Drawing Bridges

Public/Private Worlds in Russian Women's Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis questions how Russian women's identity is attached to the textual use of public/private spaces in contemporary literature by Russian women writers by drawing from feminist theories. I. Grekova and N. Baranskaia portray female protagonists in their everyday lives, public and private worlds overlapping. While these heroines create stable support systems with other women, male figures enter as interruptive forces in women's lives. Hospital settings in several works by Russian women allow comparisons between women's fictional hospital experiences and those of Muscovite women interviewed. In L. Petrushevskaia's stories, women protagonists' identities are linked to the uncertain quality of locale and the tenuous relationships which transpire in it. Russian women's identity expressed in fiction may change as the self-perceptions of a younger generation of Russian women writers evolve toward a new, gendered concept of self.

Résumé

Ce mémoire s'interroge, à partir de théories féministes, sur la façon dont l'identité des femmes russes se rattache à l'usage textuel des espaces publics / privés dans la littérature féminine russe contemporaine. I.Grekova et N.Baranskaïa représentent la femme dans un quotidien où le public et le privé se chevauchent. Pendant que leurs héroïnes créént des réseaux de soutien stables avec d'autres femmes, des personnages masculins interrompent leurs existences. L'hôpital, tel qu'on le retrouve dans plusieurs oeuvres d'écrivaines russes, permettra la comparaison entre l'expérience hospitalière féminine fictive et celle vécue par des femmes moscovites. Chez L.Petrouchevskaïa, l'identité féminine est reliée à l'imprécision du lieu et à la fragilité des rapports qui s'y développent. L'identité des femmes russes, exprimée en prose, pourrait se déplacer avec l'évolution des auto-perceptions d'une plus jeune génération d'écrivaines russes vers une conception nouvelle, et définie par son genre féminin, du soi.

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Heartfelt thanks is also due to Helen Anderson, McLennan Library's Reference Librarian for Eastern European and Slavic Studies, who not only helped me in locating material, but who also took the initiative of acquiring works especially for me, sources which later became essential to the writing of this thesis. I am much obliged to Christophe Park, who provided the French version of my abstract, and to Catherine Annau, who so diligently proofread the penultimate draught.

And finally, I would like to thank my father, David Mooney, and my husband, Kees Boterbloem, who has been a veritable pillar of support throughout the writing of this thesis.

Preface

In this thesis, I have tried whenever possible to employ primary literary sources, i.e. the original Russian versions published in literary journals. Sometimes out of necessity I have had to rely on second publications, usually when the given author's work is collected in an anthology. Russian citations are written in Cyrilic; for references and discussion in English, I have followed the Library of Congress system of transliteration except, of course, when citing published English translations which have adopted other standards. By no means does all of the Russian fiction discussed here exist in translation; Chapter Three in particular deals with a number of untranslated texts. I apologise for the possible omission of published English translations of which I am not aware; for the Russian citations lacking an English translation I offer my own attempts in order to allow for readers lacking knowledge of Russian.

Virtually all of the writers discussed first came to my attention via English translations of their stories, articles about them, literary encyclopedias, and bibliographies which make references to their work; I then proceeded to explore their writing in Russian, reading beyond the stories that had been selected for translation. I have become aware of some differences and even occasional omissions occurring in some of the translations; I shall try to point out these textual discrepancies in appropriate cases.

There are some (secondary) texts which only exist in English. What particulary comes to mind are the sets of interviews conducted in Russian in the Soviet Union but published in Swedish and English in the West. In such cases, I have chosen to trust the quality of the translations to a certain

extent[1]; the interviewers have supplied information in footnotes or otherwise when the Russian women make references which may not be understood immediately by Western readers. Methods of citation and documentation follow MLA guidelines.[2]

Virtually all of my background knowledge of the social, economic, and legal positions of women living in the Soviet Union has been accumulated by Slavists working in the West.[3] Almost all of these texts are published only in English, even if they might have been originally composed in Russian. Because of the country's lengthy history of censorship, I am not alone in doubting the validity of official Soviet accounts of the status of women. Moreover, during my research I have become increasingly aware of the exclusion of many women writers from Soviet literary encyclopedias.[4] As of yet in the Soviet Union, there has been little official indication of sincere interest in women's studies, women's literature, feminist theory, and so on.[5]

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[1] The integrity of the interviews themselves is another matter Some interviewers, most notably Francine du Plessix Gray, express overly biased interpretations of Russian women, falling into the trap of trying to delineate Russian woman's essence While it is vital to recognise these downfalls, I cannot simply discard these works; instead I have tried to develop a critical lens with which to glean some important fragments of knowledge

[2] Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 3rd ed. (New York: MLA, 1988).

[3] Nevertheless, my research on Russian women writers has not always been easy to conduct. On the one hand, the lack of work written about Russian/Soviet women writers has allowed me to perhaps initiate some valuable insights, on the other, it is lamentable that, as Goscilo points out, "the reverberations of that revolution [contemporary feminism].. have yet to reach Russian literature and its critics. Although the last decade has witnessed the emergence of English, American, French, German, Scandanavian, and Japanese women's prose--through belated original publications, republications, or new translations--nothing comparable has occurred in the field of Slavic letters Slavists, in fact, remain largely ignorant of or indifferent to both feminist criticism and fiction authored by Russian or other Slavic women." Preface, Balancing Acts: Contemporary Stories by Russian Women (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U P, 1989) ix.

[4] Wolfgang Kasak has pointed this out in in his excellent Dictionary of Russian Literature Since 1917 (New York: Columbia U P, 1988).

[5] This is not to say that no works by and/or about women have been published in the Soviet Union. Recently, some women writers' work has been collected and published as anthologies: for example, I. Grekova, Na ispytaniiakh: Povesti, rasskazy (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990); Viktoria Tokareva, Letaiushchie kacheli: Nichego osobennogo: Povesti i rasskazy (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987); Irina Velembovskaia, Sladkaia zhenshchina:

However, with the advent of glasnost', one can only hope that this state of affairs will change.[6]

Povesti, rasskazy (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988). However, I have been hard pressed to find any literary critics writing about these writers' work from any kind of feminist perspective.

[6] As I write in March of 1991 it appears that censorship is on the rise again in the Soviet Union. Although most of this censorship would seem to be directed toward television and newspapers, I know of Soviet academics who cannot mention Gorbachev's name in scholarly publications either.

Introduction

Эпиграмма

Могла ли Биче словно Дант творить,
Или Лаура жар любви восславить?
Я научила женщин говорить. .
Но Боже, как их замолчать заставить!

--1960

Анна Ахматова

Epigram

Could Beatrice have written like Dante,
or Laura have glorified love's pain?
I set the style for women's speech
God help me shut them up again!

--1960

Anna Akhmatova

Я человек жесткий, жестокий, всегда с улыбкой на полных, румяных губах, всегда ко всем с насмешкой.

-1988

Людмила Петрушевская

I'm a callous person, a cruel person, who always has a smile on her full rosy lips and always treats everyone with ridicule

--1988

Liudmila Petrushevskaia

In order for a first world feminist to overcome the difficulties involved in studying worlds beyond her own and to transcend the insidious web of information retrieval, she must appreciate "the immense heterogeneity of the field [of subaltern studies] ..., and ... must learn to stop feeling *privileged* as a woman."[7] What Spivak suggests is that we learn from these 'other' women,

[7] Gayatri C. Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York and London. Methuen, 1987) 136.

give up the notion that they can be "corrected by our elite theory and enlightened compassion." (Spivak, 136) Although this advice is directed toward researchers in subaltern studies, I feel it is a necessary point of departure for anyone investigating not only other worlds, but also one's own. Certainly, to grasp and comprehensively deal with the enormously heterogeneous quality inherent in the field of Russian/Soviet studies proves an awesome task to its researchers and analysts, regardless of whether they themselves originate in the Soviet Union or elsewhere. I regret that the limited length and scope of this thesis precludes an exploratory discussion of non-Russian Soviet women writers.[8]

By choosing to write about contemporary Russian women writers and their work, I have found myself in the position of the outsider looking in. Although this position may appear to offer the advantages of objectivity, I continue to distrust this notion in its most imperical sense; I have tried not to simply retrieve and organise material about Russian women in an orderly, scientific manner. Coming to my methodological rescue, Sandra Harding has offered an alternative feminist perspective on the issue of objectivity and reinventing ourselves as other. She argues that according to feminist standpoint theory we must start from women's lives. This position is frequently misinterpeted as the locus of information that will resolve our dilemmas. Instead, we ought to be discovering the kinds of *questions* we should be asking by starting from women's lives[9]; the standpoint launches

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[8] I would urge any readers interested in these fields to consult the bibliographies which I have listed in my bibliography.

[9] Harding makes two important points in understanding this position "The terms 'standpoint', 'perspective', 'view' and 'experience' are often used interchangeably to refer to what some particular women actually think, feel or see But there is a confusion here. It can not be that women's experiences or 'what women say' in themselves provide reliable grounds for knowledge claims about nature and social relations. After all, experience itself is shaped by social relations " Furthermore, "Members of marginalized groups must struggle to name their own experiences *for* themselves in order to claim the subjectivity that is given to

us in the right direction. I could not have begun writing about Russian women's fiction without first coming to terms with Russian women's standpoint(s), their multiple and often contradictory identities.

In another article, Harding further questions feminist epistemological claims that:

> only people who are women and therefore have women's experiences can generate feminist insights; that only those who are African American or lesbian or working-class or Third World can originate antiracist or antihomophobic or antibourgeois or antiimperialist insights. Is it true that only the oppressed can generate knowledge, that one can contribute to criticism and the growth of knowledge only out of one's own oppression? Standpoint theories argue that knowledge must be socially situated and that some situations are worse than others for generating knowledge. But is a "social situation" determined exactly and only by one's gender, or race, or class, or sexuality?[10]

Harding suggests that it is possible to generate valuable knowledge without necessarily sharing the same origins as those of one's subjects. She points out that women can act as valuable "strangers" to the social order, perceiving what can be seen from a "wild zone"; for example, a First World feminist studying an oppressed group may even be ideally situated to

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members of dominant groups 'at birth' through the letters' insertion as legitimate speakers and historical agents into dominant language, history and culture Achieving publicly self-named 'experience' is a pre-condition for generating knowledge So women speaking women's experiences is a crucial act, and an epistemological one, too." Sandra Harding, "Starting Thought From Women's Lives: Eight Resources for Maximizing Objectivity," to appear in Journal of Social Philosophy, forthcoming I obtained access to a copy of this chapter and the one cited cited in the following footnote at a workshop conducted by Sandra Harding at McGill University, Montréal, March 27, 1991

[10] Sandra Harding, "Reinventing Ourselves as Other: More New Agents of History and Knowledge," Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives (Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, forthcoming)

recognise multiple standpoints as she herself must juggle multiple identities.[11] I have noticed the dexterity with which Russian women also juggle identities. The titles of two recent publications about Russian women reflect this insight: Balancing Acts: Contemporary Stories by Russian Women and Soviet Women: Walking the Tightrope.[12] These titles conjure up a multitude of images of circuses, performances, vertigo, fancy footwork, borderlines, sitting on the fence, daring deeds, diplomacy.

Carola Hannson and Karin Lidén discover through their interviews that Muscovite women had indeed almost mastered the balancing act of multiple and contradictory identities, with perhaps disturbing consequences:

> All the women we spoke to... actually had very definite opinions about equality, women's problems, and sex roles. But it turned out that these opinions were riddled with contradictions--precisely as if these women had 'never asked themselves that question.' Sometimes these contradictions were an indication that they weren't used to talking about or analyzing the problems. We were amazed that women who talked about obvious inequities could at the same time deny that these inequities were worth discussing with other women. We also came to see the contradictions as an expression of an almost schizophrenic concept of reality: On the one hand, the women often assured us that they were fully equal

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[11] "Women, and especially women researchers, are 'outsiders within'," Harding insists, "...it is when one works on both sides of such divisions of human activity that there emerges the possibility of seeing the relation between the dominant activities and beliefs and the activities and beliefs that arise on the 'outside'... Dorothy Smith develops this point when she notes that for women sociologists a 'line of fault' opens up between their experiences of their lives and the accounts of their lives generated by the dominant conceptual schemes...So objectivity is increased on this account by thinking out of the gap between the lives of 'outsiders' and the conceptual schemes favored by 'insiders'." "Starting Thought from Women's Lives: Eight Resources for Maximizing Objectivity."

[12] Francine du Plessix Gray, Soviet Women: Walking the Tightrope (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

> to men; and, on the other, they talked, not only indirectly and unconsciously, but also in direct and straightforward terms, about how they suffered from belonging to the 'second sex' in the male-oriented Soviet Union. This split perception of reality, which occurred with such frequency, seems to have its origins in two myths: that Soviet women are equal to Soviet men, and that women need to be 'feminine.' We had expected to encounter both these conceptions, but we thought we would find a dividing line between official and private ideologies; we never imagined that the myth of equality would be embraced to almost the same degree by individual women as by the official ideology, nor did we imagine that the myth of femininity would be encouraged so consistently by society as a whole."[13]

It is precisely this capacity or necessity to bridge public and private ideologies which distinguishes the sort of women Russian women writers choose to portray in their fiction; it would be difficult to draw even a jagged line separating their public realm from their private one.

By starting from Russian women's lives, my endeavour understands a greater, more personal dialogue which may emerge from this work. In fact, this thesis consists of a variety of dialogues, amongst the writers in question and their fictional characters, Russian women in general, the theories I discuss, and myself. I hope that Russian women and their experiences can also question the validity of some of the presuppositions and theories maintained by Western feminists. Beside the voices of the women writers

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[13] Carola Hansson and Karin Lidén, Moscow Women: Thirteen Interviews, trans. Gerry Bothmer, George Blecher, and Lone Blecher, intro. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (New York: Pantheon, 1983)186.

and their fictional protagonists, I have also relied on the otherwise unheard voices of a variety of Russian women who have given interviews to Western feminists, such as Swedish journalists Hansson and Lidén, and Americans Susan Jacoby, Francine du Plessix Gray, and Andrea Lee. Thus the purpose of this introduction is to initiate multi-layered dialogues that will continue throughout the paper, reëmerging in full force at the conclusion.

Gayatri Spivak offers further counsel in the matter concerning the difficult but necessary focus of the first world feminist: questions of identity and reciprocity, "not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me? Is this part of the problematic I discuss?..." (Spivak, 150) When discussing contemporary Russian women's fiction and their position in society, all of these questions, difficult as they may be, deserve sustained consideration; in order to be acknowledged, other voices must continue to interrupt, to disrupt, to challenge deeply engrained assumptions. Perhaps the most prevalent way in which a Russian woman would identify or name a white, Western woman, such as myself, is by what I am lacking compared to her: that is, although I may enjoy more (material) benefits by virtue of living in the West, I am obliged to adopt a feminist program because my society does not offer me the equal rights which she, as a Soviet citizen, has been guaranteed. Accordingly, many Russian women are extremely sensitive to the term "feminism": on the one hand, it is considered superfluous in Soviet society because it is associated with the struggle to achieve basic rights which they (supposedly) already enjoy; on the other hand, precisely because feminism involves a struggle, it is deemed unfeminine and shrill, the antithesis of ideal womanhood (described above by Lidén and Hannson).

Western feminists might perceive Russian women as privileged: they actively participate on a full scale in the workforce; moreover, the concepts of glasnost and perestroika seem to offer an ideal situation for women to improve their position in society and to grasp new power. Yet this so-called western feminist agenda for Soviet women must be put aside in order to understand their own ideals, goals, attitudes toward politics, many of which may appear very different, and even conservative, to many western feminists. Caught in the dilemma of being unable to position themselves collectively in a public sphere due in part to official pressure, one of Soviet women's most radical aspirations may be a developing desire to regain or retreat into a private sphere. It is important to recognise the incongruous mixture of elements that are creating this desire. The movement toward the "private" is perceived by many women as potentially radical: instead of struggling ineffectually to achieve everything (i.e. career, motherhood, etc), one in five Soviet women today would prefer to be a 'housewife' (Gray, 38), a limited role which allows for some privacy. These women's reaction to glasnost seems to translate into an overwhelming urge to return to home and hearth; such a reaction could also indicate a refusal or denial of voice, a conservative movement with possibly negative consequences.

There is a disturbing coincidence in that a conservative (patriarchal) discourse is simultaneously promoting this same movement. In his Perestroika, Gorbachev describes his ostensibly "revolutionary" campaign which includes his intention to enable women "to return to their purely womanly mission." That mission entails "housework, the upbringing of children and the creation of a good family atmosphere."[14] As usual, a hard

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[14] Mikhail Gorbachev, Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 117.

economic factor underpins this discourse. In a country soon to be in desperate need of human resources, the state must encourage motherhood in order to increase the birthrate. With such official ideological support and economic necessity, how can women's desire to find a private realm remain radical and personal?

> *How would you find the time?*
> I would leave the children in one of the weekly boarding schools. What else can you do? Tsvetayeva had three children, but she kept on writing.
> *You just said that the birthrate was low in the Soviet Union. What could be done to raise it?*
> To raise the birthrate one has to raise wages. They're so low now that women can't afford the luxury of two or three children.[15]

> Эх, досуг, досуг...Слово какое-то неуклюжее «до-суг»... «Женщины, боритесь за культурный досуг!» Чушь какая-то... Досуг. Я лично увлекаюсь спортом -- бегом. Туда бегом -- сюда бегом. В каждую руку по сумке и ... вверх -- вниз: троллейбус -- автобус, в метро -- из метро.[16]

> Oh, spare time, spare time. What a ludicrous phrase -- 'spare time': 'Women -- fight for spare-time culture!' Sounds ridiculous. Spa-a-re ti-i-me. Personally, I like to run. I run here and there, with a bag in each hand of course, up and down, to the trolleybus, the metro, from the metro...[17]

Before introducing the chapters of this thesis, it is necessary to briefly discuss some aspects of public/private theory that underpins them all. Part of Alison Jaggar's review of political theories concerns how each major theory defines and treats public and private issues. Liberal political theory

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[15] An excerpt from Hansson's and Lidén's interview with Liza (all interviewees' names have been changed), an editor at a Moscow publishing house. Moscow Women, 16.

[16] Natal'ia Baranskaia, "Nedelia kak nedelia," Novyi mir 11 (1969) 25.

[17] Baranskaia, "A Week Like Any Other," trans. Pieta Monks, A Week Like Any Other: A Novella and Short Stories (London: Virago, 1989) 6.

regards the public realm as encompassing "those aspects of life that may be legitimately regulated by the state," whereas "the private realm is those aspects of life where the state has no legitimate authority to intervene."[18] The presence or absence of state intervention defines the public and private spheres. What remains difficult and controversial to determine, of course, is when the state does or does not possess the legitimate authority to intervene in certain aspects of life. That there is and should be a dividing line between the public and private is indisputable in a liberal analysis; precisely where to draw that line, however, remains a key debate among liberals. Jaggar goes on to point out how the liberal tradition has been linked with capitalist economic systems, since they so readily complement each other. Whether in the better interest of private business or private lives, "an emphasis on the preservation of civil liberties and of individual rights to freedom from intervention thus remains a central feature of contemporary liberalism". (Jaggar, 35)

Marxist political theory also recognises public and private spheres, yet in doing so, it arrives at a dilemma similar to that of liberal theory in being unable to account for those areas of life in which the state has no legitimate interest. But while liberal theory insists that a division, albeit an abstract one, exists between public and private spheres, the ultimate Marxist aim is the equation of these spheres, i.e. the state is the people, the people are the state. Yet, this communist utopia remains an unattainable ideal. Jaggar provides two reasons for this impasse:

> ...the Marxist conception of human nature as a continuous social creation precluded the view that there is any aspect of an

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[18] Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983) 34.

> individual's life which, in principle, is of concern only to that individual. The other reason is that, in spite of the prevailing capitalist belief that Marxism requires the state to control every aspect of social life, Marxists in fact do not accept the ultimate legitimacy of any state power. (Jaggar, 61)

Although Jaggar proceeds to eke out where women fit or fail to fit into traditional theoretical analogies, it is Elshtain who moves the public/private debate fully into a feminist arena. She agrees with Norman Jacobsen's view, which she cites: "the genius of all great political thinkers is to make public that which is of private concern...".[19] In the same breath, her premise for bringing feminism to the fore lies in the fact that traditional theory produced by these "great political thinkers" has always been formulated from male standpoints, which essentially maintain a gender-blind bias.

In search of a broader sense of public and private worlds beyond that of simply deeming the public world political, as opposed to the private world as social and familial, Elshtain turns to Brian Fay, who conceives of the public and private

> as two of a cluster of 'basic notions' that serve to structure and give coherence to all known ways of life and those individuals who inhabit them. The public and the private as twin force fields help to create a moral environment for individuals, singly and in groups; to dictate norms of appropriate or worthy action; to establish barriers to action, particularly in areas such as the taking of human life, regulation of sexual relations, promulgation of familial duties and obligations, and the arena of political responsibility. Public and

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[19] Jean Bethke Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 1981) xiii.

> private are imbedded within a dense web of associational meanings and intimations and linked to other basic notions: nature and culture, male and female, and each society's "understanding of the meaning and role of work; its views of nature;...its concepts of agency; its ideas about authority, the community, the family; its notion of sex; its beliefs about God and death and so on." (Elshtain, 5)

The title of Elshtain's work, Public Man, Private Woman, fully recognises the public/private dualism as a gendered concept. A value hierarchy is inherent in virtually all dualisms. The opposition of a male public realm versus a female private realm is no exception: a sense of power is imbedded in the public sphere whereas in most cultures, women have had a history of being relegated to and silenced within the private (domestic) domain. Even in the Soviet Union, where women have made up more than half of the work force for decades, they have been burdened with the responsibility of maintaining the household and family. It has been argued that this double shift has prevented them from moving up in their careers. This situation is most glaringly obvious in the forum of politics, where women are active to a certain extent at local, municipal levels while remaining virtually absent from the higher echelons of power and prestige in the Communist Party, the Central Committee, the Politburo, the army, the bureaucracy, the secret police, and so on.

Whereas (traditional) political and social theories often treat public and private realms as abstract concepts, fiction problematises them. When writers play with trope and metaphor, representation and symbolic dichotomy, it becomes difficult to simplify or distinguish public/private oppositions. By seeing the public/private opposition as gendered hierarchy,

a lens is created through which one can perceive how public and private values are organised in fiction. The fact that Soviet women occupy both public and private spheres may further blur the opposition.

Chapter One begins with developments in Soviet women's writing in the sixties, introducing a chronological framework for the thesis as a whole. In that decade, some women writers emerged with a new approach to literature. In particular, I. Grekova and Natal'ia Baranskaia started to publish short stories and novellas focusing on women and women's issues in society. In this chapter I will discuss a number of their stories in varying depth. The story most familiar to Western readers, Baranskaia's "A Week Like Any Other", touched an especially raw nerve of Soviet society when it first appeared in Novyi mir in 1969 for its honest portrayal of a young professional working mother. Baranskaia and I. Grekova develop heroines who break away from former socialist realist stereotypes in an effort to expand "women's province." Carolyn Heilbrun's observations about women as outsiders provides a partial analytical framework for studying these stories. Virginia Woolf, Elaine Showalter, Nancy K. Miller, and Judith Kegan Gardiner offer further suggestions on the relation between women writing and concepts of identity.

During the seventies and eighties, an increasing number of works by Soviet women writers began to be published, mainly in literary journals. I have chosen to centre my discussion in the second chapter on the striking prevalence of hospital settings in their fiction. Keeping the public/private debate in mind, can the hospital be seen (partially) as a site where women heterogeneously operate outside of masculist (kinship) social structures and their inscriptions? In some of the stories, this observation would seem to hold true as the women patients form their own, unique support system. Yet,

in several stories the public sphere of the hospital is embodied partially in the male doctor persona with whom the heroine establishes a personal relationship. With attention to marginality, the hospital can be perceived as a displacement and as a mergence of the public/private opposition. Many of these hospital stories provide an escape for the protagonist from her daily life. The hospital setting often serves to contrast a community of women versus their individual isolation in society. The hospital, often perceived as a marginalised sphere, becomes the centre, the locus fusing public and private, while everyday life is shifted to the margins of the stories in question. In other stories, there are less overt references to a hospital or clinic (i.e. abortion, childbirth); there remains an implication about public control (hospital) of private property (women's bodies). Considering the situating of protagonists in hospital, what does this imply about the importance of examining and reappropriating the experience of the female body? Due to the writers' preoccupation with the existential and emotional in the hospital stories, it would seem that this question is of secondary or little importance to them. Helena Goscilo suggests that the choice to situate women characters in hospitals is an indication of an ailing society.[20] Yet this is just one fraction of a complex metaphor which also allows for other interpretations, such as escape, healing and renewal, collective care and support systems.

Playwright Liudmila Petrushevskaia's fascination with narrative voices and the instability of place translates into her short stories, the focus

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[20] Goscilo, introduction. Balancing Acts, xxii. Goscilo has gone on to further analyse the locale of hospital wards in Russian women's fiction in her article "Women's Wards and Wardens: The Hospital in Contemporary Russian Women's Fiction," Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme vol. 10 no. 4 (Winter 1989); some of her observations are discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

of chapter three. The identities of her women protagonists are reflected in the temporary, uncertain quality of the places they inhabit or pass through. In rambling interior monologues, her narrators consider interpersonal relationships from an ironic, guarded distance. In "Svoi krug" ("Our Crowd"), the narrator tells her story almost exclusively in the past and future tenses. Could this absence of the present indicate the death of the narrator and the ultimate privacy that death and darkness provide? Despite the avant garde label applied to her in the Soviet Union, Petrushevskaia's narrative style strongly derives from nineteenth century influences and the Chekhovian voice. Chudakov's studies[21] on Chekhov will allow me to make some structural comparisons.

Linda Alcoff's theory of positionality helps to further elucidate the metaphorical bridge I am trying to describe between identity and place:

> I assert that the very subjectivity (or subjective experience of being a woman) and the very identity of women is constituted by women's position. However, this view should not imply that the concept of "woman" is determined solely by external elements and that the woman herself is merely a passive recipient of an identity created by these forces. Rather, she herself is part of the historicized, fluid movement, and she therefore actively contributes to the context within which her position can be dilineated. I would include Lauretis's point here, that the identity of a woman is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history,

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[21] A.P. Chudakov, Chekhov's Poetics, trans Edwina Jannie Cruise and Donald Dragt (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983).

as mediated through the cultural discursive context to which she has access.[22]

The writers discussed in this thesis present the reader with perceptions of Russian women's identity. In their fiction this identity is rooted in and to a large extent determined by the sort of place in which they are located. Different elements of identity are apparent in the choice of fictional setting: the everyday situations, at home and at work, in I. Grekova's and Baranskaia's prose; the prevalent hospital locale, a marginalised sector which again merges the public and private; the uncertain, temporary, unstable quality of places in Petrushevskaia's stories.

It would seem that over three decades of contemporary fiction by Russian women, a variety of conceptions about women's identity have sprung forth, some of the hackneyed stereotypes having fallen to the wayside. Perhaps we can look forward to a turning point in Russian (women's) literature as a younger generation of Russian women writers seems to turn toward a more feminist oriented conception of self.

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[22] Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 13:3 (1988) 434.

Chapter One

Writing Russian Women's Identity: Women's Networks and Marginal Men in Prose by I. Grekova and Natal'ia Baranskaia

I. Grekova[23] and Natal'ia Baranskaia focus on the issue of women's identity by writing from the standpoint of women's lives. By establishing a woman character as the central protagonist, their short stories tend to depict women forming support systems, that transcend the boundaries of public and private spheres. In this chapter, I shall discuss how these informal women's networks arise out of women's social relations with others. Counter-balancing the multi-faceted characters of the women protagonists and their networks with other women, I. Grekova and Baranskaia tend to portray male characters as interruptive events in women's lives.

First, it is necessary to discuss how the process of women writing is connected to the issue of searching for women's identities. By way of organising this discussion in relation to the work by I. Grekova and Baranskaia, I borrow from some relevent ideas that have arisen from Western feminist theory and literary criticism produced over the past years, beginning with Carolyn Heilbrun:

> There are four ways to write a woman's life: the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may

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[23] I. Grekova is the pen name used by Elena Sergeevna Ventsel, a professor of science. The "I" does not stand for Irina, as some people believe. *Igrek* is the Russian term for the Latin letter "Y," often used in mathematics to denote an unknown quantity. I refer to the pen name, I. Grekova, without dropping the initial to avoid losing the connotation. Heilbrun comments on women writers' pen names: "I have the impression...that, despite a few famous male exceptions, women write under an assumed name far more than do men, and have done so since the early nineteenth century. Women write under pseudonyms for profound reasons that require scrupulous examination. As Gilbert and Gubar put it, 'the [woman's] pseudonym began to function more prominently as a name of power, the mark of a private christening into a second self, a rebirth into linguistic primacy.' " Carolyn G Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988) 109-10.

> tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognizing or naming the process. (Heilbrun, 11)

I. Grekova and Baranskaia have chosen to embark on the second path. Their stories first began to appear in literary journals during the 1960s in the Soviet Union. By that time, both women had already established other careers, had families, struggled through the war and other hardships, only turning to writing fiction later in their lives when they were again single and relatively free of responsibilities. This fact cannot be simply glossed over, for it indicates the actual material conditions necessary for writing. In the case of I. Grekova and Baranskaia, to become a single older woman is to open up another private sphere in one's life cycle; it can also mean gaining interpretive power which may not yet be accessible to a younger woman writer, especially if her days are filled with obligations to her children, marriage, and career. Carolyn Heilbrun further elaborates on how a writer's age can play a significant role in developing her creation:

> ...for female writers this act of self-creation comes later in life than for such a one as Keats. George Eliot was thirty-eight at the time her first fiction was published. So was Will Cather. Virginia Woolf was in her thirties. This is by no means a universal rule with women writers, but it is frequent enough to be worth noticing. Acting to confront society's expectations for oneself requires either the mad daring of youth, or the colder determination of middle age. Men tend to move on a fairly predictable path to achievement;

> women transform themselves only after an awakening. And that awakening is identifiable only in hindsight. (Heilbrun, 117-118)

Elaine Showalter aptly points out that "in A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf argued that economic independence was the essential precondition of an autonomous women's art."[24] The other precondition remains, of course, sufficient time. I. Grekova, Baranskaia, and most of the other writers discussed in this thesis strongly favour the genre of the short narrative piece[25]; even their occasional novels are often divided into diminutive narrative sections.[26] Membership to the Writers' Union permits Soviet writers to devote their time to their creative work; however, very few women to date have been admitted to this privileged society.[27]

In another essay, Showalter has acknowledged women writers' preferences for short or sectioned prose forms such as the short story and the diary; she attributes this to the fact that spare time for most women comes in limited, intermitent measures. She then links this pattern to the imagery of quilt making by American women:

> ...piecing is the art form which best reflects the fragmentation of women's time, the dailiness and repetitiveness of women's art. As Lucy Lippard observes, 'the mixing and matching of fragments is the product of the interrupted life... What is popularly seen as

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[24] Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986) 137.

[25] The 'rasskaz'--the short story; the 'povest"--the long short story, sometimes called a novella in English translation.

[26] In chapter two there is a discussion of two such novels, Iuliia Voznesenskaia's The Women's Decameron and Inna Varlamova's A Counterfeit Life.

[27] The Writers' Union has usually dictated thematic and stylistic guidelines to which many writer's work does not adhere. Non-members may still have their work published, but Union members have tended to have priority. In recent years, there has been an effort to publish works which have been shelved due to their content, lack of space in journals, and so on. Many of the stories discussed in this thesis were published years after they had been written.

'repetitive,' 'obsessive,' and 'compulsive' in women's art is in fact a necessity for those whose time comes in small squares.'[28]

I. Grekova's and Baranskaia's fiction gives expression to the social realities which women have experienced; the writers themselves are rooted in that experience. Virginia Woolf provides a simile of the spider's web to illustrate the interconnectedness of writing and the conditions for the production of literature:

> ...fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners...[W]hen the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things[29], like health and the houses we live in.[30]

What remains so distinct about the emergence of I. Grekova's and Baranskaia's writing at that time is that it was preceded by a long stagnation of creativity in general (with the exception of certain writers, some of whom published in samizdat). Along with other writers' work, I. Grekova's and Baranskaia's subject matter broke away from the what had come to be standard socialist realist stereotypes of (fictional) women characters.

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[28] Elaine Showalter, "Piecing and Writing," The Poetics of Gender, ed Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia U P, 1986) 228. Fifty-seven years before Showalter wrote this, Virginia Woolf was tentatively prescribing something similar: "...I will only pause here one moment to draw your attention to the great part which must by played in that future so far as women are concerned by physical conditions. The book has somehow to be adapted to the body, and at a venture one would say that women's books should be shorter, more concentrated, than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work. For interruptions there will always be." A Room of One's Own (London: Triad Grafton, 1985) 74.

[29] It is precisely these "grossly material things" described by Woolf which also provide me with a basis for Chapter Two about hospital settings ("health") and for Chapter Three about (un)stable places ("the houses we live in").

[30] Quoted by Nancy K. Miller in her "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic," The Poetics of Gender, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia U P, 1986) 275.

Although stylistically their writing could still be termed as 'realist', their prose reflects a process of the shattering of social myth surrounding the Soviet heroine, which allowed them to depict contemporary women's lives.

In particular, Baranskaia's well known "A Week Like Any Other" ("Nedelia kak nedelia") functioned as a consciousness raising instrument, sparking heated debate when it was published by Novyi Mir in 1969. One of the supreme ironies of this work is that it is presented as a seven day excerpt from a young married working mother's diary; to actually record all of her daily events would be physically impossible for a woman like Ol'ga, the protagonist/narrator, whose days and nights are so overcharged that she barely manages to sleep six hours a night. Only through fiction could such an account of the average urban working woman's social position be conveyed.[31]

Baranskaia's and I. Grekova's portrayals of women are rooted in the everyday realities encountered by women in the work place and at home; their primary concern would seem to be directed toward articulating Russian women's identities, rather than searching for alternative identities or actual answers to the social issues their fiction raises. It is this urge to finds ways of representing their own identities, instead of relying on previous, often men's, formulations[32], that inspires writers like Baranskaia and I. Grekova.

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[31] Another venue can be journalism. Susan Jacoby interviewed "Vera," a thirty-one year old journalist who chose to specialise in the role of women in Soviet society. Vera confesses that her "desire to write about women's problems grew out of her own experiences as a wife and mother." She felt that the expanded news coverage of women's problems between 1969-71 "resulted from a combination of growing public and official concern", possibly a reaction in part to Baranskaia's story, which was considered highly controversial and resulted in a flood of mail to all the newspapers. Jacoby, "Vera," The Friendship Barrier: Ten Russian Encounters (London: Bodley Head, 1972)182 and 188.

[32] For example, I am thinking of the vast array of Soviet heroines who embody ideals of motherhood for male writers such as Gorki. As we shall discover, women writers are equally concerned with concepts of motherhood; however, their perceptions, often based on experience, can only differ from those of men.

Judith Kegan Gardiner works through concepts of identity to arrive at how female identity may be achieved through writing by women. She agrees with Nancy Chodorow, who finds that "the self is defined through social relationships; issues of fusion and merger of the self with others are significant; and ego and body boundaries remain flexible."[33] Gardiner goes on to discuss the fluid quality of women's writing:

> The formulation that female identity is a process stresses the fluid and flexible aspects of women's primary identities. One reflection of this fluidity is that women's writing often does not conform to the generic prescriptions of the male canon. Recent scholars conclude that autobiographies by women tend to be less linear, unified, and chronological than men's autobiographies. Women's novels are often called autobiographical, women's autobiographies, novelistic... Because of the continual crossing of self and other, women's writing may blur the public and private and defy completion. (Gardiner, 185)

Although Gardiner is referring to Western women writers, these assessments may also apply to the work of I. Grekova and Baranskaia. The action of their stories does not often function along standard linear schemes; their heroines rarely resolve the problematics assigned to them. The fictional diary of Ol'ga may roughly follow a chronological order, but the heroine manages to do 'nothing more' than barely accomplish her multitude of daily tasks and duties. The title, "A Week Like Any Other," further emphasizes the utter lack of traditional heroic plot; the petty events and nostalgic reminiscences, the chaotic laboratory and cramped apartment, all

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[33] Quoted by Judith Kegan Gardiner in her "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," Writing and Sexual Difference, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 182.

are permanent fixtures of Ol'ga's life. She dreams of having enough time and money to take a long overdue vacation, to keep up on new trends in scientific research, or simply to finally be able to mend her clothes. During one of her lunch hours, she splurges on a haircut, which she later pays for several times over in lost time.

The popularity of heroines like Ol'ga finds its premise precisely because such portrayals are "modern Russian women's self-perceptions cast in literary form" (Goscilo, Balancing Acts, ix); a certain awakening transpires when a reader can recognise herself in a text, when the acts of being named and naming herself coincide through fiction. Perhaps the aspect which most unifies Russian women readers is that to a large extent they occupy common positions within their society: approximately 92% of women living in the Soviet Union work, although most are so overburdened caring for their children and husbands that only a minority can advance their careers. Yet motherhood, with the sacrifices and joys it entails, is highly cherished by many Soviet women and is often considered more important than one's work or marriage. Since I. Grekova and Baranskaia tend to depict women as working mothers who are usually single, widowed or divorced, they allow for a great deal of self-identification not only on the part of the reader, but on their own personal behalf, too.

Gardiner is naming a dialectical women's network, an active process of relations among the woman author, her female characters, and her women readers. Gardiner likens motherhood to women's artistic production: "The maternal metaphor of female authorship clarifies the woman writer's distinctive engagement with her characters and indicates an analogous relationship between woman reader and character." (Gardiner, 179)

Contained within many of Baranskaia's and I. Grekova's texts is a women's network. Since their female characters often range broadly in age, a variety of relationships among them is allowed to emerge. With the exception of Baranskaia's story "The Woman with the Umbrella" ("Zhenshchina s zontikom"), there is at least one (biological) mother character in each of the stories discussed in this chapter. This (central) figure provides the basis for certain familial relations to take form. Figuring most prominently are mother-child relationships which exist in all of the selected narrations: I. Grekova's "The Hotel Manager" ("Khoziaika gostinitsy") and "The Ladies' Hairdresser" ("Damskii master"), and Baranskaia's "A Week Like Any Other", "The Purse" ("Koshelek"), "Lubka" ("Liubka")[34], "A Delicate Subject" ("Delikatnyi razgovor"), "At Her Father's and Her Mother's Place" ("U Nikitskikh i na Pliushchikhe"), and "The Kiss" ("Potselui"). Out of this selection, the stories which in some manner deal with mother-daughter relationships (all of the stories mentioned above excluding "The Ladies' Hairdresser") pertain to a special category. On yet another level, some of these relationships include a third dimension, i.e. the presence of a grandchild or grandmother, depending on the narrative perspective. Stories which incorporate three familial generations (of primarly women) include: "The Hotel Manager", "The Purse", "A Delicate Subject", and "The Kiss".

To facilitate my discussion, I have ordered it according to the position of the protagonists and characters by their stage of womanhood:

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[34] Pieta Monks has chosen to transliterate this name as "Lubka" in her English translation of the story whereas I follow the Library of Congress system of transliteration to refer to the Russian text and in my discussion in general. Monks' transliteration often differs from the Library of Congress system.

adolescence, young adulthood, older adulthood.[35] Baranskaia portrays two teenage girls: Talia is the thirteen year old protagonist of "At Her Father's and Her Mother's Place"; Liubka, a deliquent in her late teens, remains the central focus of "Lubka". Talia's story takes place in Leningrad in 1923. Her parents are divorced: this family situation requires that she live at one of her parent's home. At the outset of the story she begins to reside at her father's apartment. Their lives appear to mesh well together: during the day, Talia's father works as a doctor while his daughter attends school nearby; in the evenings, they spend their time harmoniously together, reading, drawing, inventing fairy tales. The home is cosy and well-kept and the father showers affection on Talia. One day, however, Talia discovers a love letter addressed to her father from a certain Rita. The existence of this other woman in her father's life makes it impossible for Talia's idyll to continue; she abruptly returns to her mother's apartment, where she had been residing previously. Talia's mother's endless work as a nurse and a voluntary social worker causes her to be rarely home; the apartment itself is poor and shabby and Talia must forego all of the special treats she enjoyed at her father's place. In the end, Talia is still struggling to come to terms with her parent's divorce and the effects of the resultant broken family situation.

Liubka also suffers from a poor family arrangement which has affected her life more seriously than Talia's. Severely neglected for years by her single, alcoholic mother and by an indifferent community, Liubka has become a rather wild young woman. Complaints from her neighbouring tenants about her noisy, drunken parties which run late into the night lead

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[35] One of Simone de Beauvoir's innovations is to challenge the homogeneous conception of woman by looking at women according to their stage in the life cycle. Gender changes according to age. Le deuxième sexe II: L'expérience vécue, (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

her to being tried by a people's court. During her trial, members of the community voice their petty and often hypocritical grievances against Liubka; yet there are a few brave individuals, including Mikhail, one of her co-workers at a light-bulb factory, who offer other perspectives on Liubka's situation. The judge takes pity on the girl, understanding that she cannot be held responsible for all of the complaints against her, and gives her a second chance with the agreement that Liubka will try to change her ways. A few months after this scene, Mikhail, who has fallen in love with Liubka, invites her to a theatre production of My Fair Lady. This story of a young woman's transformation, along with the prospects offered to her by a second chance and a serious relationship with Mikhail, seems to inspire Liubka to turn over a new leaf. At the end of the story, she takes charge of her life, cleaning her and her mother's filthy apartment and dismissing her former 'hooligan' friends, whose lack of support during the trial has disappointed her.[36]

Talia and Liubka both lack a unified, stable, reliable home; the high value they place on an ideal of home is obvious at the end of both stories for the teenagers are committed to cleaning their respective mothers' apartments. Both of their mothers have neglected the upkeep of their homes; it is implicit that in neglecting the home, they neglect their daughters. Talia's mother is involved in worthy causes, but in her zealous dedication to helping others, she has let her own daughter down. Liubka's mother has suffered many personal defeats; her extreme self-involvement has made her unable to perceive and tend to the needs of her daughter.

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[36] This story is a good example of how some Baranskaia's work is dated by the sentimental style and moralistic proletarian themes of Socialist Realism and can be easily read as such.

Gardiner refers to Erik Erikson's theory of identity in order to help determine female identity. Erikson claims that adolescence is a period spent trying to establish one's identity that is formed and manifested through social relationships; at some point in one's adolescence, one will probably experience an 'identity crisis'. Although I would argue that identity crises are not limited to the span of one's teenage years, the stories of Talia and Liubka certainly centre on the problematic founding of young women's identity through familial and social relations.

In the case of Talia, she is only just breaking away from a child's world. As her perception of others widens, she increasingly questions her parents' divorce. The discovery of Rita's love letter forces her to confront her father's sexuality and her own. Perhaps the most disturbing part of the letter is when she reads: "Я влюблена в тебя, как девчонка"[37] ("I'm in love with you like a young girl"[38]). This sentiment all too closely resembles Talia's own feelings toward her father; as she reads on she begins to recognise it as "a shameful letter" and she blushes profusedly. Unable to yet accept Rita's existence and the relationship she has with her father, Talia returns to her mother's home. After her idyllic stay at her father's place, her mother's dismal, empty apartment is far from a wholly comforting haven. However, it is the site from where she can proceed to forge her own identity.[39]

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[37] Baranskaia, "U Nikitskikh i na Pliushchikhe," Otritsatel'naia zhizel': Passkazy, malen'kie povesti (Moscow: «Molodaia gvardiia», 1977) 60.

[38] Baranskaia, "At Her Father's and Her Mother's Place," trans. Pieta Monks, A Week Like Any Other, 222.

[39] This story veils an incestuous tension. Although Talia is apparently not a victim of incest, her quick, instinctive retreat from her father's home can be seen as an unconscious act of claiming or preserving her identity. Feminist research has demonstrated the frequent failure of adult males to sexually distinguish daughters from (young) women. This aspect of male sexuality can have devastating consequences on the formation of young women's identity. I thank my co-adviser, Sarah Westphal, for relating this issue to the subtext of the this story.

Liubka's identity crisis transpires later in her adolescence and comes in two stages. First, the trial serves as a rude awakening: she faces the sobering possibility that she will be sent to a notorious reform school in Siberia. Although she does not know how to speak out to defend herself, the trial offers her an opportunity to silently reflect on her miserable childhood and highschool years. These interior thoughts provide the reader with Liubka's own standpoint; it is a private voice, hidden in the sea of the public courtroom. For example, she realises that she cannot afford to be sent away, given her sense of duty to care for her mother:

> Как она оставит мать? Кто же будет раздевать ее и укладывать ночью, когда прибредет она из своей шашлычной? Там в конце смены, к двенадцати, убирая весь день вороха грязной посуды, успеет она набрать из недопитых рюмок и стаканов полную порцию..всесоюзный коктейль, или по-русски--ерш Нет, не может Любка бросить мать. Здесь бранили Прасковью, смеялись над ней. Любкино сердце защемила обида. Разве она плохая? Никогда мать не обижала Любку, не ругала, не кричала, не наказывала ее. Один только раз случилось.[40]
>
> (How would she leave her mother? Who would undress her and put her to bed each night after she'd staggered home from the shashlik café? She ended her shift there at midnight. When she'd cleared away the mountains of dirty dishes she could get a full measure from the dregs of the wine and brandy glasses... a united cocktail. No, Lubka could not abandon her mother Here they cursed and laughed at Praskovya. This hurt Lubka deeply and made her very sad. Praskovya wasn't really bad. She'd never hurt Lubka, never sworn or shouted at her. She'd never punished her--well, only once.[41])

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[40] Baranskaia, "Liubka," Otritsatel'naia zhizel',162.

[41] Baranskaia, "Lubka," trans. Pieta Monks, A Week Like Any Other,162-3.

The second phase of Liubka's identity crisis comes about when Mikhail finally gathers up the courage to ask Liubka to go to the theatre. She goes through excessive pains to look attractive for this special occasion. But after the show, when she sees Mikhail and herself reflected in the lobby mirror, she suddenly becomes aware of the clown-like exaggeration of her garish costume, lurid makeup and laquered hair-do in comparison to Mikhail, "таким ладным и простым в сером костюме" ("Liubka", 181) ("so serene and simple in his grey suit" ["Lubka", 184]). In her decision to strip away this mask and to clean the apartment from top to bottom, Liubka's values radically shift and her emergence into a newly founded identity propels her into adult womanhood.

Of the few portrayals of young adult women in Baranskaia's and I. Grekova's prose, perhaps the most important remains that of Ol'ga in "A Week Like Any Other."[42] In trying to fulfill her duties as a junior research assistent at a laboratory as well as a mother, wife, and full-time housekeeper, Ol'ga is already worn out at the age of twenty-six. She shares a research room with nine co-workers; three of these, Lusia Vartanovna ("Dark Lusia"), Liudmilla Lichova ("Blonde Lusia"), and Shura, are Ol'ga's special friends, all working mothers like herself. These women form a kind of informal support network. For example, each day at lunch hour one of them does all of the shopping for the rest. Given that grocery shopping is an extremely time-consuming process, this kind of arrangement is ingenious.

Ol'ga's friendship with these women also allows her to compare her situation to their respective ones. Dark Lusia already has one young son,

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[42] A special case in point is Vera, the heroine of I. Grekova's "The Hotel Manager", who is portrayed from the time of her birth to her sixtieth birthday. I shall deal with this story later in this chapter.

Mark, and does not intend to have more children. Her husband, a Doctor of Sciences, finds fault in her desire to pursue a career instead of devoting all of her energy into raising their son and having more children. He refuses to let Mark go to kindergarten; thus, Dark Lusia must hire a nanny. Recently, she has secretly had an abortion while away on a business trip.

Meanwhile, Blonde Lusia has no husband. Her son's father, a captain, lives in another town, married with children. She found out this information too late. When she announced that she was four months pregnant, he

> ...исчез, как провалился Мать Люськи, приехавшая из деревни, сначала чуть не прибила дочь, потом пошла жаловаться на капитана «самому главному начальнику», потом плакала вместе с Люськой, ругала и кляла всех мужчин, а потом осталась в Москве и теперь нянчит внука, ведет хозяйство. От дочери она требует только--делать покупки, стирать большую стирку и обязательно ночевать дома.[43]
>
> (...disappeared into thin air. Lusya's mother came up from the country. First she nearly killed her daughter. Then she went to the Captain's boss to complain about him. Then she and Lusya cried together and cursed all men. Then she settled down in Moscow. Now she looks after her grandchild and does the housework. All she asks of her daughter is to do the shopping, the main wash, and to come home at night.[44])

The least is known about Shura. Her husband is an alcoholic, a fact which the other three mothers have quietly deduced. Shura's ten year old son is home alone after school; every afternoon Shura makes a flurry of telephone calls to him to ensure that he is safe.

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[43] Baranskaia, "Nedelia kak nedelia," 27.
[44] Baranskaia, "A Week Like Any Other," 9.

After assessing her friends' various situations, Ol'ga seems reluctant to admit that "Должно быть, самая счастливая из нас--я." ("Nedelia kak nedelia", 27) ("I should be the happiest one." ["A Week Like Any Other", 9]) There is a precedent for Ol'ga's inspection of her and her friends' lives. At the beginning of the week, all of the women working at the laboratory are given a questionnaire which inquires as to various details of their private and public lives: marital status; how many children; how many days per year of leave from work due to illness, pregnancy, children, etc; how many hours per week spent on "а) домашнюю работу, б) занятия с детьми, в) культурный досуг" ("Nedelia kak nedelia", 25) ("(a) housework; (b) with the children; (c) on spare-time cultural activities?" ["A Week Like Any Other", 6]).

The questionnaire sparks several lively debates among the women as well as provoking several troubling questions and rumours. The surveyors are vaguely referred to as "demographers"; their presence is felt in the phrasing and tone of the questionnaires they have left to be filled out. One of the most sensitive issues the questionnaire raises is that of maternity. Four out of the nine women working in Ol'ga's laboratory are mothers. All of the women are painfully aware of the low natality rate in the Soviet Union.[45] They remain suspicious of the questionnaire's underlying purposes: on the one hand, the childless women fear that they will they be poorly assessed for not having a family; on the other, the mothers in the group have only one or two childen. On the Monday when they receive the survey, Dark Lusia is sharply perceptive:

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[45] This story takes place in 1969. At that time, medals were still being given out to mothers for having large families and abortion had only been fully re-legalised several years earlier.

--В общем, они надеются выяснить важный вопрос: почему женщины не хотят рожать?

--Люся! Они ж этого не говорили!--возмущается Люся беленькая.

--Говорили. Только называли это «недостаточные темпы прироста населения» Мы вот с тобой даже не воспроизводим населения. Каждая пара должна родить двоих или, кажется, даже троих, а у нас только по одному...(Тут Люся вспоминает, что беленькая--«мать-одиночка».) Тебе хорошо--с тебя не посмеют спрашивать Оле тоже хорошо--она план выполнила. А я? Мне вот дадут план и тогда--прощай моя диссертация! ("Nedelia kak nedelia", 26-28)

('What they really want to know is why women don't want to have babies.'
'Lusya, they never said that!' says Blonde Lusya indignantly.
'They did, but they called it: "an insufficient increase in population growth". You and I aren't even reproducing the population. Every pair should have at least two if not three children; we have one each.' (Here Dark Lusya suddenly remembers that Blonde Lusya is a single parent.) 'You're all right, they wouldn't dare ask you for more. Olya's OK as well, she's fulfilled her norm. But me! They'll give me a plan and then I can kiss my dissertation goodbye.' ["A Week Like Any Other", 8])

The following day at work Ol'ga discovers her co-workers embroiled again in arguments about the motherhood issue. In partic lar, they are discussing question five of the questionnaire: «Если вы не имеете детей, то по какой причине: медицинские показания, материально-бытовые условия, семейное положение, личные соображения и пр. (нужное подчеркнуть)». ("Nedelia kak nedelia", 32) ("If you have no children please give the reason: medical evidence; material circumstances; family situation; personal reasons, etc...[please underline whichever is relevant]." ["A Week Like Any Other", 19]) Some women find fault with the question for its tactlessness;

others wish to shift the burden of guilt on married women or women of childbearing age; others declare women without children to be selfish. The conversation ends in an emotional chaos as the issue unleashes each woman's personal resentments and conflicting commitments. One of the women tries to reason with the rest,

> «Товарищи, ну что вы так разгорячились, в конце концов каждая из вас сама выбрала свою долю»...
>
> Стало потише, и тут мелкая душонка Зинаиды вырвалась визгливым вскриком:
>
> --Сама-то сама, а вот когда приходится за них дежурить, или в командировку на заводы таскаться, или на отчетно-выборном вечере просидеть, то и нас касается. ("Nedelia kak nedelia", 34)
>
> ('Comrades, why are you getting so excited? In the end we all choose our own fate.'
> Everyone calms down. Then narrow-minded, mean Zinaida shouts out:
> 'Well, maybe we do. But when we have to stand in for them [working mothers], trudging around factories on business trips, or sitting all evening at meetings, then it affects us as well.' ("A Week Like Any Other", 22)

Although the nine women work together, statements such as Zinaida's suggest a diversity perhaps unrecognised by Ol'ga. Throughout the story her identity is simultaneously defined by her own introspection which the questionnaire demands of her and by the perceptions of the other women around her. While discussing the questionnaire, Ol'ga and the two Lusias are approached by one of the senior researchers, Maria Matveievna, a seventy-year-old model Soviet worker. Ol'ga tries to explain to her how the questionnaire accentuates the tensions between her private and public life:

--...у меня двое детей и я этого... стесняюсь, что ли... Мне почему-то неловко--двадцать шесть лет и двое детей, вроде это...

--Дореволюционный пережиток...--подсказывает Люся черная.

--Что вы такое говорите, Люся!--возмущается Марья Матвеевна. --Не выдумывайте. Оля. Вам надо гордиться тем, что вы хорошая мать, да еще и хорошая производственница. Вы настоящая советская женщина!

Эм-Эм говорит, а я спрашиваю--про себя, конечно,--почему мне надо гордиться; такая ли уж я хорошая мать; стоит ли меня хвалить как производственницу и что же входит в понятие «настоящая советская женщина»! ("Nedelia kak nedelia", 29)

('I have two children and I'm ashamed of it. I feel uncomfortable. I'm twenty-six, I have two children, and somehow, I feel like a...'

'...throwback to pre-revolutionary Russia,' prompts Dark Lusya.

'Really, Lusya,' says Maria Matveyevna indignantly. 'Now listen, Olya, you must be proud of yourself, you're a good mother and a good worker. You're a real Soviet woman.'

M.M. speaks and I wonder why I should feel proud. Am I such a good mother? Am I really a praiseworthy worker? And what is a "real Soviet woman" anyway? ["A Week Like Any Other", 12])

Ol'ga's doubts about her fragmented identity are never resolved within the framework of the story. Rather than offering solutions or criticism, Baranskaia seems more interested in exploring how Soviet women try to perceive themselves in the midst of accomplishing a variety of balancing acts between their public and private lives. Inevitably Ol'ga's social relations help her to make comparative distinctions between herself and her fellow workers. In the eyes of the state, according to a party member such as Maria Matveevna, Ol'ga is an exemplary Soviet woman. Yet Ol'ga's own

experience tells her that something is terribly wrong if a life which leaves her tired and worn at the age of twenty-six is officially considered ideal.

The third group of women protagonists represented in the six remaining stories by Barankaia and I. Grekova are primarly older women. I have divided this group into mother and non-mother characters, although their collective character trait remains that of a maternal sensitivity. The four mother characters are further defined by their single status, whether due to divorce, widowhood, or having never married. Liudka, the protagonist-narrator of "The Purse", is separated from her husband, has a young son, and lives with her mother. Her life is arranged so that she has the time and space to work at home as a writer. Just as she is beginning a story about a lonely woman "с грустными глазами"[46] ("with sad eyes"[47]), her work is interrupted by Igor, an old friend and former highschool sweetheart. Liudka still harbours a regret that she never married him. However, during their walk in a nearby park, Igor loses his wallet and keys, and with these his temper. He must leave immediately to find a locksmith and borrows money from Liudka. He "насупленно молчит" (is "silent and scowling") as she waits with him for his bus: "Мне становится тягостно с ним. Я думаю: «Хорошо, что я не вышла за него замуж.»" ("Koshelek", 270) ("His presence now depressed me. 'What a good thing I didn't marry him,' I thought." ["The Purse", 67]) Liudka inevitably prefers the relative freedom inherent in her present life; her relationship with Igor permits her to realise that the identity of being a married woman cannot mesh with her concept of herself. Indeed,

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[46] Baranskaia, "Koshelek", Zhenshchina s zontikom: Povest i rasskazy (Moscow: «Sovremennik», 1981) , 267.

[47] Baranskaia, "The Purse", trans. Pieta Monks, A Week Like Any Other, 63.

she is ultimately concerned with the process of writing and the creation of (alternative) identities, as the memory of Igor fades away and

> появляется одинокая женщина с грустными глазами...Я знаю, что произойдет с ней дальше. Распорядиться ее судьбой я не могу, я только знаю, что ее ждет. А что ждет меня?
>
> На этот вопрос я отвечаю:
>
> --Тебя ждет письменный стол, отличная бумага,
>
> ручка...Прибавь-ка шагу! ("Koshelek", 270)
>
> (the lonely woman with sad eyes rematerialised...I knew what was going to happen to her, and I couldn't alter it. And what about my life?
> I answered myself: 'A writing table, paper of excellent quality and a pen. Forward march!' ["The Purse", 67])

In I. Grekova's "The Ladies' Hairdresser", Maria is the mother of Kolia and Kostia, two sons aged twenty-two and twenty, and heads a Moscow computer institute. The demands of providing for her lazy, jovial sons and running the institute despite an incompetent staff leave Maria little time for the research she cherishes or for leisure. On the spur of the moment, she stands in line at a hair salon in an attempt to improve her appearance. She takes the risk of accepting an appointment with a young apprentice, Vitali, who turns out to be not only a talented hairdresser but also an ambitious, inquisitive, intelligent young man. During the long process of cutting, colouring and curling her hair, a friendship begins to form. Maria informally becomes a motherly mentor for Vitali: she marvels at the talents and strong sense of motivation of the deprived orphan in comparison to her sons' lackadaisical character despite all of their advantages of having a home and a good education. Maria's new hairstyle pleases her and she begins to visit Vitali frequently. His hairdressing may be interpreted as a metaphor for altering or enhancing one's image; this is, after all, Maria's underlying desire

in her first impulsive visit to the hair salon. Yet her relationship with Vitali is not purely cosmetic. Although the factors of age, gender, education and experience would usually create an immense chasm between the two, they are irresistibly drawn to each other due to these very differences. Vitali's observations and dreams cause Maria to question her own values, her sense of self, and the nature of her friendship with this young man.

The identities of two other mother characters, Baranskaia's Zoia of "A Delicate Subject" and Nadezhda of "The Kiss", are also largely defined by their social relations. Zoia and Nadezhda, both grandmothers, are devoted to the welfare of their working daughters. One summer Zoia is looking after her daughter's, Galina's, son at their rented dacha while Galina commutes to Moscow to work. In the fall when little Igor can attend kindergarten, Zoia plans to work again so that they can all live off her pension and salary. In the meantime, Zoia is summoned by her dacha landlady, Alevtina Pavlovna, who informs her of a "scandal": Galina is driven into town by Alexei, her son-in-law. Alevtina Pavlovna accuses Galina, a single mother, of being "debauched", of chasing after her son-in-law, and insists that this state of affairs must end. Although Zoia strongly protests in defence of Galina's innocence, she must give way to the domineering landlady and explain the matter to her daughter. Galina in turn refuses the son-in-law's offer for a lift into work the following morning and takes the commuter bus as usual.

Baranskaia's third-person narration of "A Delicate Subject" differs from most of her stories' narrative schemes, which tend to centre on a single subject, because it focuses on one character at a time, shifting its lens when a new character enters the plot. For more than half of the story, we read the "delicate subject" from Zoia's standpoint; the emphasis shifts to her daughter when she sets out to work the following morning; finally, after his offer has

been refused, the narration deals with the son-in-law's perspective on the matter. Each character is linked to the next by certain social relations; the story would not be so fluid if the characters were presented in another order.

The mother-daughter relationship between Zoia and Galina is based on mutual support. Zoia cares for her daughter's son until he is able to attend school while Galina works to provide for the three of them. Needless to say, their financial situation is tight; they are at the mercy of Alevtina everytime they are late in paying the rent for the dacha. It is difficult for Zoia to ask her daughter to stop accepting Alexei's rides into Moscow which alleviate the stress of daily commuting for Galina. Moreover, no one except the self-righteous landlady can perceive any moral dilemma in Alexei's and Galina's commuting arrangement. Yet, due to Alevtina's broad sphere of influence, Zoia, Galina and Alexei feel obliged to adhere to her demands; especially from Zoia's and Galina's point of view, the question of choice is no longer an issue.

The protagonist of "The Kiss" is confronted with a different kind of choice. In her forties, Nadezhda works as a philologist, "старший научный сотрудник института АН СССР, обитательница однокомнатной квартиры, интересная женщи:а"[48] ("a senior scholar at the Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, the occupant of a one-room apartment, and an attractive woman..."[49]). At a party she meets a younger man, Viktor, who is attracted to her. He sees her home in a taxi and the next day suggests that they meet again. Caught up in the excitement of a possible romance, Nadezhda takes pains to prepare a dinner for two at her apartment. Meanwhile, her daughter, Natasha, who has recently had a baby, phones

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[48] Baranskaia, "Potselui", Zhenshchina s zontikom , 264.

[49] Baranskaia, "The Kiss", trans. Wanda Sorgente, Balancing Acts , 3-4.

her to ask her to spend the night at her place and to pick up some essentials for her. At first, Nadezhda chooses to continue with her elaborate dinner preparations, but twelve minutes before the appointed time she decisively packs a shopping bag with her provisions and takes the subway to her daughter's place.

For Nadezhda, her independent single status allows her to make many choices. Although her identity is founded in her strength and self-reliance, it is modified by her relations with others. She is immensely flattered and excited by Viktor's attentions, which reassure her that inspite of recently becoming a grandmother she can still enjoy a romantic relationship. Nevertheless, the form this relationship will take remains uncertain and already she questions how it would change her life. Her faithful commitment to Natasha is altogether different; the fact that they now share the experience of motherhood perhaps enhances Nadezhda's maternal impulse to protect and care for her daughter.

The final two stories feature childless, older single women characters: Sofia, a senior university professor in Baranskaia's "The Woman with the Umbrella" and Vera, a hotel manager in I. Grekova's novella "The Hotel Manager". Despite their lack of children, both women's professions partially assume a maternal quality. When Sofia reflects on her "never-ending stream" of students and graduate students, she does it with a certain motherly sensitivity. She does not distinguish individual relationships with these students, but rather, she presides as an adoptive mother of a collective whole. In the same way, the students celebrate her birthday every year, despite the fact that each time it is a different combination of individuals who do so. However, when she vacations at her dacha, the sixty-year-old Sofia is regarded by the other dacha renters as an eccentric recluse, a

"Шпенапка"[50] ("Tramp Lady"[51]) carrying an old broken umbrella. Outside of the social relationships via her career (public sphere), Sofia's identity cannot be appreciated or respected.

While the manner in which Sofia is perceived radically differs according to her public and private positions, Vera's vocation as a hotel manager defines her entire life. "The Hotel Manager" maps her years of selflessly serving her husband and entertaining his guests which later prepares her for her career after his death. As she works her way up to becoming the manager of a hotel, her own home still functions as a personal hotel and hospital: there she shelters and cares for her ailing mother and houses an aging actress and her best friend's teenage daughter. She also has two successive relationships with married men, both of whom sporadically visit her, profiting from her seemingly endless hospitality and generosity. Vera's identity is inextricably linked with her role as a hotel manager and all of the maternal qualities such a profession demands.

I have briefly discussed how, in each of the selected works by I. Grekova and Baranskaia, women's identities are forged largely through their social relationships with others. Yet it is interesting that their relationships with other women often differ from those with men. I have noticed that the various stories portray instances representative of women's lives. No matter how short the narrative, I. Grekova and Baranskaia take great care to establish the given woman protagonist's identity by relating her position in society; in many ways, the stories may be more aptly described as character

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[50] Baranskaia, "Zhenshchina s zontikom", Zhenshchina s zontikom , 188.

[51] Baranskaia, "The Woman with the Umbrella", trans. Pieta Monks, A Week Like Any Other , 214.

sketches, portrayal of the protagonist's everyday life, instead of linear action plots directed toward a certain resolution.

Frequently, the relationship arising out of the protagonists' interaction with other women characters is similar to a women's network. In many of the stories discussed the protagonists interact with certain women--mothers, daughters, friends: these interactions, if portrayed in a positive light, function as women's support systems. One of the ideal support systems among women is represented in "A Week Like Any Other". Ol'ga and her three co-workers can rely on each other for advice, sympathy, condolence, humour, and practical help in a way which would be difficult to expect from their husbands or other colleagues. Their mutual support serves as a buffer against the everyday hardships with which they are confronted.

Whereas Ol'ga's support system is located somewhat like a private oasis in the midst of the public sphere of her work place, other women's networks occur in the privacy of their home(s). In "The Hotel Manager", Vera's house comes to be shared by three generations of women: Anna Savishna, Vera's mother, Margarita Antonovna, a retired actress, and Vera herself. Shortly after Anna Savishna's death, Vika Smolina, the young daughter of Vera's best friend, appears on the doorstep and asks to be taken in. Although the three women are not related, their relationship develops strong familial undertones:

> И вообще, в этой семье[52], в своеобразном содружестве двух женщин--стареющей и старой,--Викина запальчивая молодость

[52] Whereas Michel Petrov has chosen to translate this word as "house" in English, note that in the original Russian text, I. Grekova uses the word "sem'ia" ("family") which better reflects the how these women, unrelated by family ties, nevertheless constitute a family. Later in the same passage, Petrov qualifies the term "aunties", although I. Grekova does not make this distinction. For all intents and purposes, the two older women are aunts to Vika and she addresses them as such.

пришлась как нельзя было кстати. Обе тетушки души в ней не чаяли. Каждая по-своему наставляла ее на путь истинный, настолько по-разному, что физически нельзя было слушаться обеих...[53]

(In that house, with the singular friendship of two women, an aging one and an old one, Vika's impetuous youth was very much welcome. Both 'aunties' adored her. Each in her own way tried to set Vika on the right path, but in such different ways that it would have been impossible to follow both.)[54]

Other women's support systems consist of mother and daughter teams. In "The Purse", Ludka shares an apartment with her mother and young son; Blonde Lusia of "A Week Like Any Other" has a similar arrangement with her mother. "A Delicate Subject" reveals Zoia to be living with her single daughter and her grandchild. While Nadezhda of "The Kiss" does not reside with her married daughter and grandchild, she is devoted to their well-being.

Through their prose, Baranskaia and I. Grekova seem to implicitly suggest a set of ideal values concerning women's ability to nurture, mother, and provide moral and practical support for each other. Thus, a strong sense of disappointment ensues when a possible network fails to materialise. This is particularly true of the first two stories discussed--"Liubka" and "At Her Father's and Her Mother's Place"--in which the expected relationship between mothers and daughters has broken down or failed in some essential way.

While all of these stories about women encompass aspects of women's identity and the importance of support groups among women, they

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[53] I. Grekova, "Khoziaika gostinitsy", Zvezda 9 (1976) 105.

[54] I. Grekova, "The Hotel Manager", Russian Women: Two Stories, trans. Michel Petrov (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983) 266-267.

do not exclude the presence of male figures. Yet, because the stories largely relate the continuity of women's lives, male characters often enter the narrations by temporarily intersecting or interrupting them. Their presence may hail the advent of welcome changes in the women's lives or, conversely, problematize them. This statement calls for some qualification: I would not like to give the impression that the men can only serve in one of two oppositionary roles. Talia's father's role in "At Her Father's and Her Mother's Place" serves various purposes; as a parent, he is far more committed to nurturing his daughter than is her mother. However, Talia's stay with her father only represents a brief interlude in her life spent mainly residing at her mother's apartment.

Baranskaia and I. Grekova tend to portray men as isolated and interruptive events in women's lives. The number of single mother characters--Blonde Lusia, Galina, Liudka, Maria, Nadezhda, Liubka's mother, Vika's mother, Talia's mother-- attests to the temporary interventions of the (mostly anonymous) men who have fathered their children and since died, divorced or abandoned them in the pre-history of the stories discussed.[55]

In other cases, within the fictional chronotope[56], men briefly enter women's lives as a romantic event. In "The Kiss", after the younger Viktor meets Nadezhda, he kisses her in the elevator when they leave the party together, he takes her home in a taxi, the next day he telephones to insist that he must see her again, prompting Nadezhda to invite him for dinner the

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[55] The potential power and exclusivity of all-women relationships and bonding are tempered by the brief insertion of male characters so that any suggestion of lesbianism is dismissed and the heterosexual conventions remain intact.

[56] Chronotope is a term used by Bakhtin which means literally "time-space". See M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: U of Texas P, 1981).

following evening.[57] Within the confines of the story's spatial time, Nadezhda's encounter with Viktor is an unusual, unexpected, and fleeting event which has disrupted the daily rhythm of her life: a single, independent career woman, she enjoys a considerable amount of freedom, modified by her commitment to her daughter. Indeed, as she prepares for her dinner with Viktor, she already speculates how her life would change if they were to have an intimate relationship; her decision to break their date is based not only on her deeply-rooted sense of loyalty to her daughter, but also because her principal concern about a relationship with Viktor would most likely entail an invasion and eventual erosion of her freedom, time, identity:

> Вдруг, оставшись с ней до утра, он скажет, что намерен здесь жить. Или наоборот: в какое-то утро исчезнет и больше никогда не придет. Но до того, как оставить ее, он сделается невнимателен, забывчив, она же--подозрительна и ревнива. Он молод, красив. Страх старости удесятерится в ней. Начнет считать морщины, красить волосы, ходить по косметичкам. Потеряет свою независимость, потеряет счастливую легкость хорошо поработавшего и хорошо отдохнувшего человека...
>
> ("Potselui", 265)
>
> (What if, after spending the night with her, he suddenly says that he intends to move in? Or the other way round: he'll disappear one morning and never come back. But before leaving her, he'll become inattentive and forgetful, while she'll be suspicious and jealous. He's young and handsome. Her fear of old age will grow tenfold. She'll start counting her wrinkles, dying her hair, and running to facial salons. She'll lose her independence; she'll lose that carefree ease that you see in people who work well and relax well.. ["The Kiss", 5])

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[57] Sarah Westphal has pointed out that the delicate eroticism implied in the older woman/younger man liaison in "The Kiss" is a departure from the conventional portrayal of women's heterosexual relationships. I would add that Baranskaia only goes so far as to suggest the possibility of a liaison rather than to explore it.

Liudka also places greater importance on her independence and freedom than on romantic pursuits, although, unlike Nadezhda, she usually shares her apartment with her mother and son. "The Purse" opens and closes with Liudka's sitting alone at her desk on the verge of writing a short story. Her son is away at the dacha, her mother is supposedly working, and Liudka has taken an extra precaution to ensure that this precious privacy is uninterrupted by disconnecting the telephone. Despite these measures, her friend Igor arrives at her door, his knocking shattering her contemplation. He insists on going for a walk with her in the park, but upon losing his keys and wallet, he just as abruptly leaves her. Igor serves only to divert the protagonist's attention momentarily away from her writing, the activity which, along with her family, provides continuity in her life.

In a different way, Alexei also unwittingly disrupts the regular pattern of Galina's life in the story "A Delicate Subject". Instead of commuting to work by bus as usual, she has accepted his offers to drive her into Moscow a few times. Before this arrangement can become a habit, Alevtina insists that the "scandal" come to an end. Thus, Alexei resumes his solitary drives to work and disentangles himself from the fabric of Galina's life. As opposed to Nadezhda, Galina benefits from Alexei's chauffeuring services, a welcome perk in her tiring schedule. But she cannot afford to risk poor relations with her landlady as she assumes her share of responsibility for the upkeep of the household.

In I. Grekova's stories, male characters appear and disappear in women's lives, functioning as events over slightly more sustained periods of time. The title "The Ladies' Hairdresser" names the young man, Vitali, who becomes the focus in Maria's life for several months; yet, with a couple of exceptions, they only meet when Maria makes an appointment at the hair

salon. Their friendship exists where the margins of their lives intersect. When Vitali finally decides to change his profession at the end of the story, it is doubtful that the two will ever meet on a regular basis again, if at all.

Men and women periodically interrupt the life of Vera, the heroine of "The Hotel Manager", as though they were checking in and out of a hotel (Vera even meets her last lover, Sergei, because he is a guest at the hotel where she works). The difference between them is that virtually all of the women live with Vera and become committed to mutually supporting and caring for each other, whereas the men--first Vera's husband, and subsequently two married men--are more absent than present in her everyday life. When they do occasionally appear, they expect food, shelter, and loving attention. The second of the married men, Sergei, certainly treats her with far more respect than the other men. However, as the story concludes, he, too, remains more of a benevolent visitor than an active participant in her life.

Although I have only selected a few stories to discuss in this chapter, they faithfully represent some of I. Grekova's and Baranskaia's most significant themes. In other works, I. Grekova does not necessarily focus on "women's field", nor do her heroines always rely on a women's support group to survive. Her story "No Smiles" ("Bez ulybok") is a case in point: in a Kafkaesque setting, the woman narrator/protagonist faces a (all male) Special Commission at her institute which has accused her of "Порочное направление в науке"[58] ("fallacious orientation in research"[59]). Her only friends, two male colleagues at the institute, try unsuccessfully to defend her

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[58] I. Grekova, "Bez ulybok", Na ispytaniiakh: Povesti i rasskazy (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990) 434.

[59] I. Grekova, "No Smiles", trans Dobrochna Dyrez-Freeman, The New Soviet Fiction: Sixteen Short Stories, ed. Sergei Zalygin (New York: Abbeville P, 1989) 79.

case. Sergei Zalygin finds that, due to I. Grekova's personal experience in high academic circles,

> in her fiction she often depicts the life of the Russian scientific intelligentsia. The novella "On Probation" (1967)...was subjected to biased criticism for its truthful portrayal of a collaboration between scientists and the military. In "No Smiles"...she gives a candid account of the ordeal and the consequences of such criticism.[60]

Baranskaia also writes from perspectives other than women's point of view. However, these stories by her which adopt a male gaze tend to produce rather flat images of men; their identity often remains two-dimensional as compared to the multi-faceted characters emerging from her portrayals of women. When writing a man's story, it would seem that Baranskaia relies on more traditional formulae, such as a man finding his destiny in sharing his life with the ideal motherly woman. "The Petunin Affair" ("Proisshestvie s Petuninym") is a good example of such a formula: after struggling unsuccessfully with office politics, the narrator/hero, Petunin, turns to the mysterious and beautiful Nina, a single mother, for solace. At the end of the story entitled "Fragmentary Notes" ("Otryvochnye zapisi"), he relates how he is gradually becoming part of the family: Petunin's emphasis on this new found joy appears to be a return or regression to childhood; he identifies more readily with Nina's infant son as opposed to assuming such adult roles as husband/lover/father:

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[60] Sergei Zalygin, bibliographical notes, The New Soviet Fiction , 388. Yet no where in his assessment of I. Grekova's work does Zalygin mention the frequent portrayal of women in her many stories and novels.

> Теперь в конце каждой недели я уезжаю в Лопатинск и провожу субботний вечер с Ниной и Петушком. Я чувствую, как она становится все доверчивее и мягче. С Петушком мы большие друзья. И когда разыграемся и расшалимся, порой нам обоим попадает от «нашей мамы» (так говорит Петушок), и за эти слова я люблю его еще больше.[61]
>
> (Now I go to Lopatinsk at the end of each week and spend Saturday evenings with Nina and Petya [her son]. I can feel her becoming warmer and more trusting. Petya and I are great friends. And when our play gets too loud or our antics too boisterous, we sometimes both get it from "our Mum", as Petya says, and for these words I love him even more.)[62]

It is interesting to also note that even in a story such as "The Petunin Affair" where the protagonist is a man, an integral part of his role becomes that of the interruptive element in the pattern of a woman's private life. Moreover, Nina, who is located in the margins of the story as a whole, increasingly becomes the focus towards the conclusion of Petunin's narration, despite the fact that he labels the final section "Fragmentary Notes".

In conclusion, the founding of women's identity is largely through their social relations: on the one hand, with her (permanent) women's network or support system; on the other hand, with her (temporary) relationships with men. Public and private worlds are assimilated by portraying the heroine in her everyday life—at work, at home, at social occasions, shopping, taking public transportation, and so on. In the following chapter, I explore what happens when women protagonists are uprooted from this familiar foundation and displaced to the more alien setting of the hospital.

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[61] Baranskaia, "Proisshestvie s Petuninym", Otritsatel'naia zhizel' , 233.

[62] Baranskaia, "The Petunin Affair", trans. Pieta Monks, A Week Like Any Other , 120.

Chapter Two

General Hospital Soviet Style: Private Women in Public Places

This discussion of the fictional hospital settings depicted by Russian women writers entails beginning thought from women's lives. It is important to begin with Russian women's own experiences in hospitals and clinics in order to question the premises of fictional accounts and to avoid treating women as theoretical abstractions. This shift in one's methodological approach to conducting research has been promoted by Dorothy Smith[63] and others[64]; Elshtain echos her concern: "One must first *locate* the female subject in creating a feminist political theory *for* and *about* her..." (303)

Hansson and Lidén interview a variety of Soviet women living in Moscow. Their thirteen interviews have provided a medium through which we can learn not simply how these women live but also

> how the women themselves regarded their life-style. Were they aware of the implications of their situation? Did they discuss them? What did they consider their greatest problems? Did they envision any solutions? Did they feel imprisoned by the ingrained sex roles that characterize Soviet society? How were they able to manage their double roles as workers and as wives and mothers?[65]

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[63] Dorothy Smith, "A Sociology for Women", The Everyday World as Problematical: A Feminist Sociology, (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987) 49-104.

[64] Especially Sandra Harding, whose comments I quoted and discussed in the Introduction.

[65] Moscow Women: Thirteen Interviews, xx. This work was originally published in Sweden in 1980. To my knowledge, there is no published Russian copy of the transcription from the tape recordings of the interviews which were conducted in Russian without an interpreter in Moscow, in the spring of 1978. Therefore, I am obliged to quote the Russian women in the English translation. All of the women's names have been changed to protect them. Although Hansson and Lidén admit in their preface to the book that "it is difficult to give a complete picture of the situation of Soviet women in thirteen interviews", nevertheless, "a number of important patterns did emerge." (xx) In their book, Hansson and Lidén include

I have excerpted the interviews to convey these women's experiences in hospitals for the purpose of my study. Providing a personal context grounded in real-life experience for the fictional prose I discuss later in this chapter, their comments touch particularly upon reproduction issues: abortion, poor conditions in maternity wards, the pain of labour and abortion without sedatives, gender in relation to the medical profession, and so on. Although the women interviewed come from all walks of life, their opinions reflect to a striking degree a common set of values and their experiences are so uniform that they seem to have taken place in the same hospital. Here, then, are brief introductions of six of the thirteen women interviewed, along with selected passages from those conversations:

Liza, a twenty-eight year old editor, is divorced and has one son. She drops off little Emil at a "boarding school" daycare on Monday mornings and collects him for the weekend on Friday evenings. She has had seven abortions. On the topic of abortions she confesses:

> ...It's hard both physically and psychologically. Now that it's done with drugs there's no pain, but it's hard on the psyche.
> *How are women affected?*
> There are painful repercussions. There's no way of thinking about anything else when you're pregnant and you have to wait two months for an abortion. Then the aftermath is difficult. It affects not only your sex life, but also life in general. Sometimes I fear that I may be pregnant again; then I can't think about anything else, can't write, can't read, can't do anything. People say that when a woman gives birth to a child she gets younger, and when she has an abortion she gets twice as old. So I have become seven times as old!...The only concern doctors seem to have is to make

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short chapters on various aspects of the position(s) of women in Soviet society, providing important facts and statistics which enhance the testimonial information.

abortions relatively painless. Previously no drugs were given. But the dread of pregnancy still remains stronger than anything else... *[about her own pregnancy]*... The delivery was very difficult. They don't use any drugs, gas, anything. None of the women around me wanted them either. I begged for a Caesarean, howled like an animal, couldn't stand the pain any longer. I screamed so much that they finally had to give me something to induce labor, and I had terrible contractions and kept on screaming until there was blood in my mouth...My baby was born in a special clinic, but still...During the delivery I was badly torn, but they didn't even sew me up. Recently I went to a gynecologist who asked me whether I had given birth in the country--but in fact I gave birth at a special clinic in the capital.

...How was the hospital? How many in each ward?

There were twelve in each ward. I was happy to be among all those women. One is so sensitive after a delivery--all of them were so open and receptive. They listened to me, and of course I gabbed on as usual--not about babies, but my usual propaganda. We had some lively discussions. I get sentimental when I think about the time I spent there.

Didn't you discuss the problems of women?

No. We talked about literature and politics, very little about children. (Hansson and Lidén, 21-23)

Lida, thirty-one, is the single mother of a two and a half year old son. She works as a chambermaid. Like Liza's son, Lida's little Danilo stays in a nursery from Monday morning until Friday night. Lida has had one abortion which she describes as "terrible".

How was your delivery?

Incredibly easy--perhaps because I wanted a baby so badly. Everyone was envious. The pregnancy was also easy... But I saw how the other women suffered. The midwives hardly helped them at all, and they didn't get anything to ease their pain. It was horrible to see how they suffered, but I also thought it was humiliating to give birth without anyone caring about me. When my

labor pains began, I went into the room where you give birth, and they left me there. At one point someone came in to get something, and she said, "Oh, you can see the baby already." She ran for help. But he could have fallen out--anything. Then a lot of people appeared, but that's only because she happened to come in at the right moment.

Was it because a lot of women happened to be giving birth just then?

Not at all! Next to me was a girl who had given birth to twins that morning--one was stillborn... Before my delivery they took her away, so I was really the only patient. I don't know what it's like in other places, but that was a humiliating experience. After the delivery I had to walk back to my ward, although one isn't supposed to get up immediately... (Hansson and Lidén,105-106)

Anna, twenty-two, is married and has a three-month old daughter. Although she has not had an abortion, she says, "But that day will probably come, because there isn't a woman alive who doesn't have to have an abortion at some point in her life." (49)

What was it like when you delivered your daughter?

There were seven women in the labor room. Some got drops, some laughing gas. When the labor pains started, the women had to get up and walk to the delivery room. It felt as if the child was going to fall out--it was horribly painful. I think it would be wonderful if fathers could be present at the delivery. Let them see how difficult it is. (Hannson and Lidén, 52)

Thirty-two year old Liuba, an artist, is married for the second time. She has a son from her first marriage. She mentions that the statistics published on how many abortions are done in hospitals fail to include the secret ones...

Secret?

A private abortion costs 35 to 40 rubles. Usually nurses do them. Also doctors. Everyone knows about it, but nobody talks about it.

Why aren't all abortions done in hospitals?

> It's taken for granted that if a woman is absent from work for three days she's having an abortion. If she isn't married people start talking; if she is, maybe she doesn't want people to know. Hospital records are public, so women try to avoid going there...Here everyone is afraid of getting pregnant, terrified of having to have an abortion. It's difficult and painful; I should know, I had one at the hospital. Now they've started giving painkillers. But outside the cities they don't...
>
> *What were conditions like when you had your baby?*
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> My baby was born in a little infirmary in a community outside Kalinin. It was great because I was the only one who had a baby that day. The midwife and her assistant spent all their time with me, talked to me, helped me. I've heard about what it can be like to have a baby here in Moscow, alone, with no one to help...
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> *Did you receive sedatives during your labor pains?*
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> No, and I think that's right, because the mother and child can be damaged by them...After Alyosha was born I heard about natural childbirth. I read that "thanks to the progress made by our doctors, women are able to give birth almost without pain." But I had been totally unprepared....You have to consider that hospital services are free, so you can't expect extra comfort. It's possible to buy extra attention and services, that certainly happens, but...no, they're always afraid that something might happen, so things are usually left as they are. (Hannson and Lidén, 147-149)

Twenty-three-year old Sonia is married and has a newborn daughter. She is on paid maternity leave for the first four months and is entitled to eight unpaid months as well. She feels men are better suited for responsible jobs such as doctors because "the work at home requires much more of the woman than of the man. Women are always tired, but men have time to devote to learning, to developing." (Hannson and Lidén, 60) Sonia has already had two abortions.

> *Was it difficult to get the abortion?*

> No, I had contacts. I knew a female gynecologist. I was given anesthesia and didn't feel a thing. But if one goes to a regular clinic--the official way--it's a very painful procedure. They don't give any painkillers. It's awful.
> *She goes on to talk about deliveries. Not even then is anything given for pain, she says, unless one has contacts. She describes her own experience, how hysteria spread through the labor wards when someone began to scream, and how it felt to get up and walk into the adjacent room when her labor pains began. She had requested to have her husband with her but had been turned down, for hygienic reasons, and she lay there for two days after she delivered, because it was the weekend. It's obvious that Sonya has read a great deal about the West and been influenced by her reading, and she agrees with the other women we interviewed that care in the Soviet Union is inadequate.* (Hannson and Lidén, 63-64)

Masha, also twenty-three, is married and works as a draftswoman at a truck factory. Her daughter is two and a half and stays at a day-care center while the parents work. Masha has not had an abortion and uses the rhythm method (this practice, along with abortion, is the most common form of contraception in the Soviet Union). Masha, like most of her friends and the other women interviewed, live in constant fear of becoming pregnant.

> *Tell us about your delivery.*
> My delivery was difficult and extended. I don't remember if the others got anything for the pain, but I didn't, except at the very end when I got an injection. I don't know if they gave me anything after that because I was so exhausted by then. My labor lasted twenty-four hours. I think there was a doctor in the ward, and probably an aide also, but I wasn't sure because the pain was so terrible. There were five other women in labor in the so-called labor room. When my time came I called, and I had to walk to the delivery room. My daughter was born almost immediately. I wasn't allowed to sleep during the first two hours after delivery. They claim that could be dangerous. Then I was taken to surgery to have stitches.

> There were thirteen women in my ward and it was O.K. I was able to see my daughter the day after the delivery. She was completely swaddled except for her hands, which were bare; it felt so good to hold them. The next day I unwrapped the whole little bundle to see if everything was the way it ought to be. (Hannson and Lidén, 75)

These interviews reveal some of the distinctly different conditions Russian women experience in the field of health care, as opposed to those of their contemporaries in the West. I find it difficult to imagine an economically advantaged Western woman experiencing a "shock of recognition" upon reading these accounts of the poor quality of medical care. As Liuba points out, "hospital services are free", i.e. funded and run by the state. Bribes, connections, and illegal private services can significantly improve the quality of public medical care or even allow women to bypass the public apparatus altogether, as is the case with private abortions; it would appear that, whenever possible, women resort to these means.

By locating the female subject and allowing her a voice by way of the Muscovite women's testimonies, we gain a better idea of hospital conditions in the Soviet Union than if we were to rely on fictionalised accounts alone. The women interviewed relate experiences of intense pain and humiliation in childbirth and abortion. They speak of lack of pain killers, lack of privacy, lack of professional attention and care. Whether aborting or giving birth, they all have had to walk to and from the operating or labour room.

The Soviet woman's position in the hospital only resembles superficially that of the Soviet heroine. Few of the awful realities are translated into or addressed in the prose written by Russian women, although one is safe to assume that all of them have had at least one experience in a Soviet hospital. Their fiction often either avoids or glosses over an actual depiction of the stark, depressing hospital setting. A few

stories mention in passing the lack of supplies or staff, a need for renovations, or the bleakness of the atmosphere. However, none of the narratives, even the first-person narratives of a woman patient, reflect the horror, shame, and, at times, indignation expressed in the interviews.

The hospital locale is the prevalent feature in all of the fiction to be discussed in this chapter. Similar to the interviews cited above, the protagonists' personal experiences transpire in a highly public setting. The hospital or clinic is an unusual facet of the public sector in that it is a site where people's most intimate bodily functions or disfunctions are often on display.[66] Birth and terminal illness, wounds and operations: everyone who passes through the medical institution is recorded into bureaucratic annals. Whether in fiction or in real life, public and private spheres inextricably overlap in the site of the hospital.

In my discussion of public and private in the Introduction, I point out the absence of women in the most powerful, most prestigious sectors of society. Even within fields where women are in a clear majority, such as health care[67], men continue to occupy the highest paid and most prestigious positions such as head doctors, surgeons, specialists, and hospital administrators, "who remain in charge of formulating all national health policy".[68] Thus, like all other public sectors in the Soviet Union, the field of

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[66] One has only to remember how Soviet women giving birth are usually obliged to share a common labour room as well as a large ward.

[67] In 1970 in the Soviet Union, women accounted for 99% of all nurses, 98% of pediatricians, 83% of midwives, and 74% of doctors. Although these statistics have changed very little since then, I find the date significant in that it is roughly the average years around which the hospital stories to be discussed were written. Hansson and Lidén point out that, along with other 'typically female' occupations, "these professions are among the lowest paid... A 1972 budget proposed for the Soviet working family assumed that the man's salary was 50 percent higher than the woman's—it was taken for granted that the woman worked and that she was badly paid." Hansson and Lidén, 27.

[68] Gray, "The Women's Century", Soviet Women, 34. In this chapter, Gray provides some more up-to-date statistics on women's work, salaries, etc, although I find that they differ little from those gathered in Hansson's and Lidén's work over a decade prior. For more recent

medicine is controlled by men. Reinforcing this trend is the common opinion among men and women that men are more suited to such responsible positions. On the one hand, this notion stems from some beliefs in biologically determined masculine and feminine traits; on the other, working women overburdened with household and childrearing duties have scarce time in which to pursue specializations or to simply keep them up to date. Gray interviewed a renowned Georgian gynecologist, who, despite his philanthropic attitude toward women, confirmed the usual Soviet prejudices against women gynecologists:

> Of course there are prejudices, as well there should be! The brainier the woman, the more she tends to prefer men doctors, because our best specialists are clearly men. As you know, over 75 percent of Soviet doctors are women, but they just don't work well. A child gets sick, they take those days off, they take more time off to have babies, they get behind in their research, they're useless to us...in every area of nature, in each species of animal and plant life, there is a specific function which is akin to a vocation, a calling. Snakes, say, must move by crawling on the ground...And a woman's first calling is to educate her family; men will never be able to do it as well as women...what would happen to the future of the planet if women ceased to look on the family as their first priority? *Kaput!* Here at this clinic, I have officially declared that I don't accept women doctors on my staff. Let them complain, let them feel abused... (Gray, 17-18)

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statistics confirming these trends in Soviet society, see Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme: Soviet Women 10:4 (Winter, 1989).

Despite or because of attitudes such as Dr Khomassuridze's expressed above, the reality remains that men tend to specialise more and move to higher positions of prestige and responsibility in the field of medicine than do women. This tendency is reflected time and again in women writers' fictional portrayals of hospitals. Within a medical setting, men are commonly depicted as doctors, usually as specialists or head doctors, whereas women characters most often enter a clinic as patients. Some minor female roles include those of nurses, women's wardens, or janitors.

Of the nine works of prose to be discussed in this chapter, five short stories especially highlight a relationship between a male doctor and a woman patient: Liudmila Petrushevskaia's "The Violin" ("Skripka"); Viktoria Tokareva's stories "Nothing Special" ("Nichego osobennogo") and "Centre of Gravity" ("Tsentrovka"); "In Memoriam" ("Na pamyat' ") by Tat'iana Nabatnikova; and "Delos" by Natal'ia Sukhanova. These five relationships all exceed in some manner the boundaries of official doctor-patient interactions, demonstrating the difficulties inherent in the medical profession of separating a doctor's public duty to his patient(s) from his private, emotional attachment to a given one. The doctors in these stories come to assume other roles beyond their public jurisdiction, such as those of a father, a lover, a confident or a friend.

The title of Elshtain's book, Public Man, Private Woman, aptly names how men and women are largely perceived and treated in society. The selected stories here reveal, despite the majority of women employed in the field of medicine, how these Russian women writers often choose to place

male characters in the public role of the doctor.[69] Yet, in these stories and others to be discussed, it is the private sphere which attracts and modifies the public one in the form of personal relationships; to a certain extent, the private woman privatises the public man, personalises the public space. The male doctor characters find themselves performing their own kind of balancing act, juggling their public duties with their personal impulses, a plight similar to that of many women protagonists depicted by Russian women writers.

The head doctor in "The Violin" develops a paternal attitude toward Lena, the protagonist who lies about her life. The doctor takes a special interest in this pregnant woman. He realises, perhaps even from the start, that her whole act is a sham; yet, possibly out of sympathy, he allows her to remain at the hospital for a month. He eventually must resume his authority by issuing her discharge, despite the knowledge that she probably has no place to go. In the end, the doctor's professionalism precedes his personal concern for Lena. In fact, it is difficult to ascertain whether this interest is simply an extension of his bedside manner, an integral part of his public persona, because Petrushevskaia does not provide the reader with any greater insight into his character.

In Tokareva's hospital stories, the doctor characters profess a more convincing personal concern in the welfare of their patients. Moreover, their role is not limited to the hospital setting: Tokareva further personalises them

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[69] This is not to say that women are never portrayed as doctors in any of the hospital stories. Yet, the identities of women doctor characters are not deeply explored and to a large degree they are relegated to silent, passive secondary roles. This feature could support the reality that so few women doctors specialise for in the stories selected the women patients usually require the care of a specialist, such as a surgeon, who is inevitably male. Nevertheless, given that 75% of Soviet doctors are women and that in other fictional settings women portray women both as professionals and as caretakers of others, I find a curious void in the hospital story genre of stories in which a relationship develops between a woman doctor caring for a male patient.

by providing information about their private lives, feelings and experiences. "Nothing Special" deals with the relationship between the sole survivor of a car accident, Margo, and Ivan Korolkov, the surgeon who nurses her back to health. It is in the hospital where Margo experiences true caring under the gentle hands of Korolkov. She comes to regard him almost like a knight in shining armour, an image not far from the tsar-like and fairy-tale king connotations of his name.[70] Korolkov may enjoy a position of prestige at the hospital, but in other regards, he has failed to live up to any of his aspirations. When his chance for true love arrives in the person of Margo, he is unable to make a leap into a new life shared with her. The hospital provides the environment in which, as doctor and patient, their love can be initiated and nurtured. When Margo leaves the hospital and Korolkov meets her for the last time in her apartment, they consummate their love. Ironically, though, in this very act, this love cannot survive for, in the outside world, Korolkov is no longer her doctor, but her lover, with other commitments--to his wife, teenage daughter, and profession.

The hospital also functions as a medium or bridge between public and private worlds in Tokareva's story "Centre of Gravity". Again, the doctor character fulfills to some extent the narrator/protagonist's fairy-tale vision of the ideal man, in that he resembles her first love, Onisimov, and he literally comes to her rescue by preventing her from committing suicide. Unaware of his real name, the narrator names him "Not-Onisimov", at once a negation and a promise of her first love. Like Korolkov, Not-Onisimov is a surgeon.[71]

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[70] Ivan is the name of six of Russia's tsars and "korol' " means "king" in Russian

[71] Although I am well aware of the sexual metaphor implied by the man's role as surgeon--namely that of phallic penetration—and the conscious or unconscious desire of the woman patient for her doctor to become her surgical-sexual healer, I have chosen not to pursue a psychoanalytical critique in this thesis and would rather suggest this subject as the possible starting point for future research.

But whereas in "Nothing Special" Korolkov removes Margo's ruptured spleen, the functions of which can be carried out by one's marrow, Not-Onisimov repairs hearts, literally in the case of Alla, his patient at the hospital, and metaphorically in the case of the narrator of "Centre of Gravity". To a certain extent, Not-Onisimov balances and combines his public and private commitments: the action begins late at night in the narrator's apartment, where the doctor intervenes in her private despair. Together they proceed to the hospital, where Alla also suffers a deep depression in isolation. After the narrator has convinced Alla to try to go on living, the narrator and Not-Onisimov return to their apartment block as the sun is rising.

The story illustrates the fluidity between public and private worlds, how healing and the role of the hospital can be stretched as a metaphor to describe some human relations. The hospital itself is perceived by the narrator as another world, a cluster of white buildings, "казалось, что корпуса в медицинских халатах"[72] ("like doctors' white coats"[73]), the halls of which are silent and deserted at after-midnight hours, a place where boundaries are erased and possibilities undreamed of could transpire. The narrator remains dressed in her white wedding dress, in which she was going to commit suicide earlier on, and she thus appears as an other-worldly vision to Alla. It is only when the narrator's glasses fall from her face onto Alla's and Alla puts them on that she can clearly see that this strange visitor truly exists. The narrator then convinces Alla to try to walk; it is a moment of healing and new hope for them both:

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[72] Viktoriia Tokareva, "Tsentrovka", Letaiushchie kacheli: Nichego osobennogo: Povesti i rasskazy (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987) 250.

[73] Viktoria Tokareva, "Centre of Gravity", trans Michael Glenny, Granta: New Europe! 30: 100.

Она встала. Мы обнялись и медленно вышли из палаты в коридор. На мне было белое свадебное платье, на Алле белая больничная рубаха с печатью на спине. Мы медленно продвигались, обнявшись, как привидения, и мне казалось, что если мы подпрыгнем, то взлетим и поплывем. Ее слабость перетекала в меня, а в нее--моя радость, та самая, которую я люблю больше всего на свете и от которой мне хотелось бы умереть. Но сейчас мне не хотелось умирать. Мое деловое настроение пропало, улетучилось. Я хотела одного идти вот так, обнявшись, и, как бабочку в ладошке, нести эту чужую хрупкую жизнь (Tokareva, 253)

(She was up. We walked slowly out of the room and into the corridor, I with my white wedding-dress, Alla in her white patient's gown with the hospital stamp on the back. We clutched each other like a pair of white ghosts, and I had the feeling that if we were to jump in the air we would take off and float Her weakness flowed into me, and my gladness flowed into her, the gladness that I love more than anything else on earth and would like to die of But at that moment I didn't want to die. My earlier mood had gone, vanished. I wanted only one thing to keep walking with Alla, my arms around her, to carry this stranger's fragile life, like a butterfly in the palm of my hand. [Tokareva, 102])

It is the doctor's turn to marvel at his patients when he comes across the two women supporting each other in the hospital corridor. They have taken the curative process which he had initiated another step further. The narrator describes the night's events as an almost magical happening in which each person reaches out to someone else, "и тогда весь мир замкнется в едином хороводе" (Tokareva, 255) ("and then the whole world would be joined up in a single Grand Chain." [Tokareva,105])

The doctor/patient relationship developed in "In Memoriam" by Nabatnikova remains within hospital limits. The narrator, Magdalina, is

dying of a stomach tumor; her name makes a possible biblical reference to Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus healed of devils (Luke 8:2) and who is traditionally identified with the repentant woman whom Jesus forgave (Luke 7:37–50). The use of this name can be seen as an ironic device: Magdalina dies of her tumors and, instead of repenting, she harshly judges her son. If one were to expand the biblical reference further, Magdalina's doctor could be considered (ironically) a latter day Jesus of sorts. He is unable to heal his patient of her tumors, nor is he in a position to forgive her. Yet, their relationship does resonate with something of the purifying or healing character Jesus imparts to Mary Magdalene when, for example, Magdalina exchanges these words with her doctor and experiences a rush of spiritual strength:

> --Не надо обезболивать. Раз не могу жизнь своими силами переносить-не надо, уберите ее от меня.
>
> Говорю это послдним своим отчаянием, а какой-то незадетый смертью остаток успевает еще раз ненасытно удивиться: прямая четкость носа, бровей, четкость взгляда, о господи, серые глаза, темнота этих светлых глаз и еще что-то неподдающееся: не одолеть словами.
>
> --Не хочу следующего дня,--горько шепчу я.
>
> --Ну вот, в вас еще горечь. Люди, изжившие все запасы, говорят совсем не так. Перестаньте. Я сейчас уберу вашу боль--не лекарством,--говорил он, сосредоточившись пальцами на моем животе.
>
> ...Он сам вытирал мои губи салфеткой, и мне не было стыдна. Как если бы я была его ребенком.
>
> Меня уже не хватает на удивление.

Наверное, последние часы моя душа, спохватившись, решила провести в этом мире самым прекрасным образом [74]

('You don't have to anesthetize me If I'm no longer able to endure life on my own, I don't need it anymore, take it away from me.'

I said this at the height of despair, but some insatiable part of me still untouched by death once again managed to marvel at the straightness of his nose and brows, at the clarity of his gaze—O Lord, his gray eyes, the darkness of those light eyes—and at something else that baffled me, that words could not convey.

'I don't want to live to see tomorrow,' I whispered bitterly.

'See, there is still some bitterness left in you. People who have exhausted all their reserves don't talk like that. Stop it. Now I'll take away your pain—not with medicine,' he said, palpating my stomach with his fingers.

...He wiped my lips with a napkin himself, and I felt no shame.

As if I were his child.

I no longer have enough strength left to be amazed

In all likelihood, my soul, having suddenly come to its senses, has decided to live its last hours on this earth in the most beautiful way possible.)[75]

The story is composed of the last entries she writes into her diary and a final post-mortem paragraph narrated by a third person. Magdalina is virtually alone in the foreign environment of the hospital: her son visits her infrequently and her one roommate dies. The only meaningful interaction she has with anyone during her last month is with her doctor, who administers care and attention with the respect and intelligence she desires and needs in order to die with some sense of dignity intact. She lives in and speaks to the reader through the silent, written world of her diary, which contains her most private thoughts and feelings. In her last entry, she knows that she will die the same day; yet she must wait for her mother to visit her and collect her diary. However, her mother never arrives for she dies at the

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[74] Tatiana Nabatnikova, "Na pamiat' ," Domashnee vospitanie (Moskva. Sovremennik, 1984) 75-6.

[75] Tatiana Nabatnikova, "In Memoriam", trans Catharine Theimer Nepomniashchi, Soviet Women Writing: Fifteen Short Stories (New York: Abbeville, 1990) 124.

same time as Magdalina. It is the doctor in the end whose tremendous respect for his patient induces him to quietly pocket her notebook despite his inner doubts about such a gesture:

> Умереть в то же самое время--вот все, что может сделать один человек в память другого.
>
> А как живому сохранить память, если она будет вскоре завалена домашними хлопотами, простудой жены; вот Харитонову сегодня сделал резекцию желудка--и не вполне удачна, как он там сейчас--надо идти смотреть, думать--тут уж лучше выбросить эту тетрадку в мусорную корзину, чем жалким образом валяться ей в запыленной куче старых писем.
>
> Но рука не поднялась. (Nabatnikova, 84)
>
> (To die at the same time–that's the most one person can do in memory of another.
>
> But how can a living person preserve the memory if it will soon be buried by domestic cares, by his wife's cold; today he performed a stomach resection on Kharitonov–and not altogether successfully, and how is he now–have to go and see, think–so it would be better to throw this notebook in the wastepaper basket than leave it lying pitifully in a dusty pile of old letters.
>
> But his hand refused to move. [Nabatnikova, 130])

Preserving the memory of Magdalina by saving her diary is the doctor's personal gesture; he recognises that it would be a cold, inhuman alternative to dispose of it quickly in the anonymity of a hospital dustbin. If he were to read it one day, he would discover how keenly his patient appreciated every detail of his care, criticising him when he failed to live up to her exacting standards and lauding him when he, for example, fights his staff to keep her room empty of other patients during her final days. He would also learn of her passionate love for him and secret wish for him to take the diary.

The link of memory influences the doctor who narrates the story "Delos" by Sukhanova. In the maternity ward where he works as head doctor, the narrator recognises one of the pregnant women, Ekaterina Semenovna, a former patient of his when he started practicing medicine. Because of his fond memory of her, he strikes up a conversation that leads him to discover, by way of her descriptions of her condition, something that the staff had completely overlooked owing to its extreme rarity: an extra-uterine pregnancy. Ekaterina's unusual pregnancy becomes increasingly a public concern: the doctor is obliged to move her to a more specialised maternity clinic; more staff members become involved in the case; his assistants later write reports to be published in medical journals. At the same time, the doctor's private concerns and doubts grow in importance: while fearing for Ekaterina's life, he must rely on his intuition to guide him in this matter with little medical research to back him up. However, due to the carelessness of an assistant, it is the fetus that perishes. Several months after this event, which continues to haunt and depress the doctor, Ekaterina visits him with her husband and two sons at the hospital. As the doctor observes the family standing together he catches sight of the phantom image of the lost daughter.

This story is saturated with references to Greek mythology; in particular, the myth surrounding the island Delos. Delos, originally a floating island, is eventually chained down to the sea's floor and becomes the refuge given to Leto by Jupiter so that she may give birth in peace to the twins she is carrying. One of these twins, Apollo, not only is the god of light and prophecy and patron of the arts, but also becomes a renowned physician who instructs his own son and Artemis in medicine. This son excels as a physician to the point that he brings the dead to life.

The doctor/narrator is well aware of this story, quoting in particular passages from a Homeric hymn about the island and Leto giving birth. He remarks that if he could name the maternity clinic where he works, he would call it "Delos", for in many ways he perceives it as a place of refuge for pregnant women. This metaphor could be extended to suggest the pregnant woman herself and her womb, the floating place of refuge chained down inside of her. In Ekaterina's case, her fetus exists miraculously, precariously, outside of its protective haven, the uterus. This extraordinary medical phenomenon helps to raise the narration to the level of a modern day myth. Sukhanova's predilection for myth, which she weaves into all levels of the narration, including into the identity of narrator himself, reinforces his traditional role.

"Delos" employs yet another dimension of the myth, for the narrator himself is named Anton Apollinar'evich: his patronymic implies "son of Apollo" and, therefore, an exalted physician capable of bringing the dead to life. Although Anton Apollinar'evich fails to accomplish literally such a feat in the case of Ekaterina's fetus, his profession does involve delivering babies, bringing them safely to life: an everyday miracle.

In these five stories, the doctor characters are all expected, to some extent, to fulfill the mythical role of the son of Apollo, the ultimate healer.[76] Although each of the doctor characters discussed is outstanding in his field of specialisation and assumes a position of great, even godlike, importance at his hospital, none, of course, is humanly capable of satisfying a mythical role. Moreover, each doctor is painfully aware that his public role cannot

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[76] By endowing these doctor characters with stereotypically feminine traits such as the capacity to nurture, gender becomes mobile; one of women's conventional beliefs is that if she loves, she will be loved in return. The portrayal of men who care for women allows for a certain reciprocal relationship.

always mask or remain separate from his private feelings. It could be said that owing to Anton Apollinar'evich's personal empathy and anguish over the death of Katia's daughter, he revives her image in his fantasy. It is perhaps with the same urge to remember a patient that Magdalina's doctor salvages her diary. The stories are a testimony that one's professionalism does not always exclude emotional involvement: the chasm between the public realm of the hospital and the private concerns of the patient may be bridged in the person of the physician.

In other hospital stories and novels by Russian women writers, the doctor remains a secondary character, merely a feature of the hospital local along with nurses and aides. Most of these stories focus primarly on the patient(s) and their relationships with fellow patients and people from the outside world. The site of the hospital, usually a marginalised world in everyday life, becomes the centre of the patient's life, especially if she must spend an extended period of time there. Within this specialised microcosm, she may have time to reflect on her life, her marriage, her career; it is a place where she may meet several other patients, often from very different walks of life, due to sharing a ward or walking on the hospital grounds. Because of the uncertainty or pain of their medical condition and the isolating quality of hospital life, the patients tend to become sensitive and open, relying on each other for comfort and solace.

Several works especially relate how women patients sharing a ward create a small, communal island of privacy within the often alienating environment and indifferent treatment of the public hospital: The Women's Decameron (Zhenskii dekameron) by Iulia Voznesenskaia; A Counterfeit Life (Mnimaia zhizn') by Inna Varlamova; "To Be Carried Through to Term"

("Na sokhranenii") by Elena Makarova; and the aforementioned "The Violin" ("Skripka") by Petrushevskaia.

The division between the outside world and the hospital is particularly stark in the novel The Women's Decameron: the ten women in a maternity ward must cope with living through ten days of an imposed quarantine due to a skin infection going around in the hospital. The solution to easing their impatience and boredom, suggested by Emma, a theatre director, is to follow the story-telling pattern of Boccaccio's Decameron; each day a different theme is chosen about which each women will tell a story. While the themes reflect the women's shared concerns and experiences, the various stories' content and style demonstrate the diversity of Leningrad women represented. The daily series of stories touching on some of the most intimate details of the women's lives finally unites them in an unusual friendship. They form a specialised world in which they can give voice to, make public, their innermost secrets; yet, they remain a collective private whole detached from the rest of the hospital and uninterrupted by the outside world.

The women's cancer ward in A Counterfeit Life functions in a similar but less structured manner. The protagonist, Nora, gradually develops friendships with the rest of the women in her ward as well as with a few patients in other wards. Some of the patients have spent long periods in the hospital. In comparison, Nora is a novice, having breast cancer with good chances for recovery. Through her friendships with two of the patients, Katia and Aureliu, Nora reëxamines her own life and finds it sorely lacking: she can no longer believe in her marriage nor the career she shares with her husband as journalists toeing the party line. She has led a counterfeit existence; another translation of the novel's Russian title would be "an

imaginary life" or "a sham life". When Nora is eventually discharged, she finds it difficult to leave behind the new life she has forged for herself at the hospital:

> Миновав проходную, она поплелась вдоль ограды. Куда она шла, зачем? Ее жизнь осталась здесь. Давно ль эти люди в пестрых халатах казались ей прокаженными? Теперь никого в целом свете роднее не было.[77]
>
> (After she had passed through the entrance, she walked along by the fence. Where was she going? Why? Her life was left behind in there. Had it been so long ago that these people in their motley robes had seemed like lepers to her? Now there was no one in the world dearer to her.[78])

The hospital continues to represent a secret world apart from her everyday life. She must return almost daily to the hospital for treatments. Although she has become an out-patient, she visits her friends, brings them supplies, cheers them on. Nora perceives herself as leading a double life. At the end of the novel she begins to take the first steps to overcoming her own personal trauma experienced at the hospital: the removal of her breast and the resulting scar and X-ray burns on her body. Her friend and lover Aureliu, having found some privacy in a shed on the hospital grounds, takes Nora there and insists on seeing her scar. His gentle kiss along the length of her scar at that moment is perhaps more healing than all of the medical treatment Nora has received. His own death precipitously near, Aureliu bids Nora farewell at the hospital gates, urging her to get on with her life. He has been the last tie linking her to the emotionally charged world of the hospital.

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[77] Inna Varlamova, Mnimaia zhizn' (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979)186.

[78] Inna Varlamova, A Counterfeit Life, trans David A. Lowe (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988) 167-8.

As in many of the stories and novels, the patients' perceptions of the hospital shift dramatically during their stay: at first seen as an inhospitable institution, it gradually reveals its more human aspects. The hospital as a site of medical care can meet other needs such as comradeship, intimacy and love, although not necessarily provided by the staff. The choice of locating women protagonists in a hospital setting could invite broader interpretations. In a society where women are often obliged to assume the role of a full-time caretaker of others at home and at work, an immensely time-consuming role, to enter a hospital for whatever reason immediately relieves them of all other responsibilities. Thus, a woman as a patient experiences a role reversal, becoming the recipient of care. The stories which include a male doctor further emphasise the woman patient's shift of position.[79]

The hospital takes on different nuances depending on the character's medical condition. Many of the stories, not surprisingly, represent women in hospitals or clinics because they are pregnant or having an abortion, both experiences common to most Russian women. Yet, A Counterfeit Life, "Nothing Special", "Centre of Gravity", and "In Memoriam" depict women suffering from fatal or near-fatal ailments—breast cancer, a ruptured spleen, heart disease, a stomach tumor. Some other stories dealing with women patients' endangered lives include three more works by Liudmila Petrushevskaia: "The Isolation Box: A Dialogue" ("Izolirovannyi Boks: Dialog"), "Paniia's Poor Heart" ("Bednoe serdste Panii") and "The Storyteller" ("Rasskazchitsa").

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[79] Women as patients tend to become passively childlike; in Canada, at least, we are becoming increasingly aware of the frequency of male doctors' sexual abusing their women patients. It is important to note how the writers of these hospital stories are controlling romantic variants, processing out the harsher side of social realities.

The severe nature of the characters' illnesses in all of these stories could be seen as indicative of the grim reality of women's condition in Russian society. Furthermore, as Helena Goscilo points out, in some of these contemporary stories,

> the recent female protagonist falls prey to maladies other than fatal despondency (terminal heartbreak having been Romanticism's favorite affliction and cause of heroines' death). In several of their works, Ganina, Varlamova, and Grekova, for instance, deal with heart disease, breast cancer, and other 'unappealing' sicknesses that demystify and demythologize a woman's body.[80]

Contrary to Goscilo's observations, I find that the painful reality of the diseases and medical complications or conditions in most of the stories is often glossed over or even aesthetised, although the pretext for locating women in a fictional hospital setting does tend to reflect the specificity of women's bodies: pregnancy (The Women's Decameron, "Delos", "The Violin", "Paniia's Poor Heart"); abortion ("Na sokhranenie", The Hotel Manager" Paniia's Poor Heart"); cancer ("The Isolation Box"); especially cancer of the breast (A Counterfeit Life) and uterus ("The Story Teller"). Nevertheless, the nature of a patient's physical condition and the scientific examination of it do not always guarantee a less cryptic, more "truthful" representation of her body in some of the hospital stories. "Delos", "Centre of Gravity", and "In Memoriam" are examples of how a woman's medical condition can assume mythical meanings, magical shadings, or biblical resonances. In Varlamova's A Counterfeit Life, Nora needs Aureliu to reromanticise, regenderise, a body that no longer seems to be her own,

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[80] Helena Goscilo, Balancing Acts , xx.

mutilated as it is by a severe mastectomy, X-ray treatments, and male hormonal injections. Lena's body in "The Violin" puzzles the hospital staff, for they can find no medical evidence to confirm the symptoms of which she mendaciously complains. Conversely, in the case of all the cancer patient characters, their disease itself remains largely a mystery to themselves and their doctors. Despite the assays of the first person narrator of "In Memoriam" to truthfully record her experience of dying, her subjectivity and perspicacity are locked in a constant inner struggle. As Magdalina dies of a stomach tumor, she at first attempts to do without morphine out of bravery and pride; yet, when her doctor finally persuades her to accept the injections, their effect permits her flights of fantasy to avoid the reality of her pain and "Тусклая больничная текучесть, немощное передвижение шлепанцев по коридору, звяканье шприцев в биксах, метастазы боли сквозь тишину всех палат..." (Nabatnikova, 71) ("the dingy ebb and flow of hospital life, the feeble shuffling of slippers along the corridor, the tinkling of syringes in sterilizers, metastases of pain through the quiet of the wards..." [Nabatnikova,121])

I agree with Goscilo's suggestion that the prevalent hospital setting in some of Russian women's fiction may be viewed as

> a metaphorical microcosm of an ailing, segregated society in which women, its quintessential victims, join forces to struggle, however unavailingly, against colossal incompetence, shoddiness, general indifference to their plight, and a dreary sense of isolation. (Goscilo, xxii)

Nevertheless, I have attempted in this chapter to reveal some other features and dynamics inherent in this genre. As opposed to I. Grekova's and Baranskaia's fiction depicting women in their everyday life, portrayals

which might lead to establishing a sense of Russian women's identity, the location of women protagonists in the more foreign setting of the hospital, a realm and role apart from their daily experience as worker-mother-wife, offers the possibility of highlighting and even critiquing their conceptions of self. Separated from her usual routine and responsibilities, a woman patient is suddenly provided with a seemingly unlimited amount of unstructured time during which she can reflect upon, evaluate, and even reconstruct herself and her life. The hospital comes to serve as a transformative chronotope out of which the protagonist may emerge, changed not only physically but mentally and emotionally as well.

Unlike Russian women writers' often flat portrayals of men, many of their male doctor characters are represented with at once more integrity and more idealisation. On the one hand, they are endowed with qualities which stereotypically characterise women: empathy, caring, sensitivity, imagination. Their struggles to balance their public and private responsiblities reflect Russian women's everyday dilemma; there is an implicit equation or identification between women's role as worker/mother/wife and doctors' role. On the other hand, the male doctor in this fiction sometimes becomes the source of fantasy and desire for the incarnation of women's dream man, the omnipotent healer of body and soul, although this character must be tempered with human failings in order to maintain at least an edge of reality.

The Muscovite women present us with stark images of their painful and humiliating experiences in Soviet hospitals: for example, Liza recounts how, during labour without any painkillers, she "howled like an animal", screamed until there was blood in her mouth, was badly torn by the delivery but was not sewn up. In contrast to such testimonies, the women's voices in

the fiction discussed seem to be glossed over by traditional narrative language and story-telling technique so that even painful hospital experiences become buried under ironic, mythical, whimsical or biblical devices. These women writers appear to be "inhibited by the masculine, logocentric thinking reflected in their traditional 'patriarchal' discourse, which summarizes the experiences of the others instead of allowing the other (a woman) to speak for herself."[81]

What seems to be a disparate, marginal world becomes a place of possible exchanges and revelations. The hospital as a microcosm of society demonstrates how public and private spheres are ultimately interconnected, how the invisible line separating the two domains in actual fact can be better perceived as a myriad of draw bridges constantly ascending or descending, allowing or preventing exchanges. The writers of these stories are drawing multiple bridges in the form of women's bodies, women's relationships, patients and doctors, birthing and abortion, surgery and healing, role reversals and role playing, refuge and wandering, silences and voices, memory and mutability, myth and reality, life and death.

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[81] I am grateful to my co-adviser, Serafima Roll, for articulating this important issue for me.

Chapter Three

An Uncertain Space: Petrushevskaia's Short Stories

Identity can be seen as linked to one's location. In the first chapter, women are depicted in their everyday life, at home and at work, the public and private aspects of which constantly overlap. The settings remain more or less stable, serving as an extension or modifier of the protagonist's identity. In Chapter Two, the hospital setting illustrates how public and private worlds can converge in one place. The female protagonist as a patient—uprooted from her usual surroundings and daily routine—stands out in relief. The hospital setting reflects to some extent her physical and emotional condition. The concept of place serves a different role in the prose of Liudmila Petrushevskaia: its temporary, undetermined quality reflects the crises of contemporary urban women. Their urge to establish a certain stable, harmonious place remains essentially a thwarted desire. Human relationships are linked to this ideal place; yet, unlike the women characters previously discussed, who enjoy support systems and friendships, Petrushevskaia's protagonists are unable to establish or sustain such relations, although these may be intensely desired. Petrushevskaia manipulates space in her texts often by means of the protagonists' relationships within these realms.

Before discussing the concepts of ideal places and interpersonal relationships, the first part of this chapter will offer a brief structural analysis of Petrushevskaia's prose, in particular dealing with the organisation of episodes, type of characters, modes of narration, as well as on a thematic level with the realm of dominant ideas and the author's ideals and

sympathies.[82] Due to the elusive quality of these texts, a better understanding of the structure of the fourteen stories selected for this discussion will help to provide an overall view of the sort of places and character types favoured by Petrushevskaia as well as an insight into some of the values she tries to promote.

When considering episodic order, the confines of time and space come into play. At first, it would seem that Petrushevskaia experiments little with possibilities of time. In many of her stories episodes are ordered in rough chronology; yet, few clues are offered as to when and over exactly what period of time the story takes place. Furthermore, none of the stories is organised into a series of conventional episodes. Often the supposedly most dramatic episodes do not transpire during the narration or they are buried behind other scenes. For example, in "The Story Teller" ("Rasskazchitsa"), Galia's mother is dying of uterine cancer in a hospital. We only learn about this through double indirect narration; the narrator summarizes what Galia reports to her co-workers. We discover that her mother has died only when Galia is absent from work and the news is announced to the office staff. When Galia returns to work, no one asks about her mother or her funeral and we learn no more about what has happened. While the death of Galia's mother is important, we as readers remain emotionally detached from the event itself. This death nevertheless marks a turning point in the story not only for Galia herself but for the whole staff.

Conventional episodes forming synthetic plots are virtually absent in Petrushevskaia's narrations; hers are stories of temporality. An incident ,

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[82] My method here loosely follows that of A.P. Chudakov, so expertly demonstrated in his Chekhov's Poetics . See especially his "Realm of Ideas" for an in-depth discussion of eternal ideas and the author's ideals or sympathies

description or impression usually is treated with more elaboration. Even the few stories which appear to follow a more standard story line still end with a "zero result"[83]; "Klarissa's Story" ("Istoriia Klarissy") is just such a case. The heroine goes through several crises and phases of maturation, physically and emotionally. Yet, at the conclusion of what should be a happy ending, Klarissa seems to hover on the edge of yet another disaster. None of the episodes seems to have any precedent, remaining merely an assorted mismatch of events and circumstances. The *process* of her (obscure) life amounts to the ultimate story, rather than cause-and-effect or action-and-result formulae: this observation holds true for all of the selected stories here. The lack of interconnectedness of events further lends itself to an emphatic portrayal of the instability of place and the isolation of characters.

The setting for the short stories, though a vitally important factor, as I shall discuss later, appears to be on the surface equally vague. Many stories take place in an interior setting, be it an office, a hospital ward, a café, an apartment, a taxi, a bus, or a dacha. One or two objects or aspects about the setting are sketched in, but very little detail is given beyond that. Several stories make (occasional) use of outside spaces, such as the open, muddy fields in "Through the Fields" ("Cherez polia"); outside a dacha in "Milaia dama;" a beach in "Klarissa's Story;" a dacha village and countryside in "Youth" ("Iunost'") and "Uncle Grisha" ("Diadia Grisha"); a rooftop in "Elegy" ("Elegiia"); a graveyard in "Our Crowd" ("Svoi krug"); a rainy street in "The Violin" ("Skripka"); and Moscow's Lenin Hills in "The Overlook" ("Smotrovaia ploshchadka").

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[83] "each event which comprises part of the *fabula* is annulled either by the material itself (the 'zero result') or it is obscured by the *syuzhet*." (Chudakov, 172)

The overall impression of the stories' spatial organisaton, time sequences and episodes combined is one of ephemerality, anonymity, disconnectedness. There are few bridges of concrete information; the characters exist suspended in an undefined, indefinite world. They themselves blur at the edges. Although we generally know the characters' gender and approximate age, they often go unnamed throughout a story. We never learn their occupation unless it is a vital part of the story (e.g., the senior doctor in "The Violin", which takes place uniquely in a hospital; he goes nameless throughout the story, his profession identifying him). Sometimes one or two characters are named, the rest remaining in an undefined, unquantified group, such as in the "office" stories like "Mania," "The Story Teller," and "A Clap of Thunder" ("Udar groma") where the narrator, staff and others are nebulously present.

Only four stories, "Our Crowd," "Uncle Grisha," "Nets and Traps" ("Seti i lovushki") and "Through the Fields", identify all the key characters by name and other attributes. These are the only stories out of the selected fourteen which are narrated in the first person, by a nameless woman. These first-person narratives allow the heroines to suggest a greater degree of intimacy or familiarity with the characters and surroundings as well as their perhaps more limited vision and subjectivity than the third-person narrators. Allowances are made by the author to maintain a certain balance in the narrations; information is severely rationed. If the narration is in the first person, then it is excessive to include her name and details which she herself would not disclose. However, it would seem unnatural if she did not refer to people she knew by name. That is why the narrator of "Through the Fields" does not mention any of the guests at the house by name; she is a guest herself and a stranger to all but Vovik.

In the stories narrated in the third person, it would appear that the frequency of character anonymity is largely due to a desire for relevance and concision; the author wishes for the reader to focus on other dynamics at play. With a few exceptions, the cast of main characters rarely exceed three. If one character is a doctor in a hospital and the only doctor in the story, why mention his name and superfluous particulars? In two stories, "Milaia dama" ("Darling Lady") and "Dark Destiny" ("Tiomnaia sud'ba"), no names are mentioned at all, except for the endearment "milaia dama." In others such as "Youth," the heroine is called "a certain Nina," implying that she is more a type than a character, an hypothesis. Moreover, as Nina is the only character discussed, her name is hardly mentioned, the personal pronoun being used freely with little confusion.

While the omission of names could be labeled as one distancing factor in the narration, the almost complete exclusion of direct speech is most certainly another. There is virtually no direct dialogue between characters in third-person narrations, only double indirect speech via the narrator. Even in most first-person narrations, the only voice directly received by the reader is that of the unnamed (woman) narrator; these narrations remain almost uniquely as interior monologues. Such control over the characters' utterances would imply that the author is withholding information, obliging the reader to follow only the narrators' line of thought without knowing other points of view.

In Petrushevskaia's prose, whether first- or third-person, the narrator is not meant to be invisible or characterless, seamless with the text as a whole. She decides what to bring to our attention, interrupts herself, repeats herself. Her voice is not wholly detached from the scenes and characters which she describes. In most stories, the narrator's role competes with those

of the characters for the reader's attention, most notably in "The Overlook" and "Milaia dama", where the narrator makes it apparent that her role is decisive in determining the fate of the characters.[84] For example, in "Milaia dama," she discusses in the first paragraph the difficulties of writing such a "banal" story. Having introduced two characters, an older man and a younger woman, she ponders the fact that if there had not been such an age difference between the two, then she could have written a classical novel with a large cast, and so on.

In other third-person narratives, the narrator appears to be one of the minor, unnamed characters who observes the main characters and events. She then often uses the first person plural, suggesting that she is just one of the crowd. In "Mania," this is certainly the case: the narrator aligns herself with the office staff where Mania works. As everyone at the office discusses Mania and her affair with a co-worker Iura, the narrator is one of many who pass along gossip overheard in the halls. Significantly, the narrator never becomes so intimate with the main character(s) that they would communicate with each other, verbally or otherwise. The third-person narrator, even if present in the scenes, maintains a large distance from the other characters that often broadens toward the conclusion of a story; it is as though she decides to raise the drawbridge that previously mediated communication and identification. For example, as "Mania" unfolds, the narrator uses "we" more and more rarely; by the end of the story, the narrator has dissociated herself from the rest of the staff. At the same time, the

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[84] Helena Goscilo has also noted the subjectivity of Petrushevskaian narrators in her comments on her narrative monologues: "Their unmistakable signature is the garrulous, almost obsessive narrator who disgorges a stream of gossipy information...The darkly ironic tone adopted by Petrushevskaia's dialogic narrator serves to emphasize the quiet desperation that is her heroine's customary state. And the chatty mode of narration intimates that repeated disheartening defeats and futile searches for significance or security are the common lot of the majority." Balancing Acts , 331.

narrator almost always maintains a similar objectifying distance between the reader and the fictional characters. We as readers are not encouraged to empathise with the protagonists: we learn virtually nothing directly about the characters' thoughts and desires; only through their actions, gestures and expressed attitudes may we make some inferences.

I have discussed the relatively undetermined nature of the characters' identities—the scarce information as to their names, voices, positions, desires, and the distancing effect of the narration, an ironic device. A certain type of protagonist does prevail in the majority of the stories selected here: the young heroine, a woman usually in her early twenties. Whether in first- or third-person narrations, we observe her in retrospect, from an undetermined point in time when she has already "matured"; this so-called psychological maturity is obviously questionable owing to the naïveté possibly inherent in the act of repenting or confessing. Again, the reader should remember the lack of identified causality in Petrushevskaia's stories; simply because a character appears or claims to have matured through aging and life experience does not justify the reader's believing her. Often the distancing, ironic quality of the (third-person) narration prevents the reader from making such connections. The powerfully persuasive voice of the first-person narrators, who seem to obsessively divulge their secrets, is nevertheless also strongly marked by irony.

In the first-person stories, the woman narrator looks back on a period in her life when she was younger, (supposedly) inexperienced, and naïve. We are given to understand that she has since aged and lost that ingenue quality through hard lessons in life. The woman who narrates "Through the Fields" recounts an event which occurred during her early twenties. After a train ride together with an aquaintance, Vovik, they arrive at the station and

proceed to walk through the woods and fields to reach the house of destination. A terrifying thunderstorm breaks loose, but they have no choice but to push on for several kilometers through the mud, the downpour and lightning bolts. During the experience their shyness and silence evaporate momentarily, they laugh wildly and are drawn emotionally closer together, the prospect danger being imminent. The narrator comments on how she felt and thought at the time, as a young woman feeling the enormity of her future before her. She is deeply touched by Vovik's character, having caught a rare glimpse of it shining. When they reach the house and he is reunited with his fiancée and friends, she resigns herself to the position of the perpetual outsider. The story is enriched by the added insight of the narrator, for she now knows better how to dramatise and lyricise this experience than she would have at that time.

Another woman tells of a ruder awakening in "Nets and Traps." When she is a university student, she has an older boyfriend, Georgii. A preoccupied, serious graduate student, he becomes impatient with what he perceives as her childish, dependent personality. When she becomes pregnant by him, he writes his mother a letter to allow his "wife" (they plan to marry and settle down soon) to stay at her apartment and give birth there. The narrator travels to this unknown town to meet Georgii's mother for the first time, arrives with the letter, and the mother permits her to stay. At first, the narrator is elated as she and Nina Nikolaevna enjoy each other's company. But Georgii fails to answer any of their letters and eventually Nina Nikolaevna loses faith in her future daughter-in-law, throwing her unceremoniously out of the apartment. The narrator then explains how she manages on her own, gives birth to her daughter, and eventually reunites

with Georgii. She claims to have learned to never be naïve, to never allow such a period in her life to repeat itself.

The story is a series of failed communications and misunderstandings. The narrator is unable to converse with Georgii, nor with her mother-in-law; all forms of communication seem to have broken down. Even the manner in which the narrator relates the stories poses problems of understanding: she withholds information, only to divulge it later; she alters information that she initially has stated otherwise. For example, at the outset of the story she explains that at the time of the event she is married, a fact which she must later revise several times: she is engaged, then pregnant by her boyfriend, then admits that her relationship with Georgii is not even going well, and so on.

Several other stories deal with young, isolated, inexperienced women: in "Uncle Grisha," the narrator spends a summer renting a dacha in the country and commuting to work; "Youth" is about the transformation of Nina from a wild, lion-maned beauty to a calm, short-haired woman; "A Clap of Thunder" concerns a certain Marina and her unusual relationship with an older man; "Milaia dama" revolves around a woman whose age is too far removed from the older man who is so attracted to her; "Dark Destiny" recounts a single woman's desperate blunder; in "Elegy," a loving young wife valiantly tries to manage with her impoverished husband and two daughters; in "The Story Teller," Galia tries unsuccessfully to win the affection and friendship of her indifferent co-workers; "Klarissa's Story" is about one woman's trials and errors on the way to maturity; "The Violin" tells of a homeless, husbandless, pregnant woman, Lena; and "Mania" reveals the gullibility of a young office worker. Although there is a male protagonist in "The Overlook," he is involved with several impressionable young women

and one mature one. The criticism of the narrator of "Our Crowd," she herself a mature woman, often falls on the inexperienced younger women involved in her circle of friends.

Aside from the "younger naïve woman/older mature woman" dichotomy, several other types of women characters appear. Sometimes there are minor characters such as a girlfriend as supporter or accomplice for the heroine. Yet, these women remain ineffectually on the periphery of the story and their weak presence only seems to emphasize the acuteness of the heroine's isolation. Lena's girlfriend never visits the hospital once during the month that Lena rests there ("The Violin"). When Marina's relationship with Zubov abruptly ends owing to the appearance of a mysterious woman in his life, Marina urgently telephones a girlfriend to talk about the situation. The sympathetic friend listens briefly, then excuses herself to do something, leaving the bewildered Marina alone again with her dark and troubling worries ("A Clap of Thunder").

In other stories, secondary (mainly women) characters form an homogenous group, acting as an ineffectual mass either sympathetic to the heroine's cause or indifferent to it. Pavel's wife is eventually liked by the other women who work with Pavel but her name is never disclosed, an omission creating a distance between her and the others. When Pavel dies suddenly and they offer her a place to stay, she instead takes her daughters and leaves the town without a word to anyone ("Elegy"). The narrator of "Our Crowd" appears to have, as the title of the story implies, a whole circle of friends. Yet as the circle disintegrates and reorganises, it becomes evident that the heroine stands alone. Galia of "The Story Teller" believes that she has made friends of her co-workers, but when she invites them to her wedding, no one wishes to attend. Klarissa goes through school as a

dreamy loner and ugly duckling. Later, as a married woman, she complains about her husband to a girlfriend, something which is considered wrong. When her husband leaves her unexpectedly taking their son with him without former agreement, Klarissa begs his friends to come to her aid and is coldly rebuffed ("Klarissa's Story"). The narrator-protagonist of "Nets and Traps" seems to have no friends of her own and treats those of her boyfriend Georgii with excessive attention. When she stays at the home of his mother, Nina Nikolaevna, she thinks that she has found a true friend, a new mother figure. These hopes are dashed when Nina Nikolaevna turns her away. In "Mania," everyone at the office is (supposedly) fond of Mania but they fail to give timely advice about Iura that would have spared her the awful deception facing her at the end of the story. Mania's girlfriend sometimes accompanies her to Iura's office, but remains in essence a passive figure.

In comparison with the women characters discussed in the previous two chapters, Petrushevskaia's women seem incapable of establishing positive relationships with either women or men. In her fiction, women's support groups, friendships, or love relationships remain largely an ideal that is unattainable to the heroine in question. If she does attain it, it is only a temporary, often fleeting period which usually ends in deception (for example, the fate of the heroines of "The Story Teller", "Nets and Traps", "Mania").

Upon considering Petrushevskaia's artistic world as a whole, several themes or ideas become apparent. I would divide her realm of ideas between those perceived as eternal ideas and those indicating the author's own ideals or sympathies. Eternal ideas might denote the meaning of a person's life, the purpose of existence, truth, death, and so on; these atemporal, aspatial, unchanging universalities lend a textual coherence to

Petrushevskaia's otherwise uncertain artistic world. The author's ideals are those which are frequently discussed in the writer's works and command her sympathy; these authorial sympathies are often shared with the protagonist.

Fate resonates Petrushevskaia's artistic world. On the surface, it would seem that fate is something which cannot be avoided; the characters struggle with their daily troubles to little or no avail. Events happening by chance may alter the course of one's entire life. In accordance with this concept of fate, a strong sense of destiny prevails in the Petrushevskaian world. The frequent device of fate or destiny may be perceived as an externalisation of helplessness; indeed, this sense of vulnerability via fate remains in keeping with the friendless, isolated types Petrushevskaia portrays. Story titles sometimes reflect this predilection for doom: "A Clap of Thunder," "Dark Destiny," "Nets and Traps."

Often a narrator identifies fate emphatically, recognising its unpredictable and powerful qualities. At the conclusion of "Through the Fields," the narrator-protagonist sums up the strangely lyrical experience of crossing the fields in the midst of a thunderstorm with the sweet, shy Vovik:

> ...а я не ждала, а грелась душой после долгого и трудного жизненного пути, сознавая, что завтра и даже сегодня меня оторвут от тепла и света и швырнут опять одну идти по глинистому полю, под дождем, и это и есть жизнь, и надо укрепиться, поскольку всем приходится так же, как мне, и Вовику в том числе, и бедной Вовиковой невесте, потому что человек светит только одному человеку один раз в жизни, и это все.[85]
> (I was not waiting, however, for I was warming my soul after the long and difficult path of my life, realizing that tomorrow and even today I would be torn away from

[85] Liudmila Petrushevskaia, "Cherez polia," Avrora 5 (1983):114.

> the warmth and the light and thrust out again to walk alone through the clay field in the rain. And that's how life is and one must become stronger, everyone has to--not just me, but Vovik, and even Vovik's poor fiancée, because a person shines for only one person once in his life and that is all.)[86]

It is clearly due to fate, states the narrator of "Milaia dama", that the older man's and the young, milaia dama's ages are too disparate, preventing them from consumating a love affair; this unchanging fact is simply due to her late arrival to this world, to too many revolutions of the sun and stars. While the man and his wife wait for a taxi, he has a chance to speak to the young woman, his beloved. But then the car arrives and " . все кончилось, и исчезла проблема слишком позднего появления на Земле ее и слишком раннего его--и все исчезло, пропало в круговороте звезд, словно ничего и не было."[87] ("... everything ended, and the problem—her too late arrival on Earth and his too early one— disappeared—and everything vanished, was lost in the revolution of the stars, as if nothing had ever happened."[88])

Fate usually arrives in the most unexpected forms. At times, one senses that the status quo cannot be maintained but that the characters themselves will not be intellectually or emotionally capable of changing matters themselves. They lack the perception possessed by the narrator or the reader. In "Elegy," Pavel's wife's adoring and subservient love for him seems to suffocate him toward the story's conclusion. And yet he, too, has become dependent on her and her unflagging support. When he falls from the icy roof of his home while attaching a television antenna, his death comes as a shock at first. His wife quickly abandons the town with her

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[86] Petrushevskaia, "Through the Fields," trans Stefani Hoffman, The New Soviet Fiction, 237.

[87] Petrushevskaia, "Milaia dama," Avrora 2 (1987): 94.

[88] Translations without a page reference have been translated by myself.

daughters. The story as such, then, remains unfinished although this sort of ending was to be expected because, as the narrator explains in conclusion,

> ...ведь все в свое время думали, что с ними что-нибудь случится, что он от нее уйдет, не выдержав этой великой любви, и он от нее ушел, но не так.[89]
>
> (...really everyone at a certain time thought that something would happen to them, that he would leave her, unable to endure this great love, and leave her he did, however, not in that way.)

The forces of fate and destiny appear to permeate Petrushevskaia's realm. Yet her narrators rarely elaborate in a philosophical or abstract manner; in this prose, the characters are rooted in a distinctly material, concrete world. The eternal ideas arise from the combination of events (or lack thereof) and out of silence. Death plays a significant role in four stories, yet the reader learns nothing more than what happens to the surviving characters. One might infer many notions from this silence: that death is part of the life cycle whether expected or sudden; that it forces those remaining to change, regardless of whether that change is positive or negative. One senses in Petrushevskaia a refusal to expound on certain unattainable domains.[90]

Concerning the role of silence, it is possible to draw a comparison between the prose of Petrushevskaia and Chekhov. Chudakov also notices a tendency in Chekhov to remain silent on the subject of eternal ideas and explains further:

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[89] Petrushevskaia, "Elegiia," Neva 7 (1987): 91.

[90] Goscilo points out that silence serves a similar dramatic technique in Petrushevskaia's theatre work: "Many of their [the dramatis personae's] revelations emerge through silence, for what is withheld or left glaringly unsaid tends to provide a key to the psychological makeup of Petrushevskaia's characters." Balancing Acts, 330.

> In Chekhov's world...the resolution of these problems assumes a transcendental realm; the author can only go up to a specific point, beyond which lies a realm which words cannot penetrate...As Chekhov approaches such a limit [e.g. death] he refers the consciousness of the reader to his own (mystical) experience...The principle of silence provides the means for an adogmatic embodiment of the most lofty ideas; it assumes the absence of dogmatic discussion of these ideas and gives only their signs, which then serve as a canvas upon which everyone traces his own patterns. (Chudakov, 213-214)

It is similarly difficult to trace the source of Petrushevskaia's own ideals or sympathies. Like Chekhov, she treats her characters and subjects adogmatically. As the narrator is virtually always the only voice received directly by the reader, this adogmatism does not arise from a polyphonic text. This might seem unusual, as dogmatism might be considered as issuing from a single unified source, in this case, the narrator. However, Petrushevskaia's third-person narrators still permit much speculation on the part of the reader. Certain facts are reported to us, but we have little or no access to knowing how the characters feel or think. Silence as a device can also indicate a private realm, unattainable to the reader, as opposed to the public realm of the text. It is almost impossible to delineate one coherent and systematic idea or event from the text; as a result, much remains unresolved and irresolvable within it.

For example, here is a brief résumé of "A Clap of Thunder": Marina, a married woman, has an eight-year friendship with Zubov, a co-worker quite a few years older than herself. We are told several times, however, that while Marina looks her age, Zubov appears ten years younger than his real

age. At first, they only talk at work. Then, when Marina changes jobs, Zubov telephones her and extends an open invitation to visit him at his apartment to see his chandelier. Marina does so, although her first visit seems to make Zubov feel restless. She continues to visit and their conversations continue much in the same way as they formerly did at work. She even attends the funeral of Zubov's mother of her own accord. One time, Zubov advises Marina to put a little more effort into her appearance, to buy new shoes, for example. When Marina visits him another time, she discovers Zubov already has company: several attractive young girls. These girls seem to know him well and address him by his first name (which we never learn). Zubov's and Marina's relationship continues, although their conversations seem to occur increasingly over the telephone, rather than in person. We are told that they discuss "everything" about their respective lives. During one of their telephone conversations, a loud woman's voice rings through the receiver from Zubov's end, harshly scolding Marina for taking up Zubov's time and so on. Marina, utterly shocked, hangs up her receiver and resolves never to call him again. But they have a second conversation over the telephone (who initiates the call is undetermined) and Marina asks whether Zubov is able to talk, whether he now has a party line, and so on. Zubov replies negatively, saying that he is absolutely alone and their regular conversation resumes. They talk about various problems: Marina's son is sick, Zubov complains about some awful woman in his destiny. Just as he is about to end the conversation, the same unknown woman's voice resounds through the receiver into Marina's ears, saying not to call so late, enough is enough. Stunned, Marina hangs up and promptly calls her girlfriend, who cannot talk for long. Then Marina is left alone, sitting in her chair at the office

at eleven o'clock at night; at this time it is urgently necessary to go home to her sick son.

It is difficult to deduce any authorial sympathy in this story. We know virtually nothing of Marina's and Zubov's feelings, desires or motivations. Marina does seem shy and isolated. Over the eight-year period of her relationship with Zubov, she has been married, has given birth to and is raising a son, and has divorced and changed jobs—all information which remains extremely limited. We know nothing more about her situation except that at the end of the story her son is ill; there is confusion or lack of logic as to why she is still at the office so late if she is so concerned about her son's health. We do not know whether Marina or Zubov question the nature of their relationship, why they feel compelled to remain in contact for so long. From what is reported of their conversations, each talks on a different level. Zubov is perhaps more mysterious than Marina; concerning him, we know only a fraction of what Marina sees and hears. The new woman who shouts at her over the telephone brings this long, puzzling relationship to an end, one which even the narrator admits is difficult to fathom. Indeed, the narrator begins the story with such an acknowledgement: "Совершенно непонятен и неизвестен тот ход событий, который привел к столь близкому знакомству между Мариной и Зубовым..."[91] ("Completely beyond understanding and reason is this course of events which led to so intimate a relationship between Marina and Zubov...")

One recognises some authorial sympathy in way the narrator chooses to focus on the subject. In the case above, our vision is guided increasingly

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[91] Petrushevskaia, "Udar groma," Avrora 5 (1983): 89.

toward Marina's sphere, into her experience of the relationship, and becomes farther removed from Zubov's world. Yet it is difficult beyond this point to trace the author's perception of the situation, except through the narrator's own bewilderment.

There are, however, stories which reveal Petrushevskaia's ideals somewhat more clearly. One of the best examples is the value system she constructs concerning age. As mentioned before, many of her stories deal with a young woman protagonist who often goes through some kind of transformation. The concepts of experience, maturity, ripeness, refined beauty, and independence stem from the value of age as opposed to youth which denotes wildness, naïveté, excessiveness, raw or unrefined beauty, and dependence. The story "Youth" develops this contrast of values exclusively. Nina goes through a wild, rebelious stage in her life when her luxuriant, lion-maned beauty and raucous, husky voice would attract everyone's attention. Her behavior and appearance are perceived as excessive. At an undetermined point in time, something changes in her and she grows out of this stage. She symbolically cuts her hair short, as if clearing away these various imposed masks and coming closer to a sense of purity and simplicity: "..и даже хриплый голос мог теперь свидетельствовать о твердых устоях и определенной силе характера..."[92] ("...and even the husky voice could now testify to stable foundations and definite strength of character...").

In other stories, the event which initiates the heroine's transformation is stressed more than her resulting new character; in some stories, we never learn whether the protagonist's experience has caused a change. The

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[92] Petrushevskaia, "Iunost'," Avrora 2 (1987): 89.

narrator often describes the heroine's life as progressing in stages or periods. This might be considered another authorial ideal: that one's life is divided into various phases, each marked by one's character, behavior, physical appearance, marital status, and each divided by a crisis or change. In the best of circumstances, the crises and changes will bring one closer to one's true image, shedding what is superfluous. At the same time, this course over time brings one closer to one's death. Petrushevskaia never openly equates the ideal of purity with death; in keeping with the principle of silence, the connection can be made only in the consciousness of the reader.

Finally, family unity appears to be another of the author's ideals, although it is rarely maintained or achieved in any story. In some stories such as "Uncle Grisha," "Elegy," and "Our Crowd," the families portrayed may be flawed in many ways but enjoy some sense of harmony together. After the unexpected deaths of Uncle Grisha, Pavel, and the parents of the narrator of "Our Crowd," the familial balance is destroyed and the surviving members disperse, divorce, become fatally ill, go mad, or disappear.

Several other stories deal with a protagonist's need to establish a some kind of family, her own family being either undesirable or virtually non-existent. While Petrushevskaia seems to value the concept of family, she does not romanticize an ideal unity as easy to achieve. Instead, family unity remains an ideal in her artistic world, something so rare and fragile that it is difficult to maintain alive for long in a world of human imperfection, fate, and death.

The first part of this chapter has dealt with narratological problematics and the realm of ideas found in Petrushevskaia. It is perhaps vital to recognise how these texts are structured—the sort of disconnected episodic

arrangements, the types of (often retrospective) heroines, their lack of support systems and isolation, the tight narrative control of information, the distancing effects of irony—to produce an overwhelming impression of uncertainty and instability. An overall atmosphere of the uncontrollable saturates and defines the sort of spaces inhabited by the characters. The second part of this chapter focuses on the temporary and stable places in Petrushevskaia's fictional world to show, on the one hand, her predilection for fate and irony, and, on the other hand, her value systems.

Her ideals of age and family unity strongly motivate her protagonists to search and try to establish some kind of home. This desired but essentially inaccessible position is a *private* place which can fulfill personal, emotional needs. I would argue that in virtually all of the stories selected, the heroines occupy temporary, precarious, or undetermined spaces and are searching (often unconsciously) for stability and harmony. Sometimes the unstable space is located in the public realm, as in the office stories, "Mania" and "The Story Teller", and the hospital story, "The Violin": the protagonists' intimate concerns permeate these stories, in an unsuccessful effort to render the public realm hospitable.

Whenever this ideal place is temporarily achieved, it is presented in material terms, including descriptions of the people and things which occupy that place. These people and objects are considered an essential part of what makes this place ideal. The protagonists' collective desire for an ideal place is differentiated by each woman's personal purpose and situation: a place to give birth, a place to die peacefully, a place to escape to, a place to have a love affair, a place to start one's life afresh, be it with a new family or new work or both.

The first-person narrator of "Nets and Traps" succeeds in finding this ideal space for a while when she is first taken in by her fiancé's mother, Nina Nikolaevna. This woman and her apartment become almost an organic whole in the narrator's perception. Her description of her new surroundings and companion suggests the experience of a spiritual homecoming, one deeply infused with reverence, relief, and joy:

> Похоже было, что она поняла, с кем имеет дело, поскольку в дальнейшем она обращалась со мной так, что все её действия вызывали у меня чувство чудовищной, ни с чем не сравнимой благодарности и такого счастья, как если бы я попала в желанный, родной дом,--с той только разницей, что я не желала бы попасть в мой родной дом. В том-то и был весь ужас, что никуда, ни в один дом на свете, даже впоследствии в нашу с Георгием новую квартиру, меня не тянуло так, как в дом к Нине Николаевне, в этот прекрасный, милый дом, где ничего для меня предназначенного не было, где каждая вещь существовала как бы выше меня уровнем, была благородней, прекрасней меня -- и в то же время всё это для меня было полно надеждой на счастье. С каким благоговением я рассматривала картины в тяжёлых рамах, прекрасные подушки на диване, ковёр на полу, столовые часы в углу![93]
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> (It was as though she [N.N.] understood with whom she was dealing, because from then on she treated me in such a way that all her actions evoked in me a feeling of incomparable, boundless gratitude, and of such happiness that it was as if I had found my wished-for childhood home. There was only one difference--I had no wish to find my childhood home. And the horror of it all is that since then I have never yearned for any home on earth, not even for my and Georgii's new

[93] Petrushevskaia, "Seti i lovushki," Avrora 4 (1974) :54.

> apartment, as much as I did for that home of Nina Nikolaevna's, that wonderful, dear home where nothing was intended for me, and where every object existed as though on a higher level than I--more noble and more beautiful than I--and at the same time filled me with hope. With what reverence I looked at the pictures in their heavy frames, the beautiful pillows on the sofa, the rugs on the floor and the table clock in the corner!)[94]

More often than not, however, we witness the protagonists trying to cope in less ideal spaces. What all of the locations have in common is a sense of temporariness or instability; in them, the protagonists are often too exposed to the public, under the gaze and criticism of too many observers. This is especially true of stories such as "The Story Teller" and "Mania" in which the heroine's actions and details of her private life are displayed in the public, impersonal setting of an office. In "The Story Teller," Galia is found only in temporary, public places: a bus, the office, the cafeteria, a café. The office in particular is a precarious spot, since Galia's job is eliminated due to administrative organization. From what Galia tells her co-workers, one can deduce that there is no safe haven waiting for her after work. Her mother is dying in a hospital; her authoritarian father makes life at home into a daily inquisition. Her boyfriend lives in a small apartment with his mother and has no time or space for her. Toward the end of the story, it appears that Galia may finally attain her own desired space: the kindly manager at the office finds her a better job elsewhere; her new boyfriend is going to marry her and his family likes her. Yet, she foolishly insists on inviting her former co-workers to attend her wedding at a café; apart from the benevolent manager, only a couple of them unwillingly show up and proceed to behave as rudely as possible throughout the dinner. Having stolen some of the flowers, these

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[94] Petrushevskaia, "Nets and Traps," trans Alma H Law, The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Fiction: Selected Stories from the USSR, ed Sigrid McLaughlin (New York: St. Martin's, 1989) 106.

two girls run into the washroom before leaving. Galia follows them and the story ends on this awkward scene:

> И тут они увидели Галю, смутились, протянули ей этот злосчастный букет белых лилий и сказали глупо-преглупо: «Это тебе». А Галя, в своём длинном до пят платье, откинув фату и сняв перчатки, страшно плакала в этом мокром туалете при кафе. Особенно им запомнился этот ужасающе дурацкий случай, как они вдруг вручили невесте в мокром туалете перед концом свадьбы этот букет белых лилий и как она вынуждена была его держать вместе со снятыми перчатками обеими руками, не зная, что с ним делать.[95]
>
> (And here they caught sight of Galia, were embarrassed, offered her that ill-fated bouquet of white lilies, and said foolishly: "This is yours." And Galia, in her floor length dress, her veil folded back and her gloves removed, was crying terribly in that damp café washroom. They especially remembered that horribly idiotic incident of how they suddenly handed over this bouquet of white lilies to the bride in the damp washroom before the end of the wedding and how she was obliged to hold it along with her gloves in both hands, not knowing what to do with them.)

As we can see from this example, the gap in reality between the heroine's desired place and the one(s) designated to her in the stories can be great. It is obviously not Galia's ideal of how to end her wedding celebration and embark on a new life by crying helplessly in a miserable café washroom before two drunk, insensitive guests. Like Galia, many of Petrushevskaia's protagonists lack the means and insight to control their destiny; their plight is not solely in the hands of fate, although this is most often how they perceive it. In several of the stories, the protagonists remain

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[95] Petrushevskaia, "Rasskazchitsa," Avrora 7 (1972): 13.

in a passive position, allowing events and other people to determine them. The heroines Mania, Klarissa, and Marina particularly embody such qualities. Petrushevskaia sometimes stretches this image of a powerless woman by comparing her to lower forms of life. Klarissa, for example, is likened to an amoeba[96]: "Можно сказать, что она в эти годы жила без руля и без ветрил, от толчка до толчка, чувствительная, как амеба, которая перемещается с места на место с примитивной целью уйти от прикосновений."[97] ("One could say that during these years she lived without any aim or direction, from one jolt to to the next, sensitive, like an amoeba which shifts from place to place with the primitive goal of avoiding contact.")

In contrast to these helpless, victimized heroines, the narrator/protagonists of the four first-person narratives tend to demonstrate a greater understanding of their position and the people surrounding them. Their acute perception mingles with a realization that each person must accept her solitude and independence to get along in life. The narrator of "Through the Fields" says as much in concluding her story: "...realizing that tomorrow and even today I would be torn away from the warmth and the light and thrust out again to walk alone through the clay field in the rain. And that's how life is and one must become stronger, everyone has to..." (Hoffman, trans, 237)

As mentioned before, Petrushevskaia's first-person narrators speak from an undefined moment in time, after the narrated events have occurred. "Through the Fields," "Nets and Traps," and "Uncle Grisha" deal with mature

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[96] The metaphor of the amoeba also says something about the undiscriminating manner in which Klarissa occupies and moves through spaces in this story. As Elshtain speculates on the existence of borders between public and private zones, she also uses the amoeba metaphor. "An amoeba has neither boundaries nor the capacity or need to define them An amoeba cannot be said to inhabit distinct public and private spheres as it oozes along in its fluid world oblivious to questions of how and why." Public Man, Private Woman, 7

[97] Petrushevskaia, "Istoriia Klarissy," Avrora 7 (1972) 14

women telling a story about something which happened during their youth. Although the first-person narrators value special, stabilizing, nurturing places, they do not cling to them, for they see past the mirage of the ideal, being aware of the temporality of all people and things. They have learned to accept the hard realities of life, including uncontrollable variants such as fate and death; this attitude is characterized further by their reliance on their inner strength and their lack of fear, innocence, and naïve sentimentality. All of these character traits seemed to be gained through aging and experience; or rather, this state of being is achieved through loss, through a peeling away of the masks of youth and ideals, as in the metaphorical story "Youth," until only a purity of perception and being will remain.

The first-person narrator of "Our Crowd" distinguishes herself from Petrushevskaia's other protagonists in that she does attempt to manipulate her destiny. Atypical of these heroines, she is endowed with an almost authorial power to determine events. The story is also unique among those discussed here because it contains an identifiable and intricate plot. Due to various events, the narrator's tight circle of friends begins to disintegrate, marriages collapse, and new couples pair off. The narrator's husband, Kolia, is leaving her for Marisha, one of their friends. The narrator is the only one of the original group to be left alone. When she discovers that she has inherited her mother's fatal kidney disease, she keeps this information to herself. Instead, she constructs a complicated scenario to induce Kolia, who has demonstrated little fatherly love, to look after their young son, Aliosha, after she has gone: she invites the old crowd over to her apartment for a party, while sending Aliosha to the dacha to spend the night (but she intentionally forgets to give him the key). At the end of a drunken and difficult evening, the guests prepare to go. When she opens the door to the

staircase, everyone sees that Aliosha is sleeping there. The narrator rushes at him, starts to beat him, and the guests separate the two, shutting the narrator inside and taking the boy away. She watches from her window as the "triumphant communal procession" hails a taxi, Kolia carrying his son in his arms. This entire scene goes according to her plan:

> В суд они не подадут, не такие люди. Алешку будут прятать от меня. Его окружат вниманием Коля, взявший Алешу на руки, уже не тот Коля, который ударил семилетнего ребенка плашмя по лицу только за то, что тот обмочился Мариша тоже будет любить и жалеть маленького гнилозубого Алешу, не проявляющего талантов даже в малой степени . а Алеша за эти годы успеет набраться сил, ума и всего, что необходимо Я же устроила его судьбу очень дешевой ценой. Так бы он после моей смерти пошел по интернатам и был бы с трудом принимаемым гостем в своем родном отцовском доме [98]
>
> (They won't take me to court, they're not that kind of people. They'll hide Alyoshka from me They'll surround him with affection The Kolya who took Alyosha in his arms is not the Kolya who'd hit a seven-year-old child flat across the face only because he'd wet himself Marisha will also love and feel sorry for little Alyosha with rotten teeth, who'd not shown even the slightest bit of talent in those years Alyosha will have time to gain strength, intelligence, and everything he needs I've already arranged his fate at a very cheap price Otherwise after my death he'd have gone from one boarding school to another and would have had difficulty being received as a visitor in his father's own home.)[99]

The goal of all her planning and actions also reflects the concept of establishing an ideal place: in this case she destines it for her son. The narrator is preparing to die and she organises her space and affairs

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[98] Petrushevskaia, "Svoi krug," Novyi Mir 1 (1988) 129

[99] Petrushevskaia, "Our Crowd," trans Helena Goscilo, Michigan Quarterly Review 28.4 (1989) 697.

carefully, if cruelly. Aliosha's welfare poses her greatest concern. Not only will he be well loved and cared for by Kolia and Marisha, but by all the friends in the circle in various ways; she has reunited the circle for the cause of her son. Moreover, she recognises the value of a stable environment for Aliosha. This is another element of her master plan:

> "И еще хорошо, что вся эта групповая семья будет жить у Алеши в квартире, у него в доме, а не он у них, это тоже замечательно, поскольку очень скоро я отправлюсь по дороге предков." ("Svoi krug", 130)
>
> ("And what's also good is that this whole familial group will live in Alyosha's apartment, in his home, and not he in theirs, that's also splendid, since I'll be setting off very soon on the road of my forefathers.") ("Our Crowd", 697)

The other characters in Petrushevskaia's narrations significantly modify the spaces they occupy. The protagonists' relationships with certain key figures function through the medium of a given place in the text. It is important, for example, that Aliosha be left in the care of good parents while remaining in his own home. The fate of the narrator's much envied three-room apartment has already been in question previously in the story. The narrator of "Uncle Grisha" recounts the summer she rented a "dacha" (in actual fact, a room in a barn shed) from Uncle Grisha and his wife.[100] Their family forms an integral part of her stay there; she values their unity despite all their petty imperfections. Her physical and emotional interaction with the family allows her to paint an idealised image of their home:

> Я иногда ходила в хозяйский дом смотреть телевизор и видела их простой народный быт...Я очень полюбила их всех, мне они

[100] The fact that the narrator refers to her landlords as "uncle" and "aunt" reinforces the familial sentiment she attaches to them and their home.

нравились все, всей семьей воедино, нравилось, что к ним без конца ходят гости и забегают соседи... [101]

(Sometimes I went to the landlords' house to watch television and I saw their simple, everyday (folk) life...I liked all of them very much, they all pleased me, with the whole family together, I liked that guests came and neighbours ran over to their place constantly...)

In "Nets and Traps," the narrator recalls how she revered Nina Nikolaevna, her future mother-in-law, especially during their first idyllic period of living together in the older woman's apartment. In the narrator's experience and her passionate memory of it, the woman and her home are almost inseparable elements, a simultaneous discovery of an ideal home and motherly "patron":

Ведь нельзя же было считать ловушкой ту растроганность и материнское (не материнское --лучше, выше) покровительство, которое я чувствовала в Нине Николаевне! Я неверно выразилась: не материнское -- лучше, выше, потому что мать не оказывает покровительства. Вместе с тем я так была размягчена, что однажды из комнаты крикнула Нине Николаевне в ванную, что хотела бы для краткости называть её мамой. Она не расслышала, переспросила, но шум воды перекрыл все мои слова, и я больше не пыталась делать таких далеко идущих предложений. ("Seti i lovushki, 54)

(After all, the tenderness and maternal patronage which I sensed in Nina Nikolaevna couldn't be considered a trap! I didn't express myself right: it wasn't maternal -- rather, it was better than that, because a mother doesn't bestow patronage. At the same time, I felt so close to her that once I shouted from the room into the bathroom that I would like to call her 'Mama' for short. She didn't hear and asked me to repeat, but the noise of the water drowned my words, and I

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[101] Petrushevskaia, "Diadia Grisha," Neva 7 (1987) 86.

never again tried to make such a revolutionary proposition.["Nets and Traps", 106-7])

In the final part of this chapter, I shall discuss how the relationships between the protagonists and other characters are often marked by problematic communication. The nature of stable or temporary places is often determined by the sort of characters inhabiting them. Thus, a given protagonist's relations with these characters hinge on the (protagonist's) idea(l) of place and its probable stability or lack thereof. In all of the texts cited here, the narration alone allows for virtually no direct dialogue between the characters; instead, the narrator filters what has been said without directly quoting. This lack of immediate verbal contact heightens our impression of the characters' isolation. It would seem that whether a relationship proceeds in a positive or negative light, there is little use for superfluous words to be exchanged. In "Through the Fields," the narrator and Vovik go through the exhilarating and frightening experience of crossing a long stretch of muddy fields in the midst of a thunder storm. Yet, neither during the storm nor afterwards when they are safely inside do they speak to each other at any length. To an outsider, it would seem that their relationship has not changed since the train ride they took in silence before the storm. Similarly, in "Uncle Grisha," the quiet, shy Uncle Grisha says no more than a couple of words to his renter throughout her stay. Nevertheless, she expresses a deep understanding of his gentle character.

Communication, when it does occur, rarely improves matters between characters. Deception and misunderstanding riddle the various human relations in Petrushevskaia's fictional world. The women protagonists' relationships with other women characters centre on the themes of motherhood, childbirth, marriage and friendship. Yet a profound and lasting

contact between them rarely evolves. At first, the narrator of "Nets and Traps" feels she has found a reliable, generous mother figure in her future mother-in-law. She describes their long conversations about Georgii, until it would seem that her hostess would be certain that this pregnant woman is indeed her son's future wife. But Georgii neglects to write his fiancée and mother, aside from the original letter that he wrote to be presented to Nina Nikolaevna; she begins to doubt her young charge's identity, grows increasingly distant and cold, and eventually turns her out of her house. The narrator describes the "metamorphosis" of Nina Nikolaevna from a maternal guardian to a formidable, uncommunicative entity:

> Каким образом произошла эта метаморфоза, мне неизвестно. У меня внезапно создалось впечатление, что она вознеслась высоко надо мною, что она нависает надо мной как гора, утяжеляя все мои движения. Я теперь с трудом двигалась в ее комнате, с трудом говорила с ней. Все ее раздражало, иногда она даже не отвечала мне на вопросы. ("Seti i lovushki", 55)
>
> (Just how that transformation took place I don't know I suddenly had the feeling that she was hovering high above me, that she was hanging over me like a mountain, weighing down all my movements. Now I moved around her room with difficulty, spoke to her with difficulty. Everything irritated her, and sometimes she didn't even answer my questions.[102] ["Nets and Traps", 108])

In the "office" stories, "Mania" and "The Story Teller," the heroines similarly lack a close woman friend in whom to confide. It would appear that the impersonal, formalized atmosphere of the office prevents anyone from establishing lasting relationships. The narrations remain within the public realm throughout. Although the narrator of "Mania" tells us that everyone in

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[102] This passage can also be seen as relating the narrator's externalization of her pregnancy.

Mania's office treats her affectionately, they do not venture to warn her of the dangers of becoming intimately involved with a co-worker, Iura. Mania's girlfriend is supportive only by virtue of her presence. From the narrator's and staff's perspective, they can see that the love affair between Mania and Iura is doomed to failure; meanwhile, Mania proceeds blindly, only to be disappointed in the end. Mania in turn remains a passive character. She does not go to anyone for advice or simply try to confide in someone. Her lack of communication with others locks her into a crippling isolation.

The protagonist of "The Story Teller," Galia, suffers from a similar experience of emotional isolation at her office, although through behavior opposite to that of Mania's. Galia frankly tells all the office staff her difficult life story down to the most personal details. At first, the people are touched by some of her tales, amused by others; however, Galia does not realise that she has become merely a source of diversion in their working day:

> Можно сказать, что в конторе, где Галя работает, это стало каким-то новым видом спорта--выуживать у нее все до самого конца, до самых подробностей, до дна, до того, чего она еще сама не поняла, но все остальные, опытные женщины и мужчины, поймут еще лучше, чем она...То есть она до такой степени не скрывается, что даже иногда становится неудобно, стыдно ее спрашивать. Чего-то она не понимает, каких-то женских стыдливых тайн, какой-то самообороны, тактики моллюска, который захлопывает створки раковины, пока еще никто не успел разглядеть, что там скрывается глубже, хотя все прекрасно знают, что там может скрываться. ("Rasskazchitsa," 11)
>
> (One could say that at the office where Galia works, this became some new kind of game--to fish everything out of her until the very end, to the very details, to the

> bottom, to the point where she herself no longer understood, however, all the other experienced women and men would understand even better than she...That is to say she does not conceal herself to such an extent that sometimes it even becomes uncomfortable, embarrassing to ask her. She does not understand something, some modest, womanly secrets, some kind of self-defence, the tactics of a mollusk[103], which slams shut the folds of its shell, while still no one managed to perceive what is being hidden there, although everyone knows very well what could be hidden there.)

Galia's co-workers, especially the women, cannot fathom her behavior and eventually tire of it. When her mother dies, Galia is absent from work for a while and when she returns, the attitude of the office staff towards her has completely reversed. No one wishes to know more about the funeral and so on. In their opinion, the office is a place to work, not to bare one's soul. No one of the staff has reciprocated Galia's attempts to establish a friendship. They are similar to Mania's co-workers, behaving much like a united front, withholding important information from the protagonist. In Galia's case, this information is the news of the upcoming reorganisation of the office, in which Galia will lose her job. Reciprocal, open communication occurs at no time in the story; the possibilities for such contact decrease, while Galia, increasingly unable to comprehend the staff's cold reserve, desperately insists that they attend her wedding. In the final scene of the story quoted in this chapter earlier, Galia is brought face to face with the dilemma, at a complete loss of how to deal with people who have only shown her rudeness and ridicule. The extreme state of her isolation is emphasized by the fact that the wedding scene is described indirectly by the two guests to the whole office on the Monday after the wedding.

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[103] Again, this is another example of Petrushevskaia's use of lower life metaphors to describe the behavior of women. Like the amoeba, the mollusk is described as sensitive, self-defensive, avoiding contact. Yet, whereas the mollusk possesses a shell, allowing it to, like a drawbridge, keep public and private worlds distinct at will, the amoeba has no such ability and does not distinguish or draw barriers between public and private.

Although most of Petrushevskaia's third-person narrations centre on a woman character, this figure remains to a large extent passive: she is observed by a narrator who only summarizes conversations and reports visible appearances and actions. We as readers rarely learn much about the protagonists' inner desires, motivations, or perceptions. This may suggest that they lack these sensitivities. However, a more comprehensive viewpoint may be that these women are faced with almost insolvable dilemmas. The narrator is not endowed with omniscient powers. Therefore, the inner world of the protagonists' remain their own; they are ultimately innately private spheres protected from the scrutiny of the other fictional characters, of the narrator, and of the readers. Only via the first-person narrators do we learn something more about their personal feelings and thoughts.

When considering the women characters' relationships with men, one notes similar communication failures. The men portrayed in Petrushevskaia's artistic world behave even more passively than the women with the exception of the one male protagonist, Andrei, in "The Overlook." These men, relegated to secondary roles in the narrations, are frequently distanced, physically and/or emotionally, from the women protagonists. This sensed distance and their accompanying silence prevents the heroines from establishing an essential, intimate rapport with them; this very lack of communication usually results in bringing the crisis of the story to a head. Georgii, the husband of the narrator of "Nets and Traps," does not talk to his fiancée for days when he is displeased by her behavior. Later, he mysteriously fails to respond to the letters written by his fiancée and his mother. One letter from him would have confirmed his wife's identity, easing the awkward situation. Even after his wife has been turned out of Nina

Nikolaevna's home and is forced to find lodgings on her own (a difficult feat for a pregnant woman in a strange town), he does not appear on the scene to help her. "Nets and Traps" is perhaps a perfect example of how Petrushevskaia draws a bridge between human relationships and the quality of place. This collapse of the narrator's relationships with Georgii and Nina Nikolaevna results in the disintegration of the stable, idealised place she has found for herself in Nina Nikolaevna's apartment.

There seems to be an invisible wall preventing open communication between men and women; this wall essentially consists of the men's absence and silence.[104] The husband of Klarissa in "Klarissa's Story" leaves his wife and takes their child without a word. Klarissa cannot contact him through his parents or friends. In "Uncle Grisha," the narrator, a young woman renting a dacha, asks Uncle Grisha to take her with him to the woods to pick berries. The old man knocks on her door to wake her, but is too shy to tell her when it is time to catch the train and leaves without her. Vovik of "Through the Fields" is similarly muted by apparent shyness. In "Elegy," Pavel begins to construct a wall to distance himself from his wife's overwhelming love by working overtime at the office or at the library.

In other stories, the communication gap is less obvious. Some sort of rapport exists between the woman and male character, but it is built on deception. Marina and Zubov carry on an eight-year relationship in "A Clap of Thunder" and yet, when it comes to an end, we have the impression that Marina never really knew this mysterious person. A good part of their conversations is carried out over the telephone: the absence of a concrete,

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[104] This would seem to be a departure from the interruptive nature of men's roles in Baranskaia's and I. Grekova's work and the idealised, mythologised role of the doctors in Chapter Two.

shared place implicit in the telephone conversations is another distancing and blinding factor. "Dark Destiny" concerns the sudden live-in relationship between a woman who desperately wishes for a husband and a man who is

> уже старый, плешивый, полный, имел какие-то запутанные отношения с женой и мамой, то жил, то не жил то там, то здесь, брюзжал и был недоволен своей ситуацией на службе, хотя иногда самоуверенно восклицал, что будет завлабом.[105]
> (already old, bald, fat, and having some kind of entangled relations with a wife and mother, sometimes living there, sometimes here. He grumbled and was not satisfied with his situation at work, although sometimes he would exclaim self-confidently that he would become the head of the lab.)

Although this man does not appear to be the most promising husband, the woman asks her mother to leave their apartment so that she can invite this stranger home. But he cannot be rooted there. After a mundane encounter between them which reveals his vulgar ways and her aspiring bourgeois ones, she returns to work. It is only then, while conversing with a co-worker, that she realises that although this man's grand ambitions are just talk and his fidelity to her will always be uncertain, her future with him is irrevocable: "Все было понятно в его случае, суженый был прозрачен, глуп, не тонок, а ее впереди ждала темная судьба, а на глазах стояли слезы счастья." ("Tiomnaia sud'ba", 88) (Everything was understood in his case: the intended husband was transparent, stupid, insensitive. But a dark destiny awaited her, and in her eyes stood tears of happiness.")

In her preface to Balancing Acts, Goscilo perceives Petrushevskaia's protagonists as belonging to

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[105] Petrushevskaia, "Tiomnaia sud'ba," Neva 7 (1987): 87.

> a drastically different segment of Russian womanhood. Calculating yet tractable victims of men as well as of their own temperaments, they function on a disquietingly desperate level of human intercourse that Petrushevskaia communicates starkly through the compulsive monologues constituting her narratives. (Goscilo, x-xi)

Considering the majority of this author's short stories, this assessment would hold true. Other critics have also noted the gloomy atmosphere which pervades her work.[106] Yet, despite their harsh lives, her four first-person narrator/protagonists do offer an encouraging alternative to the bleak portrayal of her other heroines. They have come to see past the illusion of an ideal, secure place and their identities no longer depend on its steadfast existence, but instead its continual mutability. The inevitable instability and precarious nature of places obliges these women to found a reliance in their own strengths and insights, their amoeba-like adaptability in the prospect of transience. Their secret, private world can be likened to the self-contained mollusk, a world expressed in the form of their inner monologues, to which we alone as readers are privy.

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[106] See Zalygin's comments on Petrushevskaia in the "Biographical Notes" of The New Soviet Prose, 391-2.

Conclusion: Women Writers Bridging Worlds, Bridging Identities

> "The activity of theory is, literally, about seeing. *Theorein*, the Greek word from which our own derives, meant to watch or to look at. 'Seeing' is a complex activity, transformed, like mind, over time." (Elshtain, 301)

I have attempted in this thesis to *see* Russian women's contemporary fiction from fresh perspectives, a feat which is easier said than done. Seeing is indeed a complex and often arduous activity; the fact that it is an *activity*, a process in constant motion and development, should serve as a reminder that theory cannot be treated as though it had real agency in the world; can never achieve absolute results; should not be used in order to mold subjects into theoretical abstractions. Whereas in (political and social) theory public and private spheres are perceived as distinct, the first pertaining to political influence of the state, and the second, an umbrella for domestic and social concerns , a close reading of the fiction which I have discussed reveals that these domains ultimately overlap each other, that the private domain can be, in actual fact, a moveable feast, shifting its location according to individuals' desires and needs.

In the first chapter, women characters are seen as creating support systems among themselves, be it a group of working mothers in a laboratory, or keeping matriarchal family ties strong. They move daily between private and public worlds, the borders of which become blurred. The second chapter highlights how women patients, while handing over their bodies to public care, experience intensely personal, emotional interactions in the seemingly inhospitable site of the public hospital, a world apart from their

regular work, home, and relationships with friends and family. Through the lens of Petrushevskaia's fiction, in the third chapter we note again the fluidity, even ephemerality, of the private realm, how women protagonists in their search for a private space attempt to establish it in temporary places.[107]

In the past few years, interest in Russian women's contemporary fiction has grown, not only in the West, but in the Soviet Union itself. This recent trend could be attributed to the new Soviet policy of glasnost', which to a large extent has allowed a public forum for the many voices which have been silenced for so long. At first it appeared that Soviet women as a group were especially slow to respond to this new freedom, many in fact denying that there was any necessity to voice their criticism and concerns.

The work discussed in this thesis offers various conceptions of Russian women's identities. Yet, another question remains: how do the writers themselves perceive themselves and the possible roles they play? Several distinguished Soviet women writers, ironically, those who have particularly excelled in raising the standards of women's fiction, have heatedly denied any interest in doing precisely that. Writers like I. Grekova, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and Viktoria Tokareva have reacted as though it is an accusation that their writing may differ from writing by their male contemporaries. They insist that their writing exemplifies a more 'terse' and 'masculine' style, relying more on strong plot and character studies than on

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[107] In retrospect, new questions arise from this thesis for example, the predominantly conventional heterosexuality promoted in this fiction It would be interesting not only to explore digressions from this standard, but to question the premises for maintaining the standard as such. I have barely touched on the eroticism involved in the doctor/patient relationships, or the underlying currents of the women's support systems Petrushevskaia seems to avoid the question of sexuality altogether. The Women's Decameron serves as a women's confessional: a day is devoted to the subject of rape; accounts of homosexuality are aired. Yet, this novel is an exception in that it was published outside of the Soviet Union after Voznesenskaia was exiled for feminist activities.

the supposedly more flowery 'feminine' literary style, trivialised for its penchant for detail and sentimentality.[108] McLaughlin immediately recognises the term "woman writer" as deemed derogatory in the Soviet literary milieu in the opening paragraph of her essay, "Contemporary Soviet Women Writers":

> The renowned Soviet literary critic, Natalya Ivanova, subsumes under it [the term "woman writer"] a preoccupation with women's concerns—stories of failed and of happy female lives, weddings, divorces, betrayals—and narrowness of outlook, triviality, coquettishness, and fastidiousness. Of the most visible contemporary women authors, Lyudmila Petrushevshaya feels that women's prose implies superfluous ornateness or decorativeness. She sees herself as writing in the 'male manner', which means to her, a focus on the essentials of plot and character.[109]

As usual, a writer is often her own worst critic, blind to the very qualities which distinguish her work. Petrushevskaia's short stories, for example, are in fact not strongly oriented around a plot; her characters are often vague constructions; everything relies on the compelling, almost obsessive voice of the narrator which strays from one subject to the next. In an interview with M. Zonina, Petrushevskaia avoids answering directly as to whether she demonstrates a "feminist leaning" in her selection of characters.

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[108] Viktoria Tokareva feels that her fiction is different because she writes with humour: "Humour is rare, even with male writers. I prefer male prose, though; often women's prose is overloaded with attention to detail If the woman is talented this is delightful. But I like terse literature, not *babskaya* literature " [*babskaya*, adjective from *baba*, a crude, simple peasant woman] Viktoria Tokareva interviewed by McLaughlin in "An Interview with Viktoria Tokareva", Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme 10:4 (Winter 1989) 75.

[109] McLaughlin, "Contemporary Soviet Women Writers", Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme 10.4 (Winter 1989)77

Instead she relates an anecdote: once she was asked by a publishing house editor about whose side she is on--men's or women's, to which she angrily replied, "I'm on the side of children."[110]

It is precisely this defensive attitude which has marked Soviet women writers' denials of the influence of gender in their writing or, for that matter, in their ability to publish their work. Similar to the Muscovite women whose testimony is quoted in the second chapter, Tokareva expresses conflicting views on women's identity in an interview with McLaughlin. On the one hand she professes: "You know, I used to think that a woman can find herself only if she is with a man, but I now no longer believe that. Self-realization, to have your 'self', your own dignity, is important"; on the other hand, she later dismisses a question about Russia's own feminist Aleksandra Kollontai:

> Kollontai was necessary in her day and age. But now—emancipation destroys the family. Women by nature are destined to be weaker. Men need to take care—in war men defend women and children. Of course, the Bible played a decisive role in determining women's task of helper and housekeeper for men.[111]

Recently, however, Russian women (writers) may be changing their perceptions about their identity. Last year I. Grekova wrote the introduction for an anthology of translated Soviet women's prose entitled Soviet Women Writing.[112] In it she expresses her hesitation about singling out women writers for an anthology:

> Before you is a collection of stories by Soviet women writers. Such a volume is by no means uncommon these days; collections of

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[110] Petrushevskaia interviewed by M Zonina, Literaturnaia gazeta, 23 November 1983, trans Alma H. Law, "Immortal Love", 28.

[111] "An Interview with Viktoria Tokareva", 75-76.

[112] I. Grekova, introduction, Soviet Women Writing, 9-14.

> women's writing are published in many countries, and there even are publishers who specialize in "women's literature." In my country, however, we have neither. Why? I'll try to explain. The main reason, to my mind, is that women in the Soviet Union have long enjoyed equal rights with men. We are not discriminated against economically or socially, so there is no question of any "struggle for equal rights." Equality has, to all intents and purposes, been achieved, and it is all we can do to cope with the rights we already have! (Grekova, 9)

She goes on to qualify this statement by admitting that Soviet women's problems lie in the fact that, despite their (so-called) freedom and equality, they have not been relieved of "traditionally feminine duties." Grekova's contradictory attitudes and resistance to any kind of feminist outlook echo those of many Soviet women. Adele Barker has confronted the problematic of a Western feminist looking at, theorising, Soviet women writers:

> Soviet women writers have recently been paying the price of our unwillingness in the West to contextualize them adequately. In America, at least, feminist critics have put them into their own ideological strait jackets until they have become all but unrecognizable...Despite the protestations of these writers who have declared flatly that they refuse to be labeled "women writers," we continue to mold them into something with which we can identify because it is easier than facing up to the differences.[113]

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[113] Adele Barker, "Are Women Writing Women's Writing in the Soviet Union Today? Tolstaya and Grekova," Studies in Comparative Communism 12:3-4 (Autumn/Winter 1988) 357.

Although admittedly I have attempted to write a feminist thesis about Russian women writers, a framework which perhaps many of these writers would wish to contest, it remains one of the valuable methods to examine the development of their self-perceptions, a development not to be belittled.

Recently emerging on the Soviet literary scene, a younger generation of women writers are approaching their collective identity from what appears to be a thoroughly fresh standpoint. Last year a collection of their work was published in Moscow entitled Ne pomniashchaia zla: Novaia zhenskaia proza[114] (Not Remembering Evil: New Women's Prose). In her introduction to the ten women's stories, Larisa Vaneevna embraces the concept of the gendered writer on a contemporary and historical level, inside the Soviet Union and Russia and abroad. After naming writers as diverse as George Sand, Marguerite Yourcenar, Virginia Woolf, Agatha Christie, Tat'iana Tolstaia, Avdot'ia Panaevna, Zinaida Gippius, Ol'ga Forsh, Vera Panova, I. Grekova, and Liudmila Petrushevskaia, Vaneevna proclaims:

> Женская проза есть--поскольку есть мир женщины, отличный от мира мужчины. Мы вовсе не намерены открещиваться от своего пола, а тем более извиняться за его «слабости». Делать это так же глупо и безнадежно, как отказываться от наследственности, исторической почвы или судьбы. Свое достоинство надо сохранять, хотя бы и через принадлежность к определенному полу (а может быть, прежде всего именно через нее).
>
> (Women's prose exists--as long as there is a woman's world different from the world of man. We do not at all intend to disown our own sex, and especially to make excuses for its "weaknesses". To do this is as foolish and hopeless as

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[114] Ne pomniashchaia zla: Novaia zhenskaia proza, sost. L.L Vaneevna (Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990). Although this anthology has not been translated in the West, other works by two of the contributing writers, Larisa Vaneevna and Irina Polianskaia, can be found in translation in Soviet Women Writing.

> repudiating heredity, a historical basis or destiny. It is necessary to preserve our dignity, even if through belonging to a given sex (and, perhaps, first and foremost via precisely this membership).

It would appear that Vaneevna and this new group of writers are lowering the drawbridges which were previously raised by the generation(s) wishing to prevent a gendered association of identity. Whereas Barker criticises the colonising attitudes that Western feminists tend to bear toward Soviet women writers who reject any feminist program, Vaneevna's generation seems to be (re)appropriating certain feminist positions, claiming their identity as women as a point of departure. Within Soviet society, such claims can be perceived as potentially radical in view of the masculist leanings of the generations which precede them, i.e. I. Grekova, Petrushevskaia, Tokareva. Linda Alcoff's theory of positionality helps to name this shift in identification from male identity to a female one by offering this (political) model:

> When colonial subjects begin to be critical of the formerly imitative attitude they had toward the colonists, what is happening is that they begin to identify with the colonized rather than the colonizers. This difference in positional perspective does not necessitate a change in what are taken to be facts, although new facts may come into view from the new position, but it does necessitate a political change in perspective since the point of departure, the point from which all things are measured, has changed. (Alcoff, 434)

In conclusion, if one of Soviet women's positions in society has been that of a the bridge linking public and private worlds, it may become a

possibly advantageous position when seen as gendered: this place may then

> be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where a meaning can be *discovered* (the meaning of femaleness). (Alcoff, 434)

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While the primary sources are cited, discussed, or at least mentioned in the thesis, some of the works listed under the heading, "Critical and Theoretical Texts," are not directly referred to. According to the standards of the Comparative Literature Program at McGill University, I include them in order to demonstrate the research which preceded and helped to inform the eventual premise of the thesis.

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