

CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN SOVIET WOMEN'S FICTION: 1939-1989

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts**

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March, 1991

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I should like to thank the J.W. McConnell Foundation for awarding me a fellowship over the past two years, enabling me to complete this work; and Professor T. Patera, my advisor, without whose guidance this work would not have been begun.

ABSTRACT

A number of critics have observed that there is no tradition of women's writing in Russian. The writings of Lydia Chukovskaya, I. Grekova and Tatiana Tolstaya - the principle subjects of the present work - partially contradict this perception, and defy the restrictions imposed by ideological authoritarianism and of gender.

All three writers describe aspects of the Soviet, and human, condition, in unique ways. Lydia Chukovskaya's fiction portrays women, paralyzed by the scope of the Stalinist terror, who attempt to survive with dignity and accept their individual responsibility. I. Grekova writes about single women who maintain their autonomy through a balance between their professional and domestic lives. Tatiana Tolstaya's characters inhabit an atmosphere of lyrical alienation from which there is no exit.

This study examines in detail the work of these writers in the context of other Soviet men and women writers, as well as in the light of Western, feminist thought.

RESUME

Certains critiques ont souligné qu'il n'y a pas de tradition russe de l'écriture féminine. L'écriture de Lydia Chukovskaïa, de I. Grekova et de Tatiana Tolstaïa - les auteures traitées dans ce travail - contredit en partie cette perception et défie les restrictions imposées par l'autorité idéologique et par le genre.

Les trois écrivaines décrivent, dans une façon personnelle, la condition soviétique et humaine. La fiction de Lydia Chukovskaïa décrit des femmes paralysées par l'étendue de la terreur stalinienne qui essaient de survivre avec dignité en acceptant leur responsabilité individuelle. I. Grekova a pour sujet des femmes-célibataires qui maintiennent leur autonomie par un équilibre entre leur vie professionnelle et domestique. Les caractères de Tatiana Tolstaïa habitent une atmosphère d'aliénation lyrique d'où il n'y a pas de sortie.

Ce travail examine en détail les oeuvres de ces auteures en tenant compte de l'influence des autres écrivain(e)s et de la pensée féministe occidentale.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no full-scale critical study in any language devoted to Soviet Russian prose written by women. Although the present work does not purport to be such a study, it will address, and attempt in part to redress, this critical absence. The problems inherent in a project of this kind are many. A regroupment of writers based on considerations of gender, rather than of style, or close-knit contemporaneity, can seem artificial, condescending, or groundless; or, on the contrary, can imply an agenda whose focus is determined by factors, questions and issues other than literary.

In spite of what may be considered a trend, in contemporary Russian criticism, of a women's literature, (but not of feminism), which, in this context, is to say no more than that the existence of texts written by women has become increasingly acknowledged, the number of women writers remains disproportionately small. More recent studies, given over to specific mo(ve)ments in modern Russian literature, such as formalism, or more generally concerned with the production of literature, both official and clandestine, are dominated, often completely, by texts written by men. Yet it would be as unthinkable to conceive of a gender-specific qualifier in these latter works (e.g., "Russian Men in Formalism", or "Soviet Russian Men's Fiction since Stalin") as it would be to maintain an apparently neutral, objective stance towards a body of work that excludes men altogether, other than as, possibly, characters, or the odd critic. That the presence of gender can be signified curiously and inevitably in this way is indicative of the actual, unequal difference between the sexes, in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as much as, if differently than, in the

West.

The feminist movement, in its "second wave" in the West for more than twenty years, has both effected change and altered critical theory for good; in the Soviet (and Russian) intelligentsia, the word "feminism" is pejorative; like other terms unspeakable, it does not appear in some Soviet dictionaries. Western interest in literature produced by Soviet women is considered with disdain and condescension in the Soviet literary establishment, itself dominated by conservative men. While gender parity in parallel establishments in the West is by no means a reality, it is no longer acceptable to treat the issue, and those that surround it, with silence.

The Union of Writers was created, not to protect writers, but to keep them in line with Socialist realism, devolving upon a trinity of ideological tenets - "партийность" ("Party-mindedness"), "идейность" ("ideology"), and "народность" ("populism") - abstractions which could be substantiated by political, and police, force. Since the State defined itself as a dictatorship of the people, it usurped the people's right to speak, and rendered the writers' organisation its own mouth-piece. The expression of differing points of view, which mitigates the power of absolute authority, was, once again, forbidden. The heritage of the Russian feminist movement, both literary and political, was obliterated in Soviet criticism once Socialist realism became the sole acceptable ideology.

Writers who did not stray from the narrow definition applied to literature by the State were handsomely rewarded, while those who did were censured, silenced, as the biographies of scores of writers

witness. Anna Axmatova's politically astute aphorism, that the writer is someone to whom nothing should be given and from whom nothing should be taken, was, during and for long after her time, a complete reversal of the writer's actual situation. That writers could, all the same, receive privileges and wield power over other writers explains, in part, both the low literary and moral standards of the Writers' Union, and the exclusion of women from it.

The percentage of women comprising the Writers' Union stands at about seven per cent. Moreover, that figure is in part made up of lesser luminaries, such as children's writers, and translators, whose work, like that of Nina Sergeevna in Lydia Chukovskaya's tale, *Сныск под воду* (*Going Under*), is secondary to that of creative artists, and is certainly less remunerative

In her groundbreaking work, *Silences*, Tillie Olsen points out the disparity between the numbers of male and female authors in any given anthology produced in English-speaking countries. Her statistics, compiled up to the mid-1970s, indicate that texts in any genre written by men outnumber those of women by a ratio of twelve to one. In still too many instances, contemporary publications (in English) continue to reflect an approximate disparity. Until quite recently, however, even this disproportionate ratio was not applicable to the Soviet publishing industry. To consult with the lists of authors from whom examples are taken, illustrating various rules of grammar and of style in Soviet Russian grammar texts supplies an impression of this difference: as an example, in *СИНТАКСИС СОВРЕМЕННОГО РУССКОГО ЯЗЫКА*, (*Modern Russian Syntax*) eight women authors (Axmatova, Olga

Berggoltz, V. Ketlinskaya, A. Koptiaeva, V. Panova, I. Snegova and Tsvetaeva) are cited as against one hundred and fifty men, though the presence of the first and last authors in parenthesis does indicate a liberal editorial hand. In this instance, however, even the low percentage of women in the Union of Writers is not met. Of the handful of women writers named, none are from the nineteenth century; such an absence in a list of British or French authors would be unimaginable.

The suppression of texts written by women accounts for the perceived lack of a tradition of women's writing, of women writing, in Russia:

The pressure to adhere to limiting rôles and unachievable standards made disclosure of self in a mode other than autobiography and poetry virtually impossible during the nineteenth century.¹

While it is true that perceptions of gender have influenced the shape of literary genres, posing the masculine novel against the feminine diary (for instance), it is misleading to suggest that no women writers overcame the obstacles facing them. A small number of Russian women were educated enough to read foreign languages, and had access to the works of George Sand (immensely popular among her Russian contemporaries), the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, or George Eliot. Undoubtedly, prose writers such as Elena Gan, Evgeniya Tur, or Mariya Tsebrikova were inspired by the works and example of women in other European countries which, by the nineteenth century, were less self-conscious about their national or literary paternity than

¹ Sigrid McLaughlin, *The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Fiction*, (St Martin's Press, New York, 1990), p. 9

was Russia. Traditions, intellectual affinities, the creative quest, and the desire to end oppression can surpass national boundaries and characteristics.

Russian feminism, of which there is a tradition dating at least from the 1860s, when Russian society became aware of the "женский вопрос" ("the women's question")² after the liberation of the serfs, owes much to the commitment and activism of the Russian women who went to Germany and Switzerland by the hundreds, in order to train as doctors, and whose independence and autonomy goaded future generations of women, mostly from the upper classes, to recognize the oppressive forces in all levels of the society in which they lived, and to assume integral rôles in the struggle to overcome them.³ Ironically, because Soviet women today predominate in the medical profession, (but not in administrative positions), it is one of the poorest paid.

The feminist movement in Russia was integral among the forces - radical, reformist, as well as revolutionary - of change, and for a time after the October Revolution, some of its goals seemed within grasp: emancipation; the right to education and to work; access to divorce, abortion, birth control, and children's daycare. For a short time, the new Soviet constitution recognized these and other rights and freedoms. As Francine du Plessix Gray remarks, the agenda implicated in the United States' constitutional equal rights amendment (ERA) - which, in the end, failed to be passed - was a legal, if never social,

² Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in the present work are mine.

³ Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women in the Russian Intelligentsia*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), pp. 109-126.

reality several decades earlier in the Soviet Union.⁴

As it turned out, the gap was never bridged. Bolshevik feminists (as they came to be known) such as Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand were aware that the appalling conditions in which most Russian women had to live could not be dispelled by legal decree, and thus formed "женские отделы" (departments concerned with women's affairs) in order to ease a transformation.

One of the goals of the "женотдел" was no less than to alter the structure of the family and redress the unequal disposition of labour. Kollontai went a (logical) step further from the premise, adopted by Engels and others, that a sexual morality based on enforced, heterosexual monogamy is largely responsible for women's domestic enslavement, and argued that sexual unions ought to be free of the constraints of the State. Not incidental to this project was the restructuring of the labour force and of the system of care for children, the better to enable women to earn their livelihood and to have enough leisure to pursue their own interests and development. This objective, so necessary a factor in creative work, was never achieved. The severe depletion of the work force after world and civil wars, and the famine induced by enforced collectivization, guaranteed both the importance of women in the work force and whatever rights accrued to them along the way; the family unit, however, was to remain a cornerstone. Even before Stalin repealed the liberal laws passed on abortion, divorce, single parenthood and homosexuality, Lenin rejected Kollontai's suggested revision of sexual morality, concentrating on her

⁴ Francine du Plessix Gray, *Soviet Women: Walking the Tightrope*, (Doubleday, New York, 1990), p. 32

"стакан воды" ("glass of water") concept and dismissing her theories as petty bourgeois.⁵ Kollontai, and activists like her, were silenced. (Kollontai's autobiography, in draft and completed forms, is itself a study in self-censorship.)

By the time of Kollontai's death in 1952, women's equality had long been declared achieved, along with Socialism, and therefore not open to discussion except as a phenomenon of backward, bourgeois Western countries. The enormous energy and political potential of more than half the population was channelled into industrialization and the rearing of children.

Work and motherhood became compulsory for Soviet women. The figure of the "heroine-mother" was a fantasy projected on womanhood by the State to serve its ideological and industrial ends. The double burden women have had to bear unto the present day, as well as the emotional and psychological weights incurred by the loss of kinfolk when the human catastrophes inherent in a totalitarian system were visited upon them, have been major themes in fiction written by women since Stalin's death. The turn that Soviet literature took after 1953 is well-documented. The strictures of Socialist realism, with its required positive heroes and improbable *agents saboteurs*, were criticized and loosened. The first indication of a "thaw" ("оттепель") in the literary climate was the publication, in 1953, of Vera Panova's novel, *Времена года* (*The Span of the Year*). Vera Panova, a popular writer and recipient of State literary prizes, built her reputation on works of fiction whose settings varied from collective farms to

⁵ Mikhael Stern, *La Vie sexuelle en URSS*, (Albin Michel, Paris, 1979), p. 51

factories. She was accused of "naturalism" in her post-Stalinist novel, which handles family psychology in a way that undercuts the importance placed on environmental factors in Soviet developmental psychology: Dorofea, a peasant turned Party official, raises a son who gets involved with criminal elements in society, while the children of the corrupt official, Bartasevich, are exemplary. Dorofea herself is an ambitious, perceptive, and not disagreeable character whose husband is content to play second fiddle. Apart from these reversals, the very depiction of hooligans in Soviet society, after spies and Jewish conspiracies, was a novel feature in Soviet fiction.

Other novels and tales, inferior in style, appeared after *Времена года* dealing with themes unacceptable during the Stalinist terror: in Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *Оттепель* (*The Thaw*), Dr. Vera Sherer is a victim and survivor of Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign, and in Viktor Nekrasov's tale, *Кира Георгиевна* (*Kira Georgievna*), the eponymous heroine commits adultery, only to redeem herself by forsaking personal vanity and a career as a painter to nurse her ailing, elderly husband back to health.

The most important themes of the post-Stalinist thaw - the murder of thousands of Soviet (and anti-Soviet, as well as non-Soviet) citizens, and the forced-labour camps where millions perished, though briefly and sporadically broached in works of fiction and poetry after Krushchev revealed and condemned Stalin's crimes - remained silenced until the era of glasnost. The publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Один день Ивана Денисовича* (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*) was

considered sufficient literary testimonial, and further publication of works dealing with these themes was forbidden.

Indirectly, this official ban led to the clandestine dissemination of texts originally intended for, and in some cases originally accepted by, State-run journals. Such was the fate, outlined in Chapter One of this thesis, of Lydia Chukovskaya's tale *Софья Петровна* (*Sofia Petrovna*) which, unlike that of Solzhenitsyn, was written contemporaneously with the events it describes. In one sense, the tale is a psychological portrait of a "typical" Soviet woman who retreats into isolation and helplessness as the terror advances, taking the lives of everyone she knows. Chukovskaya records a dispute with Axmatova over the question of the alleged, widespread ignorance, on the part of the people, of the nature and extent of the terror they lived through; Chukovskaya believed that the State's propaganda, specifically the trumped-up charges against "враги народа" ("enemies of the people") was, in many instances, effective, even among open and honest individuals (few of whom are portrayed in her fiction). Axmatova's reply is couched in her unique intonation, a blend of lyric anger and laconicism: "Камни вопиют, тростник обретает речь, а человек, по-вашему, не видит и не слышит? Ложь." ("Stones wail, the reed assumes speech, but you say people neither see nor hear? That is a lie.")⁶

Chukovskaya's tales are both justifications of the bystander's innocence and indictments of the State's use of propaganda. The State's effective control over the media is particularly prevalent in

⁶ Лидия Чуковская, *Записки об Анне Ахматовой*, том 2, (YMCA-Press, Paris, 1976), p. 137

Chukovskaya's second tale, *Спуск под воду* (*Going Under*) wherein the heroine, Nina Sergeevna, reads newspapers between the lines and shuts off the radio after analyzing its jargon. Her relentless process of intellection spares her any illusions about truth and innocence, but, unlike Sofia Petrovna, who internalizes and confuses two separate versions of a reality that, with both, is tragic, Nina Sergeevna suffers isolation among her contemporaries, - writers, men, - who are silent about the atmosphere of terror though they know its cause; Chukovskaya was not.

Sometimes mentioned alongside Solzhenitsyn's GULAG documents, Evgeniya Ginzburg's *Крутой маршрут* (*Journey into the Whirlwind*) is a memoir of a professional woman, a loyal Soviet citizen, who was arrested in 1937 and, after interrogation under torture, spent the following eighteen years consecutively in solitary confinement, and labour camps and exile in the Soviet Far East. Unlike the cynical Ivan Denisovich, who becomes a hardened and disheartened survivor, Evgeniya Ginzburg discovered within herself, and other women, an endurance which is akin to religious faith but is not necessarily founded in it. The values Ginzburg espouses, overtly and subtly over the course of her memoir, are humanist; in this respect, she resembles Chukovskaya, to whose generation and class she belongs. Throughout the years of incarceration and exile, not the inviolability of the Communist Party, nor the ethical consolation of an afterlife, but poetry and the compassion of a few but steadfast *compagnons de route* sustain her. While Ginzburg encountered women faithful to both Party and God, her tone reveals an admiration for the latter as much as

a distancing from the bitterness and wilful blindness of the former. One of the scores of anecdotes that form her narrative illustrates this difference: in Kolyma, where Ginzburg worked as part of a forest-felling brigade, the only women able to fulfil the daily quota were the Seventh-Day Adventists; at Eastertide, having refused to work, they were made to stand in ice-cold water:

Не помню уже, сколько часов длилась эта пытка, для религиозниц – физическая, для нас – моральная. Они стояли босиком на льду и продолжали петь молитвы, а мы, побросав свои инструменты, метались от одного стрелка к другому, умоляя и уговаривая, рыдая и плача.⁷

Ginzburg characterizes these women as semi-literate, larger-than-life paragons of endurance, separate from herself and her educated companions, who (rhetorically) ask themselves whether they could sustain such suffering for their beliefs. Without going to the extent of renouncing her intellectual and political affiliations, in a remarkable chapter entitled "Mea culpa" ("Mea culpa"), Ginzburg links the former to the latter, and writes, first quoting Pushkin's well-known line, "С отвращением читая жизнь свою" ("Reading my biography with loathing"),

В бессоницу как-то не утешает сознание, что ты непосредственно не участвовал в убийствах и предательствах. [...] Mea culpa... И все чаще мне кажется, что даже восемнадцати лет земного ада недостаточно для искупления этой вины.⁸

⁷ Евгения Гинзбург, *Крутой маршрут*, том 1, (Possev-USA, New York, 1985), p. 429. For translation, see Appendix (i).

⁸ *IBID.*, pp 128-9. For translation, see Appendix (ii).

Poetry and the fellowship of human beings, rather than a failed political ethos, provide her with a sense of moral identity, even as the figure of the dictator inspires another prisoner to declaim a poem beginning "Сталин, солнце мое золотое" ("Stalin, my golden sun").⁹ Her poetic tastes lie with Blok, Pasternak and Tsvetaeva: reciting and composing poetry in the spirit of "world", i.e. pre-revolutionary, culture, ease her mind and centre her within her condition.

That Ginzburg was able to survive the eighteen years her memoirs account falls seemingly short of miraculous, and owes directly to the many instances of compassion and help given by her fellow prisoners. In the Butyrki prison, she was interrogated for seven days without food, sleep, or let-up; on returning to her cell, her cell-mate Lyama fed her precious sugar and took care of her; in an overcrowded transport vehicle, she is given a place to sit by a woman from the Caucasus; in solitary confinement she is befriended by a biologist, Iulia Karepova; before being taken to Siberia, a Georgian artist gives her a pair of woollen stockings. Like the cranberries the famished Ginzburg discovered half-hidden in the May snow of the taiga, these small gestures add up to a saving grace.

Крутой маршрут (*Into the Whirlwind*) is an anomalous text in that it is a first-hand account of a woman's experience in the GULAG by a writer determined to express her truth in a society where truth is silenced. She is the witness Lydia Chukovskaya sought, in her work and in her life, but did not find. In this oblique way only, perhaps, can it be said that there exists a tradition of women's writing in the Soviet

⁹Евгения Гинзбург, p. 287

Union.

Neither the experience of the relatively privileged, ethically upright, lonely intellectual in Russia's capitals, nor that of the survivor who keeps her conscience intact, however, are represented again in Soviet letters - not, at least, in the work of writers such as Vera Panova, I. Grekova, Natalya Baranskaya, or Irina Velembovskaya, though a later generation would, with the climate of glasnost, be able to discuss what by then were, are, past events, remembered through a deep shadow. This atmospheric fear and silence charges the absent figure of Aunt Rita in Tatiana Tolstaya's story, "Соннамбула в тумане" ("The Sleepwalker in Fog"). By then, decades separate her from the generation that tries so tentatively, and fragmentarily, to recall her. This figure of the suppressed victim could have no place in a literature informed by positive materialism and focussed on the would-be successes of a militarized and industrialized society.

Within the span of the State's tightened, or loosened, hold on literature, however, a limited expression of the hardships of daily life, of "быт," for women whose heroism is not relentlessly self-conscious and other-oriented, was permitted. The best-known example of this is Natalya Baranskaya's tale, "Неделя как неделя" ("A Week Like Any Other"). This is almost a documentary, yet intimate, report of a typical week in the life of a working mother. Its ironic premise is a survey on women's leisure that Olga Nikolaevna, a lab technician in a research institute, is required to fill out. The questions, by their construction, require organized responses which little reflect the reality of her life; they intimidate her, and bring to the foreground her repressed

anxieties and doubts, such as the amount of work-time lost over her children's illnesses:

Но сколько дней я просиживаю из-за них дома, никто не подсчитывал. Познакомьтесь с этой статистикой и вдруг испугаются. Может, я сама испугаюсь – я ведь тоже не подсчитывала.¹⁰

Characteristic of Olga Nikolaevna in this passage is her anxiety in the face of authority, whose perception of her life is more valid than her own. Olga lives in terror of receiving a reprimand from the director of the institute where she works. Her son and daughter are often ill because they easily catch infections in the unsanitary conditions of the daycare system. Her husband, a sympathetic man because he neither drinks nor beats her, relaxes with medical journals while she struggles with household chores and feeds her family insipid meals whose only stated ingredients are macaroni and sausage. She is unprepared for every occasion she is required to meet, has no time to think, but propels herself forward, surviving.

A vital factor in the alleviation of her circumstances is her friendship with some of the women at the institute. They work out small, effective stratagems whereby they might lighten the burden they all share, figuratively, not literally, by, for example, taking turns doing their shopping in bulk. They cover for each other at work; in some cases, they share a complicity that is often expressed in non-verbal language. In particular, Olga's friendship with Lyusya Chernaya ("Dark-haired Lucy," to distinguish her from "Light-haired Lucy") is her mainstay who, at critical moments, comes to the rescue. With

¹⁰Наталья Баранская, *Женщина с зонтиком* Повесть и рассказы, (Издательство "Современник," Москва, 1981), p. 8. For translation, see Appendix (III)

Lyusya, she is able to reveal her self, her concerns and to vent her anxiety.

This solidarity among women, which plays a central rôle in much of the work of I. Grekova, a contemporary writer, is by no means all-inclusive. Standing apart, and above, the lab technicians is Marya Matveevna, an older woman and Party bureaucrat who responds to the skepticism with which some of the workers treat the survey with orthodoxy: "У нас сделано колоссально много, чтобы раскрепостить женщину, и нет никаких оснований не доверять стремлениям сделать еще больше." ("In our country we have made enormous progress towards the emancipation of woman, and there is no cause to doubt our efforts to achieve even more.")¹¹

Marya Matveevna's attitude conforms to the spirit of the survey to which the women technicians are subjected: firm, matter-of-fact, authoritative; brooking no interruption or rebuttal, it does not admit error. As Olga's day-by-day account reveals, however, the State, far from being in a position to ease the burden women like Olga carry, relies on their labour, their ingenuity and their exhaustion in order to function at all.

Although a character such as Olga is at variance with the super-heroine of Socialist realism, she has little in common with the self-reflexive, perceptive protagonist of Chukovskaya's *Спуск под воду* (*Going Under*). In fact, this latter type, so common in literary productions of women in the West, hardly exists in Soviet fiction, in part because, unlike the French and British traditions, wherein first-

¹¹ Наталья Баранская, p. 20

person narratives of experience have been securely entrenched in or near the respective can(n)ons since the early part of the nineteenth century, the Russian cultural ethos has devalued, or disembodied (by poeticising) the feminine voice. Consequently, even the protagonists of I. Grekova's work, who are almost always women describing their experience, seldom register internal conflicts within the sphere of an imperfect social dynamic, but rather shape their identity, their autonomy, in accordance with existing social conditions, difficult or adverse as they may be, by adjusting to, rather than protesting, them.

The new, or "other" prose, of which Tatiana Tolstaya is one of the best-known, and most talented, practitioners, has introduced - paradoxically - a more realistic heroine because she is observed against a background whose harshness is no longer obscured or surmounted. She may be, as often with Tolstaya, endowed with a rich imagination and an attendant faculty, or facility, for self-delusion; or, she may, as in the work of Liudmila Petrushevskaya, be embittered, competent, and too intelligent for her milieu. In neither instance does the possibility for self-fulfillment or moral ease exist.

Another distinguishing - and novel - feature of this new prose is that it contains more than token representation of texts written by women; more than "one out of twelve". This phenomenon has begun to attract attention in the West, particularly, but not exclusively, among feminist academics (and editors), as well as in the Soviet literary press, where "feminism" as the inverted quotation marks imply (and are applied) remains a highly derogatory term.

The notion of a distinctive, "woman's prose" as a subcategory of a

larger literary system within a currently shaky canon (where, needless to say, women authors are not only outnumbered but, by some accountings, entirely absent) is, if not misleading, then potentially condescending. This is particularly true in a literary sphere that, howsoever else it may have strayed from the orbit of an already outmoded ideology, upholds the view that feminism's political aims, as they are perceived to be in the West, have long been attained in the Soviet Union and guaranteed by its Constitution; and where, concomitantly, a feminist tradition does not exist. Thus, in her polemical article on "women's prose" ("В своем кругу" - "In her Circle"), Yevgenia Shcheglova remarks, in connection with what she calls "феминистский пафос" ("feminist pathos"), "для его существования нет социальных причин" ("there is no societal substantiation for it").¹² She ascribes the popularity of writers such as Tolstaya and Petrushevskaya to a growing mania among an exclusively feminine readership, but does acknowledge that a feminine (practically synonymous with "maternal") point of view differs, in literature, from the masculine. Insofar as literature is concerned, this "женское видение" ("feminine vision")¹³ is not yet fully developed, and remains unequal to the masculine, because it is superficial and psychologically deficient. She does not offer examples from the camp of masculinist literature to support its supposed maturity, roundness, or possession of a quality now in vogue among Soviet literary critics - "внутренняя свобода" ("internal freedom").

That this inner freedom has hitherto been the prerogative of

¹² Евгения Щеглова, "В своем кругу," *Литературное обозрение*, № 3 (1990), p. 26

¹³ IBID.

male writers (whether they exercise it or not) explains the reluctance of Soviet women writers to acknowledge the influence of sexual difference on the engendering of a text, formally or biographically. Yet in the depiction of female characters who are distinctly unfeminine, i.e. not *good*, Tolstaya and Petrushevskaya, in differing ways, have grasped that inner freedom which permits ironic distance between author and character. To be perceived as pertaining to "бабская литература" is to be on unequal footing with readership and critic alike, whatever their gender might be, and, of course, creates a pressure that is apart from, and not conducive to, the conditions for either writing or inner freedom. Therefore, in his afterward to Tolstaya's collection of stories, A. Mikhailov can say of her writing that it is "жестко, скупо, опровергая все наши невольные стереотипы так называемой женской прозы" ("hard, sparing, refuting all our involuntary stereotypes concerning so-called women's prose")¹⁴ while not one of Tolstaya's heroines can be described as possessing inner freedom to any degree, whereas Petrushevskaya's heroines, whose dark understanding leads to apparently destructive acts, present unacceptable models of social behaviour.

The heroine of Petrushevskaya's controversial short story, "Свой кпу" ("Our Crowd") typifies this new, resolute, but unsympathetic modern woman. The nameless first-person narrator, whose husband Kolya leaves her for another woman, discovers that she is dying of a terminal illness, and arranges to be declared an unfit mother so that,

¹⁴А Михайлов, "На золотом крыльце сидели," ("Молодая гвардия," Москва, 1987), p. 188

before she dies, she can be assured her son, Alyosha, will be pitied and cared for. She manages this by staging a scene whose *pièce de résistance* is striking her son before an audience of her friends, her "circle," invited for Easter festivities. While the story is not a justification for physical, or any kind of, abuse, it is rife with it. The narrator's own implication arises from a grim and not dispassionate comprehension of the uses of abuse, as well as of her own character, for at the outset she declares, "я человек жесткий, жестокий, всегда с улыбкой на полных, румяных губах, всегда ко всем с насмешкой." ("I'm a hard, harsh person, always with a smile on my full rosy lips and a sneer for everyone.")¹⁵ This self-characterization serves as both insight and warning: the narrator spares no one her mockery; consequently, no one in her group emerges in a "positive" light: the narrator's harshness shows up their defects, prejudices, powerlessness, incapacity for honesty, and inability to love. There are no lasting ties, marital or amical: relationships are created from the thin air of convenience and are as easily broken. A woman such as Marisha - beautiful and sexually available - can occupy a centre composed of male gazes without endangering herself, thereby proving that in order to attain sexual equality, a woman must have an additional source of power over her rivals. In spite, or because, of their unequal power, the women in the story can be adept at the social and sexual games without a semblance of fair play, such as Lenka, who "тоже играла в сексуальные игры с

¹⁵ Людмила Петрушевская, "Свой круг," (*Новый мир*, № 1, 1988 г.), p. 116. The citations in English are from "Our Crowd", translated by Helena Goscilo in *Glasnost: An Anthology of Russian Literature under Gorbachev*, edited by Helena Goscilo and Byron Lindsey, (Ardis, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1990).

большим жаднокровием" ("could also play sexual games with phenomenal coldbloodedness").¹⁶ This phrase must have seemed electrifying to the Soviet reader, so accustomed to official pudery in the life of letters; but it is the adverb "тоже" ("also") which renders a double effect of startling banality.

Banality, or "пошлость" (a word Petrushevskaya, however, does not use) dampens the atmosphere in which these characters live. Sergei, a brilliant scientist who has calculated flight principles for UFOs as well as for terrestrial locomotives, has his career cut short when the institute for which he works discovers he hasn't paid his Komsomol (Communist Youth League) membership dues; this lapse owes to laziness rather than any ethical reluctance. He is unable to take part in an important and prestigious expedition: "весь институт ходил в океан, а он с небольшим составом лаборанток осуществлял отправку" ("the whole institute went to the ocean, while he and a small staff of women who worked in the lab administered the departure").¹⁷ Meanwhile, Andrei the "stool-pigeon" ("Андрей-стукач"), an empty-headed philanderer, does go to the ocean; in this world, his kind can succeed. In between, or rather alongside, these two extremes, plods the plain-looking Zhora, also a scientist, who, at the dénouement of the story, is completing a doctoral dissertation and, in his modest fashion, appears closer to professional success than either of his rivals. (Petrushevskaya does not remark on the women's professions.) Zhora is a member of this circle in spite of being Jewish; the narrator breaks

¹⁶ Людмила Петрушевская, p. 119

¹⁷ *IBID.*, p. 117

the silence with which his difference is treated, but not respected, in a way that earns her the self-perception of being harsh. This anecdotal passage, a dispute about Zhora's eye-colour, reveals the narrator's position vis-à-vis the principle men in the story - Zhora, Kolya (her husband) and Andrey:

Все говорили, кто желтые, кто светло-карие, а я сказала: еврейские, и все почему-то смутились, и Андрей, мой вечный враг, крикнул. А Коля похлопал Жору по плечу. А чего, собственно, я сказала? Я сказала правду.¹⁸

Andrey's snort, Kolya's gesture of complicit reassurance towards Zhora (whose own reaction is not [a] given) are meant to put the narrator in her place; but rather than be outcast, she prefers to be outspoken. These instances of silencing "truth" (or even one person's version of it) are capable of being described as actual phenomena within a text, as Petrushevskaya's technique proves. It is precisely this voice - which, in an open-ended, dialogical text, can be heard - that is first subject to internal censorship when freedom of speech is denied. This passage rings other echoes in a feminist context, with the additional awareness that the men, their professions, and their complicity, are named and understood, while the narrator has the dubious privilege of namelessness, and "бестактность" ("tactlessness");¹⁹ but the relationship between silence and speech, and intention and interpretation, remains unchanged.

This discrepancy, a near-gainsaying, is comprehended by Petrushevskaya's narrator and evidenced by her aloneness; by the fact that,

¹⁸ Людмила Петрушевская, p. 117. For translation, see Appendix (iv).

¹⁹ *IBID.* p. 120

like many of her contemporaries, she has no one to talk to or be complicit with. Her eventual blindness is connected, inextricably, to her penetrating insight into her own, and her circle's, alienation. On the textual level of metaphor, her vision, heightened before blindness (or keenest before darkness) encompasses, has its source in, the past - she has inherited the debilitating illness from her mother - and foresees the (lack of a personal) future. Before she invites her circle for what will be, significantly, a "last supper," she takes her son Alyosha to the cemetery for an Easter picnic and to show him how to honour the dead, so that "никто не забыт, и ничто не забыто" ("nobody is forgotten and nothing is forgotten").²⁰ As she remembers her mother, so will he remember her. With this legacy ensured, she is now able to complete her self-directed rôle in the passion play, which is a reversal: in order to save her son, she must sacrifice him. As a result of this moral calculation, "Коля, взявший Алешу на руки, не тот Коля, который ударил семилетнего ребенка по лицу за то, что тот обмочился" ("The Kolya who took Alyosha in his arms is no longer the Kolya who'd hit a seven-year-old child flat across the face only because he'd wet himself").²¹ The narrator's apparently destructive act has, clairvoyantly, led to a form of psychological transformation - one which is possible even in the thick of stagnation.

There are few characters in contemporary Soviet literature who can say - against the odds ranged against them - that "я умная, я

²⁰ Людмила Петрушевская, p. 129

²¹ IBID., p. 126

понимаю" ("I'm smart, I understand").²² Half a century before Petrushevskaya, Chukovskaya had already written from this point of view. Chukovskaya, whose work could not come into official light for a somewhat lengthier period than that of Petrushevskaya, shares with the latter the dubious distinction of being published contemporaneously. At the same time, both write about women who experience moral loneliness and who are prevented, by a human ideology, not from giving utterance to their condition, but from being heard. Writers such as I. Grekova and Tatiana Tolstaya, who seem to have arrived on the Soviet literary scene fully-fledged and comfortably perched in Russia's humanist tradition, approach the phenomenological problem of truth differently, indirectly, but with inimitable style - a quality recognized by Soviet and feminist critics alike.

²² Людмила Петрушевская, p. 130

CHAPTER ONE

Lydia Chukovskaya (b. 1907) is a critic, memoirist, polemicist and the author of two remarkable short novels, or long short stories,¹ written over the periods of 1939-1940 and 1949-1957 respectively. Published in the West, in the original and in translations, without permission of the author, these tales have only recently been published in the Soviet Union in a single-volume edition of 50,000 copies - quite limited, when compared to the millions of copies in print runs hack-writers enjoy.² The publication of these works, however, - *Софья Петровна* (*The Deserted House*) was first published in the journal *Нева* in 1988 - marks not only the jubilees of their official obscurity, but also the end of a long personal and moral struggle.

The (non-)events leading up to the expulsion of Chukovskaya from the Russian Union of Writers of 1974 are recorded by her, in detail, in her work, *Процесс исключения* (*The Process of Expulsion*). She had anticipated such an action some time before, in 1969, upon having sent a telegram to the Soviet Union of Writers protesting the expulsion of Alexander Solzhenitsyn from that organization.³ In the interim, Chukovskaya continued, as she had begun in the 1960s, to disseminate protest letters through the channels of samizdat, as well as an essay, "Гнев народа" ("The People's Anger"),⁴ which last finally

¹ Though the English translation of "повесть," "tale," connotes more than merely the approximate length of the genre, it will be, in this work, the preferred term

² Carl R. Proffer, *The Widows of Russia and other writings*, (Ardis, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1987), p. 154

³ Лидия Чуковская, *Процесс исключения*, (YMCA-Press, Paris, 1979), p. 84

⁴ "Гнев народа," (an ironic title) contained in *Процесс исключения* concerns the scandal surrounding the awarding of the Nobel Prize for literature to Boris Pasternak

brought her case before the literary police. Knowing in advance what was about to befall her, she prepared a speech, part vindication and part *mea culpa* which, on the whole, is an ironic recognition of an honour bestowed. Early in the essay, Chukovskaya states the cost of ambiguity under the conditions by which the Soviet writer was required to abide:

Я ведь тоже еще не так давно была печатавшимся советским литератором. Значит, в той или иной степени, я соучастница общей лжи и общего молчания. Но для каждого человека наступает час, когда правда берет его за горло и навсегда овладевает душой.⁵

For Chukovskaya, not to have to pertain to a State-sponsored organization which ruins lives and mutilates or represses texts brings moral relief. She had always maintained a tentative relationship with the literary establishment, bolstered, until his death, by her father's more secure position as Russia's best-known and -loved children's writer. In this context, it is no surprise that the tribunal formed by her colleagues reproached her equally for having dishonoured Kornei Chukovsky's name, as for the technically more serious offence of causing letters of protest to be distributed and aired on foreign radio broadcasts. Chukovskaya herself saw an irony in this belated defence of her father, whose literary criticism aimed at an adult readership had been out of print since his death. The appreciative murmurs her father's reputation evoke in the members of the tribunal set up to expulse her were also designed to bring home the depth of her fall from grace. It is no surprise that Chukovskaya's colleagues, who

⁵ Лидия Чуковская, *Процесс исключения*, p. 27. For translation, see Appendix (v).

laughed when she closed her remarks by predicting that streets in Moscow would one day be named after Solzhenitsyn and Saxarov, should choose to insult her in this way.

The line that Chukovskaya had held for years - publishing criticism but waiting for a warmer thaw in order to be able to publish her tales, could now be crossed. *Софья Петровна* (*Sofia Petrovna*) had, in fact, been accepted for publication during the brief period when forbidden themes, such as the truth about people's lives under Stalin, were hesitantly permitted expression. The watershed of this period was, of course, the appearance, in the journal *Новый мир*, in 1964, of Solzhenitsyn's novel, *Один день Ивана Денисовича* (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*). The silence once broken, however, abruptly healed over again, and the permission to publish *Софья Петровна* was withdrawn. This, in spite of the author's having received 60% of her fees, as well as having been assured by her editor that her tale was ideologically sound. The decision would have had little to do with any given editor, whose power at best could only reside in mediation, and at worst in the application of new directives to the letter. Chukovskaya appeals to, and rebuts, her colleagues' reason and reasons, highlighting her own powerlessness, through which her dignity and irony shine. For example, she expresses uncertainty as to the perceived anti-Soviet leaning in her work:

Я уже давно пыталась добиться определения слова "советски" и "анти-советски". Эти понятия непрерывно меняются. Были, например, годы, очень долгие, когда писать доносы считалось "по -

советски". Были, напротив, годы, очень недолгие, когда, напротив, считалось "по-советски" спасать и устраивать на работу тех, кто вернулся из считалось преисподней, куда был ввергнут доносами.⁶

There is anger in the opposition of the qualifiers "долгие" and "не-долгие" ("protracted" and "brief") which explains the consternation her manner of speaking aroused. As one writer remarked, "То, что здесь происходит - чудовищно. Она пришла сюда и ощущает себя спокойно-враждебной." ("What is taking place here is monstrous. This woman presents herself, here, full of calm animosity.")⁷ From the point of view of her interlocutors, her stance is remarkable because they themselves, having succumbed to the power of intimidation, were now unable to exercise it. Although the session's outcome had been pre-ordained, an admission of guilt or complicity on the part of the victim would serve to justify its function. It is precisely Chukovskaya's refusal to limit her defence within the appropriate confines of the hierarchy from which she was about to be ejected that lends the proceedings a Kafkaesque air.

The consequences of expulsion were immediate: Chukovskaya became a "non-person," whose name could never appear in print. She had landed clearly on the side of the anti-soviet. Her real life in literature, if not in Soviet literature, would continue, with the publication abroad, apart from her fiction, of her memoir of childhood and of her father, *Памяти детства* (*To the Memory of Childhood*). of her ex-

⁶ Лидия Чуковская. *Процесс исключения*, pp. 93-4. For translation, see Appendix (vi)

⁷ *IBID.*, p. 93

tensively annotated conversations with Anna Axmatova, *Записки об Анне Ахматовой* (*Notes on Anna Axmatova*) (which also form an excellent and balanced guide to twentieth century Russian literature), a collection of her articles and protest letters, and a volume of poetry. Until such time as these works could be published in the Soviet Union, Chukovskaya's status as a Soviet writer became, almost in spite of herself, dissident, although a work such as *Софья Петровна* - had it come to light before its time - would have merited its author the fate of millions of her contemporaries.

Софья Петровна was written to describe the atmosphere of terror following the whole-sale purges of 1937, during which Chukovskaya's husband was imprisoned and killed under torture. She had spent two years standing in prison lines, (almost always only with other women⁶) attempting to get news of her husband, whose crime and sentence she did not know. Images of these women, as crowd and as individuals, are at the centre of both Chukovskaya's fictional works, with the difference, however, that *Софья Петровна* is exactly contemporaneous with the events described, thus bearing a unique stamp of truth.

A poem, even a long one, such as Axmatova's *Реквием* (*Requiem*), can be memorized, and was, by women such as Chukovskaya. In this way the work can exist composed but not written. This is a necessary procedure if the work is also a document that can cost lives - the author's, her family and friends. Axmatova had witnessed this with her

⁶ Anna Axmatova refers, with bitterness, to this fact, in conversation with Lydia Chukovskaya. See *Записки об Анне Ахматовой*, том 1, (YMCA-Press, Paris, 1976), p 22. "Знаете, за последние года я стала дурно думать о мужчинах. Вы заметили, там [в тюремных очередях - Л.Ч.] их почти нет." For translation, see Appendix (vii).

friend Osip Mandel'shtam, whose fate hinged on a poem lampooning Stalin. A work of prose, on the other hand, needs to be preserved as an artifact, and *Софья Петровна* was, throughout the Leningrad siege, by a series of friends who themselves perished. The unusual history of the work itself best describes the climate in which it was, had to be, written.

The tale itself concerns, not an autobiographical character, as the later *Спуск под воду* (*Going Under*) would do - that is, not a former member of the pre-Revolutionary intelligentsia, but rather "a bewildered and incredulous woman, a loyal Soviet citizen",⁹ an efficient typist who acquires modest responsibilities in a Leningrad publishing house. The eponymous heroine sees and feels the consequences of the purges, even as they bring the downfall of her superiors, but fails to understand which way the axe has fallen. Her naïveté only intensifies when her son, working as an engineer at the Sverdlovsk mines, is arrested. Sofia Petrovna, who has raised her son alone, cannot believe that he can have had any connection with saboteurs and is prepared to blame the bearer of the bad news (a friend of her son and co-worker) for having led him astray. The point that Chukovskaya stresses throughout the tale is the wide-spread trust in the State which includes the possibility for error, not terror. Sofia Petrovna's conviction that her son has been arrested by mistake does not extend beyond him. Everyone else - particularly the women in the prison queues among whom she jostles - is implicated in whatever crimes have brought them there.

⁹ Deming Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature since Stalin*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1978), p. 269

Waiting for the telegram that would assure her of her son's innocence, but which never comes, Sofia Petrovna suddenly finds herself in a nightmarish world of clandestine prison lists and long hours of waiting. The city she lives in (the publishing house is not far from the prison) becomes alien, unfamiliar. The nightmare is peopled with women who speak a language she does not understand. A woman asks her, "Ваш муж тоже латыш?" ("Your husband's Latvian, too?")¹⁰ and the question - in particular, the adverb "тоже" ("also") - seems absurd. At the same time, the women appear to have more experience and knowledge of the system than does she, which substantiates her suspicion that

[...] все эти женщины - матери, жены, сестры вредителей, террористов, шпионов! [...] На вид они самые обыкновенные люди, как в трамвае или в магазине. Только все усталые, с помятыми лицами."

What she cannot surmise is that these ordinary people are in fact blameless, no crimes have been committed, and that the criterion for arrest is as whimsical as pertaining to a particular class or nationality or profession on a particular day.

Chukovskaya does hint that part of the explanation for Sofia Petrovna's political blindness owes to a flaw in character, a pedantry that is also a mild form of prejudice. Sofia Petrovna is likely the first literate woman in her family: hence, her inordinate pride in her son, an engineer. She is used to thinking of herself as better than other

¹⁰ Лидия Чуковская, *Повести*, (Издательство "Московский рабочий", 1988), p. 47. English translations of citations from *Софья Петровна* (*Sofia Petrovna*), unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *The Deserted House*, translated by Aline B. Werth (E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York, 1969).

¹¹ *IBID.*, p. 48. For translation, see Appendix (viii).

people. She enjoys having control over the typing pool at the publishing house, and is flabbergasted when one Erna Semionovna, whom she dislikes, is chosen to replace her when she is forced to leave. ("Ведь она малограмотная и пишет с ошибками" "The thing is, she's semi-literate and makes typos."¹²) It would never occur to her that individuals can maintain the positions they have earned for themselves in society through means quite at variance with fairplay and aptitude, and that, in this instance, the usurper of her position has managed only by having denounced her and others.

Sofia Petrovna makes her way through the penumbra of waiting, isolation, fear, and yearning, without the advantage of either being able to distance herself from the general madness, or of coming closer to understanding individual suffering - if only to ease the sense of its separateness from her own.

Initially, she is assisted by her son's friend until he is arrested in turn, and by a young woman named Natasha, who had once been a typist but had been hounded out by that same Erna Semionovna. Her relationship to both, while sympathetic, is clouded by suspiciousness, as well as by the *idée fixe* that her son is innocent. Neither Natasha nor her son's friend can break through her ignorance, since that would also imply having to destroy her hope - a feeling which comes, for Sofia Petrovna, close to dementia. Unable to work, and shunned by her neighbours, Sofia Petrovna pretends her son is about to be released and invents letters, full of news, such as a curative holiday in the Crimea and an affiance. While this fantasy orients her

¹² Лидия Чуковская, p. 52. (Translation mine.)

towards a better light in the eyes of the women (neighbours and former co-workers) she decides to trust, it paralyzes her when she finally does receive a letter from her son, informing her, among other things, that he has gone deaf in one ear as a result of severe beatings, and asking her to write an appeal. The wife of the former director (now arrested) of the publishing house where Sofia Petrovna worked assures her that this would only bring more hardship to her and her son. (They sit in the bathroom because, the woman says, in her justifiable paranoia, the telephone is affixed with a listening device.)

Sofia Petrovna notes an idiosyncrasy of her son's handwriting - an upward curve where there ought to be a downstroke - before burning the letter. Emptied of thought or feeling, an old habit of perception, a shadow of affection, accompany her gesture of renunciation. Chukovskaya's irony, here, discloses the dislocation of the faculties of the mind and heart, their paralysis and bewilderment, effected in an atmosphere of constant terror. Having breathed that air herself, Chukovskaya does not bring her authority to bear either on the reader or, more importantly, on her character: Sofia Petrovna is beyond ordinary terms of temporal or literary judgements. Unspeakable, the terror is not named; but it is precisely in a silencing gesture (which simultaneously brings closure to the text) that it is voiced.

Begun over a decade later, and completed after the death of Stalin, *Спуск под воду* (*Going Under*) bears little resemblance to *Софья Петровна*, and even less does the milieu and representation of the psychological scope of the heroine, Nina Sergeevna, to that of her predecessor. Comparisons do not serve. Nina Sergeevna is a widely-

read, articulate, necessarily reserved intellectual, whose sense of division between a moral universe and the world she actually lives in leads not to a breakdown of either, but an enhancement of the former, perceived as a place accessible only through deep attentiveness and undisturbed solitude. Privately-held opinions are privileged over social intercourse, and memory over the events of the narrowly-prescribed realia of everyday; a careful irony maintains both distances and, for Nina Sergeevna, also sanity. Owing to this strategy is a range of observation and reaction that situates Nina Sergeevna, unlike Sofia Petrovna, firmly alongside opposition and acquiescence, whose risks are understood and taken into account.

Софья Петровна is a contemporary account based on a fictional character living in a real, if terrorized and alienated, time and space: *Спуск под воду* is a narrative stretched over two time zones: the past and the present. This, of course, requires a more complicated narrative technique than that employed in *Софья Петровна*, whose chronology is linear. The point of view is that of a woman keeping a diary whose intent is not only to record occurrences, conversations, impressions, news, memories, and dreams, but also to dissociate herself from all these links in order to "dive into the wreck"¹³ whence she carries up a tale within a tale, memory delivered of its story.

The past is variously represented as pertaining to the fates of those "there", in the camps; the second world war; the Leningrad blockade; and the narrator's personal experiences and losses, at first hinted at, then fully divulged. The present is filtered through the

¹³ The phrase is derived from a collection of poems by Adrienne Rich, entitled *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*, (Norton, New York, 1973).

writing of Nina Sergeevna, the only woman staying at a rest-home for writers. The relationships she develops with two very different men are described, as well as the conversations she holds with them, out of earshot, as having no concurrence with official versions of history and of current events. They are brought forth from silence.

Although the rest-home in the country is a haven, for the peace, uninterrupted working hours, solitary walks in the snowy woods, and opportunities for "going under" into the vaults of memory it provides, State-sponsored terrorism continues with the so-called "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign of 1949-50, during which the Union of Writers played an active rôle in the suppression of Jewish artists and intellectuals. Nina Sergeevna listens to the empty clichés emitted from the radio and, recognizing the rhetoric of the purges of 1937-8, is alarmed, the more so because none of her colleagues (save a Jewish poet) shares either her fear or her memories. In fact, a visiting critic from Moscow, particularly rabid in his open condemnation of Jews, upbraids her when she points out that the newspaper articles dealing with the issue have the unmistakable ring of falsehood. Another writer finds her line of reasoning irrational:

Подумать только, по тону слов! не по смыслу, а по
тону и расстановке слов отличить правду от лжи!
Бывает же этакая чушь! Какую говорит ерунду, а еще
переводчица, член Союза.. Недаром она любит
стихи...¹⁴

Nina Sergeevna affirms, (to herself, of course), "Но вот за фирму производящую ложь, я ручаюсь. Разглядеть ее клеймо я всегда сумею" ("But

¹⁴ Лидия Чуковская, pp. 181-2. For translation, see Appendix (ix)

I could vouch for the firm turning out the lies. I would always be able to make out its trademark.")¹⁵ To possess such certitude, let alone to speak from it, would have been beyond Sofia Petrovna - or at least, out of character. Nina Sergeevna faces a different range of problems, and another kind, but not degree, of aloneness. Able to interpret signs of political events that themselves are disguised and distorted if not altogether hidden, Nina Sergeevna is silenced in a company of men who, being writers, ought to be articulate and attentive, but who are, in fact, hackwriters of the sort who win Stalin prizes for literature for writing novels set in Stalin's hometown.

When she arrives at the writers' rest-home, Nina Sergeevna's expectation of complete solitude is dashed; in particular, her first encounter with the writer Bilibin, who will come to play such a significant rôle during her month's stay, impresses her unfavourably: he seems too friendly, speaks with an actor's intonation, and comes off as flirtatious and insincere. She had not the least intention of making any new acquaintance; indeed,

Я как-то не думала раньше об этом, когда ехала сюда--в одиночество. Не предусмотрела существования людей.¹⁶

The presence of other "guests" threatens to deter Nina Sergeevna from her work schedule and from her intention "наконец опомниться, встретиться с самой собой."¹⁷ Her readiness to take an instant dislike to

¹⁵ Лидия Чуковская, p. 181. English translations of citations from *Спуск под воду* are taken, unless otherwise indicated, from *Going Under*, translated by Peter M. Weston, (Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1972).

¹⁶ *IBID.*, p. 108 For translation, see Appendix (x).

¹⁷ *IBID.*, p. 104

everybody would seemingly cast her as a misanthrope: even the matron, Liudmila Pavlovna, provides fodder for some sarcastic musings about women who wish to look younger than they are; but her antipathy is directed towards the strictures of social converse which she has determined to escape. Bilibin, with his actor's veneer; the matron, with her pretensions; a bored film director and his wife, all belong to a world with which she has little in common and for which, initially, she has no sympathy whatsoever.

Quite quickly, Nina Sergeevna establishes a pattern of working and solitary walks. Her senses are keen to nature. Her eyes pick out details: frozen droplets of water clinging to the tips of birch trees, or they take in the expanse of sky, which does not appear as yellow and ominous as it does in Leningrad. She recites aloud the poetry of Nekrasov, Pushkin, Pasternak, and Axmatova, and feels that the setting and the poetry are akin, that the one is the source for the other. The sounds convey meaning in a way she has not understood before, and she is almost free of the anxiety that attends her thoughts about her daughter, Katya. She is not really impervious to the needs of separate individuals, let alone her own need to make contact; she does not yet know that there is someone near who can help her solve a key riddle in her life - a mystery which torments her waking and sleeping hours, namely the fate of her husband, long since arrested and, as she knows, dead.

The unlikely candidate to break through her reserve is Bilibin, whose persistent cordiality cannot be rebuffed without rudeness, especially when he teasingly reproaches her: "Все норовите в свою

комнату пробежать побыстрее мимо нас, грешных Нелюдимка'." ("You always try to slip past us sinners into your room as quickly as you can. You are a recluse.")¹⁸ Reluctantly, she agrees to accompany Bilibin and a journalist, but ends up losing her temper when the men agree that Pasternak, recently attacked in the press, writes incomprehensible (for the average Soviet citizen) poetry. Nina Sergeevna reproaches herself for having spoken her mind so frankly before strangers, and continues to hold both men in mild contempt. A second attempt on the part of Bilibin meets with greater success. This time, their conversation, which ranges from poetry (which, Nina Sergeevna thinks with amusement, will lead to the theme of love, "В отвлеченно-философском плане, конечно" ["On an abstract, philosophical plane, of course"]¹⁹) to silviculture, and the work he had done in the camps, logging. This detail electrifies Nina Sergeevna:

Я ждала голоса, слова, не видя ни луны, ни
деревьев... Первый вестник оттуда! Мне хотелось
поторопить, дернуть его за руку. Не молчи. Ты
вестник. Я тебя слушаю.²⁰

Until this conversation, Nina Sergeevna has been able to rely on little more than guesswork and imagination. The knowledge, very furtively conveyed to her by a friend, that confessions were extracted from prisoners under torture, has penetrated her consciousness to the point where she dreams a recurring dream about her husband's death under interrogation:

¹⁸ Лидия Чуковская, p. 119

¹⁹ *IBID.* p. 134

²⁰ *IBID.* p. 136. For translation, see Appendix (xi).

Надо бы видеть так: стол, бумага, следовательно, стул, лампа, ночь, и входят двое парней, чтобы бить. А вижу я каждую раз тяжелую черную воду, источающую холод, -- воду и молчание. Да, вижу молчание: оно клубится, как пар. Клубы молчания. Это и есть Алеша на допросе. Какие-то люди палками подталкивают его к воде. Тоже молча.²¹

In the same account of this dream, Nina Sergeevna notes that her husband had been sentenced to ten years without the right of correspondence, not understanding at the time that this was a euphemism for execution. Now, for the first time in her life, she has met someone who has gone through the experience she cannot imagine - the transit, the camps; gone is her earlier skepticism about Bilibin, her perception of him as another flunky of the Writer's Union. Now she can say to herself, "настоящий голос знаю я одна" ("I alone know his true voice.")²² The friendship intensifies: the two take walks and Bilibin describes to Nina Sergeevna his experiences, dark anecdotes about the cruelty of prison guards, about a man who, stepping out of a work formation to retrieve a letter snatched by the wind from his grasp, is torn to pieces by dogs; about a boon companion whom he was unable to save from the ravages of hunger, and buried himself under a fir-tree into which he cut a mark.

The detail and expressiveness required to make words come alive, and which Nina Sergeevna has noted as being entirely absent in the literary organs (to the extent that entire phrases can be reduced to a single stenographic notch) are present in Bilibin's recounting.

²¹ Лидия Чуковская, p. 115. For translation, see Appendix (xii).

²² IBID., p. 138. (Translation mine.)

Not only is he a messenger; he strikes a chord she has not heard among the writers at the rest-home, and did not expect to hear from him: the vivid sound of truth.

Это не был связный рассказ, а словно какие-то пятна бродили у него в памяти, проступали наружу и сейчас же делались зарубками в моей ²³

Nina Sergeevna is torn between not wishing to interrupt Bilibin's flow of association and wanting to know what could have happened to her husband, about whose arrest and sentence she has confided. From the few details she has given him, he is able to, and does, tell her that no such camp for prisoners without the right of correspondence existed, and that her husband would have been shot in the neck while being moved from one cell to another. ("Наверное, он чувствовал в эту минуту свой затылок, как и я" ["At that moment he probably felt his own neck as I did mine".]²⁴) From this brief and painful conversation, she learns that all the hours spent in queues, all the applications and letters of appeal had been in vain; he had already been buried in a location she will never know.

The "descent" ("спуск") Nina Sergeevna undergoes is much like her dreams of Alyosha being interrogated, but with a conscious purpose: to write her experience, and the experience of women like her, in the interminable prison lines. The interrogation of memory is as precipitous, as fraught with danger, as is the image of her husband being prodded into the deep. When she has completed her allotted

²³ Лидия Чуковская, p. 158. For translation, see Appendix (xiii).

²⁴ IBID., p. 160

quota of translation, she is free to turn to this difficult work, which she describes in terms of a loss of consciousness before the water closes over her head. She knows this writing, were it completed as a book, could not be published in her time. Her purpose, she recognizes, is to write for and to the future; for the present, the best she hopes is to find anyone she could trust enough to read her work without censure. Her writing, in this way, would be the substance of a bond between herself and other individuals who also refuse to obliterate history and memory, even if they are forced to remain silent through means which themselves cannot be uttered. Nina Sergeevna hopes that Bilibin, whose status as a friend is threatened by the erotic overtures he has begun to make, will become such a reader.

Just as Nina Sergeevna had hoped for unmitigated solitude, but found herself having carefully to organize her time alone, so her new relationship cannot exist in isolation. Once she has acknowledged the claim of one person on her time, others follow suit. The most determined is the aforementioned poet Veksler, who asks her to read translations, into Russian, of his poetry written in Yiddish. The poetry is about the war and concerned, in the main, with the death of the poet's son, only eighteen at the time. As they walk along the outskirts of the village of Bykovo, where much fighting had taken place, Veksler points out the grave of a friend. Nina Sergeevna notices, as she hasn't previously, that there are many gravestones, and wonders, as she always does, where her husband's is.

Veksler becomes one of the many victims of the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign when the Yiddish publishing house, Emes,

which publishes his work, is closed down. This news is announced with satisfaction by the visiting Moscovite critic, appropriately named Klovov, who arouses, more than anyone else, Nina Sergeevna's indignation. It is he who, in response to her outspokenness about the lies in the press and lack of substantiation for an international Jewish conspiracy, says, "Проявлять благодушие в обстановке активизации международной реакции это крайне опасно, крайне" ("To show magnanimity... when international reaction is increasingly active, is extremely dangerous, extremely dangerous.")²⁵ For Klovov, the arrest of the editors at Emes is all that is required to prove their guilt - the deed that supports the word.

Nina Sergeevna distinguishes between the anti-semitism of Fascist Germany and the anti-semitism that serves as a pretext for the second wave of terror:

Это не стихийное безумие, столько раз охватывавшее в прошлом темных людей, это нарочито организуемый, планомерно распределяемый бред, бред с заранее обдуманым намерением.²⁶

The degree to which the new campaign of terror effectively employs propaganda is evidenced in the ignorant, but bitter remarks of Liudmila Pavlovna, whom Nina Sergeevna chances upon weeping over the re-arrest of her sister. Nina Sergeevna, who had only recently learned the phrase "повторник" ("second-timer") is gripped with pity and alarm, for Bilibin and for all who had been released when the Soviet Union entered the war; and for Liudmila Pavlovna, who had

²⁵ Лидия Чуковская, p. 181

²⁶ IBID., p. 167. For translation, see Appendix (xiv).

until now merited Nina Sergeevna's sarcasm and suspiciousness, and now parrots the more sophisticated racism of a Klokov: "'Как вы думаете, опять начнут сильно сажать? И все из-за этих евреев!'" ("What do you think, will they start large scale arrests again? And all because of those Jews!")²⁷ Her sympathy for Liudmila Pavlovna is not so much short-lived as it is drowned in a larger wave of anger mitigated by compassion.

Although the war with Germany is now almost five years in the past, it is seldom unmentioned by anyone with whom Nina Sergeevna comes into contact. The terrible price exacted from Soviet citizens has not, it turns out, been paid in full. For a man like Bilibin, of course, the war was a release, both in fact and figuratively, but for others - particularly Jews - quite the opposite obtains: Veksler lost a son; another Jewish writer tells of how German soldiers burnt his wife and children, save one, in the Minsk ghetto. Veksler will die in a few days; the other writer, to Nina Sergeevna's amazement, wants only to live. Certain verities and the forces they animate are beyond understanding:

Надо представить себе это ясно: жгут поленья и жгут детей. Но сердце не хотело, чтобы я себе это ясно представила. [...] Надо было сделать разговор обыкновенным, чтобы снова научиться дышать²⁸

Thoughts about anti-semitism, war, propaganda, and lies, are by no means categorical, as conversations with individuals such as Liudmila Pavlovna, who believe the lies they are told (much like Sofia

²⁷ Лидия Чуковская, p. 167

²⁸ *IBID.* p. 169. For translation, see Appendix (xv).

Petrovna) and Klovov, who represents those who fabricate them, prove.

The war has left so many marks that it cannot be said to be over, and the re-activated terror is but a new front. The inhabitants of the village of Bykovo are unable to leave, because it had once been occupied by the Germans. Nina Sergeevna learns this from the young woman who changes the linen in the writers' rooms, and who regards both the writers and the work she must do with contempt and loathing. Nina Sergeevna feels the wretchedness of a life trapped in the confines of rural poverty rendered the worse by the life-term to which its inhabitants are sentenced, even as she counts the days left to her own brief stay among the pine and birch groves so evocative of the poetry she loves.

In the village of Bykovo she meets and befriends an eight-year old girl named Lyolka who tells her she cannot visit her at the writers' house, because "мы грязь натопчем" ("we track mud").²⁹ Instead, she goes to see Lyolka in the dirty hut where she lives and tends a three-year old baby, and reads her fairy-tales, which enchant her. When Nina Sergeevna prepares to return to Moscow, Lyolka begs to be taken along. Nina Sergeevna can only promise to send her more fairy tales, all the while thinking the young girl belongs in one (and forgetting that she cannot yet read).

The young woman who has no future and resents her life, the little girl who is affectionate, intelligent, responsible, but obviously has no better fate in store, belong to a world separated from that of the

²⁹Лидия Чуковская, p. 163. (Translation mine.)

rest-home not by a short walk, but by the unfathomable gulf between victims and those whose privileges, consciously or unconsciously, support the conditions for the former's oppression. Nina Sergeevna, being a mere translator among writers (whose well-off status, in contrast to her own relative poverty, is evidenced by gold cigarette cases, fur-coats, and ornate walking-sticks), and a woman among men, feels more than pity for the child, Lyolka: she crosses the line that divides the village from the rest-home. When a nearby house burns to the ground one night, Bilibin tells her that the villagers assembled, joyfully shouting to each other, "писатели горят!" ("the writers are on fire!")³⁰ In Russia, writers, it would seem, have lost their high esteem.

Nina Sergeevna completes her story and includes it in the larger tale. She variously refers to it as "Фонари на мосту" ("Lamps on the Bridge") or "Дочь" ("Daughter"), but finally settles on "Без названия" ("Untitled"). Its setting is the queue formed at the precinct of the procurator by women whose spouses, or male or female kin, have been arrested. The first person narrator befriends a Finnish woman carrying a swaddled baby. There are many women with infants who spend entire nights huddled near the building that houses the procurator's office; in the morning, these women are permitted to form a separate line. While waiting, the Finnish woman's baby dies, but she conceals this fact in order not to lose her place. Neither woman obtains any information about their respective husbands. Afterwards, when the Finnish woman's tram arrives, she leaves. Thus simply put is the outline of the narrative that had required so much

³⁰Лидия Чуковская, p 208

mental and psychic concentration. Whether or not, in the narrator's perception, the story stands as "literature," it is an attempt to describe the undecipherable, while maintaining the latter as its standard. The narrator, a persona for Nina Sergeevna who herself resembles Lydia Chukovskaya in some respects,³¹ does not claim to be able to explain, exclaim, the reasons for even one woman's ordeal:

Я почувствовала свою неминуемость. [...] В эту ночь и во все предыдущие ночи и дни меня мучило не горе, а что-то худшее: непостижимость и неназываемость происходящего. Горе? Разве горе такое? У горя есть имя, и, если ты достаточно мужественен, ты окажешься в силах произнести его, но случившееся с нами лишено имени, потому что лишено смысла. [...] Мне казалось, что голова у меня кружится и сердце медленно тяжелеет не от шестнадцати часов, проведенных на ногах, а от бесплодных усилий понять случившееся и дать ему имя.³²

Even the utterance of these sentences, their traces as marks on a page, do not contradict, speak against, the muteness and namelessness of the narrator. Not only does the story go without a title, but the subjects themselves are nameless: the narrator, the Finnish woman, all the women; the fear and the hopelessness are felt, but neither are they named.

By the time she has completed the story, Nina Sergeevna's relationship with Bilibin has reached a high-water mark. The only impediment she perceives is Bilibin's lack of appreciation for poetry. She believes, however, that in his fiction she will find, again, his real

³¹ The events in the story are based on fact.

³² Лидия Чуковская, p. 186. For translation, see Appendix (xvi).

voice, imparted to her in the woods when he first broke his silence, and not the breezy, charming modulation of his social intercourse. Having noted his silence during conversations broaching on controversy, she does not prepare herself for disappointment - after all, he has good reason to be a tactician, particularly in the presence of the likes of Klokov. When she reads Bilibin's novel, however, she discovers that he has transformed his experience into a Socialist realist text: she even recognizes some of the personages he had described, removed from their context. The plot and setting are conventional: a mining town, a saboteur, a wayward hero jealous of his wife who, during the war, ideologically perfected herself and took into her own hands, like millions of other Soviet women, the war economy, and so on. When Nina Sergeevna sees Bilibin, she calls him a false witness and asks why had he not the dignity to earn his keep in an honest way. (He does not reply.)

Nina Sergeevna reproaches herself for the severity of her judgement, but even more for her presumption of a right, for "Меня по ночам не избивали в кабинете следователя, а когда вас били, я молчала" ("I was not beaten at night in the room of the interrogator, and when you were beaten, I was silent")³³ but she does not retract it. Ironically, they travel back to Moscow together, as they had come, perfect strangers again, until at the moment of parting, Bilibin turns to Nina Sergeevna and, in his actor's voice, wishes her good health.

Bilibin's parting words are also the closing lines of the tale. That Chukovskaya chooses to leave the false witness the last word is not

³³Лидия Чуковская, p. 215 (Translation mine)

simply an ironic turn, but also a "realistic" (in the sense of a narrowing of sights) accounting. The individual who allows the conditions of his or her life to transmute a creative promise into a professional compromise cannot become an artist and is morally unsuited to become a writer. The forest, which, for Nina Sergeevna, is a font of (Russian) poetry and literature, can also serve as an image (not an unattainability nor an idealization) for what is most needed - organically as well as spiritually - in order to create that which will, in turn, sustain another. With a similar figure of speech, Nina Sergeevna explains to herself the matter of her own work.

The intense feelings Bilibin arouses in her obscure her initial impression of him; she has forgotten that, upon asking him whether he loved the forest, his response had been, "раньше любил" ("once I did").³⁴ Even though his real voice remains, in her imagination, connected with the grove where they both shed their masks and spoke the truth to each other, "отговорила роща золотая" ("the golden grove has grown silent").³⁵

Nina Sergeevna does not explain Bilibin to herself, nor does Chukovskaya explain him to her reader. Indubitably, the readers she seeks do live in the future. Bilibin proves, by fulfilling his requirement to explain the rôle of the Party organizer, that he belongs to the rank of those writers she overheard discussing their daily output - between fifty and twenty pages, if the task consisted of character psychology, somewhat less if the material were technical.

Neither does Chukovskaya elaborate on Nina Sergeevna's posi-

³⁴ Лидия Чуковская, p. 135. (Translation mine.)

³⁵ The first line of a poem by Esenin. (Translation mine.)

tion as the unique woman writer among men. Perhaps there is significance in the fact that the only men at all sympathetic are the two Jewish writers, and this, not because they are singularly charming, eloquent, or otherwise attractive (they are not) but because, like the villagers of Bykovo, they have so much against them; they are outcasts, or about to be cast out. As a translator, Nina Sergeevna's position is lowly, relative to the status of her male colleagues. The difference is material. She also refers to her work in terms of output, and otherwise not at all, but her true literary efforts are a secret, destined for a desk-drawer. When Veksler comments on her insightful way of discussing poetry and enquires whether she also writes, she denies that she does. This unwillingness cannot be ascribed to "modesty," a quality sometimes attributed to Chukovskaya herself.³⁶ Her attitude - to her calling, her immediate community of writers, and the wider community of all her contemporaries - can be intimated by way of the question she poses Bilibin, after he describes the villagers' hopeful celebration of the conflagration of the writers: "И Лелька тоже?" ("And Lyolka, too?")³⁷ (Bilibin does not answer.) Lyolka's absence, or silence, in that crowd would have made of Nina Sergeevna an exception to the rule, placed apart from those who rule.

Silence is an important but complicated theme throughout all Chukovskaya's work, but nowhere is it more fully elaborated, and its rôle in moral reality so broadly delineated than in her tale, *Спуск под воду*, where speech and writing are ineluctably connected. There is a

³⁶ By, among others, David Lowe and Deming Brown.

³⁷ Лидия Чуковская, p 208. (Translation mine)

silence, a lethal substance made up of lies and forgetfulness, which must be broken; there is an opposite silence at the heart of the word, its integrity. Nina Sergeevna knows both the drowning in the one, through her nightmares of the torture of her husband under interrogation, and through her descents in fathomless memory.

In a politically tense atmosphere, speaking one's mind leads, at the very least, to self-reproach. When Nina Sergeevna expresses her opinion, on the persecution of Pasternak, for example, or of Jewish artists and intellectuals, she upbraids herself not because she appears unwomanly to the men around her, but for the risk brought to her person and to her daughter. Bilibin even jokes about the possibility of having to testify against her as a consequence of her outspokenness.

Bilibin's work is, in contrast to Nina Sergeevna's story, a kind of anti-testimonial. Chukovskaya examines, without offering any overt analysis, the phenomenon of the complicity of victims, of whom Bilibin is but one example: Liudmila Pavlova, who conceals the fact that her sister has served a sentence in the camps and has been re-arrested, searches the writers' rooms when they are out; and Veksler, even after the closing down of the press that publishes his poetry, praises Stalin as a brilliant military strategist, are others. Whether they are rationalizing their continued safety, are disoriented by fear, or do in fact accord their speech with private belief, is inconsequential, as far as the State is concerned.

Nina Sergeevna does not except herself from the silence and compromises the terror has imposed, generally, on everyone. As one Jewish writer tells her, when she loses her temper over the critic

who had praised the ability of his "cosmopolitan" colleagues (including himself), only to denounce them in the press a few days later: one has to live; one has to preserve one's life and the life of one's children.

Although her biography bears it out, Chukovskaya does not herself emphasize this line. Instead, she implies that a third course is open for those who have trained their moral vision on a distant, perhaps vanishing point: to refuse to lie.

In a world where speech is monitored according to its compliance with, or variance from, the official, mono-language of patriarchy (in whatever form it rules), that which is committed to paper all the more powerfully upholds, or threatens, the currency of that language. Silence cannot be heard or seen, but a lie, in the personal realm as in the public, is detectable in a blandness of diction, an absence of imagery, a lack of modulation and resonance. Repeated, a lie achieves an elasticity of phrasing reducible to a single sign, at once meaningless and readily understood. Monopolized by an author, or a dictator, it loses its vraisemblance to experience and to speech. Chukovskaya's fiction bears out her metaphor of truth: it seizes by the throat.

CHAPTER TWO

I. Grekova, born in the same year as Lydia Chukovskaya (1907) belongs to a later generation of writers by reason of her publishing history: her first story, "За проходной" (a title variously translated as "Outside a Gatekeeper's Office," "On the Inside," and "Behind the Gate") was published, in *Новый мир*, in 1962, twenty-five years after *Софья Петровна*, but predates its appearance by the same amount of time. (Such are the curiosities of Soviet letters.) I. Grekova is a pseudonym recalling the mathematical symbol for an unknown quantity ("игрек" [igrek]). The writer's real name is Elena Sergeevna Ventsel, and she was trained in mathematics and cybernetics, which she taught at the Zhukovsky Military Academy until 1967. In that year, her novel *На испытании* (*At the Testing Ground*) was perceived to be critical of the Soviet military, and therefore anti-soviet. The experience of social ostracism, inevitable following State censure, and familiar to many Soviet writers, artists, scientists, dissidents, and the like, was an unexpected one for I. Grekova; in part because her career in literature began, as N.N. Shneidman remarks, at an age when most Soviet women retire,¹ but more saliently, because she had reached a pinnacle in her scientific career, and was the author, under her real name, of numerous scholarly publications as well as of a widely-used textbook on mathematics. Her pseudonym was no protection: while women in the Soviet Union had, and continue, to carry double burdens, it is not possible to live a double life.

¹ N.N. Shneidman, *Soviet Literature in the 1980s: decade of transition*, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1989), p. 171

Unlike Chukovskaya, I. Grekova has never been politically active. With a scientist's purism (but not prerogative) she disdains institutional politics, bureaucracies, any impediment to conducting objective research or the production of fiction. Her stance vis-à-vis the Soviet literary scene is humorously unambiguous: when Tvardovsky, editor of *Новый мир*, I. Grekova's principal publishing venue, suggested she become a full-time, i.e. professional, writer, she protested, "Мне? Профессионально - в литературу? Да это все равно, что мне, солидной женщине, матери троих детей, предложить пойти на панель!" ("Me? Become a professional writer? That's no different from suggesting that I, as a respectable woman and mother of three children, go out on the streets!")² Interestingly, I. Grekova chooses to interpret Tvardovsky's suggestion as an attack on her honour, and pitches the respectability of a mother of three against a woman of easy virtue's ill-fame: the range is limited by relationships traditionally imposed on women, though in Soviet society (at the time of this remark) a mother would, as a matter of course, also be working, whereas prostitution was a tabu subject. But in the context of a proposition to join the Union of Writers, an organization consisting, for the most part, of untalented and greedy men, I. Grekova's metaphor, while somewhat of a reversal, is apt.

In spite of the distance I. Grekova established between her two public personae, through maintaining a literary pseudonym and con-

² Григорий Свирский, *На лобном месте. литература нравственного сопротивления (1946-1976 гг.)* (Новая литературная библиотека, Overseas Publications Interchange, Ltd., London, 1979) p. 436. The translation is by Robert Dessaux and Michael Ullman, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: The Literature of Moral Opposition*, (Ardis, Ann Arbor Michigan, 1981)

tinuing scientific work, she was not, in either function, able to evade the consequences of the official displeasure she incurred by her fiction. Apart from being stripped of her professorship and demoted to another institute, her textbook was withdrawn from use (as if it were also ideologically suspect) and, apart from one short story, she was not published for the next ten years. In the short story based on this experience, "Без улыбок" ("No Smiles"), written in 1970 but only published in 1986, I. Grekova reduces the time-frame to a matter of weeks, thereby anticipating for her fictional alter ego a vindication earlier than that granted herself. She does, however, reproduce the intellectual climate of tension in the Soviet Union during the late 1960s.

The story, told from the point of view of a highly-placed scientist accused of ideological deviation in research, is I. Grekova's most autobiographical work. The charge brought against the narrator is unsubstantiated by any facts, and she does not bother disputing it directly. Her real deviation, that of producing ideologically unsound works of fiction, is referred to only once, by a colleague the narrator refers to as "Раздутый" ("Windbag"), who concludes his denunciation of her by saying, "Я ей советую: откажитесь печатно от своих работ! Это будет благородной поступок." ("I advise her - renounce your work in writing! That would be a noble deed!")³ The narrator herself never mentions her literary activity, but she does admit to a passion for

³И Грекова, *На испытаниях. повести и рассказы*, (Советский писатель, Москва, 1990), p. 448. English translations of citations from "Без улыбок" are taken from "No Smiles," translated by Dobrochna Dyrz-Freeman, in *The New Soviet Fiction: Sixteen Short Stories*, compiled by Sergei Zalygin, (Abbeville Press Publishers, New York, 1989).

reading, and intersperses her narrative with quotations from the Romantic poet Küchelbecker, in whose diaries, maintained while in solitary confinement, she is engrossed. Küchelbecker's diaries help her to perceive her own isolation and anxiety, compounded by a number of betrayals and intensified by coolness from her colleagues (hence the title of the story) with distance and irony. The latter is expressed in her habit of dubbing her colleagues, friend and foe, with nicknames in lieu of character physiognomy or psychology, such as "Гном," ("Gnome"), the afore-mentioned "Раздутый," "Белокурый," ("Blond") and "Кочузыый," ("Slantbelly"). These tags serve to differentiate among the personalities that lighten, but mostly darken, the narrator's professional world, while maintaining their anonymity, and to identify her rapport with them in simplistic, succinctly positive or negative terms. This at once distancing and fabulistic effect is to be expected in a story qualified, after its title is given, as "полу-фантастический" ("semi-fantastical"). The reader is hence warned of a specific coding which employs satirical devices in order to criticize, but not seeming outright to attack, a structured reality from the vantage of having fallen out of place. The narrator describes her former position of grace at the moment she realizes its loss:

А ведь всегда было иначе. Сколько я помню, мне всегда сопутствовал Успех. Он выносил меня в каждый президиум, говорил обо мне каждое Восьмое марта. Еще бы женщина-ученый, автор трудов, переведена на языки, и прочая, и прочая. Я привыкла к Успеху, как будто он сам собой разумеся⁴

⁴И. Грекова, p. 455. For translation, see Appendix (xvii).

Her professional achievements, for which, being a woman, she is singled out as being both example and exemplary, are characterized not as an intricate progression involving ambition, aptitude, discipline (not to speak of sacrifices and compromises), but as an objectified embodiment of quite another system, having the power to confer or revoke privileges. Her perception of this exchange is suggested by the deceptively vague "и прочая, и прочая" ("*et ceterae*"), a false modesty which belies the tone of the story. While dismissive of the special honours bestowed on her by reason of her gender, she has not refused them. As this passage clarifies, she has never had to suffer the disadvantages of sexual difference. When one of her more malicious attackers thrice splutters, not her name, but the pronoun "она" ("she"), she reacts with anger:

"Почему председатель его не остановит? -- думала я в тупом изумлении -- Впрочем, может быть, ни он, ни Раздутый не понимают, что это оскорбительно. Откуда им знать, как себя чувствует женщина, про которую говорят, про которую кричат просто "она", словно ее вывели для телесного наказания на площадь перед кабаком.."⁵

This simile is all the more vivid for being one of the few indicators, apart from gender-denotative verbal endings, of the narrator's consciousness of her sexual difference as a physical reality, a confined status further degraded through unequal transactions with men. It is significant that I. Grekova should choose a traditional form of public punishment in a location where women were not permitted to surpass

⁵ И Грекова, p. 447. For translation, see Appendix (xviii).

the limit of the private; that is, to speak in their defense, publicly, on the square. Similarly, the narrator's removal from respectability is initiated and enacted by a group claiming to uphold a collective moral standard. As if to compensate for the duplicity of that standard, an old (and old-fashioned) friend, one of few, defends her as an individual "и вдобавок женщина, [...] а где наше рыцарство, товарищи?" ("And, moreover, a woman, [...] and where is our chivalry, comrades?") The narrator responds by blowing her nose "очень громко, очень неженственно" ("very loud, very unfeminine.")⁶ By this, and other, gestures, the narrator disrupts the silence being imposed on her, and dispels the obscurity in which the proceedings against her, and its preordained outcome, has been cast. When her turn comes to speak, she is deliberately unprepared, saying only, "Отказываюсь признать свои ошибки, потому что их не было. Я права. Жгите меня, я не могу иначе." ("I refuse to admit my mistakes, because there were none. I am right. Burn me if you will, but I can't do anything else.")⁷ Though "Gnome" assures her that no one intends to burn her, and the narrator concedes a clumsiness of phrasing, her image, implying the practice of burning witches, and cast in an echo from Goethe, does recall another, distant, and apparently less civilized era than the present. The narrator's allegiance lies, as she makes clear, with that represented by the imprisoned and solitary poet, the only character in the story given a (true) name. She notes, during the "железный поток

⁶И. Грекова, p. 451.

⁷IBID., p. 454

проработки" ("the iron stream of the work-over")⁸ that the process itself has its own inorganic evolution, susceptible to the interest of other parties (or the Party) remote from her own. Ironically, the accidental publication of an already-prepared scientific article helps re-establish her reputation. The "work-overs" cease, and her colleagues, who had turned away from her, once again greet her with smiles. In the aftermath of persecution, they do not add up.

As a rule, I. Grekova's heroines live out one form of isolation or another, sometimes, but not always, owing to external factors. The much-vaunted "shortage of men" after the Second World War and Stalin's purges depleted the stock, is one explanation given for the abundance of single women, usually mothers, in fiction written by women. I. Grekova tends to be laconic in this regard: in her novel, *Вдовий пароход* (*Ship of Widows*), which will come under discussion, the heroine, Olga Flerova, mentions her husband, killed at the front at the beginning of the war, and of the story, once, then never again. The narrator of "Без улыбок" ("No Smiles") is even more reticent: without referring to husband, lover, or children, an absence is briefly felt when she comes home, surprised to find her apartment empty, "хотя живу одна уже два года" ("even though I have been living alone for two years").⁹ Women who are not only single, but also enjoy the advantage of living alone, are, like I. Grekova, at the top of their profession, and are too busy to feel lonely, let alone reminisce and yearn. Marya Vladimirovna, the heroine of "Дамский мастер" ("The

⁸И. Грекова, p. 456

⁹IBID., p. 435

Ladies' Hairdresser"), a researcher in an institute, would not be apt to find herself in the predicament Trifonov, in "Другая жизнь" ("Another Life"), places Olga Vasilievna, a biologist and Marya Vladimirovna's contemporary, who mourns her husband's death while simultaneously, and painfully, reliving her jealousy.¹⁰ For the most part, loneliness and grief, though frequently present in many of the characters' lives, are temporary emotions to be gotten over. The former is almost absent in the lives of I. Grekova's less well-situated women characters who must live in communal apartments, such as Olga Flerova, a music teacher in *Вдовий пароход* (*Ship of Widows*), or Valentina Stepanovna, a librarian in "Летом в городе" ("Summer in the City") who, in spite of her profession, her long-standing friendship with Zhanna, and life with her daughter in a communal apartment they share with the unpleasant, too-talkative Polya, Adele Barker categorizes as a "woman alone," that is ("struggling") without a man.¹¹

As revealed in "Летом в городе," ("Summer in the City") and in other works by I. Grekova, the condition of being "alone" in the sense implied by critics as different as Adele Barker and N.N. Shneidman is one chosen by the heroine herself, and not thrust on her by an accident of fate. The section treating Valentina Stepanovna's early rejection of her husband is a Proustian, olfactory-induced flashback: the

¹⁰ I. Grekova's style is occasionally compared with Trifonov's. See Halina Stephen on I. Grekova in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literatures*, vol 9, ed by George J Gutsche, (Academic International Press, 1989), p 52: "Although she admits to having been influenced by Dostoevskii, she [I. Grekova] reserves special fondness for Trifonov, whom she sees as a representative of the new Soviet prose, prose which merges a variety of genres and modes - reality and fantasy, humor and tragedy, the factual and the lyrical "

¹¹ Adele Barker, "Women without men in the writings of contemporary Soviet women writers," *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed by Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, (John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1989), p 433

smell of a lime-tree calls to mind the summer they separate over Volodya's affair with another woman. Not on account of the infidelity, but on her husband's lies, Valentina Stepanovna decides to end their marriage and is impervious to her husband's apologies, protestations of love, bewilderment, and her own ambivalence. Many years later when they meet by his design, she repulses his overture of friendship; though he has remarried, he finds his life empty, while she, who remained single, does not.

The lime-tree smell reminds her not so much of her disillusionment, however, as of the clandestine abortionist she consults after Volodya has left, and outside of whose dacha a lime-tree stood. He is a slick profiteer, who first treats her with a series of useless injections, costing twenty-five roubles apiece. When this fails, he sets an appointment for an "оперативное вмешательство" ("surgical intervention")¹² for which she herself was to provide the sheets and towels. The sudden appearance of the militia prevents her from keeping the appointment; instead, she flees and carries out her term, giving birth to a daughter to whom, now grown-up, she is recounting the story. Whereas by her daughter's generation, abortion had become the principal means of birth control,¹³ in her own time, the procedure was made illegal by Stalin, required connections, money, and courage, and was dangerous both physically and socially. Valentina Stepanovna has to weigh her fear and ignorance against her future which, as a single

¹²И Грекова, p. 490. English translations of citations from "Летом в городе" ("Summer in the City") are taken from Sigrid McLaughlin, *The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Fiction*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1989).

¹³ Stalin passed a decree making abortion in the Soviet Union illegal in 1936; the decree was repealed in 1955.

mother, is also uncertain and fearsome.

Никогда не приходилось с этим иметь дело. Какая-то уголовщина.. Читала в газетах случай и врача, и женщину - под суд. Стать преступницей, подсудимой. И все-таки без этого нельзя.¹⁴

During this difficult interlude, between separating from her husband and dealing with an unwanted pregnancy, Valentina Stepanovna suffers a depression and sees no one but her friend Zhanna, who, though presented as a fickle, vain woman, is a loyal, emotional presence in her life. It is she who provides Valentina with the name of an abortionist, and then, when both mother and daughter are afflicted with scurvy during the war, procures lemons. "Это в войну-то! Откуда? Спросишь--смеется: 'Заработала честным трудом.'" ("And that during the war! And where did she get them? If you asked her she just laughed and said, 'I earned them with honest labour.'")¹⁵

Now, when both women are middle-aged, and Valentina's daughter is a university student, Zhanna is likely to arrive unexpected at her friend's house with the news, "Опять на жизненном пути повстречалась мне любовь." ("Once again, love has crossed my path in life.")¹⁶ Her affairs with men are short-lived, for the reason that they are married, yet she goes through a great deal of trouble to maintain a youthful appearance and heart, all because of "это проклятое одиночество!" ("this damned loneliness!").¹⁷ While her efforts are successful

¹⁴ И. Грекова, p. 490. For translation, see Appendix (xix).

¹⁵ *IBID.*, p. 482.

¹⁶ *IBID.*, p. 484. (Translation mine.)

¹⁷ *IBID.*, p. 485. (Translation mine.)

in her perception and in that of the men who desire her, Valentina's roommate, Polyа, condemns her: "Пятый десяток - не двадцать лет! А она на себя накручивает. И Лариска за ней. Туда же." ("Over forty ain't twenty! But she's got to doll herself up. And Lariska right in her footsteps. Same way...")¹⁸

In this story, Zhanna and Polyа represent antipodal points of view where men are concerned: the former submits to, and suffers for, what she calls beautiful dreams, while the latter curses men for their habits of drinking and poor hygiene: "На что мне мужик? От него грязь одна. Стирайся на него, стирайся..." ("What do I want a man for? He brings home nothing but dirt. And you just keep doing the laundry for him, always the laundry....")¹⁹ Valentina Stepanovna does not judge either woman (though she feels inimically toward Polyа), and neither does I. Grekova, though significantly, when Volodyа tries to reconcile with Valentina, he tells her that she, unlike his second wife, possesses an eternally feminine quality, and immediately complains,

Вообрази, я иногда вынужден сам себе стирать трусы и майки... [...] Но мужчине даже как-то неловко заниматься хозяйством, правда? Возьми литературу: где ты найдешь мужчину - домашнего хозяина? Это как-то противоестественно. [...] Вспоминаю, как ты г,телестно хозяйничала в нашей маленькой комнате [...] Помнишь?

-- Забыла ²⁰

If it were possible that the difficulties facing women in I.

¹⁸ И. Грекова, p. 483

¹⁹ *IBID.*, p. 486

²⁰ *IBID.*, p. 475. For translation, see Appendix (xx).

Grekova's work could be alleviated by the return of "the traditional family structure,"²¹ then traditional perceptions of gender require revision. As I. Grekova shows in this early story, she is attuned to the necessity for reversals and change, in social hierarchies as in private relationships, which literature can register if not effect.

This theme frames the story's opening, and recurs as an image in a conversation Valentina later has with her daughter, Lyalka. Her duties as a librarian include organizing readings by, and receptions for, writers; thus, in a filled conference room through which the fragrance of lime-trees wafts, the writer Aleksandr Chilimov, described as having "хмурое, немолодое лицо, чуть отечное книзу, с глубокой, врубленной морщиной между бровей" and "большие, жесткие руки" ("a sullen and aged face, its lower half slightly swollen, a deep wrinkle engraved between his eyebrows" and "large, crude hands")²² sits at the rostrum and stares past the gathering at a portrait of Turgenev. His gaze holds fast even as various speakers - a metalworker, a lab technician, an old woman - praise him for his depictions of the progressive features of the builders of communism. In a curious parallel, when Valentina teases her daughter for her unconventional dress, Lyolka retorts, "Ты бы хотела меня видеть чистой, белой, тургеневской" ("You'd like to see me pure, white, like a heroine from Turgenev")²³ - which last epithet implies a prim artificiality. Breathing the relatively freer, post-Stalinist air, Lyolka, and her generation (at which Valentina marvels) is capable of dismissing the values of a previously venerated authority

²¹ Adele Barker, p. 439

²² И. Грекова, p. 468

²³ IBID., p. 483

which confined women in superficial imagery and poses while depriving them of autonomy, speech, and leisure. From a literary icon of Turgenev, not known for any depth of characterization of women, I. Grekova frames a criticism of the power structure masculine convention upholds.

In her much-praised novel *Вдовый пароход*, (*Ship of Widows*) I. Grekova examines once again the predicament of women living without men through the perception of a woman of the intelligentsia who finds herself among contemporaries of varying classes, tastes and temperaments. Olga Flerova is a professionally-trained pianist about to embark on a performance career when the Soviet Union enters the Second World War, her husband is killed at the front, and her mother and young daughter are crushed to death during a bombardment of their neighbourhood of Moscow, which also leaves her partially paralyzed, and temporarily deaf and blind. Without doubt, hers is the harshest fate meted out to any character in I. Grekova's oeuvre, but neither author nor character dwell on it for very long: "Так, в глухой темноте шло для меня время без времени" ("So in this deaf darkness passed a timeless time")²⁴ - and by the next page, she has recovered as much as she ever will and is looking for work. Her intended career is now out of the question, but this is the least of her regrets: "Пожалуй, я не была по-настоящему талантлива. От таланта мне досталась только свирепая совесть, заставлявшая меня без конца упражняться." ("I have

²⁴И Грекова, *Вдовый пароход*, Новый мир, № 5, (1981), (ст. 66-147), p. 67. English translations of citations from *Вдовый пароход*, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *The Ship of Widows*, translated by Cathy Porter (Virago Press Limited, London, 1985).

never really been very good. My talent had conferred on me nothing but a savage dissatisfaction with myself and an implacable conscience, which forced me to practise endlessly".)²⁵ She tends to be as hard on herself as her life is, but her experience of near-death, and release from it, has shed a light on ordinary reality that renders it interesting.

Entirely bereft and almost friendless at the start of the novel, Olga Flerova comes to form part of a close-knit community of women. To live alone, or with one other person, would not suit her: like Chukovskaya's Nina Sergeevna, who would like to sink into the consciousness of each passenger on a train full of women, Olga Flerova needs the clarity that identifying with several points of view can provide.

Owing to I. Grekova's stylistic reliance on dialogue, the five women are, from the onset, easily distinguishable from one another. Dialogue also bridges the sections told from Olga's first-person point of view, and those of the omniscient narrator. Kapa Gushchina, who is religious in an earthy, ritualistic way, and would like to enter a convent in her old age, works as a nightwatch. Ada Efimovna, a former singer in musical comedies, has lost her voice and sells tickets in a theatre in order to remain near that locale. This devotion in professionally-reduced circumstances is paralleled by Olga's humble but challenging job as a music teacher in an orphanage. Panka Zyкова is a reticent, capable, and somewhat dogmatic tool-fitter who takes an instant dislike to Olga and to the latter's habit of listening to Classical music on the radio. And finally, Anfisa Gromova, who, on her return from the war-front where she had worked as a nurse, forms an

²⁵И Грекова, р 68

especially close friendship with Olga.

Anfisa also attains prominence over the other women because she bears a son for whom she sacrifices her life, and who takes up the central portion of the novel. In Anfisa's case, there is no question of an abortion, though the child was not conceived with her husband (who, when he returns from the war, beats her, forgives her, takes to drink, then is crushed by a trolley). As Vadim develops from a spoiled child to a wilful, lazy and ungrateful adolescent and man who ruins his mother's hopes of respectability, Anfisa's relationships with the other women alters; devoting her strength and personality to an illusion, her connection to the world and interest in, and desire for, exchange, wane. Interestingly, when Olga first becomes friends with Anfisa, she lends her a copy of Dostoevsky's *Униженные и оскорбленные* (*The Insulted and the Injured*) which Anfisa "с жадностью прочла" ("read passionately") because it is "про жизнь" ("about life");²⁶ years later, however, when Anfisa is dispirited and worn out, she rejects a similar offering:

Зайдешь к ней поделиться, а она книжку сует, будто лекарство какое. В книжке, моя матушка, про других написано, а ты мне такую дай, чтобы про меня²⁷

Even couched in free indirect speech, this passage connotes Anfisa's confusion through the change in the address of her remark, from the third-person to Olga herself. As such, it veils what might otherwise form an authorial digression on the absence, in literature, of texts that speak of and to women's experience.

²⁶И Грекова, p 85 (Translations mine.)

²⁷*IBID.*, p 133 For translation see Appendix (xxi).

A less subtle censorship is exerted on Olga at her place of work. She discovers she can compose music, and though modest about the results, soon develops a passion for writing songs for children, who are also her performers and audience. When Inna Petrovna, the pedantic new director of the orphanage replaces Eulampia Zaxarovna (who had hired Olga out of kindness) Olga's and her children's diversion, being ideologically unsound, is disallowed. She is informed that

Пользование в работе с детьми неапробированными, непроверенными материалами в наше время приравнивается к идеологической диверсии²⁸

The words "в наше время" ("at this time"), referring to the post-war years before Stalin's death²⁹ form the only non-ideological unit in this otherwise bloodless phrase of a language I. Grekova, like other Soviet women writers, never utilizes, only quotes. As to everything, Olga becomes accustomed to this new stricture, and is only briefly haunted by the strain of a polka (composed by her) at night.

Just as Olga reflects on, and interprets, the characters of the women she lives with, so is she perceived by them: her reticence, her solitary habits, and the fact that she never weeps, create the impression she is a cold but dispossessed snob. The children, on the other hand, love their music hour best, though some of them call her Baba-Yaga, after the witch in Russian folklore, because she walks with a stick. ("Ко всему привыкаешь" ["You can get used to anything."]³⁰)

²⁸ И. Грекова, p. 95 For translation, see Appendix (xxii).

²⁹ This information can be deduced internally in the text

³⁰ *IBID.*, p. 70

Among these perceptions emerges the figure of a woman who maintains her autonomy, keeps her own counsel, and knows no fear: "Я вообще не боюсь стихийных бедствий грозы, бомбежки, разгневанных мужчин" ("I'm never afraid of elemental disasters - thunderstorms, bombing raids or angry men.")³¹

As N.N. Shneidman notes, the widow's ship is rocked by Vadim's emotional turbulence, and the focus of the novel shifts from the undynamic lives of the women to Vadim's regeneration. Through caring for his mother during her last illness, and resolving to begin anew after her death, Vadim reenacts a well-known Russian scenario.

Before Anfisa dies, she becomes incontinent, and speaks an incomprehensible bird-talk. Vadim takes complete charge of her, and permits no one to see her. This obsessive and chronic care also has the effect of "feminizing" him: apart from learning to be patient and tender with his mother, he

кормил и мыл ее, он выполнял и другие процедуры, от которых мужчины обычно уклоняются, оставляя женщинам все нечистое, отвратительное.³²

This turn of events would be puzzling, were I. Grekova's hearkening to Dostoevsky, with whom she reveals in this and other work a strong link, not taken into account. The possibility for change, that modern redemption, resides even in relations that have failed under embittering circumstances. More importantly for I. Grekova, in the nurturance and preservation of life ("простота и яркость"

³¹ И. Грекова, p. 144

³² IBID., p. 139. For translation . see Appendix (xxiii).

["simplicity and light"]³³), a reversal of rôles is not only possible, but necessary.

In I. Grekova's most recent, novel, *Перелом*, (*The Turning-point*) this reversal relates explicitly to gender. Kira Petrovna Reutova is a medical doctor by profession. She takes pride in her work, and - like so many of I. Grekova's heroines by the time they reach middle-age - she has attained for, and by, herself, a certain degree of security; a point of rest. She has long since divorced her husband, a hard-drinking, smooth-talking journalist, and has raised two sons who are now adults: one is as capable and compassionate as the other is purposeless and unreliable. The "turning-point" (on a purely physical plane) occurs when Kira Petrovna, in Moscow to speak at a medical conference, slips on the icy streets and has to be taken to hospital, where she begins a long convalescence that does not end, even when she is able to return home. Still on crutches and unable to work, let alone climb to her fourth-storey flat, she finds her younger son has married and occupies, with his wife Natasha, her room. The *deus ex machina* is a Doctor Chagin, director at the hospital where she works, and her mentor. Only half-aware of her situation, he invites her to live with him, supervises her near-complete recovery, and convinces her to return to work. Doctor Chagin's tactful hospitality and medical supervision (for Kira Petrovna fails to heal herself) are almost as vital to Kira Petrovna as his openness to her confidence and timely advice. Though Doctor Chagin remains a shadowy, somewhat remote figure, in his simplicity and kindness he is, at least in literature written by

³³И. Грекова, р 69

women in the Soviet Union, almost unique.

For Kira Petrovna, the turning-point is a baptism, through pain, into a new (and difficult) life: a Soviet specie of the mystical "cloud of unknowing".³⁴ If, at the start of the novel, she feels content because she is useful, the experience of being laid-up in a hospital, far from home and at the mercy of the very system in which she once exerted authority, destroys her illusion of autonomy and indeed of self. Pain fills the gap in her broken consciousness; its very name (боль) is the root of the word for hospital (больница) - a morphological connection she is startled to realize, for the first time in her life, though for the greater portion of it she has worked in a hospital, diagnosing the cause, and finding the remedy, for the pain of others.

This reversal - from the status of doctor to that of patient - is reminiscent of Dr. Liudmila Dontsova in Solzhenitsyn's novel, *Раковый корпус* (*Cancer Ward*). When stricken with cancer, she, too, loses her former efficiency and equanimity:

Чтобы до такой степени известное тебе, многократно, вдоль и поперек известное, могло вывернуться и стать совсем новым и чужим - Донцова все-таки не представляла.³⁵

Whereas Solzhenitsyn's Dr. Dontsova sinks into fear and helplessness, I. Grekova's Dr. Kira Petrovna is constitutionally incapable of remaining depressed or self-absorbed. (In any event, she is not faced with mortal terror.) When the pain recedes, leaving its own insight as

³⁴ The phrase is borrowed from the title of an anonymous work of English mysticism.

³⁵ Александр Солженицын, *Раковый корпус*, (YMCA-Press, Paris, 1968), p. 373. For translation, see Appendix (xxiv).

psychological scar-tissue, Kira Petrovna gradually begins to understand the paradoxes in her life and in her society. She has identified her purpose in relation to others, her children and her patients; she has made a profession of need and, by ensuring professional and domestic autonomy, has removed herself from its source. Unlike Dr. Dontsova, she is not alone; her spirits rally, and she quickly becomes acquainted with other women on her ward: Darya Ivanovna, who has cancer, and with whom she forms a "настоящая дружба" ("true friendship"); with the simple and friendless Olga Matveevna, whose only human tie in the world is with her cat, Timosha; and with Zina, a perplexing, articulate, distraught woman who takes an instant dislike to Kira Petrovna. These three relationships elicit varying emotional responses, according to the character of the individual concerned - and this, for Kira Petrovna, used to being treated with universal deference and gratitude, is a novelty. In particular, Zina's antagonism piques her interest; from Darya Ivanovna, whose friend everyone is, she learns that Zina has attempted to commit suicide after her husband (a bigamist) returns to his first wife and informs her she has no legal right to stay in their apartment. "Ах, так?--она говорит.--Сказал: в воздухе прописана? Так и пойду в воздух ' И шагнула прямехонько в окно " ("Oh, yes?--she says.--'You say I'm registered in the air? Then I shall go to the air.' And straight away she strode through the window.")³⁶ For Kira Petrovna, whose husband tried to forestall their separation by claiming, "мальчишкам нужен отец" ("the boys need a father") (to which

³⁶И. Грекова, p. 166. English translations of citations from *Пепелом* (*The Turning-point*) are mine.

she adds, laconically, "Оказалось, не так-то и нужен" ["As it turned out, he wasn't needed that much"]³⁷ this behaviour is foreign, even distasteful. To round out Zina's character, I. Grekova supplies her with a drug habit. On learning this, Kira Petrovna, the Soviet doctor, remarks, "... Наркомания - так нас учили - бич капиталистических стран." ("Drug addiction, or so we were taught, is the scourge of capitalist countries.")³⁸ In spite of her prejudice and naïveté, Kira Petrovna does not pass judgement on Zina, but rather on herself, for the flaw - or privilege - that prevents her from being able to communicate with her. After Zina's death, she makes up for this lack, when, with Dr. Chagin, she adopts her son, Volodya, a mute boy, and - ironically - teaches him to speak.

Kira Petrovna's exposure to a character as harsh and (to her) as antagonistic as Zina helps reshape her self-perception even as her physical appearance deteriorates and her *amour propre* disintegrates. Her recovery is as much psychological as it is physical: thus, she can quote Darya Ivanovna's sympathetic statement about Zina in connection with her own daughter-in-law, Natasha, whom she dislikes and has reason to resent: "Ее тоже можно понять" ("One can understand her, too."). And further, "Пытаюсь понять Наташу, войти в ее психологию. Смотрю на себя ее глазами." ("I try to understand Natasha, enter her psychology. Look at myself with her eyes.")³⁹ The portrait is not flattering, but it does her justice.

³⁷ И. Грекова, p. 110

³⁸ *IBID.*, p. 172. (Translation mine.)

³⁹ *IBID.*, p. 203 (Translation mine.)

Similarly, the portrait that I. Grekova provides of Soviet society - in spite of criticism that in her later work, particularly in the novel under question, she has mellowed in this regard - is singularly unbecoming. It is a society incapable of taking care of its own. I. Grekova removes her resourceful heroine from her comfortable provincial setting to the Soviet capital in part to render more acutely this failure. Kira Petrovna's fall in the icy streets of Moscow is paralleled by Zina's fall from the apartment where she has been evicted by her husband: in either event, no provision is made for accidents. Kira Petrovna discovers, for example, that she cannot receive adequate care, or even have her bed linen changed, without bribery. Zina is permitted to stay in the hospital, in spite of her erratic, "aggressive" behaviour, because the ward matron, who happens to be compassionate, is reluctant to have her sent to a psychiatric hospital where she would be mistreated. Kira Petrovna's mentor, Dr. Chagin, rescues Zina's son from a State-run orphanage for the same reason. Olga Matveevna cannot return to her flat but must go to a nursing-home without being able to see her Timosha. (In a cruel touch, the cat is poisoned by Olga's neighbours, whom she herself terms "волки" ["wolves"]).⁴⁰ If these characters survive at all (and for the most part, they do not) it is owing to the strength and compassion of other individuals - i.e., values which, in a supposedly egalitarian society, are considered "bourgeois".

These defects in society are mirrored in personal - particularly heterosexual - relationships, of which not a one is presented in a

⁴⁰И. Грекова, p. 178

positive light. This, too, is a deliberate strategy on the part of I. Grekova, for on the train to Moscow, Kira Petrovna falls in love with a man with whom, owing to the fracture and her ensuing deterioration, she is unable to meet again. (Without this fracture, perhaps, the novel would have become a simple love-story.) Kira Petrovna had been in a position, professionally and psychologically, to divorce her first, aforementioned husband; Zina, a dependent personality, is almost driven to suicide by hers. Valentin, her younger son, who, like his father, is an alcoholic, fights incessantly with his wife Natasha - a fact which determines Kira Petrovna to leave her own apartment. Dmitri, her elder, and more reliable son, marries predictably and joylessly. (Both sons are a disappointment to her.) The only true love, I. Grekova seems to suggest, is that which is not dependent on ties of blood or legality, of desire or dependence, for it is precisely these ties that are regulated, and therefore spoiled, by society.

I. Grekova's implicit social critique becomes, at times, the conscious focus of her heroine's thoughts. The division of labour along gender lines is a good example:

Феминизированные профессии - это чаще всего невыгодные, изнуряющие, непрестижные. Учителя, врачи, - почти сплошь женщины. А те, в оранжевых робах, ворочающие шпалы и рельсы на путях, - мужчина-руководитель стоит покрикивает. А домашний труд - отупляющий, неизбывный... Работа, дом, вечная нехватка времени - скольких женщин они надломили, преждевременно состарили!⁴¹

The dry, sociological thesis statement is vividly offset by the image of

⁴¹ И Грекова, p. 118 For translation, see Appendix (xxv).

women in orange overalls building a railroad and being shouted at by a foreman. The notion of masculine chivalry is a masculine myth - at least, in Soviet society, where the underpaid, hard labour is undertaken, for the most part, by women, while positions of influence are, in the main, held by men.

This (common) reality seldom enters Soviet literature, but as a theme, an observation, or merely as an image, in the work of I. Grekova it can be met with a degree of reversal - even subversion.

While I. Grekova, as a novelist, does not offer a solution, nor as a critic apportion blame, she does imply that personal change is necessary, be it through the catalysts of pain, brokenness, or loss; yet, throughout her fiction, all her heroines find their way into a new life, independence, and, oddly, peace.

CHAPTER THREE

Of the new writers who have been publishing since the censorship was opened up under glasnost, Tatiana Tolstaya is considered to be one of the most promising talents to have arrived on the literary scene. Her short stories - difficult, dense, unusual in their range of diction, rich with adjectives, narrated from many points of view, almost unrelievedly gloomy but for an always present situational irony, have in just a few years established her as a writer of international status.

Writing contemporaneously with political change, not to say upheaval, she is considered to be part, or possibly a crest, of a new wave in Soviet literature which is now commonly referred to as "другая проза" ("the other prose"). In this way, it is formally distinguished from the established, mainstream tradition of Socialist realism, in which it would have been unlikely to have found a niche. This prose, as exemplified in the work of Yegvenii Popov, Viacheslav P'etsux, Liudmila Petrushevskaya, Valerija Narbikova, and Viktoria Tokareva, to name a few, is truly "other" in that it explores previously forbidden themes in dis-establishmentarian styles. The hard realities of the former are almost, but not quite, belied by the unorthodox innovations in Baroque ornamentation of the latter. The "otherness" of this prose does connote an ethereality muddled by the cares of earthly (Soviet) existence (nowhere more evident than in the work of Tatiana Tolstaya) unmitigated, however, by idealism, and expressed in language reminiscent of the great modernist innovators, Joyce, Proust, and Woolf.

The other prose is not, on the other hand, entirely innovative, even within the tradition of modern Russian literature (which experienced a cut-off point by the end of the 1920s): the critic Yevgenia Shcheglova points out "что в отечественной литературе многие из тех новаций, которые сконцентрировались в нынешнем авангардистском крыле, уже существовали" ("that in Russian literature, many innovations claimed by today's avant-garde have, in fact, already been explored").¹ (In this instance, she has in mind the technique, reminiscent of Zoshchenko, of blending authorial point of view with that of character.)

More significantly, the other prose derives its drive from opposition: from otherness. It would not have come into existence without the relaxed controls of censorship. Indeed, in his article, entitled simply "Другая проза" ("The Other Prose"), Sergei Chuprinin declares that no commonality links the new writers (for they certainly do not form a "group" in the sense of the village prose writers, for example) "кроме того, что и те, и другие годами, иногда десятилетиями не могли пробиться к читателю" ("except that, during these and other years - sometimes for decades, they have been unable to reach their readership").² Tatiana Tolstaya had the good fortune to appear on the literary scene when the reins of censorship were loosened enough to contain both the controversial subject matter of her stories as well as the no less challenging stylistic idiosyncrasies in which her themes are expressed. The critics are unanimous on this latter point:

¹ Евгения Щеглова, "В своем кругу," *Литературное обозрение*, № 2 (1990), p 23.

² Сергей Чупринин, "Другая проза," *Литературная газета*, № 6, (II, 8, 1989), p 4

Tolstaya has experienced a minor *succès de fou* which is linked to her unmistakable, and to a degree inimitable, mastery of her own voice and exposition of her broad literary culture. In reviews of her collection, entitled "*На золотом крыльце сидели...*" (*On the Golden Porch*), Andrej Vasilevskij remarks that her stories are "насыщены 'знаками' культурных явлений. Двадцатые годы, к которым она отсылает читателей и критиков, в ее прозе присутствуют," ("saturated with cultural traces. She hearkens her readers and her critics to the twenties, which are present in her work")³ while Leonid Baxnov finds an even earlier antedecent of modernist literature in her "иронические отношение к донкихотам (не к их благородству, а к возвышенно-романтизированным представлениям о действительности)" ("ironic relation to the Don Quixote-types; not to their nobility, but rather to their lofty and romantic notion of reality").⁴ The key word in the second remark is "ironic," for Tolstaya's irony defies interpretation, as the vagaries of critical stances towards her authorial intention illustrate.

It is, of course, a quality of irony to be open-ended, to generate meanings that can oppose and defy each other. Sigrid McLaughlin states that Tolstaya

removes the reader from situations which traditionally would evoke compassion, introspection, and a sense of personal responsibility or catharsis. Scoffing at sentimentality, empathy, and ethical involvement, she ridicules hallowed assumptions and the clichés of tradition[.]⁵

³ Андрей Василевский, "Ночи холодны," *Дружба народа*, № 7, (1988), p. 257

⁴ Леонид Бахнов, "В мире журналов и книг," *Знамя*, № 7, (1988), p. 228

⁵ Sigrid McLaughlin, "Contemporary Soviet Women Writers," *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme*, Vol. 10, No. 4, (1989), p. 80

whereas I. Grekova notes that "вообще, жалость к своим героям - одна из отличительных черт творчества Т. Толстой" ("in general, compassion towards her heroes forms a distinctive characteristic in the work of Tatiana Tolstaya").⁶ Andrej Vasilevskij defends Tolstaya, declaring that "автор не жесток, жизнь жестокая" ("it is life, not the author, that is cruel"),⁷ but Raisa Shishkova comes closest to identifying Tolstaya's paradoxical style: "в этих рассказах весьма сложная игра, спутано милосердие и беспощадность" ("these stories are marked by a complicated interplay of mercy and ruthlessness").⁸

The differing ideas and ideologies implicit in this range of response attest to Tolstaya's surface elusiveness, and the masking of her authorial agenda, through the praxis of irony. As the critic Justinia Djaparidze-Besharov notes, however, irony itself "is so elusive of definition because its origin lies in a character and not in an idea".⁹ And though Tolstaya's remarkable prose style has been qualified, by some of the above-mentioned critics, by its affinity with poetic structures and figures, at its heart is a human personality, an individual voice privileged in the context of loneliness, difference, oddness or disempowerment. These themes occupy most, if not all, her stories, but are especially evident in those stories which deal with, or are told primarily from the point of view of, children. It is in these

⁶ И Грекова, "Расточительность таланта", *Новый мир*, № 1, (1988), p 255

⁷ Андрей Василевский, p 256

⁸ Раиса Шишкова, *Континент*, № 56, (1988), p 401

⁹ Justinia Djaparidze-Besharov, "Towards a Definition of Irony," in *Studies in Slavic Literature and Culture in Honour of Zoya Iureeva*, ed. by Munir Sendich, (The Russian Language Journal, East Lansing, Michigan, 1988), p 85

stories - three out of thirteen in the collection - that I. Grekova notes Tolstaya's particular talent:

Детство в ее рассказах – особенное, диковатое, не идиллическое, не умиленное, подчас даже трагическое, пронизанное ярчайшими эмоциями: страх, любовь, ненависть, бурная строптивость.¹⁰

While all relationships hinge on unequal power and unequal desire, that between children and adults is particularly vulnerable, from the point of view of the former (though by no means always) to various forms of misunderstanding, betrayal, or abuse. In Tolstaya's fiction, childhood is not simply a separate space, but a dynamic apprehension of the world spontaneously at odds with it.

"Свидание с птицей" ("Date with a Bird") is arguably representative of Tolstaya's *raison d'écrire*: the theme of intensified perception followed by disillusionment runs through all her work, but is best conveyed in this story, where the line between childhood and adulthood is demarcated along precisely these terms.

The setting of the story is a summer dacha where two boys spend their days building sand castles while their mother tends their dying grandfather, and their uncle Borya smokes and does nothing at all. The elder of the boys, Petya, possesses an intense imagination that ornaments the simplest daily activities: while eating rice kasha, he perceives, among other wonders,

ступенчатые храмы с высокими дверными проемами, прикрытыми струящимися занавесами из павлиних перьев, золотые огромные статуи, мраморные лестницы, уходящие ступенями глубоко в море, острые серебряные обелиски с надписями на не-

¹⁰ И Грекова, p 256 For translation, see Appendix (xxvi).

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- a vertiginous series of images characteristic of Tolstaya's descriptive prowess. Petya befriends an alcoholic woman down the lane, Tamila, who charms him with stories purportedly based on her own life, but which are lifted, in fact, from Russian fairy-tales. Once she lived on a glass mountain, but was spirited to an earthly locale by a dragon and consequently lost most of her power. Petya half-believes her biography, but the stories about magical, mythological birds - Finist;¹² Alkonost, who lays pink eggs which confer on their owner a life-long yearning for the unattainable (she offers him one: "Петя не знал, как это - затосковать на всю жизнь, и яичко взял" ("Petya didn't know what it was to be depressed for life, and took the egg"));¹³ and Sirin, the bird of death, who presages his presence with an infernal beating of wings before suffocating the suspecting victim - all attain hyper-real proportions in the boy's perception of the events and psychological climate around him. He is certain that Sirin hovers about the house, in wait for his dying grandfather, whom he loves.

Tamila's hold over the boy resides in the serious, unmocking and respectful manner with which she treats him, along with a freedom to do as he pleases and to think as he likes. She stands in sharp contrast to his practical mother, who has never even heard of Alkonost, and his uncle Borya, a vulgar bully who somehow knows of his

¹¹ Татьяна Толстая, "На золотом крыльце сидели ", ("Молодая гвардия, Москва, 1987), p 110 For translation, see Appendix (xxvii)

¹² In Lydia Chukovskaya's tale, *Спуск под воду* (*Going Under*), Nina Sergeevna entrances an illiterate peasant girl with the tale of "Finist"

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p 116 English translations of citations, unless otherwise indicated, are from *On the Golden Porch*, translated by Antonina W Bouis (Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1989)

friendship with Tamila - a knowledge conveyed in lewd innuendoes and ditties. One stormy night, his grandfather dies; Petya makes his way to Tamila's house, only to find her in bed with his uncle, whose angry curses send him reeling with desolation to the shore of the lake.

The penultimate line of the story, "Все правда, мальчик Все так и есть" ("It's all true, child. That's how it is.")¹⁴ forms a break in the boy's point of view and introduces a compassionate reassurance on the part of the invisible author, in opposition to his realization that "Все - ложь" ("Everything was a lie").¹⁵ The passage from childhood innocence, from a pure, non-hierarchical relationship with emotions, perceptions, signs, and individuals, to an understanding of the (apparently) adult realities of sex and of death is not represented as a necessarily helpful maturation, but rather as a horrible shock.

The true mystery, in the boy's perception as well as in the text, is in the relationship between the man and the woman. There is not a more unsympathetic character in Tolstaya's work than Uncle Borya, nor one more strangely appealing than Tamila. The former delights in tormenting children: his method is best understood by its singular failure with Petya's younger brother:

Дядя Боря [...] искал, к чему бы прицепиться. Ленечка пролил молоко, и дядя Боря обрадовался - вот и повод поговорить. Но Ленечка совершенно равнодушен к дядиному занудству: он еще маленький, и душа у него запечатана, как куриное яйцо: все с нее скатывается.¹⁶

¹⁴ Татьяна Толстая, p. 124

¹⁵ *IBID.*, p. 124

¹⁶ *IBID.*, p. 125 For translation, see Appendix (xxviii).

Petya, on the contrary, is old enough to be open to laceration, as well as susceptible to the possibilities for transformation that Tamila provides - a world where girls do not drown but become silver fish, where a necklace made of one hundred thousand lemon pits enables one to fly - indeed, escape. Both adults have power over him, and though in his view the two are antipodal, they comprise the same reality. In Tolstaya's irony of pity, the world is made up equally of light and dark, even if their secret complicity is beyond childhood and corrupted by adulthood.

The difference between two modes of perception, opposed on the basis of a difference of power, is explored textually and dialogically in the first story of the collection, entitled "Любишь - не любишь" ("Loves Me, Loves Me Not"). Another child-pair, sisters, share a comic antipathy towards their nurse, Maryvanna, hired to promenade them and provide French conversation. (These details suggest a pre-Revolutionary setting.) The story is told from the first-person point of view of one of the sisters who rebels against her upbringing. She effects this, in part, through a distortion of polite speech: "И нарочно буду говорить...'нездрасьте' и 'будьте нездоровы'" ("I'm going to say on purpose... "how *don't* you do", and "*bad-bye*".)¹⁷ The girl's spirited recalcitrance in the face of adults and the privileged world, economically and culturally, in which they live, is conveyed in the following serial dialogue, cited in full for effect:

Спи, моя радость, усни!
 ..Да, а французский с Марьиванной что-то не идет
 Не отдать ли меня во французскую группу? Там и

¹⁷ Татьяна Толстая, p. 3 (Translation mine)

гуляют, и кормят, и играют в лото. Конечно, отдать! Ура! Но вечером француженка возвращает маме паршивую овцу:

--Мамочка, ваш ребенок совершенно не подготовлен. Она показывала язык другим детям, порвала картинки, и ее вырвало манной кашей. Приходите на следующий год До свиданья! О ревуар!

--Не досвиданья! --выкрикиваю я, увлакиваемая за руку расстроенной мамой. --Ешьте сами вашу поганую кашу! Не ревуар!

("Ах, так! А ну вышвыривайтесь отсюда! Забирайте вашего мерзкого гаденыша!" -- "Не больно-то надо! Сами не очень-то воображайте, мадам!")

--Извините, пожалуйста, с ней действительно очень трудно

--Ничего, ничего, я понимаю!
Ну что за наказание с тобой!!!¹⁸

Not only has Tolstaya largely dispensed with traditional forms of representing dialogue ("she said", "she replied"), she has also displayed a variety of punctuation marks to set off one speaker, one level of speech, from another. Except for the girl who, significantly, retains her "я" ("I"), the speakers, the adult women, are stripped of personal pronouns. They are recognizable by means of their diction, or by the intended address, rendered syntactically or vocatively.

The first speaker, obviously the mother, tenderly exhorts her daughter (in the familiar imperative) to sleep. Place and time are established: night, the bedroom door of a woman's daughter. The ellipses with which the second phrase commences indicate a break in continuity, thus in context; the mother then, or later, utters her

¹⁸ Татьяна Толстая, p. 10. For translation, see Appendix (xxix).

reservations (to the silent other?) about Maryvanna which, as the next phrase makes clear, is overheard by her daughter, whose positive reaction to the plan of being sent to a French group is conveyed by her exclamation of joy. Events move quickly: the narrative voice of the first person is distanced, perhaps by time and in memory, for it is unlikely that the girl would refer to herself as "паршивая овца" ("the black sheep"). The experience of the French group is not described, but takes place and is summed-up in the voice and perception of the French woman in her address to the mother. The girl's interruption, a fulfilment of her earlier threat to break the rules of civilized discourse, is reinforced by the repetition of the first personal pronoun. Her presence, both in the scene and on the page, is stronger than that of the two adult women who are her caretakers; their rôle is defined by her. The parenthetical exclamation of the French woman aptly conveys her own loss of temper which is, as it were, incidental. She addresses, first child, then mother, in exasperated language that elicits a similar, if more dignified, response from the mother. After the parenthetical phrases (which possibly represent thought), both women revert to a polite, if unsympathetic, exchange. The last line in this fragment, and the last word, is the mother's, addressed to her daughter who is no longer her joy but her burden.

This transition, occurring in a few lines, conveys the emotional climate which the girl both influences and is influenced by, while the internal cues inserted by the author ensure that the identity of the speaker is not in doubt. Much of the story is constructed through dialogue rather than through descriptions of events or of psychological

states; this excerpt in particular is revelatory of the author's intention, hidden though it may seem in the absence of a directed commentary, to render her heroine humorous and empowered.

Compassion, which I. Grekova calls Tolstaya's strong point, and Shcheglova says goes missing entirely (according to the latter, the endings are tacked on, and without them, Tolstaya appears cold, sardonic¹⁹) does not extend much beyond children - or the old, who do not play as important a rôle, with the exception of Laura's father in "Соннамбула в тумане" ("The Sleepwalker in Fog"). Children, for the most part, are protected by their youth from the cynicism of adulthood, and therefore come fairly unambiguously through Tolstaya's irony. Her adult characters, in particular, but not exclusively, women, often do not: their reality is grim, and their personalities are not fit for it. They live in an atmosphere lacking in imagination, beauty, grace - all qualities they value. This runs counter to the very tenor of Tolstaya's rich prose, a discrepancy which, much more than any relationship or need, is a source of conflict within the characters and, undoubtedly, within the reader.

In the story "Огонь и пыль" ("Fire and Dust"), Rimma, an office-worker, is convinced the future holds broad possibilities outside the limitations of her circumstances, the few details of which include life in a communal apartment with a husband, children, and an old man whom she likes, but whose room she would like better; she already has plans to redecorate it. An extra room, a vacation to the south, a black market rummage sale of women's clothing, line the paltry

¹⁹ Евгения Щеглова, p. 24

perimeter of conceivable change, excitement, and adventure she craves. Even these ardent but modest hopes are dashed: the old man lives on and on, the vacation is never realized, and the clandestine sale is a fiasco. Her mental arrangement endows these possibilities an imagery beyond their scope, as is the feeling of impending happiness in their stilled wake:

нет, что-то большее, что-то совсем другое, важное, тревожное и великое шумело и сверкало впереди, будто Риммин челн, плывущий темной протокой сквозь зацветающие камыши, вот-вот должно было вынести в зеленый, счастливый, бушующий океан ²⁰

The faint outline of her visions for herself, like the dim double of a rainbow, is as vague and airy as it is remote. In contrast, Pipka, a toothless, vivacious woman who appears and disappears without warning, and whose entire life is a series of misadventure the descriptions of which arouse doubt and suspicion among women and sexual desire among men, lives a simultaneity of reflection and action. Pipka has been to Malaysia, to England, and points in between. Her principal mode of travel is abduction by men: gypsies, Japanese sailors, and the like. Because her stories are situated far beyond the pale of Rimma's comparatively mild fantasies, it never occurs to Rimma that Pipka is living an enviable life. She discredits her:

Римма привыкла и почти не слушала, думая о своем, предаваясь своим неторопливым мечтаниям ²¹

At most, Rimma notes that geography is not Pipka's fort , and only

²⁰ Татьяна Толстая, p. 97. For translation, see Appendix (xxx).

²¹ IBID., p. 99. For translation, see Appendix (xxxi).

reacts strongly to her when she becomes a brief but unsuccessful rival for her husband's affections.

Rimma's life, dull as it seems, is secure, while even the existence of the hut Pipka lives in is dubious. Rimma's security insulates her from the reality of adventure and change, and renders her passive in the face of a future happiness which must come of its own accord, without summons, waiting, or any other expenditure: "Не надо шевелиться, не надо торопиться, все придет само" ("She didn't have to stir, she didn't have to hurry, it would come to her").²² Disillusionment, occurring (as happiness might) without any warning signal, breaks upon her during an excursion, organized by a woman from her office, to visit an acquaintance whose daughter has returned from Syria with heaps of clothing: the best items have been sold, the rest are tawdry, ill-fitting; and the brief vision, from behind a curtain, of the young woman who had lived in Syria, her tanned skin offset by her white dress after Turgenev, has the force of beating her beautiful, oceanic dream-life into thin air. Afterwards, she attempts to console herself with the familiar signposts of husband and children:

но утешение было фальшивым и слабым, ведь все
кончено, жизнь показала свой пустой лик -
свалявшиеся волосы, да провалившиеся глазницы.²³

In this story, Tolstaya suggests that character is destiny and that destiny is blind. The faculties Rimma possesses, for living her life with an aim to improve it within her means, and for fanciful mental excursions away from that life, cancel out each other's potential, and

²² Татьяна Толстая, 100

²³ IBID., p. 108. For translation, see Appendix (xxxii).

render her powerless. Pipka pays no attention to the former and achieves the latter, effecting, in the end, a complete disappearance - perhaps to Australia, a country that has great hold over another passive dreamer, Denisov, in "Соннамбула в тумане" ("The Somnambulist in Fog") - and one which implies a transformation: in Pipka's case, into lumps of charcoal; carbon, the base element of diamonds.

A side-effect of Rimma's introversion is consciousness, or an intense awareness of banality whose substance, Tolstaya suggests through imagery alone, is incontrovertible - at least for her:

Все как-то подернулось пылью. Иногда ей хотелось
- странно - поговорить на этот счет с Пипкой, но та
больше не появлялась.²⁴

Even the possibility for dialogue is thwarted by barriers spanning time and space. In Rimma's mind, the desire to make this connection is not only "strange," it is also unprecedented among the women in Tolstaya's fictional world, where friendship plays a rather superficial, stage rôle in an atmosphere of less successful, more intimate relationships. At the same time, this somewhat theatrical feature of immutability prevents self-evasion except by means extraordinary.

In an innovative and lucidly experimental fashion, Tolstaya explores this *cul-de-sac* in the story, "Чистый лист" ("A Clean Sheet"). Ignatiev, more than similar male characters of his age and temperament, such as Peters or Denisov, is trapped within the confines of a failed life: his wife has left her job in order to devote all her time to the care of their chronically sick child, Valerik. He pities both but loves neither; nor does he love, but craves the company of, his

²⁴ Татьяна Толстая, p. 105. For translation, see Appendix (xxxiii)

mistress, Anastasia, who has taken to not answering the telephone. He is unable to cope and succumbs to a depression so strong and so vital that it becomes personified: "Каждую ночь к Игнатьеву приходила тоска [...] Так и молчали часами - рука в руке" ("Depression came to Ignatiev every night. [...] And they spent hours in silence, holding hands.")²⁵ The depression (or melancholy, for the feeling is sentient, not numb) follows him everywhere, including the cellar-bar he haunts after work with a commiserating friend. This male camaraderie, though usually ending in mutual irritation from the prolongment misery imposes on company, is the sole exception to the absence of human warmth in Ignatiev's life. It is not, of course, enough. Unlike Rimma, Ignatiev is incapable of imagining even minor changes in his life, which would seem ornamental in comparison with the solution of all his problems. No escape routes are open to him, other than an idle promise to become "другим человеком" ("a new man"),²⁶ that is, to become a person able to take himself, and all his charge, in hand. Thanks to a tip from a friend, and surgery, he does in fact become this new person, a parodically hip type brimming with self-confidence and with utterances such as "Не споткнись, когда к бабам пойдешь" ("Just don't trip when you go pick up babes.")²⁷

The shift to a new identity is acknowledged, but restrained, by a subtle narrative intrusion: "Игнатьев - Игнатьев?" ("Ignatiev - Ignatiev?")²⁸ - as if he required a new name. This "Игнатьев?" bears

²⁵ Татьяна Толстая, p 74

²⁶ *IBID.*, p 78

²⁷ *IBID.*, p 94

²⁸ *IBID.*, p 93

no resemblance to his former self; now he is free of the suffering which afflicts his wife, his son, his mistress, and, as his friend points out, is endemic to their society and the conditions under which they live: "У всех примерно такие обстоятельства, в чем дело? Живем же как-то" ("We all live pretty much the same way, what's the problem? We all manage to live somehow.")²⁹

Ignatiev is deaf to this logic; the suffering he feels most acutely is his own. It is private. Whatever the causes, personal and social, he behaves as if he has been singled out by his allotment. Thus, he cannot bear the presence of another suffering, mirroring, as it does, his helplessness. Immediately after his surgery, Ignatiev plans, without any qualms, to dispose of his son by sending him to an institution, where his cries of pain will not reach him.

Like most writers of her (but not a previous) generation, Tolstaya eschews a vocabulary of morality - no character would refer to his or her "conscience," for example - but at times her intention lies within its scope. That which Ignatiev has had surgically removed, as if it were a muscle or an organ, is both within, and external to, the body, and is called "Life" ("Жизнь") but is also associated with his erstwhile companion, "melancholy" ("тоска"). It is also his decision, and his will, in the Faustian sense, to make this separation, this exchange. To the extent that his personality is responsible for his failures - and this is where Tolstaya provides the least detail, and can be said to be lacking, as Shcheglova suggests, in psychological depth - Ignatiev is able to alter his fate. In the diction and depiction of this newly-born,

²⁹ Татьяна Толстая, p 78

crass urbanite, Tolstaya ensures that he, inevitably, will also, adversely, affect the lives of others - in a direct way. A new and dangerous beginning is possible, and can be brought about by means which are drastic, but not implausible. The superposition of an artificial persona, in the world as in this text, is one way, however "immoral," of attempting to transcend the condition of powerlessness. It is achieved at the cost of consciousness, which is to know pain, uncertainty, loneliness, and defeat, the reasons for which are ascribed between the lines of the story as located in a society where honesty and compassion are missing; reasons which are beyond the apprehension of this "другой человек," re-fashioned, as he is, in the image of the oppressor.

The excessive measure taken by Ignatiev is, of course, an exception among Tolstaya's more angst-ridden characters. Their desultory lives, which Tolstaya describes parabolically, rendering fantastic imagery of the ordinary and the bleak, are incapable of being lifted to the shape and melody of her prose itself and are, if anything, brought down to new and unexpected depths of Gogolian humiliation. Thus Peters, (in "Перепс"), imagining that, by learning German, he will impress, and win the love of, a woman he hardly knows, finds himself in a cheap bar drinking pink-coloured alcohol, developing an infatuation with a young woman before she even speaks, and has his wallet robbed by her. His monologue with himself, however, leads him to the inexplicable conclusion that life is marvellous.

The line between narrative description and the internal point of view of character parallels that between a given perception of reality

and its true form. The juxtaposition and overlapping of these processes are untrammelled in the figure of Denisov, the anti-hero of the long story, "Соннамбула в тумане" ("The Somnambulist in Fog"), written after the publication of Tolstaya's first collection of stories. The type is already familiar: a middle-aged man without any remarkable external attributes, no life behind and nothing ahead of him, who is consequently depressed, unambitious, romantic, lonely and idle. These qualities shape Denisov's character; that he is a writer experiencing a block deepens them, from which void of self his imagination takes flight - a catherine-wheel of extended metaphor which begins with a humble human sound, but ends with an eternal utterance of the word. This mortal trace is likened to a mere cough during a musical concert, the recording of which will be sent into space as a letter from earth:

Концерт с сочным гриппозным клеймом родился,
размножился миллионами черных солнышек, раз-
бежался во все мыслимые стороны. Светила погаснут,
и обледенеет земля, и планета морозным комком вечно
будет нестись неисповедимыми звездными путями, а
кашель ловкача не сотрется, не пропадет, навеки
высеченный на алмазных скрижалях бессмертной
музыки, -- ведь музыка бессмертна, не так ли? --
ржавым гвоздем, вбитым в вечность, утвердил себя
находчивый человек, масляной краской расписался на
куполе, плеснул серной кислотой в божественные
черты.³⁰

Denisov is obsessed with the great questions of existence, meaning, and immortality, but does not pose them; their shadow falls on the more trivial light of his mental rambling, whose scope is as

³⁰ Татьяна Толстая, "Соннамбула в тумане", *Новый мир*, № 7, (1988), p. 9. For translation, see Appendix (xxxiv).

horizontally confined as it is vertically limited. This curious geography is suggested by his simultaneous aversion to the landmass of Australia on his map of the world, and his envy of an upstairs neighbour who is a naval captain. His apparently irrational dislike of Australia is contrasted and paralleled by Rimma's oceanic yearnings in "Огонь и пыль" ("Fire and Dust"), during which Australia also surfaces. A country whose only borders are water, Australia represents for both these landlocked characters (for whom travel is never a possibility) the opposite of what they can hope to know. Denisov goes so far as to drop cigarette ash on the map where Australia lies, and finally tears it out altogether. The symbolic and epistemological act of aggression, based as it is on his personal frustration and, as Tolstaya makes clear, his inability to write, is impotent as all his acts are.

Tolstaya links these several, disparate elements by arranging them in a cluster of images. Thus, the references to Australia and the absent sea-captain recur, twice more, in the same order, and Denisov's few and unsuccessful attempts to write are embedded in this cluster. The distance between the beautiful imagery of meditation and the concrete practice of writing is insurmountable.

The effect of tension and discord thus achieved is mirrored in other elements of the story, in the triangular relationship formed among Denisov's lover, Laura, and her father; and in a dream sequence which lends a historical perspective to Denisov's alienation and inspires him to perform an action in the world whose intention is to improve it but whose result is humiliation.

The dream is set in Leningrad during the blockade: three

figures, two men and a woman, all starving, approach him, begging him to share a ring of bagels (called a "бублик"); at first he refuses, then relents, but holds back the greater portion for himself. He wakes from the dream mortified, disoriented, and grief-stricken, which latter feeling is focussed on his Aunt Rita, who had disappeared during his boyhood, i.e., during one of Stalin's purges. Denisov has never discovered her fate; her disappearance was sealed with a command never to speak her name.

The connection of Aunt Rita with the woman in his dream (it is she who made the request to share his bread) is followed by a guilty process of denial: "Перед кем я оправдываюсь? Не было их, не было! Ни здесь, ни там, нигде!" ("Before whom am I justifying myself? They didn't exist, they didn't! Not here, not there, not anywhere!")³¹ Although this passage refers to the besieged Leningraders, Denisov's intensity is not in tune with official, Soviet history, whereby the citizens of Leningrad, oppressed from without, are considered both victims and heroes, whereas the fate of millions has been suppressed, silenced in history (the conscience of a nation) and in individual consciousness. As dreams do, however, Denisov's has contained this illogic of history and of memory, and brought forth the unspeakable. Denisov rejects the conclusion his train of thought directs him to: "Лучше он будет думать о Лоре" ("It would be better to think about Laura.")³²

Nevertheless, his dream works an effect: conscious, suddenly,

³¹ Татьяна Толстая, p. 12. Translated citations from "Соннамбула в тумане" are mine.

³² IBID., p. 13

of society's corruption, and that each individual (starting with himself) carries a portion of responsibility, he endeavours to remedy what he can, and at the first opportunity which presents itself - ironically - in a butcher's queue. Denisov notices that the butcher's measuring weights are fixed inaccurately, but the butcher, in a parody of the language of a "planned" economy, explains the shortage of meat in terms of military production priorities, justifies his argument by bragging of his own exploits during the civil war, and finally manages to turn the crowd's disapproval onto Denisov himself, for wearing imported footwear. Neither his dreams nor his inspirations are applicable to the world he lives in. It is, significantly, after the humiliation at the butcher's that Denisov tears Australia out of his map.

Denisov's sole consolation is in his relationship with Laura, who is represented as a stupid and empty-headed woman (from his point of view): "Глупая женщина, она тоже бредит наугад" ("The stupid woman, she, too, raves at random").³³ She is also a sexually available woman who does not present any demands, emotional, intellectual, or marital. Her character is presented entirely from her conversation, which is monologistic, breathless, and rendered through the technique of free indirect speech:

Лора сегодня страшно устала, прости, Денисов, Лора ездилa к Рузанне, у Рузанны что-то с ногой, кошмарный ужас. [...]³⁴

Laura's conversation is entirely "other"-oriented and, from Denisov's perspective - weighed down as he is with a frustrated yearning for

³³ Татьяна Толстая, p. 14

³⁴ IBID., p. 13. For translation, see Appendix (xxxv)

freedom - concerned with petty detail and trivial conflicts. But Laura, with three former husbands, an independent spirit, and an honest delivery, is a more dynamic character than Denisov knows or can be. Her steady flow of speech contains some of the more interesting phenomena of Soviet society of the mid-1970s: unofficial vernissages, eccentric artists and poets of the "village" school; the occult, mystic healers, acupuncture; furs, fashion, dachas; and the activities and sayings of her wide female acquaintanceship by which these themes enter and preoccupy her life. It is her rootedness that Denisov needs; and, in moments of fierce mental anguish, Denisov recognizes this: "Лора! Тошно мне, мысли давят, Лора, приезжай, расскажи что-нибудь!" ("Laura! I'm unhappy, my thoughts are heavy, Laura, get over here, tell me something!")³⁵

Laura lives with her father, a scientist who has been demoted to writing articles for children. He is a broken man, and the cabinet where he writes popularized renditions of tales from the animal kingdom is described as a tomb, whose dominant colour is a dusty, sunless yellow. He also is given to bouts of melancholy, during which Laura attempts to reassure him, by comparing his prose style to that of Turgenev. Laura's father's task is both simpler and more difficult: he must revise his text until it appeals to the lowest common denominator, reflecting neither his erudition nor his ability to articulate it. In this indirect, but telling, way, Tolstaya suggests her stance vis-à-vis Socialist realism, whose purpose, poised on the axis of bloodless ideological abstractions ("народность" ["populism"], "партий-

³⁵ Татьяна Толстая, p. 13

ность" [Party-mindedness]) and conflictlessness is to portray a positive revolutionary or proletarian hero in a "language of culture in which signs achieve the lowest degree of arbitrariness."³⁶ Laura's father's airless room and muffled voice is the atmosphere of a repressed culture in which all Tolstaya's characters live, but are unable to love. Her achievement, thus far, lies in accommodating such a claustrophobic chamber among the many dimensions of space her metaphors elaborate, from the possible castles of childhood perception to the continents of mature yearning.

Tolstaya's versatility with styles of speech, and with their representation, lends itself to intended and unintended ironies, as her critical reception has already indicated. The languages of her texts, "masculinized" in a mental posture outside space and time, "feminized" as a concern for the everyday, for быт, are not complementary to each other in a dialogical sense. Undifferentiated except in relation to silence, it is through their utterance that these languages are understood to go unheard.

³⁶ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel - History as Ritual*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981), p 9

CONCLUSION

Without exception, all the writers considered in this study would resent being classified as "women writers," for the reason that an opposite distinction does not apply. The term "бабская литература,"¹ as opposed to "женская литература" ("women's literature"), (the distinction is minor; both terms are pejorative) indicates the opprobrium with which such a classification is met, in the Soviet Union, by men and women alike. "Women's literature" automatically presupposes a narrow outlook on life, usually domestic and trivial, marked by an uninhibited emotionalism along with a concomitant inability to reason or to be objective, and all conveyed, invariably, in a second-rate style.

Of course, writers such as Lydia Chukovskaya, I. Grekova and Tatiana Tolstaya - to name the three principal subjects of this work - destroy this preconception to such an extent that it is to wonder how, and why, and with whom, the stereotypes about women's writing continue to hold credence. The implied question is rhetorical: the literary canon is populated by men, who dictate the terms of both inclusion and exclusion. Because, traditionally, women have been excluded, those who wish to write must, to a degree, disavow their gender in a way that is never required of men. If to be a woman writer is to pertain to a second class, then it is better to be considered - just - a writer.

Unfortunately, women writers have never been considered on the basis of their work alone. Their writing may be of such a calibre that their entry into the canon is indisputable; nevertheless, that

¹ The term "бабская" is derived from "баба" which is, in Russian, a demeaning term for a woman.

entry, more often than not, is guaranteed by their paternity - a peculiarly masculine obsession. Thus, in all the criticism pertaining to the work of Lydia Chukovskaya (and it is not substantial) not a single critic spares the mention that she is the daughter of Kornei Chukovsky. She may as well have emerged directly from his head(ache). Similarly, many critics writing about Tatiana Tolstaya find it necessary to point out that she is the grandniece of the writer Alexei Tolstoy. To none does this information - which can scarcely be termed biographical - appear unwarranted or superfluous. (I. Grekova, having named herself, escapes this dubious recommendation.) The reasoning for this, though never stated, is clear: women who are gifted enough to write (that is, in this context, to write, up to professional standards, not merely letters and diaries) have inherited this quality from some male literary forebear or another. As the preceding two examples show, this patrilineal justification can be literal, but it can also operate figuratively: a woman writes well if she writes "like a man," and if her literary antecedents and influences are reassuringly masculine.

In her translation of a selection of short stories reflecting the "image of women in contemporary Soviet fiction," Sigrid McLaughlin takes care to note, in the biographical notices concerning the women (but not the men) writers, that each contributor negates the importance of gender in her work. She quotes Liudmila Petrushevskaya as saying "While writing, the author ignores his [sic] own personality, becomes genderless [...] If he defends his own [sic] sex, he's in

trouble”;² Natalya Baranskaya, responding to western (i.e. feminist) interpretations to her work, in particular to her story “Неделя как неделя” (“A Week Like Any Other”) “has rejected a feminist stance”;³ Irina Raksha “does not identify with any women’s tradition in writing”⁴ (as if there were traditions from which to pick and choose) and, finally, Viktoria Tokareva “does not see herself as belonging to a category called ‘woman writers’.”⁵ In a feuilleton entitled, “В стране побежденных мужчин” (“In the Land of Defeated Men”), Tatiana Tolstaya remarks that the vaunted absence of women in the higher echelons of political power in no wise signifies that women do not wish to exercise power - and do, as mothers and as wives; if anything, “женская бюрократия страшнее мужской” (“women’s bureaucracy is more dreadful than men’s”),⁶ citing as evidence a survey that concluded women support the death penalty to a greater degree than do men. Finally, I. Grekova believes that equality between the sexes is not desirable; also rejecting the term “женская литература,” she asserts that “there are fewer outstanding women writers than men” because of “the special emotional and nervous structure of a woman’s personality, in her enslavement to problems of love, marriage and the family.”⁷

² Sigrid McLaughlin, *The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Literature*, (St Martin's Press, New York, 1989), p 99

³ *IBID.*, p 112

⁴ *IBID.*, p 124

⁵ *IBID.*, p 160

⁶ Татьяна Толстая, “В стране побежденных мужчин”, (*Московские новости*, № 38, 17 сентября 1989 г.)

⁷ I Grekova, *Soviet Literature* No. 5, 1986, p.140

This summary, brief as it is, reveals as many attitudes and problems as the number of speakers themselves, and perhaps more; all, however, are united in their rejection of gender-related terms, be it "woman's literature" or "feminism". Francine du Plessix Gray explains that "many Soviet women speak and act like our most emancipated feminists. But they have never had access to our basic feminist texts. [...] Thus they still think of American feminists as 'man-hating separatists'."⁸

While it is difficult (and problematic) to compare the situation of American, or Western, women, with their Soviet counterparts, their comparative freedoms and comparable burdens, misogyny itself is not a fluid cultural factor; its various manifestations, however, are. Tolstaya's (misplaced) wit is an example of how adroitly, and how often, the issue of male violence against women can be distorted and belittled. (The verbal attack on feminists and feminism in general after twelve women were massacred in Montreal on December 6, 1989, - though "extreme" - is another example.)

Until recently, in Soviet literature, as in society, sexual assault, the physical abuse of women and children, the treatment of women in psychiatric, and other, hospitals, in prisons, the practice of abortion as the sole method of birth control - none could be discussed. Writers such as Petrushevskaya, who do treat these themes in their work, are chastized for their bleak representation of society. In the meantime, freedom of speech in the Soviet Union entails the novel availability of pornography as much as it does a frank avowal and discussion of the

⁸ Francine du Plessix Gray, *Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope*, (Doubleday, New York, 1990), p. 97

(NB "Separationist" is a misnomer, the correct term is "separatist")

issues of violence against women; of misogyny as a *modus operandi*. Until such a discussion, and appropriate changes, take place, the very terms "masculine" and "feminine", and their cultural definitions, have little meaning.

The notion of the mind, on the other hand, as an androgynous entity is both an ancient and a modern one. It is a trademark of Flaubert, the first modern novelist, and is summed-up in his famous phrase, "Je suis Madame Bovary"; it is discussed in Virginia Woolf's text, *A Room of One's Own*; in that work, Woolf proposes that the best, i.e. the freest, creative minds are evenly balanced along masculine and feminine principles. Of course, contemporary Soviet definitions of masculinity and femininity differ widely from Woolf's perception, writing as she did in another time and place, and writing - more importantly - with other constraints. How many Soviet women (writers) have a room of their own? I. Grekova, who does, echoes Woolf when she speaks of women's "enslavement" as a reason for the paucity of their achievements in the creative sphere (for a slave, apart from having no leisure, has no right to speak) and emphasizes, in all her heroines' lives, the importance of privacy, space, and solitude. These properties, considered prerogatives of the male (writer) are denied his counterpart, if she is perceived, not as an autonomous being, but as a vessel, a wife, a mother, a servant.

Economically and psychically disadvantaged, it is understandable that the Soviet woman writer should be wary of special consideration in the sphere of literature. Literature, after all, should encompass all human experience, and not be confined to the trivia of the enclosed

domestic space and its repetitive gestures, nor ornamented with the false lyricism of day-dreams. The metaphors of foreign geography, evidenced in the work of Lydia Chukovskaya, Liudmila Petrushevskaya, Natalya Baranskaya and most poignantly in Tatiana Tolstaya (who, ironically, has travelled extensively) are particularly intense in a country where internal passports are required.

The issues of censorship, and the various levels on which it operates, are only beginning to be explored. Women are silenced in societies where freedom of speech is valued above any other, and is guaranteed as a right. In the Soviet Union, until recently, women writers have had to silence themselves as women as well as as writers. This is particularly true of lesbians. Heterosexual writers, male and female, while often having, by reason of societal restraints, to curtail the literary expression of their sexuality, have always been able, in one context or another, to write about significant relationships outside the range of domesticity, work, or friendship. Viktoria Tokareva, for example, remarks of her controversial tale, "Длинный день" ("The Long Day") that "I wrote it before glasnost; it could only be published now. I am not a time-server" ⁹ The paucity - indeed, the complete absence - of lesbian texts shows that the lesbian (as the gay) writer must still "serve time". The humanist ideal of the universality of all experience, which, in any event, bypassed Russian intellectual history along with the Renaissance, is and remains the shibboleth of a powerful minority.

That women have been denied access to the dominant discourse is evidenced in the history of language itself and is ascribed in

⁹ Sigrid McLaughlin, "An Interview with Viktoria Tokareva," (Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme, Vol 10, No 4, 1989), pp 75-76

grammatical paradigms. In English, this is manifested by the third person singular masculine pronoun, supposedly a universal point of reference; in Russian, because it is inflected, by all "impersonal," i.e. masculinized, pronouns, such as, for example, the dative pronoun of address, "кому" ("to whom") whereby the speaker assumes that, before the addressee is identifiable, his gender is known. This linguistic development can be ascribed to the historical exclusion of women from the forum of public speech. With women absent, men would (naturally) speak to and of each other employing masculine grammatical endings. In this way, the absence of women has been inscribed into the structure of language.¹⁰

This theory has serious implications for both the study of linguistics, and the study and production of literature itself. If the mind is androgynous, but language is sexed, then any utterance is already shaped, influenced, by a rigid pattern that cannot, it would seem, be arbitrarily altered without the risk of losing sense. In fact, in various Western European languages, (women) writers have already begun to experiment with, to subvert, to expand, their mother tongue.

In the same essay wherein Woolf claims androgyny for the mind, she also expresses the need for "a new sentence" to be composed. A recent story by Valeriya Narbikova, entitled "Равнодушие света дневных и ночных звезд", (a title which can, roughly, be translated as "The Indifferent Light of Diurnal and Nocturnal Stars") contains sentences that might well answer Woolf's call:

¹⁰ Some of the insights in this passage are derived from a lecture on Slavic morphology, delivered by Olga Yokomaya, Professor of Linguistics at Harvard University, on June 23, 1989, at Norwich University in Vermont.

[...] Дождь был "он" для удобства людей, и звезда была "она" для их удобства, не своего, и солнце "оно" для... а там у них были свои отношения. Дождь менял свой пол на другом языке; луна, она же месяц, меняла пол в одном и том же языке. Переход пола Язык являлся как бы материализацией перехода пола. Человеческие отношения выявляли пол, переход пола, и это проявлялось в языке. Но когда сам язык указывал на пол стихий, светил, их отношения вытекали из языка. Ветер гонял стаи туч Звезда говорила со звездой."

In this passage, as in others, Narbikova plays with, and disrupts, the notion that things of themselves possess gender, are heterosexually opposed (in order) to attract each other. By desexing her metaphors, she charges them in a new and changed relationship to language, within language, with each other, and with an element of surprise. This is a far cry from Aesopian language - the code developed by Soviet (male) writers to bypass the censorship of the day.

Narbikova's style; her themes, including a love triangle uncharacterized by petty moral anguish; her unprejudiced, and practically unprecedented, references to both male and female homosexuality; and her subversive, literary allusiveness - all show promise for a literature that seeks, like the society it reflects, to be open-ended).

"Валерия Нарбикова, "Равновесие дневных и ночных звезд", *Женская логика. сборник женской прозы*, ("Современник", Москва, 1989), p. 502. For translation, see Appendix (xxxvi)

APPENDIX

Translations of Russian Citations

(Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.)

(i) How many hours this torture (which, for the women religious, was physical, and for us - moral) lasted, I no longer recall. They stood, barefoot, on the ice, and continued to chant prayers, whereas we, having cast aside our implements, rushed about from one guard to another, begging and pleading, sobbing and crying.

(ii) When you are sleepless, the consciousness that you did not participate, first-hand, in murders and betrayals, is of no consolation. [...] Mea culpa. And more and more does it seem to me that even having spent eighteen years in a living hell is not enough to purge my guilt.

(iii) No one has added up the number of days I've had to stay home because of them. When they find out this statistic, they will grow afraid. Perhaps I'll be afraid - for I haven't added up the days, either.

(iv) Everybody spoke up, some said yellow, others light brown, and I said Jewish, and for some reason everyone got embarrassed and Andrei, my eternal enemy, snorted. And Kolya slapped Zhora on the shoulder. But strictly speaking, what had I said? I'd said the truth.

- from "Our Crowd," translated by Helena Goscilo, in *Glasnost: An Anthology of Russian Literature under Gorbachev*, edited by Helena Goscilo and Byron Lindsey, (Ardis, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1990).

(v) After all, I too had been, until quite recently, a published Soviet author. Therefore I was, on one level or another, an accomplice to the universal lie and the universal silence. But for each individual there comes a time when truth seizes you by the throat and forever takes possession of your soul.

(vi) For some time I have been trying to obtain a precise definition of the terms "soviet" and "anti-soviet". Their meanings are constantly fluctuating. There have been, for example, periods - quite protracted - when it was considered "soviet" to write denunciations. And there have been periods - quite brief - when it was considered "soviet" to rescue and provide a living for those who had returned from the nether-world [e.g. the camps] whence they had been sent because of denunciations.

(vii) "You know, over the past few years I've begun to think badly of men. You've noticed, there are hardly any there" [in the prison lines - N.B. Lydia Chukovskaya].

(viii) [...] all these women were the mothers, wives and sisters of saboteurs, terrorists and spies! [...] They looked like perfectly ordinary people, just like in a streetcar or shop. Except that all looked tired and baggy-eyed.

- from *The Deserted House*, translated by Aline B. Werth, (E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York, 1969).

(ix) Just imagine! One has to distinguish truth from falsehood by the tone of the words, not by the sense, but by their tone and arrangement! What nonsense! What gibberish she talks, and she's a translator, a member of the Union... It's not suprising she loves [...] poetry [...]

- from *Going Under*, translated by Peter M. Weston, (Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1972).

Items (x) - (xvi) are also translated by Peter M. Weston.

(x) Somehow I hadn't thought about this when I was on my way here - to seclusion. I hadn't envisaged the existence of other people.

(xi) I waited for his voice, for a word, without seeing either the moon or the trees... He was the first messenger from there! I wanted to hurry him, to jog his arm. Please, don't be silent. You are a messenger. I am listening.

(xii) It should have been like this: a table, paper, an interrogator, a chair, a lamp, night and two thugs coming in to beat you up. But each time I dreamt of heavy, black water, exuding cold. Water and silence. Yes, I could see the silence. It swirled up like steam. And that was Alyosha under interrogation. People were shoving him with sticks towards the water. Also in silence.

(xiii) It wasn't a coherent story but like some kind of spots wandering around his memory, working to the surface and making a notch in mine at the same time.

(xiv) This was no spontaneous madness which so often in our past had seized ignorant people. This time it was a madness deliberately organized, planned and spread, with a carefully thought-out purpose.

(xv) One must grasp this clearly - logs are burnt and children are burnt. But my heart didn't want to grasp it clearly... [...] One had to make the conversation sound ordinary to learn to breathe again.

(xvi) I felt mute. [...] This night and all the preceding nights and days I had been tormented not by grief but by something worse: the incomprehensibility and namelessness of what was taking place. Grief? Was grief really like that? Grief has a name and if you have sufficient courage you find the strength to pronounce it. But what had happened to us had no name because it made no sense. [...] My head seemed to be spinning and my heart gradually growing heavier not from the sixteen hours spent on my feet but from fruitless efforts to grasp what had happened and give it a name.

(xvii) And yet it had always been different. As long as I could remember I had always been accompanied by Success. It elected me to every presidium, spoke about me every March 8. And how: a woman scientist, author of serious works, translated into other languages, and so on and so forth. I became used to Success, as though it were something to be taken for granted.

- from "No Smiles," translated by Dobrochna Dyrz-Freeman, in *The New Soviet Fiction: Sixteen Short Stories*, compiled by Sergei Zaligin, (Abbeville Press Publishers, New York, 1989).

(xviii) *Why doesn't the chairman stop him? I thought in dumb amazement. But then, maybe neither he nor Windbag understands that it is insulting. How are they supposed to know what a woman feels like when they call her, when they shout at her, "she" as though they had brought her out onto a square in front of a tavern for corporal punishment...*

- from "No Smiles", translated by Dobrochna Dyrz-Freeman.

(xix) Never before had I had to deal with such a thing. These were some kind of criminal dealings [...] I had read of incidents in the newspaper. The doctor and the woman both had to go to court. Become a criminal, a defendant. And still I had to do it.

- from "Summer in the City," translated by Sigrid McLaughlin, in *The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Fiction*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1990).

(xx) "Imagine, sometimes I have to wash my own underwear. [...] But a man even feels awkward doing housework, don't you think so? Just take literature. Where do you find a man doing housework? It's unnatural. It wasn't that way with you. I remember what a charming housekeeper you were in our little room [...] Remember?" "No, I've forgotten."

- from "Summer in the City," translated by Sigrid McLaughlin.

(xxi) You go to confide in her, and she offers you a *book*, like it was some kind of medicine. But the book is about other people. I want one that's written about me. [N.B. In this context, the phrase "моя матушка" ("my mother") is untranslatable.]

(xxii) The use of unapproved and unchecked teaching material at this time was tantamount to ideological diversion.

- from *The Ship of Widows*, translated by Cathy Porter, (Virago Press Limited, London, 1985).

(xxiii) [...] he not only fed her and washed her, he did all sorts of other things, too, the dirty and disgusting things that men usually disdain.

- from *The Ship of Widows*, translated by Cathy Porter.

(xxiv) Dontsova had never imagined that something she knew inside and out and so thoroughly could change to the point where it became entirely new and unfamiliar.

- Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, *Cancer Ward*, translated by Nicholas Bethell and David Berg, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1968).

(xxv) More often than not, the feminized professions are unremunerative, exhausting, and without prestige. Teachers and doctors are almost all women. And the women in orange overalls, pounding ties on the railroad track, getting yelled at by the foreman... And housework: dull, inescapable. Work, home, never enough time - how many women have been broken, have aged prematurely!

(xxvi) In her stories, childhood is untamed, unusual, not idyllic or tender; at times even tragic, charged with the fiercest emotions: terror, love, hate, stormy recalcitrance.

(xxvii) White palaces with emerald scaly roofs, stepped temples with tall doorways covered with streaming curtains of peacock feathers, enormous golden statues, marble staircases going deep into the sea, sharp silver obelisks with inscriptions in an unknown tongue [...]

- from *On the Golden Porch*, translated by Antonina W. Bouis, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1989).

Items (xxviii) - (xxxiii) are also translated by Antonina W. Bouis.

(xxviii) Uncle Borya whistled, [...] looking for something to pick on. Lenechka spilled the milk and Uncle Borya was glad - an excuse to nag. But Lenechka was totally indifferent to his uncle's lectures: he was still little and his soul was sealed like a chicken egg; everything just rolled off.

(xxix) "Sleep, my darling, sleep tight."

...Yes, things aren't going too well with Maryvanna. Should I be sent to a French group? They go out for walks, and get a snack, and play Lotto. Of course, send me. Hurrah! But that evening, the French-woman returns the black sheep to mother.

"Madame, your child is completely unprepared. She stuck her tongue out at the other children, tore up pictures, and threw up her cream of wheat. Come back next year. Good-bye. *Au revoir*."

"*Bad-bye!*" I shout, dragged away by my disappointed mother. "Eat your own crummy wheat! *No revoir!*"

("Is that so? Well, just get out of here! Take your lousy kid!" - "Who needs it! Don't think you're so hot, Madame.")

"Forgive us, please, she's really quite difficult."

"It's all right, I understand."

What a burden you are!

(xxx) [...] no, something bigger, something completely different, important, exciting, and great rustled and sparkled ahead, as if Rimma's barge, sailing in a dark stream through flowering rushes, was about to be carried out into the green, joyous, roaring ocean.

(xxxi) Rimma was used to them and hardly listened, thinking her own thoughts, deep in her unhurried dreams.

(xxxii) But the solace was artificial and meager, for everything was over, life was showing its empty face: hair askew and gaping eye sockets.

(xxxiii) Everything was covered with a layer of dust. Sometimes she wanted - strange - to talk about it with Pipka, but she never came back.

(xxxiv) Branded by a hacking, phlegmatic cough, the concert was born and multiplied into millions of black suns¹ and scattered in all directions. The light of celestial bodies will go out, the earth's crust will be covered in frost, and the planet, a chunk of ice, will speed forever along uncharted stellar paths, but the rascal's cough will not be erased, it will be engraved eternally on the diamond scrolls of immortal music - for isn't music immortal? - but this artful man has hammered himself, a rusty nail, into eternity, signed his name with oil paint on the dome of the universe, splashed sulphuric acid in the face of the divine.

(xxxv) Laura is extremely tired today, please, Denisov, Laura went to Rosanna's, Rosanna has something wrong with her leg, it's just awful. [...]

(xxxvi) Rain was "he" for people's convenience, and the star was "she" for their convenience, not her own, and the sun was "it" for... but these had their own relationship.² Rain changed its gender in another language;³ the moon⁴ changed its gender in one and the same language. A sex change. As if language were the materialization of a sex change. Human relationships disclosed gender; sex change; and this was reflected in language. But when language itself defined the gender of the elements and of celestial bodies, their relationships derived from language. The wind chased a flock of clouds.⁵ A star was speaking with a star.⁶

¹ "Черные солнышки" ("black suns") refer to phonograph records.

² In personifying and engendering natural phenomena and the celestial bodies, Narbikova alludes to their potential sexual interaction, or "ménage," and, elliptically, (in this instance) to homoeroticism

³ "Rain," in Russian ("дождь") is masculine, whereas in French, for example, ("la pluie") it is feminine

⁴ There are two words, in Russian, for "moon" "луна" and "месяц", the first is feminine, the second, masculine; in her placement, Narbikova privileges the former over the latter

⁵ "Wind," in Russian ("ветер") is masculine, while "cloud" ("туча") is feminine

⁶ "Star," in Russian ("звезда") is feminine. In this instance, another potential sexual relation between two celestial bodies of the same gender (in contrast to the previous phrase) is suggested. (This phrase is a paraphrase of Lermontov's line, "И звезда с звездою говорит" - ["A nd a star speaks with a star"] from the poem "Выхожу один я на дорогу" - ["I go for a lonely walk"])

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