

THE PETERSBURG TEXT IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE OF THE 1990s

by

DARIA S. SMIRNOVA

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Student: Daria S. Smirnova

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program by:

Dr. Katya Hokanson Chairperson

Dr. Jenifer Presto Member

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy Vice President for Research & Innovation/Dean of the
Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Daria S. Smirnova

Master of Arts

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The image of Saint Petersburg has influenced the imagination of Russian writers since the establishment of this city in 1703. Today, it is common to speak about the Petersburg Text in Russian literature that has its own mythology, imagery, and stylistics. However, the research in this sphere is predominately concentrated on works written before the second half of the 20th century.

This thesis addresses the revival of the Petersburg mythology in the 1990s in works by such authors as Mikhail Veller, Andrei Konstantinov, and Marusia Klimova. It illustrates how the reinvention of traditional Petersburg themes contributed to the representation of the “wild 1990s” reality. It also examines the influence of mass media and popular culture on the development of Petersburg narration in terms of genre, style, and the creation of an author’s public persona. The cultural significance of the cityscape in these works is of particular interest.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Daria S. Smirnova

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Vyatka State University of Humanities, Kirov, Russia

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Russian Literature, 2012, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Linguistics and Translation, Vyatka State University of Humanities

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

21st Century Russian Prose and Cinematography
19th Century Russian Prose
Intertextuality in Literature and Pop Culture

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate teaching fellow, Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program,
University of Oregon, Eugene, 2010 to present

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Summa cum Laude, Vyatka State University of Humanities, 2008

PUBLICATIONS:

“Marusia Klimova and the Decadent Culture of Contemporary Saint Petersburg”,
The Russian, East European, and Eurasian Conference “Russian and East
European Arts, World Stage”, University of Oregon, 2012 (forthcoming).

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I dedicate this work to my parents, who went through the hardships of the 1990s and did not forget to teach me how to read and love reading. I also dedicate it to the most wonderful city in the world which makes some dreams come true – to the city of Saint Petersburg.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The History of Petersburg Text in Russian Literature and in Literary Analysis

Vladimir Toporov introduced the idea of “the Petersburg text” into Russian philology in 1970s, having become its founder and main theorist. In his works, he analyzed a number of texts of classic belles-lettres, written in and/or about Saint Petersburg, in an attempt to determine the attributes of style and content, which are specific for the Petersburg text and allow defining a literature work as belonging to its body.

He begins his fundamental work *Петербургский текст русской литературы* (*Petersburg Text of Russian Literature*, 2003) suggesting that the text constructs a new “supersaturated reality” consisting of ideas, myths and symbols, derived from the nature of the city itself:

*Петербургский текст, представляющий собой не просто усиливающее эффект зеркало города, но устройство, с помощью которого и совершается переход **a realibus ad realiora**, пресуществление материальной реальности в духовные ценности, отчётливо сохраняет в себе следы своего внетекстового субстрата[...].*

The Petersburg Text, as it is not only a reflection of the city that emphasizes its effects, but also a device that makes it possible to ascend **a realibus ad realiora** (the transformation of the material world into the spiritual values), obviously retains the features of its non-verbal substratum [...].¹(Toporov, 2003, p. 7)

One of the most influential ideas is the temporality of the city’s existence.

Originating from the city’s creation myth it has been dominating the Petersburg theme throughout the centuries, imparting to it an apocalyptic mood and an anticipation of the disaster. (Toporov, 2003, p. 23, 51) Developed almost synchronically with the city itself, this myth appears in the earliest urban folklore – songs, stories, legends - and travels into the classical works of 19th and 20th centuries. (Toporov, p. 45-49; Buckler, 2005, p. 126-127) The disastrous flood of 1824 as depicted in A.S. Pushkin’s *Petersburg tale The*

¹ This and all subsequent translations from Russian are mine, unless otherwise is indicated.

Bronze Horseman (1833) is a perfect illustration of the following definition by V.N.

Топоров:

Эсхатологический миф Петербурга – о том, как космос растворяется в хаосе, одолевается им, и этот хаос – по преимуществу водный[...].

Petersburg eschatological myth is about cosmos disappearing in chaos, the latter is primarily water [...]. (p. 47)

The same prophecy sounds in the poem of by Zinaida Gippius *Petersburg* (1909)

*Нет! Ты утонешь в тине черной,
Проклятый город, Божий враг [...].*(Lib.ru/Klassika, n.d.)

*No! You will drown in your black mire,
Vile city! And God's foe – full-blown!* (Gippius translated by Markov and Sparks, 1966)

However, less than a century after Toporov (in 1910s), in the novel by A.A. Belyi *Petersburg* (1913), this idea is expressed through the image of a bomb explosion, which reflects the terrorist movement and the revolutionary atmosphere in the capital on the turn of the centuries. (Matich, 2010, p. 39)

The eschatological myth gave way to various themes and symbols that became inherent to the Petersburg text. In Petersburg literary mysticism Toporov distinguishes two layers: “low” traditional *diavolizm* based of folklore and biblical imagery, and “high” *demonizm* containing some original “personified” (*личный*) imagery. (Toporov, p. 48) As a rule, the first one pictures various forms of “uncanny”– vampires, ghosts, witches, and fortunetellers. The city is often compared to a graveyard (necropolis) or a decaying corpse, bringing associations with hell. (Buckler, 2005, p. 121) The second - introduces specters and visions, which symbolically represent certain historical figures, such as city’s creator tsar Peter the Great. The latter is closely associated with the legendary Falconet statue, which sets itself in motion and haunts a protagonist as the ghostly *Bronze Horseman* or *Bronze Guest* as depicted in the most influential texts by Pushkin and Bely. How Pushkin developed his idea of The Bronze Horseman, and how it reflected his relationships with the autocratic power is described in the comprehensive work *Pushkin and His Sculptural Myth* by R. Jakobson (1975).

At the “higher layer” of Petersburg mysticism, the narration enters the sphere of the phantasmagoric - *prizrachnost’* by Toporov (p. 41). Not only the history of the city’s

creation, but also the nuances of its geographical location and climate, such as the famous White Nights, shaped the notion of its ephemeral nature and caused doubts in its material existence. One of the best expressions of this idea can be found in the famous lines from one of F.M. Dostoyevsky's early novellas *Слабое сердце* (*A Weak Heart/A Faint Heart*, 1948).

[Петербург] походит на фантастическую, волшебную грёзу, на сон, который в свою очередь сейчас исчезнет и искурится паром к тёмно-синему небу. (Dostoyevsky, 1972, p. 48)

[Petersburg is] like a fantastic vision of fairy-land, like a dream which in its turn would vanish and pass away like vapour into the dark blue sky. (Dostoyevsky translated by Garnett, 2011)

This idea was further reflected in a myth about the city's deceptive nature. The city is presented as a place where appearances always lie and conceal the unattractive truth behind them. As a literary motif, it was introduced and developed in the unsurpassable *Nevsky Prospekt* by N.V. Gogol (1833-1834).

О, не верьте этому Невскому проспекту! [...] Всё обман, всё мечта, всё не то, чем кажется! [...] Он лжёт во всякое время, этот Невский проспект, но более всего тогда, когда ночь сгущенною массою наляжет на него [...] и когда сам демон зажигает лампы для того только, чтобы показать всё не в настоящем виде. (Gogol, 1990, p. 39-40)

Oh! Do not trust that Nevsky Prospekt! [...] Everything is a cheat, everything is a dream, everything is other than it seems! [...] It deceives at all hours, the Nevsky Prospekt does, but most of all when night falls in masses of shadow on it, [...] and when the devil himself lights the street lamps to show everything in false colors. (Gogol, 1985, p. 238)

The imagination, as well as virtually any type of mental activity, plays an important part in Petersburg narration. Almost everything material and physical has its fantastic replica, often antagonizing the original, as in Gogol's *The Nose* (1832-33), Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846), etc. Being the fruit of a human imagination itself, the city appears unnatural and contrived. Dostoyevsky in his *Записки из подполья* (*Notes from Underground*, 1864) calls it "the most abstract and premeditated city in the whole world". (Dostoyevsky, 2001, p. 5)

The opposition of real and imaginary is one of many presented by Toporov as he describes the basic themes lying in the core of Petersburg poetics - among them: the autocratic (royal) power and "a small man", artificial and natural, dead and alive, foreign

and Russian (which is often represented by the oppositions Petersburg – Moscow and/or Petersburg – Provinces), harmony and chaos, and, finally, original and imitation. Toporov also attempts to establish specific “Petersburg” vocabulary, classifying the most recurrent words and phrases according to their semantics and function in the text. (p. 60-66)

Among the Masters of Petersburg text Toporov names A.S. Pushkin, V.G. Belinsky, N.V. Gogol, Goncharov, F.M. Dostoyevsky, Vs. Krestovsky, A. Blok, A.A. Belyi, Annensky, Remizov, Merezhkovsky, Sollogub, Z. Gippius, Viach. Ivanov, A.A. Akhmatova, Gumilev, Khodasevich, Mandlestam, adding to this list Zamiatin, Zoshchenko, Kaverin, Pil’niak, and Vaginov. Outside the fiction realm he also mentions A. Benois and his *Scenic Petersburg (Живописный Петербург, 1902)*, and E.P. Ivanov and N.P. Antsiferov revealing the Petersburg theme in its “mythical-symbolical grasp”. (Toporov, 2003, p. 23-25)

Although Toporov’s idea of the Petersburg Text was accepted by Russian philologists and became an invaluable contribution to the field, his system of attributes and definitions of it became a subject of criticism in regard to a number of aspects.

First of all, Toporov’s suggestion that in the plot of a Saint Petersburg text there is always a “soteriological trend/aspiration” (author’s intention to reveal the way to salvation in the most unbearable living conditions) seemed questionable. The same idea is often present in the texts clearly not belonging to the body of Saint Petersburg text, such as in L.N. Tolstoy’s works. Moreover, it existed before such a body of texts appeared in Russian literature and continues to be found in the out-of-Petersburg texts in Russian and other literatures. (Markovich & Schmidt, 2005, p. 11) Also, it was noted that Toporov focused on a certain number of writers and texts (mostly F.M. Dostoyevsky and his “accompanying” texts - comments, diaries, essays), ignoring many others, and drawing conclusions based on these preferred texts and their specifics. In addition, Toporov was found to be carried away by the historiosophical ideas by G. Fedotov, as he attempted to interpret Saint Petersburg text in relation to its significance for the formation of Russian national idea, and tried to ascribe messianic qualities to it, taking it too far from the questions of philology. (Markovich & Schmidt, 2005, p. 6-7) I.P. Smirnov, in his article *Petersburg: the city of the dead and the alive (Петербург: город мёртвых и город живых, 2005)* partially justifies Toporov in his desire to conduct “sort of a

restoration work aiming at reestablishing the traditional artistic realization of Petersburg”. (Smirnov as cited in Markovich & Schmidt, 2005, p. 57) A number of Petersburg themes which did not receive close attention (if any) in Toporov’s work appear to be significant for the field and were discussed by many scholars in Russia and abroad.

Richard Wortman, examining the establishment of Western type power by Peter the Great, calls Saint Petersburg his “paradise”, the “embodiment of his ideas of regularity, the symmetry, order, and control”. He notes that the promotion of this image was one of Peter’s “scenarios of power”: “like the triumphal entries, the capital had to be represented as well as created; it had to be celebrated by being depicted”. (Wortman, 1995-2000, p. 52-53) The ways in which Petersburg’s imperial significance is celebrated in Russian literature are explored in the works by Buckler, Barskova, Matich, Turoma, and others.

The Silver Age of Russian literature brought about the ideas of cultural palimpsest presenting Petersburg as an heir of the formerly great cities: Athens, Rome, Venice, and Paris. The Italian motifs were one of the main themes in the poetry by Blok, Mandelstam, Gumilev, and prose by Merezhkovsky. The image of the “eternal city” in the imagination of Petersburg writers is discussed in the works by Presto, Turoma, and others.

The 20th century’s fascination with the city as an influential force that accumulates and formats the human culture is revealed through literature in the book *The City as Catalyst* by D. Festa-McCormick. In the chapter on Saint Petersburg - *Bely’s Saint Petersburg: A City Conjured by a Visionary Symbolist* - she compares the Russian capital to Alexandria of Egypt in the way its nature was predetermined by its creator, and to Chicago and Buenos Aires in the rate at which it created its artistic individuality. Characterizing the 19th century’s city “as a protagonist in fiction, projecting visions and molding individuals”, she described Petersburg as a specimen of such, a city “that acts as a force in man’s universe”, “holds a mirror to man’s folly”, but also “is a springboard [...] from which visions emerge that delve into existences unimaginable elsewhere.” (p. 15) In her conclusion, D. Festa-McCormick speaks about the value that of literary representations of the cities can have for sociology and interdisciplinary studies. (p. 193) In this light, it is interesting to note a work by Joseph Rykwert, a historian and critic of

architecture, called *The Seduction of Place: The History and Future of the City* (2002), in which he regrets of a certain insufficiency of such studies:

Sociologists, traffic experts, and politicians have all written at length about the city and its problems. Economists and futurologists have prophesized its demise. Reading them I have always been struck at how little the physical fabric of the city – its touch and smell as well as its sights – occupies their attention. (p. 6)

In his search of the “fabric” of the city he resorts to literature.

Considering the above mentioned, it is not surprising that lately the Petersburg text has been studied extensively in the general culturological context, in which it was interpreted through its connection to the cityshape. City maps, guides and urban culture phenomena are regarded as texts that abound in intertextual inclusions from literary works. Among other topics, Julie Buckler, in her *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape* (2005), presents the view of the “marginal” places and spheres of life in Saint Petersburg - slums, cemeteries, industrial districts, *dachas*, and outskirts – exploring their representation in classical and “middle brow” literature about the city. The collection of essays by Olga Matich, Ulla Hakanen, Polina Barskova, Alexis Peri and Christine Evans, accumulated in *Petersburg/Petersburg: novel and the city, 1900-1921* (2010) explores the “affinity of urban space, modernity, and literary modernism” as presented in Petersburg text of the time. (p. 6) The book is supplemented by the “virtual Part 3” in a form of a Web site titled *Mapping Petersburg*, which constructs a Petersburg *Hypertext* that “helps mediate physical and virtual space” and thus “offers a unique teaching resource to humanists and social scientists not only in the Russian field, but also in urban studies.” (p. 331)

Great Reforms and Historical Parallelisms

Traditionally, every significant event in Petersburg political and social life was reflected in literature, explicitly or allegorically. The departing point of it was Pushkin’s poem *The Bronze Horseman*, in which the Decembrists’ uprising of 1825 was coded in the depiction of the destructive flood of 1824. One of the interests of this research is to observe how this tradition was developed in the literature of the 1990s.

There are certain historical parallelisms that can be revealed comparing this time to the end of the 20th century. First of all, both periods can be defined as “transitory”. According to J.L. Reed (2010), transitory time is “the narrow gap between great historical periods” that tends to “fall by the history’s wayside”. (Reed & Blair, 2010, p. v) In his collection of essays on the Petersburg cultural life he describes “approximately 10 transitory years from the end of communism to the establishment of Putin’s authoritarian system”. According to his definition of “transitory” the decade shifted from the round numbers (1990-2000) to the period of 1993-2003. Considering this reasoning acceptable, we suggest referring to the period of 1905(07)-1917 as analogical to the above mentioned. Indeed, the description given by J.L. Reed can apply to both:

It was a decade marked by uncertainty, excitement, chaos, grandiose hope, and violence. All futures were possible, nothing was certain [...] Only in memoirs of those transitional years does one begin to sense the elusive historical line of expectation and betrayal. (p. v)

The turn at the end of the 19th century was marked by a series of catastrophes – World War I, first Russian revolution of 1905, The February Revolution of 1917, Nicholas’s II abdication, and, finally, The October Socialist Revolution. All marked the end of the epoch and could not fail to bring apocalyptic thoughts to the minds of people of all classes and origins. However, this time also brought hope which had originated in the era of Great Reforms of the 1860s and was urged on by the growing number of political movements opposed to the tsar’s regime and bureaucratic preponderance. The beginning of the 20th century promised changes and freedom, the expectation escalated by the first Russian Revolution of 1905. The enthusiasm for the ideals of Revolution was reflected in the Petersburg text as well, Blok’s poem *The Twelve* (1918) being the classical example of it.

While the end of the 19th century was often described as *razrukha* (often *полная разруха* – complete devastation), the turn at the millennium received such names as “the wild 90s” (*лихие девяностые*) and *bespredel* (outrage). After Gorbachev’s liberal policies of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, there was the coup of August 1991, when Leningraders gathered for protests on Palace square, and “barricaded the Mariinsky Palace (city hall), ready to oppose the tanks”. (George, 2010, p. 5) These and other events cannot fail to appear reminiscent of the mass demonstrations and strikes of the

period 1905-1907 and the barricades around Winter Palace in the last attempt to protect the Provisional Government in 1917. However, apart from freedoms and rights the collapse of the Soviet system brought new hardships and threats to the social life of the Russians. Gorshkov et al. in their book *Russia at the Turn of the Centuries (Россия на рубеже веков, 2000)* speak about the process of extreme social stratification (*расслоение общества*): the phenomenon of the so-called “new Russians”, the rapid and often unfair redistribution of the national property inevitably increasing the tension within the society. (p. 29-31) This process is mentioned in *The Analytical Report on the Socio-Demographic Situation in Russia in 1993* edited by N.M. Rimashevskaja (1994) in connection with the problem of poverty which “acquired a stable and persistent character”. (p. 23-25) According to the report, a significant part of the population (“the outcasts”) slides into the certain “zone of deprivation”, driven there by the market economy and unable “to climb out of it” without the help of the expensive social economic measures on the part of the state. (p. 24) Reed registers the same processes describing the situation after the financial setback of 1998:

The transition from government ownership to private enterprise presented the opportunity for a few well-placed and ambitious individuals to grab at Russia’s natural riches, industries, factories. As the few in Moscow grew astronomically rich, poverty in the provinces reached bottom. (Reed & Blair, 2010, p. viii)

The collapse of the industrial enterprises, unemployment and manifold confusion in legislative system led to the high (and ever increasing) level of criminal activity, unheard of during the Soviet times. Violence and life threat (with the help of the so-called *kryshi*) became usual way of resolving business conflicts and demonstrated the fusion of criminal and market structures. (Rimashevskaja, p. 141-143; Gorshkov et al., p. 290-291) Speaking about organized crime interfering with the business life of Saint Petersburg, Reed calls the city “Chicago on the Neva”, mentioning bloody gangster shutdowns right on Nevsky Prospekt and numerous assassinations of people in power. (George, 2010, p. 11)

The statistics on all the above mentioned was alarming, not mentioning the numbers describing the alcoholism and suicide rates and the new wave of emigration to Europe and the USA, the “brain drain” aggravating the frustration in all spheres of intellectual and administrative activity. (Rimashevskaja, 1994, p. 55-57, 71-75)

In comparison to “the stability of Soviet communism”, the idea of the new “democratic” state was losing its credit among common Russians in this ordeal of the time:

Light jokes were made about “good old days”, but they were ringed with a genuine nostalgia. [...] If this capitalism was an antidote to communism, there were few takers. (Reed & Blair, 2010, p. viii)

In this regard, L.A. Gordon and E.V. Klopov in their comprehensive work *Gains and Losses in Russia of the 1990s (Потери и обретения в России девяностых, 2000)* warn about “the threat of sliding toward complete authoritarianism” and discuss the raise of nationalistic and even fascist attitudes and policies connected to the Chechen wars of 1994-1996 and 1999-200(6). (Gordon and Klopov, 2000, p. 101, 107-110)

The Cultural Life of Saint Petersburg in the “wild 1990s”

Let us examine the effect all the above mentioned had on the cultural life of the city. Surprisingly, the general picture of artistic life in Saint Petersburg in the 1990s shows that the city benefited from the events on the political arena. Together with its name Saint Petersburg seemed to redeem its leading role. Looking “very run down” by the Soviet rule in late 1970s (George, 2010, p. 1, 18-19), it started to gain its luster that attracted the gazes from abroad.

The witnesses of this time remember it as the period of “the rehabilitations of the city’s rich cultural heritage and exposing the truth about its past tragedies”.

The World of Arts Movement and the entire Silver Age enjoyed a revival. The works of St. Petersburg’s Symbolists, Acmeists, and Futurists [...] were published again, as were the later “Bronze Age” works of Mikhail Zoshchenko and the Serapion Brothers, and Daniel Kharmis and the Oberiuti. (George, 2010, p. 3)

George notes the significance of the acknowledgement of such figures as the academician Likhachev and Joseph Brodsky. Brodsky’s fame was only a part of the wave of the émigré literature and art return to the new Russia: everything, from Nabokov’s memoirs to Stravinsky’s music received its long awaited acclaim. (Reed & Blair, 2010, p. 5) Even Diaghilev’s ballet was revived by the Mariinsky troupe during the new *Saisons Russes* in Paris in 2002. (George, 2010, p. 16) The culmination of Petersburg cultural festivities was to happen in 2003, the tricentennial of the city’s foundation. Meanwhile

the city authorities and organizations kept bursting out with projects, aimed at attracting investments from abroad and reaching the European standards in its infrastructure and tourists' accommodation. (Buckler, 2005, p. 249-251)

On the background of the revival of arts, the situation in literature did not look as optimistic. On the bigger scale, the same tendencies seemed to dominate its development: the revival of the old Russian (Imperial) traditions and openness to the new concepts and Western influence. However, it definitely lost its monopoly as the main art form reflecting the moods of its generation. In the flood of writings of all kinds and topics, suddenly available to the reader, there was a big confusion regarding the belles-lettres mission in the minds of contemporaries. Many researchers and essayists explain it as an effect of the sudden outburst of the mass media and of the incipient electronic culture. (Roll, 1996, p. 8; Tikh, 2002, p. 364) They also note the influence of pop culture, the democratization of the arts and the abundance of pulp literature along with its commercial success. (Roll, p. 8-9; Tikh, p. 370-371)

In the discussion of the role of literature in contemporary Russia, the famous writer Tatiana Tolstaya (born 1951) notes that a writer lost his/her traditional status of a prophet, that Russian literature is losing its historical and philosophical dimension in favor of entertaining functions:

По-видимому, во всем мире роль писателя свелась до какого-то развлекателя. И в последнюю очередь это происходит в нашем восточноевропейском мире[...]. (Tolstaya as cited in Roll, 1996, p. 152)

Apparently, in the whole world the role of a writer has been reduced to some sort of entertainer. And we in our Eastern European world are the last to see it [...].

The discontinuance of state subsidies for publications threw many authors into the situation of the open market, in which they had to make their writing answer the demand of the time or quit the profession. In an attempt to be competitive against the flow of the “disclosing” literature (Tikh, 2002, p. 304), interpretations of the current events in the country and foreign “bestsellers” full of action and suspense (*остросюжетный*), the contemporary belles-lettres struggled to acquire their main qualities – i.e. being topical and sensational.

The fact that many prominent writers of the time turned to journalism proves once again the ability of this genre to register the immediate state of affairs in its topicality and

underscores the need for this quality in fiction in order to provide it with the historical authenticity that would make up for its “under-reflected/under-considered” character (*неотрефлексированный*). For instance, that is how Tatiana Tolstaya commented on her decision to lead a column “*на злобу дня*” (in response to the latest events) in The Moscow News in the beginning of the 1990s:

Пишу я мало, медленно[...] Таким образом много не напишешь, а ведь жалко бывает, что вот так и проживешь и не успеешь чего-то. И я обнаружила для себя, что есть такая удобная вещь, как журналистика[...].

I write slowly and by small portions [...] This way not much can be written, and sometimes it makes me feel that I will live a life, and some of it will be missing from my writing. And I discovered such a convenient thing as journalism writing [...]. (Tolstaya as cited in Tikh, p. 364)

The process went the other way with equal success. Thanks to the increase of publishing activity (mainly private), many writers from journalism realized they had the opportunity to issue the accumulated stocks of their materials in books and even separate series. For various reasons – for coherence, entertainment, or, at times, personal security – they chose to array them into the form of a fiction plot. Often the narration would explore the formerly censored sides of life – the lifestyle of marginal groups, underworld figures and shadow processes (such as the so called *fartsovka*², prostitution, financial schemes, and more global social phenomena such as racism, nationalism, homophobia, etc.)

² *Fartsovka* is a jargon term which originated from the English “for sale” and denoted buying goods from foreigners and selling them for profit, which was illegal in the Soviet Union. (Zemtsov, 2001, p. 123)

CHAPTER II

URBAN FOLKLORE AND NOSTALGIA IN MIKHAIL VELLER'S *THE LEGENDS OF NEVSKY PROSPEKT*

M. Veller is already acknowledged by his audience as a master of the Russian contemporary short story. (Tukh, 2002, p. 81) *Легенды Невского проспекта* (*The Legends of Nevsky Prospekt*) is an example of such mastery. It is a compilation of stories about personalities, places and even objects, which are related to Nevsky Prospekt or Saint Petersburg in one or another way.

Examining this work, we can observe how one of the most influential myths of the Petersburg text – the myth of its imaginary nature separated from the actual reality – is exploited through the author's choice of genre. We may also trace the allusion to Gogol's *Nevsky Prospekt* (1833-1834) in terms of the objects of the stories as well as the style of narration.

The book was published in 1993 to great success with its audience. Unfortunately, the book, as well as Veller's literary work in general, was "left out in the cold" by contemporary literary criticism, which happened to notice him only after the author turned to social and political journalism. However, although literature is evaluated by critics, it is being written for the reader, and Veller's book has not left the reader indifferent. The heated discussions on forums and in the comments at the publisher's websites are "raging" around a common question: "Are the stories true or merely the fruit of the literary imagination?" The most competent part of the audience in their dispute with the indignant "non-believers" referred to the title of the book, reasoning that nothing there even has to be true, for the author himself identifies the stories as "legends".

J.A. Buckler, in her book "Mapping Saint Petersburg" (2005), gives the following definition: "The term "legend" (in Russian *legenda*) derives from the Latin verb "to read" (*legere*). "Legend" refers to a popular story or myth transmitted across time and space, as well as a key to reading a visual representation such as map." (p. 116) She also states: "Urban legend is loosely defined as a *false* story of the bizarre or supernatural, narrated as if it had really happened, and corresponding to given community anxieties [...]. Urban

legend is generally “verified” by its narrator with reference to an eyewitness or other source, [...] which leaves the story open to question.” (p. 117) All of the above “as if, loosely, false”, “verified” in quotes, and finally “open to question” do not vote much for the legend’s veracity. However, they do not vote completely against it: “loosely defined”, generally “verified” still leave the space for deviation, and lead again to the open question. When the definition does not provide us with a clear answer, the rule of contraries can be applied. What differentiates the legend from pure fiction or fantasy in its general and literary meaning? Could not a story picturing a UFO be called a “popular story” fitting into all the aforementioned definitions? It certainly can. These stories in a hundred interpretations are available in both written and oral forms. Yet what makes such a story become a legend is its connection to a certain place or a person, the real existence of which/who is not questioned by even the most suspicious reader or listener. Through such connection, the place or a person becomes *легендарным* (“legendary”). Today the gods and heroes of the classic myths seem no more real than a UFO. However, we still can travel to Athens and visit the Parthenon and see Mount Olympus, which gives us the material representation of the story, the reality and tangibility of which prevents us from appointing the story completely to the class of fiction.

This connection is expressed in “the second etymology of the word “legend” [which] points to the virtual inscription of oral lore on material surfaces such as building and monuments and to their actual inscription in literary text”, leading to “productive symbolic relationships.” (Buckler, 2005, p. 176) In this respect, Veller completely justified his choice of the word *легенды* by connecting it to a truly material and undoubtedly real Nevsky Prospekt. The Prospekt, as a universal symbol of the city, functions as a point of intersection for many stories that the collection includes. None of them are devoted to the Prospekt completely; there are no detailed descriptions, historical reminiscences, lyrical digressions on social meaning, or general atmosphere anywhere, except for the introduction. Neither narrator, nor characters confess their personal impressions or relations to the place, as N.V. Gogol does in his tale *Nevsky Prospekt*.

In Veller’s account, Nevsky Prospekt is the background for the whole body of the collection, the crossroads of the character’s life paths. As an easily recognizable stage set,

it keeps the spectator (the reader) focused and aware of the place and the time at which the action is taking place.

Nevsky Prospekt, like Rome, to which “all the roads lead”, stretches strings to all other topographic points – streets, buildings, monuments – of the city. Like Dostoyevsky, Veller names the actual places, which his characters visit or live at, sometimes providing them with addresses, which are as real as the city itself:

Жил он, кстати, на Восьмой линии Васильевского острова, в комнатухе со старенькой мамой.

I'd mention that he lived at the 8th line of Vasilievsky Island, in a tiny room with his old mother. (p.6)

К дому двадцать два по Восьмой линии подваливал сияющий интуристовский автобус.

A dazzling tourist bus would stop at the house number twenty two on the 8th line of Vasilievsky. (p. 19)

Вода в озере Красавица, что по Выборгскому шоссе, заметьте, летом ледяная, а в мае просто в свиное ухо закручивает.

It's to note that the water in the lake Beauty aside of Vyborg highway is ice cold even in the summer; in May it simply twirls a human body into something resembling a pig's ear. (p.23)

These passages are taken from the first story of the book about Fima Bliashiz, the founder of the black market of illegally imported products from Europe. Bliashiz is a typical underground hero who would never appear in any official records of the city except for the criminal reports (which is also doubtful) or published literature. The name of this character, though real, must have been known in a very narrow circle of the people “in the profession” and those who knew him personally. Today, more than forty years later (considering the dates the author provides), his name would rarely be mentioned by those people or their children; it would tell no story to the new generation, had it not been captured by the writer's imagination and found life in his word. The writer “dresses the name up” in distinctive personal features: appearances (shocking by their uncommonness or common to the point of inducing curiosity), utterances (which are destined to become aphorisms), habits, manners, realia of the time, deeds and whims – everything that

constitutes a person. Either restoring it, or simply making it up, the writer creates a personality which becomes as alive as the reader him/herself:

А в маленькой задней комнате, привычной с детства, сидел Фима в дешевом костюмчике фабрики Володарского, в скороходовских туфлях, с часами «Победа», и координировал движение маховика.

But in the small back corner room, which used to be his nursery room, Fima was sitting in his old and cheap suit made by Volodarskaya factory, with shoes from “Skorokhod” shoe plant on his feet, and “Pobeda” watches on his hand, and coordinated his underworld flywheel movement. (p. 19)

The well-outlined personality evokes empathy in the reader, who starts associating him with his/her own life and surroundings: every other citizen of the USSR in the 1970s lived *в маленькой комнате*, had *часы «Победа»* and dreamt of *старый подержанный «Москвич»*. This “fictional realism” (if it is appropriate to use such an oxymoron) convinces the reader that the character exists in a congruent reality. Consequently, when the “bizarre and supernatural” takes place the reader almost feels involved in an extraordinary event.

This effect becomes even more dramatic if there is a tangible point available for the reader’s perception or knowledge: a fact, an object, or a place. The unknown ones acquire meaning and distinction; the famous ones add new dimensions to their values.

Гостиница Европейская was one of the few fashionable and highly ranked places in Leningrad in 1970s. Today it is a luxurious Grand Hotel Europe located at the corner of Nevsky Prospekt and Mikhailovskaya Street. It is also a place where, for the first time, we meet a character of Veller’s story *Танец с саблями (The Sabre Dance)* - an Armenian Soviet composer Khachaturian. The real Khachaturian was a frequent guest at the restaurant *Крыша* (“The Roof”) at the top of the *Гостиница Европейская* building. Veller’s Khachaturian is a man “*на коротких ножках*”, “*личный большой друг Мравинского, Рождественского и прочих*”, “*человек знаменитый, гость желанный, широкая душа, кавказской общительной щедрости*” (“on short legs”, personal dear friend of Mravinsky, Rozhdestvensky, etc.”), “a famous man, a welcome visitor, a generous heart, sociable and friendly in the best Caucasian manner”), who is seen in “the most musical cafeteria in the world”, where “*любая буфетчица [...] знала о музыкантской жизни города больше, чем директор Ленфилармонии*” (“every waitress knew about the city’s music life more than the head of Leningrad Philharmonic

Society”). (p. 12) The real Khachaturian went to Spain to perform, whereas Veller’s Kachaturian goes once to Spain to see how Salvador Dali “*зарицует голый на швабре через весь зал, маша своей саблей*” (“is prancing on a mop naked down the hallway, waving his saber”). (p. 12)

The Museum of Arctic and Antarctic is one of the numerous Saint Petersburg museums. According to Veller, it is a church “at the Kuznechnaia Square, the corner of Kuznechnaia and Marata Street” which “is still there, white and yellow, standing out against the brownish sooty buildings”. In a real museum, one can see archeological monuments and relics telling the history of discovering the Northern Sea Route. In Veller’s museum, one can see and touch a Mauser pistol which belonged “to Papanin himself”. Papanin “was a simple and straightforward man of commissar class”, but during long twenty-four-hour nights in the Arctic he acquired a habit of “abnormal intimate affection towards small arms” (“*ненормальной интимной нежности к легкому стрелковому оружию*”) and, later, almost committed suicide, when the radio operator tricked him. He added an odd component to his non-assembled favorite gun; the commissar could not assemble it for the first time in his life. (Veller, 1994, p. 198-204)

The real objects and places described in Veller’s stories inevitably have a whole range of personalized associations which create a new realm, a new reality behind the name. In that manner, 22 8th line Street on Vasilievsky Island is not just a house, but a place where Fima Blyaishiz brought his aged mother her first fur-coat, where he devised his brilliant financial schemes, and where later he dreamt about a common girl who preferred a common Soviet engineer over him – over a *legend* of Nevsky Prospekt.

On comparing the examples of two representations of reality provided above, it always appears that the writer’s representation is more attractive to the reader, if we are allowed to assume on the part of the majority of them. The writer’s representation evokes all kinds of feedback: surprise, indignation, skepticism, curiosity and finally the desire to visit, to see and to touch. Which representation is more effective, or should we say - affective? And also, should we ask: Which reality is better?

If this question is stated as a literary one, we probably should refer to the great. Dostoyevsky was convinced that the reality he created was better and was strongly opposed to the proponents of the reality of fact. Tolstoy simply acknowledged only one

reality: the reality of ideal. (Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy as cited in Hellebust, 2003, p. 498) Rolf Hellebust, in his article “The Real Saint Petersburg”, reminds us that dualism tends to be seen as “a primordial basis for Russia’s mentality” (p. 496). The same idea can be observed in any sphere of culture, including religion and sets of values, it is seen even in the architecture of churches “symbolizing in its sensual splendor the real existence of heaven on earth” (Hellebust, 2003, p. 497) However, Russian duality is of a special kind: it is not simply opposing the body to the mind, the tangible to the invisible, the defective to the ideal, but rather it is observing two *realities*, opposed, but also originating from one another – the eternal interpenetration of yin and yan. We can assume that by this “opposition” Russian culture does justice to its orient-bound nature. The literature has been demonstrating this over the years across a chain of events.

There was a writer who wrote an extravaganza-tale *Алые Паруса* (*Scarlet Sails* by Alexander Grin, 1916-1922). In modern times, every year in May, a real boat with the real scarlet sails floats down the Neva, becoming a real event in the lives of thousands people. The famous *Чижик-Пыжик* is not a monument to a real bird, but to a silly rhyme³: however, Saint Petersburg without *Чижик-Пыжик* is no more real than without the Bronze Horseman. These are some of the many examples of “a contrast between actuality and an improved fictional variant” in the culture of Saint Petersburg. (Hellebust, 2003, p. 497) Considering the aforementioned, we come to the conclusion that Russian literature has traditionally placed a created reality which was perceived in the “positive” meaning of “a higher, spiritual truth, individual rather than social” over the reality of fact, or actuality - our external environment, also rendered in Russian as *действительность*. (Hellebust, 2003, p. 499)

Does the book *Легенды неевского проспекта* belong to this tradition, universal for all Saint Petersburg texts? Does Mikhail Veller position his creation as a reality, better than actuality? Apart from the devices that imply that, the epilogue’s explicit statement confirms the following:

³ “Chizhik Pyzhik, an 11-centimeter statue of a siskin, was installed near the Summer Garden in 1994, on the site of the former Imperial Legal Academy, founded by Prince Pyotr Oldenburgsky in 1835. The Academy's students wore green and yellow uniforms that apparently made them look like siskins. Their habitual - clandestine - visits to a well-known local hostelry led to the Petersburg folk-song, “Chizhik Pyzhik, where've you been? On Fontanka, drinking vodka.” (“St. Petersburg Monuments and Memorials,” n.d.)

*Я никогда не вернусь в Ленинград.
Его больше не существует.
Такого города нет на карте.
Истаивает, растворяется серый вековой морок, и грязь стекает на стены дворцов и листы истеричных газет. [...] А хорошее было слово: над синью гранитных вод, над зеленью в чугунных узорах – золотой чеканный шпиль: Ленинград. Город-призрак, город-миф – он еще владеет нашей памятью и переживет ее [...].*

I will never return to Leningrad.
It does not exist anymore.
There is no such city on the map.
Grey, age-old shadows are pining away and disappearing; and the mud is streaming down onto the palaces' façades, onto the feverish newspaper pages. [...] It was good, this word: over the blue of the granite waters, over the green of the cast-iron lace – a chased spear of gold: Leningrad. A ghost-city, a myth-city – it is still holding our memory and will outlive it [...]. (p. 268)

The imaginary city is opposed to its actual equivalent: it even has a different name. The author prefers that name as “a good word”, over the present one. In his recollections he brings up the cultural legacy of the city, restoring its traditional image. He remembers being a witness of the city's mythological nature. It is in his past, or rather in his idealized recollections, the city of youth, love and hopes, and thus – a better city.

In the author's mind, these ideal qualities of the city are opposed to the modern obsession with the material, which makes the *actual* so much inferior.

Город моей юности, моей любви и надежд – канул, исчезая в Истории. Заменены имена на картах и вывесках, блестящие автомобили прут по разоренным улицам Санкт-Петербурга, и новые поколения похвально куют богатство и карьеру за пестрыми витринами – капают по Невскому.

The city of my youth, of my love and my dreams – sank, disappearing in the History. The names on the maps and street signs have been replaced; shiny cars are tanking along the ravaged streets of Saint Petersburg; and new generations are laudably forging their fortunes and careers behind the colorful shop windows – they fall upon Nevsky as drops. (p. 268)

In the epilogue, it is as if the author is estranged from the city he never will return to. He calls himself an emigrant: an emigrant from the city as well as from the reality that he externalized out of his own personality.

The epilogue and the prologue are the most “personal” parts in this work, which includes no other lyrical digressions touching upon the theme of the city in the context of time. The shift from the stories to the digressions resembles the slide from a person's

direct speech to his diary notes. The stories, though also told from the first person and even sharing some biographical details, are presenting a narrator as a good story-teller, rather than a thoughtful person; they are designed to produce an immediate impression on the reader, rather than induce him/her to reflection. The digressions on the contrary create an image of a writer observing himself from afar in chronological introspection. The writer makes a distinction between himself and his main character, the story-teller, yet places himself in the position of a neighbor, a peer, and even a friend of the character and the reader. This device the author is borrowing from a Pushkinian tradition, so easily recognizable and organic to Russian literary text: “*Когда-то я тоже жил на Невском и был с него родом*”. (p. 1) Taking into the consideration the fact that the author is indeed our contemporary and takes a very active social position being referred to in many other spheres of life besides literature, he constitutes a prominent figure of our time. Thus, the narrator becomes highly personalized, making the literary reality feel even closer and more tangible.

We observed the same effect of personalization when the development of the characters was discussed. We mentioned that places and objects become meaningful in the reader’s mind through their connection to the literary characters, developed into the fascinating personalities. Here, Veller falls into another literary tradition of Saint Petersburg dualism: its ontological concentration around a real person. Hellebust connects with the Saint Petersburg mysterious relation to its founder, Peter the Great, who was an embodiment of a “typical broad Russian soul”, “a paradoxical unity of opposing traits”, and imprinted his individual nature on the realm of his city. (Hellebust, 2003, p. 505)

However, the book contains stories in which the narration is not supported by the colorful description of the character, or the personalized figure of the narrator, neither is it connected to a certain place or object of interest. The author placed these stories in a separate unit called *Байки «Скорой помощи»* (“The Ambulance Stories”). Every story in this unit tells of special cases or just unusual occasions in medical practice. The stories are mainly short; the language is closer to the colloquial. The patients or just unlucky victims are not given names, but are described by their professions, positions, age or sex. These stories create an impression of casual talk accidentally overheard in a public place. In other words, they answer the definition of *байка*:

БАЙКА, -и, ас. (разг.) Побасенка, выдумка, басня (во 2 знач.). Охотничьи байки. Что-то не похожа эта б. на правду. (Shvedova, N. I. U., & Institut russkogo iazyka im. V.V. Vinogradova, 2007, p. 27)

BAIKA2, (col.) Tale, story, fable (2nd meaning). Hunters' baikas. This baika doesn't sound like a true story.

According to *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language by V. Dal'*

(*Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка В. Даля, 1935*) this word originates from the verb *баять* or *баить*:

БАИТЬ на юг от Москвы, *баять* и *байкать*, *баивать* [...] сев. и вост. также в зап. губ. *говорить*, *болтать*, *беседовать*, *рассказывать*, *разговаривать*, *толковать* [...]

BAIT' to the South of Moscow, *baiat'* and *baikat'*, *baivat'* [...] north. and east. also in the west. provin. *to speak*, *to chat*, *to converse*, *to tell*, *to talk*, *to discuss* [...] (p. 39)

In some areas and other Slavic languages this verb is connected to the meaning of “healing with magic words” or “casting a spell”. (Dal', 1935, p. 39) This etymology reveals a quality which is very important for identifying it as a genre: its oral nature. Indeed, the traits of oral text can be observed throughout the whole book. Its language is picturesque and vivid, often by its resemblance to the colloquial conversation, containing stylistic and even grammatical errors, such as case ending misuse: “*В одна тысяча девятьсот пятьдесят третьем году, как известно, Вождь народов и племен решил устроить евреям поголовно землю обетованную на Дальнем Востоке [...]*”. (p.1)

The author also uses a whole range of jargon words, sometimes on the verge of obscenity: “*бомбить фирму, вломить срок, накатят телегу, шмотки, коммиссионки, деловар с баилями, [...] сдай чепец и канай кирять*”, etc.

The narration abounds in anecdotes of the time, well-known abbreviations, contractions and diminutive forms. The language of the narration constitutes a peculiar mixture of the Soviet ideological “stamps” and paraphrases or precise citations from literature not necessarily distinguished by any quotation marks. Both ideological and literary languages are used in such an unexpected and unusual way, that the form often contradicts the content outrageously, which creates an ironic and sarcastic tone of

narration and is so full of humor that the reader cannot help laughing. For instance, that is how the narrator describes a prostitute's career.

Сдельная оплата стимулирует производительность труда. Быстро усвоив эту экономическую истину, Марина освоила прогрессивную французскую технологию. Без сомнений, она была талантливым работником.

Piecework payment encourages productivity. Having learnt this universal truth of economy pretty soon, Marina mastered a progressive French technology. Without doubt, she was a talented worker. (p. 50-51)

Да есть ли на свете такая сила, которая превозможет русскую силу, справедливо воскликнул другой гениальный русский классик, Гоголь. И он был, конечно, прав.

But is there strength in the world that would surpass that of Russians, as the other Russian classic writer Gogol fairly exclaimed. And he was, of course, right. (p. 52)

Another oral quality of Veller's *басня* is the narrator's orientation to the knowledgeable reader. The author expects the reader to share the common knowledge of Leningrad reality of the 1970s-1980s. He uses the nicknames of topographical points of the city, brings up jargon characteristic of the relatively short period in the epoch, and refers to historical figures and events using descriptive terms (examples above). By this he transforms the reader into an interlocutor, bringing the narration closer to oral conversation, where both the story-teller and the listener are to a certain degree acquainted and share background information. Our assumption of the "oral" quality of Veller's texts is greatly supported by the audio-book *Легенды Невского проспекта: читает автор* (The Legends of Nevsky Prospekt: read aloud by the author), which he recorded only for this work, and which presents the oral manner of peculiar tone and intonation demonstrating the way the author imagines as the best one to read his stories aloud.

The *басня*-like nature of the book is not only observed in its language and manner of narration, but also in its composition and even title. As has been established, the author chose Nevsky Prospekt as the universal symbol of the city. Nevsky Prospekt, as the center of social life in the city and even the country, is a vibrant vein in actual human life and a crossroads for the lines of literary reality. To crown it all, Nevsky Prospekt is a rich source of information of any kind: "[...] усвоить моду и манеру, познакомиться,

светский андеграунд, кино – театр – магазин – новости – связи – товар – деньги – товар – лица и прочие части тела [...].” (p.3) Nevsky Prospekt is an ideal place not only for the exchange of money and goods, but also for informational exchange: gossiping, story-telling, scandalizing. It is a place, where these stories are being told and where their characters appear or live. For that reason the title of the book is not *Легенды о Невском Проспекте* (“The Legends **about** Nevsky Prospekt”), but *Легенды Невского Проспекта* (“The Legends **of** Nevsky Prospekt”): for those are the legends which belong to the Nevsky Prospekt, but do not speak about its historical, social, aesthetical or archeological values.

However, though the author mentions the genre of *басня* in his book, he gives chooses the word *легенда* for its overall title. The genre of legend answers the element of miracle that is still often present in his work, whereas *басня*, however unusual it may be, may remain in the frame of possibility. Legend, on the contrary, is supposed to be so outrageous that it breaks the previous perception of reality, and thus imprints itself deeply in the cultural memory of the people and the place. It is interesting to note that a modern interpretation of *басня* is directly connected to the urban legend, which incorporates in itself into the miraculous nature of the ancient legends and the topicality of *басня*. According to J. Buckler, who examines this genre in detail, the urban legend is often marked by the presence of “uncanny”, or a supernatural force inexplicable by common sense. (Buckler, 2005, p. 121) Though Veller’s stories do not include any mysterious supernatural phenomena (such as ghosts, moving chairs or animated parts of the body), the breaking point from reality to the absurd is usually very recognizable in the text by the stylistic shift from colloquial to elaborated, sometimes elevated belle-lettres, possibly accompanied by the appearance of a certain unexpected object. In the story about Fima Blyaishiz it is a sudden effect of a white hat, which makes a reasonable and intelligent man become a slave of his desire to possess it. The scene, where Fima sees the hat for the first time, stands out due to its style and choice of words:

Это была не простая, а какая-то необыкновенная шляпа. Она была белая, как синий снег, и поигрывала искристой радугой, как бриллиантовое кольцо королевы. Драгоценным муаром опоясывала ее орденская лента, и горделиво подрагивало стрелчатое рыцарское перо, горя алым знаком доблести.

It was not an ordinary hat, but some incredible hat. It was white like blue snow and a rainbow of sparkles was shimmering on it as if on queen's diamond necklace. A ribbon of precious moiré was girdling it and an arrow of a feather, scarlet as flame, was trembling with pride over it as a sign of valor. (p. 21)

[...] на курчавой голове его горела царской короной бриллиантовая шляпа.

[...] a diamond hat was burning on his curly head as a tsar's crown. (p. 24)

In the story *Марина* the legend starts with the appearance of Arabian sheikh on Nevsky Prospekt, which is itself almost equal to a miracle. But the legend steps into its rights with the description of a former prostitute enjoying the extremes of freedom and luxury:

В ту неделю и всплыла на уста млеющего в летнем зное Невского изменчивая легенда ее жизни. В серебристом «мерседесе» неслась она по проспекту, и пассажиры троллейбусов пялили глаза в окна вниз: водительница была одета в автомобильные перчатки и золотое колье, и ни во что более.

It was this week when the fickle legend of her life appeared on the lips of Nevsky Prospekt as it was melting in the summer heat. In her silver Mercedes, she was rushing along the prospekt, and the passengers were staring down from the windows of the trolley buses: the driver was wearing gloves, a golden necklace, and nothing else. (p. 57)

To see such a picture on Nevsky in the 1970s would be even more outrageous than to see the Bronze Horseman galloping at full pace along the same street.

The peculiarity of Veller's stories is that they always portray the event within the scope of material possibility: the event will not contradict the laws of nature or the limits of the human capacity; neither will it be totally inexplicable. However, the level of absurdity, the contradiction to the common sense and the current state of things in the society, as well as sometimes complete lack of a reason for a character to commit a move described, makes it almost impossible for the reader to comprehend such possibility and to believe the author.

What are the other traditions of Russian literature and of Saint Petersburg text in particular, the representation of which we can find in Veller's work?

Starting with the prologue, we can see the features of the representation of the city as a place of governmental power. The author could not avoid mentioning this topic, as in the 1960s-1970, Leningrad's cultural importance was still very much loaded with the

ideological sense of the Soviets. The city was no more an imperial capital, but it became a point of the closest attention of the other empire, no less, (if even no more) authoritative. The author mentions a legendary *Дело врачей* (The Case of the Doctors) also known as *Ленинградское дело* (The Leningrad Affair), when a group of prominent doctors were accused of terrorism; many of them were Jews. He mentions Stalin and his repressions, Khrushchev and his innovations. Veller portrays Leningrad as a place where most severe measures would be applied in the first place as an experiment before the general declaration in the country.

Фимина судьба была решена на высшем ленинградском уровне, хотя его дело не приобрело такого всемирного звучания, как дело Бродского: что ж, удел поэта – слава, удел бизнесмена – деньги; каждому свое.

Fima's fate was decided at the highest echelon of Leningrad, though his case didn't enjoy the international fame, as Brodsky's: oh well, fame is a poet's lot and money is a businessman's; to each his own. (p. 24-25)

[...] и гайки пошли закручиваться, и в Ленинграде, как и везде в Союзе, но довольно особенно, стал нарастать вполне негласный, но еще более вполне официальный, государственный то есть, антисемитизм.

[...] and the screws began to be tightened: in Leningrad, as everywhere in the Soviets, but in a quite a special way anti-Semitism, yet hidden, but quite official, that is national, began to rise. (p. 27)

In general, the theme of governmental power in Veller's book acquires an anti-Semitic focus, which could be prompted by his personal experience as he himself was Jewish.

Another unavoidable theme is the omnipresent KGB. As an international center of the country, Leningrad was covered by the double layer of total control, accountability and report. It leads us back to Marquis de Custine's Letters from Russia, where he complains of the complete impossibility for a foreigner to be granted an independence in his discovering the city. (Custine & Buss, 1991, p. 83) Veller witnesses the same:

Стукачей участвовало в празднестве уж не меньше, чем иностранцев, и дружили только самые безоглядные и храбрые, – кроме специально выделенных для дружбы, разумеется, и проинструктированных, как именно надо дружить.

The number of informers participating in the celebrations was no less than the number of guests from abroad; only the brave and the reckless dared to make

friends with the foreigners – apart from those who were allocated for friendship and thoroughly instructed on how exactly they were supposed to be friends with them. (p. 9)

On par with Custine, Veller describes the chain of subordinates and their superiors who generated reports on each and every person, thus creating the all-controlling vertical of power, which made it impossible to trust anybody and gave way to bribery and deception.

Along with the theme of control, Veller develops the idea of Russians constantly attempting to copy the West, and to acquire its achievements in any possible way, even under the threat of punishment from the government. The last aspect reveals this character of Russian mentality in a different light than in Custine's work. If Custine and many Russian Slavophile writers portrayed this obsession with Western culture as a trait imposed from above, Veller's examples of the Soviet epoch prove that it was innate to the character of a common citizen of this country - a habit so strong, that it could even push him/her to the crime. This theme is convincingly depicted in the phenomenon of Soviet hipsters (which was also wonderfully envisioned in the film *Стилляги (Stiliagi)* by Valerii Todorovskii, 2008):

*Иностранцы? Иностранки?
Нет! От пяток до бровей —
Это местные поганки,
Доморощенный Бродвей!*

Boys from abroad? Girls from abroad?
No! From hills to brows –
Those are local toadstools,
The self-made Broadway!

The author also touches upon the ineradicable ability of Russians to create an outward appearance that usually has nothing in common with the true state of things – the effect of *Потемкинские деревни*⁴. In the story *Марина* a naïve Englishman falls into the snare of a Russian prostitute, who appears to him as the finest lady in the world and a person of all possible virtue. He marries her and then becomes so fascinated by the wonderful idea of communism presented to him in all its glory by his Soviet colleagues

⁴ Potemkin villages or Potyomkin villages – “an impressive facade or show designed to hide an undesirable fact or condition. Grigori *Potëmkin*, who supposedly built impressive fake villages along a route Catherine the Great was to travel. First Known Use: 1937”. (“Merriam-Webster Dictionary,” n.d.)

and “friends”, that he makes a decision to stay in the USSR and renounces his United Kingdom citizenship. Only as a full member of the Soviet society does he encounter the treatment that this government offers to its people: a tiny apartment, a miserable salary, and limitations of rights. His disappointed wife returns to her old occupation and he becomes a typical Soviet alcoholic with a strange foreign accent.

The plot of the majority of the stories is no less sad than the one written above. However, the absurdity of the situations, the author’s biting irony and the peculiar language of the narrator together create an irresistible humorous effect, which votes again for the duality of the Russian literary realm.

In the conclusion, these observations allow to suggest that Mikhail Veller in his book *The Legends of Nevsky Prospekt* represents a new style of contemporary Russian short story at the junction of legend with Russian *байка* and urban legend. In the style, he combines the Gogolian sharp descriptiveness of language and the sense of the absurd with the straightforwardness of contemporary jargon and modern informative narration. The oral-like quality of Veller’s stories is skillfully expressed in a written text. Though by its style and composition this work stands far from any classical book of short stories, it reveals a connection with the unique traditions of the Petersburg Text: the demonstration of Saint Petersburg imperial power, its deceptive appearance, the city in the eyes of a foreigner, and finally, literary reality of the Petersburg Text as opposed to the actuality of Saint Petersburg of the 1970s through 1990s.

CHAPTER III

MIRRORS, DOUBLE BOTTOMS, AND SLUMS IN *BANDITSKII*

PETERBURG BY ANDREI KONSTANTINOV

The title of the novel by Andrei Dmitrievich Konstantinov (born 1963) clearly connects it with the Petersburg theme. *Banditskii Peterburg* (Bandits' Petersburg/Criminal Petersburg) was written in the period of 1993 - 1998 and gained popularity mostly as a screenplay for the famous TV series of the same title directed by Vladimir Bortko, first presented on the channel *HTB* (NTV) in 2000.

Known rather as a newspaper reporter and a journalist investigator, A. Konstantinov attempts to accumulate his materials in the series of essays and fiction works on the organized criminal structures in Russia, predominately Saint Petersburg. The essay *Banditskii Peterburg* is an introduction to the fiction parts of the series; it educates the reader on the reality in which the novels are set and supports it with real life examples. Its structure and style place it somewhat in between a journalist feature and an academic research work in the sphere of criminal studies. Presenting real statistics, names, places and cases, it draws a vast picture of the criminal situation in Leningrad and Petersburg throughout the period of the late 1980s and the 1990s. The author also makes an effort to familiarize the reader with the realities of the criminal world by explaining and illustrating the customs and laws that rule it, giving definitions of the argot (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 65-74), revealing the hierarchy of the criminals in the prison and out of it (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 74-79). The text cycles around one conclusion: the criminal structure is not simply the gang of violent criminals breaking the law in various ways, but a thoughtfully built organization, which was a result of the political and economic changes in Russia, and became a force that influences the state of affairs in the country and shapes its future. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 96)

The essay is written in the manner of social and political journalism. The author is trying to raise the Russian audience's awareness of the gravity of the situation. The content of many chapters is sensational, which is often reflected in the titles, such as: *Murder as a Means of Conducting a Business* (*Убийство как способ ведения дел*, p.

104-105), *What is the Price of Liquidation* (*Сколько стоит ликвидация*, p.113-114), etc. The titles like *Life and Death of Kolya-Karate* (*Жизнь и смерть Коли-Каратэ*, p. 47-51), or *Bandit Who Wanted to Go Down in History* (*Бандит, который хотел войти в историю*, p. 139-145) usually introduce short stories, which resemble Veller's *baiki* and differ in style from the rest of the essay.

The plots of the fiction part interweave involving the same settings (e.g. 15th CID) and the same characters (e.g. the “godfather” of Petersburg criminal world, *Antibiotic*, is a central figure for several novels, as well as his main persecutor - a major of 15th Department, Nikita Nikitich Kudasov). Every novel is titled by one word denoting (or referring allegorically to) the occupation of its protagonist, usually the person who leads the investigation, e.g. *The Lawyer* (*Advokat*), *The Judge* (*Sud'ia*), *The Journalist* (*Zhurnalist*), *The Garbage Man* (*Musorshchik*), etc.

For the present analysis the first novel of the series was chosen. It consists of two parts - *Advokat* and *Sud'ia/Advocate-2* (or *The Lawyer* and *The Judge/The Lawyer-2*). Further in the analysis, the transliterated title *Advokat* will be used, for in Russian the word *advokat* provides the duality of interpretation both as “a lawyer” and as “an advocate” (associated with the expression “the devil’s advocate”) and gives way to broader semantic interpretation, when used both to indicate the protagonists’ educational and professional background and, later, their criminal nickname.

Advokat covers the period from 1991 to 1996, often defined as the time of private capital formation in post-Soviet Russia, the time, when the city has just redeemed its historical name (on the 6th of September, 1991). However, aside from the political-economic clichés, the plot of the novel can be described as a personal story of three childhood friends, who, under the inhuman conditions of the ruined state system and the thriving world of bandits, managed to retain their connection and adhere to the basic human values. Although all three characters, Sergey Chelishchev (Tchelitchew), Oleg Zvantsev and Ekaterina Zvantseva (Shmeleva/Goncharova) are extremely important to the narration and share the author’s attention, the character of Sergey Chelishchev can be singled out as the protagonist. His occupation as a lawyer predetermines the title.

The special features that make this text outstanding – its journalistic origin and the initial intention of a movie script – are also the ones characterizing it as representative

of the popular writings of the time. These two traits result in the two opposite, almost conflicting qualities of narration: exact and sober representation of the reality of the 1990s, based on facts and personal experience, is combined with the immediate mythologizing of it in an attempt to make it spectacular and emotionally impressive.

In the context of The Petersburg text discussion, these two major qualities of *Banditskii Peterburg* can speak to its affiliation with the Petersburg supertext, as they reinterpret the two universal properties of it as determined by N.V. Toporov (and other scholars): the philosophical idea of salvation (soteriological idea) conveyed by the plot, and the phantasmagorical nature of the city fabric, expressed through the stylistics of the text.

In *Advokat* and *Sud'ia*, the idea of salvation is revealed through the various motifs of Sergey Chelishchev's situation. He can be seen as a classical Petersburg thinker (perhaps, it explains the choice of an unusual Russian family name for a protagonist: *Chelishchev* in Russian originates from *chelo* (чело) or *chelishche* (челище) – a (big, high) forehead, denoting the ability to think, meditate, reflect; also – the meaningful part of the word *chelovek* (человек) – a human) whose intense thinking comes from the necessity to solve a complex moral dilemma. (Toporov, 2003, p. 8, 14, 65) In accord with the traditions of Petersburg narrative, the problems he is solving are of the existential character, often affiliated with the ideas of Christianity and tightly connected to the actual historical process.

Занимаясь любимым делом русских разночинцев — размышляя о судьбах народа, Челищев машинально поглядывал на дверь кабачка.

Entertaining himself in a way favored by all educated Russians in the 19th century – meditating on the fate of his people, Chelishchev mechanically kept watching the door of the bar. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 253)

The city often becomes the setting for such meditations, as a protagonist starts off on a long aimless walk around its prospekts, embankments, and through its slums trying to get rid of the visions that haunt him. In a contemporary novel, as we see, the walks were replaced by long and fast driving, which corresponds to the pace and explains partially the reduced amount of meditation parts as compared to the 19th century prose. Indeed, driving does not leave that much time for meditation and requires better control and more alert attention on the part of the thinker.

Некоторое время он бесцельно кружил по городу. Хвоста за ним не было и не могло быть, просто Челищев не хотел признаться себе в том, что боится возвращаться в пустую квартиру, откуда увез к черному пруду депутата. Ему казалось, что стоит лишь лечь спать и закрыть глаза, как явится с того света Глазанов, будет протягивать к горлу скрюченные руки[...].

He aimlessly wheeled around the city for a while. It was not that he was trying to get rid of the tail - there was none: he simply did not want to acknowledge how afraid he was to go back home, to his empty flat, from which he took the deputy to drown him in a black pond. It seemed to him that as soon as he goes to bed and closes his eyes Glazanov will rise from the dead and appear in front of him stretching his rotten hands to reach the throat [...]. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 356)

Nevertheless, protagonist's meditation turned out to be significant in the novel; it was not omitted in the television version of it. The voice behind the scene was constantly revealing the thoughts of the protagonists⁵, which is not quite typical for the Western action movies.

One of the main Petersburg themes exploited in the novel made its way to the 1990s from the famous astute observation by Gogol, which became quite consequential for the further developing of Petersburg poetics. N.V. Gogol was the first to declare mysticism and ambiguity a typical Petersburg trait. In his *The Nevsky Prospekt* he practically labeled Petersburg narration as unreliable and pointed out its double nature. In *Advokat* this idea is expressed through the prolonged metaphor of mirror and double bottom. Besides the term *zazerkalie*, the criminal structures and people connected to them are often defined as “shadow”, “underground”, and even “werewolf”⁶. All these mystical epithets acquire quite practical interpretations in the novel. The classical binary opposition of “black and white” or “right and wrong” in fact appears to be more of the “as it seems to be and as it is”, which brings us back to the famous Gogolian lines: “*Всё обман, всё мечта, всё не то, чем кажется!*”

Since its creation Petersburg had its double, first in physical form – its reflection in vast body of water penetrating and embracing it, and later – in the body of folklore and

⁵ The voice part is performed by the prominent actor and a master of dubbing Valery Kukhareshin. In the course of the movie he introduces such significant notions of the narration as “human chess” and the “metronome metaphor.”

⁶ The etymology of this word in Russian makes it answer the modern interpretation. *Oboroten'* in Russian derives from *oborot* or *obratit'sia* – “a turn (around)” or “to turn”, or to have the other side to show.

literature surrounding it. Many poets paid credit to the view of Petersburg embankments, cathedral domes and city lights reflected in the ever-changing surface of its waters. There is much written about the abstract Petersburg, the way it reflects the actual city, conveys its essence, but also creates an independent figure, which is bigger and more significant than the city itself. This figure is not an exact copy, but rather a distorted, hyperbolized and mystified version of the city, which reveals the conflicts of its nature, its inner essence, which usually consists of its people, citizens, who are representative of the country and of the epoch they came from. One of the most recent references to this quality can be found in Joseph Brodsky's account *A Guide to a Renamed City*.

The process of recognizing these incurably semantic reflections, loaded with moral judgment, became a process of identification with them. As often happens to a man in front of a mirror, the city began to fall into dependence on the three-dimensional image supplied by literature. Not that the adjustments it was making were not enough (they weren't!); but with the insecurity innate to any narcissist, the city started to peer more and more intently in that looking glass, which the Russian writers were carrying – to paraphrase Stendhal – through its streets, courtyards, and shabby apartments of its population. (Brodsky, 1986, p. 80)

The reflection is always a temporary thing, it only exists while we look at it; but for those short moments, the recognition of this temporality forces us to focus all our feelings, grasp every detail and conclude into the comprehensive impression. The reflection is always detached from the function of the object reflected (a bank reflected in the water, ceases to be an organization, but becomes only a building, a flat view), it takes the object out of its usual context and the span of time: it allows to stop the moment and assess creating the direct connection between the appearance and the information it gives about the object.

However, the reverse process also takes place. The abstract creation beams back at the actual city bringing changes, which alter its structure. In 1990s, as a result of numerous literary accounts about the criminal life in Petersburg, and the following television and film versions of them (*Banditski Petersburg* – one of the first and the most influential one, that “set the tone” for the theme), Petersburg was “granted” a title of “The Criminal Capital” of Russia, in addition to and often instead of its previous “Cultural Capital”. The new title got firmly attached to the city and is legitimate up to the current date.

The reality of the 1990s is often referred to by its contemporaries as something “hard to believe”. Later, by the end of the decade and the beginning of the next one, the book fairs and shelves would be flooded by criminal reading (*чмуво*) about *avtoritety*, *strelki*, *razborki* and *mokrukhi*, most of it consisting of the so called *chernukha*. (Graham, 2000, p. 8-9) The television would be choking on the reports and TV shows about criminal world, and the vocabulary that Konstantinov is so meticulously explaining in his work will be the ABC to everyone older than 10. It will become necessary part of the daily conversation and would even be often heard from “the high tribunes.” However, in 1993, *Banditskii Petersburg* appeared as the first serious attempt to document the chaos, to structure it and analyze it not only from the angle of causes and consequences, but also from the angle of human morale. It was an attempt to answer the eternal question of the choice between good and evil, honor and survival.

It must have been a refreshing and inspiring experience for the reader, who had to face these question on everyday basis throughout this ordeal of the time, to find the echo to his/her own thoughts in someone else’s account, supported by the straightforward facts, sober analysis and indisputable evidences. To crown it all, it correlated well with personal experiences and was presented in the form of bright and convincing fiction. Not so inspiring was the effect of acknowledgment: the reader had to accept that all happening to him/her is not a temporary and occasional phenomenon, a hallucination or a dream, but bitter truth, the reality, in which his/her country currently exists. This reality required meditation and cried out for logic and a system of values it could fit into. The book and subsequent television version evoked the feeling of the collective experience. Konstantinov’s *Banditskii Peterburg* became this abstract arena, in which people of Russia could openly discuss the terrible facts that nobody would be able to share or analyze, had they happened to them personally. Once again, a Petersburg writer created a literary reconstruction of the reality, the city being the setting and the all-binding abstract matter for it.

Metaphorically, these relationships of the reflection and the reflected are expressed in the text in the “mirror scene” which can be considered one of the key scenes introducing the philosophy of the novel.

To start function in his new role of the bandit leader, Sergey needs to change his appearance. Katia insists that he wears the typical attire of the *bratki*: black slacks, motley silk shirt, dark-blue jacket and long black leather coat, all of excellent quality but looking terribly tasteless together. Sergey's first reaction is indignation:

Я тебе что – клоун, чтобы маскарады всякие устраивать? (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 281)

Do I look like some clown to you to participate in a masquerade like that?

He tries to reject the new image, but Katia explains that it would not alter his inner self, but rather work as chameleon skin, adjusting him to the new environment. She asks Sergey to see it “as a uniform, if you will”, instead of that of the militia (prosecutor's) officer, bringing up an old Russian proverb - *встречают по одежке, провожают по уму* (“clothes count for the first impression”) with a new ending - “...тех, кто до проводов доживёт...” (“...and the wit will count for the last if you survive”). Thus, disguise is the necessary condition of survival, the time of rapid changes requires from the extinct species masking themselves as the strongest ones. Is not it the argument Peter the Great was guided by while establishing a European city on the edge of the Asiatic country?

However, appearance does alter the inner essence: its reflection hits back and percolates through the inner nature. The appearance (in both senses) of Saint Petersburg on the body of the country changed its identity forever and broke its self-introspection into two parts, opposed to each other as left and right.

On his way to irrevocable changes, Sergey receives his first portion of reflection from a real mirror.

Закончив, он подошёл к огромному, в полстены, зеркалу и чуть не отшатнулся. На него смотрел громадный (видимо зеркало чуть увеличивало) незнакомый парень, чья одежда, причёска и глаза оставляли мало места для фантазий по поводу его рода занятий.

- Вот это да-а! – прошептал Челищев, глядя на своё отражение и недоверчиво провёл пальцем по верхней губе, которую еще полчаса назад украшали усы. Двойник повторил его движение, и только тогда Сергей окончательно уверился, что видит в зеркале себя.

[...] Катя и Сергей подошли, держась за руки, к старинному зеркалу и оттуда долго и с удивлением рассматривали друг друга. До чего же красивая в этом зеркале стояла пара!

When he finished [dressing], he approached a huge, half-of the wall, mirror and nearly shrank back. A massive (apparently the mirror had an effect of enlargement) stranger was looking at him, his garment, haircut and hardly leaving space for conjecturing about his occupation.

- Here we a-are! – Whispered Chelishchev, looking at his mirror reflection and distrustfully sliding his finger over the upper lip, deprived of its adornment: only half an hour ago he had a moustache. The double repeated his motion: only then Sergey came to believe that he saw himself in the mirror.

[...] holding hands, Katia and Sergey came up to the antique mirror and, from there, stared at each other surprisingly. What a beautiful couple stood there, in this mirror! (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 283)

Here, Sergey is not described as looking at himself, but at someone else. This other is a stranger, he is different, he is not merely Sergey's reflection, but a separate essence, an independent figure, that only looks like Sergey. It is interesting that the author never refers to the reflection as Sergey, but only as "he", he who looks at Sergey from the mirror. In fact, Sergey is rarely granted a detailed description: the reader almost never knows what he looks like until he is approaches in the mirror (it is usually a device of the narration from the first person, which is not the case here). It creates an impression that this other in the mirror is in fact more real than Sergey himself, and is able to convey deeper and truer understanding of the protagonist's real nature (e.g. if not for that scene, we would never know that Sergey had worn mustache, it is not mentioned anywhere before, and in the mirror they are only mentioned at observing their absence). Later in the paragraph the author overtly calls the reflection *двойник*.

Alongside (and right after) the description of his new hairstyle and clothes, the author mentions the expression of his eyes, which matches his new bandit look. Among other characteristics the stranger in the mirror is "enormous"; this impression is highlighted by the repetition of size-defining words in the paragraph: "huge" mirror, "half the wall", "enormous" guy reflected in it. Both "huge" and "enormous" in Russian have *-громад-* as their root, reminding of the classic "*громады*" of Petersburg buildings and cathedrals, denoting something that is bigger than a man, impressive and oppressive. This root is also onomatopoeic with the word *гром* (thunder) and, in this context, brings in an association with the set expression "*как громом поражённый*" ("as if stricken by the thunder"), which denotes the extreme degree of astonishment. Not mentioned

directly, this astonishment is present in the Sergey's reaction: he almost starts back, so foreign is the reflection. He whispers, as if trying not to scare away the stranger in the mirror. And only after "the motion test", Sergey *уверился* (got assured). The choice of word is also interesting here, for the author avoids the usual *поверил*, but applies old-fashioned verb, occurring more often in the religious/convictions/self-analysis context, and almost always with the prefix *раз-* (*разувериться* – to get disappointed, undeceived, and disabused).

In the next paragraph of the "mirror scene" the mirror is called *старинное*, and, as if developing the idea of time-travel, it reveals to the characters its prophetic quality. What Katia and Sergey see behind the glass surface is a beautiful couple, holding hands, "looking surprisingly" at the real ones "from there". They will indeed become a couple, they will call each other "husband" and "wife" and there will be moments when they will surprise each other beyond comprehension.

Prophecy is shown to Sergey when he looks at the glass in his parent's apartment after their murder: he sees his father's face and a flock of grey hair over the tired expression of his eyes, but this face is his own. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 185) Later in the narration, Sergey's hair growing grey is mentioned repeatedly as one of the measurements of what he had to go through on his way of turning into a bandit. Indeed, he repeats his father's fate in a way and perishes resisting the overwhelming power of the criminal world.

Developing the idea of the mirror as a delusive matter, the concept of *zazerkalie* (the world behind the mirror) reveals a whole range of images and ideas dovetailing with the traditional mythology of the city. Describing the inhabitants of the underworld, the author clearly resorts to the "low layer" of Toporov's *diavolizm*: it is inhabited by witches, vampires, living dead, werewolves, etc. Let us examine a number of folkloric images in the plot.

An attractive secretary Yulia Voronina, whom he saw as a depraved young woman, a spoiled and shallow toy in the hands of her boss, *turned out* to be a professional seductress working under the instruction of the Deputy Prosecutor. What he remembered as a "night of love" with her after the celebration of his new rank conferment was, in fact, a fine combination aimed at keeping him away from his home on

the night of his parents' death. In a way, we can suggest that Sergey's journey in *zazerkalie* begins with staying at Yulia's apartment that night. There, for the first time he notices the discrepancy between the façade and the interior: looking around he is wondering "how the girl managed to get such sweet digs" ("как это могла молодая девчонка получить такую приличную хату"). (Konstantinov, 1995, p.167) With the attentiveness of a detective, he singles out the details, such as the new raspberry pink push-button phone, that "he could swear" were not sold in the city, "at least not in the common stores". This and other details indicate that Yulia does not belong to a "normal" world, in which a young secretary could only afford a room in a communal apartment. The silver cigarette case with the name of the district attorney on it carelessly left on the table partially explains Yulia's well-being to Sergey. However, the luxuries exceed the "gift of affection" level and rather look like generous compensation for confidentiality, lulling the conscience and keeping an accomplice on a short, but golden leash. Intoxicated with alcohol and sexual desire, Sergey perceives these signals on the level of intuition, rather than sober analysis. His intuition appeals to him in a dream sending him a nightmare about falling in a construction pit at the Smolensk Cemetery, the one in a cycle of nightmares he will be seeing throughout the narration. The intoxication and the dream appear to be this transcendental state, which transfers Sergey into a new reality. He wakes up in the other world, the world in which his parents are dead and the surface of his life cannot remain undisturbed any more. *Oboroten'* Yulia becomes his conductor into the underworld. Female beauty and sexual appeal becomes one of the most dangerous types of the "werewolves". Later Sergey develops a special alert feeling towards its deceptive nature: at the chamber of one of the officials he reminds himself that an attractive secretary readily demonstrating her body is just a maneuver of distraction, a common practice in the "shadow" offices.

Будучи уже достаточно тертым по разным хитрым офисам человеком, Сергей не приписывал суету девицы исключительно на счет собственного мужского обаяния: он знал, что в некоторых конторах на должности секретари брали проституток-профессионалок, задачей которых было отвлечь посетителей, сбить их деловой настрой.

Having seen quite a number of "shadow" offices like this, Sergey did not flatter himself thinking that it were his manly charms that made the girl fuss around him: he knew, that in some offices they hire professional prostitutes, which in the role

of a secretaries distract the visitors and keep their minds off business.
(Konstantinov, 1995, p. 301)

Having come to believe it without doubt, he projects this rule on Katia and suspects her of manipulating him using her womanly power over his feelings and body.

However, this rule of the underworld applies only to young and attractive woman. Another female “werewolf”, baba Dusia, contrary to her repulsive appearance, belongs to the “light side” of the mirror. An old hunched janitor *baba Dusia* (“granny Dusia”) turns out to be Evdokia Andreevna Kuznetsova, an investigator of cases of particular importance, still remembered in the office by the famous and mythical “onion case”, working on which she approached the highest echelons of power and was nearly exterminated, having lost her career, family and health. The scene of baba Dusia’s transformation has a palpable “fairy-tale” flavor to it.

Морщины у бабы Дуси разгладились, нелепый голубой платочек упал на плечи, обнажив густые седые волосы... На стуле сидела не уборщица, а интеллигентная, мудрая женщина со скорбными умными глазами.[...] Баба Дуся выпила водку легко и красиво и четкими, уверенными движениями взяла сигарету[...].

Baba Dusia’s wrinkled face smoothed out; a silly blue headscarf fell on her shoulders, a shock of thick hair exposed... Not a janitor, but an intelligent, wise woman with the eyes full of understanding and grief sat on the chair. [...] Baba Dusia took a shot swiftly, gracefully; her motions were confident and accurate when she lit a cigarette [...]. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 205)

This new woman appeared before Sergey as if out of a “vacuum that arose around him” after his dismissal; she was the only one to come to talk to the “leprous” (cursed). Drinking vodka (this time “Rasputin”) becomes a ritual during which the “werewolf” transformation happens. It takes a moment after Sergey empties his glass and raises his eyes at her. The change is astonishing: he “stops short” (*осёкся*), “looks in astonishment... at a stranger” (*удивлённо глядя... на незнакомую женщину*), he is “stricken” and “cannot believe”. (p. 205-206)

The following alludes back to the famous Pushkin’s motif from “The Queen of Spades”: the old, witch-like woman, as if resurrected from the previous epoch, shares crucial information with the young man in search. The difference is that in the current plot the revelation happens voluntarily, in exchange for the respect Sergey showed to an old woman despite the common neglectful attitude. Evdokia Andreevna reveals to

Sergey the actual “deal” in the public prosecutor’s office: who is the three, the seven, and the ace in the set. On the example of her own tragic story, she warns him, and urges him to stop his investigation.

Her metamorphosis has an effect of catharsis on Sergey; it “breaks the ice crust inside of him”. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 207) From purifying tears he proceeds to the heavy sleep of intoxication, his head resting on the old woman’s “warm, strong palm”, her voice “floating away” (*уплывающий*) as she talks. This hypnotic state lasts only 30 minutes, during which Sergey sees a prophetic dream, the second in the cycle. (p. 208) When he awakens, baba Dusia disappears without a trace, besides the note containing “seven digits” and a word of seven letters – *позвони* (call). (p. 208) This telephone number opens to Sergey the door to the Bar of the city, where he will acquire his other side as *the advokat*. Later in the narration, baba Dusia becomes his eyes and ears on the prosecutor’s office and provides him with a book of her personal observational notes, thus, granting him the most valuable treasure of the new epoch – information.

The “shadow sides” that the female characters reveal seem to offer various interpretations, from pagan and folklore beliefs to antique mythology. Women can be compared to mermaids, Naiads (luring men) or Moirae (telling the fortune, sharing wisdom). The opposition of the dark and the fair side in the person alludes to the basic “unity of opposites” notion as well as the Heaven-Hell Christian mythology.

However, within the frames of this work, it is preferable to interpret it as an argument of the double-sided, deceitful nature of the city. The inclination towards mythologizing in Petersburg literary tradition prompts the author to resort to the images of the uncanny.

One of the key characters of the plot, the embodiment of the “evil” side of the *zazerkalie*, Victor Palych Govorov or *Antibiotic*, among his other practices often exercises his “werewolf” talent. The mask that he chose to wear, or as we would now say his image, is that of a “good-natured grandpa”, a harmless old man, whose only concern is the well-being of his young and inexperienced “colleagues”. He gives speeches at the bandit gatherings, promoting his “ideology” of work for common good, for the benefit of the “community”. He also enjoys individual conversations with his “subjects”, at which he discusses their personal matters and expresses his sincere desire to help solving out

problems for in an exchange of a minor favor or a task. His intonations are those of an elderly person, he is constantly complaining about his health and the unbearable burden of responsibility he only carries for the sake of everybody else's wealth. He seems to be a human with his own weaknesses, such as the passion for Georgian wine (*hvanchkhara*) and the Russian *banya*. However, his real joy is of devilish character: playing with human lives entertains him the most. Trying, testing, exercising his power to subjugate, to press down strong individuals and whole organizations turns out to be his ardor.

Больше всего на свете он любил играть в «человеческие шахматы» и никогда не упускал возможности разыграть интересную комбинацию[...].

More than anything in the world he liked to play “human chess”: never would he miss a chance to play out an interesting combination [...]. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 409)

Only failure at this game can make Victor Palych bare his teeth. The word “wolf” is often used to describe him in the moments of rage and dissatisfaction: the predatory “wolf” expression in his eyes, the “grin of a wolf” appears on his face in anticipation resistance or a big gain.

Антибиотик перечитывал его уже в который раз и нехорошо, по-волчьи скалился [...].

Antibiotic was reading it again and again, and a bad, wolf-like green appeared on his face [...]. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 406)

Он казался старым и усталым, но когда веки Антибиотика снова поднялись, плеснуло из-под них на Васю холодным волчьим блеском.

He seemed old and tired, but when Antibiotic lifted his eyelids again, a cold glitter of wolf stare splashed from under them at Vasia. (p. 381)

Antibiotic is also a central figure of another metaphor characteristic of Petersburg text: the metaphor of carnival, disguise, and theater settings. Apart from being an excellent “human chess” player, he is a master of theatrical performance. He, being a director and the main actor of the scene is on stage, whereas his underworld subjects play the secondary parts, while watching him performing the lead.

Валдай был чрезвычайно польщен тем, что его пригласил для «серьезного разговора» сам Антибиотик, которого Вова за свою карьеру видел всего несколько раз, да и то, что называется, с галерки.

It was extremely flattering to Valdaï that he was invited for a “serious conversation” with Antibiotic himself, whom Vova saw only few times throughout his whole career, and even those few times he watched him from the gallery. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 417)

The territory Antibiotic operates in is only a setting for his well-staged shows:

*Интересно, — поймал вдруг себя на мысли Сергей, — почему же Палыч, для которого **даже стены “Крестов” оказались лишь декорацией**, никогда не предлагал мне навестить Олега?*

Interesting, - suddenly Sergey caught himself at realizing – why on Earth Palych [Antibiotic], for whom even the walls of Kresty turned out to be a mere theatrical setting, has never offered me a chance to see Oleg there? (p. 412)

To receive a part in this play Sergey himself had to try on another costume, which looks like a humiliating clownery to him. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 283)

Sergey often refers to Antibiotic as a “vampire” (*упырь*), or a “dead man” (*мертвец*), completing the metaphor of the “underworld” and “hell” for the criminal world that the old man presents. Like a devil, he buys people’s souls, manipulating their passions and vices.

However, it seems that Sergey’s journey through the underworld takes his life away from him, and he is slowly turning into a living dead himself.

А когда после его слов Сергей глянул Юре в глаза, стало оперу, насмотревшемуся всякого за годы работы в «Крестах», и вовсе жутко. Не смотрят так живые люди на живых [...].

When Sergey finished talking he looked Yura in the eyes and this cop, who had seen much while working in Kresty, got terrified. It was nothing like a glance of a living person; he saw the eyes of a dead man [...]. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 414)

When Sergey, after several nights of drinking and oblivion, returns from the Smolensk Cemetery, having decided to put his friends to death, he is taken for a living dead by a driver of a random gypsy cab:

*[...] слева начиналось Смоленское кладбище. [...] «Веселенькое место. Тут клиентов точно не будет, кроме душ неуспокоившихся», — попытался приободрить себя шуткой извозчик и вдруг оцепенел от ужаса, машинально вдавив педаль тормоза в пол. **Из темноты кладбища скользнула к машине черная тень. Вымазанная землей рука стукнула в стекло.***

- Подбросишь, хозяин?

- Не... не... не! — забормотал биолог, судорожно ища ногой педаль газа.

- Ты что, больной? — сказала **тень** хриплым, но вполне человеческим голосом [...].

[...] on the left the Smolensk Cemetery appeared. [...] “What a fun place. Here, there is definitely nobody to pick up, but for the restless souls,” – the driver was joking to himself trying to relax, when suddenly he was startled with terror, automatically slamming on the brakes. From the darkness of the cemetery a dark shadow slipped up to the car. A hand, stained in dirt, hit at the window.

- Will you give me a ride, fellah?
- No...no...no! – The biologist murmured, anxiously probing for the gas pedal.
- Are you crazy or what? – said the shadow with a hoarse but quite human voice [...]. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 229-230)

Sergey’s double Oleg (or vice versa – Sergey can also be seen as Oleg’s double) also has a chance to be in the role of a dead man, or rather of a corpse. Simulating his murder, Sergey brings him to the Smolensk Cemetery and “buries” him in a fresh grave designated for another body. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 429-430) Oleg’s subsequent “resurrection” gives them advantage in the final combat with the bandits from Antibiotic’s gang, as they are startled to see their former leader risen from the ashes. However, the shock does not last long and Sergey and Oleg perish from the bandits’ bullets, finally arriving to the kingdom of the dead; Sergey in the delirium of the death agony returns to the Smolensk Cemetery, where everything began. (p. 504-505).

The Smolensk Cemetery is the predominating locus of the narration that triggers a whole range of the reader’s expectations, evoking numerous literary and cultural associations. It alludes back to the idea of Petersburg as Necropolis, which “was a favorite sally of Petersburg-hating-nineteenth-century Russian writers”. (Buckler, 2005, p. 221) J. Buckler, in her research of the Petersburg cityshape, presents a whole history of the city’s burial territories development and the literary accounts devoted to them. (p. 220-229) Indeed, Petersburg as a city “built upon the bones” is known for its special relationships with the cemeteries. Since the time of its creation, the city was described as “a tombstone marking its own grave” (Buckler, p. 220), a city in which “ruins are built” (Algarotti as cited in Buckler, p. 218), “the city of the dead [that] antedates the city of the living” (Mumford as cited in Buckler, p. 219), and “a gigantic and well-functioning factory for the production and intake of the dead people” (Toporov as cited in Buckler, p. 221). These comments were mostly based on the discrepancy between the death and birth

rates, which in Petersburg was rarely in favor of birth, i.e. life, but rather, especially in the years of political upheavals, terror, and epidemics were much on the death's side.

A new turn of history brought about the anticipated consequence of a huge human loss and at the Smolensk Cemetery it is again “crowded”. Situated at the heart of Petersburg, at the estuary of the Gulf of Finland, it became the center of the city’s “deadly activity”, if one may say so. Historically, it has been a place that “offered final home to modest merchants and humble people of the “middle estate” (Buckler, 2005, p. 223), intelligentsia included in this circle later. It’s central location, but socially somewhat “marginal” position (the cemetery is less prominent than the Lazarevski at the Alexander-Nevisky Monastery, or the Tikhvin “Masters of Art” Cemetery) made possible the outrageous phenomenon of *podkhoroneniie* or placing of random bodies, usually of criminal origin, into the graves designated to the others, which was done secretly and not without bribes. Corpses, some of them disfigured, are being buried into the graves of other people, put under their coffins, sometimes two or three in one. Apart from Konstantinov’s account, the cases of secret double burial are shown in the cult movie of the 1990s *Brat* directed by Alexei Balabanov (1998), in which they also take place at the Smolensk Cemetery. It seems that “the death factory” of Saint Petersburg in 1990s was as “productive” as at the turn of the previous century, and, as far as the main coffin of the city – the Neva river - became less reliable (in the end of the 20th century the drowned bodies were easier to identify), the underworld “undertakers” (*grobovshchik*) turned back to the marshy soil of its cemeteries. (Nekrasov as cited in Buckler, 2005, p. 223)

It is interesting that at the turn of the previous century Petersburg cemeteries attracted the attention of the cultural historians as the “cultural text” providing comprehensive and more than less reliable “chronicles of the city life” - the statistics consisting of the names, dates, the occupation and class information, and even faces of the people buried there. (Buckler, p. 221) In the 1990s, when the history seemed to be falling apart and everything formerly established became questioned, these data were highly jeopardized. The repeated acts of vandalism at the cemetery, the miserable state of the monuments in the absence of the budget, the criminal activity – all undermined the cemetery chronicles and threatened to turn it into one mass grave for the victims of the “wild 90s”. (Cherkaz’ianova, 2006, p. 16)

The phenomenon of *podkhoronenie* at the Smolensk Cemetery opens the theme of the double bottom (or false bottom) that accompanies the motif of duality and mirror throughout the text. Maintaining the title of thieves, the criminals rob the common people of their last privilege. The cemetery keeper selects the graves, that would not be paid much attention to, will be soon forgotten by the relatives and arouse no suspicions. Often those are old people, god-forsaken *babushkas*, who have lead lives quite the opposite of those happened to cross the bandits' ways. The coffin's bottom becomes this looking glass surface that divides peaceful and restless, deceased and murdered. The rare visitors will bring their flowers and candles, shed their tears over the double bottom graves, and the unwelcomed "cohabitants" will steal the last respects from their hosts. The tombstones on them will bear no names of the unknown victims, hiding the clues from those who might look for them and shielding them behind someone else's face on the photograph over the epitaph. Ironically enough, the name of the cemetery keeper reflexes this dual nature perfectly. A righteous Bogomolov ("God prayer") is only used for official references, to identify the persona at the beginning of the narration, while the criminals prefer "Walter" pronounced in the German manner, both reflecting the origins of the place he supervises (The German Lutheran Cemetery) and denoting an old, tried and true German gun, known as a weapon of *Wehrmacht*. Unlike "the German" from *Brat*, Walter does not pursue the idea of the cultural memory perseverance; he does not fit into any stereotypes about his nation (he is not a doctor, intelligent and knowledgeable, ready to help and to give an advice, like Hoffman from *Brat*), in fact there are no reasons to call him a German, besides his nickname. Like everything in the underworld, he is just a fake, a puppet in the hands of Antibiotic.

Apart from the above mentioned meanings, the Smolensk Cemetery acquires a status of a place of initiation in the plot. Like in *Brat*, the protagonist of the Konstantinov's novel returns to the cemetery again and again, bringing to the site his existential anxieties, looking for the answers, questioning the correctness of the chosen path. It is worth noting that in *Advokat* the place is much more mystified, then in the *Brat*. Whereas for Danila in *Brat*, a migrant from the province, the cemetery was still foreign territory, for *Advokat* characters, who are the natives of the city, it has history: it revives the memories and retains their kinship ties (Sergey's parents are buried at the cemetery).

If Danila comes to Smolensk only for need, for Sergey this place is a vision that haunts him in dreams as well as in reality.

The main dream cycle throughout the narration is the “foundation pit” dream. In fact, the novel starts with this dream, picturing Sergey and Oleg at the Smolensk Cemetery, where they went to drink away the shock of the news – Katia is marrying another man and leaving Saint Petersburg (Leningrad at that time). After a good amount of vodka they decide to try another pain reliever and head to the dorms of the psychological department (notorious for the easy virtue of its female students). Picking their way through the labyrinth of the old cemetery, they come across a wide foundation pit with the iron reinforcement rods sticking up from its bottom, “as if the spears from a wolf hunting trap”. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 165) Suddenly, Sergey jumps over the pit, but is about to fall down, when Oleg throws himself at him and pushes him ahead, his lower body sliding down the steep wall. Now Sergey turns around and pulls Oleg up on the ground. The best suits that they wore for the exam all in mud, they sit down to smoke. Each of them makes an important life decision: Oleg is determined to drop out of the university and go to the army, Sergey – pursue a career in the Prosecutor’s office.

In Sergey’s dreams this situation is reproduced over and over, each time with a different outcome. (p. 231, 287) He sees it the night after meeting Oleg in Kresty, the night Katia tells him a story of Oleg’s first “resurrection”. The “foundation pit dream” is closely connected to the motif of Sergey and Oleg’s friendship, but it also marks the milestones of his life, as if confronting the present with the ideals of the past, of his youth.

In reality Sergey often returns to the Smolensk Cemetery, as if his life cycles back to its fateful locus. The plot of the dream repeats itself in the reality. The first part of the novel *Advokat* ends in an impressive scene, dividing it from the second part (*Advokat – 2* or *Sud’ia (The Judge)*). Having received “incontestable” evidences of Katia and Oleg’s participation in his parents’ murder, Sergey goes on a long drinking bout. Sometime later, he awakens on his parent’s grave in the middle of the night. His heart is set on the decision to take vengeance on his friends. He feels no regret and the plan is ripe in his head. “At the very edge of the cemetery” Sergey stops in front of a deep and dark pit, “dug out by God knows whom and for God knows what”. For a moment it seems to him

that the reinforcement rods are sticking out from its bottom. This time, ten years after, there is nobody to secure him from behind. Sergey takes a leap – the chapter (and the first part of the novel) ends with ellipsis.

There are gothic motifs and mystical, almost folklore elements in the scene's description. The setting of it – the grave, the cemetery, the night – already provides the sinister atmosphere and anticipation of a tragedy. The image of Sergey acquires the features of both possessed man and an animal: he acts “as if lead” by the inner decision, he takes advice from a mysterious “voice” brought to him by “the wind [...] howling over the abandoned graves”. (p. 368) He bursts into a “terrifying laugh” and “growls” before jumping. The foundation pit, once again, becomes the crossing line of Sergey's life, after which he puts on a different mask – that of the Judge.

The metaphor of duality extends itself to the other key sites of the city. In this regard, extremely symbolic for the criminal theme of the book is the famous *Petersburg Investigative Isolation Ward # 1 of the city of Saint Petersburg* (Isolation Ward #47/1 of The Direction of the Federal Service of Punishment Execution) – the so called *Kresty* prison at the Arsenalnaya embankment.

The very concept of a prison is distorted there. Created to protect society from criminal “elements”, it often serves to provide their own security. Anticipating a savage reprisal from rivals the bandits “get caught” for minor crimes to spend several months under the alert protection of militia. The leaders of the criminal groups set up their partners for temporary dismissal from business or/and as a light penalty. Imprisonment is used as the method of psychological pressure: to threat, test and/or get the necessary information. The high ranked criminals apply for the procedures of the system of justice such as arrest, interrogation, and secret recruitment, which are performed for them by the bribed militia officers and detectives. The prison is one of the favorite settings for Victor Palych's (Antibiotic) talented productions.

Capitalizing on the immobility of the arrested, he stages whole theatrical performances, as in the case of Katia's interrogation “starring” the corrupt detective Chernov, “respected” private lawyer, and even her lover and partner Sergey Chelishchev. In fact, he does not scruple to shoot the entire performance and watch the “reality show” analyzing in his head the new game set of the “human chess”. The scene of Sergey and

Katia's date in Kresty being videotaped by a young officer Yura from the operations department of the prison seems to be an improbable occasion, brought up to pepper the plot. However, among other evidences of the criminal power to outreach inside the militia system, it remains an extravagant favor, but not an impossible one. Money, objects and information travel from outside and among the cells without hindrance through "the corridors" build out of the bribed and bullied officers and guards, who seem to exist there to cater to the needs of their prisoners.

Юра из оперчасти «Крестов» довел до Званцева информацию о свидании Челищева и Катерины грамотно и аккуратно. Арестованный вместе с Олегом Ветряк, сидевший в «Крестах» безвылазно с августа 1992 года, «случайно» подслушал разговор двух цуриков, когда его дернули на допрос. Ветряк сидел отдельно от Званцева, но «пустить коня» в «Крестах» никогда не было проблемой.

Yura, an officer from the field service of Kresty, brought the information about the meeting between Katia and Chelishchev right to Zvantsev with all his professional caution and accuracy. A prisoner *Vetryak* that was arrested with Oleg and has stayed put in Kresty since August of 1992, "accidentally" overheard the conversation between two guards, when they were dragging him to the interrogation. *Vetryak* was not in one cell with Zvantsev, but to throw a word in Kresty has never been a problem. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 418)

Once again, behind the façade begins the distorted reality of *zazerkalie*, which often reveals quite the opposite of what it appears from the outside.

The rest of the city seems to accommodate to the double nature of its dwellers. A cozy restaurant "At Stepanych's" (*У Степаныча*), "the interior design of which brought about the nostalgia for Russia's prerevolutionary magnificence", is Antibiotic's business office, where he instructs his "cut-throats" and bribes his ministers. The guests rarely are able to swallow a bite of the delicious meal at his table. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 297)

The Hotel Pulkovskaia (The Pulkovo Hotel) turns out to be another headquarter of Petersburg mafia, despite (or thanks to) its inconvenient location near the Pulkovo airport, away from the city itself. Hosting the bandits' events of all kinds, from weddings to kingpins' coronations, it acquired its criminal nickname "the bullet" (for the similarity to the Russian word "пуля").

The monument to Lenin on the square of the Finland train station and the statue of the Emperor Paul I by the Mikhailovsky (Inzhenerny) Castle appear in the narration not due to a search for a symbolic replacement of the legendary Bronze Horseman, nor to

admire the city sites, but rather as secret meeting places, where it is easy to get lost in the crowd or use the wide panorama to make sure there is no surveillance around. Both monuments are involved in the hide-and seek scenario of the lives of the criminals.

Unlike the above mentioned, many of the underworld locations are described vaguely and leave the address undetermined: most of them are obviously situated in the city's outskirts. At the "pigsty" (*свинарник*), which in fact is a bar and a small casino, visited exclusively by the Antibiotic gang, Sergey and Oleg are forced to hide in a secret dungeon under the bar counter, the ladder to which is disguised under the heavy cabinet. There, in the dark and tight coffin-like space they learn about the false bottom of the Antibiotic games he played with their lives. The scene in the "pigsty" seems to be one of the possible criminal outcomes that appeared in the author's head, when he visited the quite real Karabas's farm, described in his essay *Banditskii Peterburg*. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 84-90)

The need for disguise and false bottom penetrates even into the characters' homes. Numerous caches and hiding places are found in Katia's apartment, when Sergey conducts a search there hoping to discover the false bottom in their relationships. Using the "magic heel" of her winter boots (one of the boots is equipped with an empty place in a thick heel), he begins his own double game. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 374)

The examples discussed above give us the general picture of the cityshape in the novel. A certain pattern of the characters journey through the city can be distinguished: with the development of the narration, the action is forced further and further out of the center towards the industrial zones and rural outskirts of the city. The Revolution Highway (*Шоссе Революции*) is first mentioned as Sergey's path to his first murder. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 315) Later in the plot it becomes one his most frequent routes as he escapes "the tails", flees from insomnia, or goes out of the city to find support and shelter at "the small homestead" near Luga (Leningradskaia oblast'), where his judo coach Fedoseich resides. Ironically, Sergey and Oleg both perish at his quiet remote nook, while Katia with her children (including the unborn baby she is pregnant with) and Fedoseich escape to the Ukraine. From there Katia immigrates to Turkey, where she is waiting her men at the last secret meeting place of the novel – at a small restaurant Janna (*Джанна*) on the shore of the Bosphorus or Istanbul Strait. The city, which is situated

“only a couple degrees west” of the Pulkovo meridian (the longitude on which Saint Petersburg is located), as we know thanks to the eternal “exile” Brodsky and his Flight from Byzantium”. (Brodsky, 1985, p. 39)

For the Petersburg text, it appears to be a tradition to exile the protagonists from the city, as they go through the trials and metamorphoses that the city puts them through. Abroad or far away, lost in the vastness of the Empire, thus the stories of Onegin, Pechorin, Raskol’nikov, prince Myshkin, Oblomov, of Nikolai Apollonovich and his father Apollon Apollonovich, and many others, ended. Frequently, the alternative to the exile is death, ghostly unconscious existence in the city, or insanity, as it happened to Germann from *The Queen of Spades*, Evgeny bedny, the revolutionary Dudkin, and a succession of real personalities whose names remained in the lore or city’s scattered chronicles, such as Ksenia of Petersburg, or unlucky “sometime-writer” Sveshnikov, the author of *The Memoirs of the Fallen Man*. (Buckler, 2005, p. 125, 175)

In connection to the cityshape, it is interesting to draw attention to the social aspect of the narration. While analyzing the novels from *Banditskii Petersburg* series, it appears helpful to extrapolate from its genre. The latter can be defined as criminal drama, the texture of which is set onto a detective story structure. In addition to that, the novels definitely bear the traits of the lifestyle description chronicles, a guide to the certain sphere of life. The closest of the most significant Petersburg text it can approach would be Dostoyevsky’s Petersburg.

The novelty of Dostoyevsky’s vision of the city was in his dedication to its so called “marginal” spheres, both in physical and geographical sense. According to J.A. Buckler, “the “Petersburg Text” sustains a social-moral focus on city slums”, and “literary slumming” (Buckler’s term, p. 171) has long been considered “a centerpiece of literary tradition”. (p. 159) Later, this theme was almost eradicated by Soviet official prose, which censored any representation of the seamy side of life, claiming the non-existence of such (the last Soviet writer to describe “the bottom” seems to be M. Gorky). However, in the 1990s, it had a revival, and the writers became eager “to open the eyes” of their audience to “the truth of life”.

Trying to define the concept of “slums”, Buckler notes the common confusion of those who attempt to affiliate the social marginality of the citizens with the

geographically marginal territories, where they expect to find them living. (p. 158-159) In fact, most of the 19th century narration about slums should be interpreted as such “in terms of social rather than physical margins” (p. 158). Inhabiting the huge tenement buildings in the downtown area around Haymarket Square, the characters of the “underworld” dramas by Nekrasov, Dostoyevsky and Krestovsky are marginalized from the society by their social status, a stigma of disgrace, and a lifestyle on the line of decency (or beyond it). The same could be said about the characters of *Banditskii Petersburg*. Easy money and the necessity to be mobile “at work” (to be in the spotlight of events, to be able react promptly, and to control the central areas which are the source of money - trade, crowds of people, underground casinos, prostitution spots, etc.) allow them to rent apartments in the prestigious districts, circulate around its centers of social life: restaurants and banyas mostly. However, their presence there is illegitimate: their lifestyle requires keeping low profile, appear only in “their” places, and avoid direct (close) interaction with the people outside “their caste”. There are more layers to this exclusiveness than that of Dostoyevsky’s slum dwellers. Money opens many doors for them. However, the veil of crime trailing behind them scares away most of the officials and businessman, fearing to jeopardize their reputation or even life. “The standards of respectability” along with “the bounds of decency” so highly regarded in the works by Gogol and Dostoyevsky used to be almost in direct proportion to the person’s origin, background and income (Buckler, 2005, p. 172). Traditionally, the lack of the latter would push the characters behind them, of which the story of the Marmeladovs is a perfect example. The “indecent” of Konstantinov’s characters is more comparable to that of Nastasia Philippovna. It is the moral quality of it that confines the bandits and their cooperators to the small circle of the alike. However graceful, educated, tasteful and rich Katia Zvantseva is she would hardly be seated next to the Governor’s wife at an official reception. Since she became Advokat’s wife and Antibiotic’s employee, her chance to show herself is the posh restaurant filled with cutthroats and thieves congratulating their partner on returning from jail. Sergey’s former colleague refuses to shake hands with him, informed of his “shadow” activity. The figure of publicity, the deputy Glazanov, comes to visit his patron Antibiotic secretly, in the dark of the night, after a long driving maneuver around the city.

The “marginality” of the criminal world has physical evidence as well. In case their presence in the center is undesirable, they reside in the *okrestnosti*. I am using this term in the definition given by Buckler as she contrasts them to *okrainy* (p. 158). Indeed, specifically equipped “farms”, “pigsties”, and “dachas” resemble the residences of the nobility, used for recreation, escape from rumor, and a place to spend the time of crisis.

Isolated from the official society the criminals create “a city in the city” (comparable to the term “a state in a state” used by Konstantinov when opposing the two systems), every member of which is chained to it by his/her origin from a petty crime (committing a crime or benefiting from crimes) and the air of doom. Another characteristic feature of this society is disillusionment – their somber acceptance of the reverse side of reality. The detachment from its terrors requires detachment from the ideals of morality, often described as “crust” or “ice” covering one’s soul and heart. The outsider position of the criminals, however, entitles them to the privilege of calling things by their proper names, as they do not feel the necessity to adhere to the false official standards and “save face”.

In her analysis of the development of the “slum” theme in Petersburg literature throughout the 19th century, J. Buckler describes two tendencies that appear to repeat themselves in the end of the 20th century in the series of *Banditskii Petersburg* novels. One of them is the journalistic approach of creating an account as a sensation. (p. 176-179) The other is resorting to foreign romantic traditions of the earlier period and introducing a moralizing voice of the narrator. (p. 173-175)

The very fact that *Banditskii Petersburg* was written by a professional journalist makes it affiliated with the first of the two tendencies. Indeed, even chronologically, the analogy is asking to be noticed: Vasilii Mihknevich’s *The Sores of Petersburg (Iazvy Peterburga, 1886)*, Anatoly Bahtiarov’s *The Belly of Petersburg (Briukho Peterburga, 1887)*, *Tramps (Bosiaki, 1903)*, and *The Done-For (Otpetye liudi, 1903)*, and many other accounts were written in the period of the last two decades of the 19th century. *Banditskii Petersburg* series cover the situation of the 1990s being the heir of the processes that gained their momentum in the late 1980s. In both cases, the interest in the “shadow” side of city life can be explained by the exhaustion of officially approved topics and the weakening of the regime (tsarist and Soviet accordingly) bringing with it the relaxation of

ensorship regulations. Likewise, both tendencies might have generated from the desire to illustrate the failure of the regime, “revealing the sores” being a sideways means to attract attention to the system’s inability to solve its problems.

The distinguishing feature of the journalistic “discovery” literature according to Buckler was the position of a writer as “an educated narrator, who was both intrepid explorer and social-moral witness” (p. 176). As a rule, journalists claimed personal acquaintance with the people mentioned and physical presence in the places described, either predetermined by their own lifestyle (e.g. Nikolai Sveshnikov, p. 175-176) or accomplished by some sort of masquerade and “agent penetration” activity (e.g. Nikolai Zhivotov, p. 177-178). Such narration can be found in the “introductory” part of the series: the essay *Banditskii Petersburg* itself.

Although the essay largely consists of criminal chronicles and the biographies of leader bandits, there are instances of the first person narration, in which the author describes the so called “excursions into the underworld”. Having won some amount of respect with the criminals, he, a reporter of the Saint Petersburg newspaper *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, has access to one of the prostitution spots on Nevsky Prospekt, which is supervised by a criminal group (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 146-150). Surprisingly, the account of it does not fall into a nauseating, meticulous description of the scandalous details of this profession, as the contemporary *chernukha* style would present it. Neither does it take on the moralizing tone of insulted virtue. The manner in which Konstantinov writes about the contemporary Nevsky brothel is closer to that of Sveshnikov’s account, as he “walks his readers calmly through the notorious slums” (Buckler, 2005, p.175) The investigator inquires of his stern looking guide about the mechanisms of his work as an organization: logistics, shares, prices, expenses and risks. He is not seeking for revelation in a heart-to-heart talk with any of the women; there is hardly a line about the horrors of their situation. Like in A. Bakhtiarov’s realistic sketches of 1895, this account presents the underworld existence as a personal choice rather than ill fate and tragic necessity. In this regard, the author seems to passively accept the point of the pimps, who claim that most of women come to them voluntarily. This “ambivalence towards the marginal figures of the city” carries the idea of the author’s low moral standards and decreased receptivity to the perverted nature of the norms in the criminal world. (Buckler, 2005, p.

177) However, as a literary device his affected indifference has more impact than the physicality of *chernukha* or the moralistic moaning of an “educated narrator”.

Смотреть на эту «нервную работу» довольно скучно. И противно.

Watching this “nervous job” was quite boring. And disgusting. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 150)

The cynical “boring” provided as a dominant emotional response to the view of a dirty brothel and a procuress’s daily routine evokes an alarming sense of the casualness of the situation. The heavy “disgusting” is an addition to that, another level of emotion, rather than a word of censure. In a few lines the word is repeated by the criminal in an apologetic tone.

[...] Противно, конечно... Вообще, это все страшная грязь, но это - деньги...

[...] Of course, it’s disgusting. It is all, in fact, is a terrible mess, but it’s – money... [Gangster Vint (Screw) concludes with a sad smile]. (p. 150)

The conclusion of the whole sketch being farmed out to the criminals, contributes to the acquittal tone brought about earlier. It might be explained by following the tradition of journalistic “slumming” prose described by Buckler as “titter[ing] between exposè and apologia”. (p. 176) She notes that Petersburg journalists often used to live in close proximity to their subjects, by territory as well as by their social status. (p. 176)

The similar idea of “merging with the characters” Konstantinov describes as “the cop’s syndrome” (*ментовский синдром*):

[...] При второй [фазе синдрома] меняются понятия. Бандиты и воры становятся понятнее, ближе и роднее, чем обычный законопослушный человек. На второй фазе мент начинает чувствовать себя своим в мире сыщиков и воров. А там, где чувствуешь себя своим, всегда легко сменить роль. Или взять себе еще одну роль «в нагрузку».

[...] In the second phase of the syndrome values get substituted. Bandits and thieves become easier to understand than a common law-abiding person, they become close, like relatives. A cop starts feeling at home in the world of detectives and thieves at the second phase. However, where you feel at home you always easily switch roles. Or you take another role “in addition”. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 122)

This “syndrome” might as well strike a journalist, who often identifies himself with a detective investigator, but due to “well-known circumstances” has to maintain

unregistered relationships with his subjects. (p. 5) An example of such relationships would be a short story constituting a record of a conversation with a famous “thief” - *Gorbatyi*. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 22-38) The criminal biography of the “main specialist on the antiques in Saint Petersburg” crowns the authors essay on the long term confrontation of the two criminal cultures: “the thieves” and “the bandits”. Y.V. Alekseev by the nickname *Grobaty* (“hunchbacked”) is the representative of the Old World, the world of thieves, which, he claims, used to adhere to certain moral code of rules or notions (*понятия*) unlike the bandits, who disregard any rules that could limit their rapacious appetites. As a journalist, the author visits the dying man in the prison hospital. The interview resulted in a number of monologues and a letter that Alekseev wrote to the author few months before his death. They picture a man quite intelligent, educated and principled, who cares about the fate of his country, detests violence and takes pride in his specific skills. A son of “the enemy of the people”, he according to his own words “suddenly found himself among people” in the penal colony, unlike in the world of law-abiding citizens of the regime oppressed state. A man of the old school, he claims to see his “occupation” as an art, which he does for the love of it. Speaking about the art as such, he takes pride in his ethical standards that would never allow him to buy the masterpieces stolen from the storeroom of the Hermitage; he only would go for the “honest” things (whether stolen by him personally, or stolen from private collections, is not specified) but hardly he meant the things bought for their legitimate price. (p.28)

The author leaves this romantic image unedited. His scarce commentary comes down to: *судите сами* (judge for yourself). (p. 24) However, it is hard not to notice that some of the old criminal’s observations echo the author’s own concerns: the unprecedented level of corruption among the high ranked officers in all spheres (even in The Hermitage), the miserable conditions in which the lower level militia works, the irrevocable disconnection from the values of the past. Does the author sympathize with the old “knight from crime” based on the similarity of opinions or simply chooses “the least of the two evils”, it is hard to say. However it is evident that the story of *Gorbatyi* is a significant experience among those, on which he builds his notion of the mysterious *zazerkalie*.

Another mode of “slumming” literature is the melodrama “society tale” introduced into the Petersburg text in the second half of the 19th century by Vsevolod Krestovsky. Let us see how *Banditskii Petersburg* can be reminiscent of *Petersburg Slums* written in the 1860s. Abounding in all kinds of “melodramatic excesses”, Krestovsky’s work was condemned by the critics for its “anachronistic and antirealist” plot, “melodramatic overkill” and “pandering to the popular audience”, thus, sent off to the rank of the “tabloid literature” (Buckler, 2005, p. 173). The same can be said about the plot of *Advokat*: it is a melodrama containing a love triangle, miraculous resurrections, unbelievable coincidences (mostly meetings), secret children, etc. However, rather than being a failed attempt to raise problematic social issues in the context of the fiction plot, it seems to be the author’s intention to remain within the frames of entertainment literature without a claim to enter the acclaimed literary genres or, even less, to introduce any new ones. This intention might have been predetermined by the history of the book’s creation: the author was asked to produce a film script on the basis of his journalistic investigations. (Konstantinov, 1995, p. 5)

According to Buckler (p. 173-174), Krestovsky borrowed his notorious melodrama from the traditions of the romantic French *roman-feuilleton*, namely, from an “overwrought” *Les Mystères de Paris* by Eugène Sue (1842-43). Attempting to explain this choice Buckler describes his prose a mixture of descriptive “journalistic passages” with “hoary plot motifs”, the effect being as follows:

Krestovsky brings his reader into close contact with the pressing contemporary issue of urban poverty by making his work seem familiar in the literary terms, evoking the society tales, urban sketches, and foreign melodramas of the earlier nineteenth century. (p. 173)

What were the sources Konstantinov resorts to in building his *siuzhet*? At the first glance there is nothing more obvious than a classic frame of the American Western: two best friends and a girl are against the whole world, racing and shooting provided. Like Krestovsky, Konstantinov looks back in around two decades (the peak of the Westerns’ popularity in America was in the mid-1960s) into the cultural tradition of the foreign country that set the tone for the popular entertainment sphere at the time (France - for Krestovsky, America – for Konstantinov).

Speculating about a concrete example that would inspire Konstantinov's creation, we might suggest a cult movie *Once Upon A Time In America* by Sergio Leone (1983). (Martin, 1998, p. 13) In this movie the tradition of Western is taken on the next level of the criminal romanticism – a gangster movie. Leone “abstracted the memory of this genre, minimizing its conventional plot logic and maximizing its ‘attractions’, its purely spectacular element.” (Martin, 1998, p. 13) Attempting to apply the same strategy, Konstantinov capitalizes on such “attractions”. Both men and Katia demonstrate the properties of a superman/-woman. They all combine perfect physical shape (with the exception of Sergey's crisis “drinking” periods) with high intellect and devotion to the ideals of love, friendship, conscience, etc. In addition to that, they are all incredibly lucky to escape death when it is most probable to happen to a common mortal. When the circumstances force them to commit a crime, the damage to their reputation is always reduced in the context of fighting the evil, and is interpreted according to the Russian proverb: *добро должно быть с кулаками*. (Except that the Dostoyevskian motifs of crime and punishment do not let the protagonists meet the happy ending.) The “action” element of a movie script is evident in the detailed descriptions of the fight scenes (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 353) and the metaphors of the martial arts' holds and feints that would seem inapplicable elsewhere:

- *А вот вы — вы же на камикадзе не похожи, и наркотики — это что-то новое в вашей биографии... Что случилось-то, Екатерина Дмитриевна? Катю передернуло. Этот опер сразу ударил по болевой точке.*

- Let's talk about you – you don't look like you are some kamikaze and the drugs – this is something new in your biography... So, what happened, Ekaterina Dmitrievna?

Katia convulsed. This detective hit the painful spot right away. (p. 402)

This and other elements became the predecessors of the imagery that later will be seen in the popular genre of action movies called *boevik* in Russia, the sequel *Brat* and *Brat- 2* being the specimen of such.

Speaking of the philosophical idea of the film by Leone, Martin sees it as “a wrenching duality”:

[...towards] epic enchantment on the one hand, and massive disenchantment on the other; the imaginary movie-made America pitted against the real, historical America [...]. (Martin, 1998, p. 13)

Comparing it to *Banditskii Petersburg*, it is easy to notice that the level of “enchantment” is considerably lower, if any, in a Russian gangster tale. The events illustrated, have not yet descend into the realm of history: the “sores” are too fresh to turn into romantic scars, the flesh still remembers the pain. The romanticism that is being borrowed is to fill out the emptiness; it is placed where it no longer exists. Soul brothers, love carried out through life, partnership, struggling with the evil – all if it flavors with the nostalgia for the Soviet childhood – poor and unsettled (after the WW II), but inspired by the simple ideals of friendship, faithfulness, and optimism. Borrowed from the romantic 1920s, gangster movie context allows dividing a new complex and deceitful world of the 1990s, at least schematically, into the trivial black and white, good and evil. The reader or the viewer is tempted to take a rest in this simplicity before he/she realizes that the biggest evil the heroes (just like everyone in the audience) are struggling with is the disenchantment.

Last, but not the least analogy between the two is that of particular importance for the topic of this research: the role of the city as characters’ home and a social-historical environment of the plot (more expressed in the movie version of Konstantinov’s work). New York, a city with an extremely strong distinctive atmosphere, can be called (as an heir of Chicago) a Criminal Capital of the United States of the time. Like in Petersburg of the 1990s, New York of the 1920s became an oasis for a thriving popular culture, especially musical genres. Its multicultural nature and geographic position (on the bay, upon the banks of a navigable river, island in the middle) can be compared to Saint Petersburg. The manner in which the city reflects the transfer in time and changes in the personal life of the characters is best demonstrated in the scene on the train station. On the day when Noodles (the protagonist) departs, in the 1920s, he looks around as if trying to grasp a last view of the city, and his glance is caught by a bright design around a mirror door – the abstract illustration of Coney Island with a respective motto: “Visit Coney Island”. Noodles comes up to the mirror and looks at himself, but the face reflected is 35 years older. The mirror transferred him (and the plot) into 1960s, when Noodles returned to the city to find his friends graves. The viewer realizes it only when 50-year old man walks away from the mirror: there is a new design

on the wall – a big red apple and the sky scrapers’ silhouettes around it – the contemporary emblem of the city, the city that the protagonist does not know.

In *Banditskii Petersburg* the relationship between the city and the characters is illustrated in a vertical descent from the bird’s eye view (usually of the top of a historical building or cathedral, e.g. Isaac’s cathedral) to the close-up on the figure of the character moving along the street or showing in the window of the building. The camera slowly focuses on the character and starts following him/her into the next scene. The symbolic meaning that both perspectives convey in the representation of the city are discussed by prominent scholars in the field, such as Olga Matich and Ulla Hakanen, both agreeing on the basic set of associations they evoke. While the view from above is associated with “a gaze from the outside”, a historical panorama and “an awareness of the virtual control of space” (it being “a complex of social relations defined by power and regulations”), the close-up view conveys a different sensation of horizontal “inside gaze” that offers a “more immediate and intimate engagement with that which had caught the eye of the pedestrian [...]” (Matich, 2010, p. 14-17)

In *Banditskii Peterburg*, the choice of the frame sequencing can be interpreted as an attempt to illustrate the affect the global processes in the city had on the life of its citizens.

A significant part of the success that the television version of *Banditskii Petersburg* had with the audience belongs to its popular soundtrack, in particular to the leitmotif song *Город, которого нет* (*The city that does not exist/The city that isn’t there*) by R. Lisits and I. Korneliuk. Echoing the epilogue of Veller’s *The Legends of Nevsky Prospekt*, it expresses his generation’s longing for a place they could call home: “a shelter for a wanderer”, where “they remember and wait”, where the light of “the forgotten truths” is still shining. This song is full of nostalgia for the ideals of the past, of the pain of disillusionment, and of despair in the face of the unknown future. The city in it is the ephemeral projection of the human hopes. But is there a city in Russia that would answer to all these moods better than Saint Petersburg? As Imperial Saint Petersburg exploded and Soviet Leningrad collapsed, both sinking in the swamps of oblivion, the city in which former Leningraders found themselves does not have a name,

for both its names describe a city “that is not there”. Thus, the legendary ephemeral quality of the city is seen through the historical dimension.

Nevertheless, its citizens keep seeking their new Petersburg, and as if relying on the power of thought that once gave birth to it, recreate its image in words, repeating like a mantra:

*Я найду этот город, которого нет...
Там для меня горит очаг,
Как вечный знак забытых истин.
Мне до него последний шаг,
И этот шаг длиннее жизни[...].*

I will find this city that does not exist
There a fire is burning,
As the eternal sign of forgotten truths.
One last step separates me from it,
And this step is longer than life [...].
(Lisits as performed in Markin & Bortko, 2011)

CHAPTER IV
MARGINALITY, INSANITY, AND SELF-CREATION IN THE TRILOGY BY
MARUSIA KLIMOVA

Tatiana Nikolaevna Kondratovich was born in Leningrad, Russia, in 1961, approximately two months before the first man, a Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, was launched into space. It was a great triumph of the Soviets and an upheaval of ideology, portraying the Soviet man as an optimistic, cheerful, energetic and even all-mighty person. The title of a Soviet person was considered unimpeachable; stainless was the image of everyone living in this blessed country. However, Tatiana's generation was to witness the opposite and became the first to express the protest against the hypocritical banner. Protest is an inspiring impulse of Kondratovich's work as a writer and cultural activist. She destroyed her higher education diploma and changed her well-sounding name into a vulgar nickname, Marusia Klimova, a character of a well-known criminal song. In her books published under a pseudonym of Marusia Klimova, she protests against both hackneyed norms of the Soviet lifestyle and the literary canon of narration which was limited by Soviet censorship and the highly respected traditions of Russian classical literature. Her literary works became a shocking experience for the Russian (post-Soviet) audience, unaccustomed to such undisguised exposure of deviant forms of human sexuality as well as the forthright language used to describe them. This writing manner and her subsequent cultural activity won Marusia Klimova the fame of a "marginal person, queen of *épatage*, devil in a skirt," etc.

M. Klimova as a writer is known for her autobiographical trilogy consisting of three novels *Голубая кровь* (Blue Blood, 1991, published 1996), *Домик в Буа-Коломб* (House in Bois-Colombes, 1998), and *Белокурые беснии* (Fair-haired Devils, 2001). The main character of all three books is Marusia Klimova, a literary double of the author. The relationship between the writer and her heroine is a particularly interesting phenomenon: Klimova not only uses the name of her character as her literary pseudonym, but also exploits it and the image behind it in building her public persona. The autobiographic manner and the realism of depictions, on the one hand, convince the

reader of the true to life character of the plot. On the other hand, the phantasmagoric events and personalities occurring within the objective reality of narration undermine its convincing qualities, and the reader is more inclined to qualify the writing as fiction. This oscillation between real and imaginary becomes the warp of Tatiana-Marusia's image and writings. The name Kondratovitch is almost forgotten (but for the rare references to her husband and the main critic Viacheslav Kondratovitch) as if it was burnt together with her philology degree diploma from the Leningrad State University. Having hidden her eyes behind the sunglasses and her face behind the indispensable cloud of cigarette smoke, (the usual portrait of Marusia in press and on television) the real person dissolves in her character in the best traditions of decadent self-fashioning.

Apart from her writings, Marusia is acknowledged as a talented translator from French of such almost "untranslatable" authors as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Jean Genet, Pierre Guyotat, Georges Bataille, Monique Wittig, Michel Foucault, Pierre Louÿs, most of them being and having been controversial and revolutionary figures in French literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. For her translations she was awarded the Order of Arts and Letters (she became a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*) in 2006; she also organized and held several international colloquia devoted to the work of these writers (Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Jean Genet) in Saint-Petersburg.

However, the glory of "the queen of Decadence" came to her as a creator of the notorious web-magazine *Дантеc* (Dantès, 1999) and as a hostess of the Saint Petersburg festival of the underground art *Темные ночи* (The Dark Nights, 1999, 2000).⁷ After the success of all the above mentioned, Marusia Klimova continues to develop the "New Decadence" culture as a film director.⁸

Klimova has also continued writing, often in the genre of essay, contributing to well-known periodicals (in Russia and in France) and has spoken on the radio, promoting

⁷ The title of the festival is an alternative to the famous "white nights" – the period in June and July when the nights are day-like bright in Saint Petersburg due to its extreme Northern latitude. This natural phenomenon became one of the major attractions of the city and gave name to the famous musical festival "White Nights" which took place for the first time in the city in 1992.

⁸ She attempted to stage the scene of murder from the novel by Jean Genet *Querelle de Brest*, which she translated. The movie bears the unequivocal title *Убийство Жоашена или то, что не снял Фассбиндер* (*The Murder of Joachen or what Fassbinder did not shoot*) which explicitly states the artistic goals of its creator.

the interests of women writers. She has also become a successful blogger, whose entries in the LiveJournal under the nickname of FEMME TERRIBLE are close to her novels in style and mood. In 2004, she wrote the controversial and iconoclastic *Моя история русской литературы*, continued her research on Celine, and in 2007 was granted the title of the “Most famous person of Saint Petersburg in the field of art” by an internet-vote held by the e-zine *СОБАКА.RU*

Lately, in her interviews and talk-show presentations Klimova refuses to be called a decadent but prefers to be referred as belonging to the post-modernism movement.

Apart from the various definitions Klimova’s writing might receive – in regard to genre, literary trend, and its position as marginal versus mainstream, etc. – it might be interesting to note how it encompasses the latest tendencies, such as so-called “destructivism”, “physicality” (*телесность*), and the formation of a new subjectivity (as opposed to the traditional “white, heterosexual, male” subjectivity of classical Russian (and global) literature), the development of which, according to Seraphima Roll characterizes the works of such prominent writers of the 1990s as Sorokin, Yerofeev, Narbikova, Tolstaya, and others. (Roll, 1996, p. 14-16)

It is anticipated that these tendencies will come to light in the course of the following analysis. However, the analysis will mainly focus on the way in which Marusia Klimova’s themes and poetics are predefined by the Petersburg tradition.

A theme that was characteristic of Petersburg literature of the end of the 19th century and that connects Klimova’s works with the ones previously discussed is the interest towards the marginal groups of society, their lifestyle and effect they have on the artistic life in the city.

The marginality of Klimova’s characters is different from that in which we find the poor people described by Krestovsky, Sveshnikov, and Dostoyevsky. It also cannot be compared to the marginal position of the criminals from Konstantinov’s “underworld”. One would hesitate to describe them as a social group forced beyond the margin, primarily because it is hard to define where this margin lies. One of Klimova’s reviewers, naming marginality as “the most characteristic” feature (*характернейшая*) that unites all her characters, notes that each and every of them is marginal in their own way:

[...] *Не только те, кто роется в помойке или торгует собой. Благополучные родители Маруси, «порядочная советская семья», – маргинальны, с точки зрения истории («великая эпоха» кончилась для них ясно чем), а также они маргинальны как обыватели, с точки зрения самой современно и богемно свободной Маруси. Преуспевающий парижский юрист, поклонник произведений Селина, – тоже маргинал (по отношению к смыслу творчества своего «кумира»), потому что культура для него есть лишь приятный шумовой фон сытого самодовольного существования[...].*

[...] Not only those who are rummaging in trash or selling their bodies. Marusia's well-to-do parents, "a decent Soviet family" – is marginal, from the historical point of view (it is clear in what way "the great epoch" ended up for them); they are also marginal as philistines, from the point of view of Marusia herself, who has a modern worldview and enjoys bohemian freedom. A successful Parisian lawyer fond of Céline's works is marginal as well (in regard to the meaning of his favorite writer's literature), because culture for him is merely a plausible background noise for his replete and self-satisfied existence [...]. (Bondarenko, n.d.)

In other words, they are all "marginal" regarding each other. Another "passionate" critic of Klimova's works (and her husband) Viacheslav Kondratovich describes it as action "against nature" – *наоборот* – bringing up the title of J.K. Huysmans's famous novel. However, as he notes, in the reality of the 1990s it is hard to find any "nature" – any departing points or moral criteria – to go against. Thus, the characters are just acting and living "against" in regard to each other:

[...] в их поступках нет не малейшей доли сознательности [...] они все поступают наоборот по отношению друг к другу[...].

[...] in their actions there is not a smallest portion of consciousness [...] they all act so that they are contrary to each other [...]. (Kondratovich, 1991, p. 4)

Speaking about the conscious/unconscious manner - *сознательность* - in which Klimova's characters maintain their marginality, a certain distinction should be drawn. According to Bondarenko's insightful observation, it is the author herself who defines each and every character as marginal based on her vision of this "most characteristic feature" in every particular case (as it is with the above mentioned "decent Soviet family" of her parents and the "successful Parisian lawyer fond of Céline"). However, these "relatively" marginal characters never become central to the idea of the plot; they are not "heroes", but rather additions to them, diversifying the spectrum Klimova's marginality with a couple of new perspectives.

The group of real Marusia's *МАР-ГИ-НА-ЛЫ* (using Bondarenko's text intonation) - often described by critics as "кунсткамера" (a cabinet of curiosities), *заповедник-резервация для неизлечимых психопатов* ("reservation for incurable psychos", Trofimenkov, 1999, p. 148), *немая кинокомедия* ("silent comedy film" Trofimenkov, 1999, p. 147), and simply *зоопарк* ("zoo", Latynina, 2005) – can easily be seen within the quite conscious social movement of the time. Elena Trofimova, in her article «Отъехавшая» реальность или поэтика безумия в прозе Маруси Климовой (2007) defines them as "asocial and apolitical individuals, suffering from sexual deviations, and insane" and compares them to the members of the famous Petersburg artistic group *Mit'ki* (1982). (p. 173-174) She describes their social position as a "literal retreat to the periphery of social life", which was typical of the Petersburg (and Russian) underground artists in the last two decades in Soviet Union. She characterizes such "retreat" as "marginality by principle", which at that time constituted the aesthetic element of postmodernism.

[...] это был и эстетический жест, признание имманентной художественной ценности бытия люмпена [...который] видит мир не как систему, а как совокупность случайностей [...].

[...] it was an aesthetic gesture, an acknowledgement of the immanent artistic value of a lumpen [...who] sees the world not as a system, but rather as a succession of accidents [...]. (Trofimova, 2007, p. 173)

In addition to the reference to this trend, Trofimova regards Klimova's idea of marginality in connection to "the problem of marginality of the Leningrad-Petersburg culture as such". (Trofimova, 2007, p. 173-174) The loss of Imperial status of the capital threw Saint Petersburg (Leningrad at the time) back to its geographical position of a provincial city on the edge of the country. The realization of it was painful, especially under the weight of the "artistic, historical and literary legacy" the city embodied.

Материальная деградация соседствовала с культурными амбициями. Это не могло не выразиться в особом акценте ленинградской культуры, и маргинализм здесь описывается как один из ее конструктивных элементов.

The physical (material) degradation was combined with cultural ambitions. It could not help resulting in a peculiar accent of Leningrad culture: marginality here is described as one of its constructive elements. (p. 174)

It is important to reiterate definitions of “apolitical” and “aesthetic” in the discussion above, for the marginality of Klimova’s characters has nothing to do with the dissident tradition of the Leningrad intelligentsia. Bondarenko speaks about the absence of any kinds of “transpersonal vectors” (*надличностные векторы*) in their existence. Indeed, if there are vectors, they rather seem to be deeply personal and are directed not so much “against” as “above”. Marusia burns her diploma to spite her parents but also to demonstrate that she is *above* their philistine concerns of career and comfort: *above* her father hiding the volume of Gumilev poems, the love of which would compromise him as a KGB officer; *above* her mother who shut her eyes at infidelity to remain a wife of *vyezdnoi* (eligible to travel abroad) captain, *above* her brother Grisha who is ready to renounce his sister to get admitted to the KGB school, etc.

Each of them finds their own reasons to rise “above the banality”. Some of them “retain the memory of the former intelligentsia status or aristocratic background”. (Trofimenkov, 1999, p. 148) Poet Kostia is “a representative of the extinct underground culture of the 1970s-80s [...] frantically devoted to a mystical tradition that remains vague to the others” (Kondratovich, 1991, p. 4) When he is granted an opportunity to finally realize his literary potential and produce something that is going to be actually published (Marusia offers him a potboiler - to write a detective story under her pseudonym), he *consciously* ruins the chance and turns it into a manifesto of his obscure and escalated ideas. Like Raskol’nikov, he kills the old lady and robs her, but keeps the money, for using it would mean joining the petty ideology of *gain*, whereas his devotion is to *loss*. He sees Marusia’s mission as a writer as follows:

[...] она [...] должна была принять эстафету бесконечных поражений и вести свой корабль туда, куда ей указывали путь звезды, то есть творения погибших в пути художников и поэтов [...].

[...] she should have picked the baton of endless defeat and sailed her ship following the stars which are the creations of the artists and poets perished on the way [...]. (Klimova, 2001, p. 121)

Although this explanation can be interpreted as the trivial ravings of an unsuccessful writer, nevertheless in Marusia’s case it worked to her benefit, as she remained “cold and hungry”, but did not stain her name by complicity with the production of commercial bestsellers.

Another representative of “marginality by principle” is the former French aristocrat Pierre (*Пьер Троше де Ля Фейад*), who voluntarily turned himself into a *clochard* and surrounded himself with “Russian semi-immigrants of the third wave”, which alone can appreciate his former nobility, the dominant element of his ego. (Bondarenko, n.d.) His marginal status makes it possible to combine the latter with indulging his depraved propensities, such as chasing after the prostitutes he hosts and harassing his “mail-order bride” Galia and her daughter from Russia.

Even the most down-to-earth character of the whole story, Pavlik, looks down upon his female colleagues in “that cathedral” (implied is St. Isaac’s cathedral) from the podium of his exquisite homosexual sex appeal, surpassing their ability to attract men, as well as from a position of a person who has been abroad and knows the taste of Western comfort. Combining both, he laughs at their petty aspirations.

Most of these claims for their “marginal” superiority are obviously groundless. They are fantasies and manias of their beholders rather than their real statuses in the objective reality. The only ground they are based on is the marshy soil of the “famous Petersburg snobbism”. (Serebrianaia, 2004) Just as the city itself learnt to appreciate its ruins and to take pride in its “outsideness”, the characters of Marusia Klimova regard the fuss of the Soviet philistines, who are trying to timely re-form (sometimes de-form) themselves, from the height of eternity, in which everything is finite, everything turns into chaos, and, ultimately, has no sense.

This idea of finiteness of every attempt and indifference to action takes us to the next Petersburg tradition of the end of the 19th century that Marusia Klimova reinvents in her writing – Decadence. Attempting to outline the philosophy and symbolism of contemporary Decadence, Olga Serebrianaia in her article *О последней правоте декаданса* (“*On the Last Truth of Decadence*”, 2004) finds that it is particularly characteristic of the city on the Neva. She offers the following definition of the contemporary decadent:

[...] декадентом является тот, кто испытывает глубокое недоверие ко всякой активности, связанной с вещным воплощением продуктов конструктивной способности воображения [...].

[...] a decadent is the one who deeply distrusts any activity affiliated with the material realization of the products of a constructive quality of imagination [...].

“Realization” (*воплощение*) by Serebrianaia is often connected to the word “project” (*проект*), and not in vain. Indeed, having acquired new meaning and popularity in the late 1990s it often intimidated Russians by the amount of active intention it implied. In its turn Petersburg, being “one of the most large-scale personal projects ever accomplished in Russia” (*один из наиболее масштабных личных проектов, когда-либо осуществленных в России*), has always aggravated this feeling, being a visual demonstration of the cost and the result of any breakthrough.

*Материя повседневности петербуржцев состоит из **продуктов разложения чужой проективности**. Мысль о финальной тщете всякого начинания любой житель этого города подбирает в ранней юности прямо на улице.*

For Petersburg citizens, the matter of their casual life consists of the projects realized by the others. Everyone who lives in this city picks up the idea of the final futility of every initiative in their early childhood and right from the street.

Throughout the argument, Serebrianaia highlights the pressure any creative thought experienced at the sight of Petersburg accomplishments in all cultural spheres and the sensation of decay they conveyed to the viewer.

Здесь все уже образовано – и, судя по явным признакам упадка, образовано очень давно.

Everything has already been created here – and, judging by the salient signs of decay, is far in the past.

Edward Muraden, the owner of Petersburg night club Decadence, which inherited the cultural atmosphere of the festival “Dark Nights” organized by Marusia in 1999, expresses the same idea in his interview with the information agency *Iskusstvo Rossii* (*Искусство России*).

Петербург необыкновенный город. Делать что-то плохо или хорошо в этом городе нельзя. Здесь нужно делать исключительно. Этот факт накладывает на тебя большую ответственность. Самодостаточность и величие города влияют очень сильно на все творческие натуры, именно поэтому здесь принято просто гулять.

Petersburg is an extraordinary city. Here, it is impossible to be simply good or bad at doing something. Here everything needs to be exceptional. This fact imposes a big responsibility on you. The city seems self-sufficient and magnificent, and it affects people’s creativity a lot. That is why people prefer to just walk around here.

Among Klimova's characters, Kostia is the one who realizes this idea the most. He sees the cultural legacy of civilization as some "invisible load" that he envisages as a "cupboard-tradition", which grew unbearably heavy over the centuries. Today it crashes all its weight on those few who know about its existence, whereas at the beginning of century it was evenly distributed among people, and they carried it without much effort up the invisible ladder of time, chatting cheerfully on the way. Being one of those few, Kostia keeps lying on the sofa in his little apartment on Decembrist's Street, "right under the roof", immobile under the weight of the load consisting of "various pictures, palaces, monuments, historical examples, exemplary models, standards and ideals..." The apogee of this monumental cultural authority for him is St. Isaac's cathedral whose huge golden dome is shining right behind his window. He calls it a *грумада* that appeared from "the meaningless conglomeration (*нагромождение*) of people's ambitions, foolishness, greediness, and stupidity". (Klimova, 2001, p. 23-24)

Единственное достоинство собора – это то, что он такой огромный и у него здоровенный золоченый купол, который видно издалека, даже с другой стороны Невы, а людям больше ничего и не надо, им этого достаточно, собор подавляет их своей величиной, которую они всегда путают с величием – толпу гипнотизирует сила, масштаб, количество золота, потраченного на купол, а красота и эстетика никого не волнуют.

The only merit of the cathedral is that it is so huge and there is an enormous gilded dome on top of it, which is seen from afar, even from the other bank of the Neva, and people, it is all they need, they are satisfied with it, the cathedral is overwhelming them with its great size, which they always take for greatness – the mob is hypnotized by the power, scale, amount of gold wasted on the dome, and nobody cares for the beauty and aesthetics. (Klimova, 2001, p. 22)

Reluctant to join "the mob", Kostia boards up the window rejecting the view many would pay high price for and hiding from the world in the darkness of his tiny room. Here, the idea of impossibility of accomplishment is presented as a result of the absence of artistic taste among the common citizens confined in "their standardized houses and apartments". For Kostia the idea of good taste lies in the realization that there remained no taste, no art and no culture. All the concepts and ideals of culture are so worn out and trite that even the words describing them have lost their initial significance: the words "god", "soul", "greatness" are "so empty and approximate"; today, they hardly mean more than "crap" or "condom". The embodiments of philistine understanding of

art, in his opinion, are the Soviet museum guides, who use these trite words to teach people what to admire, “poking their pointers” into the so-called masterpieces.

It is not in vain that Marusia’s other friend Pavlik (Kostia’s antagonist on many levels) happens to work at the St. Isaac’s cathedral and also develops contempt towards its guides and research officers. Both of them, each in their own way, nurture the sense of elitism and superiority towards the crowd of pseudo-artistic and pseudo-religious people who spend their lives in blind “philistine worshipping” (*обывательское преклонение*). (Klimova, 2001, p. 22-25) The traits of it Kostia sees in Marusia’s literary and translation work. Every act of creation (or accomplishment) he interprets as an evidence of the “slavish industry and servile assiduousness” of the creators. He tries to convince Marusia of the futility of her efforts: being a successful writer she is still “doomed to work for some Vasia or Petia”. Not understanding it is being an idiot, who does not know anything about human nature or the world therefore is not able to create anything worthy. Her willingness to keep running around this vicious circle only demonstrates her “enslavement by the world that does not deserve it and should be regarded with nothing but contempt”. (Klimova, 2001, p. 23)

The only vector of creation that Kostia accepts is the negative one: he wishes the creator of the cathedral aimed at making it “worse, as worse as one can only imagine”. The outright ugliness of it would become “a piercing light that exposes the truth”, primarily the misery of the philistines who are afraid of this light and “prefer to wonder in the shadow of perfection”. (Klimova, 2001, p. 25) Thus, in his monologue *диванный мудрец* (“sofa thinker”) Kostia reveals the reasoning behind the infatuation with monstrosity that characterizes the Decadence of the late 20th century. As E. Trofimova notes in her article, the cultural decay in Russia compared to Europe has always been more palpable, almost physically present, which resulted in much more “materialistic” images and more realistic representation of it in literature.

*[...] если западный постмодернизм был [...] движением эстетического свойства, то русский аналог этого направления стал прямым выражением позднесоветских и перестроечных реалий, где примеры мусорной кучи, деморализации, деконструкции и распада можно было наблюдать в их крайних **вещественных** проявлениях.*

[...] while modernism in the West was [...] a movement of an aesthetic nature, its Russian analogue became a direct embodiment of the realities of the late Soviet era and perestroika, in which the examples of a pile of trash, demoralization, decay could be observed in their extreme material forms. (Trofimova, 2007, p. 177)

The association of anything material with decay is crucial for Kostia's (and other decadent figures') philosophy. According to it, Beauty and Taste migrated to the realm of the ideal once and for all. Therefore, Kostia considers complete idleness a better pastime than any productive activity. Here, we may return to Serebrianaia and her definition of contemporary Decadence:

Определенно, декаданс – это упадок. Не оспаривая этимологии, спрашиваю: упадок чего? И отвечаю: упадок желания что-либо доказать этому миру.

Certainly, Decadence is a decline. Not arguing the etymology, I ask: the decline of what? And I answer: the decline of a desire to prove anything to this world. (Serebrianaia, 2004)

In this regard, it might seem that Marusia herself shares the moral of “the mob” and opposes Kostia, saying that “anyone can lie on the sofa”. However, having been sent to the range of the philistines by Kostia's highbrow reasoning, she feels offended: her remark resembles a meek response of a pouting child, rather than an actual reproach. The gap that divides her from “them” is of different kind: it consists of emotions and impressions which all can be united under one word – *disgust*. Aversion and disgust are rendered through the burlesque images of the bodies, heavy and tangible, often resorting to the device of synesthesia. The type of people that averts Marusia the most is that of a common Soviet employee, or *sovok*, who sees their main duty in preaching the copybook morality to those who happened to be their clients (customers). A continuous attribute of them in Marusia's imagination is “red mug” (*красная рожка*). This word combination serves as a label, a sign, which immediately marks the narration with outright hostility and switches the stylistics into a lower register. The red or crimson (*багровый*) color of the faces, hands, eyes often denotes aggression.

*Кругом люди куда-то торопились, тащили сумки, толкались, ругались. Инвалид с костылем и **красной рожкой** шёл посередине улицы и толкал всех.*

All around people were hurrying, dragging bags, pushing one another, arguing. A disabled man with a crutch and a red mug was walking in the middle of the street and pushing everybody. (Klimova, 1998, p. 82)

“Redness” is used to imply the peasant background of Marusia’s relatives from Ukraine (Zhmerinka), to indicate their occupation in hard physical labor. Speaking about Marusia’s grandmother’s neighbor Gandzya, a woman “with golden teeth and huge red hands”, the author also hints at her mercenary aspirations to inherit the house. (Klimova, 1998, p. 42)

The color of blood, red is also associated with the process of digestion, obesity and clumsiness. Bondarenko notes the overuse of the word “жрать” and “жратва” (gorge, to gorge, to pig out) in the narration generally, and in relation to Marusia’s family lifestyle particularly. Marusia and Pavlik agree on their disgust towards fat women, calling them “trough” (*колода*), “hill” (*куча*), “hulk” (*туша*), and simply *baba*.

Я терпеть не могу толстых баб. Они такие отвратительные, меня от них тошнит.

I hate these fat women. They are so disgusting, they make me sick. (Klimova, 1998, p. 57)

Right after Pavlik declares the above, he meets the grotesque embodiment of his fears – a fat old lady “with a huge belly” who lies moaning in the hospital hall, suffering from overeating after she had stuffed herself with greasy Russian *bliny*. The apogee of the disgust towards an obese woman’s body is the scene in which Pavlik is seducing (or prostituting himself with) a director of the passport office helping his friend to get a visa.

Она была такая огромная и толстая, ну как все наши советские, которые постоянно что-то жуют[...] Она обняла меня и я просто задохнулся в ее жирном потном теле. [...] Тогда она разделась, и как огромная гора жира и мяса, рухнула на меня.

She was so huge and fat, just like all our Soviet ones, which are constantly chewing something. [...] She hugged me and I simply suffocated in her fat sweaty body. [...] Then she took her clothes off, and, like a huge mountain of fat and meat, crashed down on me. (Klimova, 1998, p. 103-104)

Meat, flesh, and blood, being symbolic of the materialistic world and animal nature of humans, irritate the decadent perception of Klimova’s characters. They symbolize life processes, increment and stagnation, but also inevitably lead to the thoughts of their ultimate stage – putrefaction and excrement. The word “crap” is used extensively throughout the text in its direct and figurative meaning. The “smell of crap” and decay usually accompanies the appearance of the “red mugs”.

Комната была разделена занавеской, в форточку с мясокомбината проникал отвратительный запах.

A curtain divided the room into two parts; the disgusting smell was filling it up through the window coming from a meat factory. (Klimova, 1998, p. 25)

The odor is often present in the city's atmosphere, as in the following description of the springtime in Saint Petersburg:

Маруся шла по темной улице мимо ободранных домов, из подворотен воняло дерьмом, потому что пришла весна и всё разлагалось. Мимо проезжали машины и от их дыма и гари небо казалось желтым. Маруся остановилась на набережной и закурила. Она смотрела на темную воду канала, на плавающую грязь.

Marusia was walking along the dark street, passing the shabby and ragged houses, the dark corners stinking like crap, because it was spring and everything was decaying. The cars were going by, the sky seemed yellow from their gas and smoke. At the embankment Marusia stopped to smoke. She looked at the dark waters of the canal, at the dirt floating on its surface. (Klimova, 1998, p. 35)

The portrayal of Petersburg as a decaying mass was a popular metaphor in the Decadent poetics of the turn of the 19th century. However, the description above appears to be deprived of metaphorical quality, presenting a selection of negative characteristics imbued with a feeling of disgust. (Zagurskaia, 2007, p. 192) We can suggest that in Marusia's decadent vision rotting biological mass presents a scenario of decay contrary to the one she clearly prefers – entropy.

The idea of entropy played an important role in poetics of such prominent decadent writers as Bryusov, Sologub, Merezhkovsky. Bryusov “saw something ominous in the process of dispersion of the world” and wrote his famous *Демоны пыли* (“The Demons of Dust”, 1899), images from which roamed from piece to piece in the poetry and prose of Decadents and Symbolists. (p. 164) Dust and litter were characteristic of Sologub's poetic language, which his poetic “passport” *На серой куче сора* (1985) is demonstrative of. (Pavlova, 2007, p. 164-165)

In Klimova's writing the idea of entropy is expressed predominately through the fragmentariness of perception. This sensation Klimova conveys through the structure of the narration, which consists of disconnected pieces of events descriptions, biographies, flashbacks to Marusia's childhood, chunks from Puvlik's diary, monologues rendered as indirect speech, lyrical digressions by Marusia herself, etc. Trofimova interprets it as “the

postmodernist fragmentation of life”, which appears as “the distraction of hierarchical connections, the entropy of material and spiritual, the existential loneliness of an individual who lost his/her common guidelines and reference points.” (Trofimova, 2007, p. 178) The same is witnessed in Bondarenko’s review, when he speaks of the reader’s empathy:

Ведь и его жизнь так построена временем, что при внешней пестроте и якобы «массе возможностей», в общем-то, чаще всего он идет в никуда. Ведь все мы прекрасно знаем, что живем только сегодняшним днем, «мгновением», что какого-либо гарантированного и предсказуемого будущего у нас не имеется.

The time shaped his/her life so that, given the superficial variety and would be “abundance of opportunities”, practically he/she goes nowhere. Indeed, we all are fully aware of the fact that we live only today, at this moment, and we don’ have any sort of guaranteed and predictable future for us. (Bondarenko, n.d.)

Although it is hard for the reader to trace the development of the plot consisting of these small “close-ups”, they nevertheless manage to get composed into a sort of mosaic, bearing a grey pattern of Petersburg history. The reviewers and critics cannot help comparing this narrative strategy with the famous fragmentariness of Bely’s *Petersburg*. Polina Barskova (2006) examines fragmentariness as a reflection of grievous state of the city on the turn of the 19th century, which contributed to the general distress and urged new forms of artistic expression.

I focus on the structural fragmentation in the texts of Petersburg that searched for adequate means of representing a close-up of their painful present moment. In a way, such texts were doomed to lack textual coherency due to their denial of *outsidedness* since according to the scholar of modernity Linda Nochlin, “the fragmentariness is a quality shared in the modern city by both the perceiver/constructor and the object of perception.” (Barskova, Nochlin as cited in Barskova, p. 708)

In Bely’s *Petersburg* fragmentariness is traditionally seen as a “result of the apocalyptic catastrophe that is encoded in the Petersburg text.” (David Bethea as cited in Barskova, 2006, p. 708) However, it also is “a result of revolutionary violence”, which receives a comprehensive symbolic representation in an image of a bomb explosion. (Bethea, Barskova, Matich). Surprisingly, following Olga Matich Klimova calls Bely’s text “splinters from a bomb explosion” in her *Моя история русской литературы*

(2004). The imagery of “splinters”, “slivers”, “fragments” are often exploited by her reviewers as well.

Сознательные (или бессознательные?) хаотичность и асимметричность повествования невольно напоминают знаменитые обрывки всё того же Петрония: стало уже общим местом сравнивать их с осколками античной вазы. Однако все эти «осколки» так и остались бы осколками [...] если бы все эти разрозненные части[...] не соединялись вместе глубокой лирической волной [...].

Chaos and asymmetry consciously (or unconsciously?) brought in the narration remind of the fragments from the same Petronius: it has become commonplace to compare them to the fragments of the antique vase. However, all these fragments would have remained mere fragments [...] if all these separate parts [...] were not connected by a deep lyrical wave [...]. (Konratovich, 1991, p. 5)

Unlike in Bely's novel, Marusia's fragmented reality does not feature or fear explosion. It seems that her world consist of the fragments remained from the former catastrophes. It is not of her agency to trigger a bomb; she has to live in the ruins caused by others, the results of the process she has never been involved in. This post catastrophic world-view is symbolically illustrated in one of the flashback scenes, in which Marusia recalls fainting in front of *The Last Day of Pompeii* by Karl Briullov in The Russian Museum.

Однажды экскурсовод так долго рассказывала им про картины, что у Маруси внезапно потемнело в глазах, и она грохнулась на пол [...]. После этого Маруся даже во сне увидела землетрясение в Помпее, как будто она тоже находится в самом его центре, все рушится, кругом визжат младенцы и обезумевшие простоволосые полуголые бабы бегают, спасая свои пожитки и детишек, а вокруг бушует пламя.

Once a museum guide was telling them about the pictures for so long that suddenly everything went black before Marusia's eyes and she crashed down on the floor [...]. After that Marusia even saw the dream about an earthquake in Pompeii, as if she was also there, at the very middle of it, everything is falling to the ground, the babies are screeching all around and women, panic-stricken, half-naked, bare-headed, are running, trying to save their belongings and children, and all around it the flame is raging. (Klimova, 2001, p. 27)

The scene above demonstrates Marusia's sensitivity to the symbols of catastrophe imprinted in the cultural legacy of the original Decadent movement. The significance that Russian artists and writers such as Merezhkovsky, Blok, and others retrieved from the contemporary natural disaster – the Messina earthquake - was closely connected to

apocalyptic prophecies, which as they thought were evident even in nature. (Presto, 2011, p. 580-581) In Marusia's time these symbols are no longer prophetic but rather supportive of her perception of the world culture as a pile of litter. She sees common people and culture experts rummaging in it in the search of new meanings and applications. (Klimova, 2004) Meanwhile, her only desire is to get lost among these fragments, to vanish to the stranger's eye, as she learnt too well that any attention to her life brings about violence and intrusion (in family, in school, in art creation). Like in Sologub's short story *Маленький человек* (1905), in which the protagonist Saranin turns into a speck of dust and disappears (Pavlova, 2007, p. 165), Marusia wants to become invisible in her wandering among the views of the city:

Раньше... ей очень нравился Невский, потому что там было очень много народу, она чувствовала себя в это толпе надежно спрятанной от посторонних взглядов. [...] Марусю ужасно раздражали эти люди, которые на нее пялились, поэтому она любила ходить исключительно по Невскому проспекту[...] - все равно в толпе тебя не видно.

She used to like Nevsky a lot, because there were a lot of people there, she felt well hidden from the strangers' eyes in this crowd. [...] These people that stared at her were terribly annoying, so she liked walking exclusively along Nevsky [...] – anyways no one can see you in the crowd. (Klimova, 1999, p. 116)

The “deep lyrical wave” joining the fragments together, which Kondratovich mentions in his review, is the acute feeling of loneliness and insignificance that paints the city grey and keeps the character detached from the others.

Во дворе напротив был серый дом. По двору бегали дети. Рядом находились какие-то очистные сооружения и летом, когда ветер дул в их сторону, в квартире воняло, как-будто что-то разлагается. Сейчас была весна, грязный снег еще не растаял, и все вокруг было грязное, серое и унылое. В такие дни она всегда чувствовала беспокойство и тоску, и ей хотелось пойти куда-нибудь, только чтобы не сидеть на месте, и хотя идти было некуда, все равно, можно было идти просто по улице, по лужам, мимо серых домов, и так ходить долго, долго, пока не устанешь, и ноги не откажутся передвигаться. Тогда можно будет сесть на скамейку на ледяном ветру, потому что некуда идти и никто не ждет, и никто никому не нужен, и так и должно быть всегда, до самой смерти.

A grey house stood in the courtyard across the street. Kids ran around the yard. Nearby there were some sewage treatment facilities and in summer, when the wind blew to their side, it smelled terribly in the flat, as if something was decaying. It was spring, the dirty snow was not yet gone, and everything around was filthy, grey and dull. She would always feel worried and sad on the days like

that, and she would want to go somewhere only not to sit here, at the same place, and though there was nowhere to go, she would just walk along the street anyways, she would walk through the paddles, by the grey houses, and would keep walking like that for a long time till she would get tired and her legs would refuse to move. Then, she would sit on the bench in the cold icy wind, because there was nowhere to go, and nobody was waiting for her, and people don't need each other, and that's how it is and should be always, till the very death. (Klimova, 1999, p. 11)

However, as we can see, the character does not strive to escape this feeling: in her meditation there is a certain degree of satisfaction with the state of things. The final goal of Marusia's lonely wandering is to reach the point of no return:

Дома она в основном стояла у окна и смотрела в серое небо, ей хотелось уйти куда-нибудь подальше и гулять, гулять, только бы не возвращаться домой к этой пошлости и обыденности.

At home, she would usually stand by the window and look into the grey sky, she wanted to go away, somewhere far, and walk, walk, but only not go back home, to this dull and common life. (Klimova, 1999, p. 133)

This adolescent dream of an escape later turns into a conscious desire to merge with the emptiness.

Here our analysis approaches the theme that may require a separate comprehensive research – the development of the idea of insanity in Marusia Klimova's trilogy. Many scholars and reviewers refer to this theme as a framing of her symbolics and a binding agent of the narration. (Ishtvan, p. 197; Zagurskaia, 2007, p. 192; Bondarenko, Serebrianaia) E. Trofimova calls the plots of Marusia Klimova's books “a philosophical apogee of insanity and “deviation” as the most adequate form of existence.” (p. 177)

Если говорить предельно обобщенно, для Маруси Климовой суть и облик бытия – тихое тотальное безумие, изредка взрываемое приступами немотивированной истерики. Человек представляется нам кретином, дебилом и шизофреником.

To put it in the extremely general terms, the aspect and the essence of being for Marusia Klimova is quiet and total insanity, interrupted by the occasional attacks of unmotivated hysteria. The human appears to be a cretin, an idiot, a schizophrenic. (Trofimova, 2007, p. 172)

Calling insanity “the essence”, “the image” and “the texture” of the existence in the trilogy, Trofimova supplements the argument with an attempt to diagnose the types of

it presented in variety. She describes Marusia's state as paranoid melancholia; the old Frenchman Pierre clearly demonstrates the syndromes of schizophrenia; the fates of the Russian immigrants "are presented as the anamneses of the mental patients"; among them the case of Kostia is salient as an example and "holistic picture of the Russian immigrant psychosis". (p. 172) If Grisha's obsessive idea of KGB surveillance received a proper amount of attention, he would probably be suspected in suffering from "delirium of persecution".

However, since Dostoyevsky and his novel *Idiot* (1868-1869) in particular, it became hard to scare away the reader with an overt acknowledgement of the protagonist's mental illness. Interestingly, in the times of Dostoyevsky, the word "idiot" also referred to a particular mental disorder, rather than being an offensive term equal to "stupid" (like "schizo" is today). Trofimova pays credit to this tradition, saying that this inclination to insanity in the prose of Marusia Klimova was inherited in her genealogy, as one of the major genes of Petersburg culture. The cause of it she sees in the social matters.

[...] безумный герой в петербургском контексте всегда был реакцией на абсурд мироустройства.

[...] an insane protagonist in Petersburg context has always been a reaction to the absurdity of the world. (Trofimova, 2007, 174)

In the trilogy, it appears to be a reflection of a "paranoid context of the reality of *perestroika*." ("*параноидальный контекст перестроечной действительности*", Trofimova, p. 175) She refers to the Moscow conceptualist school and *соцарт* movement that aimed at distraction of the Soviet propagandistic supra-text with the help of the irony ridiculing its actual absurdity when clashed with the real state of things.

The absurdity of the 1990s' *bespredel* (outrage) is undoubtedly a strong factor in shaping the poetics of insanity in the novels. However, there are certain ways in which the mythology of the city creates specific patterns for every particular case of insanity, depending on the character's inclinations. The city in the imagination of an insane person constitutes a sort of a microcosm, in which the character finds and establishes his/her own reference points that correspond to this or that state or stage of the insanity.

For instance, in Marusia's case the insanity – deep and long depression and suicidal inclinations – are based on the apocalyptic myth of the city, on the idea of

finiteness of a human and his/her transcendence into the other infinite reality, which is represented by the powerful image of the “abyss” (*бездна*). Accordingly, her Petersburg is divided into the locations traditionally associated with the emotional states, which alternates as she moves around the city. Nevsky Prospekt provides a neutral state of light melancholia, as she is comfortably hidden in the crowd and involved in a monotonous movement. Generally, the motion around the city – Fontanka, Moika embankments, long walks in the industrial areas - provides the relative detachedness and enjoyable decadent depression. The location at the top of the tall building – The Public Library, Kostia’s apartment “right under the roof” – are lucid moments, associated with the flight, complete detachedness, clear vision, full agency and freedom. The Neva is the embodiment of the elemental power, the dark and cold substance, which is nevertheless irresistibly attractive due its constant motion: the river represents the “abyss”, the possibility of suicide, the power both of demonic and creative qualities. The bridge is in the closest position to the abyss and represents the state of balancing between life and death, human and demonic, reality and oblivion. The following scene appears to be exemplary in this regard.

Дул ветер, внизу под мостом темная вода завивалась водоворотами. «Какое здесь сильное течение», - подумала Маруся. Она шла и смотрела в лица прохожих, а они были мрачные и угрюмые. Внезапно всё представилось ей как бы застывшим и черным. Она вспомнила, как давно в феврале шел мокрый снег, и она стояла на мосту и смотрела в чёрную воду. Вокруг летели огромные хлопья и падали на лица, на пальто. Она долго стояла и смотрела на воду, и какое-то странное тяжелое чувство вошло в неё тогда [...].

The wind was blowing; the dark water was whirling vortexes under the bridge. “What a strong current it is here” – Marusia thought to herself. She was walking and looking into people’s faces, but they were sullen and dull. Suddenly, she saw everything as if frozen and black. She remembered how long ago, in February, it was also snowing, and she was standing on the bridge and looking into the dark water. Huge damp snowflakes were flying around and falling on faces and coats. She stood there for a long time and watched at the water, and some strange heavy feeling penetrated her that night [...]. (Klimova, 1999, p. 108)

The two opposed powers – human and elemental - are depicted as two flows running perpendicularly: the water flow under the bridge, and the flow of people on it. The protagonist is crossing the bridge lost among the crowd, but unlike Bely’s characters, who kept being devoured and taken away by the human flow, it takes an effort to stay

inside. She already saw the river and realized its elemental power (she notes to herself that the current is strong) that attracts her. But, as if for the last time before stepping into the abyss, she turns to people: she looks “into” (not “at”) people’s faces, trying to find a response, build connection with them, as if hoping for a safety rope that would drag her out the dark whirlpools. But the sullenness of the faces only alienates her. And then, suddenly, the abyss covers her: everything turns “stiff and black”. What happens next is presented as a flashback; however it appears to be a vision open to many interpretations. “Long ago in February” may refer to any particular moment in the history of the city – too classic is the description of the darkest and the nastiest month in the northern capital. It may as well not refer to any particular time, but be an abstract and eternal reproduction of the Petersburg hero lost in the whirlpool of February darkness, snow and water, somewhere between the earth and the sky, looking into the abyss and merging with it as it “penetrates” him/her filling the soul with something “strange” and “heavy”.

Death, which is identical with the infinite darkness in Marusia’s perception, is promising freedom and something “which is above it all”. The longing for this higher (or deeper) meaning of life is what attracts her in it.

[...] Все застыло в неподвижности...Ведь, кроме этого, есть и еще что-то...Но что? И где оно?

[...] Everything is frozen and immobile...But besides this, there is something else...But what? And where is it? (Klimova, 1999, p. 108)

Let’s compare it to the extract from Gippius’s poem *Песня (Pesnia/Song)*, 1983):

*Увы, в печали безумной я умираю,
Я умираю,
Стремлюсь к тому, чего я не знаю,
Не знаю...*

*И это желание не знаю откуда,
Пришло откуда,
Но сердце хочет и просит чуда,
Чуда!*

Alas, in sorrow **insane** I am dying,
I am dying,
I am striving for, what I don’t know,
I don’t know.
And this desire **I don’t know from where,**
Came from where,

But the heart asks for and wills a miracle,
A miracle! (Gippius translated by Milkova, 2002, p. 7)

The perception of life as a journey towards death increases the anxiety over the limited lifetime: will there be enough time to solve all the mysteries and find *то, чего нет на свете*? The inexorable flow of time seems to be visible and physically palpable to the heroine:

И серые тучи на сером небе... И красная секундная стрелка мелкими щелчками продвигается вперед по циферблату ровно и монотонно... Она похрустывает и поскрипывает [...].

And the grey clouds on the grey sky... And a read second hand moves around the clock evenly and monotonously, by small clicks...It grinds and crackles [...]. (Klimova, 1999, p. 108)

The color combination of red and black suggests the devil's agency in counting the duration of a human life by moments, as it refers us to another instance of insanity – Kostia's delirious visions:

Красное на сером – дьявольское сочетание... «Тот неяркий пурпурово-серый...» [...]. Часто иногда бывает темно в глазах или перед глазами эта темнота приходит извне [...].

Red on grey - devilish combination...“That pale, greyish-purple...” [...]. Often sometimes it gets dark in the eyes or before the eyes this darkness comes from out there [...]. (Klimova, 1999, p. 98)

The allusion to Blok's poem *К Музе* (1912) (*To the Muse*, translated by D. Obolensky in 1965) suggests that the hellish power is also in charge of the creative force, with which the poet can be endowed only in exchange for his/her surrender to the darkness, according to the Dionysian myth that fascinated the minds of Russian poets in the late 19th century (Merezhkovsky, Blok, Bely). As many of them, gradually Marusia learns to enjoy playing with eternity.

Иногда...Маруся погружалась в какое-то особое темное пространство, причем чем дальше она продвигалась вглубь, тем темнее и темнее становилось, и постепенно уже нечем было дышать, и оставалось только срочно выскакивать обратно на свет – а вдруг не успеешь? В таких состояниях Маруся иногда ловила кайф, и постепенно привыкала к этому так, что они стали ей необходимы как наркотик. Она чисто бессознательно вызывала в себе эти ощущения. Возможно это был путь к безумию, у каждого он свой.

Sometimes [...] Marusia would sink into some special dark space, and the deeper she sank, the darker it was there, and soon she felt like she could not breathe, and she had to jump out of it back to the light as soon as possible – but what if it's too late? Marusia would sometimes feel euphoria in such states, and gradually she got addicted to them, she needed it like a drug. She would evoke these sensations in herself absolutely unconsciously. Maybe it was a way to insanity, everyone has their own. (Klimova, 1998, p. 69)

As Marusia abandons the microcosm she was accustomed to and moves to Paris, the negative sides of her insanity aggravate. As if out of the number of emotional states that she was able to experience in Saint Petersburg, only one – the most powerful and most poisonous is left.

Утром она проснулась и с первой же сознательной мыслью, с первым же взглядом вокруг к ней вернулось отвращение, которое стало как бы частью её самой, которое поселилось в ней и уже не собиралось никуда уходить...и она с ужасом поняла, что скоро будет не в состоянии вообще дышать, тогда для жизни места не останется, и будет лишь одно огромное отвращение.

She he woke up in the morning and, with the first flash of consciousness, with the very first glance, the disgust returned to her, the aversion which has already become a part of her, which settled down in her mind and did not want to leave...and she felt terrified as she realized that soon she will not be able to breathe, and there won't be space for life in her, for all the will be left is one huge feeling of disgust.

[...] она чувствовала, как подступает безумие, черная бездна, страшное пространство без дна, куда можно падать и падать, безо всякой надежды вернуться назад [...].

[...] she felt the insanity approaching her, a dark abyss, a terrifying bottomless space, and she could keep falling down it endlessly, without any hope to get back [...]. (Klimova, 1998, p. 48)

[...] Она наконец-то подошла к последней границе в своих мыслях о самоубийстве и словно встала, покачнувшись на самом краю крыши.

[...] Finally, she approached the last line in her suicidal thoughts: she as if was standing on the very edge of the roof, swaying. (Klimova, 1998, p. 145)

In Paris, the game-like quality of her state vanishes. Her aesthetic delirium turns into real fears and hallucinations. Her creative melancholia transforms into a serious lingering depression. Her bohemian marginality “by principle” becomes reduced into somewhat quite trivial: she now belongs to a legitimately marginal group of Russian

émigrés. Without home, work, or friends she “practically was in one category with homeless people and prostitutes”. (Klimova, 1998, p. 149)

Having lost her cultural orientation, she tries to establish it anew. She starts with restoring her Petersburg behavioral patterns and sets off on long journeys around the city: she wanders along the Parisian streets where “life went on day and night”, sits on the Seine’s embankments “reeking with urine” in the company of clochards and idle young people, spends hours with a book at the top of the Centre Pompidou reading and looking down on the square full of street artists. As opposed to Petersburg, Paris abounds in bright colors: variegated decorations of the Center, pink flocks of candy floss, lights of the river trams, and fireworks on the 14th of July over the bridge covered with verdure. (Klimova, 1998, p. 67-69, 94-95) Nevertheless, every site takes her back to a similar location in Petersburg, as she is trying to restore the sensations of the past. At The Pompidou center, she remembers the nights spent at the Public Library (today – The National Library of Russia) sitting at the table by the window, where the view of Nevsky Prospekt and Gostiny Dvor behind the veil of darkness and snow would place her mind “in complete oblivion”. In this state she could “leave the shell of her body behind, at the table” and “float over the city, over this low grey sky and watch[ed] it from above”. Just for a moment she could “acquire relative freedom”. (Klimova, 1998, p. 69) By Christmas, memories would suddenly attack her with a strange nostalgic mixture, in which all sensations – views, smells, tastes, and touch - are merged together in one feeling of mystery, holiday and home. In this mixture she would see the snow-bounded Nevsky and the Neva and feel the prickly snowflakes on her cheeks and the “screech” of the wind; she would smell tangerines and hear the rustling of candy covers; she would remember every detail of the tree decorations; and through “the mist of childhood memories” she would see the portrait of Blok, “which have been hanging there, on the wall in her room, for a long time.” Blok’s blue eyes, The Christmas tree, Ded Moroz made out of foil, his long cotton wool beard, and again – Blok, who was for Marusia “the embodiment of both Christmas and Petersburg” – all blended in a kaleidoscope of memories.

[...] и это рождало в ней именно то ощущение, которое она снова пыталась воскресить здесь, в Париже, и которое как будто умирало в ней, как будто уходило в какую-то унылую желтую вату [...].

[...] and it gave her this exact feeling, which she tried to resurrect here in Paris, and which was slowly dying in her, as if sinking into some dull yellow cotton [...]. (Klimova, 1998, p. 119)

It is in Paris, in a shabby house lost in the Pigeon Forest (Bois-Colombes translated from French), where the most classical sceneries of Northern Venice rise in her imagination.

[...] в этом сне, где высокое небо и серые тучи над медленной тяжелой рекой, и серый холодный гранит, и четкие плавные линии, и их завершенность и чистота – всё это сон [...].

[...] in this dream, where the sky is high above, and grey clouds are [floating] over the slow heavy river, and the granite is cold and grey, and the lines are precise and smooth, and complete and clear they are – everything is a dream [...]. (Klimova, 1998, p. 9)

Nothing is left from the littered city with its shabby walls and red hostile faces: what remained are the reference points, archetypes and symbols, showing the heroine her way back. Finally, Marusia falls in a deep delusion, losing her orientation not only in regard to Petersburg, but to the time and space in general. Everything that surrounds her - the dream of the city, the small “coffin-like” room - seems to be a part of some “other life”, as if all of it “has already happened”, and not only once. (Klimova, 1998, p. 9-10)

Only upon her return to Petersburg, does she come to the harmony with herself. The notorious St. Isaac’s cathedral is rehabilitated as it becomes one of the main cultural and emotional “landmarks” that allows her to be safely invisible but not lost on her wanderings around the city:

[...] где бы она ни была, она везде видела купол Исаакиевского собора.... Она была уверена, что она у себя дома, и знает здесь каждый угол, каждый проходной двор, каждую подворотню, так что в случае чего, всегда сумеет спрятаться [...].

[...] and wherever she was, she could see the dome of the Isaac’s cathedral [...] And she knew for sure that she was at home, and knew every corner, every courtyard, every arch, and, just in case, she would always be able to hide [...]. (Klimova, 2001, p. 27)

While Marusia’s Petersburg microcosm is largely predetermined by her decadent perception and consists of states and emotions, Kostia’s microcosm of insanity is based on ideas. Obsessed with the works of Berdyaev and Rozanov, Kostia sees the city as a conglomeration of “secret signs” that support his delirious interpretations of the latter.

For instance he sees the “devil’s sign” in the shape of the crosses on the Vladimir Cathedral - “as if cut roughly with blunt scissors”. A mosaic portrait of Mayakovsky at the metro station Mayakovskaya appears to him as “a huge red icon”, which urges him to kneel down and cross himself. (Klimova, 1999, p. 98) In his little universe everything – Devil, Christ, Blok’s blue coat, Bely’s silver dove, and Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* – all is mixed up. Looking for or hiding from his Fair-Haired Devil (*Белокурая Бестия*) in the cemeteries he performs rituals that make sense to him alone: he walks around Saint Ksenia chapel at Smolensk cemetery (Klimova, 1999, p. 70-71) and changes a black coat into a blue cloak at the Volkovskoye. (Klimova, 1999, p. 78) Finally, he finds himself in the unsolvable labyrinth of symbols and ideas, which merge into each other reflected in the mirror walls of it. Among them, he cannot find his own reflection. (Klimova, 1999, p. 116)

In the nature of Grisha’s insanity salient are the motifs from Bely’s *Petersburg*. As his paranoiac fear of KGB surveillance exhausts his mind, his imagination comes up with a quite exotic, but constructive delusion – the patronage of a UFO. Just as the idea of ideally symmetrical city in the head of Apollon Apollonovich originated from one “spot”, the UFO fantasy starts with a “glowing spot” that Grisha *suddenly* encounters walking along Nevsky Prospekt.

Точка стала расти, расти, приближаться, и вдруг прямо перед Гришей появился человек, абсолютно лысый, с очень пронизательными глазами... Гриша точно не мог объяснить в чем заключалась его необычность, и только повторял: «Глаза его горели неземным огнем» [...].

The spot started growing, went bigger, closer, and suddenly a man appeared right before Grisha, he was absolutely bold, with very shrewd eyes... Grisha could not explain what was so special about him and only kept saying: “Unearthly fire was burning in his eyes” [...]. (Klimova, 1999, p. 109-110)

Compare to the “evil squinted eyes” which “dilated, lit up, and flashed!” in Bely’s *Petersburg*. (Bugaev (Bely), 1978, p. 13)

Grisha’s patrons from other planet turn out to be leading double game and make him disappear in the sea as he sails the ship following their instructions.

Generally, the characters of the trilogy tend to lose control over their ideas and visions so that they fully absorb them and make them disappear from the actual reality. Only Marusia herself manages to step away from the edge and turn into “homo

busience”⁹ (*человек крутящийся*, Bondarenko), who may stay at the margin of the society and common morale, but is also able to promote and defend its art in the world.

How do both Marusia Klimova, the character, and Marusia Klimova, the writer, manage to stay afloat in the stormy waters of the 1990s, overcoming poverty, depression, insanity and marginality? We suggest that her secret is that along with the melancholia of the Decadence she inherited and artfully developed another tradition of the 20th century *fin de siècle* – life creation or *zhiznetvorchestvo* (*жизнетворчество*). In the introduction to the book *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (1994) Irina Paperno asks a question: “Is the case of *zhiznetvorchestvo* closed?” (p. 3) The example of Marusia Klimova/Tatiana Kondratovich convinces us that it remains open not only for literary research, but for contemporary Russian literature itself. The contemporary definition of *zhiznetvorchestvo* as “aesthetic organization of behavior” leaves no doubt about Tatiana Kondratovich’s affiliation with this phenomenon. (Paperno, 1994, p. 3) However, if we regard it in its original, characteristic of the Russian Modernism form, namely, as “associated with highly publicized episodes from the artists’ private lives that acquired the status of significant cultural events”, it becomes problematic to state the same. (p. 2) Indeed, what do we know of Tatiana Kondratovich’s private life, besides the fact that she is happily married to Viacheslav Kondratovich (who has been her boyfriend since the college times, her main reviewer and her philosophical guru as of today), she has no children, lives in Petersburg (but used to live in France), works as a translator, writes books, hosts festivals... However, this appears to be a slide into a discussion of her public life. Indeed, Tatiana Kondratovich is hard to expose as an eccentric trouble maker à la Oscar Wilde, or at least Andrey Bely. Apart from her writing, she is not known for spontaneous misconduct (despite a shoplifting case described in a recent entry of her blog) or non-traditional sexual behaviour – some critics warily explore the possibility of her bisexuality. (Zagurskaia, 2007, p. 190)

Searching for analogies in the realm of 20th century life creation, we can suggest Zinaida Gippius as her predecessor. The structure of Tatiana’s family and milieu resembles that of the Merezhkovskys. Her husband, a prominent philosopher and an

⁹ A term in English is my translation of a neologism Bondarenko came up with in Russian.

erudite, plays a role of a generator of ideas and a spiritual leader of the small artistic society that includes such people as Timur Novikov (an artist and the establisher of The New Academy of Arts), Dmitry Volchek (a translator and a writer), Yaroslav Mogutin (artist, writer, lives in New York), etc. Although Viacheslav takes active participation in Tatiana's image creation (for instance, takes part in picking a pseudonym), he can not be called her co-author, neither does he qualify as a writer. A childless marriage it seems to be productive, given Tatiana's literary works and artistic projects, which is reminiscent of Zinaida Gippius treating her letters and diaries as children. Like Gippius, supposedly inferior in respect of education and artistic awareness, Marusia clearly surpasses her husband in her ability to reflect life on paper; she gains fame as a writer and becomes a representative of her family (or creative unit) on the market of artistic trends. Reminiscent of the 20th century "queen of Decadence" are the hints of androgyny, if we are to take her novels as biographical, fascination with homosexual men, and her own asexuality.

In its contemporary sense, Marusia's life creation strategy consists in using the protagonist of her books as her public persona. Anna Uliura, in her article *Литературная стратегия и писательский имидж Маруси Климовой* (2007) defines it as the "author's strategy". (p. 179) She speaks about the "simulative" function of her pseudonym and character, describing it as 1) a means of acquiring the freedom of statement 2) a means of "marking" the target reader. (p. 180-182) The topos "if not of a holy fool then of an idiot" (*если не юродивой, то идиотки*, p. 180) gives Marusia "the ability to break through the shroud of literary equivocations and political correctness and say what seems reasonable in a blunt, straightforward manner." The perfect example of it would be her constant opposition to Pushkin's status of a literary idol, her furious resentment towards even acknowledging him a talented poet. The "idiot" Marusia can afford to claim with the spite and insolence of a high-schooler: "*И Пушкин их мне тоже не интересен!*" ("And **their** Pushkin is not interesting to me at all!"). (Klimova, 2004, p. 12). She can keep calling him "a philistine that managed to convince the crowd of his greatness" (p. 19), blaming him of the absence of "some secret vice, which would cause him real agonizing shame and would be so hard, almost impossible to confess". Such a secret should be this luring mystery that in Marusia's opinion is the "mark of a

real/proper poet”. (Klimova, 2004, p. 14-15) “**Their** Pushkin” in this regard appears to be too simple, too “known”, too primitive to her, so that she would even prefer Dantès. The latter, proclaimed to be her “most favorite hero of all Russian literature, who was at least silent (“even if only because he did not speak Russian”), and “silence is a sign of wholesomeness/completeness.” (Klimova, 2004, p. 17) In addition, she offers to start the list of Russian “great poets” with Lermontov, and his angry and daring “How often surrounded by a motley crowd...” (*Как часто пестрою толпою окружён...*, 1840). To crown it all, “idiot and marginal” (*идиотка и маргиналка*) Marusia went in her mischief as far as publishing a scandalous “pseudo-literary” zine *Dantès* devoted to the Pushkin’s bicentenary and opposed to the official celebrations. The style and the objects of her “avant-garde irony” seemed hardly digestible to anyone. Although the question of poetic superiority of Lermontov over Pushkin has been offered in Russian philology long ago, and the overkill of “vulgar and standard” anniversary laudations has been noted by many among intelligentsia (*Новый Мир Искусства*), neither has seen so much discussion in all levels of society as after the sabotage of the “idiot” Marusia.

Considering the above mentioned, we can suggest that Tatiana Kondratovich had many opportunities to appreciate the “discursive freedom” that Marusia Klimova offered and is fully aware of it when she laments as follows in her *My history of Russian Literature* (2004):

[...] напрасно я стала писательницей [...] read – “invented Marusia Klimova”], теперь в результате все меня считают за полную идиотку. А ведь я вполне могла бы стать ученым, филологом, защитить диссертацию и даже сделать научное открытие.

[...] it is all in vain that I became a writer. It only resulted in everybody thinking of me as of complete idiot. And I could have become a scholar, a philologist, I could have defended a dissertation and even make an academic discovery. (p. 12)

Behind this theatrical pose there is a clear understanding that the philologist Tatiana Kondratovich would never dare to call “*Я помню чудное мгновение...*” (“I remember a wondrous moment...”, 1825) “plain nonsense” that does not contain “a single gram/ounce of poetry” in it. (p. 14) Such a claim would require a comprehensive comparative research followed by lengthy debates with the opponents in academia. Meanwhile Marusia Klimova easily publishes a whole book practically consisting of the similar statements; in this book one is more likely to find minor factual mistakes than

pages of references and citations. Although many critics see her anti-Pushkin creations as mere “amusement for underground pseudo-intellectuals” (“псевдоинтеллектуальные развлечения андеграунда”, New World of Art), “free-and-easy gibing” (“разухабистый стёб”), and “deliberately simple-minded taunting ditties” (“деланно-простодушные дразнилки”, Latynina, 2005), some of them manage to distinguish the actual target of her attacks. For Olga Serebrianaia (2005), for instance, it is obvious that the attacks are directed not at the poet Pushkin, but at the heavy and quite “man-made” (*рукотворный*) monument to **their** Pushkin.

При этом «мой Пушкин» любого из них (как, например, «Мой Пушкин» Цветаевой) может оказаться самым что ни на есть дельным литератором, замечательным стихотворцем и приятнейшим компаньоном во время неспешных вдумчивых прогулок. Проблема лишь в том, что «своего Пушкина» у большинства людей просто нет. Есть только Гений, и с этим либо приходится бороться, либо признавать собственную неадекватность перед лицом этого мира.

Meanwhile, “my Pushkin” of each of them (as for example Tsvetayeva’s Pushkin) may be quite a professional writer, an author of wonderful verses, and the most delightful companion during the long and thoughtful promenades. The only problem is that the majority of people simply don’t have “my Pushkin”. All they have is the great Pushkin, a genius, which one can either struggle with, or accept their own inadequacy in the face of this world.

To distinguish this message Olga Serebrianaia had to be one of “ours” (*своим человеком*), who, behind “the face of a saleswoman from a convenience store” (Latynina), saw a sly grin of an educated reader. It seems that there are few “initiated”, who react to the second property of Marusia’s pseudonym and literary image. They, as Anna Uliura (2007) puts it, are able to recognize in it “carnivalized Other” (*карнивализованного Другого*) that “marks a potential recipient as belonging to a certain social (intellectual) group”. (p. 180) The name of Marusia Klimova applied to a qualified philosopher and a translator from French sounds as absurd as her statement that Dantès is “a character of Russian literature”. This absurdity neutralizes the flavor of elitism that accompanies the figure of Kondratovich and originates in her queer literary tastes as well as the unique specialization of her translation work. Reducing her image to Marusia Klimova and her writings to *steb* (“gibing”), Kondratovich launches her product into the “masses”, thus informing them of their ability of agency, their possibility to make their own cultural choice. In other words, she claims that every saleswoman at the

convenience store can have her own opinion about Pushkin's poetry, other than that officially proclaimed. This mass character (*массовость*) as opposed to both academic and marginal elitism *and* Soviet-like officialism (*официоз*) requires new language and stylistics, which Kondratovich finds in the obscenity and the mythology of Decadence. Trying to inscribe this author's strategy in post-modernist context, Anna Uliura concludes as follows:

[...] сверхзадачей при подобном положении вещей становится маркирование «декаданса» как китча, «грязи» как стиля, «модернизма» как отрицания постмодернизма, «маргинальности» как актуальности – то есть фактически создание некоего канона дурного вкуса (или обозначение дурного вкуса как канона).

[...] in this case the underlying objective appears as marking “Decadence” as kitsch, “filth” as style, “modernism” as the negation of postmodernism, “marginality” as actuality – practically the creation of some sort of canon of the bad taste (or defining bad taste as a canon). (p. 182)

It is interesting to observe, how Tatiana Kondratovich employs Decadent mythology on other levels in building her “writer's image” (*писательский имидж*). For instance, her and her husband's interpretation of such a decadent phenomenon as “dandyism” (*дендизм*) is particularly worthy of attention. The defining element of dandyism, according to Viacheslav Kondratovich, is a touch of “necessary negligence” in everything – clothes, appearance, convictions and beliefs, speech, writing, position in a current cultural context, etc.

Именно эта небрежность, позволяющая денди разомкнуть "вечно замкнутый круг", является жестом его презрения к смешному совершенству "слишком человеческого" мирка, его скрытого признания собственной ограниченности, и, тем самым, знаком его открытости большему, тоски по подлинному, но недостижимому совершенству.

It is this negligence that allows a dandy to break through the “eternal vicious circle”, in it there is a gesture demonstrating his contempt to the ridiculous perfectionism of the “too human” petty world, his covert acceptance of his/her own limits, and thus, a sign of his/her openness to the more, to the above, his/her longing for the true, but unreachable perfection. (Kondratovich, 1999)

Kondratovich ascribes the mosaic, scattered and loose character of academic knowledge of the great minds of the 19th century to a sort of cultural dandyism. He feels nostalgic for it and opposes it to the standardized, strictly structured and carefully registered cultural knowledge of today, which he associates with the philistine desire to

look “no worse than others”. In other words, dandyism is interpreted as freedom, while perfectionism is seen as a sign of enslavement (of an artist by the theorists, for example).

According to the distribution of roles in the family of the Kondratoviches, Tatiana (in her literary persona of Marusia Klimova of course) takes the idea of her husband to practical level and, capitalizing on her status of a woman-writer and her image of an idiot, develops the “necessary negligence” into some sort of ingenious giddiness (*невинная взбалмошность*). For example, her reluctance to present her iconoclastic ideas (e.g. regarding the debunking of Puskin’s image) in a form of an academic research are explained by nothing else but her own laziness: she said what she felt like saying – further nuances are for those “who are at least paid for doing that”, i.e. for the contemptible theorists and narrow specialists – “adults”.

Я считаю, если долго употреблять какое-либо слово, то взрослые люди в конце концов сами разберутся, что ты имеешь в виду.

I think if you use some word long enough the grown-ups will eventually figure out what you mean. (Klimova, 2004, p. 19)

Dandyism and “idiotism” combined make it possible for Marusia Klimova to be as inconsistent in her opinions as she is. She can claim aversion for Pushkin’s poetry and use one of his lesser known poems, *Домик в Коломне* (*The Little House in Kolomna*, 1830) as an epigraph and the main literary metaphor (intertextual basis) for her book *Домик в Буа-Коломб* (*The House in Bois-Colombes*, 1998), thus demonstrating broad knowledge and deep understanding of the poetical value of Pushkin’s work. She claims that she “doesn’t believe in feminism, for it is all in theory and in practice women are envy and hate each other ferociously” (Klimova, 2004, p. 18), and initiates discussions about “the position of women in contemporary culture” on the radio *Свобода* (1999) (n.b. most articles devoted to her books I found in the journal “Gender Research”). She is known as a friend and a patroness of sexual minorities, however, in her book *Голубая кровь* (*Blue Blood*, 1996) she depicts the gay and transvestite Pavlik as the most cynical and mean-spirited person at the same time practically calling him the new “hero of our time”. She ridicules the artistic life of Petersburg of 1990s, remaining one of the most active participants of it and a friend to many figures that she provides bitter parodies of in her books.

However, this inconsistency is being cherished and maintained as a part of her image quite consistently. In this regard Marusia Klimova cannot be reproached in dividing art from life, which was one of her main arguments against Pushkin and such. In her life, as well as in her writings and publicity she has never been exposed as a normal (orthodox) person (positively reacting at the majority of truisms). She also claims that all her books are autobiographical, which is easy to confirm. Meanwhile, her blog entries, radio interviews, essays (including her *Моя история русской литературы*, 2004 and *Моя теория литературы*, 2004), and biographical/memoirist accounts (*Парижские встречи*, 2009) are featuring the distinct voice of Marusia Klimova, not Tatiana Kondratovich (and signed accordingly).

Thus, Kondratovich/Klimova's life creation strategies dovetail well with the "new type of artistic behavior" defined by Anna Uliura as "shifting the accent/emphasis from the production of the art pieces (art works) towards, so to say, the production and reproduction of the reputations and canons." (p. 186) What made her "a successful image-maker" was her strategy of developing her reputation within the concept of Decadence as she became its inspired promoter. It resulted in the reinvention of the whole mythology of Decadence and its development into the new forms and stylistics that today include the elements of glamour, gothic and punk culture, and are associated with underground artistic activity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In our research we analyzed the books by three different writers, all of them written in or about the 1990s in Russia. The works of these writers may be considered to be the so called “middle brow” literature; in some respects they belong to marginal literature of the time. However, according to J. Buckler, this type of literature often contains the invaluable cultural and sociological information about the time and place it was written in, as it reflects the immediate reality.

Let us see what image of Saint Petersburg of the 1990s we received from analyzing these works. We saw Petersburg as a criminal capital of Russia, the “shadow” processes of black marketeering, prostitution, plundering gaining their pace in the 1970s-1980s, as it is described in Veller’s *The Legends of Nevsky Prospekt*. We saw how these processes went out of control in the years of *bespredel*, when the city fell under the yoke of criminal structures that operated and lived in their own “city in the city”. The slums described by Dostoyevsky and Krestovsky persisted through the change from Imperial to communist regime; they only grew in scale and became much more aggressive. We had the chance to compare the lifestyle of the Soviet artistic elite partying at the top of Evropeiskaia Hotel (Grand Hotel Europe) as depicted in Veller’s account to the aimless wandering and miserable vegetation of the Petersburg underground “bohemia” as they get by from potboiler to potboiler making the mental hospitals a regular stop in their routes, like it is in Marusia Klimova’s books. We saw how the common people are losing their reference points regarding the moral norms, state ideology and art, and sink into *poshlost*, gradually approaching one or the other margin until they join one of the marginal group, for in Petersburg of the 1990s everyone is marginal in relation to each other. It appears that for anyone who still has the potential to break through this dynamic stagnation, if we can call it so, the only way out is immigration.

In this regard, the city remains the only available orientation, the substance that does not change through ages. Its landmarks and guidelines are still there. Nevsky Prospekt retains its significance as the center of the city’s manifold life and the attraction for people from all possible strata. It remains the meeting point for the citizens of

Petersburg. Here they bring their hopes, emotions, experiences, and stories. Here they seek and hide. The statues and monuments of the city are also rather landmarks than mysterious embodiments of the human will, which has completely given up its agency to history and chance. The gaze of a Petersburg artist is still directed above, to the domes of its cathedrals, and strives to reach the point of overlooking the city from its heights, to access the panoramic “bird’s eye view”. The former outskirts – *okrainy* – the industrial territory around the Okhta river is now the setting for the city’s busy life, also becoming a residence for the common people and the former slum dwellers, as if reserving the downtown exclusively for walking, and farming it out to the Westerners and their fancy projects, and the show-off actions of the rich Russians, which all, in fact, pass unnoticed by them. The cemeteries are the growing attraction for both the city dwellers and its historians. Surprisingly, it is the cemeteries that are perceived by them as the centers of spiritual activity, not the city’s numerous cathedrals and churches. The Smolensk Cemetery is representative of the idea as the characters of both *Banditskii Peterburg* and Klimova’s novels turn to it seeking to rejoin with the ancestors in blood (as in Sergey’s case) or in philosophical development (as in Kostya’s case). It seems that in doing so they strive to restore the broken time line and find their place in the history.

The literary works chosen for the analysis also present the variety of genres, which are sometimes hard to determine without acknowledging the influence of the other forms of narration: folklore, journalistic writing, and diary writing. It seems that all three authors are questioning the ability of the novel, which was the predominate form in the literature of the 19th century, to convey the dynamics and variety of experiences of the time (the 1990s). However, the short forms of narration do not offer enough space for creating the more or less comprehensive picture of it. Therefore, there seems to be a tendency to produce a series of the sort form pieces of writing with one plot line and united under the frame of the novel. Each of the writers offers their own way to do so.

Mikhail Veller resorts to the urban folklore that was created and passed down from generation to generation over the decades of the Soviet rule. He registers these scattered pieces of the oral narration and preserves them in the form of Gogolian humorous life sketches, while connecting them through the legendary locus of Peterburg - Nevsky Prospekt – and threads them on a string of nostalgia.

Andrei Konstantinov presents his journalistic investigation to us in a form of a criminal drama peppered by the Hollywood special effect of a *boevik* and purely Petersburg mysticism.

Marusia Klimova draws a picture of her postmodernist perception of the world as a myriad of fragmented experiences and remnants of the outdated cultures and morals. As her representation of the reality inclines towards extreme individualism, subjectivity, and reject of the common morale, she resorts to the mythology of Decadence and the strategies of dandyism and self-creation, which allow her to connect and unite her frustrating experiences and her aspiration of protest based of her active creativity under the common concept of this movement.

In all three cases, the city, or better yet its literary image, appears, not a protagonists, but a historiosophical ideal regarding which the characters estimate the significance of their lives. The idea of Petersburg as a special microcosm of time and space helps them to localize their impression and experiences, which is only possible when they distance themselves from the heat of the present moment.

As we can see the mythology and symbolic potential of the city is able to accommodate every creative purpose and remains the inexhaustible source of artistic expression. The authors continue to capitalize on its traditional myths and images, reinventing them again and again in every new contemporary reality.

It is obvious that each of the literary works analyzed here require further study and may offer interesting discoveries in terms of their genre, intertextual structure, historical background, and more. From the angle of their affiliation with Petersburg text, it might be quite helpful to conduct a detailed comparative analysis of their text against the most emblematic Petersburg texts by the classic writers of the 19th century. In this regard, Veller's account could be compared to *Nevsky Prospekt* by Gogol', Konstantinov's work – to the novels by Dostoyevsky and Krestovsky, and Marusia Klimova's trilogy – to Dostoyevsky's, Sologub's and Bely's works, as well as to the self-creation practiced by Zinaida Gippius and Symbolists. As for the present research, it was aimed at presenting an overview of the main tendencies and topics of the literature of the 1990s in their connection to the Petersburg text and was conducted accordingly.

APPENDIX
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