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Liudmila Petrushevskaja: How the "Lost People" Live

Playwright Liudmila Petrushevskaja talks of the days in the not so distant past when she lived in a two-room apartment with her husband, Boris, and their three children: "I sat in the bathroom, up on the washing machine, my legs hanging over into the bathtub, and wrote. It was the only place I had to myself; it was my 'Time-Out.'" Petrushevskaja's description of that period of her life makes the Western woman's familiar call for a room of her own seem hopelessly extravagant. Through sheer persistence, Petrushevskaja has managed to ignore this and other obstacles to her work: directors' unease, censors' disapproval, critics' indifference. Gradually, things began to change.

Whereas even two years ago she was a little-known writer, Petrushevskaja now has plays staged at three Moscow theatres: Love, a one-act play, is staged together with one-act plays by Volodin and Zlotnikov at the Taganka Theatre; her two-act play, Three Girls in Blue, opened last spring at the Lenin Komsomol Theatre; and a series of four one-act plays (Love, The Stairwell, and two new, unpublished works "Andante" and "Colombine's Apartment") under the common title of her comedia del arte spoof, "Colombine's Apartment," premiered after many delays on February 2nd, 1986 at the Contemporary Theatre. In addition, two of her plays for children, A Suitcase of Nonsense and Two Windows, have been accepted for production at the Lenin Komsomol Theatre.

After years of critical neglect or dismissal, Petrushevskaja's work is examined in the December issues of three major journals: New World, Theatre, and Contemporary Drama.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the efforts of Alma Law and other interested specialists, her work has begun to gain notice in the United States as well. In the past two years, four of Petrushevskaja's plays have been staged in the United States, including<sup>2</sup> at the University of Maine and the Eccentric Circles Theatre in New York.

At least as important as all these successes is another change in Petrushevskaja's status: with one child grown, this "kitchen dramatist," as her critics once dubbed her, now lives in a four-room apartment, including a room set aside for her work.

Petrushevskaja is a controversial writer, but not for reasons that are immediately evident to the Western reader. Her writing is not overtly political, nor does she herself have any interest in politics. Invited to contribute to

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the almanach Metropole,<sup>3</sup> she declined. Her plays, which have repeatedly been brought up through final rehearsals at such major theatres as the Ermolova and the New Dramatic Theatre, then cancelled, represent a different kind of challenge to social norms. Set in a contemporary urban environment, Petrushevskaja's plays depict characters who live at what, were the Soviet Union a country that acknowledged the existence of poverty, would be called the poverty line. Since Soviet society has no such officially recognized problem, the playwright's works constitute something of an enigma, one that could be characterized by a slight shift in punctuation: while most of the worst of Soviet literature depicts a "reality" that does not exist, Petrushevskaja's writings depict a reality that "does not exist."

This makes the task of producing her plays a complex one, and the task of reviewing them more complex still: the sympathetic critic cannot praise her in print for the realistic depiction of what cannot be acknowledged in print; the unsympathetic critic cannot castigate her for distorting a social reality that the critic knows to be accurate...cannot, but often does.<sup>4</sup>

I met with Liudmila Petrushevskaja in mid-October, and we spoke about her work, her life as a writer, and her place in contemporary Soviet literature. Our conversation, frequently broken off so that the playwright could take care of her then three-year-old daughter, Natasha, took place in the kitchen, an occasional setting, to do her critics some justice, of her plays.

A strong-minded woman with craggy, expressive features, Petrushevskaja is a writer with a dry sense of humor, a writer for whom the experiences of life and the content of her writing are closely connected. Much of her material in fact comes from stories, gossip, and anecdotes that circulate among her acquaintances and neighbors, giving rise to an oral tradition she refers to as urban folklore:

I have taken the kind of stories that you could recount to another person and it would catch his interest. And maybe that story itself reached me in the third or fourth version. It is...gossip, the foundation of present-day folklore, folklore within the confines of one apartment house, one institution, folklore you can tell in a bus to a completely unknown person and it would be absolutely fascinating to him.

There is a genre in Moscow that no one notices, and it has practically disappeared. It is called an "incident." In the past, children and old people used to tell each other "incidents"...That is real, pure folklore, and I preserve it, take care of it, and collect it as much as I can. I have a whole book I have collected called "Moscow Incidents": mysticism intertwined with reality, themes from the Middle Ages intertwined with themes from the last century, jokes with catastrophes...My acquaintances sometimes call me and tell me that they've

heard something. There is a small number of people who collect expressions and incidents for me. Because of my situation [two young children--NPC] I'm at home a great deal and don't get to hear much... and so sometimes the individual bits of "folklore" are known to me alone.\*

It is these "individual bits" that form the basis of Petrushevskaja's narratives. Her heroines are often plain women, psychologically dependent on men who mistreat them, burdened by expenses they cannot afford, and children for whom they cannot adequately care. These women are, in the playwright's words, "people who have gotten lost out in the world," alienated by circumstances, geography, or a history of family conflicts from older relatives who could alleviate their day-to-day difficulties. Irina, the heroine of Three Girls in Blue, must spend as much time tending to the needs of her querulous mother as she does to those of her five-year-old son, Pavlik. The nameless heroine of the dramatic monologue Nets and Traps must await the birth of her first child at the home of her tyrannical mother-in-law, rather than with her own mother, who lives in a distant city. Nina, heroine of Music Lessons, cares for her infant half-sister while her mother is wholly absorbed in a crumbling marriage to Nina's stepfather, a violent ex-convict. Galya, heroine of The Stairwell, attempts through one-time encounters with strangers, to conceive a child so as to placate her suicidal mother.

What these women have in common is their existence on the brink of catastrophe:

A woman who doesn't have a child, but could at any moment conceive one "from nowhere"; a woman carrying a child in her belly; a woman who has given birth to a child--along with the sick, the elderly, and children: these are the weakest and the most vulnerable moments in human life. A child alone on the street could perish; a woman with a child alone in a city apartment could perish; an old woman left alone could perish. I examine the lives of people who can perish.

Petrushevskaja typically catches her "lost" heroine at the very moment in her life when she is still trying to pull together all the traditional elements of happiness: a husband, a child, a good income, and a private place to live. The heroine's perpetual failure in this quest condemns her to duplicate her mother's social status: single parenthood, a tiny flat, and a miserable income. Petrushevskaja comments:

Earlier, a woman occupied a kind of serf status and lived with her family, either with her parents if she weren't married or with her husband if she were married. And if she were a widow, all the same, as nowadays in Central Asia, woman belonged to the home. She couldn't go out on the street alone, [and therefore] she couldn't be killed. They could kill her at home, but outsiders couldn't kill her. She was in some way protected...If she strictly observed the rules of a given society, she would remain alive. We have no rules...There is a moral code, but in that

\*This and subsequent quotations of Petrushevskaja are taken from our conversation of 15 October 1985.

moral code there is nothing written about how to survive as a woman alone.

In a society where feminism remains an alien concept ("I haven't seen many of them; in Russia there are almost no feminists," Petrushevskaja acknowledges), single women remain, for married women, an object of pity. In no small measure because of the economic and logistical difficulties of daily life, aloneness is equated on a material level with vulnerability, on a spiritual level with loneliness.

Love is the currency with which the heroine tries to purchase her way out of this loneliness. Her search for a "good man," by means of whom she could acquire the other tokens of happiness, is both naive and mercenary. It is, oddly, just these qualities that allow for her exploitation by lovers who are equally mercenary ("You should know your price, what sort you are," sneers Galia's potential lover in The Stairwell, "You're out of your league playing hard to get. Cute girls can play like that, but not your sort").

In return for the pretense of love, Petrushevskaja's male characters request anything from a casual affair (Three Girls in Blue) to a meal and some vodka (The Stairwell) to a phony marriage (Love), the quickest route to a Moscow resident permit. These goals, as the bridegroom Tolya in Love points out, are a lot less ephemeral:

'What is love after all? What's so good about it? What does it get you? Take your Kuznetsova--loved Kolia madly in return, married him, and now each one thinks the other's nuts (he makes a circular with his finger). And their child sits on the potty in the middle of the room and howls.'

Despite their loneliness, Petrushevskaja's heroines never have the luxury of being by themselves. Their loneliness is in fact magnified by the cramped, urban setting for her plays. The heroine of Music Lessons lives in two rooms with her mother, brother, infant sister, and, at times, her stepfather. By the play's second act, she lives in the neighbors' apartment as one of five people in two rooms. Vera Pavlovna, heroine of Come into the Kitchen, lives with her daughter in a one-room apartment, as does the mother Evgeniia Ivanovna in Love. Au, heroine of Petrushevskaja's unpublished play "Andante," comes home from the hospital to discover that her friend has moved in with her husband. Desperate, she finds illegal housing with three Beautiful People, a Moscow ménage à trois who relegate her to the bathroom.

The formal compactness of most of the plays--one act, one set, few actors, and the observance of the three unities--mirrors the sparse and cramped conditions in which the characters "live" (one critic argues that, given their conditions, Petrushevskaja's characters do not live at all, they

merely adjust to circumstances, be it a leaky roof, no indoor plumbing, or a shortage of medicine for an ailing child).

The plays' compactness is not only a formal restatement of a common theme. It is a conscious choice that has given the playwright in her early years--the mid-seventies--greater flexibility in getting her plays staged, whether by amateur theatre groups or by professional actors who donate their time for the opportunity of staging her work. It is testimony to Petrushevskaja's talent that a group of actors from the Moscow Art Theatre have been her unofficial troupe for almost a decade. As Petrushevskaja describes it:

Those actors for whom I wrote Music Lessons, they became my troupe, my theatre. It began around 1976 and lasted until very recently... It was a group of people at the head of which was Igor' Vasil'ev, the actor from the Moscow Art Theatre, and five or six people from the Moscow Art Theatre. They were people who used to go



Photo: Valerii Plotnikov  
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to my public talks...I used to say that it was an urban guerilla theatre, a theatre intended for rapid deployment at a specific location and rapid disappearance from that location. I wrote the short plays with one or two people especially for them.

Petrushevskaja's use of the term "guerilla theatre" as a description of these performances is not a casual one. Her unofficial Moscow Art troupe has been an important factor in building support for her work in the theatre establishment, unaccustomed to the troublesome themes she examines. The "iznanochnost" (hidden, ugly side) of adult relations--fictitious marriages, one-night stands, part-time prostitution to augment a miserable income--is deemed an unseemly topic for art, neither sufficiently typical to warrant depiction, nor sufficiently instructive to deserve the viewer's attention. Ira, for example, in Three Girls in Blue, explains to her current lover why it is good that he has a car:

'I had an acquaintance. Note: "had." We met once a week on Fridays. I had a regular standing appointment at his place. I'd call and he'd say, "As usual." Or else he'd say, "Sorry, not today. Let's get in touch next week." That's to say, once again I was supposed to do the calling. He had one advantage: he lived in a convenient location, right beside the metro. But every single time, I missed the last metro. I didn't earn enough for a taxi. At first I was embarrassed to ask him, and then I thought what the hell. What was I supposed to do? I asked him. And then it turned out--my price<sup>8</sup> was the same as the cost of a taxi. I was a taxi!'

To compound matters, throughout Petrushevskaja's writings runs a strain of black humor, sometimes outright morbidity. Galia's date for the evening in The Stairwell is a funeral musician, who promises to play for free if Galia's mother indeed commits suicide ("'We'll play everything. Chopin's March'"), or for anyone else who dies, provided it doesn't happen too frequently. In the unpublished one-act play "Cinzano," the lead character drinks away the money intended for his mother's burial, while her body lies unclaimed at the morgue. In the unpublished story "The Trial Begins," the heroine leaves her newborn, premature son on a cold windowsill to die. In her published work, morbid passages have been abbreviated or eliminated altogether. In the following passage from Love, the bridegroom Tol'ia reassures his bride Sveta that she was indeed wise not to buy second-hand, white shoes for the wedding at the local market:

'During the war, in my hometown at the end of the winter, the German cemetery started to thaw and cave in. Can you imagine? Winter, you know, they covered the bodies in a hurry with earth and that was that. And in the spring, it began to sink.

My friend grabbed off two red boots. One came out of the ground by itself, but the other he had to dig for, and in the most unexpected place, as if the torn-off leg had been put by the head, with the foot next to the face besides. (He laughs) And do you know what? He shook out the meat and bones, and traded the boots at the bazaar. He got plenty for them.'

This passage was cut from the play when it was originally published in the March, 1979 issue of Theatre, and therefore, of course, is cut from performances as well. It is small wonder that conservative critics, educated to believe the tenet that art should be an uplifting experience, react with repulsion. "You watch a play by Grekova, and her description of our hardships leave you with a sense of the nobility of life," one critic commented, "Petrushevskaja leaves you with a feeling of despair at the world." In response to such comments, Petrushevskaja is resigned, but philosophical:

It is not that my work contains unacceptable things. [The theatre establishment] is simply not used to me. It takes a long time to get used to me. A long time must go by, and maybe they will never get used to me. And maybe by the time they do, I'll have retired, or changed to a different kind of work, and new people will have come....

Behind this apparent placidity is the impatience of an author who began to write relatively late--in 1963 at age 25--and for whom recognition came slowly:

At age 29 I wrote my first real story. It was after a long series of unsuccessful works. I worked at the time at a journal, and used to stay after work every day and write, write, write, write. And when the year came to an end, we always displayed a humorous wall newspaper, "Who Accomplished What This Year?" And about me they wrote that I'd managed to break the letter "P" on the typewriter.

The year 1972 marked the transition from prose to drama. While Petrushevskaja still produces work in both genres, it was the opportunity to write a play for the Moscow Art Theatre that first interested her in drama. Her Music Lessons, commissioned by the Moscow Art Theatre, was, ironically, never staged by that theatre; nor have any of her other works been performed there, despite the<sup>10</sup> active interest on the part of Igor' Vasil'ev and other Moscow Art actors.

The opening of the four one-act plays, "Colombine's Apartment," at the Contemporary Theatre in early February has marked a high point in Petrushevskaja's permitted visibility. "You had better try to see the plays now," warned one

young woman outside the theatre, "They'll close it for sure in a few days." Asked if anyone really knew of Petrushevskaja, or whether they had just turned up to see whatever was showing that evening, the woman turned and gestured at the crowds trying to buy up spare tickets. "Look at them," she said, "This is unusual, even for Moscow. It's a pilgrimage. People are scrambling to get in!" Indeed they were, although some thought they had come to see "Colombine's Room" instead of "Colombine's Apartment." Others didn't know what they were trying to see; they had simply heard that it was worth seeing. As the maneuvering for spare tickets continued, cars rolled up to drop off the privileged, precisely the people parodied in Petrushevskaja's "Andante." Her "lost" heroines of Love and The Stairwell, however, would never have succeeded in getting tickets, even if they had known how to get to the Contemporary Theatre.

At age forty-eight, Petrushevskaja is one of a few women playwrights--Nina Sadur, Liudmila Razumovskaja, Nina Pavlova--whose work has received any recognition in this country. In addition to writing plays and short stories, Petrushevskaja works part time as a translator from Polish into Russian. She lives with her husband and their two younger children, Fedia, ten, and Natasha, now four, in a quiet northern section of Moscow on what one Moscow bookseller routinely refers to as "Petrushevskaja Street." The playwright's oldest child, Kirill, age twenty-two, is now married and has a daughter of his own.

The overriding impulse behind Petrushevskaja's writing is not the exploration of the current "burning" social issue, such as in Gel'man's plays, or experimentation with artistic form, but the recounting of "what has happened," a theatre based on the primacy of communication:

[The actors] and I had the idea of creating a completely new theatre, an absolutely new theatre, not the kind of new theatre that is new in form. Form comes by itself when you have something very important to say...A person doesn't choose a particular form in order to call up a friend and communicate what has happened to him. We, too, wanted to communicate precisely what has happened [emphasis by Petrushevskaja]...When I have something I need very much to communicate, I sit down and communicate it. I don't think about what I should have at the beginning or the end. When a person has something that should be communicated, everything is already sitting there ready in his head...And that is the kind of form that exists: the form of communication.

Precisely what Petrushevskaja communicates has been misunderstood by many of her critics. Because her characters are ordinary people in modest circumstances, Petrushevskaja has been misperceived by critics as a so-called bytopisatel', or author who writes about everyday life. Unsympathetic critics

characterize her writing not as bytopisanie (a descriptive term meaning "the writing about daily life") but as bytopisatel'stvo (a term of opprobrium meaning "the tendency to scribble about daily life").

In fact, Petrushevskaja vehemently asserts, she writes not about everyday life, but about its exceptions, the encounters of an ordinary person with events that mark a turning point in that daily existence. She denies any kinship of her work with that of the "Forty-Year-Olds," a group of Moscow writers who focus predominantly on descriptions of daily life,<sup>11</sup> and speaks of that school of writing with considerable acidity:

As for the Forty-Year-Olds, the so-called flow-of-life [writers], that phenomenon doesn't exist in my work... There is a certain Volodia Makanin, who, I sense, continues Trifonov's writing...but as for the rest of what belongs to the so-called Moscow School, it is pure scribbling, boys who are out to make money, weak with their pens...I never describe everyday life. I describe extraordinary events, do you understand? I describe incidents. I describe catastrophes...but absolutely never everyday life...

The quiet flow of life, eating eggs and drinking kefir in the evenings, long dopey conversations with one's wife--that doesn't interest me at all.

Equally vehement is Petrushevskaja's objection to critics' classification of her writing as "tape-recorder speech":

Everyone says, 'Look, a tape recording of life,'... That's all non sense, because with a tape recorder you'll never record what you need. Never. If you... set up a microphone and record someone's family life for a month, in the course of that month you'll find one word, one phrase that you can use.

Much of the verbal material for Petrushevskaja's plays nevertheless comes from conversations overheard in the bus, in shop lines, or on the street, and "grafted," to use her term, onto her writing. Of her two-act play, Three Girls in Blue, considered to be her most ambitious work to date, Petrushevskaja says, "nothing was thought up by me, practically everything that was said, I overheard."

Petrushevskaja's skill in grafting is apparent in the colorful and varied language of her characters. The playwright deliberately plays on verbal incongruities, urban slang and peasant speech--"diuzhe" ("very"), "okromia" ("apart from," "except")--malapropisms, and stylistic infelicities that reveal a character's origins ("eto moi podarok personal'no dlia tebia," announces Nikolai Ivanovich proudly in Three Girls in Blue [emphasis mine]).<sup>12</sup> Petrushevskaja pays particular attention in the playscript to pronunciation

(or mispronunciation) as a key to a character's personality, education, or social status ("poniala" instead of "ponialá"; "navernóe" instead of "navérvnoe"; "voshche" instead of "voobshche"; "shchas" instead of "seichas").<sup>13</sup> Her use of language, which continues the tradition of Zoshchenko's writings of the 1920's, is refreshingly at variance from the rhetorical turns of phrase in more conventional dramatic works.

Most critical commentary on her work overlooks Zoshchenko's influence,<sup>14</sup> for reasons having as much to do with politics as with literary analysis, preferring instead to see Chekhov as her literary godfather. The fact that her best-known play is entitled Three Girls in Blue, in which three women, distant cousins to each other ("third-degree sisters" in Russian),<sup>15</sup> spend a rainy and ill-fated summer vacation in a leaky summer house outside Moscow, compounds this misperception by critics eager to seize upon a reference to Chekhov's Three Sisters. Petrushevskaja comments:

When I finished that play, I suddenly thought to myself, 'Someone will probably think that this is Three Sisters.' And that amused me a lot...I thought, 'Who'll be the first?' In fact, I had nothing of the sort in my head at the time. In general, I don't really like Chekhov's drama. I like his early short stories better, the real Chekhov--Chekhonte.<sup>16</sup> It's possible to imitate Chekhov's plays, but to write the kind of short stories that Chekhov writes is impossible.

In fact, a much less distant literary ancestor than Chekhov is Vampilov, a playwright whose works, like Petrushevskaja's, were held up for years and were actually only staged on a wide scale after his death by drowning in 1972. Vampilov's substitution of the anti-hero for the positive hero, of psychological detail for abstract ideals, of recognizable realia of life for lofty settings mark a turning point in contemporary drama increasingly now divided by critics into "pre-Vampilov" and "post-Vampilov."<sup>17</sup>

Director Mark Zakharov of the Lenin Komsomol Theatre has been instrumental in ensuring that Petrushevskaja's works, unlike Vampilov's, are staged for her contemporaries. Apart from his considerable cuts in the text of Three Girls in Blue, as well as his questionable introduction of silent female phantoms from another era into the Lenin Komsomol production, Zakharov has been supportive of Petrushevskaja's work both in print<sup>18</sup> and in his cautious efforts to convince the theatre establishment of the validity of her work.

As for Petrushevskaja, she is impervious to criticisms of Zakharov and his interpretation of her play:

Thank god there is the possibility of different points of view about an already existing text, not one lying around in my desk drawer or circulating in notes from hand to hand. That's already a source of joy. An enormous source of joy.

Towards the end of our conversation, Petrushevskaiia expressed the hope that, with Gorbachev's coming to power, changes would take place in the cultural sphere that would benefit contemporary drama. I, thinking of the stagnation of the late Brezhnev years, remarked that, for that hope to be realized, there would need to be new people in the literary establishment, younger and more active. "Well," hesitated Petrushevskaiia with a thin smile, "perhaps younger and less active."

  
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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Liudmila Petrushevskaiia's publications include the plays Tri devushki v golubom in Sovremennaia dramaturgiia, No. 3, 1983; Uroki muzyki and Lestnichnaia kletka in Viktor Slavkin and Liudmila Petrushevskaiia, P'esy (Moscow: Sovetskaiia Rossiia, 1983); Liubov' in Teatr, No. 3, 1979; Prikhodite v kukhniu in Oдноaktnye p'esy (Moscow: Sovetskaiia Rossiia, 1979); and two dramatic monologues, originally published as short stories, Seti-lovushki in Avrora, No. 4, 1974; and Skripka in Druzhba narodov, No. 10, 1973. Among her unpublished works are the plays "Cinzano," "Den' rozhdeniia Smirnovoi," "Pesnia dvadtsatogo veka," and her two newest plays "Andante" and "Komnata Kolombiny." Recent articles on her work include Viktor Gul'chenko, "Vstrechnoe dvizhenie," Teatr, No. 12, 1985; Anatolii Smelianskii, "Pesochnye chasy," Sovremennaia dramaturgiia, No. 4, 1985; and M. Turovskaiia, "Trudnye p'esy," Novyi mir, No. 12, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> See also the translations Four by Liudmila Petrushevskaiia, tr. Alma H. Law (New York: Institute for Contemporary East European Drama and Theatre of the Center for Advanced Study in Theatre Arts, 1984); Sowjetische Zeitstücke 2, ed. Susanne Rödel (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1985), 129-204. The latter volume includes Petrushevskaiia's Tri devushki v golubom with plays by such established figures as Arbuzov, Gel'man, and Roshchin.

<sup>3</sup> Metropole (Metropol') is an unofficial almanach, produced in 1979 by a group of twenty-three writers, artists, scholars, and essayists, including Vasilii Aksenov, Vladimir Vysotskii, Evgenii Rein, and Bella Akhmadulina.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, articles by I. Dedkov in Literaturnaia gazeta, 31 July 1985; A.I. Stepanova in Pravda, 1 August 1985; and E. Surkov in Izvestiia, 18 May 1985.

<sup>5</sup> P'esy, 145.

<sup>6</sup> Teatr, No. 3, 1979, 188.

<sup>7</sup> Surkov.

<sup>8</sup> Sovremennaia dramaturgiia, No. 3, 1983, 129.

<sup>9</sup> Four, 8. This section is, to my knowledge, only available in print in Alma Law's translation of the original.

<sup>10</sup> Petrushevskaja calls this episode her "Theatrical Novel," a reference to Mikhail Bulgakov's embittered reminiscences (1937) of his association with the Moscow Art Theatre (1925-36).

<sup>11</sup> The Forty-Year-Olds include Vladimir Makanin, Ruslan Kireev, Anatolii Kurchatkin, Anatolii Afanas'ev, and Anatolii Kim.

<sup>12</sup> "This is my present personally for you." The character's use of personal'no, instead of the neutral, and correct, "lichno," marks him as a crass and uneducated middle-level bureaucrat, for whom intimacy and generosity are doled out like office memoranda.

<sup>13</sup> Respectively, "she understood," "probably," "in general," and "just now."

<sup>14</sup> Attacked in 1946 together with the poet Anna Akhmatova by then Secretary of the Central Committee (1944-48) Andrei Zhdanov, Mikhail Zoshchenko (1895-1958) was rehabilitated after Stalin's death. Zoshchenko's influence on a wide range of contemporary Soviet writers from Shukshin to Iskander has nevertheless been greatly undervalued or ignored by literary scholars.

<sup>15</sup> A "third-degree sibling" is the child of one parent's cousin.

<sup>16</sup> During Chekhov's early period (1880-86), the writer used a number of pseudonyms, the best known of which is Antosha Chekhonte.

<sup>17</sup> Among the best analyses of Vampilov is Vsevolod Sakharov, Dela chelovecheskie: o literature klassicheskoi i sovremennoi (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1985), 223-39.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Zakharov, "Zerkalo dushi," Pravda, 10 March 1985.