

Pushkin's Mystification: Tatiana's Letter, a Translation from French?

Summary

The article explores the question of the existence of a foreign original for the letter of Pushkin's heroine in his poetic novel *Evgenii Onegin*. The clue to the question is implied by Pushkin himself: the narrator introduces Tatiana's letter with the claim that it was written in French, whereas in the text it maintains the same language as the rest of the poetic novel. Although scholars discovered a number of parallels between the heroine's letter and French poetry and pointed to specific texts as possible sources, the present article attempts to challenge the postulation of a French original for Tatiana's letter. Textual analysis of the heroine's letter, conducted in the present article, shows that neither its style and language, nor its phraseology and vocabulary resemble a translation. The putative existence of a French original is interpreted in the article as a deliberate mystification arising from the linguistic situation in contemporary aristocratic society, which can be described as bilingualism (for Russian aristocracy French was the only language for literary expressions of feelings). The article explores the reason for Pushkin's mystification, which could have been the taboo against sentimental self-revelation in Russian aristocratic society: in order not to seem ridiculously anachronistic for 19th century aristocracy, Tatiana's letter required a putative French original. However, the study of Pushkin's correspondence shows that the revelation of deep feelings was associated in his own letters with the use of his native language, whereas French was reserved for expressing clichés of literary sentiment. The function of the poet's assertion that he had to translate Tatiana's letter from a mysterious French original could be to point to the literary nature of the heroine's feelings and to imply the impossibility of her dreams in the narrative reality of the novel.

Key words: Alexander Pushkin, Evgenii Onegin, Tatiana's letter, epistolary prose, bilingualism

One of the best-known passages in Pushkin's poetry is without doubt Tatiana's letter to Onegin, which forms part of the third chapter of *Evgenii Onegin*. Tatiana's letter has been considered the finest poem in Russian literature, since the time of the publication of Pushkin's novel to the present day: the poet's contemporary, Pavel Annenkov, described it as

‘marvellous poetry’;¹ the journal *Severnnye Zvety* for 1827 stated that its lines ‘burn the pages’;² a modern critic called it ‘a Russian poem composed by a genius’;³ Vissarion Belinsky noted that ‘Tatiana’s letter drove mad all Russian readers’, who saw in it ‘the supreme exemplar of the revelation of a woman’s heart’.⁴

In *Evgenii Onegin* Tatiana’s letter stands isolated from the rest of the text, since it lies outside the general strophic structure of the composition.⁵ The heroine’s epistle deviates from the Onegin stanzaic form and consists of seventy-nine lines in iambic tetrameter with a free pattern of rhymes. The letter is unique, as it simultaneously belongs to three situational planes: ‘non-narrative reality’ (the narrator states that he has the letter in front of him and treasures it, ‘Письмо Татьяны предо мною; / Его я свято берегу’); one character addressing another; and the contextual plane of the whole poetic novel.⁶ The letter is thus perceived by the reader as ‘a quotation’ from Tatiana’s life⁷, an action performed by the heroine, uniting the authorial intent with the intent of the character.

Although Tatiana’s letter maintains the same language as the rest of the poetic novel, the narrator introduces it with the claim that it was written in French (‘Итак, писала по-французски...’) and that he was compelled to translate it into Russian, ‘in order to preserve the honour of his homeland’ (‘Родной земли спасая честь, / Я должен буду, без сомненья, / Письмо Татьяны перевесть’). Pushkin’s implication that a foreign source underlies the composition of the heroine’s letter (inferred in ‘Tatiana...sighs and, taking for herself another’s joy, another’s grief, whispers in a trance a letter for her dear hero, learned by heart’, ‘Татьяна.../ Вздыхает и, себе присвоив / Чужой восторг, чужую грусть, / В забвенье шепчет наизусть / Письмо для милого героя...’) is the cause of much scholarly debate.

¹ ‘чудные стихи’ (Набоков, В.В., С. 332).

² ‘сии стихи, можно сказать, жгут страницы’ (Северная Пчела, 1827, № 124). Бочаров, С.Г., С. 72.

³ ‘гениальные русские стихи’, Бочаров, С.Г., С. 75.

⁴ ‘письмо Татьяны свело с ума всех русских читателей... высочайший образец откровения женского сердца’ (Белинский, В.Г., С. 73)

⁵ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 227.

⁶ Найндорф, М.И., С. 34.

⁷ Найндорф, М.И., С. 34.

Although not all scholars believe that Tatiana's letter had a foreign original,⁸ the majority express no doubt as to its status as a translation: Craig Cravens calls it 'stylised and translated';⁹ Caryl Emerson states that 'Tatiana's love letter to Onegin was originally in French but we only see its cooled-down Russian version';¹⁰ Nina Dmitrieva writes that Tatiana has to write her confession letter in French (it cannot be otherwise due to social-historical reasons);¹¹ Vasilii Sipovsky discovered a number of parallels between Tatiana's letter and French poetry;¹² and Leonid Serzhan pointed to an elegy of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore as a possible source.¹³

The hypothesis formulated by Leonid Serzhan, that the main source of Tatiana's letter could have been an elegy published in 1819 by a minor French poetess, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786–1859), is reaffirmed by Yuri Lotman, who suggests that Pushkin's interest in the French elegy could have been aroused by its poetic form combined with its female authorship: it was not overly individualised and so could be used as a prototype for a young girl's letter. Lotman argues, however, that the French elegy relies on a series of lyrical commonplaces and that Tatiana's letter could just as well be traced to a multitude of other sources.¹⁴ The view that the letter had a French original is supported by Pushkin's close friend and lifelong correspondent, Petr Vyazemsky, who states that the poet was even planning to compose Tatiana's epistle in prose, and possibly in French, to convey the lexical peculiarities of her style.¹⁵ Although Vyazemsky's testimony, confirmed by the majority of

⁸ 'Пушкинское письмо Татьяны – мифический перевод' с 'чудесного подлинника' – сердца Татьяны' (Бочаров, С.Г., С. 78-79). 'Ведь язык письма Татьяны, вопреки предварительным извинениям автора, – русский, непереводаемой. Он не предполагает стоящего за ним французского текста' (Виноградов, В.В., С. 222).

⁹ Cravens, С., Р. 699.

¹⁰ Emerson, С., Р. 10.

¹¹ Дмитриева Н.Л. С. 86.

¹² Сиповский, В.В., С.19.

¹³ Сержан, Л.С., С.22.

¹⁴ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 229.

¹⁵ Вяземский, П.А., С. 23. Vyazemsky's letter is quoted from Лотман, Ю.М., С. 227.

modern scholars, is regarded as conclusive, the present article will attempt to challenge the postulation of a French original for Tatiana's letter.

A clue to the refutation of the common assumption concerning the existence of a French original is concealed in the text of *Evgenii Onegin* itself. In characterising the style of Tatiana's letter, Pushkin first mentions two false sources of his inspiration, 'tender Parny'¹⁶ and Baratynsky,¹⁷ delaying the presentation of a third version of the epistle's origin, with the help of the technique of retardation: Tatiana's letter as a genuine document, which the poet translated ('Но вот / Неполный, слабый перевод, / С живой картины список бледный'), albeit 'incompletely and feebly', and inserted into the text of his poetic novel.¹⁸ Moreover, the narrator compares his 'translation' with Weber's opera *Der Freischutz* 'performed by the fingers of timid schoolgirls' ('Или разыгранный Фрейшиц / Перстами робких учениц'). It is difficult to take this comparison at face value: the most renowned poet of Russia could have hardly compared his own poetry, even if he pretended that it had been 'translated', with music performed by schoolgirls. The poet's evaluation of his own 'translation' of Tatiana's letter as 'an incomplete, feeble, pale copy of a vivid picture', is clearly ironic and therefore casts doubt on the existence of a French original, which, as he claims, he had so inadequately translated.

The narrator supplies another explanation for the heroine's choice of language which pertains to her poor knowledge of Russian ('Она по-русски плохо знала, / Журналов наших не читала, / И выражалась с трудом / На языке своем родном', 'She had not mastered Russian all that well, did not peruse our journals, and in her native tongue expressed her thoughts with difficulty'). This explicit statement of the narrator contradicts his own lines in chapter 5: IV about Tatiana's 'Russian soul' ('Татьяна, русская душою'), her love of Russian winter 'Любила русскую зиму', her superstitious beliefs in 'dreams, cartomancy,

¹⁶ 'Я знаю: нежного Парни / Перо не в моде в наши дни'.

¹⁷ 'Певец Пиров и грусти томной' refers to Evgenii Baratynsky (1800—1844).

¹⁸ 'Cf. Лотман, Ю.М., С.230.

the moon's fortune-telling' ('и снам, и карточным гаданьям, и предсказаниям луны'), and in her observance of ancient Russian folk customs (Chapter 5: VIII-X). The narrator's statement also conflicts with the narrative 'reality' of the poetic novel, from which it is clear that Tatiana must have had full command of at least the colloquial style of her native language since infancy. Proficiency in colloquial Russian would have been indispensable for her communication with her nurse, who could not have known any language except her native (a conversation with the nurse about her marriage precedes the scene of Tatiana's writing of the letter).¹⁹ It is also evident from Pushkin's text that Tatiana speaks Russian with her mother, her sister and indeed the addressee of her letter (who writes his own letter to her in Russian at the end of *Evgenii Onegin*). Her life and the life of her family is pervaded by folk traditions (they love round swings, circle-dances, pancakes during Shrovetide and kvas) and customs of the Orthodox Church: twice a year they fast and prepare for Holy Communion, go to Church on Pentecost and listen to folk songs, performed between the Nativity and Theophany.²⁰ It is likely, therefore, that Tatiana had a complete command of the high register of Church Slavonic through her regular participation in Church services.²¹ A girl, brought up in a Russian village among people for whom Russian would have been the only language of daily communication, could not have found it difficult to express herself in their and her own native language. Consequently, the contradiction between the narrator's descriptions of Tatiana's life in a Russian village and his claim that she 'had not mastered Russian all that well' has to be viewed as a conscious literary device aimed at creating the effect of comic incongruity, which would have been immediately appreciated by the audience.

¹⁹ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 228.

²⁰ 'У них на масленице жирной / Водились русские блины; / Два раза в год они говели; / Любили круглые качели, / Подблюдны песни, хоровод; / В день Троицын, когда народ, / Зевая, слушает молебен, / Умильно на пучок зари / Они роняли слезки три; / Им кvas, как воздух, был потребен'.

²¹ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 228.

Conflicting statements in the depiction of characters are in keeping with the poetics of Pushkin's novel in verse. As pointed out by scholars, 'the principle of contradiction' is an 'intrinsic structural element' of Pushkin's poetic work and 'manifests itself throughout the novel on varied structural levels, including the juxtaposition of different characteristics of heroes in different chapters and stanzas'.²² As stylistic conventions, literary canons and rules are repeatedly invoked in Pushkin's poetic novel in order to be parodically contrasted,²³ the explicitly stated reason for the heroine's choice of language (the narrator's obviously contradictory claim that Tatiana did not know her native language) can also be perceived as the object of ironic or parodic contradiction.

Pushkin's poetic novel contains another ironic suggestion that Tatiana's choice of language might have been conditioned by custom: aristocratic ladies were not used to expressing their feelings in Russian ('Доньине дамская любовь / Не изъяснялася по-русски', 'until now ladies' love did not converse in Russian' XXVI, 11-12). The composition of a love letter would have demanded an acquaintance with the Russian literary style, which Tatiana evidently had not fully acquired.²⁴ Therefore, Pushkin's formula 'она по-русски плохо знала' ('she had not mastered Russian all that well') could be interpreted as implying a lack of mastery of the Russian written register. The reader is given a clue to the interpretation of the heroine's linguistic characterisation: Tatiana could not express in letter form all the minutest distinctions of her feelings, for which she knew ready-made French expressions.²⁵

The narrator's statement concerning the freedom with which Tatiana commanded French reflects the peculiarities of the linguistic situation in Russian society during Pushkin's time.²⁶ The poet, like most of the educated aristocracy at the start of the 19th century, received

²² Лотман, Ю.М., 1975. С. 30.

²³ Woodward, J.P., 27.

²⁴ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 229-230.

²⁵ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 229-230.

²⁶ Кучминская, Н.Р., С. 133-141; Стрекалева, Т.В., С.177-181. Маркелова, Г.В., С.84-89. Гордеева, Л.П., С. 49-55.

a French upbringing: he spoke French at his parents' house; his father's library, which he had access to in his childhood, consisted exclusively of French books; the poet's first literary compositions were in French (his comedy *L'Escamoteur* imitated Molière, his poem *La Tolyade* was conceived as a parody of Voltaire's epic *La Henriade*); verses written in French constituted part of the lyric poems he composed in the Lyceum; he wrote many letters in French to N.Raevsky, P.Chaadaev, A.Kern.²⁷ Pushkin first read English and German literature in French translations; and it was French literature, especially Racine's tragedies, Molière's comedies, Boileau's *L'Art poétique*, Voltaire's philosophical prose, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, which constituted the foundation of the cultural tradition he absorbed.

The language of Pushkin's own correspondence can be used to shed light on the language of his heroine's epistle and consequently on the reason for the poet's mystification. A lot of Pushkin's own letters were written in French, sometimes to his friends (N.Raevsky, P.Chaadaev)²⁸ and sometimes even to his relatives. Since, according to contemporary etiquette in epistolary correspondence, ladies had to be addressed in French, he writes French letters to Anna Petrovna Kern (to whom he dedicated the most renowned lyrical poem 'I remember a wonderful moment', 'Я помню чудное мгновенье'), referring to her with the polite form of the pronoun 'Vous'.²⁹ To his sister Olga, he writes an addendum to a letter addressed to his brother Lev (27 July 1822) and asks her a series of ironic clichéd questions in French (êtes-vous mariée?, êtes-vous prête à l'être?) again using the polite form 'vous'.³⁰ However in a letter dated to 4th December 1824, which is also addressed to his brother, he adds a short note to Olga in Russian ('Милая Оля, благодарю за письмо, ты очень мила, и я тебя очень люблю', 'Dear Olya, thank you for your letter, you are very sweet and I love

²⁷ Жирмунский, В.М., С. 68.

²⁸ Жирмунский, В.М., С. 68.

²⁹ Dmitrieva N.L., P. 179.

³⁰ Dmitrieva N.L., P. 176.

you very much’), which sounds much more intimate than any of his French letters,³¹ due to the tone, simplicity of language and, most importantly, his use of the informal pronoun ‘ты’.

Before his marriage Pushkin wrote to his fiancée both in French and in Russian (addressing her as ‘мой ангел’, ‘my angel’ in a letter dated to 30th September 1830). When anxious about her health during a cholera breakout in Moscow, he writes to her more intimately, in Russian: ‘Милостивая государыня Наталия Николаевна, я по-французски браниться не умею, так позвольте мне говорить вам по-русски, а вы, мой ангел, отвечайте мне хоть по-чухонски, да только отвечайте’ (‘My gracious Lady Natalia Nikolaevna, I cannot scold in French, so allow me to speak to you in Russian, and you, my angel, reply to me even in Finnish, but only reply’, 29 October 1830). After his marriage he addressed his wife only in Russian, frequently using demotic forms and invariably employing the informal ‘ты’ (‘My beloved little wife, my angel little wife, I have already written to you today, but my letter somehow did not turn out well’, 1834).³² Pushkin contrasts French and Russian forms of address in a letter to his wife (dated to 11th June 1834), not concealing his attitude to the former: ‘Ты слишком хороша, мой ангел, чтоб пускаться в просительницы... Мой совет тебе и сестрам – быть подальше от двора: в нем толку мало... но вы, бабы, не понимаете счастья независимости и готовы закабалить себя навеки, чтобы только сказали про вас: Hier Madame une telle était décidément la plus belle et la mieux mise du bal. Прощай, Madame une telle’, ‘You are too good, my angel, to become a supplicant... My advice to you and your sisters is to keep further from court: there is little good in it... but you, females, do not understand the happiness of being independent and are ready to enslave yourselves forever, so that you will be spoken about: Yesterday Madame so and so was definitely the most beautiful at the ball and was dressed best of all. Bye-bye, Madame so and so’). As was pointed out by Dmitrieva, the contrast of the demotic

³¹ Dmitrieva N.L., P. 176.

³² ‘Женка моя милая, женка мой ангел, – я сегодня уже писал тебе, да письмо мое как-то не удалось’, Dmitrieva N.L., P. 183.

Russian form of address ‘бабы’ and the French ‘Madame une telle’ in Pushkin’s letter is more than just an attack on the use of French by high society³³ (the poet does not want his wife to put her sisters into the royal escort and expresses his intense longing to be with her). Thus, for Pushkin, Russian was clearly a language of highly personal, intimate, informal correspondence,³⁴ particularly with his wife. Therefore, it is not unlikely (contrary to the assertion of the narrator concerning the existence of a French original) that Pushkin would have had his heroine, Tatiana, compose her letter in her native language, particularly since it was addressed to a dearly beloved person.

Although Pushkin’s biography shows that French could not be regarded as a foreign language for the Russian nobility of the 19th century, he left both poetic (‘Доныне гордый наш язык / К почтовой прозе не привык’, ‘Unto this day our proud language is not accustomed to postal prose’, XXVI, 13-14) and prose commentaries on the linguistic situation in Russia: ‘our prose is still so little elaborated that even in simple correspondence we have to create turns of phrase in order to explain the most common notions, and our laziness more eagerly finds expressions in a foreign language, whose mechanical formulas are ready made and known to everybody’.³⁵ If Pushkin’s poetic commentary can be viewed as ironic, his prose commentary, which chronologically coincides with the composition of the third chapter of *Evgenii Onegin*, clearly attributes the use of a foreign language in written correspondence to laziness. Pushkin’s older contemporary Nikolay Karamzin had expressed similar views: ‘Let us leave it to our charming ladies of high society to maintain that the Russian language is rude and unpleasant; that *charmant* and *séduisant*, *expansion* and *vapeurs* cannot be expressed in it; and that it is not worth knowing it at all. Who would dare to prove to ladies that they are wrong? <... > Our language is expressive not only for high rhetoric, for loud and

³³ Dmitrieva N.L., P. 183.

³⁴ Dmitrieva N.L., P. 183.

³⁵ «...проза наша так еще мало обработана, что даже в простой переписке мы принуждены *создавать* обороты слов для изъяснения понятий самых обыкновенных; и леность наша охотнее выражается на языке чужом, коего механические формы уже давно готовы и всем известны» (Пушкин, А.С., XI, 21).

picturesque poetry, but also for tender simplicity, for the sounds of cordiality and sentiment. It is richer in harmony than French; it is more capable of expressing the tones of one's soul! Our misfortune is that we all desire to speak French and do not wish to labour at cultivating our native language. Is it not strange that we cannot express some subtleties in our conversation?'³⁶ Both Pushkin and Karamzin condemn linguistic laziness and reluctance to use the creative potentials of the Russian language in speech and written correspondence. The narrator in *Evgenii Onegin* also includes a harsh, ironic reference to the experience of other poets, who dedicate their verses to ladies, 'all of whom barely know the Russian language and use it with difficulty, but corrupt it so sweetly, that in their speech a foreign language turns into a native tongue' ('Не все ли, русским языком / Владея слабо и с трудом, / Его так мило искажали, / И в их устах язык чужой / Не обратился ли в родной'). Taking into account Pushkin's bitterly satirical attitude to the linguistic incompetence of his contemporaries, it is hard to believe that there was no trace of irony, parody or mystification in the poet making his favourite heroine³⁷ write her first and only love letter in French.

The reason for Pushkin's mystification can be unveiled by his own letters in which passages directly referring to expressions of feelings were frequently written in French. The choice of a foreign language in emotional passages can be interpreted with the help of a quotation from Nina Dmitrieva: 'any sort of sentimentality seemed a ludicrous, absurd anachronism in Pushkin's milieu and way of life. Accordingly, the signs of sentimentality

³⁶ 'Оставим нашим любезным светским дамам утверждать, что русской язык груб и неприятен; что *charmant* и *séduisant*, *expansion* и *vareurs* не могут быть на нем выражены; и что, одним словом, не стоит труда знать его. Кто смеет доказывать дамам, что они ошибаются? ... Язык наш выразителен не только для высокого красноречия, для громкой, живописной поэзии, но и для нежной простоты, для звуков сердца и чувствительности. Он богаче гармонией, нежели французской, способнее для излияния души в тонах...! Беда наша, что мы все хотим говорить по-французски, и не думаем трудиться над обработыванием собственного языка; мудрено ли, что не умеем изъяснять им некоторых тонкостей в разговоре?' (Карамзин, Н.М., С. 286).

³⁷ The poet's attitude to his heroine has been unanimously described as highly positive by all scholars (cf. Emerson, С., P. 6-20; Богданова, О.А., С. 41-48). Dostoevsky expressed the view that Pushkin's poetic novel should have been called after the heroine, rather than after the hero (Достоевский, Ф.М., С. 141). D. Clayton suggested that the poet 'was metamorphosed into the heroine – not the hero – of his poem', 'Her acceptance at court, her brilliance, her tenderness, passion, and conviction – all these were the qualities Pushkin sought for himself' (Clayton, J.D., 1987, P. 261; Clayton, J.D., 1985, P. 57).

that are just coming into view in Pushkin's Russian letters were 'removed' there and then by the introduction of motifs of quite a different sort, so great at that time was the taboo against self-revelation. Only in letters written in French was there no fear of expressing feelings and seeming ridiculous, since sentimentality and a capacity and enthusiasm for self-confession had become firmly established through French literature in the second half of the eighteenth century'³⁸. Not only was French the language of emotive epistolary prose, but also some sentimental passages in Pushkin's letters (e.g. to his future mother-in-law) were modelled on French literary texts, such as the letters from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's epistolary novel *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*³⁹. Therefore Pushkin's mystification concerning his heroine's choice of language was determined by the subject of her letter, the expression of feelings.

The narrator continuously misleads the reader, giving an ironic introduction to his heroine's letter through lexical units stressing its 'verbal carelessness' ('слов любезную небрежность'), 'pretty prattle' ('умильный вздор)' and 'the mad converse of one's heart' ('Безумный сердца разговор'). In spite of the narrator's half-hearted apologies, Tatiana's letter stands out from the surrounding narrative by its strict composition. It consists largely of two distinctly organised parts: the first section (30 lines), ending with the words ('And a virtuous mother', 'И добродетельная мать'), expresses spontaneous individual speech and uses the polite form of the personal pronoun 'Вы' ('You'); and the second section (33 lines), starting with the words ('Another!... No, I would not have given my heart to anybody else in the world!', 'Другой!.. Нет, никому на свете / Не отдала бы сердца я!'), in which the informal personal pronoun 'ты' (thou) is used. The second section is followed by the penultimate part of the letter (12 lines), in which the stream of the heroine's emotions reaches its climax (where an informal pronoun is more appropriate), and the concluding four lines, in

³⁸ Dmitrieva N. P. 181.

³⁹ Dmitrieva N. P. 181.

which the heroine faces ‘reality’ and switches into a formal style (employing the formal pronoun).

The first part of the letter contains no literary allusion to French sources. It begins with a set of deeply cordial opening lines, consisting of two emotive rhetorical questions, which are aimed at creating the impression of a conversation with the recipient: ‘I’m writing to you – what more is there? What can I add?’ (‘Я к Вам пишу – чего же боле? / Что я могу еще сказать?’). The lines are simultaneously spontaneous and sincere, laconic and yet formulaic, constructed with parallel interrogative particles, ‘чего’ and ‘что’.⁴⁰ The function of the two interrogatives is to instill a sense of urgency and desperation in the recipient, reminding Onegin that in sending this letter Tatiana is putting herself fully in his power and risking not only his contempt, but also potential social ruin.

In order to convey the complexity of her emotional state, Tatiana describes an alternative situation for the reader, in which she underlines that her epistle is written in desperation: if she had any hope of seeing Onegin at least rarely, she would not face the need to communicate with him by letter.⁴¹ On the one hand, this imagined but possible situation makes Tatiana realise that she should not be writing her letter, whereas, on the other hand, the contextual situation is presented as so hopeless for the heroine that it compels her to put pen to paper. Thus Pushkin builds a tension in the letter between the proximity, in the first part of the letter and the contrast, in the second, of two contents – the imagined (whether possible or impossible) and the contextual. The imagined situation is contrasted with the narrative circumstances presented in the next three lines of the letter, in which Tatiana is trying to guess why Onegin does not show interest in her and her family: ‘Но, говорят, вы нелюдим; / А мы... ничем мы не блестим, / Хоть рады вам и рады простодушно’, ‘But

⁴⁰ Pomorska, K., P. 62.

⁴¹ ‘Сначала я молчать хотела; / Поверьте: моего стыда / Вы не узнали б никогда, / Когда б надежду я имела / Хоть редко, хоть в неделю раз / В деревне нашей видеть вас, / Чтоб только слышать ваши речи, / Вам слово молвить, и потом / Все думать, думать об одном / И день и ночь до новой встречи’.

people say that you're a recluse; / And as for us... we have no glamour, / we're glad to welcome you, our joy is artless'. Tatiana's speech in this part of her letter abounds in colloquial expressions, such as 'нелюдим', 'ничем мы не блестим'. She naively thinks that in his village Onegin misses the glamour ('блеск') which in her perception must have surrounded him in the capital. The meaning of these lines is clarified by Pushkin himself, in his letter to Petr Vyazemsky: 'a *nelyudim* is not a misanthrope, i.e., not a person who hates people, but a person who avoids people. Onegin is a *nelyudim* in the opinion of his village neighbours; Tatiana thinks the reason for this is that in the backwoods, in the country, everything bores him, and that glamour alone might attract him. If, however, the meaning is not quite precise, there is more truth in the letter: it is the letter of a woman, and, on top of that, of a seventeen-year-old woman, and, on top of that, of a woman in love'.⁴² As is pointed out by the poet, according to Tatiana's simultaneous presuppositions, Onegin appears to avoid his village neighbours, yet at the same time he feels bored by solitary life in the village and misses the glamour of high society. These contradictions in Tatiana's perception of the hero show the depth of her misreading of his character.

Tatiana views her situation in the general context of women's fate:⁴³ her reflection opens with a rhetorical question ('Why did you visit us? In the backwoods of a forgotten village I would have never known you, nor known the bitter torment?', 'Зачем вы посетили нас? / В глуши забытого селенья / Я никогда не знала б вас, / Не знала б горького мученья'). Passion makes her exaggerate her sufferings and the misery of her tragic state: she writes that she lives 'in the backwoods of a forgotten village' ('В глуши забытого селенья'), whereas, as Nabokov points out, her family must have lived 'in a country house of

⁴² 'Дивлюсь, как письмо Тани очутилось у тебя. NB. Истолкуй это мне. Отвечаю на твою критику: *Нелюдим* не есть мизантроп, то есть ненавидящий людей, а убегающий от людей. Онегин нелюдим для деревенских соседей; Таня полагает причиной тому то, что *в глуши, в деревне все ему скучно* и что *блеск* один может привлечь его... если, впрочем, смысл и не совсем точен, то тем более истины в письме; письмо женщины, к тому же 17-летней, к тому же влюбленной!' (А.С. Пушкин. Письмо П.А.Вяземскому. 29 ноября 1824 г. Из Михайловского в Москву).

⁴³ Pomorska, K., P. 63.

at least 20 rooms with extensive grounds, a park, flower and vegetable gardens, stables, cattle shed, grainfields, and so forth'.⁴⁴ Nabokov reckons that the size of the Larins' property must have been about one thousand square acres and that they could have had about two hundred souls, who lived in a village named after the estate.⁴⁵ The tone and style of this part of Tatiana's letter would seem more natural in the speech of a more mature person, perhaps the author himself, rather than that of a seventeen-year-old heroine.⁴⁶ Tatiana tries to envisage what would have been the natural order of her life had she not met Onegin, but rather encountered another man and became his loyal wife and a dutiful mother.⁴⁷ However the imaginary situation hypothesised in this part of the letter is confirmed as impossible in the second part.

In contrast to the first part of Tatiana's letter, in which her feelings are expressed calmly and reasonably (as can be seen through her use of personal pronouns: the only form of pronoun used in relation to Onegin is the polite form, Вы'), in the second part of the letter, the heroine is in a state close to a love trance. Her emotions pour out of her uncontrollably, as manifested in her use of the intimate form of the second person pronoun, the form most appropriate for the communication of two souls: 'ты'.⁴⁸ Nabokov sees in this switch of pronominal forms 'a device well known in French epistolary novels of the time';⁴⁹ Krystina Pomorska thinks that Tatiana follows a tradition of French love novels in which the informal pronoun appears in moments of the highest expressions of feelings.⁵⁰ However another explanation can be posited, namely that in the second part of her letter Tatiana is addressing not so much Onegin, whom she has only just met, as the imagined hero of her dreams ('В единый образ облеклись, В одном Онегине слились', 'Clothed in a single image, merged

⁴⁴ Nabokov, V.V., Vol. 2. P. 390.

⁴⁵ Nabokov, V.V., Vol. 2. P. 390.

⁴⁶ Pomorska K., P. 64.

⁴⁷ Pomorska K., P. 64.

⁴⁸ Pomorska, K., P. 65.

⁴⁹ Nabokov, V.V., P. 392.

⁵⁰ Pomorska, K., P. 65.

into the one Onegin'), whom she knows very well, loves and for that reason addresses so informally and passionately. The literary nature of Tatiana's feelings for her imagined lover would account for the use of the informal pronoun more than the putative influence of a French love novel.

The second part of Tatiana's letter, as previously suggested by scholars, contains a number of borrowings from French literature. Starting with Nabokov, it has become commonplace to interpret the exclamation: 'Another!... No, I would not have given my heart to anybody else in the world!' ('Другой!.. Нет, никому на свете / Не отдала бы сердца я!') as a 'rhetorical formula common in European romances' (cf. Andre Chenier in *Les Amours*, an elegy beginning with 'Reste, reste avec nous', the words: 'Un autre! Ah! Je ne puis...'; or Byron in *The Bride of Abydos*: 'To bid thee with another dwell: Another!').⁵¹ Another cliché phrase ('This is the will of Heaven; I am yours', 'То воля неба; я твоя') is thought to go back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's epistolary novel *Julie, or the New Heloise*: 'un éternel arrêt du ciel nous destina l'un pour l'autre' (part I, lettre XXVI).⁵² A parallel between Tatiana's letter and Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise* is considered to be the most convincing since, as Nabokov noted, in both Tatiana's letter ('То воля неба; я твоя', 'This is the will of heaven, I am yours') and in Saint-Preux's letter, the change of pronouns from 'you' ('вы') to 'thou' ('ты') takes place.⁵³

However, even if the stylistic effects of the change of formal and informal pronoun in Russian and in French were similar,⁵⁴ parallels with French novels in Tatiana's letter could be viewed not as borrowings but as allusions or formulaic phrases, which are used by the poet

⁵¹ Nabokov, V.V., P. 391.

⁵² Лотман, Ю.М., С. 227.

⁵³ Nabokov, V.V., P. 390. Гринбаум, О.Н., С.4.

⁵⁴ The stylistic effect of the change of pronoun in Russian and in French is different (Лотман, Ю.М., С. 227). In Russian the formal pronoun appeared relatively late (in the 18th century) and was used by aristocracy more commonly than in French (children addressed their parents with the polite form both in the 18th and in the 19th century). For Russian aristocracy the unmarked form was the polite formal pronoun 'Вы', while the marked form was used to address those who were socially inferior (servants). Thus the change of pronoun in Tatiana's letter had a more marked stylistic effect than it would have had in French.

with the aim of ironically stylising his letter as a woman's epistle. A number of expressions in Tatiana's letter which have parallels in French (such as 'Не отдала бы сердца я', cf. French 'donner son coeur'; 'Слова надежды', cf. French 'les mots d'espérance'; 'Души неопытной волненья / Смирив', cf. French 'apaiser'; 'Вся жизнь моя была залогом', cf. French 'gage'; 'Обман неопытной души', cf. French 'illusion', 'И в мыслях молвила', cf. French 'en pensée'; 'Или молитвой услаждала', cf. French 'adoucir') could have become embedded in Russian vocabulary, and therefore can hardly be viewed as borrowings at the time of Pushkin's composition of his poetic novel.⁵⁵

The remaining section of the second part of Tatiana's letter also contains commonplace expressions found in French or, more generally, European sentimental novels.⁵⁶ Even the situations in which Tatiana imagines the object of her love are typical of European love novels: she sees Onegin in her dreams before she meets him in narrative 'reality', and she hears his voice in the depths of her soul. Nabokov writes that the lines of Tatiana's letter ('Давно...нет, это был не сон! / Ты чуть вошел, я вмиг узнала, / Вся обомлела, запылала / И в мыслях молвила: вот он!', 'A long time ago... no it was not a dream! / You had but crossed the threshold, when I saw you in an instant, / I was stunned, and was aflame / and in my mind I uttered: this is him!') suggest that she could have read Racine's *Phèdre*, in which there is a similar passage, describing the heroine's emotions⁵⁷ or that she could have seen an elegy by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, in which an exclamation similar to her 'вот он!' is used ('j'avais dit: Le voilà!').⁵⁸ It is true that both Marceline

⁵⁵ Viktor Vinogradov (С. 224-225) gives parallels from Russian poetry which show that these expressions were widely used in Pushkin's time both by his contemporaries and by the poet himself: cf. 'Смирив немирные желанья' ('Орлову', 1819); 'В залог прощенья мирный поцелуй' ('Каменный гость'); 'Желаний и надежд томительный обман' ('Погасло дневное светило', 1820).

⁵⁶ 'Вся жизнь моя была залогом / Свиданья верного с тобой; / Я знаю, ты мне послан Богом, / До гроба ты хранитель мой...'; 'Ты в сновиденьях мне являлся, / Незримый, ты мне был уж мил, / Твой чудный взгляд меня томил, / В душе твой голос раздавался'.

⁵⁷ Je le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue; / Un trouble s'éleva dans mon âme éperdue; / Mes yeux ne voyaient plus, / Je ne pouvais parler; / Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler... (Racine 'Phèdre' I, iii). Nabokov, V.V., P. 392.

⁵⁸ Nabokov, V.V., P. 392.

Desbordes-Valmore's elegy and Tatiana's letter are similar in sincerity of feelings, passionate tone, forceful tenderness, warm affection and open devotion. However apart from the opening line 'J'étais a toi peut-être avant de t'avoir vu' (in Mikhail Lozinsky's excellent translation: 'Я, не видав тебя, уже была твоя...')⁵⁹ and the exclamation 'Le voilà!', there are no other similarities between Tatiana's letter and the French elegy.

Another parallel, hitherto overlooked by scholars, can be added from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which Pushkin undoubtedly studied at the Tsarskoe Selo Lycée (cf. in Onegin's characteristics 'да помнил, пусть не без греха из Энеиды два стиха', 'he recalled two lines of the *Aeneid*, albeit not without a fault'). In the *Aeneid* similarly emotive speech (e.g. metaphoric expressions conveying the notion of burning in descriptions of female love: 'Вся обомлела, запылала') is used in 'Est mollis *flamma* medullas / interea, et tacitum vivit sub pectore volnus' (*Aeneid* 4.68-69), 'Meanwhile her delicate marrow / is *aflame*, and a silent wound lives beneath her breast'; 'At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura / volnus alit venis, et caeco *carpitur igni*. / Multa viri virtus animo, multusque recursat / gentis honos: haerent infixi pectore voltus / verbaque, nec placidam membris dat cura quietem' (*Aeneid* 4. 1-5), 'But the queen, long since wounded by a weighty *love*, / feeds the wound with her blood, *seized by secret fire*. / The courage of the hero often comes back to her mind, and the nobility / of his race: his features and his words cling fixed to her heart, / and love will not grant peaceful rest to her body.' The metaphor of fire (on one occasion consuming specifically, the marrow, 'marrow burning', 162), is adopted by Shakespeare in *Venus and Adonis*, 'He burns with bashful shame: she with her tears / Doth quench the maiden **burning** of his cheeks' (69-70). This poem was popular from publication onwards and subsequently appeared in all major collected works, so it is more than likely Pushkin encountered it, possibly in a French translation, and used it in his stylisation of a female epistolary style. Therefore, there is no need to trace Tatiana's letter to a specific French original, as similar expressions of

⁵⁹ Деборд-Вальмор, М., Элегия: («Я, не видав тебя, уже была твоя...»). Пер. М. Лозинского. С. 641.

unrequited woman's love can be found very widely elsewhere in the world literature, starting from Classical antiquity.

A conventionality in expressing feelings characterizes the rest of the second part of Tatiana's letter, in which she imagines hearing Onegin's voice when she performs gestures of good will, helping people or praying. As has been noted by scholars, Tatiana 'idealises (or completely fantasises) Onegin by projecting onto him her sentimental heroes'.⁶⁰ In doing so, she completely misunderstands Onegin's character, 'not content with turning this very Byronic young man into a Werther, a St Preux, or some other virtuous – hence old-fashioned – hero of sentimental reading, her imagination has, in its more exalted moments, gone a step further: it has confected an ethical muse divinely appointed to instil noble thoughts and inspire charitable deeds'.⁶¹ Imagining Onegin as an angel, whose presence she felt all her life, prompts in her a suspicion that he might be something opposite.⁶² Tatiana explicitly asks Onegin whether he is her Guardian Angel or an evil seducer in the following lines of her letter. In asking Onegin this question, Tatiana imposes the poetics of love novels onto the narrative 'reality': in her mind she sees Onegin in terms of opposite literary types represented by Richardson as Grandisson (an ideal guardian) or Lovelace (a quasi demonic seducer)⁶³. If Onegin is a guardian angel, then Tatiana's life will be happy and idyllic, but if he is a seducer, then according to the poetics of 18th century love novels she is doomed to misfortune and death.⁶⁴

Tatiana's literary reading of Onegin's character ('Блистая взорами, Евгений / Стоит подобно грозной тени...', 'Evgenii stands, with flashing eyes, like a fearsome shadow', (3, XLI) is shared by Lensky, who also views Onegin in terms of either/or categories of an angel

⁶⁰ Cravens, C., P. 699.

⁶¹ Gregg, R.A. P. 498.

⁶² Pomorska, K., P. 64.

⁶³ Tomashevsky analyses the 'demonic' aspect of Onegin's character and traces a connection between him and the hero of Pushkin's poem *Demon* (Томашевский, Б.В., С. 548-554). Following Tomashevsky, Richard Gregg also calls Onegin 'demonic' P. 502.

⁶⁴ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 230.

or seducer (Он мыслит: 'Буду ей спаситель. / Не потерплю, чтоб развратитель / Огнем и вздохов и похвал / Младое сердце искушал...', 'He thinks: 'I will be her saviour / I will not suffer some seducer / to tempt her youthful heart/ with the fire of sighs and praise', 6, XV).⁶⁵ The narrator, however, does not share Lensky's or Tatiana's understanding of Onegin's character⁶⁶ and does not intend the reader to idealise or demonise him either. He directly states that Onegin does not resemble positive characters from 18th century novels and is certainly not like Grandisson ('Но наш герой, кто б ни был он, / Уж верно был не Грандисон', 'but our hero, whoever he may be / is certainly no Grandison', 3, X). As has been stated by scholars, 'the basis of Pushkin's approach lies in the rejection of all forms of literariness'.⁶⁷ In this respect he makes no distinction between Classicism and Romanticism, contrasting them with 'the poetry of reality' which emerges from the dichotomy between the 'literary' and the 'lifelike'.⁶⁸ Therefore any literary interpretation of Onegin's character is immediately refuted or ironically treated in the context of Pushkin's poetic novel. The narrator states that Onegin has no intention of seducing Tatiana, so the degree of his demonic threat does not correspond to the poetics of love novels and turns out to be exaggerated by Tatiana⁶⁹ ('Вы согласитесь, мой читатель, / Что очень мило поступил / С печальной Таней наш приятель; / Не в первый раз он тут явил / Души прямое благородство'..., 'You will agree with me, my reader, / that our friend dealt very kindly / with our poor Tatiana; / and this was not the first time he showed / the forthright noble nature of his soul', 4, XVIII). In fact, Onegin does not show any interest in Tatiana, as she herself noticed, when in the calmer state in which she wrote the first part of her letter.

Literary associations are equally inappropriate for Tatiana, who imagined herself a heroine of her favourite writers ('воображаясь героиней своих возлюбленных творцов',

⁶⁵ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 230.

⁶⁶ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 230.

⁶⁷ Лотман, Ю.М., 1975. С. 65.

⁶⁸ Лотман, Ю.М., 1975. С. 65.

⁶⁹ Лотман, Ю.М., С. 231.

‘imagining herself as the heroine of her favourite writers’) and models her love on literary figures such as Clarissa, Julia and Delphine (‘Кларисы, Юлии, Дельфины’). As the narrator ironically observes, Tatiana appropriates their feelings (‘чужой восторг, чужую грусть’, ‘another’s joy, another’s grief’) making them her own, although there is little similarity between Tatiana’s situation and the tragic fate of the three heroines who are brought to death by their love. The heroine of Germaine de Staël’s epistolary novel *Delphine* cannot belong to Léonce, whom she loves, because he is engaged to Matilde; the heroine of Rousseau’s epistolary novel *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* loves Saint-Preux but is married to M. de Wolmar; Richardson’s Clarissa is drugged and raped by Lovelace. Nothing similar happens to Tatiana, as Onegin respects her chastity and innocence. However her mindset cannot be dismissed as disingenuous and shallow because, as Yuri Lotman argues, for a Romantic consciousness the only reality was the revelation of feelings through literary models, which did not preclude the Romantics from love, suffering and death, despite imagining themselves (‘воображаясь’) as Werthers or Brutuses.⁷⁰ No matter how many literary commonplaces Tatiana’s letter contains, they do not detract from the sincerity of her feelings.

The penultimate part, consisting of twelve lines, bears no resemblance to foreign literary sources. Tatiana’s imagination contaminates both imaginary and ‘real’ representations of the hero. The ‘real’ Onegin is addressed with the help of the informal pronoun ‘ты’ and is invited to imagine and understand her state: ‘Но так и быть! Судьбу мою / Отныне я тебе вручаю, / Перед тобою слезы лью, / Твоей защиты умоляю...’, ‘so be it, from this moment on I give my fate unto you / before you I shed tears, / I beg for your protection’. In symmetry with the first part she again exaggerates her suffering, this time stressing her solitude: ‘Вообрази: я здесь одна, / Никто меня не понимает, / Рассудок мой изнемогает, / И молча гибнуть я должна’, ‘Imagine: I am alone here, / no one can understand me, / my reason falters, / In silence I must perish’. Tatiana claims she is suffering

⁷⁰ Лотман Ю.М., С. 230.

in solitude, although she is surrounded by her loving family: her parents and her sister. It is in the penultimate part that Tatiana at last formulates the main aim of her letter: 'Я жду тебя: единым взором / Надежды сердца оживи / Иль сон тяжелый перерви, / Увы, заслуженный укором!', 'I wait for you: with a single glance give life to my heart's hopes / or break my heavy sleep / with a rebuke, alas, well-earned!' She has outlined her own situation, mostly imaginary, and thus gives Onegin an idea of what is going on in her soul. Onegin is now invited to become a participant in the situation she has described.

The four lines, concluding the letter, recall the theme of the introduction. Tatiana returns from the situation painted by her imagination, in which Onegin was a close and possibly loving person ('Проникнул тихо к изголовью? Не ты ль, с отрадой и любовью, Слова надежды мне шепнул?', 'Was it you who made your way in silence to the head of my bed? Was it not you, who whispered words of hope with joy and love?'), to the narrative 'reality', in which he is a distant stranger, and she immediately realises the risks involved in writing the letter. The return to 'reality' is signalled by a return of the polite form 'вы':⁷¹ 'Кончаю! Страшно перечесть... / Стыдом и страхом замираю... / Но мне порукой ваша честь, / И смело ей себя вверяю...', 'I reached the end! I dread to reread this... I falter with fear and shame... / but your honour is my pledge, / and bravely I entrust myself to it' Tatiana is afraid to re-read her letter because this is the first time in her life she has allowed herself such an uncontrolled outburst of emotion.⁷² It is this emotional outburst, pointed out by Onegin's 'учитесь властвовать собою!', 'learn to control yourself!', which makes Tatiana follow his advice to the end of her life.⁷³

Tatiana's letter is addressed both to an internal character (Onegin) and to an external addressee (the reader),⁷⁴ however their reactions are different: the reader (in correspondence

⁷¹ Pomorska K., P. 64.

⁷² Pomorska K., P. 65.

⁷³ Pomorska K., P. 65.

⁷⁴ The concept of both an internal and an external addressee, originating in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, was analysed by Allan, W., P. 34.

with authorial intention) feels sympathy for the feelings expressed in Tatiana's letter, but Onegin reacts to her letter in a negative way: he does not share the reader's admiration for Tatiana and responds with an invective. In sending her letter to Onegin, Tatiana behaves in accordance with the literary norms of a heroine of an 18th century love novel, but not in adherence to the norms of Russian aristocratic circles of the 19th century, in which her behaviour would have been unthinkable.⁷⁵ The fact that she initiates correspondence with a virtually unknown person, without the knowledge of her parents, and declares her love for him, puts her actions completely outside the norms of propriety.⁷⁶ Tatiana's attitude to life, which she sees through the prism of love novels, might seem naïve and is ironically treated by the narrator, yet her transgression of the rules of social behaviour is pardoned and rendered with sympathy by Pushkin on account of the purity of her passionate feelings.⁷⁷

The poet's assertion that he had to translate Tatiana's letter from some mysterious French original points to the literary nature of the heroine's feelings and precipitates the impossibility of her dreams in the narrative reality of the novel. The existence of a French original can be interpreted as a deliberate mystification arising from the linguistic situation in contemporary aristocratic society, which can be described as bilingualism. For Russian aristocracy French was the only language of expressing feelings, therefore the reason for Pushkin's mystification is obvious: in order not to seem ridiculous, Tatiana's letter required a putative French original. However the expression of deep true feelings was associated in Pushkin's own letters with the use of his native language, whereas clichés of sentiment were often expressed through French. The analysis of the text of Tatiana's letter, conducted in the present article, has shown that neither its style and language, nor its phraseology and vocabulary resemble a translation. Out of the complexities of the linguistic situation in

⁷⁵ Лотман Ю.М., С. 229.

⁷⁶ Лотман Ю.М., С. 230.

⁷⁷ Лотман Ю.М., С. 231. A 'shade of irony' in Pushkin's treatment of Tatiana in chapter 3 was noted by C. Cravens, P. 698. For a study of Pushkin's 'romantic irony' see Milan, V., P. 250-266 and Struc R.S., P. 241-249. Elements of irony and literary parody in *Evgenii Onegin* are adduced by Little, T.E., Pp. 19-28, whose article provoked controversial response, i.e. Dvinin Vs.I. P. 85-6.

contemporary Russia a unique epistolary model exploring the intricacies and depths of a young girl's 'soul' was born, as Karazmin had hoped, in the Russian language, made by its greatest poet 'richer in harmony than French'.

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