What is in a Name: Olga Grushin's Nameless Protagonist, Mrs. Caldwell, in *Forty Rooms* as an "Everywoman"

A Thesis

by

Andrew E. Gates

Summer 2019

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WHAT IS IN A NAME: OLGA GRUSHIN'S NAMELESS PROTAGONIST, MRS. CALDWELL, IN *FORTY ROOMS* AS AN "EVERYWOMAN"

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A Thesis

Presented

to the Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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in

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DEDICATION

To Yana and our reflections: Dariyan and Artour

Happiness – Being held in your arms.

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I will be forever thankful to those who have helped me along the winding way. I'd like to thank my wife for loving me and encouraging me to get things done, and my kids for inspiring me to earn my degrees so that someday they might be inspired by me. Thank you. I'd like to thank my parents for providing an atmosphere for learning throughout my life. Thank You.

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I have to express my thanks for music and the artists and songs on my playlist that helped form this paper in my ears as I wrote – namely UB40, Steel Pulse, Franz Schubert, a myriad of other songs that helped tune out other things and stay focused – MEUTE's remix of Flume's "You & Me" maybe topping the list for the song on repeat the most. Thanks to Creators out there.

Finally, I must announce and recognize that the weaknesses of this thesis are my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

WHAT IS IN A NAME: OLGA GRUSHIN'S NAMELESS PROTAGONIST, MRS. CALDWELL, IN *FORTY ROOMS* AS AN "EVERYWOMAN"

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This thesis is an investigation into the role of names within Olga Grushin's *Forty Rooms*, in order to in understand the protagonist, Mrs. Caldwell, as an "everywoman" in which readers can see themselves. I use the names of the male characters to show them as the patriarchy, and I use their actions to show them as oppressors. Conversely, I investigate the names of the women to show their universality and characteristics that keep them blind to their existence in an oppressive social atmosphere. I go on to emphasize the importance of the protagonist's namelessness and show how several rhetorical devices and images – namely the use of pronoun confusion, first to third person narrative perspective switch, mermaids and mirrors – are used to help readers understand the protagonist as a hybrid and representing the masses of oppressed women.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. That is what I believe" – Franz Kafka, *To Oskar Pollak (January 27, 1904)*

I came across Olga Grushin's work as an undergraduate in a Teaching World Literature class when the class was assigned to pick from a list of authors from around the world who wrote/write in the English language and then lead the class in a discussion by using a website/page that we created about that author and their works. Because of my background in Russian and experiences with Russian culture, I was interested in finding a Russian author writing in English since there wasn't one on the list that was acquired in the class. The first and most obvious author that might come to mind for most is Vladimir Nabokov, but at this time I didn't know he immigrated to the U.S. and wrote in English, and besides I wanted something contemporary. I looked for recent publications and ran into Olga Grushin's *Forty Rooms* (2016) on Amazon to be released soon. She fit the requirements for the class. I ran it by the professor and preordered *Forty Rooms* and bought her other two books. I think it is important to note that I also researched and read many reviews of other authors whom I now consider to fit in to my area of expertise but do not enjoy so much as Grushin's work – authors like Gary Shteyngart, Lara Vapnyar, and Ellen Litman.

This assignment introduced me to the author whom I have chosen for my thesis and also inspired my interest in Anglophone authors and particularly Russian-American Anglophone Literature. Since that point, I made the decision to use Grushin's novel *Forty Rooms* for my thesis because it has been, as Franz Kafka writes a book should be,

an “axe to the frozen sea inside” (Kafka 16) of me. It may be my connection to Russian culture and residing with a Russian immigrant that allowed this book to cause introspection or it may be that I myself have seen my own dreams come and go like the protagonist as family and work begin to take precedence over self. Either way, I believe the novel is an attempt by Olga Grushin to create a novel that speaks to more people than those who are normally interested in the rather acute angle of Russian-American authors, a novel that works as an “axe to the frozen sea inside” (16) those who read it universally, without regard to a reader’s relationship to an immigrant, immigration, or Russian culture (or American culture for that matter). Indeed it is my argument that Grushin has succeeded in providing a character that is a universal representation of women with her protagonist. Moreover, I became interested in Olga Grushin’s writing because her work has seemingly been absent from academic contemplation while other Russian-American authors have been analyzed to a greater extent – notably Gary Shteyngart in works by Martyna Bryk (2018), Brain Trapp (2016), Raymond Malewitz (2015), Maior Eniko (2015), Ulla Kriebernegg (2013), and Adrian Wanner (2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014), who dedicates a whole chapter to Shteyngart in his book *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New Translingual Diaspora* (2011).

Grushin’s first two novels *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* (2005) and *The Line* (2010) receive some of the only critical analysis outside of reviews in Adrian Wanner’s book *Out of Russia*. Grushin’s first novel, *The Dream Life of Sukhanov,* has received the most attention of her novels. The many devices or methods that Grushin uses to develop her novels into complex works is highlighted in Julie Hansen’s “Making Sense of the Translingual Text: Russian Wordplay, Names, and Cultural Allusions in Olga Grushin’s

The Dream Life of Sukhanov." The other article that discusses *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* is Kristen Welsh's "Between The Canvas and The Printed Page: Nabokovian Intertexts and Olga Grushin's Soviet Artist-Hero." Both works show how Grushin is adept at using intertextuality to create new meaning in her own work. Welsh's article being much more detailed as to one specific connection to Nabokov. Both works have played a role in how I have looked at *Forty Rooms,* but it is apparent that Hansen's piece has played a greater role as I also explore Grushin's use of names, worldplay, and some of the ways her allusions play a role in the understanding of *Forty Rooms* – particularly her main character. In his analysis Adrian Wanner notes that Grushin

> looks at first sight like another member of the new wave of successful Russian-American immigrant writers. However, she is in many respects quite different from the authors discussed thus far, [Andrei Makine, Wladimir Kaminer, Lena Gorelik, Alina Bronsky, Boris Zaidman, Gary Shteyngart, David Bezmozgis, Ellen Litman, Lara Vapnyar, Irina Reyn, Anya Ulinich, and Sana Krasikov] as Grushin herself would be the first one to acknowledge. As she stated in an interview: "I'm very happy to be part of a new generation of Russian writers working in America, such as Gary Shteyngart and Lara Vapnyar, but I do think that in my first novel at least, I have dealt with a rather different set of issues." Unlike Shteyngart and the other "Russian debutantes," Grushin is not Jewish, and she entered the United States not as a refugee but on a scholarship to Emory University, apparently as the first Soviet citizen ever to be admitted to an American undergraduate program. (179)

Grushin states that she is dealing with a "different set of issues" than others is in reference to what Wanner calls the "trait shared by almost all authors under discussion here [listed above] is the autobiographical orientation of their writings. Most of their books contain protagonists who are easily identifiable as the author's alter ego, turning the plot into a literary self-representation or self-exploration" (10). Furthermore, until writing *Forty Rooms* Grushin had completely evaded transnational themes such as immigration, assimilation, hybridity, identity, or "as Morris Dickstein has noted…coming of age, their sense of estrangement and cultural displacement, the ordeal of language, the conflicts between generations, and their need for acknowledgement within their new world" (Wanner "Moving" 281). Yelena Furman highlights the importance of hybridity as a theme of many Russian-American works in her article "Hybrid Selves, Hybrid Texts: Embracing the Hyphen in Russian-American Fiction." Furman mainly investigates texts by Lara Vapnyar, Gary Shteyngart, Anna Ulinich, and Irina Reyn. In discussing her reason for withholding analysis of Olga Grushin, Furman states, "this article focuses on the hybrid identities that emerge through the experience of immigration and living in diaspora" and Olga Grushin "does not explore this theme in her work" (Furman 22). It is true that Grushin had not focused on transnational themes and rather kept her novels' settings in the USSR and focused on the human relationship to art in both *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* and *The Line*, but Furman goes on to make another interesting statement to exclude Grushin from her article – mainly that she is not Jewish and therefore, according to Furman, does not fit categorically into her use of the term "Russian-American" because the "term not only accommodates a Russian Jewish identity but is actually almost equivalent to it" (22). Claiming that Russian Jewish is equivalent to Russian

seems absurd considering the long standing anti-Semitism found in Russia that was one of the main causes for Russian-Jews to immigrate in the first place. The claim is unnecessary and wrong for the very same reasons that Furman herself states – that the term "'Russian-American' has been applied to the non-Jewish Vladimir Nabokov and Olga Grushin" who maintains both Russian and United States citizenship. My point is not to discredit Russian-Jews from being termed Russian-American, but to highlight one of the main differences between most Russian-American literature that takes a particularly Jewish angle, and Olga Grushin's work that can be thought of as being more traditionally Russian. Adrian Wanner alludes to this more traditional style, writing that Grushin depicts "Russia as a country where the true faith of the land has been obliterated by a culture of atheist materialism, and… her use of 'high literary' style [is] reminiscent of the classics of past centuries" (Wanner 183). Wanner goes on to state that "among all the authors discussed so far, she [Grushin] is the most unambiguous and straightforward in claiming a Russian identity for herself" (184). The point is that when reading Russian-American literature, there is bound to be variance in perspective. Wanner accentuates this point about authors who have tackled the theme of Russian-Jewish hybridity:

> We have in fact seen a wide variety in the way the different writers have addressed their Jewish identity. While none of them is a "practicing Jew," in their depiction of the Jewish religion there is a spectrum ranging from David Bezmozgis's "nostalgia for old Jews" or Vladimir Vertlib's earnest grappling with the Judaic tradition to Lara Vapnyar's or Ellen Litman's indifference to the Jewish faith to Wladimir Kaminer's irony and Gary Shteyngart's vehement satirical denunciation of Judaism. (191)

Olga Grushin supplies yet another perspective. By noticing the differences in the texts and the authors' backgrounds, the similarities of theme and experience that hold them together begin to shine forth. In other words, in diversity there is also unity. In *Forty Rooms*, Grushin really begins to reveal the similarities of experience or desire to share a similar message as other authors.

In 2011, Karen Ryan wrote an article comparing the works of four female Russian-American authors, Lara Vapnyar, Sana Krasikov, Anya Ulinich, and Anna Reyn, focusing on "how gender roles are negotiated and reconfigured in adopted homelands" (Ryan 64). The article titled "Failures of Domesticity in Contemporary Russian-American Literature: Vapnyar, Krasikov, Ulinich, and Reyn" looks at how "home entails restrictions and limitations on the individual's independence and creative freedom" (65) where home is in reference to both the immigrant characters' original homeland and home life or domesticity. Ryan concludes that for a character to move away from home and "fail" in the domestic role is the means by which a new identity can be created. She writes, "Domesticity implies a sacrifice or sublimation of one's true self, whereas failures of domesticity suggest the realization or formation of a fuller, more complete self" (70). It is within these parameters or themes of gender roles and domesticity that Olga Grushin's *Forty Rooms* converses most clearly. Grushin maintains her familiar theme of investigation of the relationship between people and art but in *Forty Rooms* adds some transnational themes, like emigration, assimilation, hybridity/identity, a taste of "autobiographical orientation" (Wanner 10), and gender roles, that are more or less typical of contemporary Russian-American literature. Grushin tackles the same themes as other authors but does so from her own unique perspective. Rather than push the

transnational identity conflict of being Russian or American or both, national identity becomes more of a backstory as the protagonist in *Forty Rooms* assimilates with relative ease. Grushin's move to purposely shift away from national identity allows the text to be more accessible to a wider audience.

One of the features that is found in most of Russian-American texts is linguistic code-switching where Russian words are intermittently strewn into the English text. Grushin nearly abstains from this practice completely in *Forty Rooms* in order to show her character's acceptance of the dominant patriarchal culture. The shortage of code-switching enables more understanding and a quicker read for those who do not know Russian. The lack of code-switching also allows Grushin to highlight universal themes in a novel she "conceived…as a universal story" ("An Interview"), tackling themes that exist inside and outside of Russian and/or American cultures – namely "a journey from childhood promise to youthful ambition ending in adult compromise" and cyclical oppression of women where the story looks "specifically [at] a woman's life and a woman's choices" ("An Interview").

While overt "Russianness" tends to run in the background, Grushin has created a truly hybrid text with a plethora of allusions to classic Russian, American, and English literature. One such example is of a fairy tale that the protagonist, Mrs. Caldwell, tells her children. The tale is altered slightly from its original form in a similar fashion to what Maxine Hong-Kingston does in her retellings of Fa Mu Lan and Tsai Yen in her novel *Woman Warrior* in order to "establish the legitimacy of a unique Chinese American (as opposed to 'Chinese Chinese') experience and sensibility" (Wong 27). Mrs. Caldwell's tale is not mentioned by name but is the Russian folktale of "Ilya Muromets at The

Crossroads." In *Forty Rooms*, Grushin relates the story thusly: "The rider has stopped at the crossroads….See the stone? The words on it say: 'If you go straight, you'll find happiness. If you go right, you'll lose your horse. If you go left, you'll lose your life.' He is choosing where to go" (Grushin 188). Shortly after the protagonist tells what is happening in the tale, she reflects on the picture coinciding with the tale: "the empty yellow sky, the crows and the skulls, and the horseman, his face invisible, stooped before the gravestone" (188) – an image that most closely matches the 1882 painting of Victor Vasnetsov entitled *Knight at the Crossroads*. There are variations of both the tale and the art but none of the variations match Grushin's version of what is written on the stone. Some versions include the loss of the horse, but the most widely accepted variation of the text on the tombstone reads that down one road you'll die; down another, you'll be married; and down the third, you'll be rich. In the tale, the titular knight Ilya Muromets first chooses the road that leads to death. He conquers the trials there and returns to the tombstone, then goes down the next road and does not get married, and finally the third road is taken, but he refuses riches and does not get rich. After each road he alters the tombstone, claiming that he went and did not die, get married, or get rich ("Ilya"). The story is about trying, testing, and conquering fate – an ideal theme to be included in a novel about choice. Grushin's alterations to the tale show her effort to include Russian culture but also to make it uniquely her own.

In her review of *Forty Rooms* titled "Testing the Human Spirit," Jessica Jernigan claims that "marriage and children are not so much things Mrs. Caldwell chooses as things she allows to happen to her" (24). To some extent it may appear that Jernigan's proposition is that Mrs. Caldwell is a Bartleby figure who doesn't really do anything but

has the world turn around her and force her actions or non-actions, but this would negate the fact that she is making premeditated actions like picking the children's room "for their talk" (Grushin 258) about her being pregnant again because she would be "within … [the room's] rosy safety" (258) as she had "prepared for their conversation with care, had watched her face in the mirror as she had practiced saying the loving words leading to the hinting words leading to the shocking words to be followed up quickly by the calming words" (258). And even though the situation does not go as planned, the reader cannot deny Mrs. Caldwell's preparation and distinct choices throughout the novel because the reader is let into her mind too much to not make this realization. Mrs. Caldwell is making choices, but Grushin has done well to make the life situations realistic because they do not always go as planned, as they rarely do, like in the above scene where Mrs. Caldwell begins to worry and the anxiety builds to a point where the preparation to gradually lead into the announcement is overlooked and she cries out that she's pregnant. Whether or not the protagonist chooses her fate or fate chooses her is up to the individual reader.

Forty Rooms follows a girl through forty rooms of her life, from a "Moscow apartment bathroom…when the protagonist is not yet 5…to the suburban America entrance hall from which she will finally depart" (Fuller). An immigrant, the girl, only ever identified as Mrs. Caldwell once she is married, physically crosses boundaries and becomes a representation of the "'borderlands' between one culture and another" where she is "formed over time through the interaction of multiple cultures and constantly being transformed by new encounters" (Leitch 2097). Mrs. Caldwell is a female Russian born immigrant to the United States (in the present time) who is struggles to find herself in poetry and motherhood. Mrs. Caldwell is depicted as changing identities from daughter,

to friend, to wife, to mother, to essence or spirit. *Forty Rooms* is the story of an immigrant and even though the transnational experience is not at the forefront of the novel, there is still the reality that the novel is a hybrid text.

In her article "Hybrid Selves, Hybrid Texts: Embracing the Hyphen in Russian-American Fiction," Yelena Furman states that "Because Russian-American fiction is predicated on hybridity, critical approaches that take this into account yield the most fruitful analyses of this phenomenon" (20). Furman notes Homi Bhabha and his idea of "third space" are typical for examining hybrid texts and also mentions Gloria Anzaldúa. The critical approach that I take towards *Forty Rooms* is founded on the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and particularly her theory revolving around mestiza consciousness. The introduction to the fourth edition of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* articulates the vast opportunites of application of her theory even though her texts are often accepted as only applicable to Chicanx communities:

> Although Anzaldúa developed Borderlands Theory by examining her experiences as the daughter of farmworkers living in extreme poverty in South Texas, *the theory also applies to any kind* of social, economic, sexual, and political dislocation. Her insights help us understand and theorize the experiences of individuals who are exposed to contradictory social systems. (Anzaldúa 7 italics added)

Anzaldúa herself has also attested to the success of her theory as one that can be used in many situations, stating in an interview that "One of the reasons that *Borderlands* has been so well-received is because it allows people from all cultures to read themselves into the text and it articulates an identity and a category and a reality that the cultural mestiza

can be anyone" (Hernandez 11). In fact, although her text inspects the history and conflict of identity and culture within the borderlands of U.S. and Mexico, Anzaldúa, in an interview, has said, "I am trying to write for different audiences. On the one hand, I write for more of an international audience that came across from one world to the other and that has border people…like Australia, Hungary or China. We are all living in a society where these borders are transgressed constantly" (Anzaldúa 272-273). One of the central concepts to Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands theory is mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa claims that the mestiza (mixed or hybrid) consciousness develops where cultures collide and mix. She explains the mestiza consciousness to be the cross-pollination of racial, ideological, cultural and biological elements, but might be understood as a "conciencia de mujer" or an awareness of women since the Spanish word *mestiza* emphasizes the feminine gender (Anzaldúa 99). Thus, the mestiza consciousness recognizes the situation of women who are a hybrid of culture, race, ideology, etc. Grushin's protagonist fits the role of mestiza, but consciousness or awareness of the situation of the character is allotted more to the reader than to the character herself.

In order to be aware of the situatedness of the protagonist in *Forty Rooms* I turn to Tereza Kynclová's article "Constructing Mestiza Consciousness: Gloria Anzaldúa's Literary Techniques in *Borderlands/ La Frontera—The New Mestiza*." In the article, Kynclová illustrates Anzaldúa's use of rhetorical devices – the mosaic nature, mixing of genres, code-switching, first person to third person perspective switch, struggle between and against cultural forces, and the healing nature of writing – to create mestiza consciousness or an awareness of women. I would argue that Grushin utilizes all of these rhetorical devices but in this paper I am focusing on the protagonist of *Forty Rooms* as

being an "everywoman" that represents not only a Russian-American, but the multitude of oppressed women universally. As such, the techniques of most importance are the struggle between and against cultural forces and the first person to third person perspective switch. The former technique helps to identify the protagonist, Mrs. Caldwell, as oppressed, while the latter is used to show her representation of the masses. Anzaldúa's concept of cultural forces speaks to ethnic or national cultures, such as American culture or Mexican culture, and specifically to those who are found within cultural borders, but even more she speaks to the ideas of gendered cultures where a patriarchal paradigm reigns and the women in such a paradigm are oppressed. In my paper, I use the names of characters of men to show them as the patriarchy and their actions to show them as oppressors. Conversely, I investigate the names of the women to show their universality and characteristics that keep them blind to their existence in an oppressive social atmosphere. I go on to emphasize the importance of the protagonist's namelessness and show how several rhetorical devices and images – namely the use of pronoun confusion, switching between first and third person narrative perspective, mermaids and mirrors – are used to help readers understand the protagonist as a hybrid and representative of the masses of oppressed women.

Before beginning my argument that Olga Grushin's protagonist remains unnamed to show not only her lack of identity but also that her namelessness allows for her to be a representative of the multitude of oppressed women, I must address two points that may be seen to argue against Mrs. Caldwell being an "everywoman" or "an individual woman who in some way represents or symbolizes all women" ("Everywoman"). The two points are, first, what Alexandra Fuller notes, that Grushin "unabashedly takes a very narrow

view of what it is to be woman – and it is this very small chunk of demographic – the very entitled, the very privileged" (Paul) and, secondly, Margaret Homans' warning, reiterated by Carla Kaplan in "Women's Writing and Feminist Strategy," that:

> concepts like "self," "identity," and "experience" do not always carry the same signification; "For a black woman to have a self and subjectivity, because there was a time when she literally did not own herself, is a more difficult and noteworthy achievement even than for white women, and its political meaning extends beyond liberalism…. A defense of the 'signature' for those who have never had one would apply even more powerfully to those whose names were once not even those of their own fathers or husbands, but those of their masters." (Kaplan 351)

The argument against Mrs. Caldwell being an everywoman character is that she is mostly presented in a very limited socio-economic environment and that identity is subjective and relative to environment. In other words, how is it that Mrs. Caldwell, a rich married white woman, can be representative of woman universally? Homans' claim that a black woman may have a different understanding of identity than a white woman because of the historical recency of slavery in the U.S. is true. Even though identity can be conceived as a more or less "noteworthy achievement" (351) to any given individual, it does not deny that there are aspects of identity that are relatable and that coming to realize one's identity is a "noteworthy achievement" regardless of place and time. Even slavery to some extent can be a relatable part of identity because slavery, although differing throughout time and place, has shown its cyclical nature throughout the existence of human civilizations. Indeed the English word slave originates from the Latin

sclavus or *sclava* "identical with the racial name *Sclavus*… the Slavonic populations in parts of central Europe having been reduced to a servile condition by conquest; the transferred sense is clearly evidenced in documents of the 9th century" ("slave"). This is said not to try to equivocate how all people understand and deal with slavery and understand identity but to show that throughout time there have been people of practically all racial identities who have understood identity in a similar way because slavery has been cyclical as it surely existed before the transference of the meaning of slave onto the Slavonic peoples – slavery has existed since then, and slavery still exists today. The cyclical nature is what is of importance, because it is this cyclical nature of time and history that lends itself to Grushin's protagonist as a representative of women who have been cyclically oppressed throughout time and space.

Even though Mrs. Caldwell is presented as a rich married white woman this does not negate the fact that she is oppressed; this highlights the fact that oppression of women can exist in any socio-economic atmosphere and the reader must remember that while the protagonist is not always rich in the story, she is shown to exist in an oppressive patriarchal paradigm from the outset of the novel. Anzaldúa reminds us too that "within Borderlands Theory, oppressions are not ranked nor are they conceptualized as static; rather they are recognized as fluid systems that take on different forms and nuances depending on the context" (Anzaldúa 7). This understanding of oppression posited by Anzaldúa allows for variance or diversity of oppressional situations but also recognizes that they ("different forms" of oppression) are "not ranked" (7) and should be understood as oppressions universally that exist in their own context. This does not entail that all oppressions are equal but rather that oppression of varying severity should still be

recognized as oppression. Grushin creates a character that is relatable not because of unique financial or racial or other circumstances – in fact it would be difficult to relate to such a character as Mrs. Caldwell in many ways specifically – but the trials, the experiences, the movements through life are general and universal enough that the average reader will be able to find some relation to her, whether it be reflecting on the rooms of one's own life or lack thereof, choosing a partner, the question of having children, pursuing one's dreams, keeping of secrets, or having a hybrid existence.

The final point of reference is one that psychoanalyst and author of *Immigrants and Refugees: Trauma, Perennial Mourning, Prejudice, and Border Psychology,* Vamik D. Volkan, relates as one that all people have some relation to, writing: "All people have probably experienced some aspect of psychological importance of borders, whether through customs and immigration controls; geographic borders, such as mountains and rivers, that separate nations or other territories; or the fences and walls that separate neighboring individuals" (Volkan 100-101). With the understanding that as human beings we are presented with borders and boundaries and differing cultures that must be navigated, I venture to show that Olga Grushin's protagonist in *Forty Rooms* is a nameless everywoman in order to create a greater awareness of women living in an oppressive patriarchal hegemony. This is done by creating a character, referred to as Mrs. Caldwell, who is oppressed and a complex hybrid who represents multiplicity in the same way women universally exist in patriarchal oppression.

CHAPTER II

NAMES OF MALE CHARACTERS IN *FORTY ROOMS* AS SYMBOLS OF OPPRESSION

Introduction to Names, Naming, and Identity

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* Juliet questions "What's in a name?" (Shakespeare 2.1.85) then goes on to give her own conclusion saying, "That which we call a rose/ By any other word would smell as sweet" (2.1.85-86). At first glance this seems to be a very sensible and true statement but upon further examination the analogy does not carry its truth over into the human realm as is desired by Juliet. She believes that Romeo would still be Romeo if he did not carry the Montague surname – the name associated with the family with which her own family is in a feud. A rose does not socialize with other roses nor does it care if you call it mean names unlike humans, though it would indeed smell the same. Hypothetically, it might be proposed that roses would not be thought of as often or even as sweet smelling if it had a name that held a different connotation – for example "Thorny Dung Bush." In the case of a Thorny Dung Bush flower one might want to avoid the threat of thorns or the possibility that, in the words of OutKast, if you "lean a little bit closer" you might "see that roses really smell like boo-boo" (OutKast). So it is that the name or signifier may have multiple signifieds, some of which may not be so pleasant. In the case of humans, we can actually change the signifier or name to one that we desire, i.e. we can change our name to one of our own liking, therefore, to some extent, changing the signifieds, concepts, and connotations that coexist with the new name. Naming changes our perspective of ourselves and the perspective that others have on us and are thus part of our identity. So, if a person named

Romeo decided they did not want to be associated with Shakespeare's daft Romeo, they could change their name/signifier and would no longer carry the same preconceptions/signifieds when meeting a new person. Arguably the most prevalent place to observe this kind of name changing to express individuality and autonomy is in slave narratives like the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* and the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* where "dropping one's slave name and renaming oneself to begin life anew as a free person was often the first act of a former slave" (Hayes 675). The renaming process is done to break free from the past and highlight the hope of the future. This naming marks a new characteristic and identity of the individual at which point the connotations that will be attached to that name will be built. That is to say – a name has some connotations that come along with it, like ethnicity, or definition, or historical figures, or past acquaintances – the connotations will not be the same for each individual who hears the name, but the individual with the new name has the opportunity to build a rapport and create what it is that the signifier signifies – what people will think of the individual. In *Forty Rooms,* each name or signifier is specifically chosen because it has certain connotations or signifieds that allow the reader to better understand the novel. In other words names carry important meaning that need to be understood in order to appreciate the depth of the novel.

Forty Rooms, can be thought of as having what Yale Professor Amy Hungerford calls an identity plot where "the narrative revolves around the question of how to define and understand a character's identity" (Hungerford). The female protagonist, only known as Mrs. Caldwell once she is married, goes from room to room in life as she grows searching for her identity in poetry, school, others, things, and family. The identity plot

is understood through the conflict between Mrs. Caldwell having autonomy in a patriarchal society – particularly seen with those with whom she socializes like her father, a male apparition, and her husband. Grushin leaves the ending of the story ambiguous and up to the reader to decide whether or not Mrs. Caldwell's story is what Hungerford calls a "tragic version" of the identity plot where "the character does not come to peace with…[her] identity" (Hungerford) or "the comic version" where "the character comes to peace with his or her identity" (Hungerford). Even though towards the end of her life Mrs. Caldwell "smiled, secure in her elderly wisdom, happy with knowing her limitations at last" (Grushin 308) giving some sense of being at peace with herself, it is difficult to argue against the overarching oppressive patriarchal dynamic of the story and the fact that Mrs. Caldwell is never named nor is she able to have voice in her writing and is thus never autonomous. It is tragic that the female protagonist of the story remains unnamed, but what is important is to understand that her namelessness serves to make her a kind of universal representative of the masses of women who find themselves making decisions to appease male counterparts and make life easier in a patriarchal society. Not having a name shows the lack of autonomous creation and self-identification or understanding of self. It also opens up the window to understand Mrs. Caldwell as not being an individual, but a multitude by showing a cyclical pattern of women in an oppressive patriarchal society. Upon understanding the cyclical nature of the story, Mrs. Caldwell's absence of a name becomes more than simply symbolic of an individual oppressed, but becomes representative of the many other women whose names shed light on the state of the protagonist and women. In order to show Mrs. Caldwell as a universal representative of women it is necessary to understand with whom it is she socializes. By examining the

characters, specifically their names, who interact with Mrs. Caldwell it will be shown that she represents a kind of "everywoman" who is placed in familiar situations of choosing between men, family and career, and self or selflessness. Understandably these choices are not simple or easy and the answers need to be made on an individual basis, but Olga Grushin puts Mrs. Caldwell through a life that many will understand, where there is love, loss of love, comparison and judgment of others, the physical ability to bear children, and being subjugated and limited by space and time in a patriarchal societal paradigm.

In her article "The Named and the Nameless: Morrison's 124 and Naylor's 'the Other Place' as Semiotic *Chorae*," Elizabeth Hayes writes of the power that naming has in "cultures the world over" (675), citing the creation story in the Bible and also West African tribal cultures where "naming…brings a person into being or makes real and actual what was considered only figurative or inanimate prior to its naming" (675). Hayes goes on to write that

> Naming is an act of creation. The named – whether person, place, or object – is identified or marked by the namer as distinctive, unique, the occupant of a discrete space in the universe. To name is also to claim dominion: naming children, slaves, domestic animals, or real estate is an announcement of figurative, if not literal, ownership of the named, as well as an indication of the namer's relationship to or sentiments about the named. (Hayes 669)

The protagonist in *Forty Rooms* then lacks distinctiveness and uniqueness, and a discrete space in the universe in the same manner that Ferdinand de Saussure writes in *Course in General Linguistics* that not having a name/signifier means she does not occupy space and time as "represented in writing" in "the spatial line of graphic marks" and thus has no

"command…[in] the dimension of time" (Saussure 855). Not having a name then is on the verge of being equivalent to non-existence. Instead of not existing, the nameless person becomes someone who is not autonomous and lacks identity and a space of one's own. The protagonist becomes Mrs. Caldwell once she is married showing her relationship to Paul (her husband) where he has given her his surname representing the "figurative, if not literal ownership" (Hayes 669) of her. Rather than the protagonist gaining individuality and autonomy with her new title, Mrs. Caldwell, she is only labeled and categorized within the patriarchal society as belonging to Paul – still lacking her own name and identity. That Paul never once mentions her name in any other way highlights his "sentiments about [her – Mrs. Caldwell –] the named" (669) as belonging to him as an item that does not have its own will. These poor sentiments for her are backed up by his cheating on her with another woman and thoughts about "how quick she was to spend his parents' money" (Grushin 292) and how she can "always be so oppressive" (293).

Paul

Paul is not the first male in Mrs. Caldwell's life but as her husband has the closest relationship to her. That Paul gives his surname to the protagonist shows his power over her because he has created a sense of identity in that she is now "wife" and later "mother" as well. Paul also represents one of the major obstacles for Mrs. Caldwell – having voice. His silencing effect on Mrs. Caldwell comes as no surprise when considering the implications of his name. Paul's name originates from a Roman nickname meaning small (Hanks). Small in the context of the novel is to be understood as its definition as a verb where it means "to lessen" or "reduce" ("small") because Paul lessens or reduces Mrs. Caldwell's ability to create voice through writing and literally silencing her speech.

Paul's name also brings to mind the apostle Paul who wrote in "The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle To The Corinthians" – "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience as also saith the law" (*The Holy Bible* 1 Cor. 14.34). Tereza Kynclová claims that women can have voice through their writing and that "by writing…can gain a thorough perspective of her inner self, and achieve autonomy and most importantly, can discover how the dominant culture has devalued her personality" (Kynclová 47-48). Paul is the example of the dominant culture that "has devalued her personality" (48). He never provides the situation where she develops her identity, but rather acts in a way that keeps Mrs. Caldwell silent and not discovering "her inner self"(48) through her creative writing.

One of the most pronounced moments of Paul's not realizing his wife's attempt at voice is after Mrs. Caldwell had composed a poem out of refrigerator magnets late at night while heating milk for the baby. It reads

> My cook is a drunk and my eggs are bitter
> my driver is a dreamer and we always go so fast
> my friend is a player and I cry all day
> I have a crush on the boy
> who waters the roses
> he has bare pink feet
> and a lovely behind
> I live in the sea— (Grushin 156)

In the morning Paul is standing at the fridge. He reads over the poem once, not understanding the depth of meaning about his wife that he could find within the words – himself being "my cook" who "is a drunk," (Grushin 156) herself being the driver "who is a dreamer" since she still cannot drive legally, her "friend" Olga a player who is always running around, and a reference to her own mental health as she shows signs of depression by "cry[ing] all day" (156). Paul's only comment is about the line "I have a crush on the boy" (156). He misinterprets it as her having some amorous feelings towards another man saying, "I would feel threatened if we had a garden" (156). The lines are most likely about her son because he would have "bare pink feet" (156) and, still being in diapers, he would be able to "water the roses" (156) or flowers – "water the flowers" being a slang term for peeing in public. Her baby son is also the one who allows her peace as he "cooed happily" (157) causing "her heart, which had been momentarily unsettled,…to rest in its rightful place" (157) after Paul had haphazardly swiped away her poetic creation. After mixing her words in with the rest, a metaphor for Mrs. Caldwell being one of many oppressed women whose words are jumbled in with the rest, lacking individuality, Paul proudly presents his arrangement, exclaiming "Ta-da!" (156). His words read, "*I love my honey"* (156). Besides there being an absence of creativity and thought put into his line, there is again his domineering sentiment towards the protagonist with the use of the possessive pronoun "my." The destruction of Mrs. Caldwell's poem silences her writing - an attempt at self-expression and autonomy. The replacing of her poem with his own symbolizes the dominance of poetic form and of the space – where even the traditionally "female's place," the kitchen, is controlled by the male figure.

Paul's silencing of his wife, Mrs. Caldwell, often comes in the form of his own silence. His silence is apparent several times in the form of his falling asleep, showing a lack of interest and consideration of his family, specifically Mrs. Caldwell. One such example is early on in their marriage when Mrs. Caldwell is pregnant with their first child. Mrs. Caldwell has a one-sided conversation late one night in their bedroom when eventually she realizes that Paul has fallen asleep. Paul did not realize or hear the intimate things that Mrs. Caldwell was trying to tell him. Things that she would not ever tell him again until much later in life – particularly that she loves to write.

When the couple already have several children Paul conveniently sleeps through his turn at night to go and calm the babies who have awakened. Paul does manage to wake up when Mrs. Caldwell, after calming their children, returns to bed with cold feet. He talks about two things that he wants – getting a dog and a new house – both things that she thinks are unnecessary and impractical. When his desires have been set forth, he falls asleep again and the kids wake up again. Mrs. Caldwell tries unsuccessfully to wake him and she must go and calm the kids once again. Eventually they get both a dog and a new home.

Paul's silence and silencing can arguably be attributed to his personal characteristics, but his name ties him damningly to the Apostle Paul, partially known for his silencing of women. Furthermore, Grushin is attempting to show cyclical oppression of women throughout time that is imbedded in social constructs. Mrs. Caldwell's husband may be unknowingly oppressive to her but his oppressive character is an example of how "Western culture's favoring of the masculine" (Kynclová 48) can create inherently

oppressive individuals, like Paul, who inhibit or *reduce* "women's potential of developing self-affirmative forms of expression, such as speaking and writing" (48).

Adam

Adam demonstrates that the act of silencing is not restricted only to the protagonist's husband. Another example of Mrs. Caldwell's words being quickly dismissed is when Adam, a former lover of Mrs. Caldwell, has come over to dinner. Paul has just come home from work, interrupting an intimate moment between Adam and Mrs. Caldwell in the wine cellar, when Paul and Adam begin discussing which wine to have with their dinner. After some discussion Mrs. Caldwell interjects with a recommendation: "How about the Amontillado" (Grushin 214). Neither man realistically considers her words. Rather, they shrug off what she has said, ignoring her presence and words, and continue on with their discussion as Mrs. Caldwell exits.

The Amontillado reflects back to the subtitle of the chapter, Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado," and Adam's earlier mention of the scene where Fortunado is chained and concealed behind a wall in a wine cellar/crypt and left to die for past transgressions against the narrator, Montresor. Adam has come to steal Mrs. Caldwell back for himself and/or revenge past transgressions (or sins) against himself – the protagonist breaking up with him, not going away "across the ocean because of …[a] job" (98), and extending the lease "behind…[his – Adam's] back" (99) even though she knew he would be leaving. If Adam has honestly come to steal Mrs. Caldwell for himself he would just be moving her from one home/prison to another. In the framework of "The Cask of Amontillado," Adam ironically plays the role of Montresor who wants to imprison Fortunado (Mrs. Caldwell), but in this case, his name, Adam, has grander

implications where he, like Paul, also plays the role of patriarch because he shares a name with the biblical father of the human race – indeed the name Adam is a generic Hebrew term for man or mankind (Hanks). The revenge and oppression by Adam is brought about because of past "sins" (210) the protagonist had done – a clear reference to the biblical original sin of Eve (and then Adam) partaking of the forbidden fruit. Considering Mrs. Caldwell represents women in a universal sense (to be discussed at length below), Adam's oppressiveness is representative of the general and systematic misogyny throughout time. Just like with Adam's return to Mrs. Caldwell in the wine cellar, in the break-up he does not allow her to converse. The text in the break-up of Adam and the protagonist reads "'No,' he said, turning away…'I will stay somewhere else tonight…I will go to the airport directly from there.' I [the protagonist] tried to interrupt. 'No,' he said again, and *the force of it was like a hand clamped over my mouth*" (99 italics added). He silenced her in the past and in the wine cellar his ignoring and dismissal of her suggestion of Amontillado may have been assisted by her refusal to go away with him again, and her admitting, in reference to their past, "The sins are all mine" (209). But Adam's ignoring her comment about the Amontillado is more than just ignoring, it is an act of silencing that puts Mrs. Caldwell in the place that he wants her – in her prison. Rather than build the prison up around her as Montresor does to Fortunado, Mrs. Caldwell goes willingly and unbeknownst to herself (much in the same way as Fortunado) back into her prison home "clos[ing] the door behind her" (214) where she is trapped and figuratively buried alive or, maybe more frightful for its eternal implications, as Mrs. Caldwell describes being in the home – "like a *never-ending* sentry duty—or...a prison sentence with no chance of parole" (215-216).

The Father, Eugene

In her youth, Mrs. Caldwell also experiences being oppressed by male characters. A scene in her father's study where she and her father hold a "weekly Culture Hour" (Grushin 16) acts as an example of her being silenced at an early age. It is also an instance of indoctrination into an oppressive system, or can be considered an example of what Anzaldúa calls the "origins of an 'illness' and the pattern in which it…spreads as 'a form of disease'" – the "disinformation/misinformation perpetrated on women and people of color" (Kynclová 50). Her father would teach her about paintings, classical literature, authors, and composers – all of whom were men like Plato, Fra Angelic, and Andrei Rublev. One day after emotionlessly recalling names and dates to her father's questions she dared to ask a question of her own. Interestingly, during the entire episode, Vivaldi's "La Follia" is playing in the background. The title of the classical piece originates from a fifteenth-century folksong from Portugal to which folks would engage in wild and unrestrained dancing because the "La Follia" is translated as "folly" or "madness" (Knott). The folly or madness of the scene is not that her father is trying to teach her. It is that he is mistaken in his interpretations of the world (or art that he is teaching) and the madness which is the perpetuation of patriarchal hegemony by omitting any mention of women in his teaching. The protagonist had asked questions to her father before but these were about him: "'Haven't you been to Italy?'...'No,' he says. 'But you've been to Greece.' 'No…' 'To France, then? And England?'" (Grushin 21-22). She continues her questioning always receiving the same reply. The confusion sends her into a flurry of other questions about his wishes as she cannot understand how he could tell her about all of these places without ever having experienced them himself. Their culture hour is

interrupted because her father decides to take a phone call, leaving her alone in the study – the culture hour cut short. She then notices "There are still twenty minutes left of the Culture Hour. He has never done this before. All at once I am certain it's because I interrupted him so much, and I feel chastened" (22). That she feels chastened shows that she feels she was in the wrong and should not ask questions. She is again being silenced. In "Women's Writing and Feminist Strategy," Carla Kaplan writes that "silence has sometimes been privileged in women's writing as an alternative and coded discourse, a form of refusal and rebellion." (339). Grushin has shown in *Forty Rooms,* through Paul, Adam, Eugene, and others, that men also use this strategy of refusal, or silence, to enforce patriarchy against the rebellion of women (the protagonist) who are attempting to have voice, writing and speaking, like the young protagonist questioning the *madness* of the patriarchal culture.

The protagonist's father represents the patriarchal culture. His name, Eugene, is reminiscent of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, the titular character being the original Russian literary 'superfluous man' – a character type and term "popularized by Ivan Turgenev's novella *The Diary of a Superfluous Man* (1850) and the retroactively applied to" (Butenina 404) Eugene Onegin and others. The importance of the connection lies in that Eugene, the protagonist's father, is in some ways a superfluous man in that he does not stride with the accepted Soviet culture as he and a group of intellectuals gather together secretly to discuss underground (illegal) poetry and art. The superfluous man is also marked by his cultural prowess in that he may express his more than adequate knowledge of culture. In fact, the name Eugene is derived from Greek, meaning "well-born" (Hanks) – implying his male status (rather than female) and rank as one of high

position – someone who could obtain knowledge. Eugene expresses this trait by having the "weekly Culture Hour" (Grushin 16) where he expresses his vast "high" cultural knowledge to his daughter – teaching her and introducing her to the canon of the arts which has been historically patriarchal. While Mrs. Caldwell's father fits the character type of Eugene Onegin, her first lover loosely fits the plot of Pushkin's work better as he is also interested in the arts and after having lived with the protagonist for some time denies her love and leaves only to come back into her life later in the story to regain her love even though she is married.

Apollo

Even more relevant than her father throughout the whole of the story is a man who appears and gives Mrs. Caldwell advice. His character represents an overarching patriarchal society which is ever present in her life. The name that she gives him is Apollo, who happens to be the god "associated with…poetic inspiration" (Apollo). His name is important because it shows how she imagines the muse of poetry – as a man or more accurately a god in the form of a man. That the young protagonist sees the muse of poetry as a male god is likely a consequence of her father's cultural lessons being exclusively about male artists. Apollo's appearance at many points throughout her life, like when she is thirteen and has the life changing reading of Anna Ahkmatova's "Requiem" late one night in the kitchen after one of her father's cultural gatherings, mark poetry as another realm dominated by the patriarchal hegemony. He never discourages her from writing, but does warn her of the difficulties of being able to express oneself saying that she will "need to be supremely aware of your limitations if you desire to become a poet" (Grushin 30) and that it is "so easy to end up trapped inside a nineteenth-

century porcelain cup…especially for a woman" (46), that she must "always choose the harder path" (67) and also requiring a sacrifice of her if she is to get what she wants saying, "If you make me a proper sacrifice, I may answer a prayer or two. Just this once" (88). Apollo's warnings "make evident the high costs women writers pay for success" (Norton 1924) as he requires sacrifice for her to outgrow "this juvenile little fantasy" (Grushin 88) of writing and becoming immortal and also expressing how easy it is for women to become trapped or silenced by stereotypes of being fragile like porcelain – a commonly used metaphor for the fragility of women. Apollo's comments, and being representative of the god of poetry, together with the father represent a patriarchal literary tradition that mirrors "Bloom's model of literary history…[being] intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal"(Gilbert and Gubar 1928) as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar record.

Conclusion

The patriarchy of the story does not end with the protagonist's father, Eugene; boyfriend, Adam; husband, Paul; and ghostly poetry muse, Apollo. Grushin makes it apparent that the male characters of the story are dominant by naming practically each male figure after some King – historical or literary. By naming men after kings in the novel, Grushin is creating rulers whose dominion is not only the physical bodies and space of the home, but the "kings" also dominate and protect intellectual space by suppressing the voices of women authors, artists, poets, and Mrs. Caldwell herself. Mrs. Caldwell's three sons are named George and Richard (the twins), and Eugene. George and Richard bring to mind English kings while both Richard and Eugene (named after Paul's and Mrs. Caldwell's fathers, respectively) fit into a cyclical naming pattern that

feeds Grushin's world of cyclical time, patriarchy, and oppression. Others named after kings are the protagonist's first boyfriend in America, John (also the name of an English king) nicknamed "Hamlet" after Shakespeare's prince of Denmark, who I argue, while discussing mirrors below, originally raped the protagonist at their first meeting at a party put on by Constantine.

A final realm where Grushin uses male figures to show the oppression of the protagonist is spatial. Elizabeth T. Hayes notes that "Houses have long been viewed as representing the people who inhabit them" (Hayes 670). The mansion that Mrs. Caldwell occupies in the second half of her life has the same role as the mansion in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" as discussed by Fhimeh Q. Berenji in "Time and Gender in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' and Kate Chopin's 'The Story of an Hour'" where the "mansion is the symbol for the oppressive power of the patriarch as it limits the narrator spatially leaving her without any connection to the outside world. It stands for the prison; the domestic sphere" (Berenji 226). The home in *Forty Rooms* being a "symbol for oppressive power of the patriarch" coincides with the use of kings who exercise power over and "limit" or even *reduce* (remembering "small" Paul) physical and intellectual space. Even early in the protagonist's life, this female-domesticity trope is used to show physical and intellectual spatial oppression.

As a young girl, in her family's apartment in Moscow, there is an invasion of the kitchen, "a key site of female domesticity" (Ryan 70). The protagonist literally wants a drink of water from in the kitchen but metaphorically her "thirst" (Grushin 24) is after the space that her father's group of intellectuals have occupied – culture, specifically the arts which are a key metaphor for voice and self-discovery. To aid the understanding that the

men are controlling and/or battling over the space, one must understand the significance of the names of the two others, besides the protagonist's father, who are identified while discussing and belittling the poetry of Anna Akhmatova – Orlov and Borodinsky. Borodinsky's name is most likely in reference to *Borodìnskoye srazhèniye* or the Battle of Borodino – "the greatest battle during Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia" (Bellamy). Fittingly, Orlov holds the name of an 18th and 19th century Russian noble family that had several members who fought in the said Napoleonic wars. Borodinsky insists that Akhmatova's work "will never be published" while Orlov is not so sure "about 'never'" after which "an argument commences" (Grushin 26). These two men characterize the invasion of the kitchen and their names emphasize the battle and dominion over female voice as expressed through Anna Akhmatova's poem "Requiem." If there is any doubt as to the dismal place to which the protagonist and thereby women in general are to be found, relating a passage of Akhmatova's poem that the young Mrs. Caldwell reads after the men have gone can help illuminate Grushin's position of where woman can be oppressed:

> *No, not under the vault of alien skies,*
>
> *And not under the shelter of alien wings—*
>
> *I was with my people then,*
>
> *There, where my people, unfortunately, were . . .* (Grushin 27)

By utilizing Akhmatova's poem, Grushin is showing, through her protagonist, that woman can be oppressed in one's own home and even at the hands of one's close friends and family – specifically fathers, lovers, and husbands as expressed by the men in *Forty Rooms*. Akhmatova wrote the poem as "a lyrical cycle lamenting the sufferings of the

common people under Soviet terror" (Akhmatova). The point of the above stanza is that there is oppression in one's own homeland and at the hands of one's own people – "*not under the vault of alien skies,/ And not under the shelter of alien wings"* (Grushin 27). The poem laments not only about the space in which the oppression is taking place "*where my people, unfortunately, were*" (27) but, as Grushin utilizes the words, it emphasizes the interpretation that "*where my people…were*" (27) laments a situational oppression or the status granted women as prisoners in their own homes and of having lesser cultural value according to the reigning patriarchal hegemony in which women reside.

The protagonist falls asleep reading Akhmatova's poem and has a lengthy conversation with Apollo. Grushin uses a line by the protagonist's father when waking her up to show where men stand on the topic of their own oppressiveness. Her father wakes her questioning "with severity" (32), "And what is the meaning of this" (32). On a basic level it is about her being out of bed when she should be asleep, but in the context of her being asleep "on the *Requiem* typescript" (32) it shows that he does not understand the meaning and significance of the poem and his role as oppressor within social constructs. More importantly, Grushin is using this question to show that like the father, men in general often do not understand their position as oppressors as they are "*not…alien*" (27) but are part of a culture that is a patriarchal hegemony that in many ways unconsciously propagates male dominance. All of the male characters play some role in expressing this patriarchal society in which Mrs. Caldwell resides, whether it be sexual dominance in Hamlet or spiritual/religious control in Adam and Paul, or a hold on

the arts as expressed with the protagonist' s father and the apparition of Apollo. In this way Grushin creates the environment for her story about women to be told.

CHAPTER III

NAMES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS AS MRS. CALDWELL'S IDENTITY AND STATUS OF WOMEN

Introduction

The women named in the story duplicate the cyclical nature of names given to the men. Just as the protagonist's first son is named after her father, Eugene, and one of the twins is named after her husband's father, Richard, in order to show a pattern in patriarchy, there are several women who have their names, which carry significant meanings, passed on in time to show a cycle of oppression. The first female name passed on is the name of Mrs. Caldwell, Paul's mom – Emma. This name is given to the protagonist's eldest daughter. The name Emma comes from the Germanic word "ermen," meaning "whole" or "universal" (Hanks). The other names that are passed on are the names given to the protagonist's other two daughters - both of whom are named after one of Paul's grandmothers – Cecilia and Margaret. The name Margaret is derived from the Greek word for "pearl" (Hanks) and Cecilia is from a Latin word meaning "blind" (Hanks). The protagonist plays a linking role in the passing on of names showing that she has some role in the perpetuation of the cycle but making her into a sort of "name hub" through which all names and characteristics must past. In her article "Failures of Domesticity in Contemporary Russian-American Literature: Vapnyar, Krasikov Ulinich, and Reyn," Karen Ryan writes that "repetition…[and] circularity can express continuity of tradition and reinforce identity" (Ryan 66). Because she is the linking point between several women, she shares some of the qualities of each woman and is part of the cycle of the many women that she represents. Her namelessness allows for her to mirror these

women, or to act as a mirror so that the reader can see reflections throughout the story that show a cycle of patriarchy and oppression.

Part of the reason why Mrs. Caldwell does not have a name is to show that she is an expression of many other women. This is done by seeing connections of Mrs. Caldwell with other women throughout the story and examining the ways they mirror each other. The names themselves symbolize characteristics of Mrs. Caldwell – Emma, showing the universality of the protagonist and also a desire for wholeness that is represented as equality; Cecilia, showing the blindness to her oppression in a patriarchal hegemony; and Margaret, whose name embodies the purity of a pearl. By inspecting the relationship between several of the female characters (Emma, Cecilia, and Margaret) and Mrs. Caldwell, I will show how each one's name and characteristics add to the understanding of the oppression and multiplicity of the protagonist.

Emma

As a child, Emma, Mrs. Caldwell's daughter, is presented as crying or wailing often. Her outward expression of tears and discomfort become the unhappiness that Mrs. Caldwell herself has but is not narrating until it comes out in the refrigerator magnet poem "I cry all day" (Grushin 156). One of Emma's most interesting reasons for crying is her distaste for the Russian language. The night when Mrs. Caldwell had planned to tell Paul about herself being pregnant with their sixth child, she sits and reads to the girls in English. An explanation of why Mrs. Caldwell reads to her daughters in English and not Russian ensues saying, "When she [Mrs. Caldwell] had spoken Russian to the infant Emma, Emma had cried, as if sensing something amiss, and as a toddler she had flatly refused to submit to the pointless torture of learning some made-up word that no one but

her mother understood for every normal word used by everyone around her" (252). The refusal to learn Russian marks Mrs. Caldwell's end of trying to teach Russian to her children and as Anzaldúa points out "for a language to remain alive it must be used" (Anzaldúa 81), thus it is also the death of a cultural tradition. That language and culture are tied together has been spoken by many great thinkers like Frantz Fanon who states in his book *Black Skin, White Masks,* "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (Fanon 25). If this is the case, then to not speak a language is to not take on a world or culture, and to stop speaking a language is to lose a world, a culture. Emma's tears may show her unfamiliarity with the Russian culture but they are also showing to what extent Mrs. Caldwell has lost her own culture. Mrs. Caldwell and the reader are reminded of Mrs. Caldwell's straying from her culture by a conversation with Mrs. Caldwell's late mother when her mother chastises Mrs. Caldwell for not remembering that "Spirits loiter in places of their past for forty days, to say good-bye to all the things they loved before finally moving on" (Grushin 299) saying, "Have you forgotten all of your people's traditions?" (299). Emma's tears become Mrs. Caldwell's own – an expression of the unconscious loss of culture through assimilation.

Emma marks the sadness of loss of culture and tradition for Mrs. Caldwell, but she also symbolizes the hope to escape from domesticity. The hope comes by means of Emma's desire to take the role of home-builder rather than the domestic role. Mrs. Caldwell is only given the opportunity to build or create a home in her imagination when Paul confronts her with the idea of "living in your dream house" (176). Her imagined dream home and his are not at all the same and later, when finally they do find a home, it is Paul who decides "This house is perfect of us" (186) not giving Mrs. Caldwell the

opportunity to give her own approval of purchasing the house even though she thinks to herself that she does "love the house" (186). Importantly there is a hope, a vision that Emma will not have to go through the same situation as herself and Paul's mother, Emma Caldwell, who notably had a room in their separate house that was kept the same – the protagonist "preserv[ing Paul's parents' living room] in its entirety, down to every candlestick on every table, every cushion on every chair, every photograph on every console" (277). The protagonist has been involved in cyclical house-keeping rather than house-building, but hopes that her daughter, a part of the cycle that the protagonist represents, will be able to change the cycle and be a house-builder.

Emma's attempt at an escape is to develop her ability to structure and create buildings as seen in her early "kindergarten stick figures in their houses of squares and triangles" (271) that evolve into "Emma's elaborate architectural drawings" (271). Emma's strong will and desire "not to be ignored" (216) is shown at a young age when she bangs her wooden building blocks on the floor when her mother's attention is given to her younger twin brothers – George and Rich. Mrs. Caldwell recognizes Emma's aptitude for structure at a young age, possibly naively not worrying about the girl's future as she imagines "Emma's ten-year-old mind" where "things were… organized and logical and uncluttered" (251) – logic being a trait stereotypically associated with men. She goes on to relate that "Emma possessed a clear-eyed, levelheaded need to make sense of the world, and she usually succeeded" (251). This imagined success seems to become questionable to Mrs. Caldwell years later when she "mentioned Emma's being less communicative of late, not returning her phone calls with the usual promptness, which she found a bit worrisome" (292-293). This worriedness is culminated by "Emma

surprising everyone with her marriage and, mere months later, a baby girl" (312). It is not clear whether or not Grushin is intent on showing that Emma's attachment to a man and subsequent child is to be taken as negative or positive events. It does fit into the cyclical events of the women in the story where the women are shown to be like the protagonist as having potential (in poetry like the protagonist, or architecture like Emma) but this potential is stifled in a way reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's "Shakespeare's Sister" who finds "herself with child by that gentleman and so….killed herself (Woolf 897). Emma does not so violently end her life, but the death that ensues is the one of her dreams in the same way that Shakespeare's sister's dreams "to act" (897) or be someone who is allowed to be permitted on the stage of life to create and express her "gift…for the tune of words" (897) – to be a poet, or creator as the word poet, at its root, implies. The death of a talent or potential to act and create is mirrored in Emma and also the protagonist Mrs. Caldwell because her dreams to write are stunted by her marriage and children the same way that Emma's dreams to become an architect are apparently stopped by her getting married and having a child. Mrs. Caldwell even relates that she gives up voice for her children, albeit through a metaphor – a bedtime story that illustrates a social expectation of women to be selfless.

The story is of a princess (herself) who is given a box of "seven precious songs" (Grushin 254) by her father. She is told to "keep them secret from everyone. For her voice would stay beautiful and true only as long as the songs stayed hidden" (254). Mrs. Caldwell's concept of keeping the songs and voice (poetry) secret is not something that her father or Apollo (the possible kings in her bedtime story) told her to do, but a choice of her own that she admits to her husband later in life as being "the wrong thing to keep

secret" (288). The story goes on to tell how every time the princess was happy – after marriage or after a child would appear in their castle – the princess would open her box and sing one of her songs that brought about the appearance of another child until there were six children and only one song left at which point she decided to keep that song for herself rather than sing to the sixth child. The youngest daughter, at the time, listening to the story, Cecilia, concludes that the princess must be selfish. And it may be that Cecilia is correct, but the importance of the bedtime story brings up the connection back to Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" with Shakespeare's nameless sister also not being able to retain voice or artistic life once presented with the challenge of having a man and child as the responsibility in her life.

The connection to Woolf's work is even stronger when it is remembered that the nameless protagonist in *Forty Rooms* not only once but twice burns all of her works in the same way that Shakespeare's nameless sister took her "scribbled…pages" (Woolf 897) and "was careful to hide them or *set fire to them*" (897 italics mine) – likely to keep it from her father "not to hurt him, not to shame him" (897). Grushin's protagonist likewise vows in a prayer to "give up my life," to "have another child—a girl," and "even give up all thought of poetry while he lives" (Grushin 165) if her father is saved. Her willingness to give herself up shows her love for her father on one level, but it also shows her willingness to protect the patriarchal paradigm and assimilate into it by giving up her identity and voice. Her willingness to protect her father at all cost is further reminiscent of Gloria Anzaldúa's "Cervicide," a short story that explicitly emphasizes the servitude of women in a patriarchy where the mother and daughter must bludgeon a doe (a symbol for women) to death in order to keep the husband and father from going to jail for having

the illegal "animal" as a pet in the home. After all of the willingness to give up everything for the men, Grushin gives hope with one of the deceased protagonist's visions of an alternate reality for her daughter Emma as "divorced now and living here with her two daughters while she studies for her architect's exam" (330). The vision may seem to be a kind of double edged sword as Emma is divorced with children and in the house that Mrs. Caldwell never leaves, but it signifies a separation or "divorce" from the patriarchy (symbolized as her husband) and the pursuit of her dreams to be an architect with the hope to build *rooms of one's own* and be a metaphorical king – something Mrs. Caldwell is never able to do in their house. The significance of Emma being engaged in house-building (architecture) is not only to tie to Virginia Woolf's writings, but to show possible resistance to, or a shift in the hegemonic paradigm where women do the house-keeping and men do the house-building. Marilyn Chandler discusses this paradigm in *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*, saying that it is "a visible and concrete means of defining and articulating the self" (Hayes 670), and adding that men show "self-definition…in house-building, and for women, housekeeping" (670). Emma seems to be the one who might flip this paradigm on its head or more accurately show equality – a woman being able to self-define by creating one's own space in the same way that a man could rather than being confined to a space that someone else has built or chosen for them. Emma is seeking "wholeness" by trying to create equality spatially through architecture in the same way that Mrs. Caldwell is seeking wholeness of identity in trying to have and equal voice through her writing – an intellectual space.

Cecilia

The name Cecilia, as mentioned above, is from a Latin word meaning 'blind' (Hanks). It is not physical blindness that is present in the novel's characters but a metaphorical blindness to not be able to see the world for what it is (or at least struggle) and not able to make rational, informed decisions partially due to the "disinformation/misinformation perpetrated on women" (Kynclová 50). Celia's blindness is most clearly shown in Celia's inability to translate or understand her mother's bedtime stories. Celia's constant questioning is reminiscent of the protagonist when she was a child listening to stories told by her grandmother and questioning the what and why of a story that has deeper meaning than she can interpret. Another cause of 'blindness' is self-infliction – it can be a choice. This desire for 'blindness' to the ways of the world is expressed by Celia when she says "I don't want real life…I want a fairy tale about a princess, but only with a happy ending" (Grushin 254).

Mrs. Caldwell, too, is also partially at fault for her blindness. Gloria Anzaldúa notes that "In order to escape the threat of shame or fear, one takes on a compulsive, repetitious activity as though to busy oneself, to distract oneself, to keep awareness at bay" (Anzaldúa 67). Mrs. Caldwell fears her own unhappiness and not meeting cultural expectations as a housewife. She attempts to stay fit running on treadmill (a repetition in itself that has you moving but going nowhere), buys clothes compulsively late at night, and has children in a semi-unconscious attempt to save her marriage. Anzaldúa continues saying, "one fixates on drinking, smoking…repeating, repeating, to prevent oneself from 'seeing'" (67) – a statement that fits Mrs. Caldwell as she drinks while trying on her

clothes and smokes while running on the treadmill (quite the paradox). She is running away from her reality in the same way that Celia does not "want real life" (Grushin 254).

Later in Mrs. Caldwell's life, 'blindness' is exemplified through forgetfulness and loss of tradition – apparent through conversations between Mrs. Caldwell and her grandmother and also her mother. Mrs. Caldwell's grandmother alludes to a tree, the key image to a story which she used to tell, but Mrs. Caldwell does not catch the allusion and rather asks "What tree, Grandmother?" (241). While conversing with her mother, her mother questions the protagonist accusingly after she has forgotten what forty days has to do with anything: "Have you forgotten all of your people's traditions" (299). To strengthen the loss of tradition and culture that the protagonist has felt, both of the women (grandmother and mother) are ghosts when they speak these words, disappearing after they have spoken. Their being ghostly and vanishing from the reality of the protagonist emphasizes the status of the culture and tradition of her foremothers as deceased and almost completely removed from the protagonist. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar attribute this forgetfulness to "two illnesses [, aphasia and amnesia (loss of speech and loss of memory respectively),] which symbolically represent (and parody) the sort of intellectual incapacity patriarchal culture has traditionally required of women" (Gilbert and Gubar 1937), adding that these illnesses "appear and reappear in women's writings in frankly stated or disguised forms" (1937). In *Forty Rooms* the "illness" is disguised and only uncovered when delving into the importance and meaningfulness of names – Cecilia marking the blindness of the past and present that plagues Mrs. Caldwell, and thus women in general, because of her adherence to patriarchal constructs of socially acceptable behavior for women – mainly motherhood and domesticity.

Maggie and Mermaids

Maggie, Mrs. Caldwell's youngest child, is named after Paul's paternal grandmother. The name is suggested by Mrs. Caldwell to calm her husband after breaking the news to him that she is five months pregnant with their sixth child and also in hopes of pleasing her ailing father-in-law – "'let's name her after your other grandmother,' she said. 'It will make your dad happy. He needs all the happiness he can get right now, you know?'" (Grushin 261). Again, the naming is done to appease the patriarchal figures of the family.

Maggie does not appear in the text as much as the other characters since she is the last child, but her name is used as link between past, present, and future generations. There is the simple and obvious continuation and recycling of a family name as seen with Eugene, Emma, Richard, Cecilia, and Maggie (only George being the exception – being an unexpected twin) and there is also the meaning of Margaret and the symbolism that ties the women of the text together. Importantly, Mrs. Caldwell is the hub to which all tying is done in the story, to show her as an "everywoman."

Margaret is a name of Hebrew origin meaning "pearl" (Hanks). Pearls are widely accepted as symbolizing femininity, modesty, and purity. The first of several instances of pearl jewelry is "a prim little cross of delicate pearls" (Grushin 13) observed in the protagonist's mother's room as the young protagonist talks to the mermaid (her mother). The pearl cross that the protagonist was shown is her "father's gift when" she "was born" (13) showing the cultural expectations that he has for his daughter even at her birth. The young protagonist does not desire the pearls but rather lusts after "a necklace of small round stones, each [a] kernel of blood-red" (13). It is a ruby necklace that she longs for.

Rubies – the "stone of kings" associated with "power" and "wealth" (Braid). That she longs for the rubies rather than the pearls shows, early in the text, the conflict of spiritual/natural desires against cultural expectations that are represented later through the protagonist's problematic dichotomy of artist/poet and wife/mother.

In other instances pearls create the mirrored or cyclical experience of a mother-in-law walking in on their to-be daughter-in-law in practically no clothing. First it is Emma Caldwell who walks in on the protagonist before she marries Paul. Emma Caldwell is described as having "the tweed suit, the pearl necklace, and the rigid haircut" (Grushin 272-273) and then when the grown and married protagonist (now a Mrs. Caldwell herself) walks in on her son's Czech girlfriend and retreats back to the hall she is described as "twisting and retwisting her string of pearls" (274) before walking away. The experiences are enough to create the cyclical effect, but with the addition of the pearl necklaces there is an additional link between the generations.

Pearls are also used to epitomize Gilbert and Gubar's statement that society claims that if women "do not behave like angels they must be monsters" (Gilbert and Gubar 1932). The dichotomy of angels and monsters is presented early in the text when the young protagonist goes to her mother's room and finds a mermaid who "stands up, balancing the box in one hand and the glass in the other" (Grushin 12). On the lid of the box are "two *pearly* girls" (8 italics added), representing the angel side of the dichotomy – pearls being a symbol for purity and innocence, while "the glass in the other" (12) hand, – a "nearly empty glass of dark red liquid" (10), represents the darker "monster" side of the equation as it is a reference back to the protagonist's grandmother's bedtime story where people "having tasted of a strange drink" "are plunged there [in death to the

entrance of a hidden kingdom (the afterlife)] without any warning" (5). The significance of these two opposites is that they are being balanced, showing an attempt to claim both sides of this angel/monster dichotomy.

In fact, it must not be forgotten that her mother is represented as a mermaid – a mythical representation of duality, dualism, dichotomies, difference, and paradox – throughout the scene. Grushin goes beyond the text with the image of the mermaid, not only tying generations of women within the text to each other, but also linking together characters from several canonical texts written by female authors – Charlotte Bronte's *Villette* (1853) and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928). This is done by creating a scene where the protagonist stands in front of the mirror and is represented as mermaid. The allusion pays homage to the "matrilineal heritage of literary strength" (Gilbert and Gubar 1937) and shows a cyclical female narrative of cultural hybridity throughout time.

In Charlotte Bronte's *Villette* the image of the mermaid helps to accentuate the multiplicity of Lucy Snow. It shows that she, like Orlando, and Mrs. Caldwell are not either angel or monster, but that she is both – having multiple parts at once:

> My calm little room seemed somehow like a cave in the sea. There was no colour about it, except that white and pale green, suggestive of foam and deep water; the blanched cornice was adorned with shell-shaped ornaments, and there were white mouldings like dolphins in the ceiling-angles. Even that one touch of colour visible in the red satin pincushion bore affinity to coral; even that dark, shining glass might have *mirrored a mermaid*. When I closed my eyes, I heard a gale, subsiding at last, bearing upon the house-front like a settling swell upon a rock-base. I heard it drawn and withdrawn far, far off, like a tide retiring from a shore

> of the upper world—a world so high above that the rush of its largest waves, the dash of its fiercest breakers, could sound down in this submarine home, only like murmurs and a lullaby. (Bronte 267-268 italics added)

Lucy Snowe's room is described as an underwater scene and its depths are set against "the upper world" (268) which represents the social sphere – the world of men. Her room is located in a school where she teaches English. The water imagery of her rooms alludes to the female aspect of the mermaid who would reside in the oceanic setting. At this point in *Villette* the dark and oceanic imagery represents her depression as well as her secrets (kept from the reader – mainly her family's likely death at sea) which are partly cause for her depressed state. Lucy, being "mirrored a mermaid" (267), depicts herself as a mythical beast or monster (in the words of Gilbert and Gubar) – a mermaid that is able to traverse the two realms – one, the ocean or sea of female energy, imagination, and secrets, and the other, the land of patriarchal tradition and social constructs. In other words she is shown to have multiple parts which allow her to survive in multiple social spheres – particularly among men and the academic setting.

In Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* the main character, Orlando, traverses three centuries. The length of time serves to make "serious inquiry into the status and treatment of women in English history" (Stringer). The novel also investigates the "possibility of an 'androgynous' personality" (Stringer) highlighted in fact that Orlando has a changes identity from man to woman. The scene below is from the transformation of Orlando from man to woman – "laying her pen [, a metaphorical phallus,] aside" (Woolf location 1788) – and is shown before a mirror in a scene with many similarities found in the "mermaid" scenes of *Forty Rooms*:

> ‘Life and a lover.’ Then laying her pen aside she went into her bedroom, stood in front of her mirror, and arranged her pearls about her neck. Then since pearls do not show to advantage against a morning gown of sprigged cotton, she changed to a dove grey taffeta; thence to one of peach bloom; thence to a wine-coloured brocade. Perhaps a dash of powder was needed, and if her hair were disposed — so — about her brow, it might become her. Then she slipped her feet into pointed slippers, and drew an emerald ring upon her finger. ‘Now,’ she said when all was ready and lit the silver sconces on either side of the mirror. What woman would not have kindled to see what Orlando saw then burning in the snow — for all about the looking-glass were snowy lawns, and she was like a fire, a burning bush, and the candle flames about her head were silver leaves; or again, the glass was green water, and *she a mermaid, slung with pearls,* a siren in a cave, singing so that oarsmen leant from their boats and fell down, down to embrace her; so dark, so bright, so hard, so soft, was she, so astonishingly seductive that it was a thousand pities that there was no one there to put it in plain English, and say outright, ‘Damn it, Madam, you are loveliness incarnate,’ which was the truth. (Woolf location 1788 italics mine)

The obvious connections between the two texts are that the women are standing before mirrors and seeing themselves as or being represented as mermaids. Furthermore, there are the caves and presence of both female imagery – sea, ocean, and water, and male imagery – “the world high above,” (Bronte 268), pen, and men themselves. The presence of both male and female imagery shows the multiplicity or hybridity of the characters because both parts are present in the image of the mermaid – the upper half represents the

male realm or "world high above" and the lower aquatic half is representative of the oceanic feminine realm.

Mrs. Caldwell shows this multiplicity as well as she shares this secretive imaginary realm in front of the mirror as a mermaid where she had "somber bags of sturdy plastic conceal[ing] the bright plumage of… [her] evening dresses" (Grushin 228). The dresses are shown to be hidden, or "concealed" (228), because she shares a room and closet with her husband. Each dress is meant for some future special occasion, but they are only ever used when she is "free to imagine the outing in the privacy of the closet, a well-deserved drink close at hand, posing before the mirror in that short, blissful interval after her five children had fallen asleep and before Paul returned from the office" (230). The hidden nature of clothes and her mirror being in the closet allude to the secret nature of her desires and the extent to which she keeps it from her husband and children. It is important to note that not only does Mrs. Caldwell seek out a space where she can be herself and dream, but she also seeks time to do so. The text shows that Mrs. Caldwell feels trapped between her two responsibilities as wife and mother – both part of the patriarchal social paradigm where a man rules the household and the woman should look after the children. Lost in these two societal roles, from which she receives her only names/or titles of Mrs. or wife and mother, her true identity as an individual, who has hopes and dreams, that must deal with multiple roles and multiple cultural terrains (wife, mother, individual, American, Russian) rarely comes out. The protagonist's identity as a mermaid is shown in a closet/mirror scene similar to the one that she shared with her mother/mermaid at the beginning of the novel. When the children were asleep and her husband wasn't home from work "she was …free to imagine the outings in the privacy of

the closet, a well-deserved drink close at hand, posing before the mirror" (230). The end of the scene in front of mirror leaves Mrs. Caldwell in the form of a mermaid – her legs tightly bound by a "skirt of iridescent peacock-blue taffeta" (230) and only in a maternity bra. The reader is helped to understand her as a mermaid with the water imagery when the "taffeta pooled stiffly around her feet" (233). The wearing of taffeta is significant because it often has a sheen and reflects light like water. The bluish-green or "peacock-blue" (230) supports the water/mermaid imagery. Furthermore, taffeta ties Mrs. Caldwell's experience to the past as it is one of the materials worn by Orlando who wore a "dove grey taffeta" (Woolf location 1788). Interestingly, Mrs. Caldwell's perceives her mother, who is also never named, to be a mermaid wearing a "narrow skirt of the faintest gray color, the color of the morning mist above the waters of our dacha pond" (Grushin 8). The color of her mother's skirt also seems to allude to *Orlando* and would make Orlando into a mother figure that would be proud of this multiplicity and find her "loveliness incarnate" (Woolf 1788). The water imagery and materials show a link between all three texts, *Orlando, Villette,* and *Forty Rooms.* The connection highlights the cyclical nature and universality of experience for women throughout time.

Conclusion

Grushin uses the nameless character in order to show the position of women belonging in a patriarchal society. This is done by never giving the protagonist her own name and only having her called by her married name showing a quasi-coming into being or acknowledgement of having identity even though it is not her own as her fortunetelling gypsy maid Mrs. Simmons reminds her, "You are no more Mrs. Caldwell than I am Mrs. Simmons." (Grushin 279). Denying the protagonist a name shows her place in the text as

lesser than others, but most apparently dominated by the male characters of the text with their royal names – either temporal or spiritual – like her silencing husband Paul. Not having a name also allows for her to take on the characteristics of others or more specifically the characteristics of others to be seen in her. It is like what George Bernard Shaw wrote in *Man and superman*: "every woman is not Ann; but Ann is Everywoman" ("everywoman") only instead of his character Ann, Mrs. Caldwell stands in her place where "every woman is not" Mrs. Caldwell; but Mrs. Caldwell "is Everywoman" ("everywoman"). Furthermore, because the protagonist is not given a name, her Russian culture is easily forgotten by the reader. Without the constant reminder of her Russian heritage, her assimilation and loss of culture is fluid as there is a metamorphosis or transformation that is undergone slowly throughout the book "without her noticing" (Grushin 281). Her native culture is like her identity which is lost and oppressed by the patriarchal hegemony. I have shown that the names of the men in the story support the idea of her/women being oppressed in a patriarchal society by not allowing her voice while the names of the women help the reader to understand characteristics that are shared between other female characters and the protagonist. Each female character helps to create the nameless protagonist into an "everywoman" or universal character that can be related to on some level by many readers which is the hope of the author as she states in an interview with BookBrowse: "I conceived this as a universal story- a journey from childhood promise to youthful ambition ending in adult compromise; anyone who has lived to the age of thirty, male or female, will probably relate to that to some extent" (An Interview with Olga Grushin). Mrs. Caldwell's desire and dream to be a poet is compromised in order to exist in the patriarchy by becoming a wife and mother.

Interestingly, Grushin does not exclude men from the need to make compromises based on social expectations. Paul, too, expresses that he had a dream to be a chef, but gave it up because he felt Mrs. Caldwell "seem[ed] to manage so well by…[herself]" (Grushin 288). This shows that expectations in a patriarchal society can have effect on women as well as men. I argue that Grushin is successful in showing the multiplicity of women and the universality of experience in this story that revolves around a single unnamed character because the connections exist to show how, not only one woman, but several women have to traverse cultures to exist. The universality and multiplicity is further explored in the next chapter by examining Grushin's use of pronoun confusion, first and third person point of view in the narrative, and mirrors in order to show the connection between many people and also multiple planes of existence or rather the character's different parts which create a whole.

CHAPTER IV

LITERARY DEVICES AND AN IMAGE: THE MULTIPLICITY OF MRS. CALDWELL

Pronoun Confusion

In *Language and Myth,* Ernst Cassirer states that "the unity and uniqueness of the name is not only a mark of the unity and uniqueness of the person [or thing], but actually constitutes it; the name is what first makes man [or woman] an individual" (51). In this case the protagonist of *Forty Rooms* there is a lack uniqueness and individuality because a name is never given in the text. The lack of a known name creates an identification problem as the reader does not have a way to address the character other than by personal pronouns – in this case "she" and "her" – or by a surname that applies to several other characters within the text. The pronouns do not exclude many others. In fact they include all others who would respond to these same pronouns, i.e. women. In this way the protagonist in *Forty Rooms* is difficult to distinguish from other women and becomes one of many that are indistinguishable one from another.

Grushin uses the absence of the protagonist's name as an opportunity to confuse and intertwine characters who share her title of Mrs. Caldwell and personal pronouns. An example of this kind of name and pronoun confusion can be observed the first time the protagonist meets her mother-in-law and she is trying on the mother-in-law's (Mrs. Caldwell's) wedding dress. Admittedly this first example shines brightest when the book is being read a second time or looked at after a reading and the reader is already aware of the only name by which the protagonist is ever called – Mrs. Caldwell. During the scene the pronouns create confusion as to who is doing what:

> By the time Mrs. Caldwell edged into the room, she had struggled anew into the imprisonment of the dress, and, her back gaping open, stood in silent mortification, crimson-faced, not meeting the mirrored eyes of Mrs. Caldwell, who for the next minute, the longest minute of her life, strained to button the buttons. (Grushin 127)

In the passage the reader, if not aware that the protagonist has not yet become Paul's wife or reading through a second time, might believe that "she" is Mrs. Caldwell struggling "anew into…the dress" (127) and that it is "her"- Mrs. Caldwell's, "back gaping open" (127). In fact the two personal pronouns discussed belong to the unnamed protagonist. The confusion comes because a personal pronoun such as "she" usually refers back to a noun or noun phrase. In the case of this scene and many others there is never a noun given other than a pronoun to reference the protagonist and in fact a pronoun does not need to reference back to some independent noun but can act as the subject/noun of a sentence. That being said, the sentence still causes confusion – especially when taken out of the context of the story where the reader can understand "she" as the unnamed protagonist. When taken as a sentence by itself, the adverb clause "By the time Mrs. Caldwell edged into the room" (127) contains the only proper noun, Mrs. Caldwell, that fits the third person singular feminine pronoun "she." The middle-aged Mrs. Caldwell then becomes the one who is struggling with "imprisonment of the [wedding] dress" and it is "*her* back gaping open" (127 italics added) – both pronouns referring back to Mrs. Caldwell. The absence of the protagonist's name and constant reference to her with pronouns allows for this kind of double reading to take place where the women share the

experience so much that either character fits the situation of being imprisoned in marriage.

The scene goes on to create even more confusion that does not need to be taken out of context to exist as such. The confusion also relies on the ambiguity of a pronoun – 'her.' Mrs. Caldwell helps the protagonist button the buttons for a "minute, the longest minute of her life" (127). The long minute references back to Mrs. Caldwell until the reader remembers that the genitive singular feminine pronoun 'her' could refer to the longest minute of Mrs. Caldwell's or the longest minute of "she" – the protagonist. The confusion is created in the context of the scene in contrast to the first example because of the unlikely hood of Mrs. Caldwell putting on the dress whereas in the latter example feelings of embarrassment during the "longest minute" (127) are likely mutual. Through the shared experience and feeling, the characters become one. The use of a pronoun that does not specify one individual from another, but in the context of the story refers to the nameless protagonist, allows for her identifier – the pronoun – to confuse or absorb noun or noun phrases that are not the literal reference.

Another example of the confusion that is created by the repetition of names and use of pronouns that fit multiple characters is found when the protagonist's unnamed mother, mother-in-law; Emma Caldwell, her daughter; also Emma Caldwell, and herself (now identified within the text most often as Mrs. Caldwell) are found in the kitchen after Thanksgiving. The scene starts with Mrs. Caldwell in the kitchen alone "free… to feel at peace" (263), but then other characters move into her space one by one, a metaphor for how she is giving up her space and her own self. The culminating point is when all four women mentioned above are found in the same room in a two sentences where the names

and pronouns cause some confusion in order to emphasize their closeness and the ways that they are the same:

> Emma, gliding in next, the only one of the children to keep her clothes entirely spill- and spot-free after the two-hour meal, declined the apple and offered to help with the dishes instead; Mrs. Caldwell gave her the delicate task of drying the crystal. Her mother tried to take up a towel too, but Mrs. Caldwell would have none of it, bustling her over to the table with a cup of coffee, which she presently dispensed to Emma the elder as well (she had long stopped thinking of Paul's mother as Mrs. Caldwell). (264)

Generally speaking, who is who can be deciphered fairly easily, given the context of the scene. Readers know that Mrs. Caldwell, the protagonist, is at the kitchen sink doing dishes when her daughter walks in to help and is tasked to dry the crystal. Then the protagonist's mother tries to dry the dishes too but the protagonist sends her mother to the table with some coffee that the protagonist's mother in turn gives to Paul's mother, Emma Caldwell. Even the reiteration of what is happening is confusing because with so many names duplicated and pronouns used, there is bound to be some ambiguity needing inspection and interpretation. In the passage there is immediate confusion with the entrance of Emma as it could be the protagonist's daughter or mother-in-law, but she is then identified as "one of the children" (264). The first instance of a pronoun refers to Emma, the daughter, being given the task to dry. The second pronoun "her" is at first a bit more confusion because it is in such close proximity to the previous "her" but has a different antecedent or reference – Mrs. Caldwell, the protagonist. It does not help that there are three mothers in the scene who could fit the reference of "her mother" (264),

two of whom could be referred to as the protagonist's mother. Again in a third appearance, "her" is bustled "over to the table with a cup of coffee" (264). Presumably it is not Emma the younger sent to the table as she is allowed to dry dishes, but is the mother of which the previous "her" refers. The most confusion is caused by the cup of coffee and deciding who "she," the person who "dispensed" the coffee, is. "She" could either be Mrs. Caldwell or her mother depending on who is imagined to be carrying the cup of coffee when bustling or being bustled over to the table. The passage ends with Emma who must immediately be identified as "the elder" (264) as to not confuse her with the protagonist's dish drying daughter, and then a final personal pronoun "she" that could reference Mrs. Caldwell or her mother as not thinking of "Paul's mother as Mrs. Caldwell" (264) anymore. The scene's confusion creates unity that helps emphasize shared experience and connectedness among the women.

The confusion shown in the above two examples come by way of singular pronouns "she" and "her" signifying unity by having multiple reference points. Grushin also uses the first person plural pronoun "we" to express the multiplicity of the protagonist Mrs. Caldwell. This is done by using the plural "we" when there is only one reference or antecedent. The first example of this contradictory usage is only apparent if the reader understands that the protagonist's friend, Olga, is not real. Olga helps the understanding of the protagonist in several ways. First of all, because the protagonist believes that her imaginary friend is real she can be thought of as a schizophrenic which puts her squarely into the context of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's work "The Madwoman In The Attic" where the madwoman is used to show the female "anxiety of authorship" (Gilbert and Gubar 1931) and "patriarchal socialization literally makes

women sick" (1931). This heightens the reader's awareness of Mrs. Caldwell as an oppressed woman. Furthermore, Olga acts as a second identity, representing the possible desires of Mrs. Caldwell and serving as an example that the protagonist is meant to represent multiple people and be an everywoman. The expression of the multiple identities in the young protagonist comes in the form of the use of "we" to describe herself and her non-existent friend or rather to describe two characters who are really just one. This multiplicity of the protagonist is observed when she is talking to Olga and recalling the burning of her school work and books: "You know, I almost wish we hadn't burned the old history notebooks" (Grushin 35) and then when recalling the situation she says "Olga joined me halfway through the destruction, and we took turns mockingly declaiming this or that sentence…laughing with theatrical abandon as we fed the flames" (35). It seems like quite logical and proper grammar because the unaware reader believes the same thing that the protagonist does – that there are two individuals present, both herself and Olga. When realizing that Olga is in fact a hallucination the plural pronoun "we" takes on more significant meaning as it now implies that the protagonist is expressing herself through multiple identities. Grushin then uses pronouns to show how multiple characters can be combined into a singular pronoun such as "she" or "her" and how a single character can be used to express plurality through a plural pronoun "we." There is one other situation of how "we" is used in the text to express plurality through Mrs. Caldwell and that is when "we" has only Mrs. Caldwell herself as a reference point. The plural "we" should be understood to express "women" because Mrs. Caldwell is used to show universality of experience for women. This usage occurs several times when Mrs. Caldwell has an internal monologue. One example is found after the forty-six-year-

old Mrs. Caldwell has walked in on the half nude girlfriend, Adriana, of her eldest son. Once Mrs. Caldwell has apologized and retreated back into the hallway from her son's room she is filled with a mixture of emotions – sadness, relief, jealousy, and "fleetingly bitter" (273). At this point, the third person narrative evolves into a moment of first person internal dialogue:

> In our youth we believe ourselves so unique and our stories so original, yet we are all stuck running like hamsters on the wheel of time, all acting in the same play, and the roles of the play stay the same, only the actors switch places: one minute you are an ingénue charming an affable heir—the next, a matron used for comic relief in a scene of which you are no longer the protagonist. (273)

Interestingly the dialogue is held in the first person *plural* even though she is in the hallway alone. Her thoughts are on the cyclical nature of time, comparing it to hamsters running "on the wheel of time" (273) where the hamsters are the "we" (273). What is not so apparent is about whom the "we" is referring. In her article "Women's Time," Julia Kristeva argues in contrast to men's time being linear that women's time is represented as "cyclical" (Kristeva 17) saying that it "essentially retains repetition… from among the multiple modalities of time" (16) where "there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm" (16). By thinking of women's time as cyclical, it helps the reader understand the "we" in context of women because it is "we" or women who are experiencing being "stuck running…on the wheel of time" (Grushin 273). Even if one is not familiar with Kristeva's argument Grushin supplies ample evidence that "we" is in reference to women. In the context of the story the reader is aware of the pattern of the protagonist being young and walked in on by the to-be mother-in-law, then becoming

Mrs. Caldwell and then walking in her to-be daughter-in-law who in turn will become Mrs. Caldwell and likely have "her own Mrs. Caldwell moment" (273). This pattern creates the cycle of women that could be the reference of "we." Several other hints point that the "we" is not in reference to men as well as women, namely the use of the words "ingénue" and "matron" (273) which both are in reference to women – "an artless, innocent girl or young woman" ("ingénue") and "a married woman, *esp.* one of mature years" ("matron") respectively.

In another scene there is also this first person plural pronoun usage of "we." After another startling or unique experience Mrs. Caldwell has a moment of reflection. In this case it is after she has talked to the ghost of her dead mother. By this time the reader should understand "we" in her internal dialogue to imply women when she says "maybe, the world is really like that,…the way we imagine it as children, before we stop *seeing*" (Grushin 304). The only clue in this passage that "we" does in fact refer to women is the italicized *"seeing*" (304) which is linked to the meaning of the name Cecilia, blindness, discussed earlier. Again, Grushin is showing that Mrs. Caldwell is plural, multiple expressions of identity expressed in a single character. Furthermore, these moments of internal dialogue highlight another device that Grushin uses to express the multiplicity of Mrs. Caldwell – the first to third person narrative switch.

Narrative Switch

The use of pronoun confusion created ambiguity between characters in order to relate the multiplicity of Mrs. Caldwell's complex identity – extremely complex because she represents a multitude. First person narrative switching to third person narrative has a similar result to pronoun confusion without the opportunity for misinterpretation. In

"Constructing Mestiza Consciousness: Gloria Anzaldúa's Literary Techniques in *Borderlands/La Frontera* – The New Mestiza," Tereza Kynclová examines Anzaldúa's use of the first to third person narrative switch as a technique or device to "transmit the multiplicity of … [Anzaldúa's] perspective via the texts" (51). Kynclová's work goes on to explain that the narrative switch is one of two code-switching devices used – the other being what is normally thought of as code-switching, altering languages. The device's purpose is in combating or exploiting an oppressive cultural paradigm or as Linda Nelson relates: "Switching codes, switching languages, is necessary when the dominant culture insists on one language, one color, two genders, [and] one sexuality" (51). Olga Grushin uses code-switching in the same manner as Anzaldúa, to highlight the oppression of women.

While there is the presence of linguistic code-switching within *Forty Rooms* it is minimal because of cultural assimilation and it is mostly used to point to the oppression of women whereas the narrative point of view switch is used to accentuate the protagonist as a representative of the masses of women who reside in oppression – the thesis of this paper. There is one example in particular of linguistic code-switching that stands out in expressing oppression.

When the protagonist goes to a college party she is raped. It occurs when Hamlet first criticizes the protagonist for writing poems and not reading them in public, saying that it is heresy to not read them "otherwise they are no better than solitary trees falling in the woods" (Grushin 78) and then he goes on to create bounds for the form she should use in writing her poetry claiming "of course they should always rhyme properly" (78). Following the ideological attack, in which he presents "proper" method for writing and

circulation of poetry, a confusing sexual encounter/rape of the protagonist as can be derived on page 82 from her "first poem in English, a poem with proper rhymes[:]"

Met.

"Nyet."

Bet.

Duet.

Pet.

Wet.

Not yet.

Beset.

Let.

Sweat.

Regret?

Not yet.

Cigarette. (82)

The poem has one of the few instances of code-switching in the text. The word "nyet" in the second line means "no" and coincides with the two other instances of "not yet." The insistence that "no" continues after the petting and wetness (possibly of kissing or vaginal secretion) and then the persistent threat in the word "beset," which is threat or trouble, is succumbed to or "let" which is much different than consent. The final "cigarette" leads to the idea that in contemplation of "regret" the speaker has taken to smoking which often indicates the conclusion of intercourse and can signify nervousness and/or anxiety. The rape seems to go beyond the physical and into the mental and cultural. As seen with the

cigarette, there is a sense of instability. Furthermore, we have the disappearance of a Russian word in the beginning of the poem for an English substitution "*Not yet"* that takes over and dominates the poem which symbolizes the oppression and rape of culture the protagonist is undergoing by assimilating.

The understanding of oppression of women is apparent through the use of codeswitching and also the names and actions of other men in the text. The multiplicity of the protagonist as a representative of women is also shown through the names and actions of the women in the text and codeswitching – in this case the first to third person narrative switch. The first to third switch is utilized in two ways. The first and most apparent switches are the overarching narrative changes that take place in the novel. That is to say that the novel starts out in the first person, continues for a hundred or so pages until Part Three, and then the narrative is switched to the third person where the narrative no longer is from the point of view of "I," the protagonist, but is from the omniscient, "fly on the wall," point of view, the protagonist becoming "she." The second method in which the switch is used is when the story switches back and forth from third to first to third person narrative in the occurrence of internal dialogue like the two instances discussed above where Mrs. Caldwell uses the first person plural pronoun "we." Upon the death of Mrs. Caldwell late in the novel, the narrative completely switches back from third to first person perspective during one of these moments of internal dialogue. In the article "The Varieties of First-Person Narration: Four Stories By Kafka," William G. Strong notes that "there is no one essential function of the first person from which all the others could be derived" (483). Strong is saying that without analyzing the text, there is no set rule for what first person narrative implies: "in some cases…it creates a distance

between perspective and event, while in others it cancels the same distance" (483). I might add that there is no set rule for third person narrative as well, but with that being said Grushin's novel fits Tereza Kynclová's analysis of the switching of narrative point of view in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* when she writes: "Replacing "my" with "her" implies the writer's acceptance of a multiple voice and also her identification with the doomed experience of the oppressed woman" (Kynclová 54).

The transition from "I" and "my" in *Forty Rooms* to the third person "she" and "her" illustrates the movement away from self and individual identity. It is not coincidence that the protagonist gets married, becomes the mother to six children, and becomes a grandmother in the section of the novel that is narrated in the third person. Each new role represents another way that the protagonist has to become even more selfless and part of something greater/larger than herself – a way in which there is "simultaneous shaping of both her personal as well as collective identity" (53) as a woman. The shift to third person point of view creates a larger scope or field of view for the reader. Instead being tied to the limited mind and perspective of protagonist Grushin is able to express a wide variety of techniques that show the multiplicity of women and tie the women of the story together into the form of the protagonist who in some ways represents them all. The third person allows for the pronouns "she" and "her" to be used and cause confusion between characters. It allows the reader to get into the head of multiple characters like Mrs. Caldwell's daughters, Emma and Celia, while they are dreaming and see that Emma does have a desire to "build a city" (Grushin 254) and Celia is blind and cannot "discover…[an] entrance" (256) or exit. The ambiguity of the third person allows for speculation as to who is telling the story and provides possibility of

interpretation that Mrs. Caldwell is oppressed but has come to terms with her life "happy with knowing her limitations at last" (308), arguably meaning that an oppressed life is one that ultimately allows for growth. This may be so, but the story allows for alternative interpretations as well, where women in general need to do as the protagonist does at the end of her life and "see things so surely, down to the smallest of details" (324) so that they can make conscious decisions about how to live and exist as a plural individual – one with many parts in a "culture [that] insists on one language, one color, two genders, [and] one sexuality" (Kynclová 51).

The final switch back to the first person narrative takes place when Mrs. Caldwell dies. She finally comes back into being an individual and escapes the oppression in life. In the final pages of the novel, the protagonist *sees* herself as a multitude, sensing "ghostly women moving through the house. All with their own versions of my elderly face…they are only a vast, cosmic branching of endless possibilities, or numberless outcomes—all of them variations on my own fate…an endless theater of myself" (329). The significance of having alternate selves show that life may lead in varying directions. Mrs. Caldwell's life went the way it did because of choices she made like when she "*chose* the wrong thing to keep secret" (288 italics added) – the secret being that she loves to write poetry. The argument being that choice can affect the future or which Mrs. Caldwell will be reality. The trick is seeing the possibilities and alternatives and accepting that, like Mrs. Caldwell, people may have multiple parts, being hybrid or mestiza, and do not have to accept being pigeon-holed into an oppressive culture and meet every expectation but can and should seek to build like

Emma. Grushin accentuates the nature of the text as one which should be reflected upon to recognize multiplicity of the self through the leitmotif of the mirror.

Mirrors

Mirrors are one of the most prevalent symbols in *Forty Rooms* that show multiplicity. In "What's in a Mirror: James Joyce's Phenomenology of Perception," Gerald L. Bruns claims that "The basic function of a mirror is to produce a likeness of whatever passes before it. What interests Joyce, however, is the way mirrors do not produce empirical images but, on the contrary, register multiple forms of difference: alienation, *alternative or multiple identities,* and unauthorized or embellished versions of dubious originals…" (Bruns 574 italics added). It is important to note that even in the mirror's "basic function…to produce a likeness of whatever passes before it" (574) the mirror creates an appearance of an additional person or thing. While Bruns is analyzing mirrors in the works of James Joyce his analysis holds true for *Forty Rooms.* The mirrors in Grushin's novel express the "basic function" (574) of a mirror as well as to show "alternate or multiple identities" (574) reflecting the "original[]" (574) – Mrs. Caldwell. The understanding that a mirror can show multiple or altered reflections illuminates the readers understanding of Mrs. Caldwell as representing "multiple identities" (574). The mirrors found throughout Grushin's novel work in many ways, but ultimately serve to provide additional perspective of the protagonist.

In some instances the protagonist sees herself in a mirror but does not recognize herself, like when she is burning her papers and observes a "savage-eyed girl in the mirror" (Grushin 94). In these situations the reader is allowed to see the mixed emotions and expressions of thoughts that the narrator does not directly reveal about the

protagonist. In other scenes there is an exchange that takes place in a mirror that links two characters together like when Mrs. Simmons says to Mrs. Caldwell that she is "no more Mrs. Simmons than you are Mrs. Caldwell" (279) after which "For a moment their eyes met within the silvery pool of the priceless mirror" (279-280). The two characters share an unexpressed understanding that they are not to be defined by their married names. Another example is when the young protagonist stands in front of her mother's mirror with her mermaid/mother "the two of…[them] reflected," her in a "short white nightgown with green parrots" and "the mermaid a slim undulation of shadow" (12-13). The protagonist does not see how they are joined together in the mirror, but in time the reader understands the mirror's ability to bend time and foreshadow the protagonist's evolution into her mother – becoming mermaid herself.

Furthermore, the mirror is used to show an abnormal amount of reflections of the protagonist on several occasions to amplify the understanding that she is not representative of a singular figure but a multitude of women. Both instances of this phenomenon take place in rooms that create an "infinity" effect because of parallel mirrors. The first example is when Paul and Mrs. Caldwell are in the ballroom of their mansion and Paul adorns her with a "choker necklace of golden filigree" (189). The "choker" is reminiscent of the kind of collar that is put on a dog to train it, and symbolizes the control of Paul over his wife. After the necklace is on her, "she looked at the shadowy woman in the nearest mirror, at all the women in all the mirrors around the room…She thought she saw a reflection on the edge of the crowd stand up and leave without a glance back, and was seized by a wild desire to follow" (189). The multitude of women are presumable also under the restraint of a "choker" as they are a reflection of

Mrs. Caldwell, but only one (and that one possibly only the imagination and desire of Mrs. Caldwell) gets up to leave. Symbolically, the mirrored women represent the masses of women oppressed by patriarchal culture. Central to the mirrored women is Mrs. Caldwell because she stands in as a representative of them.

The other example of this kind of multiplicity as shown by mirrors is when Mrs. Caldwell had been running on the treadmill in the basement gym after conversing with the ghost of her dead grandmother. Mrs. Caldwell finishes her run and is "out of breath" and "crying for some reason" (241) when she looks in the mirrors and sees that "the mirrors all around the exercise room [are] crowded with unmistakably middle-aged women" (241). Mrs. Caldwell eventually turns off the lights off so that she can no longer *see* the mirrored women or herself. Turning off the lights is an example of "escap[ing] the threat of shame or fear" (Anzaldúa 67) where Mrs. Caldwell wants to be like Celia, not wanting "real life" (Grushin 254) – to be blind to her own unhappy state being oppressed. She does not want to recognize that she is someone "stuck running like hamsters on the …[treadmill] of time" (273). As with all of the examples, Grushin, like an artist "make[s] use of the mirror…to show us something that we would not otherwise be able to see" (Mirrors) or at least see as clearly – that Mrs. Caldwell is as representative of the masses of women residing in an oppressive patriarchal culture.

Conclusion

The image of the mirror, in *Forty Rooms,* is also a tool to insight and self-reflection or introspection. "In ancient art the mirror is often associated with the world of women" (Mirrors) and so the mirror can be likened unto a kind of portal or gateway into "the world of women" to better understand the state of women in the text, but also a

reminder to reflect on one's own status in reality. If the mirror acts as a portal and way to have a different perspective, then so too does Mrs. Caldwell act as a portal or mirror allowing readers to reflect on their own status in life and also reflect on the status of women around them. In fact, the surname Caldwell or "cold" well or "spring" (Mills) lends itself to the idea of a portal of insight because as the University of Michigan symbolism project notes, wells "frequently appear in fairy tales and dreams as places of *penetration into the unknown worlds* of unconscious, of what is hidden and, in everyday life, inaccessible" (Well italics added).

The image of the well is also "symbolic of the female womb" (Well) where life can "spring" (Mills) into being – another emphasis on the novel's subject of women and also foreshadowing the choice of the protagonist to have children. While the surname Caldwell leads to imagery of water, symbolic of women, Grushin is also using word play with the name where Caldwell can be interpreted as "called well," indicating the importance of her name and names in general. Ironically, the protagonist is not called anything but her married name. This kind of word play falls into what Carla Kaplan notes in her article "Women's Writing and Feminist Strategy" as what Patricia "Yaeger… calls 'language games'" (347) that can be used by "women writers [to] break out of silence and force male discourse and tradition both to speak about them and converse with them" (347). Grushin's "language games" with names and narrative in *Forty Rooms* force investigation on the reader who wants to truly comprehend her work.

Central to comprehension of *Forty Rooms* is the protagonist and understanding her as an "everywoman" character. I have shown that her nameless status not only shows her as a women living in an culturally oppressive patriarchal paradigm but that it allows

her to take upon herself the names of women throughout the text. Each name creates more depth in the protagonist and shows her many parts – the multitude of attributes, trials, and situations of women. That the protagonist is representative of oppressed women has been shown by first examining the names and characteristics of men throughout the novel that produce an oppressive atmosphere. Next the names of women were studied to show characteristic traits are shared between the protagonist and other women/girls in the novel, such as Celia representing blindness and Mrs. Caldwell's as well having "decades of [metaphorical] blindness" (Grushin 304) of her oppressed state. In order to show the multiplicity of Mrs. Caldwell I have shown how Grushin uses images and symbols, like mirrors, pearls, and water – all of which are symbols of the goddess Aphrodite that the "Greeks…[believed] to be at the same time Greek and foreign" (Pirenne-Delforge) – herself a symbol of female beauty, fertility, and sexuality. The images and symbols help to tie not only characters from inside the text to Mrs. Caldwell, but also allude to and bring in characters from classical texts like Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Charlotte Bronte's *Villette* to emphasize the multiplicity of Mrs. Caldwell and the cyclical oppression faced by women throughout time. To further illustrate that Mrs. Caldwell is indeed an "everywoman" character and representative of women in general, I explored Grushin's use of ambiguity through pronoun confusion, her use of code-switching in the form of switching narrative point of view, and also the role of mirrors "to show us something that we would not otherwise be able to see" (Mirrors) like Mrs. Caldwell's emotions, desires, and multiplicity. While my perspective that the protagonist of *Forty Room* is a representative of women universally may be argued against, I maintain that Grushin has created a woman figure that has traits and attributes

that can be related to by women globally who live in a patriarchal hegemony. It is important to understand the multiplicity of the protagonist because it makes apparent the complexity of identity that in turn helps readers to have and understanding of the status of self and women in culture, or have, what Gloria Anzaldúa calls, mestiza consciousness.

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