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**Visions on civilizational collapse: Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's tale *The New Robinson Crusoes***

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**Abstract**

The end of the world as we know it takes many different forms in literature. In recent years, many authors have focused on the consequences of a civilizational collapse in our society, and the ways in which we try to survive. In this paper, we analyze the unique vision of collapse presented by Ludmilla Petrushevskaya in her tale *The New Robinson Crusoes*, which follows a family who go back to nature to find salvation in a crisis context. We consider all the challenges they face to survive in the *locus non amoenus* they and their few fellow survivors inhabit. Also, the author gives us a set of ethical guidelines on how to survive in a hostile environment amid a post-apocalyptic landscape. In this paper we present them in the form of a Decalogue that could serve as a guide to how humanity should evolve if it intends to face the challenges posed by the twenty-first century.

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An apparent aim of Russian literature is to remind us that one of our eternal partner in life is suffering. From the romantic dilemmas in Pushkin's poems and plays to the tortured characters in Dostoyevsky's novels; from the personal betrayals in Tolstoy's works to the insane tension and pain of Andrey Biely's plots, suffering never abandons us. During the Silver Age of Russian literature, suffering takes on a grim aspect in the works and lives of leading authors. Prime examples, among many others we could mention, are the poems and experiences of Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam; and, if we refer to the literature of exile, the novels and essays of Solzhenitsyn.

Russian literature seems to want to answer an unasked question: *What is the meaning of suffering?*

Among contemporary authors the question remains the same, but some of them have found different ways to answer it. Sergei Dovlatov, in his "novel" (more accurately, a collection of tales) *The Suitcase (Chemodan)*, satirically narrates the bittersweet story of his life in the USSR; Andrei Gelasimov, in his novel *Thirst (Zhazhda)*, deals with the wounds of the Chechen war through the everyday life of an alcoholic former soldier whose face is covered with second-degree burns; Vladimir Sorokin, in *Day of the Oprichnik (Den Oprichnika)*, uses the past to deduce the future in a dystopian futuristic Russia full of political purges; and finally, Anna Starobinets, in her novel *The Living (Zhivushij)*, also takes us into the future to show us the black mirror of reality of a post collapse world in which social networks are the new KGB.

Among this new wave of writers we are still discovering an author who defies easy categorization: Ludmilla Petrushevskaya. She has been defined as "one of the most controversial prose writers and dramatists in Russia" (Woll, 1993, p. 125) and criticized for presenting a naked and outrageous view of her characters' reality, a view very rarely found among female writers in recent decades. Her prose has even been described as "anti-ladylike".

Petrushevskaya has many detractors, for example, Olga Slavnikova (2001, p. 61) cannot find anything original in Petrushevskaya's works and denounces the excess in her books: "Her books are catalogues of various diseases, calamities, crying injustices." As a literary figure, Petrushevskaya is controversial and difficult to categorize for many reasons, some of which have to do with her peculiar biography. She started to write, in her own words, "late", when she was almost 30 years old and when many of her contemporaries were already recognized authors (Grekova, 1997, p. 164). Famous mostly for her short stories, she is also well-known as the author of many acclaimed and award-winning novels, plays, and screenplays, while also being an occasional painter and cabaret singer. Her subject matters are also wide-ranging, from realistic to fantastic. She has described the decadent and selfish *intelligentsia* in *Our Crowd (Svoi Krug)*, and portrayed a loving mother in the claustrophobic atmosphere of a communist apartment in *The Time: Night (Vremia Noch)*. She has written tales of love and family in *Immortal Love (Besmertnaya Liubov)*, highly original stories of pain, fear and nightmares in her short-story collections such as *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby (Dva Tsarstva)*, and even fairy tales such as her screenplay for *A Fairy Tale of Fairy Tales (Skazka Skazok)*, an animated film from 1979 directed by Yuri Norstein.

In the words of Lipovetsky (quoted by Smith, 2003, p. 229), Ludmilla Petrushevskaya takes her place within the Russian postmodernist tradition: “This type of fiction shares a number of features with postmodernism, such as parody, an impulse towards playfulness, an emphasis on the relativity of time and space, and a hypertrophied dialogism that brings into conflict various versions of events and their interpretations, all the while juxtaposing genres, styles, and the voices of both the characters as well as the equally empowered voice of the author.” (Lipovetsky, 1999 p. 243).

As regards suffering, in Ludmilla Petrushevskaya’s stories it is possible to find something new that has much to do with critical reactions to her work. According to Parts (2005, p. 78), “she is considered to present an “unfeeling” stance toward the events she presented”. Opinions on the reasons behind this stance vary among scholars: some maintain that the author’s harshness is “saturated with pain”, while others argue that it is merely a sign of indifference (Parts, 2005, p. 78).

This paper does not intend to explore the reasons for her special view of suffering. In any case, she offers a unique opportunity to contemplate the suffering of others through a prism of indifference. Even though the events she narrates are sometimes terrifying, pitiful and worthy of our compassion, the apathetic narrative tone can either overwhelm the reader or allows him/her to simply analyze what is happening and why. Thus we could say the reader is free to learn amid the suffering (as we can sometimes read between the lines) and that her special perspective is an invitation to reflect so that the message is not obscured by a curtain of tears.

One of her most well-known tales, included in the collection *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor’s Baby*, is *The New Robinson Crusoes* (*Novye Robinsony*). This story was published for the first time in 1989, in the edition of the Russian literary journal *Novy Mir* where Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago* (*Arhipelag GULag*) also first appeared (Hernández, 2011, pp. 10-11). In Clowes (1995, p. 146) we discover that the tale once had a subtitle: “The New Robinsons: A Chronicle of the End of the 20th Century”. To a certain extent, this story represents an anomaly within her oeuvre and offers the reader some degree of relief by abandoning the claustrophobic spaces of Russian apartments and dysfunctional family relationships, the same as those she experienced during her childhood (Grekova, 1997, p. 164).

According to Smith (2003, p. 232), “Dalton-Brown identifies two prevalent modes of postmodernist writing prevalent in Russia today: the dystopian (or apocalyptic text) and the mythical text.” This tale could be easily identified as dystopian.

Even though “The raw material of her texts are dysfunctional families, broken hopes, abandoned children, sick mothers, misery, and destitution, all of which produce an effect of unrelieved gloom” (Parts, 2005, p. 83), in this tale the reader faces something new.

On the contrary, the three family members at the center of the story, although not exempt from conflicts, work together in their fight for survival. Father, mother, and teenage daughter have fled from a city –probably Moscow– and find themselves trying to survive an unspecified disaster in “a lost and forgotten little village beyond the Moria river” “gluhuju i zabroshennuju, kuda-to za rechku Moru.”

Yet the atmosphere in the countryside is no less claustrophobic than in a small Stalinist apartment. They experience the *locus non amoenus* in a place full of menace, strife, and hunger. To paraphrase Clowes (1995, p. 147), Petrushevskaya's tale constitutes a rereading of a cornerstone of Western modernity, Defoe's *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

What is this *locus non amoenus* and why is it so unpleasant for them? The reason in this case is clear and also a common theme in Russian literature throughout the ages: the *intelligentsia* can only survive in an urban context in their circles of universities, research institutes, associations and so on. If they are confronted with a collapse (civilizational, or due to a war, dictatorship, or disease) they are useless and helpless.

We have seen this many times. For example, in Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales (Kolymskie raskazy)* (1995), a series of terrible tales of hunger, death, violence and horror in the Siberian *gulag* near the Kolyma mines, the former poets, musicians, engineers, and philologists are a new group of "good for nothings" in an environment of wild nature and manual labor. In fact, the only redemption they can find is to pretend to be woodworkers so they can spend a couple of days near the stove, as in the story entitled *Carpenters*.

A similar situation is also described by Dostoyevsky in *Memoirs from the House of the Dead, (Zapiski iz myortvogo doma)*, which narrates the lives of convicts in a Siberian prison camp.

When social constructs collapse, being a member of the privileged class is not necessarily an advantage. In fact, it could be even a disadvantage when Others, those who were not so privileged, identify you as a member of that social class.

Collapse seems to be a magic wand that generates a tabula rasa with all classes, nationalities and races, which in turn makes us aware how weak we are and how fragile is the bubble in which we live.

Although the unnamed family members in *The New Robinson Crusoes* belong to the *intelligentsia* (the father is a geologist and descendant of a wealthy family, the mother's profession is not clearly specified, and the daughter is probably a student), they transcend the characteristics typically associated with this social class.

Furthermore, as in many novels and films addressing the end of the world, we are never told what is really happening and why. However, we are made aware that the main characters do not have the knowledge to cope with survival in the countryside as useless members of the decadent *intelligentsia*. The author points this out with a few Chekhovian details that the reader can pick up and gather: for example, when the mother and daughter need to consult a book called "A complete guide to cultivating orchards and gardens" ("*Spravochnik sadovo-ogrodnogo khozyaistva*") to find out what to do with their fruit garden.

In contrast with the knowledge they lack, an old *babushka* they come across in the village represents the key to survival, not because of her position or career but because she still possesses the ancient knowledge of farming, of how to grow and harvest vegetables:

“The situation was corrected by the same Anisya, she took the baby-goat under her protection, having previously smeared it with mud, and her goat took the baby-goat as its own, and did not kill it.” “Polozhenie popravila vse ta zhe Anis'ja, ona vzjala kozlenka k sebe, predvaritel'no vymazav ego svoej dvorovoj grjaz'ju, i koza prinjala kozlenka kak svoego, ne ubila.”

“We had a *babushka*, a fount of folk wisdom and knowledge.” “U nas byla babushka, kladez' narodnoj mudrosti i znaniy.”

In the opinion of some scholars, tragedy is trivialized in Petrushevskaya's works (Parts, 2005, p. 85). In this particular case, it is clear that the narrator (a teenage girl) does not exaggerate the suffering or even stop to think carefully about the tragic situation; she does not have the time. If we focus on her inner voice we find just a few comments about her feelings, an ironic but tender attitude towards her fellow survivors, and some rays of hope. Surviving becomes much more important than lament in times of collapse.

The fact that the main character does not complain about what is happening is also an example of Petrushevskaya's typical 'absent author' (Parts, 2005, p. 88), that is to say, when any “compassionate authoritative voice seems absent” (Parts, 2005, p. 78).

The daughter mentions that she misses her friends:

“I repeat that we were living isolated from the world and I missed my friends a lot” “Povtorjaju, my zhili daleko ot mira, ja sil'no toskovala po svoim podrugam i druz'jam [...]”

That they have very few resources to eat and labor is hard:

“We guzzled salad from dandelions, cooked soup with nettles and spent all day long plucking grass and carrying, carrying, carrying it in backpacks and bags.” “My zhrali salat iz oduvanchikov, varili shhi iz krapivy, no v osnovnom shhipali travu i nosili, nosili, nosili v rjukzakah i sumkah.”

That her mother once started crying:

“Two tins of preserved fish were the response to her wild behavior, and mother has begun to cry.” “Dve banki rybnyh konservov byli ej otvetom na ee dikoe povedenie, a mama zaplakala.”

But as far as her complaining goes, the text reveals little else. Petrushevskaya uses the Chekhovian stylistic resource whereby the reader is given apparently mundane everyday details, such as how their hands become stronger and more calloused; Tania's yellow boots and coat; and the eyelashes of a dead sucking pig. Therefore, the story does not resort to using tear-inducing narrative devices and is constructed as a puzzle of small pieces that the reader has to put together.

Tragedy also needs to be analyzed in its national context. Expressions of sensitivity vary across different cultural contexts. Russian pragmatism might be difficult to understand for other cultures that express their sensitivity differently.

Moreover, the attitude of the family is peculiar. They seem to think: Well, we are facing a civilizational collapse, maybe we will all die, but we are fighting with all our strength, doing what

we can to help others, these are the circumstances we find ourselves in, so let's do our best to survive!

One of the last sentences in the story: "But we still have a lot of life to live". "No nam do jetogo eshhe zhit' da zhit'", is revealing.

The story ends with this message: let's make the most of everything we have at our disposal. We are survivors (as the Russian people have been on so many occasions, despite the suffering experienced), which makes us proud because we have left a comfortable environment to find ourselves here (the father feels redeemed: "he [the father] did not remember the city, he was happy with his new destiny" "on byl schastliv svoej novoj sud'boj i ne vspominal o gorode") and overcome all the adversities that appear before us.

### ***Locus non amoenus***

In this tale in particular it is possible to find a new concept we have decided to call *locus non amoenus*. As cities are overcrowded and unsustainable places with no food production and no means for self-sufficiency, cinematographic and literary responses to civilizational collapse are similar: we need to go back to nature.

In many works of classical, medieval, and Renaissance literature, idyllic nature was depicted as a place in which to rest, to fall in love, to find everything we need to survive. Centuries and even millennia before cities became the sprawling, crowded, and polluted places we inhabit now, many authors such as Virgil, Dante, Boccaccio, and Shakespeare turned their gaze to nearby nature to find peace and comfort. There were also some exceptions such as Ovid, who in his *Metamorphoses* presents nature as being full of menace and violent encounters.

However, nature has undergone significant changes since Shakespeare's time, and it is no longer so easy to make her give us the resources we need for survival. Due to deforestation, freshwater pollution, biodiversity loss, soil impoverishment, and many other current ecological problems, Mother Nature is no longer the caring mother she used to be. Human life has also changed considerably since Shakespeare's time. We are extremely dependent on fossil fuels, computer science, and urban conveniences. Therefore, the countryside is no longer a *locus amoenus* but a *locus non amoenus* where threats and hard labor are common, and so people start to pay more and more attention to the seasons:

"May days, bitter days" "mesjac maj-mesjac aj"

"We spent a terrible month of June (June days, hunger days) when the food reserves usually run out in villages" "Tem vremenem my prozhili samyj strashnyj mesjac ijun' (mesjac au), kogda pripasy v derevne obychno konchajutsj".

"Everything became more and more terrifying when we started to think about winter." "Vse stanovilos' gorazdo strashnee, kogda my nachinali dumat' o zime."

Besides the threat of being unable to survive in an unknown environment, the family is also threatened by invisible beings. These may represent the powers that be (a likeness of Stalin's



political police, the NKVD), other refugees, or even the unspecified cause of the collapse itself. This is a recurrent feature of the literature of collapse, in which other humans represent an additional threat (*The Road*, *The Children of Men*), if not the principal threat itself (*World War Z*). In Clowes' opinion (1995, p. 147), these threats could be a warning about future persecutions.

Another constant of post collapse literature is the betrayal or absence of institutions. In apocalyptic times there is no army, state, or leader that can save us. For example, when institutions no longer function: "Once my mother went with Anisya to the Social Security office in Prizerskoie, but the office was closed forever and never", "Mama s"ezdila bylo s Anis'ej v sobes v Prizerskoe, no sobes byl uzhe naveki i beznadezhno zakryt,"

But the media continue to misinform: "Everything the radio broadcast was a patent lie" "Po radio peredavalos' vse ochen' lzhive i nevnosimoe,"

## Suffering

In this tale suffering has to do with fear and uncertainty. It also has to do with living in a post carbon society and all its associated disadvantages and inconveniences for the humans we are now. The characters in this tale suffer with thoughts of a highly uncertain future in which they do not know if they will be persecuted, hunted, dispossessed of their few possessions. The narrator is sure that sooner or later they will be discovered:

"If we are not alone, they will come for us. We all know that." "V sluchae, esli my ne odni, k nam pridut. Jeto jasno vsem."

There is also a constant fear of future starvation and a constant struggle for survival. Most of the inhabitants in the village are waiting to die, first Marfutka, who is no longer considered a real person, and who does not even cook or eat anything other than rotten or frozen potatoes:

"*Babka* Anisya, the only inhabitant in the village, because Marfutka doesn't count, and Tania wasn't an inhabitant but a criminal" "Babka Anis'ja, edinstvennyj chelovek v derevne (Marfutka ne v schet, a Tanja byla ne chelovek, a prestupnik)"

Later, the shepherdess, Verka, commits suicide. After her suicide, her mother, a barely delineated figure who appears only briefly in the narration, also seems close to dying of starvation.

Nonetheless, everyone in the village has an apparently matter-of-fact attitude to the imminent possibility of dying, only a few words from our naive narrator make us realize the situation: "Everything becomes complicated when it comes to surviving in times like these!" "Vse stanovitsja slozhnym, kogda rech' idet o vyzhivanii v takie vremena, kakovymi byli nashi."

They show a silent and quiet acceptance of suffering and their response to fear is to stay active and keep on fighting to survive:

"My father began to engage in frantic activity; he began digging an orchard, annexing the adjacent plot of land, for which he removed the fence belonging to some absent neighbors."

“I otec nachal lihoradochnye dejstvija, on kopal ogorod, zahvativ i sosednij uchastok, dlja chego perekopal stolby i perenes izgorod' nesushhestvujushhijh sosedej.”

“And Anisya, with renewed ardor, began to dig her orchard, to cut wood in the forest, to carry branches and trunks to her house. She was trying to save herself from starvation: that was the end that awaited her if she stood idly by” “i Anis'ja s novym rveniem prinjalas' kopat', rubit' v lesu, taskat' such'ja i stvolj k sebe v dom: spasalas' ot perspektivy golodnoj smerti, kotoraja ozhidala by ee v sluchae bezdel'ja,”

However, it is worth noting that even when the situation is distressing and dramatic, the tale is not lacking in humor and parody: the old ladies, wild and drunk, the children, represented as retarded, the difficulties the new Robinsons face in the countryside and their sometimes comical efforts to survive. As many scholars state, this wicked sense of humor and irony is necessary to attenuate the bleakness of Petrushevskaja's vision of communist and postcommunist Russia (Vanchu, 1993, p. 108).

### Surviving

Therefore, as previously mentioned, suffering in this tale is directly related to surviving, which in turn requires following certain rules. The new Robinsons are in the only place to survive and the author reminds us of this with a metaphor concealed within the name of the river they cross to reach the village, because “the name “Mora” comes from the Russian colloquialism “mor”, meaning “wholesale death”. Within this context the garden becomes a haven for survival amidst the larger wasteland.” (Clowes, 1995, p. 153).

The moral of the story is that if we hope to survive in a civilizational collapse there are some ethical-practical rules that we must follow. These rules emerge as a sort of unwritten Decalogue as proposed by Ludmilla Petrushevskaya:

1. You shall trust and help other survivors. Never: everybody against everybody else.  
In this tale, collaboration is the basis for survival. Survivors trade, share knowledge, help each other and, eventually, join forces to survive. Goscilo stated that “Petrushevskaya's dramatis personae refer to multiple instances of cruelty, betrayal, compromise, and disaster offers a bleak picture of the moral indifference and psychological isolation that have pervaded Russian society, especially during the Brezhnev years” (Goscilo, 1989, cited by Vanchu, 1993, p. 108). However, in the case of this tale every moral indifference and psychological or physical isolation leads to destruction. As González (2018) states, “Collapse will provide unprecedented opportunities for the articulation of more fair, supportive and sustainable societies” and “(...) the collective will be essential for surviving”.
2. You shall not turn your back on the weak. In our tale, the weak are the children and the old ladies, but especially the children. The family at the center of the story has nothing and gives everything. They adopt shepherdess Verka's daughter, Lena, and another orphan,

*Found.* As is commonly believed, a civilized society is judged very much by the way it treats its weakest members, namely children, the handicapped, the elderly, etc., as well as its prisoners, as Dostoyevsky said. Even in the small society of the tiny village beyond the River Moria, it functions as an ethical rule that we must follow.

3. You shall not take advantage of the weak. In our tale, survival does not get on well with moral corruption. The main characters do not take advantage of old Marfutka, despite not seeing her as a human being; they maintain their integrity and try to help her. This moral integrity, as we said, is common to every behavior of the family throughout the tale. The idea of interdependence between survivors that they adopt during the tale can also be interpreted as a call for interdependence between all living beings; interdependence that is the basis for the survival of ecosystems and indeed was for ages the basis for our survival as a human race. Furthermore, the family shares its struggles for survival with some non-human companions such as a dog, a cat and some goats, companions that also play a very important role in surviving.
4. Be a team (family as a team). You shall avoid conflicts, selfishness and disputes that destroy everyone as in another of Liudmilla Petrushevskaya's tales of collapse included in this same volume (Petrushevskaya, 2009), "Hygiene". Here, family should be understood in a broad sense, namely those with whom you survive when you need to, regardless of the degree of consanguinity. Hence, family extends to *babushka* Anisya and the two orphan children.

According to Slavnikova, "One of Petrushevskaya's constant themes is the antagonism of generations, not in the classical, Turgenev sense but in almost the biological sense" (2001, p. 62), and this can be seen in the narrated past conflict between parents and grandparents in the city. However, this is not present during the struggle for survival in the village where there is greater intergenerational solidarity.

5. You shall try to gather folk knowledge that young urban people have lost. As we have seen, the *locus non amoenus* has to do with environmental crisis but also with a crisis of values. In modern urban societies we have lost our connection with nature. Most people lack even the most basic knowledge about where their food comes from. We spend most of our time in artificial environments and have no real contact with trees or animals besides through the screen of our mobile phone. We are extremely dependent on fossil fuels. But in a post carbon society we desperately need this folk knowledge to survive. We need to recover this connection to nature because as humans we are ecodependent.
6. You shall never surrender. As in our tale, in times of collapse, if you surrender you are dead. The inhabitants of the *locus non amoenus* are exposed to multiple dangers, and their survival depends on their adaptation skills, their resilience and willpower. They must develop strong self-confidence and be undeterred. In an act of ecomimetics, survivors engage in frantic activity during the spring and summer months, preparing themselves for winter. In fact, the rhythm of the whole tale is frantic; six months fly past in around 4000 words. We can feel this frantic activity in the following examples:  
 "And, with the scared Anisya, my mother came back quickly by foot twenty five kilometers back to Moria. (...)" "i mama bystro peshkom dotopala dvadcat' pjat' kilometrov do Morys napugannoj Anis'ej (...)"

“In the afternoon, we took the goat home and keep going with the hard summer tasks: haymaking, weeding the garden, earthing up the potatoes, and all at the same rate with Anisya...” “Vecheru my prinesli kozlenka domoj, i poshli surovye letnie budni: senokos, propolka ogoroda, okuchivanie kartofelja, i vse v odnom ritme s Anis'ej...”

7. You shall seek your own redemption in times of collapse. In contemporary societies there seems to be no happiness beyond modern urban environments; it is difficult to believe that redemption or even happiness can be found anywhere else. However, our main characters are capable of finding themselves in times of crisis, especially the father. Collapse offers them a certain freedom of choice and provides the opportunity to deploy all their potential and develop new capabilities.
8. You shall plan ahead. The only way to escape the collapse is through prevention, but unfortunately this concept is absent in our societies: the latest economic crises were unexpected, the current environmental crisis is denied by some, while many others simply prefer to ignore the consequences of how depleting natural resources are currently exploited. However, the father and the mother in this tale behave differently, prepare themselves in the city for the coming collapse, and keep using foresight during the time in the village, because this is what surviving in a natural environment demands. As the narrator explains at the very beginning of the tale: “Mom and dad were determined to take the lead” “Moi papa s mamoj reshili byt' samymi hitrymi.”
9. You shall be capable of renouncing material goods. Clinging to material possessions leads to destruction; this is a very clear message in post collapse literature. As when in a house on fire, in times of collapse you shall not gather up any possessions but just run for your life. This is very difficult to do in mass consumption societies where our possessions define not only our status but even our own identity. In this tale we have a very clear example in the contrast between parents and grandparents. The narrator states that her grandparents are dead because they remained in the city clinging onto their apartment, a constant in communist and postcommunist literature where apartments are scarce and large flats a luxury. “Then everything was torn asunder amid rows about my mother and my grandparent’s flat, that could go to hell with its high ceilings worthy of a general, servants, and private kitchen. We never actually lived in it, and now, probably, my grandparents were already dead.” “a dal'she vse utonulo v skandalah iz-za moej mamy i dedovskoj ih kvartiry, provalis' ona propadom, s general'skimi potolkami, sortirom i kuhnej. Nam v nej ne privelos' zhit', a teper', naverno, moi babushka i dedushka byli uzhe trupami.”
10. You shall not trust authorities. In post collapse literature and films, old or even brand new authorities are never trustworthy. In this tale there are a few signs of this, as usual nothing too explicit, but solid enough to reach such a conclusion. In our tale authorities will not help our family because every office is already closed, and will even try to misinform over the airwaves. Moreover, we cannot be sure if authorities are not those Others who persecute the family in the village.  
In times of collapse there will be a major reconfiguration of the State resulting in a reduction of its capacity for action (González, 2018), and such a scenario could give rise to new social organizations such as small libertarian communities. However, the development of eco-fascism is also a possibility, as stated by Gordon (2013) among many

other authors. Furthermore, it seems very important to keep watch over governments and the powers to be.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *The New Robinson Crusoes* is to some extent an atypical example of Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's literary output. It takes place outside the boundaries of a city with its small crowded apartments, and far from the intimacy of a dysfunctional family. Although this does not make the story any less distressing, this new scenario does offer a glimpse of hope related to the capacity of human beings to overcome difficulties and work together for survival. It belongs to the dystopian trend in postmodernist Russian writing.

The narrative style of the author is cold, lacking in details, with a practically Impressionist structure that allows the reader to reflect on and interpret events in her own way. Likewise, the open ending and the limited information provided perform the same function of suggesting without showing and allow the reader to speculate. A naive narrator who interprets reality in her own way, without drama, filters the terrible events.

The story, originally published in 1989, now acquires even greater relevance in the current context of environmental and social crisis. It has much in common with other works of collapse literature: escape to the country and repeasantization, the failure or even the betrayal of institutions, the Other as a potential enemy or competitor, a lack of knowledge for recovering the lost connection with Nature. We are reminded that in times of collapse, cities will be uninhabitable, but that nature is no longer the welcoming space it once was.

The *locus non amoenus* is presented as an inevitable context, an environment in which we will have to fight for our survival. Suffering is therefore related to uncertainty, to fear of hardship, to the prospect of almost certain future starvation, and finally to the lack of means and knowledge required to fight for the survival of a civilization (the same one as ours) that preserves life in many artificial ways. In cities, our dependence on fossil fuels is absolute, and Lewis Mumford's megatechnics and megamachines (Mumford, 1971) acquire a new relevance.

Also, the *locus non amoenus* is a testing ground where members of the *intelligentsia* can prove themselves and find redemption, but only on the condition of renouncing the vanity of earthly possessions.

In spite of the suffering, hardship and fear, the author gives us a set of ethical guidelines to survive in a hostile environment, in a post apocalyptic landscape which is one of the fears of twenty-first century humanity. Post carbon societies are the new Godzilla, the new zombie attack, the new nuclear apocalypse, in the contemporary compendium of fears. These guidelines can be summarized in an unwritten list that the author allows us to deduce from the successful steps the survivors are taking and also from their manifest mistakes.

In this paper they have been presented in the form of a Decalogue that contrasts with other tales by the same author and serves as a guide to understand how humanity should evolve if it intends to face the challenges posed by the twenty-first century.

Beneath the form of an adventure lies a profound ethical lesson, albeit perhaps unintentional, because although the author frequently adopts a critical perspective in her work, the same cannot be said of her tendency to offer an ethical message beyond moral satire.

It also reminds us that individuals of societies of abundance are not more supportive because of their enjoyment of material goods; on the contrary, in this story there is a very clear contrast. On one hand we have the wealthy grandparents with their opulent apartment who are unwilling to share it with their son and who have failed to survive the collapse, while on the other hand our poor family and their associates live in their tiny hut yet manage to survive.

In fact, the basis of survival is collaboration and solidarity; something that should be remembered in our extremely individualistic societies characterized by mass consumption and obsession with economic growth.

We should pay careful attention to this Decalogue if we aim to preserve any form of society in the future. Points 1 to 3 state that we should move towards more collaborative societies, where social protection of the weak should take precedence. More highly evolved and supportive societies should be the basis for our future survival: societies that are at peace with the planet; societies where mass consumption of goods will not be the core of mainstream ideology; societies of prosperous degrowth, as Sergue Latouche states (2009); and societies that nurture different values such as friendship and knowledge sharing, biomimetics, interdependence, and ecocodependence (Riechmann, 2005), recognizing our real needs (Max Neef, 1994) as the Decalogue states in points 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9.

Point 5 states that intergenerational cooperation is indispensable. In modern western urban societies, little or no attention is paid to the knowledge, participation and contribution of elderly people. Also, we are losing sight of rural wisdom and the importance of living in harmony with nature. Because our system is fragile, we need to recover this knowledge for more resilient future societies.

Finally, as point 10 states, if we cannot trust authorities, we should build more participatory power structures and combat authoritarian and violent governments, and eventually evolve into self-governing small societies, as proposed by Gordon (2013) among other authors.

Note: All passages from *The New Robinson Crusoes* that appear here were translated directly from the original Russian by the author of this paper.

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