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A New Post-Soviet Village-Prose Tale:
How Natalya Klucharyova's *A Year in Paradise* Refers to
Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's *Matryona's House*.

It has been noted that works of the young Russian writer Natalya Klucharyova continue the tradition of the Soviet Village Prose School of writing.¹ Indeed, Klucharyova's novels *S.O.S.* (*S.O.S.*) and *Деревня дураков* (*Village of fools*) as well as her short story *Один год в Паю* (*A Year in Paradise*)² deal with an unhappy city man going into a deep-in-the-heart-of-Russia village to look for the real Russia. That is also the major premise of Village Prose writing. As in classical Village Prose writings, her works too explore questions of nationalism, central to that school. *A Year in Paradise*, which was published in 2007, received the prestigious Kazakov Prize for the best Russian short story in 2008, beating stories by such luminaries as Zakhar Prilepin and Olga Slavnikova, presumably (and to the chagrin of some critics, who object to such exclusive focus on topicality) for its concern about the fate of the Russian village and therefore,

¹Andrey Rudalyov, "Хождение в народ: за и против (Going to the People: Pro and Con)" in *Октябрь*, #4, 2008 <http://magazines.russ.ru/october/2008/4/ru10.html>

² Natalya Klucharyova, "Один год в Паю (*A Year in Paradise*)" in *Новый мир* (*New world*), #11, 2007, 76-86; also http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2007/11/kl6.html; translation by Mariya Gusev is available in Natalya Kluchareva, "A Year in Paradise" in *Rassказы: New Fiction from a New Russia*, eds. Mikhail Iossel and Jeff Parker (Portland, OR: Tin House Books, 2009), 343-364.

the entire country.³ That too is an important theme of Soviet Village Prose. In this paper I demonstrate that in many respects Klucharyova's *A Year in Paradise* is specifically a parody of and a tribute to the foundation Village Prose piece—Alexander Solzhenitsyn's 1959 *Матрёнин двор* (*Matryona's House*). I suggest that Klucharyova's techniques involve an exuberant development of stylistic elements found in Solzhenitsyn's text, sometimes with a certain denigration of imagery. One such element is the use of proper names and the other is assumption of the wonder tale structure, two features of *Matryona's House* extrapolated to satisfyingly almost ridiculous by Klucharyova.

Both works are narrated by a male character in first person, telling a story of his being hosted by an old village woman who dies at the end. In addition to similarities in the general outline, Klucharyova's character names attest to her story's connection with the foundation text. For example, the key character is тётя Мотя (Auntie Motya); "Мотя (Motya)" is short for "Матрёна (Matryona)," which is the name of Solzhenitsyn's heroine. There is, however, a considerable stylistic difference between the two versions of the name. "Матрёна" is a respectable village name, almost retaining the meaning of its Roman origin—"matron." In the story, it is often respectfully combined with the patronymic of "Васильевна (Vasilyevna), a patronymic formed from "Василий," a name of Byzantine Greek origin, meaning "royal."⁴ Little respect is associated with "тётя Мотя," a barely proper noun, which usually denotes a ridiculous common old woman.⁵

³ Ibid., and Sergei Belyakov, "Кукольный домик (Doll House)" in *Октябрь*, #4, 2008 <http://magazines.russ.ru/october/2008/4/ru10.html>, and Mikhail Issel and Jeff Parker, editors, *Rasskazy: New Fiction from a New Russia* (Portland, OR: Tin House Books, 2009), 367.

⁴ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Матрёнин двор" [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 132, 134-135, 138, 141, 143, 148, 149, 152.

⁵ Natalya V. Bogdanova, "Кто Вы, тётя Мотя?" <http://www.gramma.ru/RUS/?id=14.99>

It is not even clear from Klucharyova's story whether that is the old woman's real name indeed. The narrator-protagonist uses it after his only other neighbors, the two old sisters, whose own names unambiguously refer to "darkness and light," Toma and Lusya tell him "А, это тётя Мотя! — Тома с Люсей прыснули совсем как молоденькие девушки. (Oh, that's Auntie Motya!—Toma and Lusya burst into giggles absolutely like young girls.)"^{6,7} The otherwise unexplained laughter may indicate that it is an invented nickname that they have given to the peculiar old woman. Nowhere in the text does the narrator-protagonist address Tyotyа Motya directly as such; all his references to her are in the third person. When he buries her, while he puts this questionable name on her grave, it is clear that there is a doubt in his mind as to what her name really is: "На дощечке так и написал: "Тётя Мотя". Не смог сообразить даже, как ее полное имя (And on the sign, I wrote it just like that "Tyotyа Motya." I could not even figure out what her full name was.)"⁸

Solzhenitsyn's patronymic "Васильевна" for his Матрёна figures in a no less bastardized form in *A Year in Paradise*. Василий is no longer the father of the main character—Василий associated with Tyotyа Motya is an old cat, perhaps a distant relative of Matryona's "колченогая кошка (lame cat)."⁹ A common pet cat name in Russia is Васька (Vas'ka), which is a somewhat derogatory derivation from the royal "Василий." In Klucharyova's story, the use of its full form for a cat suggests simultaneously a certain intentional degradation of the reference and a certain elevation of the cat character. The only truly royal character with the name related to Василий is Prince Василько (Vasil'ko), briefly mentioned by an ethnography student in a conversation with the narrator-protagonist. Even then, the name is present only in a

⁶ Natalya Klucharyova, "Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)" in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, 80.

⁷ Here and in the rest of the paper, all translations are mine—VM.

⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Матрёнин двор" [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 130.

diminutive form and is associated with a very distant and disturbing past—the prince was blinded by his brothers.¹⁰

Another reference to the name “Василий” and its degradation in Klucharyova’s story is the family name of Васюхин (Vasyukhin), the most common last name in the village. As ethnography students visiting the village observe concerning those soldiers from the village who perished during the World War II, “[и]з двадцати погибших, четырнадцать Васюхиных, прикинь! ([o]ut of twenty casualties, fourteen are Vasyukhin, think of the proportions!)”¹¹ This last name, constituting seventy percent of the last names in the village, is obviously derived from Васюха (Vasyukha), another derogatory derivation from the royal Василий. Earlier in the story, the reader learns that the village villain is also Васюхин.¹² Chances are that Tyotyа Motya has the same last name, that she too is Васюхина (Vasyukhina). Тётя Мотя Васюхина is a bastardized version of Solzhenitsyn’s Матрёна Васильена.

If the reader is still inattentive enough to miss the significance of names in the story, Klucharyova adds a rambling discourse about a good name for a daughter, carried on by a beautiful and young ethnography student, with whom the nameless protagonist is infatuated.¹³ This is a confirmation of the necessity to pay attention to names or lack thereof, just as is the discussion of the name of the village in which the narrator stays in the beginning of the story. Like Solzhenitsyn, Klucharyova makes a connection between village names and a search for Russia.

In Solzhenitsyn, the initial stress is on the contrast between poetic Высокое Поле (Vysokoye Pole, High Field) and an example of Sovietese—Торфопродукт

¹⁰ Natalya Klucharyova, “Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)” in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, 82.

¹¹ Ibid., 84.

¹² Ibid., 82.

¹³ Ibid., 84.

(Peatmossproduct).¹⁴ Once the narrator is established as a math teacher in Torfoproduct, he learns of other villages nearby: Тальново, (Tal' novo)—Matryona's actual village, and “Часлицы, Овинцы, Спудни, Шевертни, Шестимирово (Chaslitsy, Ovintsy, Spudni, Shevertni and Shestimirovo).”¹⁵ The narrator says, “Ветром успокоения потянуло на меня от этих названий. Они обещали мне кондовую Россию. (Winds of calm breathed onto me from those names. They promised me the real old-fashioned Russia.)”¹⁶ This is another time that the narrator announces his desire to be one with the real Russia, “Мне хотелось затесаться и затеряться в самой нутряной России—если такая где-то была, жила (I wanted to get dissolved and lost in the very core of Russia—if there still was one someplace, if it still lived.)”¹⁷

Klucharyova's protagonist too is concerned with finding the “real” Russia. For him, it is his “жажда настоящего (thirst for the real)” that brings him to the village of Рай (Paradise).¹⁸ While Solzhenitsyn's Высокое Поле has certain, very subtle, paradisaical associations, the name Рай is unbelievably straightforward and ironic, as the protagonist-narrator notes.¹⁹ The name seems unusual to Russian speakers, who are familiar with common village names derived from the word “paradise,” such as Раёк (little paradise), Райково (of little paradise), and Райское (of paradise), but not Рай itself, even though there is indeed a village with such a name near Smolensk. That real village is in a much better state and has a much greater population than the practically dead village described by Klucharyova. Nor is the real village of Rai located in

¹⁴ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Матрёнин двор” [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 126.

¹⁵ Ibid., 127-128.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 125.

¹⁸ Natalya Klucharyova, “Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)” in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, 76.

¹⁹ Ibid., 77.

Грязево region (Gryazevo—a toponym derived from грязь, meaning “mud”), which, in the story, is the result of Klucharyova’s use of a real name from a different location.²⁰

“Грязево” itself undoubtedly reminds Klucharyova’s readers of another list of village names associated with a search for Russia—Nikolai Nekrasov’s 1876 *Кому на Руси жить хорошо?* (Who lives happily in Russia?), in which peasants search for whoever lives happily in Russia, coming

Из смежных деревень:
Заплатова, Дырявина,
Разутова, Знобишина,
Горелова, Неелова —
Неурожайка тож
(From neighbor villages:
All-Patched, With-Holes-Covered,
All-Shoeless, Chilled-and-Cold,
Burnt-Down, Not-Have-Eaten—
And Never-Harvest too).²¹

Such blunt irony is a typical device for Klucharyova—she overloads her tale with clues, making the story not just a narrative but a discourse on narrative, an ironic commentary on the text itself, a play on its own intertextuality. Her approach is to develop Solzhenitsyn’s subtle, buried references, for Solzhenitsyn’s text too contains references to this poem by Nekrasov and to at least one more work by the poet.

While Klucharyova references Solzhenitsyn’s Matryona with her Tyota Motya, in his turn, Solzhenitsyn gives the same name to his heroine as that belonging to an idealized peasant heroine of Nekrasov’s *Who lives happily in Russia?*²² This reference to Nekrasov helps the reader realize that Solzhenitsyn’s Matryona also has a prototype in the image of an idealized

²⁰ “Пай” in *Энциклопедия Смоленской области* (Encyclopedia of Smolensk Region), <http://www.admin.smolensk.ru/history/raion/book/-R-.htm>

²¹ Nikolai Nekrasov, *Кому на Руси жить хорошо?* (Who lives happily in Russia?) in Н. Некрасов, *Стихотворения и поэмы* (Short poems and narrative poems) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1980), 294.

²² Ibid., 379.

peasant woman from Nekrasov's narrative poem *Мороз, красный нос* (*Father Frost, the Red-Nosed*). The excerpt from the poem that starts with "Есть женщины в русских селеньях..." (There are women in Russian villages...) was familiar to every Russian when Solzhenitsyn was writing his story. Like Nekrasov's heroine, who "Коня на скаку остановит,/В горящую избу войдет! (Will stop a running horse/Will enter a burning house),"²³ Matryona does just that. She tells the narrator how when she was young she stopped a startled horse, "Раз с испугу сани [конь—V.M.] понёс в озеро, мужики отскакивали, а я, правда, за узду схватила, остановила. (Once [the horse—V.M.] got startled and tore headlong to the lake with the sled; the men just kept jumping out of the way, and I, really, grabbed the bridles and stopped him.)"²⁴ And, already after Matryona's death, the author also tells how once, waking up to a fire in her house, instead of focusing on saving herself, she was saving her innumerable ficus plants from the burning house.²⁵

Like Nekrasov, both Solzhenitsyn and Klucharyova also use dialect—one of the most straightforward ways to impart village flavor to their characters' speech. In Solzhenitsyn, who quotes Матрёна's "порция (portion)" for "порча (hex)"²⁶ and "картонный суп (cardboard soup)" for "картофельный суп (potato soup),"²⁷ these amusing variations of the local speech are superficial, more decorative than substantial.

Klucharyova uses dialect in a way more integral to the story. For example, Tyotyа Motya uses a phrase to describe her own final state with the words that the protagonist (together with most readers) does not understand—"ходит Хорохоль."²⁸ She is referring to the phenomenon of

²³ Ibid., 134.

²⁴ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Матрёнин двор" [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 138.

²⁵ Ibid., 154.

²⁶ Ibid., 146.

²⁷ Ibid., 132.

²⁸ Natalya Klucharyova, "Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)" in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, 85.

agonal breathing, characteristic of a dying person. The word “хорохоль” is not even found in Vladimir Dal’s dictionary, but the entire phrase is quoted in a letter by Piotr Miturich when he describes Velimir Khlebnikov’s death: “Речь совершенно непонятная, едва пьет, дышит с трудом, в горле клокочет. „Уже ходит хорохоль“, — сказал один старик-мужик — предсмертное дыхание. (His [Khlebnikov’s—VM] speech is absolutely incomprehensible, he can barely drink, he has difficulty breathing; something gurgles in his throat. “Already the *хорохоль* is out and about,” said an old peasant about the death rattle.)”²⁹

The alliteration, consonance and onomatopoeia of the peasant’s words are enough to work in Klucharyova’s story for a reader who does not have knowledge of the expression’s semantics. There is, however, an awareness of text extension possibilities. Anyone can search the expression on the Internet and find the excerpt from Khlebnikov’s biography, the way I did. The Internet becomes another reference in itself just as dying Khlebnikov’s insistence on going to a village becomes a part of Klucharyova’s story. The very obscurity of the words becomes a device to comment on the theme of death in Klucharyova and ties the death of a poet with the theme of Russian village death. Searching for Russia in the story or searching for Russia on the Internet both lead to the theme of death.

Presenting the noun “Хорохоль” in the written text with a capital letter, as if for a proper name of an animate entity, imparts certain anthropomorphic or at least zoomorphic features to the phenomenon of agonal breathing, to death itself. In general Klucharyova’s story is full of anthropomorphized creatures, such as the already mentioned tomcat Vasiliy, in contrast to Solzhenitsyn’s sober and rational view of life, death, and animals. For example, like Solzhenitsyn’s Matryona, Tyotyа Motya lives alone and also, like Solzhenitsyn’s Matryona, who owns a goat, “все животы её были—одна эта грязно-белая криворогая коза (all of her

²⁹ Sofia Starkina, *Velimir Khlebnikov* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardia, 2007), 300.

animals were this one dirty-white crooked-horn goat),”³⁰ all Tyotya Motya owns is a goat.³¹ Solzhenitsyn, however, mentions the goat only in relationship to difficulties that Matryona has in feeding the animal, and then, at the very end of the story, informs the reader that the goat has been taken by one of Matryona’s sisters.³² By contrast, Tyotya Motya’s goat, with her excellent communication skills, is a fully-developed character in her own right and a mover of the plot as well. She is the one who fetches the narrator when Tyotya Motya collapses before her death.³³ The animal characters impart a very obvious folktale-like quality to Klucharyova’s text.

A Year in Paradise in fact has many structural features and stylistic details referencing the Russian wonder tale. In fact, it can be analyzed by assigning Propp’s functions to the narrative.³⁴ There is the initial Function VIIIa Member of a Family Lacks Something—left by the wife in this case. It is followed by Function XI The Hero Leaves Home—taking off in a random direction “where one’s eyes happen to look” as it would be described in a folktale. Interactions with Lyokha fall under XIII The Hero Reacts to the Actions of the Future Donor and XIV The Hero Acquires the Use of a Magical Agent—house with an “interactive” map of Russia. The last two functions are tripled, first to include Toma and Lusya (Darkness and Light) as donors as well, and then Tyotya Motya, a Baba Yaga-like character with her animal familiar, the goat, making the total number of female donors the “correct” three. As is proper for the wonder tale, from the name of the village, the hero is in the other world, in the land of the dead.

Once the magical tale structure is established, there follows bastardization and reversal of functions. Function XV The Hero is Led to the Whereabouts of an Object of Search—not his

³⁰ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Матрёнин двор” [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 131.

³¹ Natalya Klucharyova, “Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)” in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, 84.

³² Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Матрёнин двор” [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 131, 135-136, 160.

³³ Natalya Klucharyova, “Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)” in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, 85.

³⁴ Vladimir Propp, *Морфология волшебной сказки* (Morphology of the Wonder Tale) (Moscow: Labirint, 2001).

grandfather's body but just a helmet that could as well be anyone's helmet in a magically disappearing clearing in the woods. Function XVI The Hero and the Villain Join in Direct Combat becomes the anti-function, the hero does not enter the combat, he is defeated. More anti-functions: The Hero is not Branded (Function XVII), the Villain is not Defeated (Function XVIII), and the Initial Misfortune or Lack is not Liquidated (Function XIX). This last anti-function is reinforced by his not getting the "princess"—Lesya. And all the subsequent functions are anti-functions. The reference to the classical anti-wonder tale, Gogol's *Viy*, strengthens the interpretation of the story as such.³⁵

But again, I see turning of Klucharyova's story into a wonder tale-like narrative as a response to that, which Solzhenitsyn already hints at in his story. In Solzhenitsyn's *Matryona's House* Sheryl Spitz recognizes folktale motifs in the hero coming from afar on a search. She also observes that the description of Matryona's house sounds like that of Baba Yaga's. Spitz, however, hurries to point out that there is nothing Baba Yaga-like in Matryona herself.³⁶ In contrast to Spitz, I do note Baba Yaga features in Matryona; for example, the initial meeting of the narrator with Matryona is strongly reminiscent of a hero's coming to Baba Yaga in Russian wonder tales. When he enters Matryona's house in search of quarters to live, Matryona lies on top of a Russian stove.³⁷ That is just what Baba Yaga does when the hero enters her hut on chicken feet: she lies "на печи, на девятом кирпичи (on the stove, on the ninth brick)."³⁸ The conversation about food and feeding that follows between the female character on the stove and

³⁵ Natalya Klucharyova, "Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)" in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, xx.

³⁶ Sheryl Spitz, "The Impact of Structure on Solzhenitsyn's "Matryona's Home," in *Russian Review* 36 (2): 173, 176.

³⁷ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Матрёнин двор" [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 129.

³⁸ Vladimir Propp, *Исторические корни волшебной сказки (Historical roots of the wonder tale)* (Leningrad: Leningrad University Press, 1986), 75.

the male character standing in the doors in Solzhenitsyn³⁹ is also reminiscent of the formulaic exchange that takes place in folktales.⁴⁰ But the most important point is that the central function of Matryona in the story coincides with the central function of Baba Yaga in folktales. Vladimir Propp says, “Классическая форма дарителя—яга (A classical manifestation of the donor is Yaga).”⁴¹ Matryona is a donor—she gives the narrator a gift of knowledge as he realizes what the essence and foundation of the real Russia is, gives him a reward for his search:

Все мы жили рядом с ней и не поняли, что есть она тот самый праведник,
без которого, по пословице, не стоит село.
Ни город.
Ни вся земля наша.
(We all lived next to her and did not understand that she was that same saint
without whom, as the saying goes, a village cannot stand.
Nor a city.
Nor our entire land.)⁴²

In contrast to Matryona’s gift, in Klucharyova, Tyota Motya’s gifts to the narrator are more ambiguous. The protagonist of *A Year in Paradise* seems to be just as confused at the end of the story as when he starts on his search. Tyota Motya, however, has many characteristics of Baba Yaga even though her donor function appears to be weakened. Inexplicably, magically, she is rich, rich in the folktale sense: she has piles of foodstuff and significantly, she has candles when electricity fails, she is in charge of light.⁴³ Her stores remind the story’s reader of the Russian wonder tale “Vasilisa Prekrasnaya (Vasilisa the Beautiful)” that states that in Baba

³⁹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Матрёнин двор” [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 129.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Propp, *Исторические корни волшебной сказки (Historical roots of the wonder tale)* (Leningrad: Leningrad University Press, 1986), 67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴² Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Матрёнин двор” [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 161.

⁴³ Natalya Klucharyova, “Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)” in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, xx.

Yaga's house "всего довольно (there is plenty of everything)" and in which the plot is based on Vasilisa's travel to Baba Yaga's house to get light.⁴⁴

The name Tyota Motya itself, aside from referring to Solzhenitsyn's Matryona, has Baba Yaga associations as well. The name, as Natalya Bogdanova points out, is believed to originate from children's nonsense rhyme folklore. Such folklore mostly refers to *тётя Мотя* as a ridiculous old woman. (And that is the sense in which Toma and Lucya use it in the story). There is, however, a strand of rhymes and stories presenting *тётя Мотя* as a supernatural being. Bogdanova singles out an eponymous story by Yuri Zverlin as an example of that mode of character presentation in literature.⁴⁵ In that story, *тётя Мотя* is a домовый (house spirit)-like character, living in the heating-ventilation system and jumping out there when the small daughter of the family is attacked; with her sword-like never-cut nails, she chases the attacker away.⁴⁶

In Klucharyova's *A Year in Paradise*, there are also competing donors, other competing Baba Yagas. The already mentioned sisters Toma and Lucya give companionship and assistance in the protagonist's search for his grandfather, which is equated with the search for the real Russia in the story.⁴⁷ The initial donor is Леха (Lyokha), who gifts a house with a magical interactive map of Russia to the narrator.⁴⁸ From his name, from his appearance and from his bizarre speech, it is easy to recognize him as a *leshii*, a forest spirit that sometimes acts as a donor in folktales. As Propp says, "Леший всегда есть не что иное, как переименованная яга (*Leshii* is always nothing but a renamed Yaga)".⁴⁹ To this list of donors, based on her name, echoing "Lyokha" and "*leshii*," and my reading of the story, I add Леся (Lesya), the

⁴⁴ Aleksandr Afanas'ev, # XX

⁴⁵ Natalya V. Bogdanova, "Кто Вы, тётя Мотя?" <http://www.gramma.ru/RUS/?id=14.99>

⁴⁶ Yuri Zverlin, "Тётя Мотя," <http://www.proza.ru/2009/12/26/468>

⁴⁷ Natalya Klucharyova, "Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)" in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, xx.

⁴⁸ Ibid., xx

⁴⁹ Vladimir Propp, *Исторические корни волшебной сказки* (Leningrad: Leningrad University Press, 1986), 57.

ethnography student. Her primary function in the story is that of the magical princess, but she is also a Baba Yaga in training. She has a potential to be a gifter with her quickly accumulating knowledge and her possibly magical abilities to make the deaf and dumb speak.⁵⁰

This double function of Lesya, she is both the object of a search for a magical princess and a potential donor, is a parallel to a double function that Solzhenitsyn's Matryona has. Matryona is both the object of a search for Russia, encapsulated in her saintliness, and a donor, who makes realization of that truth by the protagonist possible.⁵¹ Solzhenitsyn's story ends with the successful completion of that search. His hero now knows what Russia needs "to stand," reflecting perhaps a certain optimism that Solzhenitsyn felt about Russia's opportunities after Stalin's death. His ending suggests a possibility of a new, "true" direction that the country could take then.

Klucharyova's story, written considerably after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and still with the country in the grips of disappointments with life in the post-Soviet Russia, is not entirely pessimistic, but reflects the sense of a loss of direction and confusion about every value and stance. For example, when towards the end of the story, the narrator-hero prays over the body of Tyotya Motya with the words of the prayer miraculously coming to him, that suggests a way out for Russia through religion. But the conflation of that miracle with the image of Khoma Brut from Gogol's *Viy* adds great ambivalence to the interpretation of his actions. After all, Khoma Brut dies an unclean death while holding vigil over the body of a witch. And so at the very end of the story, the main hero finishes sitting on the floor, propping a map of Russia that keeps falling apart— waiting. He does not know what makes the country "stand." The contrast with Solzhenitsyn's story, made more evident by Klucharyova's parodying of its names and

⁵⁰ Natalya Klucharyova, "Один год в Раю (A Year in Paradise)" in *Новый мир* (New world), #11, 2007, 86.

⁵¹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Матрёнин двор" [1959] in *Один день Ивана Денисовича/ Матрёнин двор* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), 161.

extending and reversing its wonder tale structure, shows just how much the hero of her story does not know what makes the country “stand.”

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