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“REFLECTION”

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The focus of my study is on mirrors and reflections as they help translate the life stories of female protagonists into coherent patterns of knowledge about themselves. Mirrors and reflections in literary texts help us to understand that the act of observing requires constant adjustments to the way protagonists are presented, both to themselves and others. Of special interest are insights into representations of the mirror and reflection in texts such as Gennadii Golovin's "Anna Petrovna", Liubov Iunina's "A Woman in a One-Room Apartment", Natalya Baranskaya's "The Kiss", Viktoria Tokareva's "First Try", and Galina Scerbakova's "The Three Loves of Masha Peredreeva". Through these works I explore the mirror as a tool for reflection on how women appear to themselves, and how others see them in the act of self-contemplation.

Key words: Mirrors, reflections.

The mirror is an integral agent of reflection in literature and art. I have situated my analysis in a contemporary context, in which all viewing is necessarily subjective. When I use the term "mirroring", I do not mean mimesis so much as point of view, as informed by social and literary conventions and expectations, and concepts of gender (see Irigaray 1974). My paper does not theorize a mirror function, in the way of French theorists and feminist critics, who have drawn attention to mirroring as an important part of the early formation of self-consciousness, and whose seminal work has informed all our readings of mirrors. The mirror does not simply reflect empirical data (an objective perception of forms); how one sees and interprets is influenced by social and, more specifically, gender norms. Instead, this paper focuses on how a woman sees herself as an image that reflects social codes and certain traits of feminist approaches to aging. While I share this emphasis on the idea of the woman as representation, I will concentrate mainly on an aging and older self.¹

¹ Jacques Lacan has drawn attention to so-called "mirror-stage" in an infant's development of ego. This is an integrated self-image, which he conceives as an "imaginary" state of being, essentially a narcissistic, alienated image of the self, an 'I,' with which the child seeks to identify (Lacan, 1966: 93–101; Eagleton 1983: 165). For Lacan, the formation of ego begins at a point of both alienation from and fascination with one's own image, and one's own

Within this study, we can observe that mirrors help translate the life stories of female protagonists into coherent patterns of knowledge about themselves. Of special interest are insights into representations of the mirror and reflection in texts such as Gennadii Golovin's "Anna Petrovna" (1984–85 in 1988), Liubov Iunina's "A Woman in a One-Room Apartment" ("Zenscina v odnokomnatnoj kvartire", 1985), Natalya Baranskaya's "The Kiss" ("Pocelui", 1981), Viktoriya Tokareva's "First Try" ("Pervaia popytka", 1989), and Galina Scerbakova's "The Three Loves of Masha Peredreeva" ("Tri ljubvi Masi Peredreevoi", 1996). Consequently, the ways in which mirrors and reflections reveal aspects of women's lives connected to both fact and fantasy will be explored.²

While working on a project about aging female bodies in distress, I became intrigued by the role of mirrors in these works, which not only enabled the protagonists to observe their own bodies, faces and eyes, but also to provide an opportunity for these characters to engage in dialogue with themselves, while searching for their genuine "I" (Levin 1988: 9). Jurii I. Levin (1988: 6–25) emphasizes that the mirror as an object creates, in certain situations, a reproduction of the visible form of the object and its movement, if the object is situated in a fixed spatial relationship with the mirror, i.e. in front of it. The observer sees a precise copy of the original object, which is governed by the laws of optics. The copy is stereoscopic and arises on the mirror's smooth surface, which reflects all that is visible (Levin 1988: 8).³

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body (Lacan 1966: 93–101; Benvenuto and Kennedy: 1986 55–56). See also Irigaray (1974: 237), Foucault's discussion of *Las Meninas*, (1966: 19–31), and Foucault "Of other spaces" (2008: 17).

² References to Golovin's novella will be given in translation from *Glasnost: An Anthology of Russian Literature Under Gorbachev* (Trans. John Beebe). The Russian version of the novella is taken from Golovin's *Terpenie i nadezda: Povesti* (1988). Translations of Tokareva's "First Try" ("Pervaia popytka", trans. Kristina Chmakov), and Iunina's "A Woman in a One-Room Apartment" (Trans. Robin Bisha), are taken from *Lives in Transit* (1995); and the translation of Baranskaya's "The Kiss" ("Pocelui", trans. Wanda Sorgente) is taken from *Balancing Acts: Contemporary Stories by Russian Women* (1989), and will be indicated in the text by year and page number. The Russian version of Tokareva is from *Liudi s kryl'iami. Povesti i rasskazy* (1996), and that of Baranskaya's "The Kiss" is from *Zenscina s zontikom: Povest' i rasskazy* (1981). The Russian version of Iunina's "A Woman in a One-Room Apartment" is from "Zenscina v odnokomnatnoi kvartire" 1985). The translation of Scerbakova's *The Three Loves of Masha Peredreeva* used was published in *Glas 3: Women's View* (1992), trans. Rachel Osorio. The Russian version is from *God Aleny: Romany* (1996).

³ See also Cray (1990: 116–137). Cray contends that the stereoscope, with the exception of the photograph, was "the most significant form of visual imagery" in the nineteenth century (116).

The questions I would like to address here are: what is the significance of a reflection contemplated in a mirror as it reveals self-awareness and subjective knowledge? What does the reader learn about the women whose images the mirror captures? What else is revealed? Since the mirror concerns the reality of physical presence, we ask how the scenes of women viewing themselves in a mirror can be translated into meaningful narratives. Jennie La Belle argues persuasively that a mirror involves looking at a woman's "conception of what she is, what she has been, and what she will become" (1988: 2).⁴ The search for identity creates "the self in its self-representations to itself". Even in aging and older women, La Belle contends, the mirror represents self-reflexivity, multiplicity and self-awareness (1988: 2). Gazing at the mirror's surface, women see an inverted reflection of themselves and the world that surrounds them. This image morphs as they adjust their makeup, hair and clothes, as does the way they think of themselves.

Mirrors and reflections in literary texts therefore show that the act of observing involves constant adjustments to the perception of personal appearance as it relates to the character's self-image, and the way in which the protagonists present themselves to themselves and others. In the works considered here, the protagonists continually change the text of their lives, revising their memories and hopes, and filtering their disappointments. This feature is most prominent in Golovin's "Anna Petrovna", as Anna slips in and out of consciousness, and various memories of different periods in her life emerge as pictures. These images "paint" Anna Petrovna's portrait.⁵ Golovin translates Anna's visual moments of self-contemplation into a language that links her past to the present (Schwartz 1997: 135). Mirrors, both in literary texts and art, signify presence and absence, an inversion

⁴ Eugenia Ginzburg's *Journey Into the Whirlwind* (1967) provides an excellent example of a female protagonist, the author in this case, seeing herself in a mirror, when her prisoners' convoy stops at a disinfection center in Sverdlovsk. The mirror covers half the wall, and Ginzburg describes "hundreds of anxious, mournful eyes, all searching for their own reflection in the bluish glass" while her own reflection is at first unfamiliar: "I recognized myself only by my resemblance to my mother... Imagine. I'm more like Mother now than myself" (1967: 315). ("сотни тревожных горьких глаз, ищущих свое отражение. Я узнаю себя только по сходству с мамой... Я по маме себя узнала. Больше на нее похожа сейчас, чем на себя", 1967: 359).

⁵ One such memory is of the Moscow River and "the cherry flags streaming in the azure heights—just like Deineka's frescoes—a whole naive forest of multicolored flags!..." (1990: 390) ("как струились в высокой синеве на фресках Дейнеки, развеселые флаги—целый лес разноцветных флагов!" [1988: 210]). Aleksandr A. Deneika (1899–1969) might have inspired several other scenes in the novella (1990: 401; 1988: 221), including one where a young Anna Petrovna takes off her blouse and enters the sea. Deineka's *The Swimming Girls* (1933) and *Bathers* (1952) come to mind.

and distortion of the body. Looking into oneself (*v sebia*) becomes the act of looking at one's reflection, as it in turn suggests a path from ignorance to potential knowledge and self-knowledge.

Stolovic cites Mikhail Prisvin, who considers that "the whole history of culture is a story about what a man (*celovek*) saw in a mirror, and all his future lies in what else he will see in that mirror" (1969: 22, qtd. in Stolovic 1988: 45).⁶ As a mode of self-awareness, a mirror reflects the real world, but simultaneously creates an illusory one, which stimulates the imagination. Yet, while considering her reflected image, the woman is aware that what she has seen before in the mirror, and what she sees now, may not be the same in the future (La Belle 1988: 60).

Women use mirrors as tools for understanding the change in their appearance, especially at transitional points in their lives. It is through communicating with their mirror images that women try to reaffirm their identity. The word "mirror" (*zerkalo*) in Russian is related to: "reflect", "behold", "look", "glance", "gaze" (*zerkat'*, *zret'*, *zrak*, *videt'*, *smotret' na* [Stolovic 1988: 46]).⁷ Mirror reflections are used to reassure women that they exist, because of the close relation between physical appearance and the concept of self (La Belle 1988: 177).

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Natalia Zlydneva believes that the mirror in literature presupposes not only the presence of an object/subject and its reflection, but also a third participant in the communicative act, the author, from whose point of view the story is narrated (2013: 28–29). She argues that, as an agent of transformation, the mirror brings about an indirect narration that is analogous to indirect speech. Zlydneva refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's argument that looking at oneself directly in a mirror, one sees only a reflection of one's exterior, which is not necessarily true to life (Bakhtin

⁶ Stolovic considers the mirror a universal reflector, and a means of attaining self-knowledge, both in life and art (1988: 45–46). He has Lewis Carol's *Alice in Wonderland* in mind.

⁷ Stolovic argues that "the semantics of the word 'mirror' correlates the word with the process of visual perception". The embodiment of mirrors and reflections in art has a long and rich history. The most frequently discussed examples are *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) by Jan van Eyck, Velazquez's *Las Meninas* (1654), La gallerie des Glaces in Versailles, and the work of Johannes Vermeer (Stone 2006). Mirror imagery presupposes the existence of a spectator, although in art "there is no such thing as the visibility of a perception, let alone a spectator to whom it is visible" (Miller 1988: 209). Stolovic, citing the Etymological Dictionaries of the Russian, German and English Languages explains the meaning of the word "mirror". He points out that the English "mirror" and French *miroir* take their roots from Latin, and mean "to admire oneself in a looking glass". The German word *Spiegel* is derived from the Latin *speculum*, which means "smooth surface", "reflection", "likeness", "imitation".

1979: 34).⁸ The "I" posing in front of the mirror presents itself to the reader with a desired, staged expression. This process of self-contemplation involves a fictive other, the author, implicitly introduced in the story as an omniscient narrator, who comments on changing facial expressions and external appearances at various moments in the life of the protagonist.

Although the reflection in the mirror resembles the person it reflects, it also takes license with both presence and absence, and thus distorts the image of the body (Michie 1987: 8). Mirrors, according to Michie, reflect both vanity/surface and that which reaches beyond the body: reflection/contemplation/introspection (1987: 8). What is shown/seen is not what or where it seems to be: it is a reflection, something bent back from somewhere else (Miller 1998: 82).⁹ Since the mirror reproduces the "appearance of whatever it reflects", the protagonists present a carefully constructed facade by gazing at their reflected images (Miller 1998: 207). The mirror presupposes the existence of a visible spectator, who uses the former as a tool for creating, in Hollander's view, "artistic fictions" that the eye edits (1978: 391). Therefore, the public face is "always a hopelessly private fiction", because only the owner sees the face that she thinks looks like her, "when actually the public and his [her] intimates see a mirror image of it" (Hollander 1978: 393).

W. J. T. Mitchell affirms that we live in a society of the spectacle, and in a culture of images, "a world of semblances and simulacra" (1994: 5). He believes that a verbal representation cannot "make present" its object the way a visual representation can: "it may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do". He implies that words can "cite", but never "sight" their objects (1994: 152). Tamar Yacobi argues that when "the visual object and experience assume verbal shape in transmission" to the reader, "such interference is forced", because "words cannot possibly reproduce images" (2007: 169).

For the elderly, in particular, this interference reflects the discontinuity between the desired image, an image of youth and beauty, and the image society rejects, of the aging body. Society, as the implicit second observer of the image, conveys the author's larger contextualization. Yacobi believes that authors shape the original image to fit the frames they create. Similarly,

⁸ Bakhtin considers that viewing oneself in a mirror does not present a direct vision, but a reflection of our exterior: "I am in front of a mirror, but not in it" (1979: 34). This exterior can show a changing facial expression, and reflect what has happened throughout an individual's life, in her youth, middle and old age.

⁹ Miller (1988: 82) considers that "a reflection directs our attention to the existence of something elsewhere", referring to something out of sight.

Andrea Zlatar notes that in this society of spectacles and mirrors, "where to see and be seen is important", such discontinuity presents itself "primarily as an image of an elderly body reflected in the eyes of the other" (2010: 125).

The most complex of the women discussed in this paper, Golovin's Anna Petrovna, provides an intriguing example of the author using both the metaphor of the mirror and the metaphor of the window as reflectors. The former produces an illusory and somewhat deceptive vision, while the latter projects a direct, unmediated, and transparent vision. Golovin distinguishes between the image of life reflected in the mirror, and the sensory data that transform it. The viewing subject, Anna Petrovna, an elderly woman near death, is seen in several instances standing in front of a mirror contemplating her appearance. Moreover, nearly every day she remains behind the window as an observing subject, a spectator, of a scene in a courtyard (Friedberg 2006: 16). In his study of art and techniques of the observer, Jonathan Crary theorizes that a room can be seen as a site of a projection "of the world of extended substance", which the mind can inspect (1990: 46). The subject comes to know the outside world by observing it, and identifying what the eye registers. Thus Anna Petrovna's isolation within the walls of her room does not represent an obstacle to "apprehending the world outside" (Crary 1990: 46). The window functions both as a mirror and an object, to and through which one directs the gaze. The observer is no longer a passive receiver of sensation. Anna Petrovna sees, within a prescribed set of possibilities "embodied in a system of conventions and limitations" a range of sensory experiences and images. However, the distinction between Anna Petrovna's internal sensation and the external signs of life in the courtyard is blurred. Crary states: "once vision became located in the empirical immediacy of the observer's body, it belonged to time, to flux, to death" (Crary 1990: 4–6, 24). Crary reminds us that a new set of relations "between the body on one hand and forms of institutional and discursive power on the other redefined the status of an observing subject" (1990: 3). The observing subject's vision, in Golovin, is subjective, and the observing body is near death.

In Golovin's novella, a framed "inner landscape of the room and the outer landscape of the scene outside" is provided not only by mirrors, but also by windows. We see both the inner landscape of the mind and the outer world that the mind perceives (Kurtz 1990: 6). Anna Petrovna gazes through the dusty window of her crevice-like room, and sees:

заунивный асфальтовый тесный дворик, где в квадратиках окаменелой земли, забранной решетками, хирели обновляемые каждый год саженцы; где бродили возле пустой песочницы горемычные городские детишки, с вялой надеждой царапая асфальт разноцветными лопатками; где стояла на

чурбанах забытая всеми бесколесная машина, разрушаясь день ото дня и покрываясь с каждым днем все более, казалось, яркими и торжествующими язвами ржавчины, и где с утра до вечера сидела на древних шатких ящиках возле шелудливой стены, исписанной слабоумными гадостями кроткая, угнетенная многими печальями очередь в пункт приема стеклопосуды. (Головин 1988: 203)

... a crowded depressing little asphalt courtyard where sick saplings withered in little squares of petrified earth, blocked off by railings and replanted every year; where besides [sic] sandless sandboxes, unfortunate children killed time, listlessly scratching the asphalt with shovels of various colors; where an abandoned old car, without wheels, slowly disintegrated day by day, getting covered, every day it seemed, with more bright and triumphant sores of rust; and where from morning till evening people lined up at the glass-recycling station. Meek and oppressed by many sorrows, they sat on old rickety crates beside a peeling wall totally covered with feeble-minded graffiti. (1990: 384)

This dismal view framed through a window of disintegration, abandonment and dust, is reflected in and juxtaposed with Anna Petrovna, as she finds herself in the hallway of her communal apartment:

среди свалки умерших, никому не нужных вещей, сплюснутых, густой пылью заросших чемоданов, драных картонных коробок, перевязанных корявой проволокой, среди мешков, сложенных велосипедов, сундуков, заполненных скучной дрянью?! ... (1988: 256)

in a scrap heap of dead things that nobody needs, of squashed suitcases overgrown with thick dust, torn boxes held together with rough wire, broken bicycles, sacks and trunks filled with boring trash? (1990: 433)

Anna Petrovna feels that she resembles these abandoned and broken objects, so much "boring trash". Golovin translates different external images from the scene in the courtyard ("sick saplings", an "old car without wheels", "sores of rust", "people lined up", "old rickety crates", "graffiti") into Anna Petrovna's subjective knowledge of her own situation. The hallway in her apartment, strewn with dead objects ("squashed dusty suitcases", "torn boxes", "broken bicycles"), reflects the desolation in the courtyard.

The window scenes emerge both directly, as framed pictures, and indirectly, as reflections of Anna's state in life, in which she is now more reflector than participant. Golovin is thus able to depict Anna Petrovna's remoteness from the world around her, as she kills time, disintegrating, like the objects in the courtyard and the hallway. She is meek and oppressed by many sorrows, as are the people she sees from her window. Looking at the

line of people below her window becomes Anna's favorite preoccupation, as she submissively awaits her death.

Golovin suggests that the window and the mirror, two framed views, seem to bind reality and memories "as if they were color photographs" (1990: 389).¹⁰ As she slips in and out of consciousness, Anna Petrovna finds it difficult to recognize her present self. The reader learns about her past life through her reminiscences: the flashback scenes of her recollections resemble a montage of photographs, and images seen in a broken mirror whose shards Golovin is assembling into a coherent pattern. Through pictorial and transparently clear memories, her past life reveals her senses to be fully aware. Lacking these nuances, the present is now colorless, as is the view from the window, except when rays of sun, fall into the room, reflected by the glass (1990: 389).

Anna Petrovna recalls that when she was a young draftsman, after completing an especially complex assignment:

подходила к зеркалу – побыть немного вдвоем с такой же, как она, слегка усталой, увы, уже стареющей, но все-таки [...] счастливой женщиной, на лице которой долго все гасла, не могла погаснуть мягкая материнская улыбка добра и снисхождения к людям. (1988: 215)

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She would ... walk over to the mirror – to be alone for a bit with someone just like herself, a slightly tired and, alas, already aging, but, nevertheless [...] happy woman, on whose face a soft maternal smile of kindly condescension kept trying to fade out, but was unable to. (1990: 395)

Anna needed to have a dialogue with "someone just like herself". Her reflection in the mirror helps with her self-affirmation, and a realization about where she was at that particular moment in her life. Then, she had been happy. But now, at the time of narration, she sees that her tired and old face "лицо Анны Петровны стало совсем уж малоподвижным означающим почти ничего" (1988: 206) ("had become all but immobile and revealed almost nothing" [1990: 386]).¹¹

¹⁰ The window functions as a frame through which one observes and is observed. The frame of the window suggests both a relationship and a limitation.

¹¹ Anna Petrovna's anxiety about her identity, expressed through the use of mirror and window, curiously resembles that of Virginia Woolf's character in her 1929 story, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection". The narrator describes Isabella Tyson whose movement between mirror and window points to an "unresolved quest for understanding of life, reality, and their selves" (Kurtz 1990: 2–3). In this story the mind becomes a "reflector" and also a reflection of the past. The mind translates the external world into subjective knowledge (Chapman 1972: 332). The mirror itself is perceived as a metaphor, "descriptive" of "the patterning quality of the mind" (Chapman 1972: 337). It is the mirror and the window that have performed the role of assembling the constantly changing memories into a more coherent

Another scene involving the mirror is set during the Civil War, when after having been a refugee for a month and a half, Anna Petrovna returns to her relatives. She tries to decipher the visible resentment, pity and repulsion on their faces. She looks at herself in a mirror:

Серая нищенка осторожно взглянула на нее оттуда. Лицо у нищенки было странно живым. Анна Петровна приблизилась еще на шаг, наклонилась и увидела, что это – шевелятся брови, седые от копошащихся вшей. И потеряла на минуту сознание от безжалостного, как удар в лицо, отращения к себе! (1988: 220)

A gray old beggar woman cautiously glanced at her from the mirror. The beggar's face was strangely alive. Anna Petrovna took a step closer, bent over and saw that her own brows were moving, gray with crawling lice. And – she lost consciousness for a while from the pitiless self-loathing, which had hit her like a blow in the face. (1990: 400)

This reaction to her reflection in the mirror is very different to that mentioned earlier. When she becomes an old woman, Anna no longer recognizes herself in her reflection:

как лицо становится незнакомым, чуждым, челюсть слабеет, и словно бы со стороны – с неприязнью – глядела она на тот пугающий оскал, в котором обнажаются ее мертвые пластмассовые зубы. (1988: 223)

... her face would become unfamiliar, alien. Her jaw would slacken and, as if from outside herself, she would look with contempt on the frightening grin which bared her dead plastic teeth. (1990: 442, 402)

Anna Petrovna has a granddaughter Marina, whom she has raised. She has nothing to give this granddaughter except a ring, whose value she does not know. The following day Marina bursts into Anna Petrovna's room as she is sitting by the window. Marina starts breaking everything in the room, and destroying Anna Petrovna's clothes. The granddaughter's outburst occurred because the ring Anna Petrovna had given her had turned out to be a valuable diamond the authorities had been searching for since the Civil War. The granddaughter had tried to sell the ring and, once it was discovered to be the missing diamond, it was confiscated.¹²

pattern. This is true of Anna Petrovna as well. Her face "that revealed almost nothing" is like Woolf's Isabella Tyson, who "was perfectly empty" (Woolf 1985: 219). Isabella's friend, who had created a complex image of her, realizes that there was nothing, literally and metaphorically, behind Isabella's image, reflected within the frame of the mirror.

¹² Anna Petrovna's common-law-husband Kocubei had given her this ring during the Civil War. The jeweler, who recognizes the ring as a valuable two-faced Janus diamond informs the authorities.

The scene of Marina's violent rage precedes a scene where the street boys in the courtyard throw a brick at Anna's window, breaking it into shards. The breaking of glass, as the omniscient narrator reports, recalls Anna Petrovna's reminiscences about the Civil War, as well as other blank spots in her fading memory, and the shattered life that she is trying to re-assemble (Yacobi 2007: 167). Golovin attempts to recreate these blank spots. Like Tolstoy's Ivan Ilich, Anna Petrovna has a moment of insight that "Все было не так" (1988: 271) ("Everything was wrong!" [1990: 446]). After she dies, Viktor, her neighbor, the historian, who has been helping her, goes to the window and observes the now empty lifeless yard (1990: 450; 1988: 275). The yard reflects the emptiness brought on by the death of the perceiving "I".¹³

From the 1970s onwards, the emphasis on keeping the body fit and beautiful becomes increasingly pronounced (Gurova 2003: 181–183; Featherstone 1991: 171–173). In Russian contemporary consumer culture, advertisements popularize an idealized body and self-control. The mirror has become a tool of self-exploration and self-discovery. Such an idealized body can be seen in

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¹³ Luce Irigaray (1974: 237; 1985: 189–190) conceives the mirror as a male-directed instrument that posits the woman as the object. This prevents her from achieving a self-determined identity, an existence separate from the role of mother. Relating this principle to the Cartesian subject who thinks and therefore is (*cogito ergo sum*), as reshaped by Lacan's notion of the mirror stage and the alienation of the subject, Irigaray describes a desire to be united with an image of the mirror: "*je convoite par-dessus tout, c'est à l'irréductible d'une image en miroir que je tente de me conjoindre. Ainsi suis-je. Enfin seul, copule. Je-moi réunis en un accouplement toujours recommencé. Et aussi bien toujours manqué, de par cette glace qui nous sépare*" ("seeking, in simplest terms, to be united with an image in a mirror. This is how I am. At last alone, copula. I-me coupled together in an embrace that begins over and over again. And fails equally often, because of the glass that separates us"). Even those scholars who emphasize the French connection need to bear in mind the fundamental social and political differences and assumptions that divide Russian female authors from the majority of Western readers and theorists. Helena Goscilo, the most prominent explicator of "Russian womanhood" argues that the recent Soviet/Russian prose lacks the context and referents that were available to the Western feminist movement (Goscilo 1996: 6–7). Goscilo claims that Russian women "internalized official propaganda and the traditional male prerogatives so thoroughly that they themselves propagated the very inequities that marginalized them" (Goscilo 1990: 10). She argues that even the minority of "feminists" believed that a woman realized her destiny only through "motherhood". One of the reasons the texts discussed here are rather innovative for the period is that the women try to reconfigure their identity, not as mothers (with the exception of Scherbakova's Masha), but rather as professional women. Goscilo points to Russian women authors' reluctance to categorize themselves as "specifically women writers" (1996: 16). Concerned that women see themselves as others (men) see them, Irigaray challenges the traditional views of women by calling those very ideas into question. Russian women, however, were less equipped to engage in this interrogation of gender roles, and largely accepted their identities as mothers.

Daria Pavlovna, Liubov Iunina's protagonist in "A Woman in a One-Room Apartment". This story, as well as Natalya Baranskaya's "The Kiss", with which it seems to conduct a dialogue, focuses on the older woman/younger man relationship. Both Iunina's Daria Pavlovna, and Baranskaya's Nadezhda Mikhailovna are successful and highly educated middle-aged women, who are apprehensive about a potential romantic entanglement with a younger man. Iunina's story has an open ending. It is not clear whether Daria Pavlovna will marry the scientist who is eight years her junior.

Unlike Anna Petrovna, both Daria Pavlovna and Nadezhda Mikhailovna, who are much younger, carefully maintain their looks. All three are lonely, and painfully aware that they are aging. Daria Pavlovna spends a considerable amount of time putting on foundation and eye makeup. She is very precise about it, as she is about her clothes. Before she leaves her apartment in the morning, after she carefully applies her cosmetics, she would approach a mirror and passionately inspect her appearance:

Из зеркала, легко улыбаясь, на нее смотрела довольно молодая и довольно красивая женщина, модная и современная с головы до пят. (1985: 80)

From the mirror, a woman looked out at her, smiling softly, quite young, quite pretty, fashionable, and contemporary from head to toe. (1995: 269)

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The scenes of Daria Pavlovna in front of the mirror, and that of Anna Petrovna as a young woman, present radically different images. Anna Petrovna's pleasure at having successfully completed a task as a draftsman, reflected in the mirror scene cited earlier, does not place so much emphasis on the physical aspect of her appearance.

Conversely, Iunina's Daria Pavlovna is pleased with her lot in life, and her looks. The author paints her portrait in words, without showing her face. Instead Iunina emphasizes clothing:

Светло-серые брюки, синий кожаный пиджак, голубой тонкий джемпер с высоким воротом, синие туфли и сумка через плечо. (1985: 80)

Light gray pants, blue leather jacket, deep-blue tight-fitting sweater with a high collar, blue shoes and shoulder bag. (1995: 270)

A Doctor of Science, professor, and the deputy director at her Institute, Daria Pavlovna seeks self-affirmation, and self-fulfillment. She does not want to appear old, in spite of having a grown-up son. She will only change from her stylish suit into a more modest skirt when she must plead for an apartment for Maksim Tumanov, the young scientist at her Institute who has fallen in love with her.

Gazing at her image, Daria Pavlovna believes that that the mirror reflects an objective truth. However, it is also an artistic fiction that molds her reflection into a socially acceptable picture (Hollander 1978: 391). She:

вынула из сумки пудреницу, припудрила нос, чуть подправила локон, и деловой день деловой женщины начался. (1985: 84)

... pulled her compact out of her purse, powdered her nose, straightened a lock of her hair, and the businesswoman's business day began. (1995: 272)

Daria Pavlovna's eye edits the image in the mirror. With the phenomenon of left-right reversal, the mirror's truth is elusive. Hollander argues persuasively that "[t]he familiar mirror face ... thought up as the true and safe public mask, is always a hopelessly private fiction: no one sees it but its owner, who thinks it looks like him when actually the public and his intimates see a mirror image of it ..." (1978: 393). Daria's careful grooming and elegant clothes help her create a visual composition, an ideal picture, reflected in the polished glass (Hollander 1978: 417).

320 Although to concentrate on clothes might seem trivial, Anne Hollander observes: "To be objectively serious about clothing has usually come to mean explaining what they express about something else" (1978: XV). This "something else" is Daria Pavlovna's carefully created image of an independent, accomplished, beautiful woman, satisfied with her appearance and place in life (Hollander 1978: 391). Clothes are an important part of Daria Pavlovna's moments of self-affirmation.

In order to reaffirm her image, Daria Pavlovna frequently resorts to looking in the mirror of her "compact". She is not preoccupied with thoughts about how she was in her youth, but rather: "Она мечтала о том, какой она будет" (1985: 81); ("She dreamed about how she would be" 1995: 270). She enters her office:

Войдя к себе в кабинет, она достала из сумочки пудреницу, глянула в зеркало. Результаты осмотра ей не доставили удовольствия. Она нахмурилась, убрала пудреницу, постучала нервно пальцем по столу. (1985: 92)

Going into her office, she got her compact out of her purse and glanced in the mirror. The result of this inspection didn't bring her any pleasure. She frowned, put away her compact, and tapped her fingers nervously on the desk. (1995: 277)

Daria Pavlovna's dissatisfaction with her reflection could be due to her boss Igor Vasilievich's statement that Maksim Tumanov, the young scientist, is probably in love with her. Her response is: "Разве я похожа, Игорь

Васильевич, на женщину, в которую влюбляются?" (1985: 91) ("Do I really look like the sort of woman, Igor Vasilievich, with whom men fall in love?" [1995: 277]). The answer to this question is provided during a business trip to Leningrad, when Daria Pavlovna shares food with Maksim Tumanov, a young scientist from her Institute. She again takes out her compact and powders her nose:

Дарья Павловна вынула пудреницу, неторопливо попудрила нос, подумала: "Кажется, он мною командует". (1985: 96)

Daria Pavlovna took out her compact and unhurriedly powdered her nose. "Seems as though he's giving me orders!" she mused. (1995: 279)

Her movement is unhurried because at this point she is unsure about her feelings for Tumanov. Daria Pavlovna is contemplating what to do next, when he proclaims his love for her. Her state of mind is uneasy. Even on the swaying train she arranges her hair, dabs on perfume, and presents herself as an attractive woman who does not want to appear old. However, when Tumanov proposes marriage, Daria Pavlovna is afraid that she may cease to be the Daria Pavlovna she has created for herself, and lose her carefully cultivated self-assured identity and independence: "Поправляя у зеркала волосы, она полубернула к нему" (1985: 102) ("Fixing her hair at the mirror, she half turned toward him" [1995: 283]). She does not face him directly as she ponders the age difference between them (he is eight years younger). Besides, she thinks, she cannot become his lover since she is his boss, and that would raise ethical issues. Daria Pavlovna bursts into tears and smears her mascara. This time the mirror offers no comfort:

А Дарья Павловна, увидев измазанные тушью руки, взглянула в зеркало и, ахнув, убежала в ванную. (1985: 104)

But Daria Pavlovna, glancing at her hand smeared with mascara, looked in the mirror, gasped, and ran into the bathroom. (1995: 284)

The repeated scenes of Daria Pavlovna attempting to re-affirm her presence and of looking at herself in the mirror may imply that she is not as self-assured as she thought she was. These moments of self-contemplation could additionally be seen as pauses that give her time to ponder her situation.

Baranskaya's Nadezhda Mikhailovna ("The Kiss") confronts the same fear of losing her independence. She is a linguist, and a senior researcher at the Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, who, like Pavlovna, lives in a one-room apartment. As she contemplates a potential evening with a younger man

she barely knows—who kissed her in the elevator, and whom she has invited for dinner—she looks at herself in the mirror, aware of her aging appearance:

Надежда Михайловна села к зеркалу и принялась изучать свое лицо. Она устала. Легкий румянец погас, четче выступили морщинки. Обыкновенная женщина за сорок лет. Это отчетливо видно в зеркале ... Она сняла бусы и кольца, сбросила платье и пошла в ванную. (1981: 263)

Nadezhda Mikhailovna sat down in front of the mirror and began studying her face. She was tired. Her slight flush had faded, and her wrinkles had become more pronounced. A plain woman in her forties. You could see that clearly in the mirror ... She took off her beads and her rings, threw off her dress, and went into the bathroom. (1989: 3)

Unlike Daria Pavlovna, Nadezhda Mikhailovna is already a grandmother, and is at a point in her life where she has reached a "solid equilibrium", which she does not want to disturb. She delights in the fact that a younger man is interested in her. However, a phone call from her daughter, asking her to come and help with the grandchild, makes Nadezhda Mikhailovna rethink her potential evening with this younger man she hardly knows but for whom she has prepared an elaborate dinner. She goes to the mirror:

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Из прозрачной зеркальной дали навстречу ей вышла немолодая озабоченная женщина. Приблизив лицо к стеклу, она увидела пылающий на скулах румянец, испуганные глаза. (1981: 265)

From the transparent remoteness of the mirror emerged an anxious elderly woman. Moving her face closer to the glass, she saw the hectic flush on her cheekbones and her frightened eyes. (1989: 5)

From a "plain woman in her forties", Nadezhda Mikhailovna becomes "an anxious elderly woman" with "frightened eyes". The omniscient narrator reveals Nadezhda Mikhailovna's fear of her age. This fear precipitates her decision to go to her daughter's place twelve minutes before the male guest is due to arrive. Both women, Nadezhda Mikhailovna and Daria Pavlovna, fear the loss of identity and the potential for being abandoned by a younger man, in addition to possibly destroying the image of self-assurance that each woman has cultivated.

Viktoria Tokareva's Marla ("First Try") provides a somewhat different example of the emphasis on appearance. Marla is subjected to male scrutiny, but it is the narrator, the "I" of this story, who provides the context for assessing her life. She is perceived as a reflection of both her own and other

people's desires. Aware of her physical attractiveness, Marla uses her body to achieve her goals. It becomes a blank page on which a series of men write their narratives. Twice divorced, she seduces an elderly well-to-do businessman who sets her up in an apartment, and through manipulation and persistence she manages to defend her dissertation. When she is in her late forties, her body becomes ravaged with cancer, and is marked by surgical scars. Seeing her image in the mirror she becomes aware of her impending death: "как цинично ... глянул рак" (1996: 45) ("cynically ... the cancer glanced at her" [1995: 34]). Tokareva nevertheless manages to paint a falsely optimistic picture of Marla, gravely ill, as she defends her dissertation:

Она стояла на защите – стройная и элегантная, как манекен, с ярким искусственным румянцем, искусственными волосами и грудью. Искусственные бриллианты, как люстры, качались под ушами. Но настоящим был блеск в глазах [...]. (1996: 43)

She stood there ... slender and elegant, like a mannequin, with brightly rouged cheeks, fake hair and artificial breasts. Imitation diamonds hung from her ears like chandeliers. But the sparkle in her eyes was genuine. (1995: 33)

This picture is not a reflection of Marla's younger days when she was obsessed with her body, and sunbathed naked. Rather her physical appearance in this instance is an "artifice", a word Tokareva repeats, while Marla's fighting spirit is genuine.

Another example of the use of a mirror and reflection can be found in Galina Scerbakova's Masha Peredreeva, who is similarly obsessed with her body. Unlike the other women discussed, Masha is very young, and her goal is to become rich quickly by selling her body, so that she can buy a house on the Gulf of Riga. She is attracted to this idea by a newspaper article that discusses fees for prostitution, and considers it an easy way to obtain money.¹⁴ However, Masha does not know how to go about this, as she lives in the provinces. The omniscient author draws a detailed verbal presentation of Masha's portrait as she stands in front of a mirror (Yacobi 2004: 70; Yacobi 2007: 166):

¹⁴ Since prostitution "did not officially exist in Soviet society up to 1987" it could not be punished, and there was no legislation governing it. Some women became prostitutes out of poverty, since their families could not live on their husbands' salaries alone, or when their former husbands denied their child support. In a letter to the newspaper *Arguments and Facts* in 1990, a woman states: "I do not know how to be a prostitute, or even how you go about it" (qtd. in *Dear Comrade Editor* 1992: 108, 171, 180–81). Masha does not know "how to go about it" either, but does not even consider other means of employment.

В кухне у них на стенке висит зеркало, ... Маша встала у плиты, отсюда себя хорошо в зеркало видно. Фигура у нее, конечно, не современная. У нее и грудь большая, и попа есть, но и талия тоже. Ноги тяжеловатые, но пряменькие, ... Кожа у нее хорошая. Но не шелк, а бархат. Белая с розовым оттенком. А когда загар схватится, то так нежно, нежно желтеет. Еще у нее живот красивый. Такой весь овальный с глубоким пупком. ... Конечно, лицо у нее хуже. Рот большой, мясистый, впрочем, некоторым нравится. ... Вот глаза, правда, небольшие ... Но если положить синий тон на веки, а карандашом удлинить уголки на виски, то получается ничего себе разрезик Египетский. Стильный. (1996: 13–14)

An old mirror hung in the kitchen ... above the kitchen table. ... Masha stood by the stove. From there she could see herself clearly in the mirror. Her figure was not ideal by today's standards. She had a big bust and a bottom, a fine waist. Her legs were on the heavy side, but straight ... Her skin was good – not silk, but white velvet with a pinkish tinge. And when tanned, it became a delicate golden color. She had a lovely stomach – oval shaped and with a deep belly button. ... Her face wasn't as good as her body. A big mouth with fleshy lips, which some people found attractive. ... Admittedly her eyes were rather small ... But with a bit of blue on the eyelids and a pencil line to lengthen the corners, they weren't such a bad shape, she looked almost Egyptian – quite stylish. (1992: 98)

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Although not especially attractive, as the choice of words used in her description implies, Masha thinks that she is enticing enough, and would be worth the standard 100 rubles a time. Masha's strategy is to go to the district center, where among the hotels to be found there is one only for foreigners.¹⁵

Unlike the other women discussed in this essay, Masha is uneducated and not interested in studying. Her goal is to present herself in a way that is as physically desirable as possible. She sleeps with one of her classmates, Viktor Korsunov, who leaves to serve in Afghanistan, where he is killed. Before Viktor's death, Masha becomes involved with a young man she meets in the district park, thinking he will pay her. Instead, he beats her: "Маша

¹⁵ Both Masha and her mother are incredulous that one could earn 100 rubles "just for one time" (Scerbakova 1992: 136), as stated in the newspaper article. In 1988, Vladimir Kunin published *Intergirl: A Hard Currency Hooker (Interdevocka)*, which was translated into English in 1991. Kunin exposed a little-known aspect of Soviet life: the world of hard currency prostitutes (*Intergirls*). At that time, the possession of hard currency was still a criminal offence. The hotels in which foreigners had to stay were off limits to Soviet citizens. In 1989 Petr Todorkovsky made the film *Intergirl*. It was a Swedish-Soviet production based on Kunin's novella. See also Goscilo (1996: 43, 143–45).

включила свет и посмотрела на себя в зеркало. ... Могло быть и хуже" (1996: 29) ("Masha switched on the light and looked at herself in the mirror ... It could be worse" [1992: 111]). Discovering that she is pregnant, Masha has to convince Viktor's parents that the child is his, and that he should marry her. Only after Viktor's death do his parents accept Masha and her daughter.

Masha is aware that her attractiveness may not last: "Маша пялилась в зеркальце и так и думала – даже перебор. Пусть бы сегодня было меньше, но сохранилось бы подольше" (1996: 49) ("Masha gazed at herself in the mirror, and thought, 'Yes, I'm too attractive for my own good. If only it would last'" [1992: 131]). While in Moscow to receive a posthumous medal for Viktor, whose mother is unable to attend the ceremony, she succumbs to the advances of a major whom she encounters there. He seduces her in an empty and dusty minibus on a Moscow street, and then quickly disappears. Again, Masha does not receive any money: "Сама дура – росомаха" (1996: 66); ("She'd been a fool" [1992: 147]). Not having learned anything from her previous experiences: "Глаза глядели в сторону 'Интуриста'" (1996: 66); ("her nose [eyes M. B.] led her towards the Intourist hotel" [1992: 147]), she now hopes to improve her lot in life through foreign currency prostitution. Masha Peredreeva's actions reflect a trend of the 1980s, when some women, trying to escape poverty and the struggle for everyday existence, and desiring a quick solution, dreamed of a faster path to riches, through prostitution.¹⁶

Mirrors have shed light on all these heroines: the authors discussed have focused our attention on the reactions of women to their likenesses in the mirror. Anna Petrovna, even in old age and seriously ill, tries to maintain her identity as she contemplates her past life. Her mind becomes a reflector of her past, in spite of its spider-web fragility. Daria Pavlovna and Nadezda Mixailovna have used mirrors in order to reaffirm their carefully crafted identities. For Tokareva's Marla, the mirror reveals the truth that she is dying, and that: "Все кончилось, не успев начаться" (1996: 147) ("Everything had ended without ever having gotten started" [1995: 35]). Scerbakova's Masha narcissistically admires her body in front of a mirror. She is all vanity/surface and lacks the ability of introspection.

Looking at their reflections in mirrors does not necessarily provide these women a path from ignorance to knowledge and self-knowledge. The mirror instead emerges as a tool for reflection on how they appear to themselves

¹⁶ Masha is operating under the mistaken assumption that foreign currency prostitution will lead her to riches, and has no understanding of the potential dangers involved in such an enterprise.

and how others see them, in the act of self-contemplation. Golovin, Iunina, Tokareva, Baranskaya, and Scerbakova had an intimate understanding of their protagonists' self-image and self-awareness, as well as their concerns, as they sought identity and self-affirmation by gazing into mirrors. With the help of these mirrors, in spite of the inverted and distorted images they reflect, the authors construct a relation of reflections to the time in which each protagonist lived.¹⁷

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