMZZh, 499).

humanity; that is, the condition of being human, an acting, feeling, and living individual, more often than not – a frail individual.

This shift in Petrushevskaya's approach to the other is indeed revolutionary, since this affirmative invocation of togetherness is at odds with her prose, wherein the Sartrean notion "l'enfer, c'est les autres," as Goscilo argues, is much more prevalent.[437] More specifically – "hell is other people" or "hell is the other" in Petrushevskaya's prose and drama when others objectify me, but I can also be hell for them.[438] In her fairy tales, however, encounters with the other are paradigmatic experiences (and not fixed in terms of their predictable, negative consequences), as they allow her characters to promote, rediscover, or redefine such values as responsibility, respect, and responsiveness.[439] It is more apt, therefore, to consider human interaction in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as involving the objective characterization of "the other" while still suggesting the possibility of "communion" — a state where both sides are able to recognize and appreciate each other's subjectivity.

Petrushevskaya's Christmas tales project attempts to find an elusive home. While home for Bloch essentially amounts to "grasping ourselves and what is ours, without depersonalization and alienation,"[440] for Petrushevskaya, an heir of the Russian literature of the nineteenth century, it is less overtly sociopolitical and pertains to the spiritual side of man. Her characters understand themselves better; they are not only better equipped to understand and relate to others but also to act along the lines of togetherness. For example, once the girl from the tale "Volshebnye ochki" gains confidence in herself, she wants to help others; Little Man discovers his own strength and

[437] Goscilo, "Narrating Trauma," 171.
[438] The line "L'enfer, c'est les autres" comes from Sartre's play *No Exit* (1944) and refers to Sartre's conception of 'the gaze': looking at oneself as an object and seeing one's world as it appears to the other through the presence of another person. It is important to note that this line has been misunderstood and wrongly used to mean that "our relations with other people are always poisoned, that they are invariably hellish relations." See David Detmer, *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (Chicago: Open Court, 2008), 153.
[439] I refer to the notion paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in Chapter I with regard to Petrushevskaya's language.
[440] Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 147.

plans to become a doctor; Genii sacrifices himself for the sake of others and believes in the next generation's potential; Ivan is an active participants in the effort to change the political situation in Russia. Although the ingrained negative tendencies of fellow human beings and society render the achievement of self-realization more difficult, if not at times virtually impossible, the triumph of Petrushevskaya's active characters is nevertheless possible and lies in their not complying with these laws but rather in defending themselves against them and attempting to alter them for themselves and for others.

Between Disenchantment and Re-enchantment

The question remains: why does Petrushevskaya, a hardened writer of *chernukha*, with its terrifying vision of the world that emerges from her stories and plays, choose the fairy-tale genre as a parallel strand in her work? The answer to this question may lie in the author's personal convictions. As Petrushevskaya has begun to reveal ever more frequently in recent interviews, she does not consider herself solely a dark writer (*chernyi pisatel'*). Perhaps this explains why the number of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales continues to grow.

The answer to this question may also point to the broader question of Russian culture. The fairy-tale genre has been a long-standing tradition and has occupied a respected position in Russian literature and culture. It proves to be a potent genre in contemporary Russian literature as well, currently enjoying a veritable boom (*skazochnyi bum*).[441] The rationale behind such fairy-tale upsurge in contemporary Russian literature is open to debate, but the debate itself seems to vacillate between two predominant points of view. On the one hand, scholars point to Russian literature's fatigue in taking responsibility for posing the big questions in life. Consequently, revived interest in the writing of fairy tales is considered a form of escapism, a punch, so to speak,

[441] A term Ol'ga Lebedushkina uses in her article "Shekherezada zhiva, poka. O novykh skazochnikakh i skazkakh" (*Druzhba narodov* 3, 2007), http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2007/3/le12.html (Accessed August 20, 2018).

in the face of high art and literature that exposes and derides rather than suggests remedies to moral questions and plans for improving the world.[442] Lipovetsky's stance enriches the understanding of the turn to the fairy tale. He argues that since the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s one can observe in Russian literature a turn to "simplicity;" that is, reader-oriented discourses, as manifested, for example, by the adoption of the language of mass culture.[443] This "simplicity" is the result of a certain fatigue brought on by the overly complex postmodernist, avant-gardist, and modernist forms. On the other hand, writers also continue to return to the fairy-tale tradition precisely in search of answers to the questions pertaining to the eternal quanderies of man's existence.[444] The genre memory of the fairy tale resurfaces, and the fairy tale continues to be a vehicle for comprehending and depicting man and the world in a given historical moment. Crucially, Lipovetsky posits that the period of the 2000s follows the time of social havoc and chaos resulting from the Soviet project and the anarchic nineties. Consequently, this period—marked by the predominance of the above-mentioned reader-oriented and "simple" forms like the fairy tale—imagines itself as post-traumatic.

In my view, Petrushevskaya's approach to the fairy-tale genre exemplifies both vectors. The irony and coarseness of her narrators as well as the implicit indelible negativity of her tales signals the impossibility of achieving the grand ideas of love, family, and humaneness. This statement reverberates with Parts's argument regarding Petrushevskaya's short stories. Parts posits that Petrushevskaya evokes humanist values just to have them counterargued by a callous narrator, which serves as a reminder of the interrupted debate and terminated quest of the nineteenth-century literary tradition. This view also echoes Inna Tigountsova's position,

[442] Ivanova, "Ultra-fiction, ili Fantasticheskie vozmozhnosti russkoi slovesnosti," *Znamia* 11 (2006), http://magazines.russ.ru/znamia/2006/11/iv1-pr.html (Accessed August 20, 2018).
[443] Lipovetsky, "Cycles, Continuity, and Change in Contemporary Russian Culture," 34.
[444] Vladimir Anikin, *Russkie pisateli i skazka // Skazki russkikh pisatelei* (Moskva: Pravda, 1985), 22.

according to which Petrushevskaya's prose largely responds to a particularly intense cultural crisis in Russia over the past few decades, which reflects a kind of self-estrangement on the part of Russian postmodern writers, and which challenges the once urgent matters concerning man.[445] For example, Anna Andrianovna in *The Time: Night* refers to her grandson as an "angel." For the reader, quite the contrary thought occurs, as he likely grows into a monster, "thus reversing the moral transformations Dostoevsky implies are possible for characters such as Raskolnikov."[446] In Petrushevskaya's fairy tales too, as signalled throughout this dissertation, monstrosity is omnipresent: the birds in the pond will likely continue being dependent on white bread and cakes; the cruel adolescents will likely continue tormenting Little Man or beings physically weaker than them; sexual assaults will not cease to occur; not to mention the gruesome social condition of contemporary Russia. Indubitably, emphasizing monstrosity deflates the fundamental hope for morally and socially uplifting transformations. Petrushevskaya's prose seems to state that there is no ideal Beauty that will save the world, after all.

One can nonetheless experience the beautiful in her fairy tales. These same distressing portrayals are at times reversed in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales. Characters who are initially depicted as monsters, especially mothers who mistreat or abandon their children (the drunkard mother in "Barbi volshebnitsa i les," both women in "Chernoe pal'to," the mother in "Mal'chik Novyi god") undergo a spiritual and ethical change. The sense of the beautiful transpires from those characters who have the courage to oppose cruelty or who are genuinely humane, thereby offering at the very least a counterpoint to the oppressive negativity and disbelief in man's moral progress. In this way, the fairy-tale genre allows Petrushevskaya to tap into the notion of hope

[445] Tigountsova, *The Ugly in Russian Literature: Dostoevsky's Influence on Yurii Mamleev, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and Tatiana Tolstaia* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).
[446] Alexander Burry, "Book Review: Tigountsova, Inna. *The Ugly in Russian Literature: Dostoevsky's Influence on Yurii Mamleev, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and Tatiana Tolstaia*," *Slavic and East European Journal* 56:1 (2012), 110.

and explore the positive in man without pretending to suggest any new ways to improve humanity. The fairy-tale genre allows Petrushevskaya to return to the universal questions pertaining to man and his quest for meaning and happiness, thereby confirming that these questions remain meaningful and urgent in human existence, even in the post-theological world. Thus, if Petrushevskaya's prose, along with turn of the twentieth century literature at large, strives for depicting fragmentation, the author's fairy tales mount the attempt to seek 'wholenesses' in this world; that is, a multiplicity of individual attempts at wholeness, and not Wholeness.

To be sure, Petrushevskaya is sceptical about any *ultimate* happy ending. Although she reaches for the fairy-tale genre to re-explore the basic questions of man and existence in an attempt to re-discover something all-inclusive or fundamental for man, such as meaningful interpersonal relations, she is at the same time doubtful of any such definitive possibility. In this light, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales reflect what Maria Timchenko calls a desire to invent new forms of cultural wholeness while at the same time remaining deeply suspicious of such potentially totalizing models. This explains why Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are marked by parallel irony and attempts at the beautiful, layers of belief and disbelief, or belief capable of self-doubt, to paraphrase Dalton-Brown.[447]

Petrushevskaya's preeminent concern with ugliness, which still leads many readers to label her a writer of *chernukha*, does not preclude accepting life as it is. Contrary to how her prose and drama have been described, I suggest that Petrushevskaya's fairy tales point to the overall affirmation of whatever life offers, including suffering and loss. Ultimately, one does not have any other choice but to "live with the germs," as her heroine from the tale "Volshebnye

[447] Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 10.

ochki" proclaims, or to "tolerate parasites."[448] Lipovetsky arrives at similar conclusions regarding Petrushevskaya's short stories, which he sees as written with a gesture toward the figure of Oedipus, the one who realized how awful a life he has lived, through no fault of his own; and who managed to take responsibility for all the horror and continue to live with it.[449] While the figure of Oedipus may be an apt reference for some of Petrushevskaya's short stories, I suggest it more appropriate to describe Petrushevskaya's fairy tales through the figure of Sisyphus—condemned to the eternal task of rolling a rock to the top of a hill, from which it unfailingly rolls back down for all eternity. If Petrushevskaya's prose and drama at large suggest that life means condemnation to existence in a negative light, her fairy tales suggest a Camusian reading and bring forth his evocative closing sentence on the necessity to imagine Sisyphus happy.[450] Sisyphus is happy "at the moment he turns to retrieve the rock once more at the base of the hill (...) because Sisyphus has risen above his fate, not by dull resignation but by a deliberate choice."[451] One may be condemned to life and its absurdity, and yet one can experience the beautiful and continue facing it. Like Sisyphus, Petrushevskaya's characters do acknowledge the absurdity and negativity of life, but they also "pull themselves together," as Anya from "L'vinaia maska" does. The depth of their despair and isolation are empowering, as it compels them to realize not the "suffering of being" or "the illusion of happiness," to quote Marcel, but hope and strength to continue the (never-ending) journey to discern the meaning of their lives.

The answers to the questions I pose at the beginning of this Chapter are affirmative. Self-reflective, mocking the genre, and ironically questioning its classic canon, Petrushevskaya's fairy

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[448] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 218.
[449] "Сюжет царя Эдипа – история о человеке, узнавшем, какую жуткую жизнь он не по своей вине прожил, сумевшем принять на себя ответственность за весь этот ужас и с ним жить дальше." See Lipovetsky, "Tragedia i malo li chto eshche", http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1994/10/knoboz01.html (Accessed May 30, 2019).
[450] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 123.
[451] Flynn, *Existentalism*, 48-49.

tales nonetheless recuperate the fairy tale's utopian function in a way that corresponds to the sociopolitical and cultural changes in contemporary Russia as well as to universal human dilemmas. Her questioning of the forms and themes of classic fairy tales leads to questioning social codes but also to suggesting ways of withstanding and mitigating the effects of existential and social ills. As such, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales play a relevant and timely role in the development of Russian literature and culture. By revealing "a hidden desire to find metafoundations capable of uniting humankind,"[452] Petrushevskaya participates in the debate on re-enchanting the world. Unsurprisingly, it is here, in the search for new spiritual forces in post-Soviet literature and culture that Petrushevskaya chooses to reach for the fairy-tale genre to convey a modicum of hope.

[452] Timchenko, "Transition. The State of Contemporary Artistic Culture," 139. Quoted in Dalton-Brown, *Voices from the Void*, 10.

CONCLUSIONS

Человек смотрит в книгу как в зеркало. Видит там себя.
И интересно: один видит в тексте добро и плачет,
а другой видит тьму и злится...[453]

With the intention of offering a fuller view of the author's achievement and development as a writer, the preceding chapters have presented a largely unacknowledged section of Petrushevskaya's oeuvre, namely, her fairy tales; and argued for an interpretative focus different from the predominant focus on *chernukha* in psychoanalytical and feminist approaches to her work.

I have examined Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as entering into dialogue with the folktale and fairy-tale tradition in terms of their creative side—how they are written—and their critical concerns—why they are written. The primary texts, especially in Chapters I and II, have demonstrated the author's ways of retaining the narrative features of the fairy tale and revising the genre by drawing, as in metafiction, attention to its intrinsic components: structure, language, and stylistic conventions. Petrushevskaya's fairy tales reflect the shift in today's understanding of the traditional fairy tale. Contemporary revisions of the fairy tale comprise multifaceted genre rationalization and renegotiating the boundary between the supernatural and the everyday to conspicuously zoom in on the latter, and with it — to point to the impossibility of an effortless "happily ever after." Unreliable narrators and ironic comments, polyvalent meanings of words, open endings, and intertextual links comprise some of the postmodern techniques Petrushevskaya uses to complicate clear-cut messages and install open-endedness that encourages the reader to rethink the understanding of the fairy tale as a genre as well as the conceptions of the world experienced beyond fiction.

[453] Petrushevskaya, "Lektsiia o zhanrakh," 372.

The critical vector of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales involves their implicit commentary on the broader sociocultural situation of today's Russia, including a preoccupation with the subject and human relations at large. As I will be summing up my analysis of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales from the point of view of their critical preoccupations, I will briefly locate them in the Western and Russian literary contexts and address major differences between them.[454] While genre parody, experiment, and revision of stereotypes and conventions confirm Petrushevskaya's place next to Western contemporary writers of fairy tales in terms of their creative output, their critical aspect, although largely similar, is marked by certain notable differences.

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are marked by sociohistorical criticism but also encompass a spiritual component. They are a reaction to the economic and social changes in Russian society. In the background of these fairy tales, as analyzed throughout this dissertation, we sense problems of lawlessness, criminality, neglect of the poor and defenseless, family instability, as well as such global problems as commercialization and division between the rich and the poor. In this sociohistorical light, Petrushevskaya remains true to her disheartening self and this stance partly contributes to genre's disenchantment. As the preceding chapters have argued, however, the fairy-tale genre allows Petrushevskaya to balance out the negative, dispirited messages and to impart hope.

Petrushevskaya's fairy tales shape her answer to fragmentation and the traumatic sociopolitical experiences of the recent past, which she more explicitly depicts in her prose and drama. Norman Shneidman's conclusions with regard to the author's prose are thus inversely proportionate to her fairy tales:

[454] A number of other questions that have been mentioned in this work may provide paths for further research. For example, the patterns of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales could be further discussed through a feminist lens and women's subjectivity, a Jungian lens, religious interpretations, or through intertextual links with other Russian and non-Russian fairy-tale writers as well as the nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition. Most notably, Petrushevskaya's dialogue with Dostoevsky ought to be examined further. I believe Petrushevskaya's fairy tales are examples of preserving and reimagining legacies of religious thought in the secular, "earthly" world.

> Most characters are intelligent, educated people, but they are *all negative*, and many are themselves responsible for their shattered lives (...) The facts speak for themselves. Petrushevskaya depicts the harsh reality and the manipulative ways of her characters, but *she does not spare* any of them.[455]

And elsewhere:

> The positive in human nature is most often the result of self-abhorrence, self-pity, or a guilty conscience, which usually follows criminal activity or an immoral act. Petrushevskaya sympathizes with the predicament of her characters. She identifies with their suffering, but *she does not spare them*.[456]

I have argued that Petrushevskaya's fairy tales evoke the distance between fiction and a social reality that may seem irredeemably fragmented, but this fragmentation finds a remedy in her fairy tales. Petrushevskaya does spare her characters; or rather, to be more specific, she allows them to spare themselves through their taking responsibility for themselves and for others. Petrushevskaya emancipates her characters by allowing self-awareness through which they may rebuild their shattered lives.

Crucially, to borrow the terms from Leiderman and Lipovetsky, this self-awareness in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales necessitates captivity; that is, her characters often gain it via dependence on their beloved.[457] In "Skazka o chasakh," for example, precisely *not* cutting parental ties forges a strong relationship between a mother and a daughter as well as the latter's transformation. While in Western fairy-tale scholarship autonomy is symbolically measured by cutting family ties to become independent, the characters in Petrushevskaya's fairy tales willingly choose personal dependence, which, although depriving them of freedom, brings meaning into their lives. Petrushevskaya's focus on mutual sacrifice has a broader cultural reverberation in that,

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[455] Shneidman, *Russian Literature, 1995-2002: On the Threshold of a New Millenium* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004), 117 [italics mine].
[456] Shneidman, *Russian Literature, 1988-1994: The End of an Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 106.
[457] On the notion of captivity in postrealism, see Leiderman and Lipovetsky, *Sovremennnaia russkaia literatura 1950-1990-e gody, tom 3 (1968-1990)*, 2001; and "Zhizn' posle smerti, ili Novye svedeniia o realizme," 1993.

unlike the West's focus on the individual, the Russian folktale tradition, as well as the nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition, privileges togetherness.

This is where Petrushevskaya's fairy tales differ from Western postmodern fairy tales. The critical paradigms in the latter include feminist, psychoanalytic, and sociohistorical criticism, which often supplement each other.[458] In Western postmodern thought, especially feminist and psychoanalytic criticism, along with such other angles as queer theory and ecocriticism, are more manifest than in the scholarship on Petrushevskaya's oeuvre. As Caryl Emerson observes, there are "aspects of Western postmodernism that have been conspicuously absent, or present only in greatly weakened form, in the ex-Soviet context (...) There has been in Russia little sympathy for feminism of the sort we know here."[459]

Thus, apart from underscoring the metafictional qualities of the fairy-tale genre—which Petrushevskaya's tales do as well—postmodern fairy tales in the West, first and foremost, subvert the culturally defined parameters of female sexuality and women's submission to male sexual experience. Such are, for example, the postmodern fairy tales written by Anne Sexton, Antonia Byatt, Angela Carter, or Margaret Atwood, who are Petrushevskaya's contemporaries.[460] Like Carter's heroines in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), Petrushevskaya's women are often inquisitive and self-possessed, but unlike Carter's heroines, Petrushevskaya's are not driven by sexual desire. Unlike Anne Sexton's narratives that satirize the Grimms' fairy tales, Petrushevskaya's heroines are neither involved in any male/female power struggle nor do they fight against brutal patriarchal culture. Similarly, although humour and irony as well as social and political implications are integral to both Petrushevskaya's and Atwood's tales, their texts differ in the type

[458] Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales*, 303.
[459] Caryl Emerson, "The Shape of Russian Cultural Criticism in the Postcommunist Period," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 34:4 (1992), 367-368.
[460] Anne Sexton: 1928-1974, Antonia Byatt:1936–, Angela Carter: 1940-1991, Margaret Atwood: 1939–.

of resonance they have. For example, Atwood's "Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut" (1995) is in many ways similar to Petrushevskaya's "The Princess with Lily-white Feet" (1996). They are both humorous and parody the genre, as well as, arguably, Andersen's literary legacy. The heroines in both tales are also not typical passive or downtrodden women, which speaks to their subverting of genre stereotypes as well as the social stereotypes of female identity. However, the difference between both tales is emblematic of the importance Petrushevskaya ascribes to mutual sacrifice. Petrushevskaya's characters—the adolescent Princess and Prince—prove to be peers in the sense of their capacity for mutual sacrifice, which coincides with their stepping on the path towards self-awareness. Conversely, Atwood's Prince Charming, wearing a plaid pajama top and a pair of plum-coloured pants with polka dots, is ridiculed, which suggests that her Princesse's partner is rather disagreeable—a peerless match for the Princess of sorts—thus exploding the tradition of happy endings.

Petrushevskaya does not present women's seizing what they need or want — power, freedom, or sex. She studies women's sensibility and to some extent revises the culturally defined parameters of sexuality and stereotypes of female identity (for example, in the previously discussed "Princess with Lily-white Feet," "Skazka shkafa," and "Novye prikliucheniia Eleny Prekrasnoi"). Yet, Petrushevskaya's breaking with socially-imposed gender identity is not as explicit or as vehement as it is for the Western female fairy-tale writers mentioned above. Petrushevskaya's subject matter is, to quote Emerson, to a certain degree out of step with feminist concerns (although by all means not out of step with postmodern explorations of language, narrative, and representation).

Rather, what Petrushevskaya's fairy tales suggest is an egalitarian relationship between both sexes as well as equality among human beings, in general. To be sure, Petrushevskaya's characters are not passive but clever, active, and resourceful women. Yet, Petrushevskaya's fairy

tales at large are not so much concerned with feminist concepts as they are with universally human concepts. The latter aspect confirms Petrushevskaya's rootedness in the Russian literary tradition, where an ostensibly non-gendered brotherhood has been seen as a Russian national trait.[461] What expressly differentiates Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is that they close in on the potential to promote equality through mutual effort. Further examples include Anya and M. who face despair and grow together or Varvara and Ivan who are read through a Tolstoian lens and reflect the importance of family ties before any genuine social transformation. The fairy tale thus allows Petrushevskaya to reach a higher spiritual plane on which sexual or gender differences are less crucial than striving to build meaningful human relations and a sense of community cemented by shared values.

The fairy tale and other folk genres have had a strong presence in Russian literature and culture at large. The fairy tale in Russian contemporary literature (specifically since the last decade of the twentieth century) reveals patterns similar to the postmodern fairy tale in the West. Scholars observe in the contemporary Russian fairy tale closer ties with social reality as well as genre synthesis (the blending of other genres, such as legend, parable, or *strashilka*, but most of all folktale), and an ensuing broadening of the category of fairy-tale magic.[462] The fairy tales written by Maks Frei are arguably most experimental in style, which is marked by sharp parody of the genre. Many authors have repeatedly returned to the folktale and fairy tale to engage with sociocultural and sociopolitical themes. Among them, most notably, Irina Ratushinskaya and

[461] Virginia Woolf famously argued that the defining feature of Russian literature is the feeling of shared brotherhood. Quoted in Anna Berman, *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* (Evanston: Northern University Press, 2015), 13. The most explicit example of Petrushevskaya's approach to the notion of solidarity is the tale "Mal'chik Novyi god" (Chapter III), which revisits Dostoevsky's "The Beggar Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree."

[462] See, for example, Ovchinnikova, *Russkaia literaturnaia skazka XX veka*, 2001; and Plotnikova and Zolotova, *Fol'klorizm sovremennoi russkoi prozy*, 2011. Interestingly, Western criticism accentuates the opposite, that is, the rationalization of the fairy-tale genre, rather than the extension of fairy-tale magic onto the mystical. The latter, it seems, is closer to the Russian practice. I have argued in Chapter II that Petrushevskaya's fairy tales reflect both tendencies: rationalization and broadening the understanding of magic.

Vladimir Voinovich who, following in the footsteps of Evgenii Shvarts, wrote most explicit political parables.[463]

In her study of the fairy-tale genre in twentieth-century Russia, Ovchinnikova divides fairy tales into philosophical, adventure-philosophical, and adventure-didactic tales. The scholar considers Petrushevskaya's as philosophical-satirical fairy tales.[464] Significantly, Ovchinnikova does not place any other author next to Petrushevskaya. This fact suggests the unique place of Petrushevskaya's fairy tales in contemporary Russian literature. What distinguishes the author's fairy tales is their philosophical and satirical vector, their tendency towards "laughter through tears," depicting familiar *byt* scenarios, and offering a moral conclusion. While discussing the concept of the author's position, Ovchinnikova refers to Petrushevskaya's thus:

> The author can be a wise storyteller who each time knows and understands more than the heroes and the reader, with sad irony depicting the imperfection of man's reality, while preserving faith in eternal values. The author is both a master and a sorcerer in the "doll" world. Such are L. Petrushevskaya's fairy tales.[465]

The concluding observation regarding Petrushevskaya's fairy tales is that they are on the one hand written within the frame of postmodernism, namely, in terms of the subversion of genre aesthetic as well as ideological concerns. On the other hand, Petrushevskaya's returning to the fairy-tale genre is anti-postmodernist, since she does not intend to overturn the fundamental

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[463] Dalton-Brown observes other contemporary writers who attempt to look backward in time to rediscover ancient voices and genres in order to produce a literature that is pre-ideological. Using legends, Vladimir Makanin "looks beyond the Stalinist era to a more distant time in his search for lasting ethical values which may guide man." Anatolii Kim in his sombre texts written in the 1980s, portrays immortal unity between earth and living beings in ways which reveal human bestiality.

[464] Ovchinnikova further divides the philosophical fairy tales into philosophical-lyrical (and associates with them Mikhail Prishvin) and philosophical-adventurous (with Veniamin Kaverin and Vladislav Krapivin as the most relevant examples).

[465] "Автор может быть и мудрым сказочником, каждый раз знающим и понимающим больше, чем герои и читатель, с грустной иронией изображающим несовершенство действительности и человека, сохраняя при этом веру в вечные ценности. Автор — хозяин и волшебник в «кукольном» мире. Таковы сказки Л. Петрушевской." See Ovchinnikova, *Russkaia literaturnaia skazka XX veka*, https://www.dissercat.com/content/russkaya-literaturnaya-skazka-xx-veka-istoriya-klassifikatsiya-poetika (Accessed May 30, 2019).

wisdom that has been associated with the folktale genre — the utopian function of breeding meaningful relations and planting a sense of hope. Taking its bearings from Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, postmodernist thought has critically scrutinized the folktale and the fairy tale in its [postomodernist] effort towards antifoundationalism:

> That is, a critical attitude to the idea that underpinning our knowledge and understanding of the world and ourselves are certain indisputable principles or truths (...) Folktales and fairy tales have been seen in various points in history as offering potent expressions of fundamental facts of life: on questions of morality, of the means to succeed in the world, and of parent/child and male/female relations. Fairy tales, as imbibed by the young, have served to inculcate such facts of life and so have worked as foundations in their own right. Postmodernism in its various guises proposes a sustained critique of such foundational thinking, as evident in much of the fairy tale-related work, both creative and critical, produced since the early 1970s.[466]

Although Petrushevskaya's fairy tales do critically revise the above ideological preoccupations with male/female relations as well as female subjectivity at large (for example, by transgressing the image of passive heroines), they fundamentally return to questions of morality, and so, albeit in a modified approach, to foundational principles. Petrushevskaya's anti-postmodernist use of the fairy tale speaks to the significance of tradition, be it literary or humanist, and invoking the positive in man. At the same time, the lasting impression they offer the reader lies in their not being merely normative or moralistic. This allows us to see Petrushevskaya's fairy tales as inscribed in the poetics of postrealism, or neo-traditionalism.

I would like to conclude by quoting Robert Chandler's account of Andrei Platonov's fairy tales he composed after the war. Chandler's account is particularly apt with regard to Petrushevskaya's stance in her fairy tales:

[466] Benson, "Postmodernism," 762-763.

> Scholars and readers have always given more attention to the *Inferno* than to the *Purgatorio* or the *Paradiso*. Horror has its attractions, and even the very greatest literary treatments of kindness and goodness are often wrongly dismissed as banal. Dante's *Paradiso* is by no means unalloyed in its sweetness; it includes both Dante's most furious denunciation of the Florence of his day and his most memorable lament about the pain of exile. Similarly, the action of several of Platonov's skazki takes place against an apocalyptic background. This greatly adds to their power. They contain a bitterly ironic reference to the long war from which the Soviet Union had only just emerged (...) The conclusion is also somber, though a moment of hope glimmers through. Platonov, it seems, cannot take life for granted. Nor can Platonov take goodness or kindness for granted. A sentimental writer evokes these qualities too often and too easily. Platonov, in contrast, constantly subjects the words *dobro* and *dobrota* to examination.[467]

Similarly, Petrushevskaya's prose and drama remain better known than her fairy tales, but it is in her fairy tales where the author affirms her belief in better scenarios after the period of trauma. Petrushevskaya's use of the "once upon a time" marvelous is directed towards finding meaning in the realistic here-and-now after the Soviet period and after the chaos of the 1990s. The revisionist aesthetic approach notwithstanding, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales revive the belief in universal human values, "as part of the folktale's persistent function as an educator of mankind."[468] Despite the various postmodernist devices of revision, then, Petrushevskaya's fairy tales rest firmly on tradition, explicitly demonstrating the inexhaustibility of its resources.[469]

[467] Chandler, "Platonov's Last Word: 'The Magic Ring' Reconsidered," *Ulbandus Review* 14 (2011/2012), 99.
[468] Balina, "Introduction," 116.
[469] For the study in the post-Soviet Russian literature, its discourses on deconstruction on the one hand and continuation of classical tradition on the other, see Anna Latynina and Martin Dewhirst, "Post-Soviet Russian Literature," in *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (London: Routledge, 2002).

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