



About the author:

LUDMILLA PETRUSHEVSKAYA was born in Moscow in 1938. Petrushevskaya studied journalism at Moscow State University, and began writing prose in the mid '60s. Her first work was published in 1972, only to be followed by almost ten years of officially enforced silence, when the publication of her plays and prose was forbidden. At that time Petrushevskaya earned her living by working as a radio and television journalist and contributing to newspapers and literary magazines. When her somber and disturbing absurdist plays were finally staged, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya became widely recognized as one of Russia's finest playwrights. A collection of short stories and monologues, *Immortal Love*, was published in 1988 and met with stunning success among readers and critics alike. In 1992 Petrushevskaya's novel *The Time Is Night* was short-listed for the Russian Booker Prize; it was translated into more than 30 languages and included in college courses as one of the most important novels of the 20th century. Since then, Petrushevskaya has published over 30 books of prose. Today, award-winning plays by Petrushevskaya are produced around the world, while her prose pieces have been published in more than 30 countries. Ludmilla Petrushevskaya is considered to be the only indisputably canonical writer currently at work in Russia today. Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's recent publications have established her reputation with a new generation of readers as a master of the mystical thriller and short stories of magical realism. The New York Times bestseller *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby: Scary Fairy Tales* (published by Penguin in 2010) won the World Fantasy Award and was one of New York magazine's Ten Best Books of the Year and one of NPR's Five Best Works of Foreign Fiction.

In 1991, Petrushevskaya was awarded the Pushkin Prize by the Alfred Toepfer Foundation in Germany. She has also received prizes from the leading literary journals in Russia. Petrushevskaya's novels *The Time Is Night* and *Number One...* were short-listed for the Russian Booker Prize. In 2002, Petrushevskaya received Russia's most prestigious prize in theater, *The Triumph*, for lifetime achievement. Petrushevskaya's play *Bifem* was awarded the first prize at the New Drama Festival in 2003. In 2003 Ludmilla Petrushevskaya was awarded the State Prize of Russian Federation, in November 2021 Petrushevskaya publicly turned down this prize in protest against an imposed closure of The Memorial human rights organization. The World Fantasy Award was received in 2010 for the short stories collection published by Penguin in USA. In 2018 Petrushevskaya received The Big Book Award for life-time achievement, in 2019 the author was awarded New Literature Award (NOS), in critics' choice nomination. The national drama recognition award The Golden Mask has been awarded to Petrushevskaya in 2020 for life-time achievement.

In 2022 Petrushevskaya continued to reside in Russia while fearlessly and severely protesting against dictatorship. She left Russia in 2024.

Selected Bibliography

2022 — **Queen Lear. Magical Tales**, *short stories*

2020 — **The Wedding Night, or May 37th**, *plays*

2017 — **Kidnapped. A Story in Crimes**, *novel*

2017 — **Travels on the Occasion of Death**, *a novella, short stories*

2013 — **There Once Lived a Girl Who Seduced Her Sister's Husband and He Hanged Himself**, *short stories*

2010 — **There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby**, *short stories*

2006 — **The Little Girl from the Metropol**, *autobiography*

2004 — **Number One or in the Gardens of Other Possibilities**, *novel*

2002 — **A Black Coat**, *short stories*

2002, 2015 — **Piglet Pyotr**, *children's picture books*

1999 — **Real-Life Tales**, *short stories*

1996 — **The Collected Works** (5 volumes)

1992 — **The Time Is Night**, *novel*

1988 — **Immortal Love**, *short stories*



Complete list of prizes and awards

The Golden Mask Award 2020 (for the life-time achievement)

The New Literature Award 2018 (Critics' Choice)

The Big Book Award 2018 (for the life-time achievement)

Finalist of **The National Book Critics Circle Award 2017** (USA)

The World Fantasy Award 2010 (USA)

The Gogol Prize 2008

The Bunin Prize 2008

Shortlisted for the **Russian Booker Prize 2004**

The State Prize of the Russian Federation 2003

The New Drama Festival (first prize) **2003**

The Triumph Prize 2002

Shortlisted for the **Russian Booker Prize 1992**

The Pushkin Prize by the **Alfred Toepfer Foundation 1991** (Germany)



Selected quotes

One of Russia's best living writers.

The New York Times

We are likely to hear a lot more of his woman. Some October, perhaps, from the Nobel Prize committee.

Nation

Petrushevskaya is a strikingly original author.

The Guardian

In her best work Petrushevskaya steers a sure course between neutrally recording the degraded life of the Soviet-era urban underclass and ratcheting up the squalor of that life for the mere pleasure of it. She does so by the steadiness of her moral compass and the gaiety of her prose.

J. M. Coetzee

winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature

Thrillingly strange... Brilliantly disturbing... proves that the literary tradition that produces Dostoevsky, Gogol, and Babel is alive and well... Petrushevskaya writes instant classics.

The Daily Beast

Petrushevskaya is the Tolstoy of the communal kitchen... She is not, like Tolstoy, writing of war, or, like Dostoevsky, writing of criminals on the street, or, like poet Anna Akhmatova or novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, noting the extreme suffering of those sent to the camps. Rather, she is bearing witness to the fight to survive the everyday... [She is] dazzlingly talented and deeply empathetic.

Slate

The writing is beautifully controlled and the spirit large... She deserves a wide readership.

TLS

...a strong talent.

Kirkus Review

The auras of Samuel Beckett and the baleful Albanian magic realist Ismail Kadare blend in Petrushevskaya's work.

Booklist

Finalist of **The National Book Critics Circle Award 2017 (USA)****The Gogol Prize 2008**Longlisted for the **National Bestseller Prize 2007****Amphora**An autobiographical novel, 2006
103 pp*Translation rights sold*

English (US) Penguin
 French Christian Bourgois
 Lithuanian Vaga
 Romanian Meteor
 German Schoeffling
 Italian Brioschi Editore
 Arabic Almada Group
 Portuguese (Brazil) Companhia das Letras
 Simplified Chinese Shanghai Readers' Culture
 Czech Pistorious&Olshanska
 Malayalam (India) Green Books
 Turkish Fol Kitap

Complete
English translation
available

The Little Girl from the Metropol

This is not a typical fiction memoir. Through the prism of the story of her family, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya draws a compelling portrait of the era of communist Russia.

With brilliant precision and telling details, Petrushevskaya draws a gallery of portraits of the Muscovite intelligentsia as they struggle to survive in the new-pov-erty-stricken and ignorant-country. The author recalls her beautiful grandmother, whom the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky was in love with; her great-aunt, lover of head-of-state Mikhail Kalinin; and her grandfather, a celebrated linguist, one of the fathers of the Moscow linguistic circle. These characters are set next to violent and ruthless neighbors who attack Ludmilla's grandmother with an axe when she wants to use the bathroom in their communal flat, and beat Ludmilla if she is found rummaging in their slop-pail for the remains of

food. The 8-year-old girl grows up in the company of fatherless boys, homeless beggars and war invalids that crowded the streets of Saratov (then Kuibyshev), where her family lived as evacuees during the war. As the story of a small girl in the hungry post-war years unfolds, the fate of the enormous country appears before the reader — a country where the magical is intertwined with the mundane, beautiful and refined neighbor with terrible ones, and despair with hope. A family forest grows out of Petrushevskaya's memoir, one in which each tree is at once "a child, a parent, and a personality."

Selected quotes

Powerful... Like a stained-glass Chagall window, Petrushevskaya's Soviet-era memoir creates a larger panorama out of tiny, vivid chapters, shattered fragments of different color and shape... [It] brings to mind Auden's famous words about Yeats: 'Mad Ireland hurt him into poetry.' This memoir shows us how Soviet life hurt Ludmilla Petrushevskaya into crystalline prose.

The New York Times Book Review

[An] extraordinary memoir... Lively, bold, iconoclastic... [Petrushevskaya] has succeeded Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as the country's greatest writer and authentic moral voice.

Orlando Figes

The New York Review of Books

A gritty, surprisingly disarming portrait of the grim Stalinist era.

BBC

"Ten Books You Should Read in February"

Devastating, unjudgmental, and curiously uplifting, the memoir is a profound testament to the power of the creative, loving human spirit to vanquish brutal circumstance... The stories she tells... show a girl of unerodable pride and defiant character, intent on finding joy.

The Christian Science Monitor

Petrushevskaya is blessed with good material... [Her] sunny outlook seems all the more remarkable as we learn more details of her childhood, some of which might read as straight out of the Brothers Grimm... A preternaturally nimble and resourceful heroine, she keeps emerging unscathed... Her memoir has the fairy-tale ending its plucky heroine deserves.

Bookforum

Biting but beautiful, it's an autobiography that says much about the world both then and now.

Refinery29

A well-crafted glimpse into the past of one of Russia's most intriguing writers... Spare, often darkly humorous... Many memories have a touch of the magic Petrushevskaya includes in her fiction... Her perspective is decidedly original.

BookPage

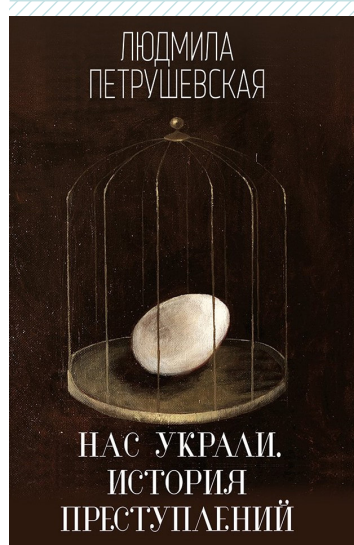
A terse, spirited memoir that reads like a picaresque novel... Lively, irreverent... With spunk and defiance, [Petrushevskaya] survived, and transcended, the privations of her youth.

Kirkus Reviews

A blend of dark humor and clipped, piercing realism... Petrushevskaya is the definition of incorrigible and indomitable, both on the page and in her life.

Publishers Weekly

The New Literature Award 2017 (critics' choice)



Eksmo

Novel, 2017

320 pp

Translation rights sold

World English Deep Vellum

Turkish Fol Kitap

Norwegian Solum

Macedonian Antolog

Bulgarian Colibri

Danish Silkefyret

Hungarian Typotex

Arabic Madhamin

Complete
English translation
available

Kidnapped. A Story in Crimes

Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, Russia's greatest living absurdist and surrealist writer, The New York Times bestselling and The World Fantasy Award winning author of scary fairy-tales, has written a traditional family drama meet a burlesque social satire, enveloped in a Bollywood soap-opera plot.

Set in the 1980s through 1990s, the novel focuses on the life of Alina, 21y.o., a promising language student who has to drop her academic career because of an unplanned pregnancy. Alina decides to give up a baby for adoption after birth and is set to leave the hospital alone. In the hospital she meets another girl, Masha, a graduate from the Moscow Institute of Foreign Affairs, who is happily looking forward to the childbirth and speaks up of her life plans with the husband, Sergei, (he, too, is a future diplomat) in a republic in South Asia. Their family has been chosen for work in the Soviet trade mission there — a fantastic career for young specialists.

Masha dies in childbirth, and Alina who delivers her baby at the same time, on an impulse exchanges bracelets with newborns' names between the babies — she wishes a brighter future for her own son, and believes that the widowed father will still take the baby along abroad, away from the dull Soviet reality. By then Alina feels connected with her baby and feels sorry for Masha's newborn son, and she agrees to breastfeed both babies while in the hospital. Soon Alina is told that her boy died from infection, but she is the only one who knows that her son is alive, since she exchanged the names bracelets. What she does not know, however, is that the baby did not die as reported — the management in the hospital have long worked out a scheme to ease the trade of babies left for adoption — and that the buyer chose her boy (listed as Masha's son) and the management unscrupulously exchanged the bracelets with names again.

Sergei is devastated, Masha's death puts his career plans on threat — only married couples enlist for a foreign service. He approaches Alina with an offer to take

over his dead wife's identity and to travel together with his baby. Alina, who is certain that Sergei's son is her own biological baby, agrees. She cannot even imagine what the future has in stock for her — there will be sexual and physical abuse from the spiteful factitious husband; survival against all odds in unthinkable circumstances in the strange country; a miraculous reunion with her own son in Moscow; struggling for living with two kids and without income or work in the turbulent 1990s. What Alina is certain about when she accepts Sergei's unscrupulous offer is that she will learn to be a good mother.

Petrushevskaya's impeccable style reaches its heights in the writer's chef-d'oeuvre. The author's exceptional command in rendering direct speech of her characters fills archetypical heroes with life and volume, while the high-pitch tension involves readers to otherwise stereotypical, if not trite, conflicts. The flamboyant cast of characters — girls who blackmail their future husbands with pregnancy; a father-in-law who banishes newlyweds in case they might claim rights for a flat in Moscow; a husband who is ready to exchange his dead wife for a stranger for the career's sake; staff of maternity hospital who trade children left for adoption, documenting them as dead; a whimsical elderly lady who falls in love with an old handicapped genius artist; Alina's former college mates with their lovers; Sergei's driver building his private paradise in an offshore country and his wife, nicknamed Kustodiev, with a certainly distinguished figure — they all form a grand choir singing a hymn to the motherhood, a driving force of Petrushevskaya's universe, where everyone is a criminal and a victim, and the author feels compassion for each.

Selected quotes

The best novel of the year, in every page there's more wit and talent than in the whole contemporary Russian prose, everyone forgive me. Written with much physiology, humor, the novel is at times scaring, always fascinating and precise from a playwright's perspective.

Dmitry Bykov

the nationally-awarded author of The Living Souls

The scope is epic — the world of Petrushevskaya has no division between important and secondary events, main characters and the rest; each character is measured in scale of fate, the light from cosmos flowing equally though everyone <...> The new moment in this apotheosis of the "matrarchy" is that the great mother, the main hero in Petrushevskaya's fiction, includes this time both mothers and grandmothers who save other's children not only from death but also from the orphanhood.

colta.ru

Kidnapped is an inventive novel — a hymn to building a family on one's own terms, whatever form that family takes.

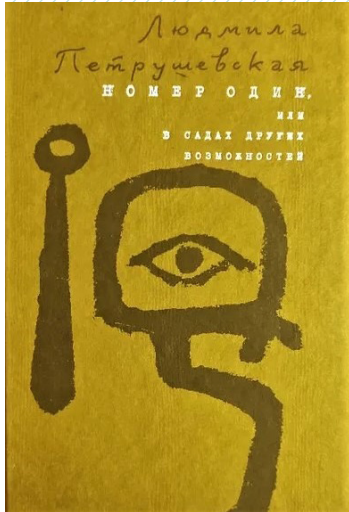
Foreword Reviews

...there's plenty of cutting satire of corruption in late- and post-Soviet Russia. This irreverent and absurdist outing will keep readers guessing to the very end.

Publisher's Weekly

Kidnapped is a cold war soap opera par excellence, replete with spies, Angolan freedom fighters, and student dormitories filled with the many nationalities of the Soviet Union. <...> Bipolar or multipolar, it is still a man's world. People are still just schemers and strivers, Petrushevskaya tells us, claiming whatever and whomever they want as their own. Such stark, sobering truths are not incompatible with a happy ending.

NYRB



Eksmo
Novel, 2004
336 pp

Translation rights sold
Polish Bertelsmann

Number One, or in the Gardens of Other Possibilities

This rich and complex Cajun brew of a novel from “one of Russia’s best living writers” (The New York Times) opens up new textual realms — a true feast for Petrushevskaya’s devoted readers and inquisitive minds alike.

The bullet-paced, breathtaking narrative opens with a brilliantly rendered dialogue between a research fellow (Number One) and the director of an ethnographic research institute (Number Two). Ivan (Number One), an underpaid, enthusiastic scientist, father of a handicapped child and clandestine creator of a computer game called *In The Gardens of Other Possibilities*, reports the results of his last expedition to the settlements of the nearly extinct Antti people, whose beliefs and myths merit international scientific attention. Number One plays a recording of the incantations of the powerful shaman of the Antti, who is an adept in the transmigration of souls and knows the way to the evil world of the dead. Ivan has to persuade the director to find 5,000 US dollars in ransom money for his colleague Kukharev, kidnapped during the expedition. Ivan fails to return to the settlement with the money — he is robbed, and the violent pursuit of the thieves ends in the double murder of Ivan and Valery, one of the criminals. Instead of dying, Ivan finds himself in the body of the thief — and in the centre of the grim

reality of the criminal world of Russia’s provinces. As Valery’s body suppresses the consciousness of the intellectual researcher and determines Ivan’s actions, the intricately concocted story escalates into a blood-curdling thriller.

Petrushevskaya’s unsurpassed mastery in rendering the linguistic personalities of the intellectual and the thief, and the dense, concentrated narrative that is the author’s signature technique, open up new textual realms. In the fictional world of Petrushevskaya, the boundaries between the real and the surreal, between everyday existence and the reality of a computer game, are blurred, and her heroes wander along the “forked paths” in the “gardens of other possibilities” that spiral into endless limbos of personal and social hells in modern Russia. The author brilliantly masters the shifts between an absurdist play through mystical thriller to social drama, putting forward the ontological oppositions of body vs. soul, living vs. being, and drawing a compelling portrait of an almost-extinct Russian intelligentsia.

Selected quotes

The reader’s perception of the text is intentionally frustrated; the brilliant narrative technique confronts and confounds (in a Joycean manner) us. <...> The concentration of the macabre surpasses everything previously published in Russia.

Russian Journal

A text of frenzied energy and passion. <...> One of the brightest literary events of the year.

ej.ru

This is the unpredictable and harrowing story of a soul that travels between bodies and at the same time tries to solve its numerous problems.

Private Time Magazine

Petrushevskaya prepares her plot with a dissector’s precision.

Afisha

Petrushevskaya has conveyed the nightmare of identity and the question “Who am I?” hanging in mid-air, unanswered, with consummate skill, in the best traditions of David Lynch.

Vash Dosug

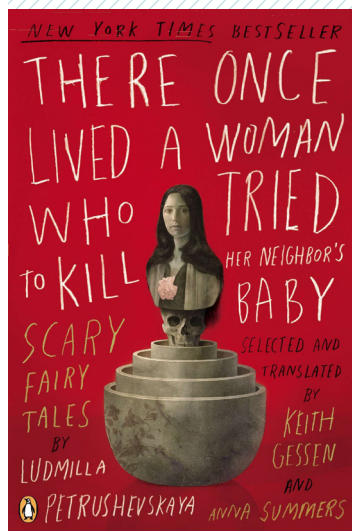
In Number One the evil is not the private prerogative of a single person — it becomes a common denominator of life.

Itogi Magazine

The World Fantasy Award 2010

One of The New York magazine's 10 Best Books of the Year 2009

One of NPR's 5 Best Works of Foreign Fiction 2009

The New York Times
Bestseller
Amazon.com Bestseller
in translated fiction

Penguin Books

Short stories, 2009

224 pp

Translation rights sold

World English Penguin

German Bloomsbury Berlin

French Christian Bourgois

Spanish Atalanta

Italian Einaudi

Portuguese (Brazil) Companhia das Letras

Norwegian Cappelen Damm

Danish Vandkunsten

Chinese simplified characters Shanghai 99 Culture Consulting

Romanian Meteor Press

Russian Astrel/AST; Alpina Prose

Estonian Tānapäev

Turkish Jaguar

Japanese Kawade Shobo Shinsha

Serbian Solaris

Korean Sigongsa

Czech Větrné mlýny

Macedonian Ili Ili

Hungarian Typotex

Armenian Vogt Nairi

Dutch De Geus

Bulgarian Prozorots

Albanian Ombra

Malayalam (India) Saikatham

Croatian Hangar 7

Complete
English translation
available

There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbors' Baby

A master of the short story genre, heir to the spellbinding tradition of Poe and Gogol, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya dazzles the imagination with explorations of death, love, space, time and identity. This is an invitation to travel along a "shadowy borderland between reality and nightmare", one not to resist.

These in her mystical scary stories that at once recall Kafka, Borges and Gogol, Petrushevskaya pictures the deprived and desperate — orphans, childless women, lonely elderly people — in search of love and happiness, in their struggle for life. The fantastic (magical transformations, resurrection of the dead, living dolls and magical objects) merges here into reality, authentically captured by the author. Petrushevskaya's signature prose, harrowing and painfully sensitive, seems to strip off your skin, making your naked nerves shudder at the touch of this fictional reality that is much too close for comfort.

Here is a childless woman who grows a girl in a cabbage (The Cabbage-Patch Mother), or a girl attempts suicide and finds herself in a horrid, unit apartment building chased by monstrous lorry drivers, escaping a split second before it is too late to come back to life (A Black Coat). There are frighteningly prophetic stories on pandemic extreme aftermath (Hygiene, The New Family Robinson).

Set against a bleak background, Petrushevskaya's "fairy-tales for grownups", as the author defines the genre, are amazingly dynamic and ingenious.

Selected quotes

One of Russia's best living writers... Every one of the 19 stories in Petrushevskaya's *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby* presents an arresting parable of this kind. Timeless and troubling, these "scary fairy tales" grapple with accidents of fate and weaknesses of human nature that exact a heavy penance. Short, highly concentrated, inventive and disturbing, her tales inhabit a borderline between this world and the next, a place where vengeance and grace may be achieved only in dreams.

The New York Times Book Review

Simply put, these stories are incredibly weird. But they linger in the mind as unsolvable puzzles: mysterious and undeniably seductive.

More magazine

These stories work the boundary states of consciousness — between sleep and waking, hallucination and realization, life and death — like a tongue works an aching tooth. You never know where you are or where you're going, because the ground beneath the narratives is constantly shifting. You know only that the world you are in is as bleak as Beckett, as astringent as witch hazel, as poetic as your finest private passing moments.

Elle magazine

Arresting... Incantatory... Timeless and troubling...

This exquisite collection [is] vital, eerie and freighted with the moral messages that attend all cautionary tales... [Petrushevskaya] is hailed as one of Russia's best living writers. This slim volume shows why. Again and again, in surprisingly few words, her witchy magic foment an unsettling brew of conscience and consequences.

The New York Times Book Review

The book could catch fire in your hands and you'd still try to be turning pages. It's giving me nightmares, in the nicest way possible.

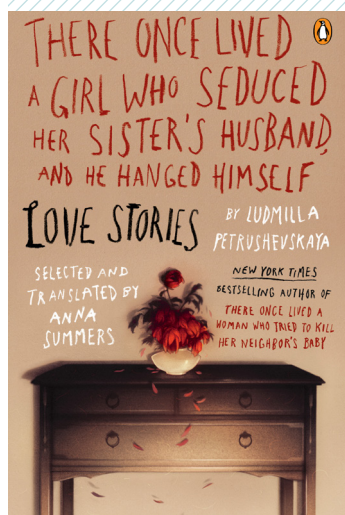
*Jessica Crispin
Bookslut*

Thrillingly strange... Brilliantly disturbing... The fact that Ludmilla Petrushevskaya is Russia's premier writer of fiction today proves that the literary tradition that produced Dostoyevsky, Gogol, and Babel is alive and well.

*Taylor Antrim
The Daily Beast*

What distinguishes the author is her compression of language, her use of detail and her powerful visual sense... Petrushevskaya is certainly a writer of particular gifts.

Time Out New York



Penguin Books
Short stories, 2013
192 pp

Translation rights sold
World English Penguin
German Bloomsbury Berlin
Russian Astrel/AST
Romanian Editura Polirom
Portuguese (Brazil) Editora Schwarcz
Danish Sylkefyret
Spanish Marbot Ediciones
Catalan Periscopi
Norwegian Solum
Hebrew Locus

Complete
English translation
available

There Once Lived a Girl Who Seduced Her Sister's Husband, and He Hanged Himself: Love Stories

By turns sly and sweet, burlesque and heartbreaking, these realist fables of women looking for love are the stories that Ludmilla Petrushevskaya — who has been compared to Chekhov, Tolstoy, Beckett, Poe, Angela Carter, and even Stephen King — is best known for in Russia.

These “love stories, with a twist” follow The New York Times bestselling collection of her mystical short stories *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby*. The publisher's blurb says, “here are attempts at human connection, both depraved and sublime, by people across the life span: one-night stands in communal apartments, poignantly awkward couplings, office trysts, school-girl crushes, elopements, tentative courtships, and

rampant infidelity, shot through with lurid violence, romantic illusion, and surprising tenderness. With the satirical eye of Cindy Sherman, Petrushevskaya blends macabre spectacle with transformative moments of grace and shows just why she is Russia's preeminent contemporary fiction writer.

Selected quotes

They are deeply unromantic stories told frankly, with an elasticity and economy of language. <...> What is consistent is the dark, fatalistic humor and bone-deep irony Petrushevskaya's characters employ as protection against the biting cold of loneliness and misfortune that seems their birthright. <...> They may not have the heart to throw the bastards out or lock the door against them, but these women hold the keys.

The New York Times Book Review

This gem's exquisite conjugation of doom and disconnect is so depressingly convincing that I laughed out loud.

Elle magazine

The length of this collection's title is in inverse proportion to the brevity of the stories, a contrast neatly reflecting Petrushevskaya's covert but stinging irony... The scouring realism showcased here in 17 works spanning her long writing life is the narrative mode that made her famous and led to her being banned in her native Russia. These strange, violent, and devastating stories of love warped by poverty, anger, and pain embody the Soviet era's soul-starving shortages of dignity, shelter, and freedom. Petrushevskaya's afflicted characters are trapped in wretchedly crowded communal apartments and suffocating family configurations, bereft of privacy, comfort, and hope. Out of misery coalesce the weirdest and most warped of romances, some disastrous, some grotesque, some

liberating, while mothers' love for their children brightens an absurdly cruel world. Petrushevskaya's phenomenal skill in coaxing radiance from resignation, courage from despair, makes for universal and timeless stories of piercing condemnation, sly humor, profound yearning, and transforming compassion.

Donna Seaman
for *Booklist*

Dark and mischievous... [Petrushevskaya's] stories never flinch from harshness, yet also offer odd redemptions... comedic brilliance... microscopic precision... several inimitable, laugh-out-loud paragraphs... creepy early-Ian-McEwan style identity disintegrations [and a] formidable way with a character profile... Petrushevskaya... ensures herself a place high in the roster of unsettling Writers of the Weird.

Locus

Both supremely gritty and realistically life-affirming... Full of meaningful, finely crafted detail.

Publishers Weekly

Think Chekhov writing from a female perspective... Petrushevskaya's short stories transform the mundane into the near surreal, pausing only to wink at the absurdity of it all.

Kirkus Reviews