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Maarten Fraanje

The Epistolary Novel in Eighteenth-Century Russia

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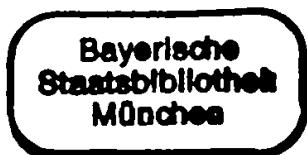
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zur
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2001

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Leiden, March 2001

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Although I have used the Library of Congress system for transliterating Russian, I will occasionally simplify given names such as Iuliia and Mariia into their English equivalents, Julia and Maria. When names are meant to be foreign, as in the case of Genrikh, I will use the original form, for example, Heinrich. Likewise, I have retained the original French for names such as Ribaupierre and de Saint-Glin (in Russian: de-Sanglen). Names of royals are given in their English equivalents: Peter instead of Petr, Catherine instead of Ekaterina.

References to pages of the novel under discussion will be given between brackets in the main body of the text. If the chapter discusses two epistolary novels by the same author, the year of the text's appearance will be added. In the case of variant editions of the same novel, a letter 'a' or 'b' will be added, for example: (1766a: vi), (1788a: 23), (1789: 129). Full details of these editions are included in the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Russian novel can be traced back to early medieval times with manuscript translations of Byzantine novels. However, it was only in the eighteenth century that Russian novelistic fiction started to appear in print and that educated Russians thought it no disgrace to confess that they themselves were authors of such texts. The acceptance of something like literature as an estimable cultural expression, and indirectly of the novel as an important literary genre, was only possible within conditions created by the reforms of Peter the Great. One of these conditions was an intense conversance with the secular culture of Western Europe. It follows that eighteenth-century Russian literature stands less in a closed national tradition that developed gradually from medieval times, than that it adopts its ideas and forms from a stockpile of thousands of years of European literature. However, the fascinating aspect of eighteenth-century Russian literature is that the particular Russian context informs aesthetic notions and gives the form of individual literary works a special aspect.

The subject of this book is an episode in the early history of the Russian novel: the adoption of one of the most significant novelistic forms of eighteenth-century European literature, the epistolary novel. This is the genre of novels such as Richardson's "Pamela" and "Clarissa", Rousseau's "New Heloise" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*), Goethe's "The Sorrows of Young Werther" (*Die Leiden des jungen Werther*), and Choderlos de Laclos's "Dangerous Liaisons" (*Les liaisons dangereuses*).

During the eighteenth century – which, it could be argued, as a cultural epoch came to a close with Napoleon's Russian expedition of 1812 - seven Russian epistolary novels appeared. These novels are: "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra" (*Pis'ma Ernesta i Doravry*) (1766) by Fedor Emin, the two novels by his son Nikolai Emin "Roza" (1788) and "An Irony of Fate" (*Igra sud'by*) (1789), Mikhail Sushkov's "Russian Werther" (*Rossiiskii Verter*) (1792), Nikolai Murav'ev's "Vsevolod and Veleslava" (*Vsevolod i Veleslava*) (1807) and two shorter, anonymous novels published in literary journals, "Some Letters from my Friend" (*Neskol'ko pisem moego druga*) (1794) and "The Suicide" (*Samoubiistvo*) (1810). I have restricted myself to these seven texts because other epistolary texts from the period do not answer the definition of the genre that I will give in chapter 2 of this book or because they have survived only in a fragmented form. In the case of one epistolary novel - perhaps the first to be written in Russian - I was not able to trace the

whereabouts of the manuscript. Its existence is only known from the accounts of foreigners visiting the Russian capital in the 1760's. They relate how Aleksandra Kamenskaia (1740-1769), the wife of the poet Aleksei Rzhevskii, read to a small St. Petersburg audience a novel entitled "The Kabardin Letters" (*Pis'ma Kabardinskia*), which they characterise as an imitation of Mme Graffigny's "Peruvian Letters" (*Lettres peruviennes*).¹ According to this account, Kamenskaia's epistolary novel seems to tell the exotic love story of a female prisoner from a noble Caucasian tribe that fought on the Russian side in the ongoing war with the Ottoman Empire. Other texts that I have excluded from my book are the fragments of an epistolary novel by the poet Mikhail Murav'ev, dated about 1780, entitled "The Correspondence of Liza and Katia" (*Pis'ma Lizy i Kati*);² the voluminous novel by Iakov Galinkovskii, "Glafira, or The Beautiful Peasant Woman from Valdai" (*Glafira, ili Prekrasnaia Valdaika*), fragments of which were published in several Petersburg journals of the early 1800's;³ and the beginnings of an epistolary novel by Petr Shalikov consisting of letters from the protagonist Leons to his beloved Elvira and to an anonymous friend. Shalikov's work appeared as a kind of feuilleton in his journal "Aglaia" and came to an abrupt end, apparently because the author's gallant courtship, which the novel was supposed to mirror, failed.⁴

From the modern perspective, the epistolary novels under discussion here are obscure texts; only a few have drawn attention from scholars who study the history of the Russian novel. Fedor Emin has received the most attention mainly because of his extraordinarily adventurous life, his antagonistic relationship with the Classicist poet and playwright Aleksandr Sumarokov, his apparently anti-establishment satire and his reputation as the first Russian novelist.⁵ His son Nikolai Emin, too, has been the subject of some monographs on Russian Sentimentalism, separate articles and an unpublished dissertation.⁶ Mikhail Sushkov's imitation of Goethe's work in literature and life has been studied as an example of so-called 'Werther-fever'.⁷ Sushkov's

¹ Mordovtsev 1911 : 74.

² Rossi 1992: 262-265.

³ Galinkovskii 1805. Galinkovskii 1807: 106-199.

⁴ Aglaia 1810: IX, i, 54-56; iii, 55-58; X, i, 58-62; ii, 32-35; iii, 66-74; XI, ii, 56-60; iii, 41-46.

⁵ Sipovskii 1910: 428-454. Pavlovich 1974: 19-38. Budgen 1976a. Budgen 1976b. Zielinski-Sorgente 1978. Schatz 1982. Kalashnikova 1991: 10-30; 35-56. Ferrazzi 1992. Titunik 1993. Avtukhovich 1995: 84-101; 108-122. Gasparetti 1998.

⁶ Pavlovich 1974: 44-59. Stepaniuk 1973. Stepaniuk 1974. Stepaniuk 1978.

⁷ Zhirmunskii 1981: 30-32. Fraanje 1995.

novel is the only one of these to have been reprinted in the twentieth-century and translated into a foreign language.⁸ Only one scholar considered the anonymous "Some Letters from my Friend" worth analysing in any depth.⁹ The remaining two works, Nikolai Murav'ev's "Vsevolod and Veleslava" and the anonymous "The Suicide", have never been given more than a superficial reading, so it is in this study that they will be extensively analysed for the first time.

Previous research into Russian epistolary novels and the eighteenth-century novel in general focused largely on making distinctions between the genres of the novels and on tracing influences and polemical connections between works, but never actually set novels apart for their use of letters.

As I chose to set these novels apart for their use of letters, I will define first what exactly constitutes an epistolary novel. A formal analysis is the precondition for a definition of the genre. With a clear understanding of the formal characteristics of the epistolary novel it will be possible to make detailed comparisons between the western-European models of the genre and their Russian followers. Thus, the formal analysis forms the basis of the comparative analysis. This comparative analysis deals not so much with the assessment of influences or borrowings, but, with what is more interesting, the dissimilarities between these works. These can be dissimilarities on all levels of the text: in the use of the formal characteristics of the genre, in the form and function of motifs and characters, and in the outcome of the action. Such dissimilarities can give us a revealing insight in the differences between the worldview of western-European and Russian authors.

Even though this comparative analysis shows not only dissimilarities, but also similarities, it will not necessarily imply that these similar elements have identical meanings. For one and the same sign put in different contexts is likely to refer to different concepts. Comparing western-European and Russian epistolary novels, I will consider the phenomenon of "Change of context" (*Kontextwechsel*) and the new meanings such a change can produce.¹⁰

The particular context I will relate these texts to is cultural and especially social. As I will show, such commonplace motifs in eighteenth-century European literature as 'resentment of the aristocracy', 'duelling', and even 'love', have different meanings within the contexts of, for example, French and Russian society. For the reconstruction of the latter context I will make

⁸ Orlov 1979: 203-222. Korovin 1990: 110-130. Eggeling/Schneider 1988.

⁹ Pavlovich 1974: 117-123.

¹⁰ Klein 1988: 11-12; 31-44. Klein 1990.

use of detailed research in eighteenth-century Russian social history, in particular in the history of the Russian service-class, the main producer of literature at that time.¹¹

I work from the assumption that the utterances of the characters, the solution to the conflict, but also the specific use of the formal characteristics of the genre, can be related to social strife. This connection of text and context is a straightforward one in the sense that the conflict between protagonist and antagonist mirrors a competition in reality between the representatives of different social groups. However, the conflict in the novels reflects more a conflict located within the author himself, a struggle between conflicting tendencies within his psyche. I consider the novel as the psychomachy of the author, in which he brings into play his desires as well as his awareness of the fact these desires should be curtailed. So one can say that both desire and the demands of social reality figure and structure these narratives.

Desire in narrative is twofold. It is first of all a desire for meaning that motivates the urge to narrate and to read; it is a desire to define and to understand ones own time and ones own position within society.¹² One of my arguments is that Russian authors of epistolary novels produced these narratives to give meaning to their desires, to find a workable solution to their inner conflict, a motive that is presumably shared by the readers of these novels as well.

Secondly, narrative desire is the driving force within the narrative, the desire of the protagonist for a certain object, mostly something that is considered of value in contemporary society. The protagonist is driven by desire, the satisfaction of which is hindered and delayed by obstacles. The value-objects and the obstacles to their obtainment in the narratives of the Russian epistolary novel are taken from conditions in the real world.

At the same time the desiring protagonist is the object of projection for the author and his readers. Through the process of identification, encouraged by the I-narration of the epistolary novel, the reader is enabled to share the desires of the protagonists. When the reader identifies with the protagonist and lives the story he lives, novelistic fiction can function as a transitional sphere, an intermediate area of experience, in which the reader can therapeutically work through his inner conflict. Within the world of the novel, the reader can receive not so much a substitute satisfaction or a symbolic fulfilment of his desires, but, what is more important, a coherent

¹¹ Especially: Raeff 1966. Jones 1973. Wirtschafter 1997.

¹² Brooks 1984: 281-282.

framework within which he can understand and master the conflicting tendencies within himself.

As I have said, desire for an object is the precondition for almost every narrative, certainly for eighteenth-century novelistic fiction. Desire however implies in a sense a will to change the existing state of things, a transgression of the existing order; desire is a revolt against the status quo. In this sense every narrative has a transgressive quality. As the obstacles to be transgressed in the Russian epistolary novels are taken from actual conditions of social reality, Russian readers must have read these novels as energised with real social tensions.

To a certain degree fiction is analogous to fantasy and dreams, however, in literature there is always a moment of conscious reflection. So literary fiction is not only structured by desire, but also by the opposing forces of reality.¹³ So the course of the narrative, the way the narrative is told, is not only determined by desire, but as much by a sense of reality, by a need to conform to social demands. From this perspective it appears that the formal characteristics of the epistolary novel correspond with psychological functions. These characteristics, especially in the way Russian authors applied them, offered specific possibilities to reflect on desire and its relationship with social reality.

In short, the epistolary novels under discussion can be seen as an endeavour by some Russian authors to give meaning to the conflicting forces of desire and social reality and to solve this conflict through a fictitious construct. Therefore, despite their apparent simplicity, these early, sometimes long-neglected Russian texts may give an especially clear insight into hearts and minds of eighteenth-century Russians, shedding new light on the complexities of their lives.

¹³ Wright 1984: 5.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RISE OF THE RUSSIAN NOVEL

The early development of the Russian novel was determined by two significant factors. The first was the reform of Russian society that Peter the Great started around 1700, thereby creating the conditions from which a secular literature could emerge. The second was the state's relaxation of its control of printing presses during the 1760's, which resulted in a growing number of private persons publishing works of their own interest. These two factors in particular make all the difference between the development of the novel in Russia and Western Europe, where a secular culture had existed since the Middle Ages and the state had never exercised complete control over book production.

The emergence of secular literature

One of the main characteristics of Russian culture before Peter's reforms was the dominance of the Orthodox Church. In Russia, the church had absolute control over all printing presses and never published works it considered immaterial to the salvation of the soul, in particular something as secular as literature. Therefore, works of narrative fiction like *facetiae* and western-European novels of chivalry, made to look like native folk tales by the creative additions of Russian copyists, were not allowed to appear in print and were sold only as shabby hand-written folios, for example at the stalls at Moscow's Bridge of the Redeemer (*Spasskii most*).

Peter the Great restricted the influence of the church, introducing a new and in essence secular mentality to Russian culture. Subscribing to the modern belief that man could improve himself and his environment, he tried to exploit the potential of his people and his country to the fullest.¹ For this purpose he needed the technical and organisational skills developed in Western Europe, so he required that all who entered his service should receive a European-style education. Russian noblemen, for their part, used this obligatory education to distinguish themselves from other social groups by linking the concept of nobility with personal refinement, the appreciation of art and literature and even the ability to produce literary works. By 1750

¹ Raeff 1983: 204. Raeff 1984: 26-31.

literature had become a noble occupation. The secular notion of literature that attached cultural prestige to non-religious texts thus entered Russia as a result of Peter's reforms and the consequent change in status of the Russian civil service class.

The absence of social institutions operating independently from the state characterised eighteenth-century Russian society.² It was the state now that took over the church's control of education and printing presses.³ Thus, the new Russian literature evolved in close connection with the state. Authors were servants of the state and clients of the developing imperial court. They often tried to please the head of state or one of his favourites and tended to express the ideas of the emperor or one of the bureaucratic factions.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Russian government became aware of the fact that the exploitation of the country's wealth would improve if more private initiative were allowed.⁴ With this aim, the nobility was exempted from obligatory state service, while at the same time room opened up to publicly express ideas not directly dictated by the state. Catherine II invited her subjects to propose social improvements by calling a general assembly in 1767 and by offering prizes through the Free Economic Society for the best essays on important social questions. Printing presses were made available for private use, and authors were stimulated to start a public debate in satirical journals. In this way Catherine's government created an atmosphere of tolerance that, although restricted in the modern sense, was free enough for literature to flourish.

These changes in the institutional conditions of literature had their impact on literary tendencies. During the first half of the eighteenth century, Russian literature was dominated by a small group of authors closely connected with the court and governmental institutions such as the Academy of Science. The most prominent of these authors were Vasilii Trediakovskii, Mikhail Lomonosov and Aleksandr Sumarokov. This limited circle of authors produced works that adhered to the same classicist set of literary rules, so that the period can be defined simply as "The Age of Classicism". However, this homogeneity was destroyed after 1760 when more people started to produce literature. Those classicist works still being published had to compete with literary works of many diverging tendencies.⁵

² Raeff 1984: 39-40.

³ Marker 1985: 24.

⁴ Raeff 1983: 239-245. Raeff 1984: 106.

⁵ Sevast'ianov 1983. Marker 1985: 70-76.

The debate about the novel

The greater availability of the printing presses caused a “boom of books” (*knizhnyi bum*), in which one literary genre clearly dominated: the novel.⁶ While visitors of an early eighteenth-century Russian bookstore had only a handful of translated prose works to choose from, such as Fénelon’s “Télémaque” or Lesage’s “Gil Blas”, after 1760 they were confronted with shelves sagging under the weight of novels. Although translations from the German and the French constituted the overwhelming majority of prose works, interested readers could also buy original Russian products and even find newly printed versions of the old Russian manuscript tales.

However, in the eighteenth century, the novel was still a disputed genre, and its appearance in Russia sparked off a debate about its moral and literary merits, repeating on a small scale the discussions held in France for over a century.

The arguments for and against the novel were of an ideological and aesthetic nature.⁷ First, the novel was said to offend Christian morality. It was considered immoral because of the depiction of human passions such as love. In 1730, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church accused Vasilii Trediakovskii of corrupting youth in connection with his translation of abbé Tallemant’s “Journey to the Island of Love” (*Voyage de l’Isle d’Amour*) (1663), which was in fact the first novel printed in Russian. In his “Rhetoric” (*Ritorika*) of 1748 Lomonosov held the novel responsible for some people’s “persistence in animal passions” (*zakosnenie v (...) plotskikh strastiakh*), a reproach echoed by Aleksandr Sumarokov, who in his “Letter on the Reading of Novels” of 1759 accused novelists of writing “bestial descriptions” (*skotskiiia izobrazheniia*).⁸ In 1766, the enlightened government of Catherine II widely distributed Ivan Betskoi’s educational “Brief Instructions” (*Kratkoe nastavlenie*), which advised that love novels be withheld from young people on the grounds that they led to moral corruption.⁹

A second argument against the novel was that the illusions and false realities created by this genre made it incompatible with Enlightenment ideology. Lomonosov compared novels with “fairy tales” (*skazki*) and

⁶ Sevast'ianov 1983: 3.

⁷ May 1963: 15-34.

⁸ Lomonosov 1952: VII, 223. Sumarokov 1781: IV, 371.

⁹ PSZ: XVII, 1060.

Sumarokov praised Cervantes' novelistic work because it showed convincingly how readers of novels run the risk of turning into foolish Don Quixotes.¹⁰

In addition, the novel raised desires that could not be realised without destroying the existing social order. For this reason young girls of marriageable age should not read about true love, nor should peasants read about the pleasant lives of nobles.¹¹ Indulgence in the novel's wish-fulfilling world contradicted the neo-stoic ideals of Russian civil servants. The novel had a potentially subversive quality.

The moral arguments against the novel were in many ways intertwined with aesthetic ones. It seems that the demand for social discipline was reflected in literary discipline, and it should not be surprising that in the mind of a poet like Sumarokov stoic virtues blended with classicist beauties. In his article of 1759 against the novel, Sumarokov opposes "distasteful romance-like style" (*khudym Romanicheskim (...) skladom*), meaning an extravagant narration, to a "natural style" (*estestvennym skladom*), which uses purist, and abstract, universal terms. He associated both styles with moral categories, identifying the ugly 'romance-like' or *romanesque* with immoral, unrestrained behaviour, and the beautiful natural style with a moral, disciplined mode of conduct.¹² It seemed that those who identified with state's best interest and endorsed its authority felt that any tolerance shown to literature, any loosening of literary restrictions in favour of the novel, would similarly lead to a relaxing of discipline in social behaviour.¹³ The historians of the western-European novel indeed associate the genre with a dissolution of authoritarian social structures, linking its rise to democratic movements, such as the emergence of the bourgeoisie. A similar picture can be painted of the Russian novel. Whereas Russian novelistic prose was initially allowed to exist only as manuscript literature, beyond the reach of authority, it subsequently emerged in print when enlightened government permitted a freer and less controlled social life.

Thus, one can say that the real history of the Russian novel begins under the emancipatory tendencies of the early years of Catherine II's reign. These tendencies allowed the desires of individuals and groups to surface and be expressed, even if they could not yet be realised. Literature, and especially those forms that presupposed reading in private, like the novel, became one

¹⁰ Lomonosov 1952: VII, 223. Sumarokov 1781: IV, 372.

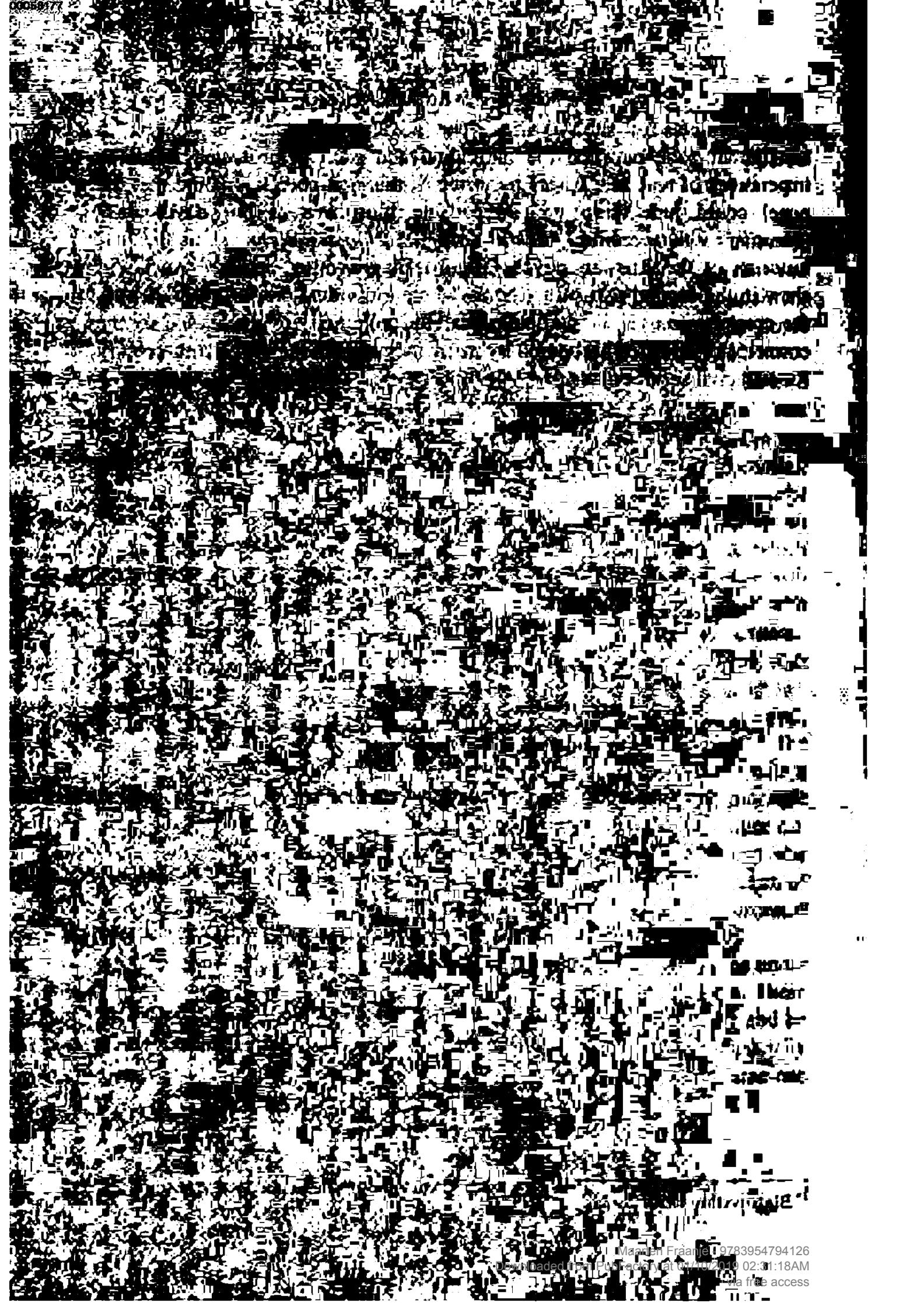
¹¹ Zhukovskii 1902: IX, 35.

¹² Sumarokov 1781: IV, 371. Egunov 1963: 151-153.

¹³ May 1963: 234-235.

of the vehicles of such desires. The novel constituted, as it were, a transitional zone between the individual and society, protected from the imperatives of real life. It was by virtue of this non-coercive nature that the novel could turn “into the inescapable biosphere of our daydreams” (*obratilsia v neizbezhnuiu stikhiiu nashei mechtatel’noi zhizni*), as the first historian of the Russian novel, Grigorii Blagosvetlov, wrote.¹⁴ As I will show in the second part of my book, where individual works are discussed, the epistolary novel in particular had the potential to give voice to the emancipatory desires harboured by many members of the eighteenth-century Russian civil service class.

¹⁴ Blagosvetlov 1856: 28-29.



CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EPISTOLARY NOVEL

In Western Europe, it was not only the relaxation of ideological and aesthetic precepts that made acceptance of the novel possible, but also the fact that the novel conformed to these same precepts. Arguments against the novel forced authors to change the tenor of their work, and gradually reproaches of immorality and improbability held true only for the older, so-called ‘romances’, but not for the new, ‘true’ and ‘virtuous’ kind of novel.¹

Early modern prose writers were persuaded that one could not show knowledge of the inner world of one’s characters without offending probability. The narrator could not have insight into the minds and hearts of his characters, supposedly being subject to the same limitations as the eyewitness and the historian. The inner world of the characters could only be disclosed through soliloquy, that is: direct speech.² Eighteenth-century authors still shared this notion, and to make their stories about the moral and social struggles of contemporary men and women look probable, they turned to first person narration.

Thus, the demand for probability logically led to the demise of the ‘falsifying’ author. Novelists started to present their work as authentic documents, fashioned after non-fictional genres such as memoirs and letters. Authors of epistolary novels, in particular, asserted that they were nothing more than mere editors and that their collections of letters were written by real people.

Many eighteenth-century authors also claimed their texts were authentic in order to facilitate the emotional relationship between the main character and the reader. As the text was supposedly composed by real, contemporary people and, in the case of letters, not written in the past but in the present tense, it showed pure, immediate emotion. The main effect of this emotive first person narration was to force the perspective of the narrating character upon the reader. It seduced the reader into identifying with this character and sharing his or her emotions, becoming implicated, as it were, in the character’s transgressive desires so as to undergo the same moral lesson in the course of the action. The reader’s emotional involvement in the story was

¹ May 1963: 46.

² Cohn 1983: 21-26.

thought essential for his or her moral education.³ The ability for sentimental compassion with fictional characters would refine a reader's feelings in preparation for social and philanthropic purposes in the real world. One can say that it was this ability to meet the aesthetic and pragmatic demands of the time that made the epistolary novel one of the prominent novelistic forms of the eighteenth century.

A definition of the epistolary novel

First of all, a distinction must be made between the epistolary novel and other epistolary works that are not novels. In the eighteenth century the term 'novel' (in Russian: *roman*) denoted a fictional story with a coherent plot based on causality. For this reason Nikolai Karamzin's "Letters of a Russian Traveller" (*Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika*), although up to certain degree fictional, does not constitute a novel, because travel does not impart the kind of causality that unites the sequence of events into a coherent plot. For the same reason the epistolary works of Mikhail Murav'ev, "Emile's Letters" (*Emilievy pis'ma*) and "The Suburban" (*Obitatel' predmestiiia*), both written about 1790, are not novels: they consist of a loose sequence of impressionistic contemplations. A more complex case is Vasilii Levshin's "A Lover's Morning Thoughts" (*Utrenniki vliublennogo*) of 1779, a work consisting of a young man's letters to two women, his beloved and a mundane lady, in which he contemplates true love. The fact that one of the women is the object of the author's love leads to a rudimentary plot - the development of their relationship - so that one could say that Levshin's work is somewhat novelistic.

Thus the first requirement for the epistolary novel is fictionality and a certain coherence of plot. In order to determine what kind of novel containing letters can be defined as epistolary, I will examine three types of narrative that make use of the letter form: those with 1) letters in the story; 2) the story in letters; 3) the story told through letters.⁴

The first two types show no differences in structure with other types of first or third person narrative. In novels of the first type, letters function in a similar way as direct speech or inserted stories. The fact that the anonymous Russian novel "Neonila, or The Debauched Daughter" (*Neonila, ili Rasputnaia dshcher'*) of 1794 contains no less than forty-nine letters does

³ Watt 1983: 229-230.

⁴ Herman 1989: 26. Herman's French definitions are: 1) *les lettres dans le récit*; 2) *le récit dans les lettres*; 3) *le récit par lettres*.

not make it epistolary: the inserted letters serve as illustrative material and enliven the narrator's text with colourful speech from the various characters.

In novels of the second type, with the story in letters, the narrator describes an event in one or more letters. However, since the action is over before the narrator begins to write letters, he is left outside the time limits of the action he is narrating. This means that in a story in letters the action and the narration take place at separate moments, and the actor and first-person narrator are not identical. Not only is there a sometimes significant age difference between them, but also an important difference in knowledge and insight. Furthermore, in stories of this type the recipient of the letters does not occupy the time frame of the narrated action, but only that of the narration, and often plays no more than the role of a passive listener. In essence, the temporal structure of a novel in letters does not differ from that of memoirs: the denotation 'letter' can simply be replaced with 'chapter'.

One could say that the story in letters is still epic, that it makes use of an epic past, and that between action and narration there is an epic distance. In contrast, novels of the third type, where the story is told through letters, can be defined as dramatic. Here there is almost no distance between the moments of action and narration, and although these do not coincide exactly, they do alternate closely with each other. In addition, the recipient of the letters finds himself within the same time span as the letter-writing character and is therefore able to take part in the action.⁵

In a story through letters, the narrator is located within the temporal realm of the story. Letters are written between the events, and each time the letter-writing character takes up his pen, he finds himself at a different point in time with respect to the action.⁶ In this sense, Paul Tallemant's "Journey to the Island of Love" (*Voyage dans l'Isle d'Amour*), translated by Vasilii Trediakovskii, constitutes a rudimentary form of epistolary novel. This work consists of two letters which both tell a closed sequence of events, the first letter having been written before the action narrated in the second letter begins. This characteristic relationship between the events and the time of their narration has a meaningful function in the "Voyage": it allows for a shift in perspective as the letter-writer's concept of love changes from passionate to gallant.⁷

In the story told through letters the proximity to, and the actual involvement in the event motivate an emotional style, and in the event the

⁵ Herman 1989: 30.

⁶ Voss 1960: 148.

⁷ Pelous 1980: 153.

letter-writer is deceived, this can produce unreliable narrative. The letter-writer does not know what is going to happen; what the outcome of the action is going to be. His letters are full of anticipations, for his view is not only directed backwards, but forwards to a yet unknown development of the action. Thus the narrator in a story told through letters possesses a temporal horizon that is not only retrospective, but has a future. In this sense, the story told through letters has its own specific ‘chronotype’. This specific narrative structure turns into a distinct genre, and one can claim that only ‘the story told through letters’ should be defined a ‘true’ epistolary novel.⁸

The genesis of the epistolary novel

There are two theses about the genesis of the specific type of narrative that we have defined as epistolary novel. The first claims that the genre originated from novels with inserted letters, in which the portion containing the third person narrative between the letters was gradually reduced until it finally disappeared.⁹ The other theory claims that the epistolary novel arose from miscellanies of letters and poetry: some letters were tied together into a plot and in this way gained the status of an independent literary text.¹⁰

Both claims have some validity. The first epistolary novel that appeared in fifteenth-century Spain, “The Prison of Love” (*Cárcel de amor*) (c. 1485) by Diego de San Pedro, belongs to a tradition of novels in which a large number of inserted letters already dominated the narrative.¹¹ However, it appears that the epistolary novel is less related to a novelistic tradition than to that of letter-books and miscellanies of letters. Over the course of time, individual letters within these heterogeneous miscellanies were connected by means of a development, generally a love-story. Thus, within the successive editions of Edme Boursault’s “Letters of Respect, Gratitude and Love” (*Lettres de Respect, d’Obligation et d’Amour*) (1669), a group of letters written to a girl named Babet was expanded and became more and more distinct from the other letters, until it formed a small epistolary novel entitled “Letters to Babet” (*Lettres à Babet*). Guilleragues’s famous “Letters of a Portuguese Nun” (*Lettres portugaises*) (1669), too, were at first meant to appear within the framework of a miscellany, but were instead issued

⁸ Vosskamp 1971: 97-98. Picard 1971: 26.

⁹ Voss 1960: 14. Herman 1989: 32.

¹⁰ Bray 1967: 22-28.

¹¹ Versini 1979: 21.

separately.¹² One of the first English epistolary novels, Richardson's "Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded" (1740-1741), also resulted from a miscellany of family letters, which the author linked with a plot. Thus the epistolary novel does not evolve from the novelistic tradition but from collections of fictitious letters that began to function as novels.

The first epistolary novels that emerged from the miscellanies contained letters written by one or two persons. We can call this kind of novel 'monologic' and 'dialogic', respectively. The correspondence that formed the basis of these novels was initially inspired by love: the French epistolary novel before 1760 consists almost solely of female love letters, sometimes including the replies from the beloved man. The model is "Letters of a Portuguese Nun", followed by Boursault's "Thirteen Letters", the "Letters of Marquise***" (*Lettres de Marquise****) (1732) by Crebillon-fils, Mme Graffigny's "Letters of a Peruvian Lady" (*Lettres d'une peruvienne*) (1747), and Mme Riccoboni's "Letters of Fanny Butlerd" (*Lettres de Fanni Butlerd*) (1757). The amorous nature of the correspondence is important for the inner structure of these novels, for love tends to dramatise the correspondence. The beloved, as participant in the action, must be provoked and persuaded to reply; the act of letter writing itself becomes a significant part of the developing plot.¹³

If the recipient of the letters is not a lover but a friend, and not participating in the action but living at a distance, then the letters tend to be more narrative. The letters do not provoke, but rather narrate action; they have no dynamic function. This is the distinction between the two monologic novels "Letters of a Portuguese Nun" and "The Sorrows of Young Werther" (*Die Leiden des jungen Werther*) (1774). In "Letters" the recipient is part of the conflict, in "Werther" he is not. Whereas the function of persuasion gives "Letters" the quality of dramatic soliloquies; the function of description likens "Werther" to the diary.

The epistolary novel of the English Richardsonian tradition differs from the French. Richardson's "Pamela" and "Clarissa" (1741-1743) have more than two letter-writers: they are 'polylogic'. The letters, written in confidence to family or friends only partly involved in the action, are therefore more narrative than dramatic. Love letters are absent; Pamela does not write to a beloved but to her parents, while Clarissa and Lovelace exchange hardly any letters. The German epistolary novel of Sophie Laroche,

¹² Guilleragues 1962: V-XXIII.

¹³ Voss 1960: 133-139.

"The History of Miss von Sternheim" (*Geschichte des Fräulein von Sternheim*) (1770), follows Richardson's model.

This Richardsonian tradition of the polylogical novel, consisting of narrative family letters, ended up merging with the French tradition of novels composed of love letters. Examples of this new form are Mme Riccoboni's "Letters of Lady Catesby" (*Lettres de Milady Catesby*) (1759), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "New Heloise" (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*) (1761), Claude-Jospeh Dorat's "Misfortune from Inconstancy" (*Les malheurs de l'Inconstance*) (1772) and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's "Dangerous Liaisons" (*Liaisons dangereuses*) (1782). In these novels love letters alternate with confidential letters within a polylogic structure.

Furthermore, one can differentiate between polylogic novels that consist of a single collective exchange of letters, and polylogic novels that contain double yet separate correspondences. In novels such as Richardson's "History of Sir Grandison" (1753-1754) and Rousseau's "New Heloise", almost all the letters, although addressed to specific persons, are copied and sent to third parties - friends. As a result, the content of the letters is known to this limited circle of friends, which gives the participants in the action a 'collective awareness' of what is happening. The ideal of Rousseau's heroes is a totally transparent community, communication without obstacles, contact between open hearts not obscured by secrets or intrigue. Letters are what hold this community together and provide it with a means of communication. In this sense, the specific use of the polylogic structure in Rousseau's novel becomes significant as the expression of a social ideal.¹⁴

In other polylogic novels, however, the fact that the content of the letters is secret is what gives impulse to the plot. These epistolary novels contain a highly complex intrigue, created by means of the uneven distribution of information between the participants. The characters are not all equally cognizant of the letters' content and are therefore not able to react adequately to events. This device is analogous to certain techniques in drama and is defined as 'discrepant awareness'.¹⁵ The device is essential to the plot of Richardson's "Clarissa" and Choderlos de Laclos' "Dangerous Liaisons". The simultaneous but separate correspondence of Lovelace and Clarissa, of Valmont and Mme de Tourvel, create a dramatic tension between the stratagems of the villains and the innocence or lack of awareness of their victims. In these novels the polylogic structure becomes the vehicle for a

¹⁴ Starobinski 1971: 102-108. Burgelin 1952: 372-383; 390; 404-405.

¹⁵ Pfister 1977: 81-91. Cf. Picard 1971: 52-53: 99.

moral critique of the falsehood of mundane behaviour and the wickedness of the dominant aristocratic class in eighteenth-century England and France.

Epistolary dialectic

As we have seen, the opposition of viewpoints and the exchange of diverging views through letters is a characteristic feature of the epistolary novel. In fact, the epistolary novel rather resembles a lengthy dramatic dialogue between two or more characters, whether actually in each other's presence or, as in the monologic novel, only implied by the letters of the protagonist. The juxtaposition of letters from different characters, with one character denouncing the viewpoint of the other, can produce a kind of 'dialogism', the apparent equality of contradictory ideological positions, as described by Mikhail Bakhtin.

This 'dialogism' is closely related to the spirit of the Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century Enlightenment believed in the suspension of authoritative philosophical systems and absolute, metaphysical truths. All knowledge was considered provisional, as empiricist experiment and open philosophical debate were thought the only way to attain truth. Enlightenment could not, and did not want to provide a coherent and secure world-view. World-views were required to compete with each other in an open debate, and philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Shaftesbury and Diderot employed the literary genre of the dialogue to mirror this process.¹⁶

The epistolary novel had the potential quality of 'dialogism', and indeed, novels like Richardson's "Clarissa", Rousseau's "New Heloise" and even Goethe's monologic "Werther" can be viewed as explorations of different world-views through the dialectic of epistolary conversation.¹⁷ For example, in Rousseau's "New Heloise", the opposition between the three main characters, Julie, Saint-Preux and Wolmar, coincides with contemporary philosophical oppositions between theists, deists and atheists, respectively. In the course of the conflict, the different ideological positions represented by the three characters are put to the test, and in the end it seems that Julie's attitude toward religion is the most appropriate and receives the author's

¹⁶ Zants 1968. Adams 1986: 200-205. Howland 1990: 4.

¹⁷ Zants 1968: 177. Howland 1990: 7-8. MacArthur 1990: 229. In his memoirs "Fiction and Truth" (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*), Goethe describes how his "Werther" actually originated from imaginary discussions with absent persons, and how he in these "dialectical exercises assembled contradicting minds" (*dialektischen Übungen widersprechende Geister herbeirief*) (Goethe 1948: X, 629-631).

approval. However, Rousseau offers fewer clues about his position on the question of suicide discussed between Saint-Preux and his friend Bomston. These politics of authorial non-interference caused the prominent critic Friedrich-Melchior Grimm to accuse Rousseau of ambiguity, of “making it a profession to support both pro and contra in matters of the utmost importance” (*un métier de soutenir le pour et le contre dans les matières les plus graves*).¹⁸ The epistolary dialogue regarding the central topic of Rousseau’s novel, individual desire, also fails to reach a clear conclusion. The ambiguity of the novel’s outcome can only point toward the author’s existential incertitude.

Translation and reception

The main western-European representatives of the epistolary novel were translated into Russian. These translations are filled with significant similarities that are indicative of the way Russians perceived the genre of the epistolary novel.

The mere fact that a text has been translated shows that it is of interest to its audience. On an average, Russian translations of epistolary novels appeared within ten years of the original’s publication. A remarkable exception to this rule is the work of Samuel Richardson. Although “Pamela” was first translated around 1750, the Russian version of Richardson’s work remained in manuscript, and printed editions only started to appear some forty years later in the late 1780s.¹⁹ A possible factor in this delay might have been the Russian public’s limited interest in these works, but the size of the original might have also influenced both the delay and the novel’s incomplete translation. For example, Russian translations of Richardson’s “Clarissa” and “Sir Grandison” did not reproduce the full text, and a complete translation of Rousseau’s “New Heloise” only became available at the beginning of the nineteenth century, despite numerous indications that the novel captured the hearts and minds of Russian readers from its appearance in 1761.

Russian eighteenth-century translations were not always of high quality. Although translations commissioned by the government promoted a certain degree of professionalism in the field, most translations, and certainly those of novelistic fiction, were done by self-styled men of letters serving in the army and the civil service. Translation work was a way to prove their

¹⁸ Grimm 1978: 29.

¹⁹ Kostiukova 1993.

knowledge of foreign languages, something prestigious and proper of the nobility. Yet their lack of expertise as translators accounts for many mistakes. Fedor Galchenkov made numerous errors when translating Goethe's "Werther" in 1781, such as taking the name of the German poet Klopstock for a term from the game of billiards.²⁰ Rousseau's translators, too, made curious mistakes stemming from their lack of knowledge of French and the cultural context of the novel. For example, when Saint-Preux describes a stroll through Paris and writes: "I ended up in the Marais" (*je me suis trouvé dans le Marais*), his translator of 1792, Petr Andreev, translates: "I wandered off into the swamp" (*zabrel ia v boloto*).²¹ And when Saint-Preux consoles himself for Julie's absence with the letter he receives from her, claiming: "a trivial piece of paper served as substitute for you" (*un vain papier me tenait lieu de toi*), Rousseau's translator of 1803-1804, Aleksandr Palitsyn, chooses to translate "trivial" with the Russian word *pustaia*. However, the literal meaning of the word - "empty" - is much stronger, resulting in: "A blank sheet of paper served as a substitute for you" (*pustaia bumaga zanimala tvoe mesto*).²²

Translation work not only served as training in a foreign language, but more importantly as an exercise in the Russian language itself. Eighteenth-century Russian translation practices must be seen within the context of the state of the literary language at the time. Literary Russian still lacked a generally accepted set of rules governing the use of its two main constituent elements, Church Slavonic and Russian. This lack of guidelines created many stylistic problems for Russian translators to solve. As a result, eighteenth-century Russian translations have an experimental character for they were attempts to create a literary language with a capacity for artistic expression equivalent to French and German. It is important to note that this experimental character made language a visible aspect of the text. Rousseau's translator Aleksandr Palitsyn accused the editor, well-known Petersburg bookseller Vasilii Sopikov, of having modified his translation in accordance with the innovative views of Nikolai Karamzin, who proposed adapting the literary language to the elegant Russian of drawing-room conversations.²³ Palitsyn himself adhered to the position of Karamzin's adversary, retired admiral Aleksandr Shishkov, who vehemently promoted the use of the Slavic element. Thus, with both translator and editor differing

²⁰ Zhirumnskii 1981: 36-37.

²¹ Rousseau 1964: II, 279 (2, letter XXII). Rousseau 1792: II, 160.

²² Rousseau 1964: II, 240 (2, letter XVI). Rousseau 1803: II, 142.

²³ MK 1805: II, 8-10. Poetry 1971: 755-756; 779.

in views, the 1803 translation of Rousseau's "New Heloise" became a kind of battleground for the two competing programmes of reform for the Russian literary language. This process of language standardisation ended up filling Russian translations with extra meanings that were absent in the original works.

Russian translators focussed more on questions of language connected with their own culture and were often unaware of the aesthetic norms that had shaped the text of the original. These they adapted to their own rationalistic, purist norms. For example, they applied logic to Goethe's irrational expressions and metaphors, destroying the stylistic, syntactical and rhythmic features that were an integral part of Werther's *Sturm und Drang* character.²⁴ Furthermore, Russian translators showed great disregard for the integrity and unity of the foreign text, often using a French adaptation as their source instead of the original. Russian translations of Richardson's novels were based on French intermediary texts, among others those of Prévost, which contained major alterations.²⁵ In other cases, they extended the novel's text with another work. Ivan Vinogradov added a translation of an anonymous English work containing the letters of Charlotte to a woman friend to his 1796 edition of "The Sorrows of Young Werther". In this addition Charlotte is unambiguously critical of her lover, which totally disregards the ambiguity of her behaviour in Goethe's original. Often Russian translators took fragments out of context, identifying the position of the author with one of the letter-writing characters, as was more than once the case with "The New Heloise". As we have seen, Rousseau's novel displayed a complex dialogic structure that caused numerous misunderstandings. Some Russian readers identified the arguments of various characters with the opinions of the author. For example, Princess Ekaterina Dashkova, in a conversation with Catherine II, took a desperate letter by Saint-Preux (3, letter XXI) to be an expression of Rousseau's own thoughts and discredited the philosopher outright as an apologist for the right to commit suicide and less directly for disobedience to the state.²⁶ Other readers, on the contrary, thought that Rousseau's real views on suicide were expressed in the reply of Milord Bomston (3, letter XXII), refuting the arguments of Saint-Preux. As far as I know, there are no separate Russian translations of Saint-Preux's letter, only one immediately followed by

²⁴ Zhirnunskii 1981: 35-41.

²⁵ Beebee 1990: 11-16.

²⁶ Dashkova 1990: 233-234.

Bomston's denunciation.²⁷ Two translations exist of Bomston's letter on its own, while early nineteenth-century anthologies of Rousseau's work, one compiled by a translator of "The New Heloise", Petr Andreev, contain parts of this letter as an authorial essay.²⁸ In these publications, Rousseau was identified as a philosopher who condemned suicide. So the letters of both Saint-Preux and Bomston were extracted from the original structure of Rousseau's novel and used as arguments for or against suicide. Readers who identified Rousseau's position with either Saint-Preux or Bomston ended up destroying the ambiguity of his epistolary novel.

A last feature common to most Russian translations of western-European epistolary novels is the fact that the translators tended to understand the novel's conflict from the perspective of their own social circumstances. They perceived the conflict between the bourgeois protagonist and noble adversary, featured in many western-European novels, as a conflict between representatives of the middle and upper nobility. For example, they saw Goethe's hero as a representative of their own noble class: the burgher Werther turned into a "nobleman" (*dvorianin*).²⁹ Furthermore, they suppressed fragments unfavourable to the nobility as a class and added sententious statements confirming the views of Russian noblemen of middle rank. In his 1750 translation of "Pamela", Ivan Shishkin adds judgemental remarks of his own about the 'natural equality' of all men to Richardson's text, pointing to the equal claim to noble status of all Russian civil servants within the context of the Petrine Table of Ranks.³⁰ Russian translators of "The New Heloise" also made conscious ideological changes, as in the dialogue between Lord Bomston and Julie's father, baron d'Etange (I, LXII). Bomston, defending the case of his friend, the commoner Saint-Preux, denounces the value of the nobility, its role in national history and calls it a repressive class, the "mortal enemy of law and freedom" (*mortelle ennemie des loix et de la liberté*). Russian translators like Andreev and Palitsyn suppressed these delicate passages.³¹ It is true, that the Russian translations retain much of Rousseau's critique of the nobility, but this critique now seems less directed against the nobility as a class than against certain ideas cherished by the aristocratic elite, such as closing the noble class to newcomers and assigning unequal privileges to nobles of different rank.

²⁷ Rousseau 1780.

²⁸ Rousseau 1785. Rousseau 1794. Rousseau 1800: I, 26-36. Rousseau 1804: 210-214.

²⁹ Goethe 1796: II, 10.

³⁰ Kostiukova 1993: 328; 333.

³¹ Rousseau 1964: II, 170 (1, letter LXII). Rousseau 1793: I, 372. Rousseau 1803: I, 347-348.

Ennobled commoners and middle-ranking Russian civil servants would no doubt have agreed wholeheartedly with this kind of critique.³²

³² Jones 1973: 6-7; 102; 111.

CHAPTER THREE

LETTER WRITING AND LITERATURE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

We have seen that the western-European epistolary novel emerged against the background of an extensive epistolary tradition, and that it actually originated from the manuals that provided models for this practice. Exemplary letters of the kind that were most characteristic of the national culture, the gallant love letter in France and the family letter in England, were incorporated into a novelistic plot. The question I will address in this chapter is whether an analogous development can be observed in Russia. Did the Russian epistolary novel originate from a native epistolary tradition and the accompanying manuals, or was it of purely literary origin, following western-European examples?

Epistolary practice before 1750

Until the second half of the eighteenth century epistolary practice was less developed in Russia than in France and England. One might think though that certain conditions typical of Russia would have encouraged epistolary communication. The reforms of Peter I had led to an increased mobility of the civil service class, requiring men in the army and the public service to traverse the vast empire at the whims of the government and spend years far away from their families. Most Russian letters that have survived from the eighteenth century are indeed those of men serving in the capital, encamped with the army at the borders or studying at universities abroad. They wrote mostly to their relatives on the paternal estate. Russian merchants engaged in correspondence to maintain their business contacts, while exiles in Siberia, like the Old-believers, wrote to their brothers and sisters to help them persevere in the true faith.

However, the enormous distances between Russian cities hampered communication. Furthermore, the postal service, founded in the seventeenth century and much expanded under Peter, primarily served the state, being an important factor holding central and provincial branches of the government together.¹ Although the postal service had delivered private letters since

¹ Marasinova 1985: 281.

1740, it was still controlled by a state that had no notion of privacy, and letter-writers had to reckon with inspections of their correspondence, the so-called ‘Perlustration’.² An epistolary manual of 1765 warned openly not to mention highly placed persons or affairs of state in private letters, or to entrust any secret to paper.³ The inadequacy of the Russian postal service was an additional obstacle to the development of epistolary practice. Postbags were often subject to careless treatment at junction stations, and even letters from the empress Catherine II could get lost.⁴ The absence of carriers on certain lines, the bad condition of the roads, and of course, robbery further complicated postal communication. Therefore, the Russian nobility often used serfs as couriers and ‘opportunity’ (*okaziia*), that is: letters sent with acquaintances passing by.

The limited epistolary activity in eighteenth-century Russia in comparison with Western Europe can also be explained by the small number of educated members of the elite: only several hundred families out of a population of over twenty million. Not only most peasants, but also many nobles, especially women, were illiterate. The overall majority of noblemen rarely wrote and preferred to dictate their letters to scribes.⁵ The inequality of education between men serving the state and their female relatives at home did not further letter-writing as a prestigious cultural occupation. Men learned how to write with the help of religious texts in Church Slavonic and were trained in the language of official documents; women composed their letters in a style that offended the literary norms of the time, following the grammar and orthography of spoken Russian. Examples of this kind of female literacy can be found in letters written during the 1720s by the female members of the prominent Kurakin family and even at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Ekaterina Turgeneva’s letters to her sons Andrei and Aleksandr Turgenev, who were studying at the university of Göttingen.⁶

Epistolary genres and satire

When early eighteenth-century Russians stood before the task of composing a letter, they turned to collections that later would be called “letter-manuals”

² Brikner 1873. Barskov 1915: XI.

³ Pis'movnik 1765: 3.

⁴ Vigilev 1990: 294-303.

⁵ Kotkov/Pankratova 1964: 15.

⁶ Sumkina 1987: 103-116. Turgenev 1911: 386.

(*pis'movniki*).⁷ These consisted of authentic letters originally collected for historical and moral interest. Here Russians found examples of all genres practised: official petitions (*chelobitiia*), written accounts to landlords or superiors in civil service (*otpiski*), pastoral and paternal letters to children, and ‘letters of respect’ to family members and friends (*poslaniia*), as well as more private letters, for example, to the wife left behind at the estate (*pis'ma; gramotki*). Epistolary forms characteristic of Russian culture, especially the official, more formalised ones, soon became models for fiction, or better put, satire, and this is how the letter entered the realm of Russian literature.

Early examples of Russian epistolary satire are the seventeenth-century mock letters to the Ottoman sultan produced by the diplomatic service of Muscovite Russia. These fictitious letters, serving to ridicule the enemy, followed a European tradition: the well-known “Correspondence of the Turkish Sultan with the Cossacks of Chigirin” (*Perepiska turetskogo sultana s chigirinskimi kazakami*), which later inspired the famous canvas by Il'ia Repin, was also known in German and Polish versions.⁸

Another example of satiric letters is the “Petition of Kaliazinsk” (*Kaliazinskaia chelobitnaia*), in which a voluptuous monk complains about the restrictions of monastic life. The nature of its parody is disputed. Some scholars put the letter within the context of a carnivalesque anti-world, typical of medieval Europe, a world that is conscious of its own absurdity before God. From this perspective, self-ridicule appears as a form of worship. So all display of man's alleged self-importance, all the pompous documents, from religious prayers to medical manuals, from newspapers to geographical works, are ridiculed by filling them with an inappropriate content.⁹ However, other scholars argue that the “Petition of Kaliazinsk” is an anti-clerical parody that must be seen within the context of the struggle of the Russian peasant class against the land ownership privileges of the Orthodox Church.¹⁰ The same two interpretations could be applied to the popular “Tale of Ersha Ershovich” (*Povest' o Ershe Ershoviche*), which depicts a court case between animals, using a kind of dramatised narrative including two judicial letters.¹¹

The editors of eighteenth-century moral journals, like Nikolai Novikov and the empress Catherine II, also took such ‘serious’ genres as medical

⁷ Demin 1964.

⁸ Pamiatniki 1989: 592-593.

⁹ Likhachev/Panchenko/Ponyrko 1984: 20.

¹⁰ Skripil' 1954: 452-458.

¹¹ Skripil' 1954: 136-139.

books, newspaper reports, dictionaries and grammars as a base for literary satire. In their journals, epistolary genres such as the petition, the written account, and the paternal letter, again served satirical ends, and in this sense these authors continued a native tradition. However, the nature of the satire had changed. The letters no longer ridiculed man's worldly pomposity or the rival social class, but the awkward minds of the Russian rural nobility seen from the point of view of the Enlightenment, thus more in line with the fictitious letters in the moral journals of Joseph Addison and Gottlieb-Wilhelm Rabener. The objects of satire exposed in their letters were mostly cruel landlords, hypocritical clerics (writing in a mixture of Russian and Church-Slavonic) and superficial fops and coquettes (composing their letters in a hodgepodge of Russian and French).

The satirical letters in Russian moral journals were sometimes joined in sequences of two or more, allowing a certain sense of development and plot to emerge.¹² One could speak here of potential epistolary novels, as in the case of Novikov's five "Letters to Falalei" (*Pis'ma k Falaleiu*), which elaborates on the conflict between the enlightened urban son and his awkward rural family. The same tendency toward plot is discernible in Novikov's two "Letters to My Nephew" (*Pis'ma k plemianniku*) and in the cycle of three letters entitled "The Accounts of Peasants" (*Otpiski krest'ianskie*).¹³ In Denis Fonvizin's journal "The Friend of Honourable People, or Starodum" (*Drug chestnykh liudei, ili Starodum*) of 1788, the characters of his famous comedy "The Minor" (*Nedorosl'*) engage in an epistolary dialogue. The journal occupies the tradition of didactic dialogue books, with Sofia asking advice from her wise uncle Starodum (literally "Old-Thinker") on her marriage with Milon, but it also carries the germ of an epistolary novel.¹⁴ Similar to the eighteenth-century Russian moral journals, this type of epistolary exposure of contemporary manners would eventually produce miniature epistolary novels such as "The Wallet, or A Strange Discovery" (*Ridikiul, ili Strannaia nakhodka*) of 1806, which consists of six letters revealing the adulterous amours of the aristocratic letter-writers.¹⁵ This type was practised in the nineteenth century by Fedor Dostoevskii in his "Novel in Nine Letters" (*Roman v deviati pis'makh*) (1847) and by Aleksei Apukhtin in his "Archive of Countess D***" (*Arkhiv grafini D****) (1890).

¹² Rychkova 1978: 26-29.

¹³ Novikov 1951: 334-337; 362-368.

¹⁴ Fonvizin 1959: II, 40-78.

¹⁵ Ridikiul 1806.

The fictitious letters that clearly mimic typical Russian epistolary forms, as in Novikov's journal, were mostly satirical and focussed on exposing the flaws of the letter-writing characters. However, this type of letter is static; it requires no development and therefore leads to no more than an anecdotal plot.

Letters in the Petrine tales

The letter was not only part of satirical literature, but also of early eighteenth-century Russian romances, the so-called 'Petrine tales'. In contrast with the satirical letters, the letters in the tales have no formal relation with real letters, nor with the "Examples of How to Write all Kinds of Letters" (*Priklady kako pishutsia komplementy raznye*) of 1708, the first Russian epistolary manual to appear in print.¹⁶ The letters in the Petrine tales have their apparent model in the letters inserted in seventeenth-century western-European heroic novels.

The letters constitute an essential part of the unique make-up of these Russian tales, which are assembled from heterogeneous material and have the structure of compilations. The "History of Aleksandr, a Russian Nobleman" (*Istoriia o Aleksandre rossiiskom dvorianine*) contains no less than nineteen letters. The letters and songs in this tale are actually independent texts integrated within the tale's larger structure. Proof of this is the fact that variant versions of a letter and an aria from "The History of Aleksandr" reappear in "The History of the Merchant Ioann" (*Istoriia o kupcse Ioanne*).¹⁷

One could say that the structure of the tales expresses a kind of anti-poetics: it defies, although not intentionally, the aesthetic demands of contemporary elite literature, such as the notion of probability. The tales contain wonders and fairy tale motifs, and show no respect for the genre-distinctions so important to Russian Classicism. Thus, material from a genre like the *conte galant* is mixed with elements from genres like the *facetiae*, the fairy tale and the novel of chivalry.¹⁸ The hero is a *galant homme*, a picaro, a fairy tale hero and an Arthurian knight alike. This chaos of genres is coupled with confusion as to the appropriate love concept. The heroes vow platonic love, but the day after the burial of their beloved they share her rival's bed, only to visit a brothel a short time later.

¹⁶ Moiseeva 1965: 121. Cf. Scheidegger 1980: 169.

¹⁷ Moiseeva 1965: 217; 222. Sipovskii 1905: 248-249; 250.

¹⁸ Małek 1987: 130-131.

As explained in the triologue at the conclusion of “The History of Aleksandr”, letters, together with songs and gifts, are part of the art of “gallantry” or “courting” (*volokitstvo*).¹⁹ Letters are a piece of beautiful rhetoric, a display of gallant language that proves that the heroes are able to live up to the norms of elegance.²⁰ Naturally, they mainly serve to bring about a meeting, to declare love, to persuade the beloved to meet the lover’s demands. This dynamic function is not only performed by letter, but also by direct speech and song (*aria*). Direct speech and letters begin with similar terms of address, and like the songs, the letters can be written in *raeshnyi stikh* or verbal rhyme, an archaic Russian poetic form consisting of repetitive sentences ending with similar suffixed verbs. In this respect it is significant that in variant manuscript copies of “The History of Aleksandr”, arias and speech are sometimes called “a letter” (*pis’mo*).²¹ Letters from the “History of Aleksandr” were, like aria’s, copied and inserted into songbooks.²² Thus letters, direct speech and arias are in a way interchangeable; they share formal features and perform the same functions.

However, the difference between direct speech and song on the one hand, and the letter on the other, is that the letter is speech put on paper and transformed into an object existing across time. These qualities inform the letter with a dynamic potential with regard to the plot. If a hostile outsider discovers a letter, the secret love of the two heroes can become public, resulting in an unhappy end. For example, in “The History of the Merchant Ioann”, the jealous sister steals a letter and betrays the secret love of the heroes to the infuriated parents. Thus the letter can be the device that gives rise to the love affair as well as the expedient that brings about its final rupture. The letter also can become an instrument of error, as in “The Story of Flarenta and Georgii” (*Gistoriia o Flarente i Georgii*), in which the wicked stepmother intercepts the letter from the princess to the prince before it reaches the postmaster (*pocht direktor*) and replaces it with a forged letter with the opposite contents.²³ Furthermore, letters bearing a declaration of love can turn into a contract. Aleksandr and his beloved Tira pledge their love by exchanging “love-contracts” (*pis’ma*) written with their own blood, as do the heroes of the “Tale of a Nobleman’s Son” (*Povest’ o shlakhetskem*

¹⁹ Moiseeva 1965: 279.

²⁰ Honnfelder 1975: 18. Cf. Nikolaev 1997: 66.

²¹ Moiseeva 1965: 222; 230.

²² Chernyshev 1940: 280.

²³ Begunov 1993: 394.

*syne).*²⁴ These letters can return at other moments in the story to legitimise the claim of one lover to the other, to make reproaches to the unfaithful and to reveal or explain the story to other characters.

As already mentioned, the letters follow baroque speech etiquette and serve as examples of the graceful rhetoric of gallantry. Emotions are expressed in the regular, embellishing figures of speech that characterised the Baroque, such as extended metaphor, and not in those expressing emotional disorder that were characteristic of Classicism and Sentimentalism, such as repetitions, omissions and inverted word order. As the letters are more or less ornamental, they do not characterise the letter-writer. Their style is differentiated only according to the decorum of the situation and not to highlight differences between characters: they do not reveal individual psychology. Thus, the letters in the Petrine tales lack some important functions found in the more sophisticated printed novel that appeared some decades later, and a direct development of narrative technique, linking the manuscript tales with the epistolary novel, cannot be firmly established.

The discovery of the private domain

One of the conditions that impeded the development of a more intimate, private form of letter was the dominance of hierarchical relationships in Russian society.²⁵ In early eighteenth-century Russia there was no drawing-room culture with its democratic tendencies, as in France, nor did there exist an individualist form of religion, focusing on self-analysis and mutual epistolary confessions, as with Protestantism in England. Relationships between Russians were mainly paternalistic, which permitted a freer though not intimate epistolary style for the superior (parent, husband) and required a more formal style for the subordinate (child, wife). The fact that many noblemen dictated their letters to a “scribe” (*d'iak*), who usually adapted his superiors’ words to the phraseology of bureaucratic documents, also hampered the emergence of an intimate style.²⁶

Peter I himself gives an example of informal style in the correspondence with his wife, the later empress Catherine I. Peter’s letters, full of tender, ironic word play, breathe a spirit of intimacy, and even Catherine in her replies, when she eventually has mastered the Russian language, can address

²⁴ Moiseeva 1965: 251-252; 297.

²⁵ Todd 1976: 31-37.

²⁶ Brelour 1964: 12; 54-55.

the awe-inspiring tsar with loving irony. The letters attest to the importance Peter placed on the private.²⁷ The multitude of short Russian letters from empress Catherine II to her closest associates, as well as her notes to her lovers, show the same predilection for the private, together with the desire to suspend court etiquette.²⁸

Only when it became possible to develop egalitarian relationships could ordinary Russians, too, free themselves from the constraints of epistolary etiquette and start writing letters that were less formal and more interesting from a literary point of view. Room for more egalitarian relationships opened up with the emancipation of the nobility and a growing consciousness of the equality of all gentlemen. This was paralleled by the emergence of movements such as Masonry, which adhered to the ideal of universal brotherhood. However, equality understood as freedom from subordination was only possible in a social sphere devoid of the hierarchy of court life and state service. Only in private could one be equal, could one be truly friends. Private life gained in moral value as a refuge from the ‘wicked world’ of hierarchy. Similarly, new genres emerged in Russian epistolary practice to express this egalitarian ideal, among them the so-called “familiar letter” (*druzheskoe pis'mo*).²⁹

The main stylistic demand of the private letter was informality. One expression of this anti-normative ‘formlessness’ was the typical change of languages, shifting from Russian to French, sometimes within one sentence. This can be seen in the letters that Denis Fonvizin and Mikhail Murav'ev wrote to their respective sisters in the 1760s and 1770s. Such a change in languages was unthinkable in the formal letters they sent to their parents in the same envelope.³⁰ Mundane ladies also expressed their neglect of formalities or *négligence* in the physical substance of their letters, which was sometimes nothing more than little pieces of paper with barely legible handwriting. These Russian ladies wrote mostly in French, perhaps to emphasise that they fell outside of Russian civil service hierarchies and could neglect hierarchical norms of behaviour.³¹

In contrast, high regard for the private could also be expressed through the artistic elaboration of familiar letters, following the example of Cicero and the gallant letter of the French manuals. It was men of letters, such as

²⁷ Petr 1861. Nikolaev 1997: 24-33.

²⁸ Ekaterina 1886. Barskov 1918.

²⁹ Todd 1976: 38-42; 68. Bukharkin 1982: 12.

³⁰ Fonvizin 1959: II, 317-359. Makogonenko 1980: 259-354.

³¹ Paperno 1975: 152. Lotman 1994: 57-58.

Gavrilii Derzhavin and Nikolai Karamzin together with their circle of friends (the poets Nikolai L'vov, Vasilii Kapnist, Ivan Dmitriev), who transformed the familiar letter into an aesthetic object or, in the words of Iurii Tynianov, into a 'literary fact'. These letter-writers avoided mentioning civil service directly: the subject matter of their letters is restricted to the private sphere. They suppressed the traditional hierarchical form, replacing it with egalitarian irony. Their letters are a form of amusement, containing literary references and figures, fragments of verses, and sometimes entire poems.³²

In search of true love

The low value placed on the private sphere in early eighteenth-century Russia corresponded to a similar view of such a private feeling as sexual love. As the private and intimate had not yet achieved a positive moral value, nor had love between man and woman. This meant that love letters were destroyed and not preserved as something of worth. It is typical that the only Russian love letters extant from the seventeenth century were kept not because of their emotional content or literary merit but as part of a legal file. This file, used as evidence against a certain Arefa Malevinskii, a clerk from a small North-Russian town, to force him to marry the object of his infatuation, consists of thirteen letters serving mainly as reminders of appointments at the back of the steam bath. The letters are short, written in colloquial North-Russian with amorous idioms from Russian folk songs, and make no allusion to highbrow, European-style literature.³³

As regard for private life started to grow, so did the appreciation of such an intimate feeling as love. Eighteenth-century Russians who began to acquaint themselves with the western-European tradition of courtly love as reflected in secular literature no longer viewed the physical attraction between men and women as a vice, the work of the devil, or something bestial. On the contrary, they now saw it as a virtue, a positive quality of the soul. Love between men and women assumed positive connotations as a mark of European-style enlightenment and noble virtue. The gallant courtship of women, including writing love-letters, became a sign of personal refinement.

³² Stepanov 1926: 90. Makogonenko 1980: 12.

³³ Pankratova 1962: 196. The definition of some highly rhetorical epistles in Russian seventeenth-century manuscript manuals as love letters is doubtful (Likhachev 1986. Demin 1965: 193).

Still, few love letters from the second half of the eighteenth century have survived. One reason for this was that the lover's sense of discretion required him to destroy his lady's letters. Empress Elizabeth I's lover, Aleksei Razumovskii, destroyed her letters shortly before his death.³⁴ In other cases, it was fury at the beloved's unfaithfulness that motivated the destruction of the letters. In his memoirs, the poet Ivan Dolgorukov describes how around the year 1785 he organised a theatrical *auto da fé* to burn a whole pile of love letters in the presence of his beloved, his cousin Elena Menshikova, not entrusting his epistles to the flames before having read their content aloud as a last reproach to her unfaithfulness.³⁵

However, some years later, in 1794, a new amorous correspondence between Ivan Dolgorukov and a certain Elizaveta Ulybysheva could not be destroyed because their missives were intercepted by her husband. The letters ended up in a legal file as evidence against him just like those of Malevinskii more than a hundred years earlier. Copies from the file circulated among the Russian public, and in 1805 one of them came into the hands of Stepan Zhigarev, who in his diary remarkably judges Dolgorukov's love letters on their aesthetic merits alone.³⁶ Love and its expression was now subject of aesthetic norms.

In the memoirs he wrote more than twenty years later, Ivan Dolgorukov characterises his embarrassing affair with Ulybysheva as just "romance-like fancy" (*romanicheskoe pristrastie*) and the letters they exchanged as no more than "romanesque verbosity" (*romanicheskoe pustoslovie*). He meant that he and Ulybysheva perceived each other according to literary schemes and that their letters were full of literary phrases. Elizaveta Ulybysheva, feeling abandoned by everyone, defines her own unhappy lot as *le sort de la pauvre Lise*, comparing herself with the heroine of Karamzin's famous story, while Ivan Dolgorukov's feelings are aroused by *bon mots* from comic operas, and he is moved into action by Ulybysheva's quotes from French love poems.³⁷ It appears that quotes substitute the authentic expressions of feeling, and literary characters provide the mould for the lovers' own identities.

Defining his past affair as *romanesque*, Dolgorukov points to a problem inherent to the growing appreciation of intimate feelings and the cultural prestige now ascribed to love. As love became a part of culture, it also became subject to norms. However, the existence of normative rules for

³⁴ Lotman 1994: 48.

³⁵ Dolgorukov 1997: 90-91.

³⁶ Zhigarev 1934: I, 56-58.

³⁷ Dolgorukov 1897. Dolgorukov 1997: 136-139.

intimate feelings posed the question of authenticity: does one speak and write letters following the inspirations of one's true self, or does one conform to set standards and merely reproduce beautiful literary phrases?

The conflict between nature and culture, between true feelings and art, between authenticity and creation, came to the fore in the intimate letter. On the one hand the letter was seen as the means of finding and capturing the individual self; it could mirror the human soul and be a vehicle of true and natural feelings, but on the other hand the letter was suspicious as a pre-meditated and contrived expression, and as such fatally mendacious. The paradox of the intimate letter was the paradox of contrived spontaneity, of a handcrafted self.³⁸

The young poet Andrei Turgenev experienced this conflict in a painful way in his courtship of Ekaterina Sokovnina in the early 1800s. Turgenev's interest in this young woman was aroused when she fled from home after the death of her father and spent some time in a poor peasant's house reading the Bible and "The New Heloise". After meeting, they began to exchange letters, which Turgenev copied in his diary. As a result his diary took on the form of an epistolary novel, the dramatic element of which is the discrepancy between Turgenev's expected role of suitor and his own inner doubts, which he expresses in his commentary on her letters. Andrei Turgenev wants to take Rousseau's "New Heloise" as his bible, his *code moral*. He tries to work himself up to the same passionate and elevated feelings as Saint-Preux and wants to convert to the idea of marriage just like Julie. Yet at the same time he knows he is incapable of such emotions. He feels trapped by the exalted idealism, sentimentalism and rhetoric of the epistolary genre, which force him to feign love. Embarrassingly enough, Sokovnina feels that Turgenev's love-declarations are nothing more than "romanesque ideas" (*romanicheskikh idei*).³⁹ *Romanesque* here means inauthentic.

Actually, the dichotomy between the authentic and the stylised, truth and fabrication, between real and *romanesque* love, is as we shall see a central theme in most Russian epistolary novels.

The epistolary laboratory

As the private person became part of the cultural norm, he started to fashion his everyday life and intimate writings, consciously and unconsciously, upon culturally prestigious models, from Cicero to Saint-Preux. At the same time,

³⁸ Howland 1991: 170.

³⁹ Turgenev 1989: 101; 118. Veselovskii 1999: 74-75.

the increasing social value of private life made it an acceptable subject of literature, especially the novel. Real behaviour tended to mould itself in the image of literary heroes, while in the same time, literary heroes assumed characteristics of real people. Authentic letters were conceived on literary models, and literary letters pretended to be authentic.

If the real and the literary are confused, and life can become art, it is not easy to draw clear conclusions regarding the influence of literature on authentic documents and vice-versa. One cannot prove that the real letter was a “laboratory” for fictional epistolary genres, or that the literary letter provided a model for real ones.⁴⁰

It is true that there are some points of comparison between real Russian letters and Russian epistolary novels. The ironic letters in the novels of Nikolai Emin resemble somewhat the letters he himself sent to his former tutor Derzhavin.⁴¹ In the case of Mikhail Sushkov, one can find many literal similarities between his suicide notes and those of his novel's main character.⁴² There are also material similarities. For example, in 1788 Karamzin writes a lyrical letter with an inserted poem to his friend Ivan Dmitriev, and the latter answers by writing a poem on the back of this paper.⁴³ The characters in Nikolai Emin's novel “An Irony of Fate” of 1789 follow the same practice: Vsemil writes a poem on the back of the sheet of paper with Plenira's poem.⁴⁴ Mikhail Sushkov's epistolary novel of 1792, “The Russian Werther” (*Rossiiskii Verter*), and the anonymous “Some Letters from my Friend” (*Neskol'ko pisem moego druga*) of 1794, both consist of typical, Russian familiar letters with inserted poems. Thus, these epistolary novels reflect some elements of the familiar letter as practised from the 1780's. In addition, the intervals between the letters in these two novels follow those of the Russian postal service: twice a week.

So one can indeed establish a relationship between Russian epistolary practice and the Russian epistolary novel, although this is not a causal relationship concerning the genre as a whole. There is no convincing evidence that the Russian epistolary novel gradually evolved from real letters, epistolary manuals, early eighteenth-century prose tales with inserted letters, or series of satirical letters in the moral journals. The similarities

⁴⁰ Bukharkin 1982: 15. Cf. Buhks 1985.

⁴¹ Derzhavin 1868: V, 490.

⁴² Fraanje 1995.

⁴³ Karamzin 1866: 5-6. Fascimile of this letter in: Karamzin/Dmitriev 1953: 307-308.

⁴⁴ Emin N. 1789: 115. Cf. Pavel L'vov's “Russian Pamela”, in which the heroine Maria replies on the back of a letter from her suitor Viktor (L'vov 1789: 113-120).

between genuine letters and literary prose can be defined more as a synchronous development, with incidental interchanges of disparate elements. A closer examination of the individual Russian epistolary novels will reveal that they derive their overall structure as a genre, together with many other features, from western-European models.

CHAPTER FOUR

F.A. EMIN'S "THE LETTERS OF ERNEST AND DORAVRA"

As we have seen, the novel did not become an integral part of Russian literature until the 1760s, when the conditions for publishing changed and the printing presses started to canvass for private orders. These presses belonged to the Academy of Science and the noble military schools in St. Petersburg, and the first private individuals to have works printed were teachers or students connected with these institutions. Guided by the noble schools' curriculum, which focused more on humanities than on technical subjects, these Russian men of letters printed translations of literary fiction, mostly popular novels.¹ Only a few of them printed works of their own, as did Fedor Emin, a teacher of Italian at the Infantry Cadet School.

Emin went down in literary history as the first Russian novelist. His novelistic work and especially his epistolary novel "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra" (*Pis'ma Ernesta i Doravry*) of 1766 occupy a key position in the chronology of Russian eighteenth-century literature, although less for its artistic merits than for its genre. "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra" is said to mark the beginning of the illustrious tradition of the Russian novel.

An oriental storyteller

Nevertheless, Fedor Emin's place in the chronology of Russian literature is somewhat problematic. As his surname indicates, he was not Russian but a former citizen of the Ottoman Empire. His precise origins are unclear and records only partly substantiate the stories he told about himself.² We can presume that Emin came from a region at the western borders of the Russian empire, for he claimed to master Polish and Lithuanian in addition to the major European languages. In the eighteenth century, this denoted Western Russia, and his prose indeed contains some Polish and Ukrainian elements.³ This implies that Russian was not his mother tongue, but close enough to his own native Slav dialect for him to master it in two years and even produce many volumes of prose in this newly acquired language. However, it also implies that Emin, as a foreigner, was a non-typical representative of Russian

¹ Marker 1985: 80-81. Shamrai 1940: 311-329.

² Beshenkovskii 1976. Compare the critique in: Budgen 1976a: 8-30. Budgen 1976b: 79-80.

³ Semennikov 1914: 140. Beshenkovskii 1976: 189. Di Salvo 1996.

culture and that, presumably, he had no extensive knowledge of the native Russian prose tradition, in particular the so-called ‘Petrine tales’. Therefore, the place Emin’s work occupies in the intrinsic development of Russian literature remains open to debate.

In the first half of 1761, Fedor Emin presented himself to the Russian consul in London, Aleksandr Golitsyn, and requested to convert to the orthodox faith. He also asked for a passport to Russia. In the eighteenth century, Russia was perceived as a land of unlimited opportunities and many Europeans turned to Russian consuls abroad with the hope of obtaining lucrative positions in the service of the emerging empire. Some offered to fight in Russia’s many conflicts as did, for example, the Armenian Joseph Emin, who frequented Golitsyn’s house around the same time as his namesake Fedor Emin, hoping to obtain permission to enter Russian service and fight the Turks in the Caucasus. Joseph Emin arrived in Russia at the beginning of 1762 and was a huge success in the capital’s elite circles. As he later wrote in his memoirs, his character excited as much curiosity as if he were some exotic animal like a dromedary.⁴ In contrast, Fedor Emin did not meet with much success after arriving in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1761. His stories about his origins - he claimed to be the son of a prominent Ottoman dignitary - and his spectacular adventures demonstrated that he possessed the perfect credentials to occupy a high post in Russian service, but unfortunately, they failed to entertain his public for long. He soon provoked only mockery, earning the dubious reputation of a mere “storyteller” (*razkashchik*).⁵ In his notes on Russian authors Karamzin wrote that Emin’s life itself resembled a novel.⁶

One may assume that Emin embellished his biography to obtain a lucrative post serving the Russian state, combining facts from his adventurous past with elements of the oriental adventure novel. His first novel, “Inconstant Fortune” (*Nepostoiannaia Fortuna*) (1763), was one of the means he used to inform the Russian public about his past through the character Feridat, an alter ego of Emin himself. In subsequent novels, including his “Letters of Ernest and Doravra”, he continued to combine novelesque features with autobiographical details to legitimise his own social position, as I will show later in detail. Some years later, in his notes on

⁴ Emin J. 1918: 173.

⁵ Beshenkovskii 1976: 193. Compare the history of Trifont in: Emin F. 1763c: 213-214.

⁶ Karamzin 1964: II, 171.

contemporary novels, Andrei Bolotov denounced Emin for using the novel as an instrument of self-promotion.⁷

The hardships of a professional author

Despite Emin's short literary career lasting from 1763, two years after his arrival in Russia, until his death in 1770, he managed to publish twelve titles. Among them are several translations and pseudo-translations of heroic oriental novels, an imitation of Fénelon's "Télémaque" entitled "The Adventures of Themistocles" (*Prikliuchenie Femistokla*) (1763), as well as original novels such as the previously mentioned "Inconstant Fortune". Emin also wrote lampoons of well-known people, which were distributed in manuscript leaflets. This was a common form of personal satire that Catherine II made punishable by law in the winter of 1764, when a satirical catalogue of book titles appeared mocking the shortcomings of members of the Russian court.⁸ Emin himself had to spend a few days in a St. Petersburg prison in early 1765, accused of writing a lampoon of his former employers, the Academies of Science and Art.⁹ The then still magnanimous Catherine pardoned him and gave him a humble job as 'junior secretary' (*sous-secrétaire*) in her personal chancellery.¹⁰ Emin was assigned the task of translating useful works, and he not only translated historical works of Voltaire and Solignac, but also compiled a history of Russia himself. In 1769 Catherine invited Russian authors to start satirical journals, under the condition that they contained their passion for invective, and Emin joined the effort. He was befriended by fellow journalist Nikolai Novikov, who after Emin's sudden death in April 1770, published an obituary poem praising the deceased as Russia's greatest historian.¹¹

Emin's literary work was not only a means of self-promotion, but one of the few ways for him to earn money. First a College Secretary (*kolezhkii sekretar'*), then a Titular Councillor (*tituliarnyi sovetnik*) - ranks that did not grant him hereditary nobility - Emin belonged to the landless service-class of ascending commoners or aspiring nobles who usually had no other source of

⁷ Bolotov 1933: 199.

⁸ PSZ 1830: XVII, 11. Longinov 1871.

⁹ Maikov 1889. IRL 1980: I, 596. Emin also wrote lampoons on Sumarokov (Gukovskii 1940: 85), and the Greek-born director of the Noble Cadet School, Lascaris (Scherer 1792: VI, 236).

¹⁰ Scherer 1792: VI, 236.

¹¹ Novikov 1951: 241-242.

income than their own labour.¹² However, his work as teacher of Italian at the St. Petersburg's Cadet School and the Academy of Arts, and then as translator in the empress's chancellery, did not bring in sufficient income to support his large family, as Emin laments in his petitions to the highest authority.¹³ He was constantly in debt, which he tried to pay off with extra earnings from writing and translating literature.¹⁴ In his first novel, "Inconstant Fortune", Emin declares that his primary source of inspiration is money, a remark that gave him the reputation of Russia's first 'professional' author.¹⁵

The opening of printing presses to private business must have given some young men the idea that they could make easy money by multiplying printed texts. However, they did not reckon with the state of the Russian book market, which was only just emerging in the 1760s. No one actually had a notion of the demands of the reading public or of its size. Furthermore, bookstores and other forms of intermediate trade were still at a rudimentary stage of development. Editions of 1200 copies were too large for the then small urban book markets of St. Petersburg and Moscow, and usually about seventy-five percent of the copies would remain unsold in the press's warehouse. Tens of thousands of volumes also accumulated in printing press warehouses because entire print-runs were retained as collateral against non-payment when it appeared the author was unable to finance his initial order.¹⁶ Like many Russian authors of the 1760s, Emin was unable to pay for any of his novels. He funded "Inconstant Fortune" with three translations, while his novel "The Adventures of Themistocles" remained in the warehouse of the Infantry Corpus for at least two years.¹⁷ He was likewise unable to pay for "Letters of Ernest and Doravra", printed at the Academy's press. In short, Emin's career as an independent, market-oriented novelist proved a financial disaster. He did not make the profit he had hoped for and was forced to find other means of putting his finances in order.

In the eighteenth century, only two major sources of income were available to authors: the market and patronage. The former was still too undeveloped to secure an income in Russia, so Emin was forced to opt for the latter in the form of imperial loans and translation jobs.¹⁸ However,

¹² Arzumanova 1961: 182. Longinov 1873a: 617.

¹³ Semennikov 1914: 138-141. Arzumanova 1961: 182. Beshenkovskii 1976.

¹⁴ Beshenkovskii 1976: 202.

¹⁵ Emin 1763a: I, 307. Grits/Trenin/Nikitin 1929: 178.

¹⁶ Marker 1985: 185; 121.

¹⁷ Shamrai 1940: 320.

¹⁸ Arzumanova 1961: 185.

Catherine II did not patronise just any kind of literature - only the translation of so-called 'useful' works were subsidised. Accepting a post at Catherine's chancellery required Emin to give up novelistic literature and to start writing and translating non-fiction: historical works, religious manuals and satirical journals that were aimed at rectifying the behaviour of their readers.¹⁹ It was this new career strategy that changed the nature of Emin's literary production. As I will show, the structure and subject matter of Emin's last novel, "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra", indicate that he had been contemplating this change even while writing it.

The novel's inner division

Emin's novel consists of four volumes. As we learn from advertisements in the "St. Petersburg Post" (*Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti*), the first two volumes appeared in December 1766. It was not until August 1767 that all four volumes became available.²⁰ As Emin himself observed in his foreword, the novel can be divided into two parts according to both publication date and contents. Roughly speaking, the first two volumes contain a love story, while the last two are dominated by essays on social subjects. I contend that the first and last parts of the novel were written at different moments, between which Emin changed his ideas about the value of the novel's subject, romantic love, and about the genre of the novel itself.

This change in concept is evidenced by the differences between the two versions of the foreword. The first version exists only in a copy belonging to the National Library in St. Petersburg. It contains a dedication to an anonymous patron who is addressed as a beloved. Furthermore, there is a short introduction in which Emin suggests that the novel's characters are modelled on real people, that Doravra may be living somewhere in Russia or abroad, and that the novel is inspired by his love for her (1766a: I, iii-vii). The second version has a dedication to the senator Adam Olsuf'ev, in which Emin excuses himself for presenting him a book about such a frivolous subject as love, although emphasising that the alluring, romantic story is in fact an antidote for love. In addition, there is a long introduction that expands upon the first version, although omitting the suggestion that the novel expresses the author's true feelings and that the characters are based

¹⁹ Budgen 1976b: 93.

²⁰ SV: 1766, No. 102; 1767, No. 62. Budgen suggests that the reason for this delay was the fact that the last two volumes had been retained at the Academy's printing press as collateral against Emin's debts (Budgen 1976a: 34; 40).

on real people. The love story that developed between the main characters in the first two parts is here discredited as exaggerated (1766b: I, i-vi).

The two versions of the foreword also differ as to how the genre of "The Letters" is defined. In the first version, the work is called a love story. Not only is love proclaimed as the most valuable thing in life, but the author himself is a lover who declares that his inspiration for literature is... love. In contrast, the second version of the introduction defines the work as a useful book that cures passion. It claims the critique of love as its main goal - not the praise of love. The author is no longer a lover, but a recluse - or *philosophe* (*filosof*) in the eighteenth-century sense of the word - inspired solely by a desire to serve society.

The first version of the foreword can be connected with the two-volume edition of December 1766. The second version, in which the differences between the first and last parts are explicitly mentioned, was undoubtedly written for the four-volume edition of August 1767. This not only implies that the first two volumes and the last two were written at different moments in time; it also suggests that the differences between the first and last parts of Emin's novel were not the result of a purposeful development of the plot, but of an unforeseen change in the author's concept of literature during the writing process. The novel is not a unified whole with one clear intention, but a complex structure containing the remnants of the author's earlier designs.

The history of Ernest and Doravra

After being unemployed for some time, the main character Ernest re-enters the Russian civil service. While working as a clerk at the house of his superior, he falls in love with the latter's daughter, Doravra. When she asks him to give a written account of his adventurous past, Ernest takes the opportunity to declare his love, threatening to leave town or kill himself if she does not relent and correspond to his feelings. It does not take long before the two are exchanging love letters on a regular basis. After her confession of love, Ernest demands more, but Doravra, advised by her friend Pulkheria, succeeds in tempering his passions. Ernest's friend, the noble man Ippolit, also helps in guiding his love affair according to the dictates of reason. He secures Ernest a post in Russia's diplomatic service, so his friend can climb up the Table of Ranks and become a suitable marriage candidate for Doravra.

Ernest writes letters from Paris and London, and Doravra enjoys his constant love, until Ernest's wife, thought dead, suddenly shows up. Doravra is infuriated because Ernest had never mentioned his marriage, and she breaks off their correspondence. Only after Ernest repeatedly threatens to commit suicide do they start to exchange letters again. Doravra acknowledges that the presence of Ernest's wife and even the performance of his marital duties are no real obstacle, as her love for Ernest is spiritual. However, when Doravra marries another man, Ernest feels compelled to stop writing to her.

In the third part of the novel, Ernest is invited to join Doravra and her husband at their estate, but he declines for reasons of virtue. He does, however, provide his friends with learned essays on social affairs and even on the education of Doravra's children.

In the fourth part, the action regains momentum when Doravra and her husband return to town. Ernest wants to shun her and seek solitude, but Doravra follows and tries to seduce him. She is once again infuriated when she finds a letter in his house that she believes to be from a rival. When her husband in turn finds Ernest's old love letters, he is so shocked that he falls ill and dies. Now Doravra is free and offers herself to Ernest physically, but he declines. He wants to live as a recluse, a man of letters, serving society with the compilation of useful works. Then he discovers that Doravra has started a relationship with an unworthy man whom she plans to marry. Ernest's last letter ends with a lament on the fickle nature of women.

The disapprobation of the romanesque

As we have seen, the first two parts of the novel are dominated by the theme of love. This love is not an urge for physical pleasure, but rather a spiritual force. By postponing physical fulfilment, love becomes a heroic achievement, the ultimate proof of moral strength. The constancy necessary for this act of postponement turns love into a virtue and thus an appropriate subject of literature. In the closing lines of his novel entitled "Constancy Rewarded" (*Nagrazhdennaia postoiannost'*), Emin warns that "love is a great sin, if it contains no property and constancy" (*liubov' bol'shim est' porokom, kogda v nei ne budet blagochiniia i postoiannosti*), bolstering his argument with a biblical reference to Jacob's fourteen-year long courtship of Rebecca.²¹ The titles of Emin's other novels, for example, "The Garden of Love, or The Invincible Constancy of Kamber and Arisena" (*Liubovnyi*

²¹ Emin F. 1764: 271.

vertograd, ili Nepreoborimoe postoianstvo Kambera i Ariseny) (1763), single out constancy as the main attribute of *romanesque* love.

When Ernest goes abroad to further his career, Doravra writes that she has read “many of those histories” (*dovol’no takikh istorii*) in which constant lovers first bear all the cruelties of fate before finally receiving their reward, which makes all their earlier sufferings pleasant (I, 146). Doravra summarises the plot of a heroic love novel and projects this on her own relationship. In his letters from Paris, Ernest confirms this heroic concept by fulminating against the vicious, inconstant love frenzy that only seeks instant physical gratification (II, 6-7), a love that is generally practised among the French, who, he says, “are not capable of true love” (*Liubit oni ne umeiut*) (II, 29). The famous French authors “who in their books glorify constant and virtuous love” (*kotorye v knigakh svoikh postoiannuiu i dobrodetel’nuiu proslavlialiaut liubov’*), would only laugh in disbelief if confronted with true lovers such as Doravra and Ernest (II, 29). In his letters from London, Ernest expresses admiration for the amorous spirit of the English and praises the heroic temper of English women, who have a natural inclination “towards extraordinary love” (*k chrezmernoi liubvi*) (II, 46). In the first two parts of the novel, Emin’s heroes believe in the ideals of seventeenth-century heroic love novels, the ideals of Gauthier La Calprenède and Mme de Scudery.

However, from the third part of the “Letters” on, this concept of love starts to alter noticeably. Doravra’s physical nature emerges suddenly when she makes sexual advances toward Ernest. She then turns out to be unfaithful, preferring another - unworthy - lover. Constancy itself is now called a false virtue, something unreal, existing only in novels. Ippolit suggests that Ernest’s feelings for Doravra emanated not from true love, but from his vain desire “to outdo *romanesque* heroes with his ardour” (*prevzoiiti goriachestiu svoiu vsekh romanicheskikh geroev*) (IV, 62). In the introduction to the four-volume edition of 1767, Emin discredits the idea of eternal faithfulness as “*romanesque* constancy” (*romanicheskoe postoianstvo*) (1766b: I, iv).

The French word *romanesque* is a keyword of eighteenth-century criticism of the novel. The Russian equivalent, *romanicheskii*, appears to have been coined by Aleksandr Sumarokov in his above-mentioned article of 1759.²² The term denoted those features that were thought characteristic of

²² The word *romanicheskii*, which I translate as “romance-like” or *romanesque*, should not be confounded with the later, nineteenth-century neologism *romanticheskii*, meaning ‘romantic’. On the history of the two terms in Russian: Budagov 1968; McLaughlin 1972; Davidson 1974; Neuhäuser 1974: 162-167; Nikoliukin 1984.

the novel, especially its fictional, i.e. false, image of the world, which rendered it incapable of providing examples of social behaviour worth emulating.²³ Fedor Emin's use of the term twice, first in his second version of the foreword and again in the last part of his novel, indicates he agrees with this critique. Emin not only discredits the early behaviour of his own heroes, but also the very genre of his novel.

This disillusion with love and disinclination for the love novel will reappear in Emin's later works. In his journal "Hell's Post" (*Adskaiia pochta*), the editor mocks those lovers who copy their love letters from the work of a certain "writer of love romances" (*liubovnago romanicheskago sochinitelia*). Further on he gives the example of the lover Liutsii, whose passionate rhetoric taken from love novels addresses his beloved with the phrase: "the union of graces, the ornament of nature" (*sobor priiatnosti, ukrashenie estestva*). Incidentally, Emin himself used these same epithets many times in the first two "romance-like" parts of his "Letters".²⁴

Another aspect of Emin's critique of the *romanesque*, also aimed at his own past work, focuses on the metaphors that imbue love with a religious quality. In his earlier novels, as well as in the first two parts of "Letters of Ernest and Doravra", Emin's heroes bestow the objects of their love with divine attributes or identify them with a deity. Ernest calls Doravra "divine" (*bozhestvennaia*) (II, 141), "a celestial spirit that took a human form for my joys and pains" (*dukh nebesnyi dlia radosti i goresti moikh ochenovechennyi*) (II, 23). Paraphrasing the First Commandment, Ernest declares that "one cannot place other idols in that temple where only Doravra is worshipped" (*Ne mozno stavit' idolov v tom khrame, gde edina obozhaetsia Doravra*) (II, 7). In the last part of the novel, Ippolit criticises Ernest for such *romanesque* sacrilege, saying that he has made love his god and forgotten his real Master, to Whom only he should devote his life (IV, 59). This remark concurs with a self-critical statement by Emin in his religious work "The Path to Salvation" (*Put' k spaseniiu*). Contemplating the word of Saint Paul in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (v. IV, 4): "The god of this world has blinded

²³ Krauss 1985.

²⁴ Emin F. 1769: 120; 182. Cf. Emin F. 1766: *vsekh priiatnosti sobor* (I, 11); *vsekh dobrodetelei i priiatnosti sobor* (I, 77); *sobor priiatneishikh prelestei* (I, 104); *venets i ukrashenie prirody* (II: 141); *ukrashenie i venets vsego estetstva* (II: 157). In his "Mocker" (*Peremeshnik*) of 1766, Mikhail Chulkov ridicules the rhetoric of passionate lovers and reproduces a declaration of love compiled from novels and tragedies, starting with the expression "union of graces" (*sobranie priiatstv*) (Chulkov 1770: I, 26). This metaphor in its specific, non-Slavonic form is borrowed from Sumarokov's tragedy "Sinav and Truvor" (Act 2, sc. IV).

them”, Emin denounces all those who deify earthly love and see in their beloved the likeness of God. Doubtlessly referring to his own past, he continues: “There are many who write voluminous love novels to show the world and their beloved the fury of their passion. They dedicate themselves to this work with the utmost industry and hardship for several years, but to take a moment to pray to God, to say “Our Father”, well, that is too difficult” (*Mnogie neskol'ko tomov sochiniaut liubovnykh romanov, chtob iz "iasnit' svetu i liubimoi osobe sil'nyia svoi strasti: neskol'ko let v onykh sochineniakh s velikoiu prilezhnostiu i trudnostiu uprazhniaiutsia, a Bogu prochest' odnu molitvu, progovorit'; Otche nashe, i proch: tiazhelo*).²⁵

In short: Emin regrets the subject of his novels and the high value he had placed on earthly love. In 1766, in the middle of writing “The Letters of Ernest and Doravra”, he turns his back on the *romanesque*, the genre of the novel, and converts to so-called ‘useful’ literature: religious works, histories and satirical journals.²⁶

The social role of the author

From the third volume of “Letters” onward, Emin no longer puts his work in the service of love but in the service of society. His hero Ernest now acknowledges that the useless, egoistic drive of love is inferior to social service, declaring that: “one should observe that love does not distract us from the duties we owe to society” (*nadobno nabliudat', chtob liubov' (...) nas ne otvratila ot nashikh dolzhnosti, kotorymi my obshchestvu obiazany*) (III, 125). Love letters are superseded by serious discussions on questions of social order and state service. Throughout the entire third part of the novel, the two friends Ernest and Ippolit contemplate man’s true task in life. They debate on whether man is born for himself or for society, whether he should strive for wealth and fame or devote his efforts disinterestedly to the benefit of mankind. They conclude that the abstention of service made possible by the Manifesto on the Liberty of the Nobility in 1762 is actually ignoble, for nobility is defined through service. The refusal to serve is as dishonourable as suicide, the threat of which Ernest the lover had used so many times to blackmail Doravra. Both acts are egoistic as they deny the idea that a person’s life belongs to others, to society. According to the two friends, life has no value except as service, and suicide is only permitted those whose failures have cost the state dearly. His characters say: “In political terms, we

²⁵ Emin F. 1780: 40.

²⁶ Budgen 1976b: 85-86. Ferrazzi 1992: 526.

are not free, but subordinate to our lord in our well-being and life" (*my, buduchi poddannye Gosudariu v zdravii i v zhizni nashei, i po politike razsuzhdaia, ne vol'ny*) (III, 153). In short: Emin's characters repeat the official doctrine of Catherine's cameralism.²⁷

Service can wear different guises: that of courtier, landowner, merchant or recluse. The latter is a *philosophe*, a man who occupies no responsible post, but who teaches social virtues and serves as a free-lance counsellor of state, much like Ernest (III, 141-142). When Ippolit reproaches his friend for this life of seclusion and his rejection of an active post in the Russian civil service, Ernest replies: "It is my duty to translate useful books for society" (*dolzhnost' moia sostoit v tom, chtob perevodit' obshchestvu poleznyia knigi*) (III, 141-142; cf. IV, 189).

Emin's hero Ernest is convinced that an author should not produce "candy" (*bonbon*), but healthy, nutritious food; not literature for mere entertainment, like dramas, novels or "trifles" (*bezdelki*), but useful, didactic literature (III, 136-137). The poet who sings of love is of less importance than a man of science.²⁸ Ernest-Emin feels the need to redefine his own role as an author, adapting his work and his concept of authorship to the utilitarian ideology of a service-minded society.

The art of compilation

Fedor Emin did not know the ideal of the starving artist who would rather die than compromise his art. He conformed to the demands of those who paid him and secured his existence. He was just as unfamiliar with the ideal of originality. In Emin's time, originality was not yet a generally accepted aesthetic norm; copyright did not exist and authors borrowed freely from each other. Therefore, many eighteenth-century Russian prose works had the character of compilations. Thus, Emin did not waste time inventing stories himself, but adapted situations he found while browsing through foreign literature. Like Ivan Krylov, who some years later wrote his journal "Devils' Post" (*Pochta dukhov*) drawing from works by the Marquis d'Argens, Emin based his journal "Hell's Post" on a series of pamphlets by the French author Eustache Le Noble, whose original dialogue he turned into an exchange of letters.²⁹ His "Letters of Ernest and Doravra" are likewise a compilation.

²⁷ Dukes 1977: 18.

²⁸ Later Emin criticises Sumarokov, who like Racine, made such a useless thing as love the main subject of his tragedies (Emin F. 1769: 271).

²⁹ Razumovskaya 1978. Rak 1986: 169-197.

The main source for Emin's "Letters" was Rousseau's epistolary novel, "The New Heloise". The second most important source was an epistolary miscellany by the seventeenth-century author René Le Pays, "Friendships, Loves, and Flirts" (*Amitiez, amours et amourettes*) (1664).³⁰ In addition, there are fragments from Voltaire's "Philosophical Letters" (*Lettres philosophiques*), as well as motives and phrases that Emin used in earlier novels.³¹ For example, the interior of Miramond's cave in "Inconstant Fortune" is identical to that of Ernest's hermit's cell.³² The name of the heroine Doravra is coined after a figure Doraura, appearing in the Italian novel of Gabrielle Martiano, which Emin translated in 1763 as "Unfortunate Floridor" (*Neshchastnyi Floridor*).³³

One of the reasons why Emin may have chosen the genre of the epistolary novel is that its characteristic form facilitates compilation. A series of short segments divided by the natural boundaries of each letter can easily be put into another sequence. Furthermore, the irregular structure of a letter is open to digressions of every kind and can contain material on any subject in arbitrary succession. Despite drawing from works written by others, Emin's technique was not lacking in creativity. By arranging fragments borrowed from several different sources, he created a new artistic entity with new meaning. As I will show, the manner in which original sources were adapted and combined with other material fundamentally changed the aspect, function and meaning of the borrowed fragments. Therefore, although Emin's work is a compilation, it can still be considered original in this respect.

Pilfering Rousseau

As mentioned above, the main source for Emin's compilation was Rousseau's "The New Heloise". Emin adopted the epistolary genre, the constellation of characters and many episodes from Rousseau. These constitute the overall fabric of the novel into which material from other sources is woven.³⁴ Directly translated or paraphrased fragments are actually

³⁰ About Le Pays, see: Remy 1925. Letts 1992.

³¹ Budgen 1976b: 75/90. Rak 1999: 151-153.

³² Emin 1763a: III, 76. Emin 1766: IV, 126.

³³ Ferrazzi 1992: 514; 505.

³⁴ Ferazzi 1992. The most thorough investigation of similarities between the novels of Rousseau and Emin was carried out by David Budgen, who in his unpublished doctoral thesis presents a detailed list consisting of 123 directly translated or paraphrased fragments (Budgen 1976a: 295-308).

quite short: not more than two or three consecutive phrases joined by Emin's own text. The borrowed material consists largely of figures of speech. Emin browsed through Rousseau's novel in search of hyperboles, rhetorical questions, exclamations, enumerations, antitheses, ellipses, in short, whatever the historian of the Russian novel Vasilii Sipovskii called "feverish gush" (*bavardage de la fièvre*).³⁵ Rousseau's novel served Emin as a lexicon of the language of passionate love.

In spite of the general similarities between the two novels, in particular the content and succession of the situations they narrate, they vary at significant moments and in many different ways.

First, the action in Emin's novel is not as complex. There are fewer minor conflicts and misunderstandings involved in the evolution of the love affair, and the characters are less mobile. Whereas Saint-Preux departs several times, Ernest does only once.

Second, the way situations are presented is often different. A situation that originally had unfolded over the course of several letters is here narrated in a single letter, with Rousseau's exchange of letters becoming a dialogue. For example, the conflict between Julie and Saint-Preux regarding his refusal to accept her financial support takes place in an exchange of letters.³⁶ A similar conflict over Ernest's refusing to take money from Doravra and his friends, composed of sentences taken from Rousseau, is presented as a dialogue between Ernest and Ippolit (I, 179-180).

At times a near-literal translation of a statement can perform a completely different function when uttered by one of Emin's characters. The statement can be transferred from main characters to secondary characters, from males to females, and vice-versa. Secondary character Pul'kheriia lectures Ernest (II, 215-230) with phrases borrowed from Julie.³⁷

Furthermore, similar situations can have a different place and function in the sequence of the action. Halfway into Rousseau's novel, Milord Bomston rebukes Saint-Preux for his weakness and tries to talk his friend out of committing suicide.³⁸ At the end of Emin's novel, Ippolit lectures Ernest with arguments freely translated from Bomston's letter, however, here they are not directed against suicide, but at Ernest's slavish submission to fate, nature and his passion, which makes him incapable of serving society (IV, 31-62). The turning point of the action in Rousseau's novel is Julie's inner

³⁵ Budgen 1976a: 105-106. Sipovskii 1910: 438.

³⁶ Rousseau 1964: II, 65-69 (Part 1, letters XV-XVIII).

³⁷ Rousseau 1964: II, 340-365 (Part 3, letter XVIII).

³⁸ Rousseau 1964: II, 386-393 (Part 3, letter XXII).

transformation during her wedding ceremony: she renounces her love for Saint-Preux and commits herself to a new social role as wife.³⁹ Similarly, Doravra's marriage constitutes the turning point in Emin's novel, but this does not bring about the spiritual renewal of any of the characters. Julie's description of her new religious feelings is transferred to Ernest at the end of the novel (IV, 75-94). However, the transformation now marks the end of the conflict: it is Ernest's final denouncement of love.

The attributes of the characters also differ slightly, but significantly. Unlike Rousseau's lovers, Doravra and Ernest belong to the same class, which diminishes the social conflict. Moreover, unlike the rigid and hot-tempered aristocrat in Rousseau's novel, the father figure in Emin's novel is a wise, understanding, noble-minded person. Rousseau's critique of patriarchal power is reversed into a portrayal of parental wisdom.

It appears that Emin chose to deviate from his main source for reasons of propriety. He wanted to avoid the controversy that surely would have arisen if he had given his protagonists the highly problematic virtue of Rousseau's lovers. For example: Saint-Preux and Julie have frequent sexual intercourse and Julie even becomes pregnant; Ernest and Doravra never cross the border between 'virtue' and 'vice' and never have sexual contact with each other. Saint-Preux is unfaithful to Julie with a prostitute; Ernest deceives Doravra, but with his own wife, which is an infidelity sanctioned by law (II, 89). Saint-Preux responds to a call from Wolmar to join him and his wife in what very much appears to be a *ménage à trois*; Ernest does not respond to a similar call, thus avoiding a situation that would have been highly problematic in terms of public morals.⁴⁰ Emin will not even give the impression that his characters compromise social norms.

Rejecting Rousseau

Although the text of "The Letters" is quite indebted to "The New Heloise", its ideological premises are not: even literal quotes from Rousseau are used to express a very different ideological point of view. Moreover, the views that Ernest and Ippolit ventilate in the third part of the novel can even be considered a direct critique of Rousseau's social philosophy. The following examples will illustrate this.

In the first chapter of his "Social Contract" (*Contrat social*) (1762), Rousseau rejects all forms of slavery as injustice, because they are

³⁹ Rousseau 1964: II, 340-365 (Part 3, letter XVIII).

⁴⁰ Cf. Zielinski-Sorgente 1978: 27-28; 44-45.

incompatible with the natural rights of individual man. He even feels that a slave is obliged to free himself.⁴¹ In contrast, Emin's protagonist Ernest tells an anecdote from Roman history about the lawyer Aburnius Valens, who preached that "natural right allows everyone to flee from bondage" (*iz nevoli bezhat' pravo estestva kazhdomu dozvoliaet*). Yet, this advocate of freedom was rightfully punished for views that, according to Ernest, are dangerous and threaten the social order (III, 31).

The eighteenth-century political debate on individual freedom was mirrored by the philosophical discussion regarding the possibility of a free will. Ernest declares that man can not "be sovereign" (*byt' samovlastnym*), in other words, cannot have a free will, because he is obliged to follow God's commandments. Transferring this logic from the philosophical to the political, he concludes that the individual cannot have political freedom, for he must obey his King (III, 89-91). According to Ernest and Ippolit, no one should have the right to determine his own life because all lives belong to the community. Service to this community is the very meaning of life (III, 63). Therefore, no individual or social group should be exempt from service; everyone, peasants as well as noblemen, have the duty to serve. This is a clear reaction to the Manifesto on the Liberty of the Nobility, issued in 1762. As nobles were no longer obliged to serve, Catherine's government had trouble in finding enough personnel to fill the less prestigious posts within the Russian civil service, a fact illustrated by a case that was discussed in the Senate in March 1767. This case concerned two young Russian noblemen who had refused to take up a post in the provincial branch of the government, claiming immunity from conscription.⁴² Fedor Emin's characters regard nobles like these with hostility. As an army officer, Ippolit considers noblemen who retire to their estates and refuse to actively serve the state as "perfidious perjurers" (*verolomnye kliatvoprestupniki*) (III, 78; cf. IV, 218). As we have seen, retirement is considered a refusal of service, and thus a crime to King and Fatherland (III, 153).

In the first chapter of his "Social Contract", Rousseau also declares that man should not obey oppression.⁴³ Emin's Ernest holds the view that obeisance to a higher power, regardless of its nature, is in itself a virtue, for it guarantees the order and happiness of society (III, 27-28).

⁴¹ Rousseau 1964: III, 351-358.

⁴² Jones 1973: 185-186.

⁴³ Rousseau 1964: III, 354-355.

Rousseau claims that ‘democracy’, i.e., the republic, was the most ideal form of government.⁴⁴ However, Emin’s Ippolit believes that “collective government” (*obshchestvennoe pravlenie*) leads to internal division and conflict; a state needs one “head” (*glava*) (III, 188-189). Emin’s character defends autocracy, using the same arguments as Catherine in her “Instruction” (*Nakaz*) of 1767.

Although Rousseau admits that some hierarchy in society is inevitable, he still concludes that everyone has equal rights. One is therefore not eternally bound to his estate, but can always change in social rank.⁴⁵ For Emin’s Ernest, the existing social hierarchy is not only inevitable, but also beneficial to society. Furthermore, a precondition for social harmony is that people stay in the estate of their birth: peasants should remain peasants and not become townsmen (III, 39). Some fragments that Emin translated from “The New Heloise” about the education of children from different social groups were now used to support existing divisions within society.⁴⁶ Finally, Emin’s lovers, unlike Rousseau’s, will not cross social boundaries, for they both belong to the same estate.

Rousseau was generally known in Russia for his anti-enlightenment views and his exaltation of primitive man, put forward in his “Discourse on Science and Arts” (*Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts*) (1750) and the “Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality” (*Discours sur l’Origine et les Fondements de l’Inégalité*) (1754).⁴⁷ Ernest attacks Rousseau’s praise of primitive man: “many philosophers have argued that man becomes unhappy by enlightenment; (...) they argue that society could be happy without any of the achievements brought about by enlightenment” (*mnogie filosofy utverzhiali, chto chelovek prosveshcheniem byvaet neshchastliv; (...) oni zhe utverzhdaiut, chto obshchestvo moglo by byt’ shchastliv bezo vsiakikh izobretenii ot prosveshcheniiia proizshedshikh*) (III, 87-88). Ernest is against the rejection of science and the Enlightenment’s achievements; science is useful and makes man happy (III, 132-135). Ernest also fulminates against the idealisation of primitive society and its socialist elements, such as collective ownership or any other form of equality (III, 92-95). Ernest then briefly reviews the historical origins of social inequality and justifies the existing social order of landowners and serfs (III, 90-92; cf. III, 186-187).

⁴⁴ Rousseau 1964: III, 404-406.

⁴⁵ Rousseau 1964: III, 379.

⁴⁶ Rousseau 1964: II, 561-585 (Part 5, letter III). Cf. Gukovskii 1936: 448-449. Ferrazzi 1992: 520-521.

⁴⁷ Lotman 1967: 226.

Thus, Fedor Emin borrowed material from Rousseau's "New Heloise" to write a novel in which the situations, overall plot development, and direct statements by the characters expressly contradict the social ideals upheld by Rousseau's political philosophy.⁴⁸ Quotes expressing democratic ideals were manipulated in such a way as to turn them into apologies for a diametrically opposed social system.

Emin and the third estate

Both Rousseau and Emin practised the novel or, in other words, the *genre roturier*, closely linked with a typically bourgeois view of the world.⁴⁹ Emin's association with the bourgeoisie - or third estate - is based on the statements he makes about the merchant class in the last two parts of his novel.

Fedor Emin used his novel to advance the interests of the third estate before the authorities. In one of his letters, Ernest begs Ippolit to share his views with an acquaintance who is a member of the Free Economic Society (*Vol'noe Ekonomicheskoe Obshchestvo*), founded in 1765, which played an important role as the centre of political discussions in the years before the Legislative Commission was convoked in 1767 (IV, 193; cf. IV, 218). The person to whom Ernest addresses himself through Ippolit can be identified as Adam Vasil'evich Olsuf'ev (1721-1784), confidant of the empress, senator and one of the prominent founding members of the Society. In the second version of his foreword, presumably written in August 1767, Emin dedicated his novel to Olsuf'ev.

Emin particularly promoted the interests of smaller merchants, much in the same terms as their own representatives would in the Legislative Commission two years later. This does not imply that Emin included himself in the estate of merchants. Although a commoner by origin, as a civil servant he was part of the Table of Ranks and sought hereditary nobility. He was acting rather as a kind of lobbyist for his business contacts, such as the Petersburg merchant Sergei Kopnin, to whom Emin tried to sell the complete edition of his work in 1767 in order to solve his urgent financial problems.⁵⁰

Emin integrates the various political statements uttered in his novel by moulding them into an anecdotal episode. One night Ernest meets some poor merchants just released from prison, where they had been held for some

⁴⁸ Gukovskii 1936: 450-451.

⁴⁹ May 1963: 16. Gukovskii 1936.

⁵⁰ Beshenkovskii 1976: 203.

minor debts. He offers them shelter and the merchants start to air their numerous grievances.

First, the merchants complain that they are not treated with due respect and stress the significance of the merchant community for the whole of society. Quoting Voltaire's "Philosophical Letters" (*Lettres philosophiques*), they say: "the merchants are the soul of the state" (*kupechestvo est' dusha gosudarstva*) (IV, 193).⁵¹ This self-aware statement from Emin's merchants anticipates how the real merchant representatives in the Legislative Commission would extol their own estate while expressing their desire to enjoy the same degree of respect as merchants in the Baltic States and Western Europe.⁵²

In Emin's novel the merchants explain to Ernest that they are poor and forced "to live the life of ascetics" (*filosofstvovat'*) (IV, 191) because their privileges are being violated (*dannye kupechestvu privilegii narushaemy byvaiut*) (IV, 194). What they meant was that the monopoly on trade given to the merchants by the General Law of 1649 was being violated by other groups within Russian society, such as non-local merchants and peasants who traded under the name of rich merchants from the first guild (IV, 202).⁵³ Rich merchants leased their license to non-merchants, because as homeowners they profited from an increase in the urban population. The rich merchants dominated the guild-house (*gil'dinskii dom*) and could quash lawsuits brought by their poorer colleagues against this illegal trade (IV, 206). In April 1767 they even managed to pass a law that lifted all restrictions on trade and crafts in the towns, very much to the disadvantage of the poorer merchants, as demonstrated by their representatives' complaints to the Commission.⁵⁴ The influx of peasant craftsmen into town, which increased competition in small trade, was greatly to their disadvantage (IV, 211). Ernest paints a realistic picture of the deterioration of town life by migration from the countryside, leading to unemployment, homelessness, drunkenness and crime. According to Ernest, peasant migration should be prevented by enforcing serfdom. The peasants should be bound to the land and condition they were, as was thought, rightfully born to, in order to protect the monopoly on craft and trade of the urban estate and safeguard society as a whole from ruin (IV, 210-215). Ernest denounces the harsh, oppressive treatment of serfs only because this was considered a major cause

⁵¹ Budgen 1976b: 75/90. Cf. Gukovskii 1936: 439.

⁵² Knabe 1975: 127-129.

⁵³ Knabe 1975: 196.

⁵⁴ PSZ: XVIII, 85. Knabe 1975: 228.

of peasant migration to the towns (III, 9-10). Ernest believes slavery (serfdom) is still acceptable and even necessary in order to preserve the economic and social position of the urban estate (III, 31). Thus, unlike the western-European bourgeoisie, the Russian merchant community felt that the only way to safeguard its economic position was by restoring a rigid system of estates with defined economic roles for every social group.⁵⁵

Both Rousseau and Emin represented the viewpoints of the so-called 'third estate', but belonged to different societies and thus naturally did not share the same interests or ideology. Consequently, although using the same literary genre, the two authors ventilated political ideals diametrically opposed to each other. While Rousseau's novel can be called subversive in genre and ideas, an expression of a social movement that eventually led to the French Revolution, Emin's novel must be considered conformist, both in political and, as I will show, literary terms.

Epistolary techniques

A comparison of Emin's novel with its immediate model, "The New Heloise", reveals differences in ideological statements, the placing of particular situations and the development and outcome of the action. Yet most importantly, is the different way they used the range of features inherent in the epistolary novel. For example, Rousseau did not make use of multiple perspectives, i.e., when the same event is narrated by two or more letter-writers from their own points of view. Emin, elaborating on devices he had used in earlier novels, such as "Inconstant Fortune", did employ the epistolary novel's potential for multiple perspectives to create a misunderstanding between Doravra and Ernest.⁵⁶ Doravra takes a letter that Ernest received from a young lady to be a declaration of love (IV, letter 3), while from Ernest's point of view it appears otherwise (IV, letter 4). Six more letters must be exchanged before Doravra finds out the true nature of this letter (IV, letter 11). In Rousseau's "New Heloise" one finds a comparable episode in which Saint-Preux believes that his friend Bomston is writing a love letter to Julie, but the misunderstanding between the two men is narrated in a single letter and not dramatically extended over several.⁵⁷ Rousseau refused to exploit the dramatic potential of the letter-exchange, presumably not wanting to destroy the "collective awareness" of his

⁵⁵ Madariaga 1981: 93.

⁵⁶ Budgen 1976a: 109-124.

⁵⁷ Rousseau 1964: II, 217-221 (Part 2, letter X).

characters. In contrast, Emin took advantage of this genre's capacity to produce contradictory perspectives in order to prolong the conflict and further the intrigue.

As we have seen, Rousseau used the device of the found manuscript, which played an important role in the French tradition of the epistolary novel, of which the mystifying "Letters of a Portuguese Nun" is its most famous example.⁵⁸ Rousseau suggested in the subtitle of "The New Heloise" that he only "collected and published" (*recueillies et publiées*) the letters of others, and that his own involvement was limited to arranging and annotating them. Being just the editor of these letters, he could not be held responsible for their style and language, or for the opinions expressed in them. Emin did not use this authentication device. The subtitle of his novel clearly states that the letters of Ernest and Doravra are "a creation of Fedor Emin" (*sochineniia Fedora Emina*). However, Emin was conscious of the suggestion of authenticity proper to the genre. In the first version of his foreword, he writes that some readers might think that Doravra is a real person, while others would say that she is only the product of his imagination. He then continues that anyone who thinks he can solve this problem will lose his way in the concoction of fact and fiction, going astray like the hunter in the fable of the Italian Renaissance author Boccalini that he quotes. The ambivalent status of the text is cleared up somewhat in Emin's dedication to an anonymous lady: the letters, which are indeed fictional, are inspired by Emin's genuine love for her (1766a: iii-vii). Emin suggests that his heroes, with their exotic non-Russian names, are the *romanesque* doubles of real persons, like the characters in the novels of Mme de Scudery, who were actually members of her entourage in heroic mythological disguises. Thus, Doravra is the double of Emin's beloved lady, while Ernest has all the features of the author himself, a foreigner with an obscure past, a pamphleteer and translator. Emin's identification with his main character is confirmed when Ernest reappears beyond the confines of the novel as the author's mouthpiece in the journal "Hell's Post".⁵⁹

Thus, Rousseau and Emin used different devices of authentication: the first employed the found manuscript, claiming the authenticity of the text as a document; the second turned to the *roman à clef*, using autobiographical allusions. The different authentication devices influenced the formal structure of both novels. Rousseau adds editorial footnotes to the letters of his characters, creating a complex interchange between his and their

⁵⁸ Herman 1989: 152.

⁵⁹ Emin F. 1769: 289.

viewpoints. Emin's novel lacks such editorial touches, and his claim of personal involvement in the letters suggests agreement between his authorial point of view and that of his main character.

Alter ego and authorial self-critique

Although there are many indications that the author identified with his protagonist, this does not mean that the content of Ernest's letters directly reflects Emin's stance. Emin's *alter ego* Ernest is constantly criticised by the other characters in the novel for his wavering opinions, his desperation, and sometimes the immorality of his thoughts. Ernest expresses evil desires that cannot be accounted for: he thinks of killing his child, born from his 'unfaithfulness' with his own wife (II, 124); he asks his wife to go away and change her name so he can declare her dead and marry Doravra, thereby committing bigamy (II, 155). When his wife does not comply but tells Doravra's father of her husband's passion, an infuriated Ernest wants to kill the messenger who informs him of his wife's betrayal (II, 155). Further to his discredit is the fact that when Ernest was challenged to a duel as a young man, he did not fight himself, but allowed his friend the army officer Ippolit to be his substitute (I, 126). The other characters call him weak, and Ernest accepts this criticism. In fact, he constantly regrets his faults and weaknesses, the immoral statements he has just made or those in earlier letters, admitting that these are the expressions of a desperate lover and not to be taken seriously. For example, he disavows an earlier letter to Pul'kheriia, saying that he wrote it "unconsciously" (*v bezpamiatstve*), "submitting himself to the inspirations of despair" (*otchaianiiia povinuias' vdokhnoveniiam*) (I, 177). Later, he dismisses the content of a letter, declaring: "Yesterday you received a letter that proves the confusion of my mind" (*Vchera ty ot menia poluchil pis'mo, pomeshatel'stvo moego razuma iz"iasniaiushchee*) (IV, 30). In a retrospective letter to Doravra, looking back on their love affair and correspondence, Ernest says that all his "scribbling" (*pisaniiia*) was no more than "passions and errors" (*pristrastiia i zabluzhdenii*) (IV, 94).

Therefore, the content of his letters are not supposed to be taken at face value. Ernest, with whom Emin seems to identify, has an inclination to vice thanks to his passionate nature. Thus, although Ernest serves as his alter ego, Emin claims no authorial objectivity for his protagonist's statements.⁶⁰ Toward the end, Ernest increasingly displays a Christian-style remorse for

⁶⁰ Pavlovich 1974: 23.

his passionate ways, as Fedor Emin himself would express in his religious work “The Path to Salvation”.

The heritage of the European romance tradition

Rousseau’s adoption of the found manuscript device is closely connected with his ambition to write a work that is lacking the typical features of a novel. When Saint-Preux relates the story of his love affair with Julie, Lord Bomston remarks that it does not resemble a novel in the least.⁶¹ Rousseau tries to distance himself from a discredited tradition of romance. In contrast, Emin acknowledges that his work is indeed a novel. As we have seen, Ernest and Doravra compare themselves with *romanesque* lovers, perceiving their relationship in the terms of seventeenth-century romances.

While Emin’s earlier novels, like “Inconstant Fortune”, follow the paradigm of the French heroic novels of La Calprenède and Mme de Scudery, his “Letters of Ernest and Doravra” has more typological affinities with the so-called ‘sentimental novella’, a popular genre of Renaissance prose literature, exemplified by one of the first epistolary novels, “The Prison of Love” (*Cárcel de amor*) by the Spanish author Diego de San Pedro. The sentimental novella was relatively short, with a simple, single storyline focusing on a limited set of characters, usually two pairs of lovers. These lovers belonged to different ranks of the nobility, or one of them perhaps to the bourgeoisie. Although they consider love an invincible force, they still must confront the demands of honour or reason (parental disapproval or class differences), which inevitably thwart their love. Their failure motivates sentiment, which keeps the focus on psychological phenomena rather than on action, and the lovers express their feelings in elegant rhetoric. Often it is the woman who proves inconstant, while her faithful lover withdraws to a “frightful place” (*locus terribilis*) to lament his unhappy lot until death delivers him, a classical topos since the sixteenth-century Amadis novels. Another important characteristic of the sentimental novella is the tendency toward the abstract, as seen in the absence of realistic details such as specific historical periods or geographical locations as background for the action. Although the action takes place in contemporary society, this is only vaguely sketched. Another characteristic is the use of exotic names instead of common proper and family names.⁶² All these tendencies are evident in Emin’s “Letters”.

⁶¹ Rousseau 1964: II, 165 (Part 1, letter LX).

⁶² Augspurger 1988: 9-26.

The most important feature that Emin's "Letters" inherited from the European romance tradition is the mechanism that connects separate situations, which again diverges significantly from "The New Heloise".

The action in Rousseau's novel is triggered by the clash between the heroes' love and the invincible social obstacles that oppose them, represented by Julie's father baron D'Etange and her husband Wolmar. These factors remain present until Julie's death at the end of the novel. In contrast, the action in Emin's "Letters of Ernest and Doravra" is not determined by constant factors. The lovers eventually find out that Doravra's father had no objections to their marriage, therefore making him no real obstacle. The fact that the heroes are already married to other persons than whom they love likewise turns out to be of little consequence: Doravra's husband's death and the consent to divorce from Ernest's wife set both lovers free again. Similarly, the force propelling the action from within the characters: love, is no more abiding than the others - in the end, it just evaporates. Thus, mutability creates the actual conflict in Emin's novel, in other words, man's struggle with fate.

The real subject of Emin's novels, as many of their titles suggest, is the hero learning how "to bear his fate" (*postoianstvovat'*) and cope with continuously changing circumstances (II, 196). Fate is thus dialectically bound to the notion of constancy. In the foreword to "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra", Emin mentions "fate" as the most important determining factor in the novel's plot, (1766b: I, iii). When the lovers contemplate the development of their affair, they refer to "fate" (*sud'ba, sud'bina, rok*) or "chance" and "fatality" (*sluchai*). For Emin's heroes, chance and the world's mutable nature constitute the essence of life.⁶³

However, when Emin or his heroes use the term 'fate', they do not mean 'fatum', 'providence', 'predestination' or any other supernatural force. They refer instead to the sum of social factors characteristic of an absolutist society that can haphazardly determine one's fortune. When in "Constancy Rewarded" judge Kalifas says that nowadays a man can be at the height of power one moment and in the deepest abyss the next, he is actually describing the changeable social status of men under an autocratic government.⁶⁴ Toward the end of "Inconstant Fortune", Emin uses Feridat's arrival in his new home country, where he initially receives protection from goddesses and geniuses but later must endure the whims of fate, as an

⁶³ Izida in "Constancy rewarded" laments that "the tale of life" (*basn' zhizhni*) is a continuous chain of unexpected and astonishing adventures (Emin F. 1764: 196).

⁶⁴ Emin F. 1764: 207.

allegory of his own arrival in Russia. Emin, too, had first enjoyed the favours bestowed on him by the empresses Elizabeth I and Catherine II, and their successive favourites Vorontsov, Shuvalov, and Orlov brothers, and then suffered the loss of their protection.⁶⁵ Thus one could say that, in Emin's novels, fate is the allegory for the characteristic mechanisms of eighteenth-century Russian society.

The allegorisation of social mechanisms as 'fickle fortune' reflects a baroque attitude toward the world. The term 'fate' refers to a presumably unchangeable world-order in which a passive, non-critical, and accepting attitude is thought the most appropriate. Emin paraphrases a discussion from Rousseau's "New Heloise" about the use of the term 'fate', which, according to Bomston, is incompatible with Enlightenment values such as free will, accountability and critical thought (IV, 31ff; 59).⁶⁶ However, this awareness of the term's complexity is not reflected in the peripatetic structure of Emin's novel, which conveys a baroque vision of the world dominated by fate.

Plot, peripety, and psychology

In "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra" fate serves not only as an allegory for social mechanisms, but is also the explanation for the actions of everyone except the protagonist, Ernest. Fate is the name given to the actions of Pul'kheriia and Ernest's wife. The end of Doravra's love for Ernest is not depicted as a gradual psychological development, but is a sudden, unexpected and unmotivated turn of fate. On the whole it is these fatalities that direct the novel's plot, and not the acts of the hero: Ernest is a victim and therefore the object of the action, not its subject.

In Rousseau's "New Heloise", the action depends on decisions made by the heroes themselves, motivated by their personal desires. In addition, the social obstacles to their love are apparent to them and not misrepresented allegorically as fate. On the other hand, the action in Emin's novel is not driven by the main character's own motives, but is constantly held in motion by external forces. Fate, as the collective term for these external forces, prevents the action from becoming truly psychological, i.e., motivated from within.⁶⁷

This allows the main events in Emin's novel to develop outside the view of the main character and take place suddenly. The action in Emin's novel is

⁶⁵ Emin F. 1763a: III, 351-356.

⁶⁶ Rousseau 1964: II, 388 (Part 3, letter XXII). Cf. Sipovskii 1910: 452-453.

⁶⁷ Avtukhovich 1995: 162. Sipovskii 1909: 266. Cf. Watt 1983: 317.

full of such unexpected events. The equally peripetrical structure of Emin's novel contrasts with that of Rousseau's, in which, in the words of Rousseau's interlocutor N. in the dialogue of the so-called "Second Preface" (*Seconde Préface*), there is, "Nothing unexpected, no theatrical surprises. Everything is anticipated beforehand and comes as it was expected" (*rien d'inopinié, point de coup de Théâtre. Tout est prévu long-temps d'avance; tout arrive comme il est prévu*).⁶⁸ In Emin's novel, the events are not anticipated, and the action is full of *coups de théâtre*.

To heighten the effect of these peripetrical switches, Emin exploits the intermittent structure of series of letters as well as the temporal structure of a letter itself. In an epistolary novel each letter is supposedly written after a certain interval of time in which an event has taken place. This brings about a rupture in the narration of events. Letters also usually begin with emotions resulting from an event, only afterwards followed by an account of what actually happened. Thus, the succession of events as narrated in a letter is inverted: first the result, then the cause. The fact that letters often start with strong, unexpected emotions provoked by an event not yet narrated produces a sort of shock-effect.

For example: when an angry Doravra suddenly breaks off her engagement with Ernest (II, letter 12), the event that precipitates her actions - the sudden arrival of Ernest's wife - is only told a few letters later (II, letter 14). Similarly, Doravra's announcement of her husband's death comes as a total surprise because the cause - his discovery of his wife's old correspondence with Ernest - is not revealed until sometime afterwards (IV, letter 12). The first phrases of Doravra's letter are actually a translation of Julie's announcement of her mother's death.⁶⁹ Julie thinks that her mother's discovery of Julie's correspondence with Saint-Preux, an event told a few letters before, is the cause.⁷⁰ Her mother's death can also be anticipated thanks to allusions to her bad health. While Rousseau carefully prepares the events, Emin consciously exploits the shock effect epistolary sequences can provide, thereby strengthening the peripetrical structure of his plot.

Character configuration and stylistic oppositions

This type of plot structure turns Emin's novel into a series of episodes, less connected by cause and effect than by the logic of juxtaposition. Emin is in

⁶⁸ Rousseau 1964: II, 13.

⁶⁹ Rousseau 1964: II, 315 (Part 3, letter V).

⁷⁰ Rousseau 1964: II, 306 (Part 2, letter XXVIII).

need of conflict and ever-changing emotional states to motivate speeches or letters written from different rhetorical positions.⁷¹ The letter serves as an example of passionate rhetoric and gallant, florid style. However, Emin's use of rhetoric does not follow the stylistic prescriptions put forward in the Russian Classicist treatises on rhetoric or in contemporary epistolary manuals. These authorities required the letter to be written in simple language, avoiding the use of extravagant rhetorical figures such as exclamations, apostrophes, and complex metaphor.⁷² Nevertheless, Emin makes extensive use of these figures, showing a marked preference for stylistic embellishment.

Style performs different functions in "The New Heloise" and "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra". As Rousseau himself observed in his "Second Preface", the letters of his characters show no significant stylistic differences.⁷³ In contrast, Emin emphasises the opposition in epistolary styles, assigning different rhetorical modes to different characters.

In Rousseau's novel, the couple Saint-Preux and Julie is paired by Claire and Bomston; in Emin's novel, the main characters Ernest and Doravra are matched by their two friends Ippolit and Pul'kheriia. However, in adopting this configuration of characters from Rousseau, Emin also reinforced its symmetrical structure. Claire and Bomston are not lovers whereas Pulkheriia and Ippolit are. Furthermore, the differences between Rousseau's characters are not very apparent, while Emin moulded his characters in the traditional typology of seventeenth-century French culture: the opposition between melancholic and sanguine, and passionate and gallant lovers.⁷⁴

Emin created this antithesis of characters by drawing on opposing sources: he modelled the passionate and pathetic letters of Ernest and Doravra on Rousseau's "The New Heloise", but based the playful and ironic letters of Ippolit and Pul'kheriia on the popular seventeenth-century miscellany "Friendships, Loves and Flirts" by René Le Pays.⁷⁵ Once integrated within the structure of Emin's novel, the letters of Rousseau and Le Pays acquire functions they originally did not have. They now provide

⁷¹ Avtukhovich 1995: 49; 89-90; 162.

⁷² Pis'movnik 1765: 24-26.

⁷³ Rousseau 1964: II, 28.

⁷⁴ Pelous 1980: 148-157.

⁷⁵ Le Pays' work served as a source for many epistolary manuals, including Russian ones. For example, other translations of the letters that Emin inserted in his novel (II, 23-24; II, 36-37) appeared later in: Pis'movnik 1801: III, 126-128; III, 379-380. Pis'movnik 1806: I, 107-108.

contrast, underpinning the opposition between characters, epistolary styles and concepts of love.

The first textual borrowing from Le Pays appears in the opening letter of the novel, from Ernest to Doravra. The fragment consists of a platitude taken from love poetry and elaborated in the ironic manner of the gallant style. In her reply, Doravra reproaches Ernest for his equivocal “prudence”. Ernest in turn also curses this allusive, gallant way of putting things. Gallantry or “artful pretences” (*ukhishchrennoe pritvorstvo*) may be sanctioned by worldly “politesse” (*politika*), but is incompatible with real love. Ernest then renounces “artful language” (*khitrost’*) and declares his love directly, with what he calls “honest imprudence” (*chistoserdechnuiu (...) neostorozhnost’*) (I, 7-10). As noted by Sipovskii, the gallantry of Ernest’s first letters is quickly eclipsed by his passionate style.⁷⁶ Ernest rejects the equivocal gallant style, declaring that he will speak of love and passion only in overt and unambiguous language, which Emin will take from the letters of Rousseau’s lovers.

While Ernest and Doravra write in a passionate style, their friends Ippolit and Pul’kheriia use the gallant style in their letters to each other. Their light-hearted, ‘ironic’ letters, almost all taken from Le Pays, contrast starkly in style and theme with those of Ernest and Doravra, taken from Rousseau. Ippolit’s burlesque suicide letter (II,4), translated entirely from Le Pays, provides a satirical counterpoint to Ernest’s various suicide threats.⁷⁷ Pul’kheriia’s reply to Ippolit, in which she begs him to stay alive because he has to answer to a poem written by a rival admirer, is also a translation. Emin changed the original genre of the poem from “stanza” (*stances*) to “elegy” (*Elegiia*) (II, 23), without doubt referring to the popular poetic genre practised by the poets Sumarokov and Rzhevskii.⁷⁸ This slight change in definition emphasises once again the stylistic contrast between the letters of the two friends: Ippolit claims he cannot write elegies, that is, express himself in Ernest’s plaintive mode.⁷⁹

Rousseau’s overt language of passion was written to call the oblique phraseology of gallantry into dispute.⁸⁰ However, Emin integrated both styles

⁷⁶ Sipovskii 1910: 451.

⁷⁷ Le Pays 1664: I, 15-16. Pavlovich 1974: 36. Schatz 1982: 79-81.

⁷⁸ Le Pays 1664: I, 24.

⁷⁹ In the anonymous Russian novel “Neonila” of 1794, the gallant Shchegol’kov boasts that he has never been subject to passion, and that with one look he can express more to his beloved “than a certain Werther with a hundred sighs, and Ernest with all his letters” (*nezheli drugoi Verter stomia vzdokhami, ili Ernest pis’mami*) (Neonila 1794: I, 85).

⁸⁰ Rousseau 1964: II, 238. Starobinski 1971: 369-379.

within his novel without attaching a negative value to the latter. The passionate and the ironic, the melancholic and the gay, the elegiac and the gallant, the recluse and the man of the world, are equally valid modes of behaviour in the seventeenth-century typology of human characters. Emin abandons Rousseau's more subtle, non-stereotypical characterisation in favour of a more traditional typology.

Emin's place in literary history

The interest a text like Fedor Emin's "Letters of Ernest and Doravra" holds is not determined by its impact on contemporary readers, of which we know very little, or by its success with the modern reading public, for whom the novel is not even available. Only historians of Russian literature attach any significance to Emin's work, again not for its quality, but because it helps paint a picture of literary development in Russia that parallels those of western-European literatures. In this light, "The Letters" is considered a manifestation of sentimental novelistic literature produced by an emerging Russian third estate, a literature that dialectically superseded aristocratic Classicism. Furthermore, Emin's novel is said to mark the starting point of a tradition traced back from Russian novels published after 1850, and as such can give us a deeper insight into the genesis and structure of these later 'masterpieces'.

The fact that Fedor Emin imitated Rousseau would seem indeed to qualify him as the initiator of the modern Russian novel. Emin's obvious indebtedness to Rousseau led to his novel being defined in the historiography of eighteenth-century Russian literature as innovative, the herald of a new sentimental, pre-romantic period, and an example of a new kind of psychological, introspective novel. The "Letters of Ernest and Doravra" would also seem to indicate that Russians were aware of new developments and striving to keep up with them.

It is true that Emin learned the craft of the epistolary novel from Rousseau. In addition to its epistolary structure, "The New Heloise" offered him a stockpile of rhetorical figures, plot situations, and a ready-made set of characters. However, as I have shown, there are many aspects of "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra" that invalidate the characterisation mentioned above. First, borrowing from Rousseau and from Le Pays, Emin used texts from different historical periods, a fact that contradicts a supposedly innovative purpose. Second, Emin's world-view was not that of a French bourgeois, but of a Russian civil servant, thus rather more conservative than progressive.

Emin does not make social life the subject of critical analysis in the spirit of the Enlightenment, but allegorically depicts it as the plaything of blind fate. Neither does he exploit the epistolary form of the novel for psychological analysis. On the contrary, the specific, formal characteristics of the letter become a means to emphasise the peripetrical, non-psychological nature of the novel's action. Furthermore, the letters display rhetorical modes that correspond to traditional psychological stereotypes. The structure of the action in Emin's novel, together with the symmetrical typology of characters, do not demonstrate a new psychological approach, but rather conformity to traditional views on man.

From this we can conclude that the significance of Rousseau and his novel in literary history cannot simply be transferred to Emin. Emin is only partially a student of Rousseau. He did not perceive "The New Heloise" as that much different from the products of the older romance tradition and was not aware of the innovative tendencies of contemporary western-European novels. Fedor Emin's concept of the novel is, as it were, atavistic and one could call his "Letters" a blend of the sentimental novel and baroque romances.

CHAPTER FIVE

N.F. EMIN'S "ROZA" AND "AN IRONY OF FATE"

When Fedor Emin finally settled in St. Petersburg after his extensive travels, he married a woman who is only known by her first name, Ul'iana. Together they had a large family, as Emin's petitions to the empress suggest. Only two of his sons' names are known: Aleksandr and Nikolai. The latter, born in 1767, followed in his father's footsteps and wrote actively from 1785 until 1797. He produced five comedies, a collection of anacreontic verse, some odes and two epistolary novels.¹

A frivolous young man

Nikolai Emin was born a non-noble as his father had not attained the rank that allowed him to transfer his noble status to his children. Fedor and Nikolai Emin belonged to what we can call the would-be nobility: individuals within the Russian civil service class that hoped to gain hereditary nobility by rising in the Table of Ranks. These men had no class-consciousness of their own, but identified with the nobility and tried to mix with it on equal terms.

Nikolai Emin entered the grammar school connected to the St. Petersburg Mining Institute some time after 1776, when it had opened to non-nobles. In 1784 at the age of seventeen, he became an assistant to Gavril Derzhavin, who at that time was governor of the Northern district of Olonetsk. However, after only a year Nikolai Emin left his post to try his luck in the capital St. Petersburg. With the help of Derzhavin, who regarded him as a protégé, Emin obtained a job at the Academy of Science, where he participated in compiling the Academy's dictionary. Dissatisfied with the boring task of collecting words, on which he is quoted to have said that he wasted his great intellectual faculties, he soon handed in his resignation. This action created a scandal for it was interpreted as a lack of respect to his superiors, princess Ekaterina Dashkova and professor Ivan Lepekhin. Emin seemed to be treating them as if they were his equals, although this was apparently more out of naïveté than on purpose.² A similar disregard of social hierarchy can be detected in a letter from Emin to Derzhavin, which is

¹ Stepaniuk 1973: 10.

² Derzhavin 1868: V, 490; 534-535; 567-568, 586.

lively and witty, but displays a tone of familiarity that seems inappropriate.³ Emin's proficiency in writing such epistles is clearly reflected in the letters of one of his most accomplished characters, the mundane Prince Vetrogon in the novel "Roza" (*Roza*). In the correspondence between Derzhavin and Emin, the latter comes across as a sort of *petit maître*; Derzhavin calls him "frivolous" (*vetren*) and in an epigram from 1797 makes ironic remarks about his behaviour, although acknowledging Emin's literary talent.⁴ This reputation of *petit-maître* would last throughout Emin's later career in the civil service.⁵

After leaving the Academy in the summer of 1786, Nikolai Emin joined the army. He served in the Kazan' cuirassier regiment under Sergei L'vov, a favourite of Potemkin's, and apparently took part in Catherine's journey to the Crimea in 1787. During a stay in Chernigov, probably in early 1787, he signed a contract with the Petersburg publisher Petr Bogdanovich to print his first novel "Roza". Soon problems arose regarding its publication. In all probability, Bogdanovich had not found enough subscribers in advance to cover the publishing costs, leading him to cancel the printing job. In a similar case, Denis Fonvizin failed to muster the 750 subscribers needed to issue his 1788 journal "The Friend of Honourable People, or Starodum".⁶ Nikolai Emin found another printer willing to print his work, Johann Karl Schnoor, and then left with his regiment to fight in the war with Sweden. After the battle at Friedrichsgamen in July 1788, Nikolai Emin arrived in St. Petersburg, where he found that his novel was on sale in two editions, one printed by Schnoor and another printed by Bogdanovich. Infuriated, Emin published a note in the "St. Petersburg Post" (*Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti*), which accused Bogdanovich of having issued his work without authorisation and recommended the public to buy Schnoor's rival edition.⁷ Emin would recall this incident in his second novel, "An Irony of Fate" (*Igra sud'by*) (1789), where he paints a satirical portrait of Bogdanovich in the

³ Derzhavin 1868: V, 490.

⁴ Derzhavin 1868: II, 285; V, 400; 467; 482.

⁵ Rostopchin 1872: 47.

⁶ Stolpianskii 1914. Anticipating possible conflicts with his authors, Bogdanovich issued a booklet with the conditions on which he would accept works for printing (Bogdanovich 1788). As he cancelled the issue of Emin's novel "Roza", the first edition, dated 1786 by Vasili Sopikov in his bibliography, has never actually appeared in print. This is probably the reason why Bogdanovich presented his 1788 publication of Emin's novel as the second edition. Cf. SK 1962: III, no. 8620.

⁷ SV: 1788, 1271; 1306; 1322.

person of the crooked bookseller Plutovich (the Russian word *plut* means "scoundrel") (1789: 87-89).

Literature in the service of a career

Nikolai Emin tried to forward his career by ingratiating himself with the fortunate men of the day. As he put it in a letter to Derzhavin, referring to his relationship with his superior L'vov, he would become "the favourite of the first favourite of the great favourite" (*pervyi favorit pervago favorita bol'shago favorita*).⁸ His literary work was an integral part of his career, and was therefore designed to a certain extent to please highly placed persons. Emin's first play, "The False Philosopher" (*Mnimyi mudrets*) (1786), is a deliberate imitation of Catherine's anti-Masonic comedies. His other plays, "Experts" (*Znatoki*) (1788) and "Rightful in his Soul, but Wrongful in Reality" (*Dushoiu prav, na dele vinovat*) (1792), were staged at the court theatre and were doubtlessly written with a courtly audience in mind.⁹ Emin's first novel, "Roza", opens with a quote from Catherine's comic opera "Boeslaevich, the Giant from Novgorod" (*Novo-gorodskii bogatyr' Boeslaevich*) (1786) (Emin 1788a: 1). Emin's second novel, "An Irony of Fate", is dedicated to Agrafena Ribaupierre, the wife of Ivan Ribaupierre, Emin's superior in the Kazan' cuirassier regiment, but also one of Catherine's closest confidants.¹⁰ Ribaupierre and his wife were involved in the secret affair of Catherine II's favourite Aleksandr Dmitriev-Mamonov with princess Dar'ia Shcherbatova, which culminated in July 1789 in the empress magnanimously organising her unfaithful lover's marriage to her rival.

After 1789, Nikolai Emin linked up with the new favourite of the empress, Platon Zubov, entertaining him with flattering odes, among other things. Emin also helped to revive Derzhavin's career by passing the latter's ode, "The Image of Felitsa" (*Izobrazhenie Felitsy*), to Zubov and subsequently the empress. However, Platon Zubov did not like Derzhavin very much, and Emin tried to please his protector by publicly criticising another poetic effort of his former tutor. This incident caused some animosity between the two poets and Derzhavin challenged Emin to a poetry contest, which the latter declined. It is said that Derzhavin wrote his anacreontic verses partly in reaction to Emin's collection of 1795, "Imitation

⁸ Derzhavin 1868: V, 490.

⁹ IRDT 1977: I, 446-447.

¹⁰ Ribaupierre 1877: 465.

of Ancients" (*Podrazhanie drevnim*), to prove that he was after all the better poet.¹¹

In the 1790s, Nikolai Emin married a daughter of Ivan Khmel'nitskii and also had to see to the education of her younger brother, the future dramatist Nikolai Khmel'nitskii. Without doubt, both the responsibility of caring for a family and the fall of his protectors, the Zubov brothers, following the death of Catherine II in 1796, forced Emin to pursue a more secure career in the Russian civil service. Emin worked in the Finland administration and became governor of Vyborg in the 1800s. He indulged in literary occupations only occasionally, such as an epitaph on the death marshal Kutuzov in 1813.¹² When Emin died in 1814, his former tutor Derzhavin put aside all past animosity and took the trouble to ask Alexander I to grant Emin's widow a pension.¹³

Amorous intrigues

At the end of the 1780s, Nikolai Emin published two epistolary novels: "Roza, a Half-True Original Story" (*Roza, poluspravedlivaia original'naia poved'*) (1788) and "An Irony of Fate" (*Igra sud'by*) (1789). In Russian literary history these are often dismissed as poor imitations of Rousseau and Goethe's epistolary novels "The New Heloise" and "The Sorrows of Young Werther". It is true that Rousseau's work in particular provided the model for the polylogic structure of Emin's epistolary novels. Furthermore, "An Irony of Fate" is preceded by a long quote from Rousseau's "Second preface" that outlines the stylistic qualities of 'genuine' love letters. The heroine of the novel, Plenira, identifies herself with Rousseau's Julie and ends up in similar situations. The heroine of "Roza" knows Goethe's novel by heart and calls her lover "completely Werther" (*sovershennyi Verter*) (1788a: 64). However, closer scrutiny of Emin's novels will reveal significant differences.

In Emin's first novel, the protagonist Milon falls in love with Roza, daughter of count D***. Milon is a young nobleman who has just lost his father and inherited a small, but reasonably-sized estate numbering about a hundred souls. However, Roza's mother, a mundane countess, would prefer to see the rich, aristocratic prince Vetrogon as her son-in-law. Although Roza has confessed her love for Milon to her confidante Prelest, she obeys her parents' will and marries Vetrogon. Seeing that his wife feels nothing but

¹¹ Derzhavin 1868: I, 248-249; II, 151; V, 598.

¹² RSE 1998: 227.

¹³ Derzhavin: VI, 319.

contempt for him, Vetrogon takes her off to their estate and resumes his correspondence with the actress and prostitute Zaraza. In the meantime, Milon feels so desperate that he tries to commit suicide, but his sister Sofia saves him at the very last moment by snatching away the pistol he has pointed at his temple. Milon then leaves for the house of his friend and confidant Cheston, who lives close to Vetrogon's estate. Naturally, Milon cannot keep himself from visiting the Vetrogon estate regularly. On one of these visits Milon and Roza declare their mutual love. However, at that very moment they are caught by a jealous Vetrogon, who chases his wife's lover from the house. Some time later Milon disappears and his friends believe that he has drowned himself. In fact, Milon has disguised himself as a gardener and is now serving at Vetrogon's estate so that he has ample opportunity to meet with Roza. While exchanging kisses under cover of a tree, the two lovers are caught by Vetrogon for the second time. Milon offers to die to redeem his guilt, but he cannot bear the slap in the face that Vetrogon gives him, a deliberate insult to his noble honour. The next morning they fight a duel. Although Milon has several chances to kill the husband of his beloved, he deliberately lets himself be wounded. Roza believes that Milon is dead and dies of grief. Meanwhile, Milon recovers, but when he sees the funeral procession bearing Roza's coffin, he tears the bandages from his wounds, as once did the Roman hero Cato, and dies as well. At this moment, Vetrogon enters Milon's room and hands a long letter of repentance to Cheston, in which he admits his responsibility for the death of the two lovers. Vetrogon takes poison and collapses on Milon's corpse. Roza, Milon and Vetrogon are all buried together under a monument with a moving inscription.

In his second novel, "An Irony of Fate", Nikolai Emin repeats a number of situations that he had already employed in "Roza". The main character Vsemil falls in love with the portrait of Plenira, who unfortunately for him seems to be married. Vsemil is so obsessed with her that he disguises himself as a commoner and enters the service of Plenira's husband, the elderly count Slabosil, supplanting another poor but very able candidate much in need of the position. The naïve Plenira does not suspect the love of a servant, or that she herself could possibly fall in love with him. In the meantime, Slabosil tells Vsemil the story of his life: one of debauchery followed by deprivation. As a young man, Slabosil had lived with a courtesan called Prolaza, who remunerated him not only with a venereal disease, but also large debts. He was subsequently imprisoned on account of these debts, but an old acquaintance of his father's, Pravomysl', set him free. The impoverished

count then worked as a tutor for a merchant family, from which he was delivered once again by Pravomysl', into whose service he entered. When Pravomysl' died, Slabosil inherited his estate and, according to his benefactor's wishes, married his daughter, Plenira. The age difference between Plenira and Slabosil, and the fact that the latter is "colder than frost at Twelfth Night" (*kholodnee kreshchenskikh morozov*) (1789: 58), discredits their marriage in Vsemil's eyes, while at the same time legitimising his love. Plenira becomes aware of Vsemil's passion when she finds him sleeping under a tree with her portrait on his breast. As she starts to acknowledge her own feelings, Plenira's anger and confusion lead her to deliberately infect herself with smallpox. When she recovers, she asks Vsemil to leave, but he refuses. Count Slabosil, who has been informed about what is going on between his wife and his servant, put the two lovers to the test. First he insists they sing a love song together, then he announces that he will be away for some months. The frightening prospect of her husband's absence scares Plenira into urging Vsemil to leave her, and he finally obeys. This convinces Slabosil of the virtue and the honour of the two lovers, and he invites Vsemil to return to his estate to live together with him and his wife, promising that he will 'inherit' Plenira after his, Slabosil's, death.

However, the irony or unexpected change of the character's fate announced in the novel's title does not take place.¹⁴ In fact, the novel appears to be unfinished: the published text is designated as only the first part, and several anticipations within the story seem to indicate that the work is incomplete. Although Slabosil bids Vsemil to return to the estate at the end of the so-called first part, an actual reunion does not take place. The fact that Plenira's friend Milena is also invited (in her turn in love with Vsemil who himself once courted her) suggests that there will be new and unexpected developments at Slabosil's estate - maybe an intrigue to pair Vsemil and Milena. Seeing as "An Irony of Fate" was republished in 1796 without the specification that it was only the first part, I shall treat the novel as if it were finished.

¹⁴ As, for example, the title of Marivaux's comedy "The Game of Love and Chance" (*Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard*), reveals the plot structure and announces an unexpected outcome.

Love triangles

As the summary above clearly shows, both Nikolai Emin's novels develop a love conflict along very similar lines: a young man desires a woman who belongs to another more powerful man. This scheme is also found in Rousseau's "New Heloise" and Goethe's "Sorrows of Young Werther".

In an article from 1806, Moscow University professor Iakov de Saint-Glin considered the love triangle as elaborated by Rousseau and Goethe the most typical plot structure of the contemporary European novel. Basically, these authors were exploring the problem of "how to confine unhappy, passionate love within the borders of friendship" (*kak mozhet neshchastnaia, pylkaia liubov' zakliuchat'sia v granitsakh druzhby*).¹⁵ In other words, how the individual can curtail his desire in order to peacefully fit into existing social structures.

Nikolai Emin's epistolary novels formulate the same conflict and can be seen as two attempts at solving the same underlying problem: the discrepancy between individual desire and the restrictions of society. As the object desired by his two protagonists is always a female member of a higher social class, the daughter of a count and the wife of a prince (*kniaz'*), it appears that this desire is not only erotic, but social as well. The woman at the centre of the love triangle is not only a focus for sexual desire, but also a symbol of social privileges and material possessions. Therefore, one can argue that the conflict over a woman between the poor lover and the wealthy, powerful husband in Emin's novels symbolises the struggle between two groups within contemporary Russian society for advantageous social positions. In other words, the love triangle reflected the antagonism between the class of the so-called "middle nobility" (ennobled commoners and well-educated but relatively poor nobles of medium rank), and the dominant aristocratic elite, both competing for prestigious posts within the Russian civil service.

In Nikolai Emin's novels, love affirms the right of the poor protagonist to aspire to such prestigious positions. According to a platitude found in poetry, love is 'democratic', the force that equals the peasant to the prince. Thus it also legitimises the passion of poor mid-ranking nobles like Milon and Vsemil for aristocratic ladies such as princess Roza and countess Prelest. Love's democratic nature is the subject of an article that appeared

¹⁵ Saint-Glin 1806: 206.

in one of the Russian literary journals of the early 1800s, the title of which posed the question: "Is Love Aware of Differences in Lineage and Descent?" (*Na vopros: razbiraet li liubov' raznost' roda, proiskhozhdeniia?*). Quoting Nelest's "definition" (*Definiciia*) of true love from "An Irony of Fate", the article concludes that "according to reason there are no objections to love in the case of political inequality by birth" (*v poniatiakh razuma net prepiatstviia liubvi v politicheskom neravenstve roda*).¹⁶ Love does not know differences in class, and looks only to the merits of the soul. With these qualities, love could become the expression of Petrine meritocracy, a political system claiming that all posts are open to people with talent, without regard to their birth. One could say that Peter I made all Russian citizens equal in their opportunities to serve the state and ascend in the Table of Ranks, in the same way that God made all man equal in love. By dint of this analogy, Nikolai Emin's protagonists can claim merit and, logically, social prestige on the basis of their passion.

The antithesis of love and marriage and the platonic compromise

In eighteenth-century European literature, conflicts over social arrangements were often couched in the opposition of love and marriage. At the time the principles of passionate love and marriage were considered antithetical, which made it possible to equate the ambitions of powerless nobles with the former and the interests of the ruling elite with the latter.

Marriage represented community values as well as family interest in wealth and status. It was a means for the economic and social advancement of the noble family. By marrying, the individual showed loyalty to the group's best interest, while fulfilling social and moral duties. Marriage also drew clear sexual boundary lines and was meant to assure genealogical purity. Marriage was a bond that was fixed, documented and had a legal status. In this sense, it was a part of the material world. The married man, the husband, had a place in the real world and could exert power and own property.

¹⁶ Aglaia 1810: IX, iii, 63-65. Cf. Emin N. 1789: 50-51. The article is signed with the initial R. The same initial reappears a month later under the story "Unfortunate Liza" (*Neshchastnaia Liza*) by Vasilii Raevskii, which too contains a long quote from "An Irony of Fate" (Aglaia 1810: X, iv, 3-22). Another quote from Emin's novel in Raevskii's poem "An Advice to Chloe" (*Sovet Khloe*) (MK 1805: II, 398-399). On Raevskii, see: Molva 1835: V, no. 5, 75-76.

Passionate love, on the contrary, represented individual interests not dependent on economic wealth or social status. Love was considered egoistic and therefore amoral. It was a force that could threaten social harmony by transgressing the barriers of class, religion and matrimony, amongst others. Love was a volatile feeling impossible to pin down in a reliable legal document. Unlike the marriage vow, the validity of a pledge of love was very dubious. Love was considered a part of the inner world - something one could think of as not totally real and therefore easily denounce as a product of romance-like fancy. The lover had no social status in the real world; no power and no possessions.

In general, plots that favour either the husband or the lover tend to shed light on the author's views regarding the legitimacy of the existing social order and the viability of individual desires fostered by the powerless. For example, the solution to the love triangle offered by Rousseau in his "*New Heloise*" implies that the interests of society prevail over those of the individual. According to Rousseau's "*Social Contract*", the individual must submit to the "general will", just as Saint-Preux forgoes his aspirations towards Julie to preserve the social harmony espoused by Wolmar's utopian Clarens.¹⁷ Rousseau seems to suggest that the suppression of egoistic desires guarantees social harmony. However, at the end of the novel as Julie lies on her deathbed, she confesses that her passion for Saint-Preux has never been extinguished. The novel's tragic end indicates that Rousseau failed to reconcile two value systems: love as the ideology of individual desire, and marriage as the embodiment of his social utopia. Rousseau doubted the extent to which man's egoistic desires can be suppressed; rather, these desires seem always to remain a source of social discord.¹⁸

The love triangle in Goethe's "*The Sorrows of Young Werther*" echoes that of Rousseau's novel, but it develops towards a significant shift in perspective. "*The New Heloise*" has a tragic end because it reveals the impossibility of an ideal society in which desire is rationally regulated; the outcome of Goethe's novel is tragic because it stresses the total impossibility of fully realising the desires of the individual. Unlike Saint-Preux, Werther will not compromise: he pursues the fulfilment of his desires to the bitter end, refusing to give in to the demands of society. Werther defends his love as an absolute; for him individual aspirations have no relative value and

¹⁷ Showalter 1972: 319.

¹⁸ Kluckhohn 1966: 94-96. Burgelin 1952: 372-405. Lotman 1992: II, 97-98. Lotman 1994: 308-309.

cannot be exchanged for other values, such as social harmony. It is this absolute stance that will lead to his death.¹⁹

The tragic endings of "The New Heloise" and "Werther" treat any possible reconciliation between individual and social interests with pessimism. This view is reflected in Rousseau and Goethe's bourgeois affirmation of marriage as an inviolable institution in which the rights of the husband are not to be compromised.

Although Nikolai Emin borrowed the love triangle from Rousseau and Goethe and placed it in a Russian context, he proposes different solutions. The endings of Emin's novels suggest that the realisations of individual desires need not clash with social harmony. Emin's view of marriage can be called aristocratic in the sense that he allows for some degree of unfaithfulness, not regarding this as a violation of the institute of marriage. As in "Werther", the catastrophe in "Roza" is initiated by a kiss, but Goethe's lovers see their kiss as catastrophic because a love relationship outside marriage is unacceptable: Charlotte's reaction shows that Werther's love and deepest desire cannot be fulfilled, thus leading him to suicide. In Emin's novel, on the other hand, the tragic ending is not initiated by the beloved woman, but by a jealous husband who cannot bear the platonic kisses given to his wife. Milon's indirect suicide is brought about by the husband's intolerance and not by the unacceptability of extramarital love.

Emin's second novel, "An Irony of Fate", ends with a *menage à trois* organised by the wise and omniscient Slabosil, a situation quite similar to Wolmar's Clarens. However, Emin avoids a tragic ending and suggests that a love triangle is actually possible, as long as it is controlled by enlightened reason and aristocratic honour. Plenira reads a letter from "The New Heloise" to Slabosil in the presence of Vsemil in which Julie addresses her two beloved men, offering her hand to the one and her heart to the other (1789: 112). Indeed, the two men end up sharing Plenira, although the younger, Vsemil, is asked to postpone consummation of his desires until after Slabosil's death.

The direction the action takes in both Emin's novels suggests that a young man of the middle nobility can realise his aspirations if only he and his adversary, the representative of the elite that holds social power, are prepared to compromise. The husband has to content himself with his wife's 'hand', i.e. her physical and judicial possession, while being tolerant towards the lover, who, in turn, has to restrain himself, satisfying himself with his beloved's 'heart', that is - possession in the mystical, platonic sense. He may

¹⁹ Cf. Kayser 1994: 149-150.

not possess the woman as 'his wife', but as 'his lady'; he will not be 'her husband' but only 'her cavalier servant'. In other words, the lover renounces his claim to physical possession and matrimonial status, or will postpone his claim to a social position in the real world until the older generation occupying these positions has passed away.

Emin's heroes find a solution to their compelling desire in the Cartesian theory of so-called 'platonic' or 'spiritual' love. According to this theory, a human being was made up of two completely separate substances: the spiritual and the physical. As a logical consequence, a man would be able to love spiritually, without demanding physical possession, without impinging upon the legal world or the rights of other men, in short - without endangering existing social arrangements.²⁰ The new world of gallantry that emerged in Russia in the first half of the eighteenth century, with its balls, theatre performances and musical and literary evenings where men and women mingled, offered ample opportunities for extramarital relationships. Such relationships circumvented and negated the legal bonds between husband and wife, parents and daughter, and thus required new rules for the interaction of the sexes. 'Platonic love' was a concept that helped to regulate this world of gallantry by offering a compromise between individual desire and the restrictions of society, which enabled the individual to co-exist peacefully with the abiding social order. The claim that this 'platonic love' was indeed possible is what made Nikolai Emin's novels end in compromise instead of tragedy.

The acceptance of ambiguity

In the sections above I have summarised the action of Emin's novels and discussed the ideological implications of their endings. However, in an epistolary novel, the action is not the whole story, and the ending alone is not the direct expression of the author's viewpoint. The structure of Emin's epistolary novels is such that the action shown or narrated in the letters of the protagonists is continuously commented upon by their confidants. For example, the success of Vsemil's aspirations in "An Irony of Fate" does not automatically mean that the author approves of Vsemil's behaviour or shares his views. Even after the action has reached an apparently satisfactory outcome, Vsemil's friend Nelest is allowed to make a comment containing unambiguous words of condemnation. Thus, the story of "An Irony of Fate", which seems to endorse the protagonist's viewpoint, is contradicted by the

²⁰ Kluckhohn 1966: 18-32. Pelous 1980: 43-70.

story's vehicle – the epistolary dialogue – which gives the last word to a critical onlooker.

The diverging views of the protagonist, who narrates and defends his actions, and his confidant, who comments on and criticises them, give a 'dialogic' quality to Emin's novels. The two main positions, represented by the protagonists Milon and Vsemil on the one hand, and their confidants Cheston and Nelest on the other, are defended with equal cogency. The dialogue is refined and subtle; there are no clear authorial directives that demand the reader agree with any one position. Nevertheless, every characterisation of Nikolai Emin's novels in Russian literary historiography has equated the author's position with those of his passionate heroes: Milon and Vsemil.²¹ These interpretations overlook the fact that the confidants Cheston and Nelest have positive aptronyms derived from *chest'* ("honour") and *nelestnyi* ("without flattery"), which implies that these characters can only speak the 'truth' and cannot contradict the author's point of view. They are, in fact, his *raisonneurs*, and their stances are never convincingly discredited. On the other hand, the protagonists' actions are rendered praiseworthy by the outcome of the story and by the sympathy Milon and Vsemil receive from the other characters. The root of both their names, the Russian word *mil*, meaning "dear", points to the sympathy they evoke. Sympathy obliterates condemnation and condones the protagonists' wrongdoings, with the result that the moral message of Emin's novels remains ambiguous.

Eighteenth-century Russian authors claimed ambiguity as a right of literature. Nikolai Karamzin defended the emancipation of literature from unambiguous moral guidelines: a story did not have to end in a clear didactic statement. As he put it in his poem "Proteus, or The Contradictions of a Poet" (*Protei, ili Nesoglasia stikhovortsy*) (1798), an author is not obliged to take a clear position, to proclaim one ideology, but can defend antithetical positions with equal fervour, praising stoic virtues at one moment and the painful pleasures of sensibility at another.²²

We have already observed a similar uncertainty regarding values in Rousseau. The ambiguity in his and Emin's works arises from their unsuccessful attempt to reconcile two opposing values: the desire of the

²¹ Pavlovich recognises the "ambiguity" (*polovinchatost'*) of Emin's novels, but interprets it as a conflict between the remnants of classicist ideology, preventing a full acceptance of sentimentalism, which she mistakenly understands as an apology of irrationalism and passion (Pavlovich 1974: 49; 57).

²² Karamzin 1966: 242-251. Cf. Lotman 1994: 54-55.

individual and the interests of society. Nikolai Emin's own uncertainties, his vacillation between ambition and pragmatism, are also assigned to the fictional characters of his novel. The epistolary dialogue between the protagonist and his confidant reflects to an extent the author's dilemma concerning the viability of desire and the moral value of self-restraint. Although he sympathises with his protagonists, Emin is not convinced of the truth of their desires and hesitates to approve the platonic compromise they have found.

Oppositions: the passionate and the moderate

The epistolary discussions between Emin's protagonists and their confidants leave out a range of topics discussed in Rousseau, such as religion and social utopias. The dialogue generally focuses on the moral implications of the amorous intrigue. The questions that arise debate whether love is of greater value than marriage, whether indulgence in one's personal desires should take precedence over the interests of society and whether passionate love is real or just a fantasy.

Milon and Vsemil are ardent enthusiasts of platonic love and speak of it in the language of Saint-Preux. The theory to which they adhere propounds that the relationship with the beloved is a spiritual bond created in a metaphysical sphere. Since the lovers constitute two halves of one eternal entity, it is logical that their love ignites at first sight, the moment when both kindred souls recognise each other. In Vsemil's case, a mere portrait is sufficient. The suddenness with which the protagonists fall in love precludes any development or gradation of their feelings. Their love is always of the same intensity and lacks all relativity. Furthermore, they regard love an absolute that must be attained at any cost, for if love is not realised, life is of no value. Milon and Vsemil's letters demonstrate that the slightest suggestion that their desires cannot be consummated results immediately in a 'logical' death wish on their part. Life's real value exists only in moments of fulfilled desire, so it should be short, beautiful and intense like the fleeting yet blessed existence of the rose picked by the beloved (1789: 15). The heroine of Emin's first novel, Roza, has totally surrendered to her passion and therefore simply fades away when she believes her lover to be dead. Milon and Vsemil maintain that love cannot be conquered because it is a supernatural force. This means that they are not responsible for their love and there is no valid moral imperative to suppress it, for love is sacred and a virtue unto itself. Love for a woman runs parallel to the love of God, and the

beloved herself can become an image of God - a common form of gallant blasphemy for which Emin feels constrained to excuse himself in a footnote (1788a: 46).²³ Given that real love is purely spiritual, according to the platonic theory, it is able to withstand the mutilation of the body, like Plenira who survives smallpox. The lovers' noble honour and virtue can easily hold their physical temptations in check, and the tolerant rationality of a husband without prejudices removes all valid obstacles to the realisation of desire, as the outcome of the action in both novels suggests.

In contrast, Cheston and Nelest are down-to-earth realists. Their rational attitude toward love does not mean they are stoics. They stress that they, too, are men of feeling, and even lovers, but they represent a moderate sensibility without passion, a kind of love devoid of violence. Their sentimental ideal is a man capable of virtuous love and not prey to passionate emotions. As Nelest explains in his praise of 'real' love (1789: 51), passionate love is an egoistic force that disrupts social harmony, while 'true' love is unselfish and fosters social cohesion, thereby contributing to a better, more harmonious society. Cheston and Nelest refute the concept of love espoused by Milon and Vsemil. They maintain that platonic love is a product of the imagination inspired by novels. They attack platonic love's articles of faith, such as love at first sight - the sudden mutual recognition of two kindred souls, a fundament that was a subject of debate in the epistolary novels of Richardson and Rousseau. While Richardson's Grandison calls love at first sight impossible and mere "fancy", Rousseau explicitly attacks the Englishman's view, confirming the possibility of such sudden "relationships born at first sight and founded on intangible affinities" (*ces attachemens nés de la premiere vue et fondés sur des conformités indéfinissables*).²⁴ Nikolai Emin continues the discussion on this topic as his character Nelest calls Vsemil's ability to fall in love with a portrait a truly "*romanesque* talent" (*dar Romanicheskii*) (1789: 29), something unnatural. The moderate confidants continue to make ironic remarks about the pathetic behaviour of their passionate friends. Cheston's behaviour in love is the opposite of Milon's, as he confesses to his beloved: "To sigh, to leap, to groan, to throw myself on my knees, to give savage looks, I can't adapt myself to those tragic

²³ In a similar case, the poet Aleksandr Klushin, in his "Epistle to my friend V.S. Efim'ev" (*Poslanie k drugu moemu V.S. Efim'evu*) (1791), apostrophes his beloved with the titles of "deity" (*bozhestvo*) and "Lord of the World" (*vladыko mira*), but feels compelled to add a footnote, anticipating criticism from those who might think such expressions "audacious" (*derzhim*) (Poety 1972: II, 323).

²⁴ Richardson 1972: II, 357-358. Rousseau 1964: II, 340 (Part 3, letter XVIII).

airs. (...) I don't imitate romances" (*Vsdykhat', rvat'sia, stonat', brosat'sia na koleni, puskat' strashnye vzgliady, ne mogu ia priuchit' sebia k tragicheskim ulovkam*. (...), *ne podrazhaiu ia romanam*) (1788a: 140). The confidants mock the mystic language of the protagonists and the fetishist tendencies in which they involuntarily reveal the physical nature of their supposedly platonic feelings. When Vsemil declares that he wants to possess the scarf covering Plenira's breasts, Nelest exposes this expression as "the common and most simple vernacular of genteel toadies" (*izvestnoe i samoe prostoe narechie tonkikh podlipal*) (1789: 54). Cheston and Nelest have doubts about the good intentions of their friends and the strength of their virtue. Platonic love is dangerous: unlike the heroes of romances, real man finds it very hard to withstand temptation.

The effects of irony

As we have seen, the ambiguity in the novels of Nikolai Emin proceeds from opposing viewpoints; from the contradictions between how the story ends and what the details of the epistolary dialogue suggest. Another source for the ambiguous nature of these novels is irony, an element absent in Rousseau.

The confidants are ironic about the protagonists' behaviour, love affairs and letter style, all of which they find pretentious. Cheston and Nelest mock the main characters' craze for Goethe's "Werther" and Young's "Night Thoughts"; sometimes even Milon's nickname 'Werther' sounds ironic. Milena makes fun of Vsemil's threats of suicide: "They are dying constantly, and meanwhile they live as merrily as a cricket" (*Vse oni pominutno umiraiut i vse zhivut prepevaiuchi*) (1789: 133). She warns Plenira of the stratagems of lovers, summarising their various modes of amorous rhetoric, one of which Vsemil will actually put into practice a few pages later (1789: 106; 121). On the one hand Vsemil's letters seem to prove his passion is genuine, for they match the stylistic qualities of real love letters described in the quote from Rousseau's "Second Preface" to his "New Heloise", which serves as an epigraph to Emin's novel. On the other hand, his letters elicit only irony from his confidant Nelest, who calls them "melodramatic *fleurettes*" (*tragicheskikh tsvetkov*) (1789: 28). Milon's love poem describing Roza as the incarnation of God is criticised by her confidante Prelest as "too high-flown" (*s lishkom vysoki*) (1788a: 52). Even Roza herself refers to the melancholic Milon as a "wax-white philosopher" (*voskovii filosof*) (1788a:

48). The element of irony in Emin's novel serves to tone down the pathos of the sentimental heroes.

This irony is at its most piercing in the letters written by the negative characters, prince Vetrogon and the prostitute Zaraza, where it further contributes to the overall ambiguity in the novel. For example, Vetrogon's ironic remarks about Milon concur with the criticism levelled by the author's *raisonneur* Cheston, which would seem to validate Vetrogon's point of view. Like Cheston, Vetrogon continuously mocks Milon's pathetic behaviour. He makes fun of Roza's craze for Young, as does her sister Krasa, a positive character, by sarcastically reminding her of the poet's noted ability to comfort his readers (1788a: 168). In addition, Milon's criticism of Vetrogon's foppish behaviour concurs with the latter's ironic remarks about himself. The negative characters Vetrogon and Zaraza wittily acknowledge their own insufficiencies, and cynically comment on the wickedness of their world.

A further level of irony is created by assigning similar behaviour and expressions to characters representing opposite moral values within the novel. Prelest'a's anglophilia, meant to suggest her non-mundane virtue, is paralleled by that of the prostitute Prolaza, whose apparent innocence only serves to dupe her aristocratic clients into greater financial generosity. Prolaza prominently displays Milton on her reading table, but appears in a *négligé* that is entirely "un-Miltonic" (*ne Mil'tonovskoe*) (1789: 77). Confessions of love uttered by the truly passionate lovers are mirrored by the fake confessions of the negative characters. Prolaza surrenders to Slabosil's advances with the pathetic: "you triumph" (*ty torzhestvuesh'*), exactly the same words as Vsemil and Prelest'a will use in their respective confessions of love, thereby casting ironic doubt on the 'true' lovers' virtue (1789: 73; 116; 125).

Contradictory psychology

Nikolai Emin's vacillation between a sympathetic attitude toward his characters and moral disapprobation of them lends depth to their psychological portrait. They are no longer morally congruent, but a mixture of positive and negative features. Emin's positive characters act in contradiction to their virtuous intentions, while his negative characters display some positive traits.

Karamzin praised the complex and ambiguous depiction of Richardson's aristocratic villain Lovelace, and he himself created a character - Erast in his

"Poor Liza" (*Bednaia Liza*) - who was neither entirely bad or good.²⁵ Like Erast, Emin's protagonists Milon and Vsemil are sensitive young men who have mistaken notions of themselves and their virtue. Their hearts are full of good intentions, but the results of their actions is morally dubious, a contradiction that is spelled out in the title of Emin's play "Rightful in His Soul, but Wrongful in Reality" (*Dushoiu prav, na dele vinovat*). The ambiguity of Emin's positive characters is also expressed in oxymoronic characterisations: Vsemil is a "sweet criminal" (*nezhnyi prestupnik*), "handsome dissembler" (*prigozhii litsemer*) and "generous and cruel lover" (*velikodushnyi i liutyi liubovnik*) (1789: 116; 130; 142).

Likewise, Emin's negative characters are not complete villains or fools. Vetrogon, the rogue in Emin's first novel, is actually a naïve cynic; his wife, Roza, calls him "cunning without cunningness" (*bez khitrosti khitrets*) (1788a: 94). Milon suggests that Vetrogon is, after all, "honourable" (*chesten*) (1788a: 20), as is the generous and honest rogue Shalunov in the play "Rightful in His Soul".²⁶ The fact that Vetrogon falls in love with his wife, although this is meant to contradict his own mundane opinions on the incompatibility of love and marriage, is more to his credit than Milon and his adulterous passion. Plenira's confidante Milena has all the traits of a coquette or *shchegolikha*, the stock negative female character in eighteenth-century Russian journals and comedies. But Milena's light-hearted wit is designed to conceal a delicate sensibility, and she generously yields Vsemil, her beloved, to Plenira (1789: 129-132).

Slabosil is also an ambiguous character. On the one hand, he is a wise and omniscient patriarch of sixty, on the other, his negative apronym recalls either past moral weaknesses or present sexual inadequacies.

The ironic contradiction between the characters' intentions and actions we have already discussed is reinforced by their psychological inconsistencies. Note the following, sometimes unconscious, discrepancies between what Emin's characters say and how they behave. Vetrogon flatly denies his jealousy, but his words belie the very feelings he is trying to conceal (1788a: 90-91). Milon must suppress a fantasy about Roza's bedroom (1788a: 157), just as Vsemil has to silence the wish that Slabosil will die soon (1789: 154). Plenira's letters, in which she is not aware of her own feelings for Vsemil, give an extraordinary example of psychological repression. The naïve young girl, unaware of her own burgeoning love, had been a familiar character in French comedy since Agnès in Molière's "The

²⁵ Kochetkova 1995: 261.

²⁶ Emin 1973: 65-66.

“Lady’s School” (*L’École des Femmes*) and reappeared on the Russian stage with Pasha in Kniazhnin’s adaptation “The Peddler of Mead” (*Sbitenshchik*) (1783). Emin reworked the short utterances of these naïve heroines of comedy into epistolary form, giving himself more room for psychological subtleties. In Plenira’s first letter he weaves a complex string of false denials, slips of the tongue, self-corrections, contradictions and projections (1789: 62-64). Using the psychological insights of the French comedic tradition, Nikolai Emin couches a subtle and sophisticated display of the heart’s contradictory movements in an epistolary form.

The dramatic novel

The use of dialogue brings the genre of the epistolary novel closer to drama. It seems that Nikolai Emin himself was aware of this affinity. In his first novel, Roza and her friends stage Voltaire’s play “The Scottish Lady” (*L’Écossaise*) (1760). This not only initiates discussions amongst the characters on the nature of drama, but also underlines structural similarities between drama and Emin’s epistolary novels.

The characters’ comments on drama repeat subjects that Voltaire discusses in the foreword to his “Scottish Lady”.²⁷ Milon, in answer to a question of Roza’s father, Count D***, says that drama is a noble art form because it serves the ends of moral enlightenment. However, it should avoid adopting an emphatic moralistic attitude: theatre is a place of enlightenment where, “not shocked by severe and harsh reproaches” (*ne oskorbliaias’ strogimi i sukhimi ukoriznami*), everyone sees the harmful consequences of evil and corrects himself (1788a: 30). Therefore, it is entirely appropriate for a noble girl like Roza to take part in a play, as was also the fashion among the Russian nobility of the day, male and female, to take part in theatrical performances at home, at court or at educational institutes like the Smolnyi. After the performance, Milon is full of praise for Roza’s modest acting style, stressing that genuine expressions of feeling are not represented by the cries or wild gestures of melodrama, but by languishing looks, a tender voice and restrained body language. Some of Milon’s comments on drama are also valid for the epistolary novel. For example, the absence of an authorial narrator is a common feature in both the epistolary novel and drama. In Emin’s novels it is not the narrator but the characters themselves who show us which of them represents virtue and which vice. Milon’s comments on

²⁷ Voltaire 1952: L, 355-359.

drama constitute a metapoetical discourse, so to speak, on the genre of the epistolary novel.

The staging of Voltaire's play uncovers certain other structural similarities between drama and Emin's epistolary novels. For example, Emin places his characters in constellations very much like those found in comedy. Roza plays Voltaire's heroine Lindane, while her friend Prelestá takes the part of Lindane's servant and confidante Polly, thus performing the same roles in the play as they do in the novel itself. It is by no accident, then, that the names Lindane and Polly will serve as their nicknames throughout the rest of the novel. In "An Irony of Fate", the friends Plenira and Milena repeat the traditional character oppositions found in Marivaux' Italian comedies: the young and naïve heroine is mocked by the witty *soubrette*. Furthermore, as so often occurs in comedy, the confidants develop a love story that parallels the love of the main characters.

Emin not only borrows many situations and motives from the comedic tradition, but he also presents them in a dramatic mode through the use of discrepant awareness. As already explained in Chapter 2, discrepant awareness is a form of dramatic irony based on the disparity between a character's own understanding of his or her actions and what the other characters or the audience knows about them. For example, the protagonist approaches his beloved in the disguise of a servant, or the protagonist and his beloved both think that the other is in love with somebody else. In drama, this is revealed through the juxtaposition of scenes. Similarly, in Emin's epistolary novel the deception of the heroes comes to light in the course of their consecutive letters. However, Nikolai Emin fails to exploit the device of discrepant awareness to the same degree as Richardson and Choderlos de Laclos. Valmont's reason for seducing the virtuous Présidente de Tourvel was a wager with his libertine friend Mme de Merteuil. Similarly, Vetrogon's prime motive for courting and marrying the innocent Roza was the task to seduce her given by one of his wicked friends. However, this fact is only revealed in the very last letter of Emin's novel (1788a: 200). Emin does not use the fact that the correspondence of Vetrogon and Zaraza runs parallel to the correspondence of the other positive characters in order to create an intrigue.

Another element in Emin's novels reminiscent of drama is the way dialogue is presented. When quoting someone directly in his or her letter, the character minimizes or even suppresses the introduction to each fragment of dialogue. The letter-writer passes on the speech of other characters in full,

without subjective interference. Richardson called this same way of presenting dialogue in his own novels “dramatic narrative”.²⁸

In addition, time in Emin’s novels is limited to a period that could easily be presented in the framework of four or five dramatic acts. Although the action evolves over several months, it revolves around a limited number of events. Time is not part of the action, nor does it change the characters or the relation between them. The passing of time is never reflected upon, as it is in the novels of Rousseau and Goethe; the characters focus all their attention on the present. This results in a lack of self-reflection and self-analysis. Emin confines his depiction of psychological processes to the limits set by a dramatic treatment of time.

The same dramatic treatment is applied to space. The action unfolds in a limited space, without taking the whereabouts of the passive confidants into consideration. The few main events take place at three or four locations and could easily be set for the stage. Situations are the primary focus of the plot, with ‘key scenes’ dramatically worked up. For example, the deaths of the main characters in “Roza” take place in closely connected spaces; Milon and Vetrogon even breathe their last in the same room, having grouped themselves together in a tableau. Moreover, Vetrogon addresses himself directly to the reader in his last speech, just as an actor would in a monologue *ad spectatores*.

The genre of the epistolary novel shares by nature a number of important features with drama, but as I have shown above, Emin considerably reinforced the dramatic aspects of his novel. On the one hand, this was probably an unintentional reflex on the part of the experienced writer of comedies that he was, and on the other, the result of the predominance of drama in eighteenth-century Russian literature.

Elements of Russian Rococo

Emin inserted a wide range of genres into his novels: lyrical prose depictions of nature and city life, satirical fables, epitaphs, love poems, quotations from comic operas like Kniazhnin’s “The Peddler of Mead” (1788a: 169), as well as songs of his own. The way in which some of these various pieces are woven into the story are reminiscent of a *genre mêlé* like the Russian comic opera. Roza recognises her lover Milon in the gardener when he answers her song in a duet, a situation repeated in “An Irony of Fate” when Plenira finds a song that she had lost, and to which Vsemil has added his own verses

²⁸ Richardson 1976: IV, 554. Cf. Richardson 1972: I, xv.

(1788a: 153-154; 1789: 115). The insertion of lyrics is connected to the fact that Russian songs were in fashion at the court of Catherine II. Mikhail Garnovskii reported in his notes of June 1789 that there were daily concerts of Russian songs, and in 1790 Catherine's secretary Aleksandr Khrapovitskii wrote a comic opera entitled "Song-mania" (*Pesnoliubie*) reflecting this craze.²⁹ The empress herself inserted Russian folk songs in her comic opera "Boeslaevich, the Giant from Novgorod", from which Nikolai Emin quotes a few lines in the first letter of his novel "Roza" (1788a: 1).³⁰ Some of Emin's own compositions started circulating in real life and were performed in Russian drawing rooms, as suggested by their inclusion in some of the many contemporary songbooks.³¹

Emin's novels also contain a wide variety of styles. The different letter-writing characters alternate regularly, resulting in frequent switches from one stylistic mode to another. The difference in style is meant to emphasise the difference between characters, their moral status and their attitudes towards certain aspects of life. For example, "Roza" opens with two letters of condolence to Milon, who has just lost his father. The first letter, written by the foppish prince Vetrogon, is composed in a witty and laconic style, full of plays on words, proverbs, Church-Slavonic used for ironic effect and short piquant poems, all of which reveal the prince's superficial attitude towards life and death. The second letter, written by the confidant Cheston, adopts a more appropriate, didactic literary style.

In the French epistolary tradition it was common to contrast rhetoric with sincerity, i.e., the elaborate style of "art and wit" (*Art & Esprit*) with the spontaneous expressions of "nature and feelings" (*Nature & Sentiments*). The former is based on semantic trope (with a predilection for periphrasis) and the latter on syntactical figures.³² In his "New Heloise", Rousseau denounced "the embellished jargon of gallantry" (*le jargon fleuri de la galanterie*), composing the letters of his passionate lovers as "the simple outlet of an honest heart" (*l'épanchement simple et touchant d'une âme franche*).³³ Since he was pretending to present authentic documents, not literature, he suggested that the style of Julie and Saint-Preux's letters was

²⁹ Garnovskii 1876: 238. Khrapovitskii 1790.

³⁰ Ekaterina 1893: 355.

³¹ So the song "Stop Moaning, Unhappy Man" (*Perestan' stonat', neshchastnyi*) from "Roza" (1788: 118-119) appears in Pesennik 1795: II, 106; Pesennik 1796: II, 129-130. The song "O Pure and Silver Well" (*Istochnik chistoi i srebristoi*) from "An Irony of Fate" (1789: 115) appears in Pesennik 1795: II, 30.

³² Sermain 1985.

³³ Rousseau 1964: II, 238 (Part 2, letter XV); II, 231-232 (Part 2, letter XIV).

not rhetoric - the construction of an author - but the uncorrupted language of real, natural people. As we saw when discussing "The Letters of Ernest and Doravra", Fedor Emin not only borrowed heavily from Rousseau's passionate style, but also incorporated the opposite mode, the rhetoric of gallantry, represented by the letters from Le Pays. His son Nikolai Emin, too, incorporated contradictory stylistic modes in his novels: the passionate utterances of lovers and the witty speech of light-hearted *petits maîtres* and *soubrettes*. It is important to note that Nikolai Emin adopts Rousseau's example of an authentic love letter from the "Second Preface" as an epigraph for his novel "An Irony of Fate". However, Vsemil's love letters show that he misunderstood the rules for passionate eloquence, as they are not only composed with syntactical figures, like the letters of Saint-Preux, but also contain complex tropes such as periphrasis.

The style of Nikolai Emin's novels distinguishes itself by the extensive use of periphrasis, a trope absent from Rousseau or Goethe, and used by Richardson only to characterise the falsehood of a negative character such as Lovelace. Nikolai Emin uses this stylistic feature in the letters of all his characters, in both their narrative descriptions and dialogue.

Nikolai Emin is a master of equivocal periphrasis. He uses it not only as a roundabout way of speaking, but also to suggest two or more meanings, as the following examples taken from Slabosil's life-story will show. In Slabosil's story of when he tutored the children of the rich but uncivilised merchant Pankratii Butylin, he jokes that because the latter's daughter Nastas'ia was not very good at mathematics, she could neither count the kisses of her two lovers nor measure the degree of their declarations of love. So inevitably: "the enchanted girdle of virtue could no longer hold the pressure of passion, snapped, and before the parents could notice the augmentation of her belly, Nastas'ia Pankrat'evna had already thrown a grandchild into their arms" (*Obvorozhennoi poias tselomudriia ne mog sderzhat' natugi strastei, porvalsia i prezhe, nezheli uspeli roditeli zemetit' prirashchenie chreva, Nastas'ia Pankrat'evna briak im na ruki vnuchku*) (1789: 95). The snapping of the belt denotes the loss of self-control, but at the same time suggests the swelling of Nastas'ia's belly. We encounter the same double entendre in the periphrastic depiction of Slabosil's first sexual favour wrested from the stoic prostitute Prolaza: "I immediately unravelled the secret and took the inaccessible Gibraltar, which, as it appeared, had been conquered several times without any floating batteries". (*Totchas razviazal ia zagadku i vzial nepristupnyi Gibraltar, kotoroi, kak kazalosia neskol'ko raz pobezhden byl bez vziakh plavaiushchikh batarei*) (1789: 78). The

unravelled secret is a periphrasis for both Prolaza's naked body as for her true character, while the image of the fortified rock attacked by warships, is a metaphor of Slabosil's warlike love tactics, while in the same time suggesting the shape of male genitals. In Emin's novels periphrasis is not only used to embellish reality or hide its unsavoury aspects, as in Vsemil's depictions of nature and satires on city life, it also provides titillating plays on words. Furthermore, periphrasis is one of Emin's main instruments of irony.

The progressive decrease in length of Nikolai Emin's novels, together with the great variety of inserted non-epistolary texts called "trifles" (*bezdelki*) (1789: 44), and the use of ironic, titillating periphrases so uncharacteristic of his western-European models, all suggest a heightened influence of Rococo aesthetics on his work.

Rococo is a term used to describe an eighteenth-century style of art characterised by elaborate but graceful ornamentation. Its particular unity of stylistic elements, as found in many eighteenth-century works of art, cannot be defined by terms like 'classicism' and 'sentimentalist'. According to the canons of the Rococo, ethical and aesthetical rules become a display of pedantry when too rigidly observed. For this reason the boundaries between literary genres were not fixed, and prose and poetry were allowed to mingle within one text. The Rococo also tried to abstain from sententious moral pronouncements, so the main characters of its elegant narrations were neither praised nor blamed. One could say that the Rococo represented an aristocratic aesthetic in the face of bourgeois moralising, depicting man with ambiguous irony rather than through one-dimensional satire.³⁴

The Rococo style left its mark on all forms of art and architecture in eighteenth-century Russia. Some well-known examples are Imperial buildings, like the Petersburg Winter Palace, with interiors full of elegant paintings by Fedor Rokotov hung on wallpaper featuring erotic scenes, and gardens landscaped with little "temples of love" hidden in the woods. The Russian taste for the Rococo also expressed itself in the popularity of the comic operas staged at the Petersburg court and of certain literary works, such as the poem "Love" (*Liubov'*) (1771) by Fedor Dmitriev-Mamonov, and "Psyche" (*Dushenka*) (1775) by Ippolit Bogdanovich.³⁵ The style of these works satisfied the sensual epicurism of the Russian courtiers and was well suited to the atmosphere of eroticism at Catherine II's imperial court.

³⁴ Anger 1968. Hatzfeld 1972. Brady 1984.

³⁵ Segel 1973.

Although Nikolai Emin broadly followed the structure of Rousseau's "New Heloise" and Goethe's "Werther", he modified these bourgeois models to suit the taste of his mundane aristocratic readership and the members of Catherine's court, to one of which "An Irony of Fate" was dedicated. In a way similar to that used by Claude-Joseph Dorat, he tried to give his novels an elegant, cheerful tone, while subduing the sentimental pathos of his main characters.

Although Nikolai Emin draws from the same type of conflict as in his father's work, he offers a different solution to the social problems that men of his station had to face. While his father's generation sought to solve these problems by resignedly discrediting desire and social aspirations, Nikolai Emin does not denounce desire completely, even though he does not see how total fulfilment is possible under the circumstances of his time. He is forced to formulate a compromise. The endings of his novels suggest that, for the time being, young and educated, yet poor and powerless Russian noblemen could find compensation for the disappointments and humiliations of everyday civil service in the platonic courtships that diverted the St. Petersburg court and Moscow drawing rooms. The Russian *beau monde* (*svet*) of the second half of the eighteenth century enabled young noblemen to realise their aspirations in conditions that seemed to belong to the real world.³⁶ However, Nikolai Emin is aware that the platonic compromise sought by his protagonists will not totally satisfy desire. He acknowledges that desire is directed at physical possession, something his protagonists never obtain, and in the end their position in the world remains unchanged.³⁷

³⁶ Pelous 1980: 10; 100-101.

³⁷ MacArthur 1990: 37-40.

CHAPTER SIX

M.V. SUSHKOV'S "THE RUSSIAN WERTHER"

The most remarkable thing about "The Russian Werther" (*Rossiiskii Verter*) is the fact that only weeks after it was written its 16-year old author, Mikhail Sushkov, killed himself in much the same way as the protagonist does.

Sushkov's death in 1792 caused something of a scandal because of his family ties to highly placed persons in Russian society. Sushkov's grandfather had occupied a post of some significance in the civil service. His mother Mariia Khrapovitskaia, who had translated Addison, Young and Marmontel, was well known in court circles, and his uncle Aleksandr Khrapovitskii, was secretary to the empress Catherine the Great.

Mikhail Sushkov was the eldest of at least nine children. His brothers Petr and Nikolai Sushkov also engaged in literary pursuits. It is through them that Mikhail Sushkov is connected to figures of nineteenth-century Russian literary history such as the poetess Evdokiia Rostopchina (Petr Sushkov's daughter) and the object of Lermontov's unrequited love, Ekaterina Khvostova (daughter of Aleksandr Sushkov). Khvostova's memoirs describe her childhood at the family estate in Simbirsk and paint a rather negative portrait of her grandfather, Vasili Mikhailevich, Sushkov's father, who took no interest in the education of his sons and left some of them to their fate at the age of thirteen.¹ This could explain the cool relationship between Mikhail Sushkov and his parents that is evident in his farewell letters.²

Nevertheless, Mikhail Sushkov was very well educated and talented. He started to write poetry by the age of 10, and at 16 he had already published some of his poems and compiled a four-volume mythological dictionary. However, most of Sushkov's writings remained in manuscript form and were collected by his family after his death. Some of these works could be published only after Alexander I became emperor, an event that brought some relaxation of censorship. The epistolary novel "The Russian Werther" appeared in 1801, followed in 1803 by a collection of poetry: "A Memorial to my Brother" (*Pamiat' bratu*), edited by Petr Sushkov. This collection consists of 69 titles of very diverse genres, some already published. We may assume that much of his work has been lost, including Sushkov's

¹ Sushkova 1928: 45.

² For the biographical material on Sushkov referred to in this chapter see: Fraanje 1995.

philosophical writings, a summary of which appears in the unpublished memoirs of his brother Nikolai.

Mikhail Sushkov formed close friendships with Nikolai Khitrovo and the poet Grigorii Khovanskii, both army officers and well known in mundane circles for their revelry. Sushkov is said to have been in love with one of Khitrovo's sisters, Natal'ia, and to have portrayed her in the heroine of his novel, Mariia, as suggested in his brother's memoirs. If this is true, Mikhail Sushkov tried hard to disguise his feelings: when addressing Natal'ia Khitrovo in the dedicatory poem to his novel he asserts ironically that he finds defects in her, and in his last letter to Nikolai Khitrovo he mentions his alleged beloved only as part of a cynical joke.

Although we know little about Sushkov's short life and much is left to speculation, his last days can be documented in detail thanks to the report on his death issued by the Moscow police officer Pavel Glazov. According to this report, Mikhail Sushkov lived for some time with his aunt, Praskovia Sushkova, in Pokrovskoe or Chirkovo (*Pokrovskoe Chirkovo-tozh*), a village in the district of Podol'sk near Moscow. It is possible that he wrote his "Russian Werther" here in - as he claims in the foreword to his novel - a burst of creativity that lasted three days. In July 1792 Sushkov left for Moscow to enter active military service in the elite Preobrazhenskii Guard regiment. As was the practice amongst the eighteenth-century Russian nobility, Sushkov was registered for the Guards at his birth and had to take leave to continue his schooling. Upon reaching the rank of sergeant, he entered active service on his seventeenth birthday, the 9th of August. On July 14th Sushkov arrived with his servant at his aunt's home in Moscow. The house was deserted. Most of the household had followed Sushkov's aunt to her country estate for the summer except for a few servants, including Sushkov's old wet-nurse. The day after his arrival Sushkov put a plan into action that he must have been considering for some time. He locked himself in his bedroom, wrote several letters, and then hanged himself. It was not until after noon the next day, when his old wet nurse wanted to surprise him with a dish of berries, that the servants found their young master dead. They sent for the police, who examined the body and confirmed that hanging was the sole cause of death. In accordance with custom, the city commander Prince Prozorovskii ordered the body to be buried at an unspecified and unconsecrated spot beyond the Moscow city boundaries. He had Sushkov's letters copied and sent at least two of them: those addressed to his uncles Aleksandr and Mikhail Khrapovitskii, to the empress in St. Petersburg One

of these letters eventually became a pamphlet that scandalised the Russian public.

One could argue that the cynicism evident in Sushkov's letters, his extreme ideas taken from Enlightenment philosophers and finally his suicide resulted from a sense of alienation felt by many members of eighteenth-century Russian nobility. As a result of the traditional hereditary law that divided up the paternal estate equally amongst all children, the individual nobleman was at pains to build up an independent economic base and was continuously subject to the threat of impoverishment. This drove him into the hands of the growing state machinery, which, in exchange for service, guaranteed social status, and promised security and legal protection for property and persons. In this way the demands of the new Petrine state disrupted the time-honoured social order, dissolving the 'intimate structures' of family and clan, and left individual Russian noblemen with a feeling of isolation and insecurity.³ In his travel notes of the early 1770's, William Richardson sees the burdensome dependence of the average Russian and his lack of individual freedom as the cause of the darker tones in the Russian "national character", such as its tendency to sudden manic-depressive mood shifts. As Richardson noted, "their despondency often terminates in suicide".⁴

In this light it is interesting to summarise a story by the German author Johann Friedrich Ernst Albrecht. In his 1788 collection of suicide stories, Albrecht recounts the life of a suicide victim told to him by a Russian prince in the time he worked as a doctor to count Manteufel in the Baltic provinces.⁵ The person in question was an educated peasant called Dubizza (the name is a corruption of the Russian *dubishcha* meaning 'churl', which apparently expresses more the view of the Russian prince than that of the author). The peasant upholds rationalist enlightenment positions regarding an individual's right to self-determination in cases of life and death. He defends his personal integrity when as a young boy he refuses to be beaten by his tyrannical father. For him life had no special value over and above the quality of a person's general well-being. This led him to perform euthanasia on his ailing mother, to pose revolutionary solutions to social questions, and finally, when he was condemned as a murderer and convicted to hard labour in Siberia, to take his own life in cold blood.⁶ Albrecht associated suicide

³ Raeff 1966: 41-47. Raeff 1984: 69-87.

⁴ Richardson 1968: 249.

⁵ On Albrecht and Russia, see: Robel 1994.

⁶ Albrecht 1788: I, 108-142.

with an affirmation of personal integrity and human dignity and a refusal to live under oppression, in slavery or with a debilitating disease. Later in the 1790s Albrecht wrote hostile novels *à cléf* about Catherine II, Paul I, Potemkin and Suvorov that designated Russia as the land called Cockroach on account of its despotic rulers. In this early story of Dubizza, suicide implies a critique of the Russian political system.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Russian noblemen tried to free themselves from their state of dependence. By emphasising their individual value and integrity as nobles, they demanded exemption from corporal punishment, compulsory state service and a range of economic privileges in order to acquire a certain degree of financial independence. These endeavours are a significant theme in Sushkov's suicide letters. As Sushkov explains in his letter to Mikhail Khrapovitskii, he seeks death because he fears the life-long subordination that contradicts his noble sense of honour: he "was not made to crawl" (*ne byl sozdan chtoby presmykat'sia*).⁷ The fact that in a few days he was supposed to appear at the Preobrazhenskii Guards in the uniform of a sergeant instead of an officer must have been a humiliating prospect for him, just as it was for many young aristocrats of the time.⁸ Sushkov's extreme sensitivity to points of honour can explain his rejection of hierarchies, his disdain for authority and for the values of a society that demands humiliating servility. It is this noble pride that is the psychological basis for his so-called Voltairianism, i.e. the mutation of Voltaire's ideas into a provocative rationalistic negativism.

The subversive intent behind Sushkov's suicide has much in common with that of another Russian nobleman, Ivan Opochinin, a retired army officer who shot himself in January 1793, leaving a will in which he denounced such official credos as the value of life and the sanctity of the soul.⁹ Opochinin's denial of the soul's immortality implies a rejection of the authority of state and church over the individual. If there is no compulsion to serve, there is likewise no compulsion to live, and if the soul is mortal the noble man will not be subject to a superior judgement in the afterlife.

In eighteenth-century Russia, suicide was considered by both those who committed it and their social environment to be a denial of generally upheld values as well as a lack of respect for authority and religion. Suicide was

⁷ Fraanje 1995: 154.

⁸ In 1800 the sixteen year old prince Aleksei Kurakin wrote in a letter to his brother that he preferred to remain hidden in his quarters for a hundred years than endure the humiliation of appearing in public in the uniform of only a sergeant (as quoted in: Jones 1973: 280).

⁹ Trefolev 1883. Cf. Lotman 1994: 217-218.

seen as a subversive act, resulting from the ideas of the Enlightenment. In this respect it seemed obvious that the suicides of Sushkov and other Russians were related to the disturbing events of the French Revolution unfolding at the time.

A half-true story

The description of Sushkov's suicide in the police report shows striking similarities to that of the Russian Werther as narrated in the novel's epilogue. Some phrases from the letters of the Russian Werther even appear in Sushkov's own farewell letters. It would be quite fair to argue then that the letters in the novel were actually drafts for real letters, and that the suicide of its hero was the author's premeditation of his own suicide, a rehearsal for real life in the realm of fiction.

The fact that Sushkov's death re-enacted in detail the demise of his literary hero poses the question of the autobiographical nature of the novel: is Sushkov himself a Russian Werther? It is easy to see the entire novel as an autobiography, as some scholars naïvely do.¹⁰ However, if we compare the novel with the known facts about Sushkov's life, we soon discover a noticeable difference between fiction and reality. We know that Natalia Khitrovo served as the prototype of the novel's heroine, but unlike Mariia she was unmarried. Sushkov himself stresses the difference between the two (IV; IX-X). Furthermore, Sushkov had not yet entered active military service, as the hero of his novel did, and never granted freedom to his serfs, as did the Russian Werther.

An autobiographical reading is suggested by the editor's ambiguous foreword that presents the novel as a description of the author's own life: "the invented Werther" (*mnimyi Verter*) (I-II) is in fact Sushkov himself. It is true that Sushkov stresses the similarities between himself and his protagonist. In his foreword he declares that he wanted to create a character that "would be similar to my own" (*takoi, kakov byl blizhe k moemu nраву*), and in the dedication he avows: "I share all Werther's feelings" (*Vertera vse chuvstva ia imeiu*) (IV; IX-X). However, the similarities between author and protagonist are not to be found in the events of their lives but in their character and feelings. Therefore, Sushkov's novel is neither pure fiction nor a true story but, as the subtitle indicates, a "half-true story"

¹⁰ Gordin 1991. Kogan 1996.

(*poluspravedlivaia povest'*), a term that appropriately conveys the idea that a core of truth is inherent in work of fiction.¹¹

Goethe presented his “Werther” as a “true story” contained in a collection of authentic documents, declaring that he was merely their editor. In contrast, Sushkov did not mimic authenticity: he presented the letters of the Russian Werther as his own creation and even explained the principles of their construction in a foreword. The device of fictional authenticity enabled Goethe to replace Werther at the end of his story with an editor who commented on his last letters and put their content into perspective. Goethe’s editor is a second, critical voice that destroys Werther’s monopoly on the text while emphasising the latter’s subjectivity and pathological state of mind. One can find a similar editorial narrative about the hero’s last days in Sushkov’s novel, however here it is reduced to a brief epilogue, and the narrator does not refer to himself as the editor of the letters. Nor does he express other views diverging from those of the main character. The voice of the Russian Werther monopolises the text, and other voices that could challenge its claim to objectivity are suppressed: the other characters in the novel are no more than dim, feeble-voiced shadows. With respect to his model, Sushkov enhances the monologic aspect, which serves to narrow distance between the author and his main character and emphasise the autobiographical nature of the work.

Goethe’s novel was short in comparison with the voluminous works of Richardson and Rousseau. The number of letters in “The Sorrows of the Young Werther” is limited to about 90, making his claim to have written the novel in three weeks entirely plausible. In the foreword to “The Russian Werther” Sushkov declares that he composed his work in just three days and, not surprisingly, the number of letters is reduced even further to 35. This reduction has a noticeable impact on the narrative structure of the novel. There is no suggestion of a prehistory, no digressions or parallel episodes illuminating the main events. Sushkov concentrated on one character and one plot line and as a result turned the short novel into a novella.

¹¹ The term is explained in Nikolai Emin’s play “Rightful in His Soul” (1792). At the question of the flighty prince Shalunov whether it is true that the theatre is more a school of vice than a place of enlightenment, the hypocritical Dvulichin is forced to acknowledge that this is “half-true” (*poluspravedliv*o), which his interlocutor translates as “a little bit of truth” (*nemnogo i pravdy*) (Emin N. 1973: 31). Nikolai Emin and Mikhail Sushkov seem to use the term in an ironic sense: as gallant authors they excuse themselves for the fact that, although they do not want to bother their worldly public with morality, their fiction nevertheless bears some critical resemblance with reality.

While the action of Goethe's novel unfolds over a period of two years, Sushkov's novella covers only half a year. The two years in Goethe's novel correspond to Werther's progression from one psychological state to its opposite, from a mystical harmony with nature to desolation. Sushkov's protagonist does not undergo a transition: for the Russian Werther desolation is his initial as well as final state. Sushkov dates the letters in accordance with the regular three to four day intervals of the eighteenth-century Russian postal service, and like Goethe he follows the seasons from summer to winter. However, the passing of time and the seasons is not reflected in his descriptions of nature, and the hero does not express autumnal moods.

The action in Sushkov's novella bears most similarity with the events in the second part of Goethe's novel. For example, Werther's satires of town gentry and his view of their aristocratic assemblies as a "collection of knick-knacks" (*Raritätenkasten*) are echoed by the Russian Werther's satires of rural nobility using stereotypical caricatures from Fonvizin's comedy, "The Minor" (*Nedorosl'*).¹²

Nevertheless, a summary of the novella's plot will reveal many departures from Goethe's novel. The protagonist, a young nobleman of seventeen (the same age as the author), arrives at his village where he faces awkward peasants, uncivilised provincial nobles and most of all, boredom. But after a few weeks a noble family arrives with a beautiful daughter, Maria (actually *Mariia*), and the protagonist falls in love. His relationship with Maria evolves in the course of three weeks but is then suddenly broken off by her departure. Contemplating the impossibility of their relationship - because he is poor and would not be able to support her - the Russian Werther decides to give up all hope and does not answer her letters. He enters military service in order to forget her, behaves in a desperate fashion, plays cards and loses what fortune he had. Subsequently he gets involved in a duel and kills his adversary. The commander helps to get him discharged from service without dishonour and he moves to another town where, by chance, he comes upon the object of his love, now married to an older man. He sees her often and their love renews, but the husband's suspicions force him to abandon his visits. Realising the impossibility of his love, he decides to put an end to his life. From the epilogue we learn that he had carefully arranged his suicide by writing a will and letters to friends and by laying out a volume of Addison's tragedy "Cato" opened to the Roman hero's famous monologue. Then the Russian Werther hangs himself. He is found the next day by his servants and buried without ceremony. He is also cursed by the

¹² Goethe 1948: IV, 329 (am 20. Jan.).

clergy, not because - as the narrator sarcastically remarks - his suicide was impious, but because he had left them no money.

A strange young man

The differences between Sushkov's novella and Goethe's novel are significant and are not only confined to events. It seems obvious that a character named 'the Russian Werther' would be modelled on the German one, but a close reading of Sushkov's text will show that his hero does not belong to the same species as Goethe's: there are marked differences in their character as well as in the significance of their actions, including their final act of suicide.

The figure of Werther took on different shapes in the work of Russian authors depending on their intentions. Nikolai Emin turned Werther into the stock character of the 'overly passionate' who belonged to a set of complementary characters, each representing a particular moral position. Sushkov, on the contrary, sees in Goethe's Werther the young non-conformist who is led to suicide by his fatal idiosyncrasies.

The unknown editor justifies the publication of Sushkov's novella by declaring that he wanted to present to society the example of "a strange young man" (*strannago molodago cheloveka*) (I). Although it is not clear whether he was referring to the novella's protagonist or the author himself, there is no doubt that the editor considered the work's substance to be the representation of a character, not an account of events. Sushkov confirms in his foreword that his main objective is to depict a character and that he focuses on the portrayal of the character's idiosyncrasies, his thoughts and feelings, while external events and other characters remain secondary. His declaration that he "followed his hero continuously in the changing circumstances of his life" (*sledoval za nim postepенно в различные обстоятельства его жизни*) (IV) implies that these circumstances are only 'changing', not developing or forming a coherent plot; they only serve to illustrate the different sides of the protagonist's character. The emphasis on character description also affects the internal structure of the novella. The character is no longer a function of the plot, an actor in an external intrigue. On the contrary, the plot becomes a function of the character. This dominance of character over plot would not reappear in Russian sentimental prose until Karamzin's stories of the early 1800's.

The protagonist of Sushkov's novel is nameless. The name 'Werther' is no more than an anonomasia used only in the title and the introductory texts

but not in the novella itself. The absence of a name reflects a lack of objectivity and authorial distance, and is characteristic of the perspective from within. It is also a conscious artistic choice directed against the onomastic tradition of older literature. As Sushkov declares in his foreword, his protagonist lacks any name or title that would call to mind a splendid genealogy, as is the case of heroes in French seventeenth-century romances. Nor does he bear a characteristic name typical of eighteenth-century Russian comedy and prose satires, in which, says Sushkov, "characters are only discernible through their names" (*v kotorykh nrayv poznaiutsia tol'ko iz imen*) (VII). Like Bolotov in his 1791 critical notes, Mikhail Sushkov criticises the use of stereotypes and the simplistic and improbable psychology of contemporary Russian literature.¹³

The Russian Werther is a rather complex character with incongruent traits, a mixture of the sentimental lover and the cynical aristocrat. He noticeably shares many features with the "fop" (*shchegol'*), the object of countless satires in eighteenth-century Russian literature. The Russian nobles of the time saw their lives as meaningful solely when employed in service of the state and therefore they fiercely rejected the French model of an independent, non-servile aristocracy given over to the pleasures of life.¹⁴ The Russian noble moralists ridiculed mundaneness as a vice and caricatured their worldly fellow nobles as Francophiles and freethinkers who had but a superficial degree of enlightenment, yet an uncontrollable passion for intrigue, duelling, gambling and debauchery. Representatives of this species in Russian novels are count Vetrogon in Emin's novel "Roza", Slastoliubov in the anonymous novel "Neonila", and Evgenii in Aleksandr Izmailov's novel of the same name. The Russian Werther shares some of these characteristics: he is a freethinker, although conforming to the ways of the world; he plays cards, fights a duel and has sex with one of his female serfs. But what is significant and what sets the Russian Werther apart from these other mundane heroes is the fact that he is not denounced by his author. Sushkov, turning in his foreword to "the honourable moralisers" (*gospoda nrayouchiteli*) (V), explicitly denies any didactic intent and refrains from passing authorial judgement on his protagonist. His objective is not to present an ideal hero or a villain, not to render a moral truth, but to give a psychologically convincing portrait of a contemporary young nobleman. Naturally the close autobiographical relationship between author and protagonist also helped prevent didactic distance from developing.

¹³ Bolotov 1933: 217.

¹⁴ Raeff 1966: 121.

Recapitulating, one can say that the significance of Sushkov's novella lies in the autobiographical relationship between the author and his protagonist. What is more, this autobiographical relationship fosters a non-didactic attitude toward the protagonist, who is now longer the bearer of either all virtues or all possible vices but a complex and agonised person. Sushkov's Russian Werther has a place in the genealogical line from the satirised 'fop' of the eighteenth century moral journals, the complex aristocratic villains Lovelace and Valmont to the bored and demonic noblemen Onegin and Pechorin, a development that is marked not so much by a change in character traits but in their valuation. In his emancipation from clear didactic valuation, Sushkov's Russian Werther shares many characteristics with Pushkin's and Lermontov's heroes. First he is plagued by boredom or *ennui*, the 'demon of noon tide' of the old Christian church fathers, which would also become Pushkin's 'demon' and one of the main characteristics of his romantic heroes.¹⁵ The Russian Werther has the "desperate ways" (*otchaiannyi nray*) (41) of a Silvio indulging in the risks of gambling though always keeping an aristocratic self-control. In the same way careless about his physical safety he gets involved in a duel and, as would later Lermontov's Pechorin, kills his adversary without any show of emotion. In a modest form Sushkov's protagonist forebodes the demonic heroes of Pushkin and Lermontov and one could claim that his novella is an early example of Russian romanticism.

Spleen

The chief characteristic of the protagonist that determines his actions, his attitude towards his environment, the style of his letters, in short, the entire story, is boredom or spleen. Spleen was a typical feature in the eighteenth-century image of mundane man and was regularly ridiculed in contemporary Russian journals, poems and novels. In Sushkov's novella, however, spleen is not depicted didactically or satirically from the outside, but as a psychological or emotional state from within.

Spleen is not to be equated with melancholy. On the contrary, one can see it as a form of depression diametrically opposed to melancholy. In eighteenth-century European cultural discourse melancholy was related to religion, either positively, as for example in Edward Young's "The Complaint, or Night Thoughts" (1742-1744), or negatively, in the rationalist

¹⁵ Kuhn 1976: 43.

Enlightenment criticism of sectarian enthusiasm.¹⁶ Spleen, on the other hand, was related to freethinking and a lack of faith; it was considered typical of mundane aristocrats. While melancholy encouraged contemplation of a life after death and made one aware of the existence of another dimension, the metaphysical, spleen prevented its sufferer from seeing anything other than a one-dimensional world. For the splenetic the world seems devoid of any transcendence - it is just a multitude of meaningless objects. Spleen could be regarded as the pathological reflex of Enlightenment scepticism, which undermined faith and caused disillusionment in traditional values.¹⁷ This disillusionment entered the souls of young well-educated Russian noblemen under the cover of Voltairianism.

Sushkov's hero expresses his spleen in a cynical wit directed against all those who still revere traditional values. The Russian Werther has lost his faith and when at a certain moment, "consumed by spleen and almost losing his senses" (*snedaemomu skukoiu i pochti v bezumii*) (66-67) he resorts to reading the Bible, he finds it impossible to derive any comfort. For this reason the smug religiosity of some of his contemporaries provokes his irritation, as for example that of the elderly playwright Denis Fonvizin. Fonvizin, the successful author of comedies like "The Brigadier" (*Brigadir*) and "The Minor" (*Nedorosl'*), had converted to a more religious life after suffering several strokes that turned him into a paralytic. He went on to write a confessional diary and devout pamphlets, such as "Thoughts on the Idle Life of Man on the Occasion of the Death of P.P." (*Rassuzhdenie o suetnoi zhizni chelovecheskoi na sluchai smerti K.P.*), inspired by the sudden demise of the once all-powerful imperial favourite Prince Potemkin in autumn 1791. Although this last pamphlet was not published until 1805, hand-written copies of it circulated among the Russian public, a situation that is reflected in Sushkov's novella. When the Russian Werther receives a copy of Fonvizin's pamphlet from his friend, he cannot conceal his scorn for the old man's Christian humility and unshakeable belief in a just Providence. Fonvizin assumed that the strokes paralysing him were a divine punishment; the Russian Werther comments cynically: "No doubt the last stroke struck him in the brain" (*Konechno poslednii udar porazil ego v mozg*) (6).¹⁸

The Russian Werther's disdain for religion stands in sharp contrast to the enthusiasm of the German Werther. The latter never doubted God's existence and always felt the presence of the divine in the natural world surrounding

¹⁶ Schings 1977.

¹⁷ Kuhn 1976: 139-140; 164-165.

¹⁸ Cf. Fonvizin 1959: II, 80.

him. Goethe's Werther feels himself part of nature. Sushkov's Werther is incapable of pantheistic enthusiasm; his world is devoid of the metaphysical. Although it is suggested that Sushkov left some philosophical writings in the spirit of Spinoza's pantheism, one cannot find a trace of nature-worship in his novel. In fact, unlike Goethe's Werther, Sushkov's Werther has very little appreciation of nature; his descriptions of it are sparse and repeat classical loci. Absent are the illogical metaphors typical of Goethe, in which the subject merges with nature. Sushkov's few metaphors are logical and do not express a romantic projection of the self in nature. Against the German Werther's pantheistic imagery and "Sturm und Drang" lyricism, the style of the Russian Werther's letters is sober and classical, reflecting a state of indifference and a cold sceptical rationalism.¹⁹

The world of Sushkov's Werther contains very little poetic beauty; he cannot but see the prosaic aspects of life. The discrepancy between the poetic and the prosaic, between literature and reality, between, for example, the bucolic idyll and real country life, is one of the recurrent motifs in Sushkov's novel.

The exposure of the idyllic was one of the subjects of the classical genre of the burlesque. The burlesque contrasted the life of idealised peasants with the trivial facts of reality, although not to show the falsehood of the idyllic, but only to mirror the serious genre with a comic counter piece, all in accordance with the classicist system of literary kinds.²⁰ The exposure of the idyllic is also an important motif in Karamzin's story "Poor Liza" (*Bednaia Liza*). This story appeared in June 1792 in the Moscow Journal, and one can assume that Sushkov must have read it while he was working on his novella. Karamzin's story tells of the young nobleman Erast who thinks he can turn poetry into reality by starting a love affair with the peasant girl Liza. Within the world of the tale, however, the idyll of peasant life is real, although only for Liza and not for a nobleman like Erast. The moral of the story is that Erast cannot escape his own class and that the virtues of peasant life remain closed to him: the idyllic *emploi* of noble men and women is no more than self-deception. Thus Karamzin's exposure of the idyllic is not so much an exposure of the idyll itself as of his hero's inadequate world-view.²¹

In Sushkov's novella the idyllic is exposed not for comic effect or to show the naïveté of the protagonist, but to underscore the falsehood of the idyll itself. The exposure of the idyll is directed against the idealisation of

¹⁹ Zhirmunskii 1981: 30-32

²⁰ Klein 1988: 19-22; 167-168.

²¹ Cf. Hammarberg 1982: 239-278.

peasants by authors like Karamzin. The Russian Werther mistrusts the degree of truth in idyllic portrayals of country life by contemporary authors and “doubts the sincerity of their exaltation” (*somnevaius' v istine ikh vostorgov*) (2). He then shows that idyllic poetry is just a sequence of compulsive rhymes by translating one of his own idyllic love poems back into the prosaic reality that inspired it, turning “a shepherd girl” (*pastushka*) into “a peasant woman in birch shoes” (*babu v laptiakh*) (3; 16). The sexual encounter that he has with one of them is not an example of high-pitched poetic love, but a mixture of momentary oblivion on his side and mechanical subordination on hers. The peasant girl is not a sensitive and virtuous beauty like Pavel L'vov's Maria, Radishchev's Annushka and Karamzin's Liza; she is not the Galatea and Estella of Florian's pastoral novels, but a soulless “wind-up toy” (*kuklu, kotoraiia dvizhetsia po zavedennoi pruzhine*) (21). In refutation of Karamzin's maxim that peasant women too are capable of love, he declares that: “they are not able to feel either happiness nor sorrow” (*ni veseliia, ni pechali ne umeiut pochuvstvovat'*) (17) and that in fact they have less feeling than his dog.

Spleen not only determines the hero's attitude towards religion, nature, and literary idealisations; it also determines the course of the action. The story of the Russian Werther is not a love story but a tale of disillusionment. The initial state is the hero's feeling of emptiness, and the action that follows, including his attempt at love, can be seen as a quest for a state of happiness defined as the inverse of the void within. When he meets Maria he thinks he has reached this state, declaring: “At last I have freed myself from this unbearable emptiness” (*Nakonets, ia izbavilsia toi nesnosnoi pustoty*) (23). But his attempt fails due to his own inertia, and he falls back on an army career, wondering if perhaps “ambition will silence the cry of the heart” (*chestoliubie ne zaglushit li voplia serdtsa*) (41). Werther summarises his life story in the phrase: “I will exploit, yes, exploit all ways to happiness, and if nothing softens my lot, I will resort to the last of all means” (*ispytyvaiu, ispytyvaiu vse puti k schastiiu, i ezheli nichko ne usladit moei sud'by, to pribegnu k poslednemu sredstu*) (41-42). However, the curve of the novella's action circles in on itself and all his actions are in vain. When he realises that his quest is leading him nowhere he sees only one means of escape.

The meaning of the end

Long before the final rupture with the object of his love, the Russian Werther starts alluding to suicide as a possible way of ridding himself of his feeling of emptiness. These allusions materialise in explicit deliberations on suicide that dominate his last letters. The novella is entitled “The Russian Werther” because, like Goethe’s novel, it is a story about a suicide: the fatal act is not just a secondary motif, as in other Russian epistolary novels, but the novella’s theme, its logical and carefully prepared conclusion.

Since the Renaissance suicide attempts and self-inflicted deaths were stock elements in European romances and also found their way into their eighteenth-century Russian descendants. Suicide fulfilled a variety of functions as a motif and an episodic event. First, threats of suicide served as a mark of passionate love, illustrating the physical and mental disorder caused by uncontrolled passion, and they were an established part of the catalogue of romantic expressions of love. Secondly, suicide was one of the few possible endings of a love story. On the one hand it was a means to punish vicious characters, serving as the instrument of poetic justice. On the other hand it could also be the logical result of the platonic love theory. According to the platonic concept of love postulated by European romances, love is an absolute and immutable state, an ever-lasting feeling that can only conclude in either marriage or death, the latter brought about by accident, illness, or self-destruction.²² For example, the suicide of Karamzin’s poor Liza underlines her altruism, her readiness to sacrifice all that is precious to her and the absolute value she puts on love. Suicide was also a very effective tragic ending as it provoked emotional catharsis and sympathetic pity within the reader. While identifying with the unfortunate hero who stabs himself, the reader would repeat this gesture in his or her imagination, thereby attempting to kill the pain of their frustrated aspirations and unfulfilled desire.

The treatment of the suicide theme in the sentimental novella à la Karamzin significantly differs from that of the epistolary novel. In the third person novella suicide is an instrument for achieving the desired emotive effect. Restricting himself to pitiful exclamations, the narrator usually abstains from moral deliberations about suicide, as this would defeat the novella’s purpose of provoking compassion. In the first person epistolary novel, however, the suicide cannot be narrated by the letter-writing character himself, and therefore this task is assigned to the fictional editor. The act of suicide

²² Pelous 1980: 51; 105-107.

must be prepared by allusions and explicit death-wishes in the letters of the main character. As suicide is less an external event than a choice from within it is more naturally the subject of reflections and moral discussions.

The discussions revolving around suicide in epistolary novels mirrored the eighteenth-century moral debate. Suicide was a controversial subject in the age of Enlightenment because it touched on fundamental questions, such as: "Has man the right to decide his own fate, to dispose of his own life and death, or should he be subordinate to Providence and higher powers? Is man his own master or does he belong to society, the state, to God?" The philosophers of the Enlightenment could not provide unequivocal answers and it was this indeterminacy that shaped the dialogic nature of some French epistolary novels. Hence the ambiguous treatment of suicide in Montesquieu's "Persian Letters" and Rousseau's "The New Heloise".

It is interesting to note the parallels in wording and argumentation between Saint-Preux's suicide letter and that of the Russian Werther. The opening phrases and the rationalising attitude towards suicide are quite similar. Saint-Preux opens his argument with the phrase: "Let us reason!" (*raisonnons!*), while the Russian Werther too emphasises the persuasive logic of his argument, and both men call on their friends to follow their examples. Justifying his argument with a reference to the "great, divine Cato" (*grand et divin Caton*), Rousseau's hero proves a representative of eighteenth-century European "catonism", as does the Russian Werther by quoting Addison's famous tragedy about the Roman hero.²³

But in spite of these similarities, the meaning of the letters differs because of the different functions they perform within the overall structure of each work. The position of Saint-Preux's letter in the middle of the novel is significant. The content of the letter is discredited not only by Bomston's answer but also by the further development of the plot: the suicide threat appears to be only an episodic event and is never realised. Sushkov's hero repeats Saint-Preux's arguments but without any invalidation. His suicide letter is not a mere threat and his final statement is confirmed by the act itself.

While the argumentation regarding suicide in Sushkov's work is close to that of Rousseau's, the way in which it is presented and functions within the work is similar to Goethe's. This does not imply, however, that the meaning of suicide in the works of Goethe and Sushkov is the same. The heroes of

²³ Rousseau 1964: II, 381. Cf. Cato as "the virtuous suicide" (*dobrodetel'nogo samoubiitsu*), the object of the Erast's adoration in Karamzin's "The Sensitive and the Cold" (Karamzin 1964: I, 743).

both novels attach different significance to their final act, as will be shown in an analysis of the metaphors they use for life and death.

For Goethe's Werther life is "confinement" (*Einschränkung*), an existence in "a dungeon" (*Kerker*).²⁴ Werther feels himself restricted because the deepest desires of his soul cannot find fulfilment: they transgress the conditions of human existence. He cannot accept that man has to compromise, that life is "either this or that" (*Entweder Oder*), that some of his desires will always go unfulfilled.²⁵ He fulminates against the rationalist doctrine of compromise and moderation, against the philosophy of the golden mean. He wants to live a complete life and fully develop all the faculties of his soul. That is why his unrestrained behaviour does not discredit him in the author's eyes and why passion, immoderation, drunkenness, insanity, artistic genius (*Genie*), and also suicide, in short, all forms of behaviour that transgress the narrow boundaries of common man's life, are judged in a positive light. In the end even death acquires a positive value because, functioning as the negation of life's negations, it promises liberation from life's confines. Death is the realm where the soul will regain its wholeness and where the lover will be united with the object of his love. However, this can only come about if the soul is immortal, thus a belief in immortality is the necessary precondition for Werther's suicide.

Sushkov's Werther uses other images for life and death, from which one can infer that his suicide has a vastly different meaning. The Russian Werther's behaviour is determined by a longing for oblivion. In his letters he repeatedly expresses the wish to be immured from the disgusting and uncontrollable world around him. In spite of his disdain for peasants he is as jealous of their blissful ignorance as he is of the insensitivity of country noblemen, and he envies the adepts of stoic philosophy in their ability to attain the blessed state of indifference (16-17; 59; 75-76). He tries to lose himself in long nights of card-playing and solitary reveries (69-70). Melancholic torpor brings relief because it causes a liberating numbness (60; 70). Imagining his dead body, he uses epithets stressing insensitivity, which is what makes death so appealing to the Russian Werther (70; 77).

This state of imperviousness, however, can only be guaranteed by the non-existence of a sentient subject. Therefore, the Russian Werther doubts the soul's immortality because that would imply eternal wakefulness.²⁶ The existence and immortality of the soul were also the subject of Sushkov's

²⁴ Goethe 1948: IV, 275-276 (*am 22. May.*); also: 290 (*am 21. Juni.*).

²⁵ Goethe 1948: IV, 306 (*am 8. aug.*).

²⁶ Sushkov 1803: 1-5; 9-13.

poem "A Conversation with Young; Thoughts on Death and Eternity" (*Beseda s Jungom. Mysli o smerti i vechnosti*) and his "Second Satire" (*Satira vtoraja*), in which he still entertained the possibility of immortality. In his novel "The Russian Werther" and in his farewell letters, he has already distanced himself from this position. Quoting Cato's monologue, originally meant by Addison as an apology for immortality, Sushkov suppresses all references to this topic and bestows the text with a different meaning. Addison's Cato originally held a sword in one hand and Plato's "Phaidon" in the other, signifying the immortality of the soul. In contrast, Sushkov's Cato only holds the sword, with the result that the monologue no longer addresses the question of whether the soul is immortal or not, but shifts its focus to the problem of the autonomous human will. The sword becomes the symbol of the power to be or not to be.

Unlike Goethe's hero, who imagined death as the gateway to an eternal afterlife, Sushkov's hero hopes to revert to an inanimate condition. The German Werther, motivated by a 'Sturm und Drang' ambition for total self-realisation, and inspired by an irrational romantic belief in an ideal afterlife, hoped to become only soul and wholly soul.²⁷ The Russian Werther, following materialist Enlightenment philosophers, doubts the immortality of the soul and seeks total self-annihilation.

The annihilation of the self is one of the possible solutions to the conflict of desire that lies at the heart of the epistolary novel's plot. As the protagonists of other Russian epistolary novels, the Russian Werther is trapped between his compelling desire for self-fulfilment and virtue's demand that the desiring self be curtailed. He cannot choose between the two: he will neither offend the social order (for example, by luring his beloved into adultery and thus making her dishonourable) (64), nor can he renounce desire. His frustrated desire implodes on itself, creating a feeling of emptiness and a sad susceptibility to the idea that the only way of breaking the deadlock is suicide.

²⁷ Kayser 1994: 130-132.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“SOME LETTERS FROM MY FRIEND”

The anonymous epistolary novel “Some Letters from my Friend” (*Neskol'ko pisem moego druga*) was published in the 1794 and 1795 issues of the Moscow journal “A Pleasant and Useful Passing of Time” (*Priyatnoe i poleznoe preprovozhdenie vremeni*). This journal appeared twice a week as a supplement to the “Moscow Post” (*Moskovskie vedomosti*) and was compiled by Vasilii Podshivalov, a close friend of Nikolai Karamzin and Ivan Dmitriev.¹ Like the journals of Karamzin, “A Pleasant and Useful Passing of Time” was a product of ‘participatory’ journalism, in which the public was invited to submit contributions. It was mostly graduates of Moscow University and the boarding school for noble youth who submitted pieces, as well as young army officers on campaign in Poland. Therefore, it is likely that we will find the anonymous Russian author of “Some Letters” amongst them. These contributors published original poetry - for the most part love songs - as well as prose translations from German and French journals. Whereas foreign sources were always mentioned, authors of original contributions, such as Derzhavin, Ivan Dmitriev, Grigorii Khovanskii, Vladimir Izmailov and Pavel Gagarin, used numerical codes, initials, or were referred to as “an unknown person”.²

Podshivalov often edited the contributions, changing the text and adding his own commentary. He also gave regular accounts of works he had received but for several reasons could not accept. Podshivalov’s critical remarks and refusals of contributions were sometimes considered humiliating for the author concerned. Khovanskii, an accomplished poet who had published in the journal regularly, was so infuriated by Podshivalov’s refusal to print one of his works that he challenged the fastidious editor to a duel at a public gathering at Moscow University in July 1795.³

¹ Karamzin 1866: 51-66.

² Neustroev 1875.

³ Karamzin 1866: 56. Shortly after, in September 1795, in reply of some who “demand a firm answer” (*trebuiut reshitel'nago otveta*), Podshivalov published a list of contributions he had rejected for reason of their mediocre quality (PPPV 1795: VII, 320).

Authentic fictions

The journal's reliance on contributions, together with Podshivalov's editorial interventions, complicated the structure of "Some Letters from my Friend". The novel is presented as a collection of authentic letters. The "unknown person" (*neizvestnyi*) (IV, 127; V, 374) who submitted the letters to the journal introduces himself as the letters' original recipient, while in fact his role of recipient and editor of the collection is part of the novel's fictional structure. Similar claims of authenticity were common in eighteenth-century western-European epistolary novels. However, authentication devices are rare in their Russian counterparts. In "Some Letters", the use of the device was encouraged by the fact that the journal in which the novel appeared was compiled in part from anonymous contributions, making it difficult to verify claims of authenticity. In addition, the journal's editor, Podshivalov, reinforced the claim by repeating the words of the letters' fictional editor. Furthermore, he shortened the novel by cutting four letters down to the fragments he thought most interesting and by substituting the omissions with a summary in his own words. Here he became, as it were, co-author of the novel: the real-life editor doubles the fictional editor.

Not only does the author of "Some Letters" suggest textual authenticity, he also lays claim to truth by linking the story to real historical events. "Some Letters" is the only Russian epistolary novel with a plot clearly set in history. In his introduction, the fictional editor asserts that the papers have been in his possession for a long time; in fact, the letters were written seven years previously, dated from July until October 1787. The main historical fact referred to is empress Catherine II's famous journey to the Crimea, which took place in the first half of 1787. The heroine Amalia and her husband Heinrich (*Genrikh*), both Germans, are said to have been part of the empress's entourage and to have spent the spring with her in Kiev (IV, 167). Here her husband falls ill, and Amalia leaves him behind to complete the journey with the empress, arriving in Moscow in June 1787. After the court leaves for St. Petersburg, Amalia waits alone in Moscow for her husband to arrive. It is in this situation that the protagonist of the novel meets her at a ball. Shortly after their encounter he writes his first letter and the epistolary novel begins.

Writing to his friend, the nameless protagonist announces that he no longer is the frivolous young man he used to be but now a sentimental lover: he has met Amalia. Unfortunately, he learns that she is already married, and

knowing he must distance himself, he leaves Moscow for the countryside. Here the protagonist exalts in the superior mores of the peasants and in the true life he discovers in nature, all of which convinces him of the legitimacy of his irrational passion. Shortly after his return to Moscow, the protagonist falls ill, but Amalia's compassion restores his health. He starts to frequent her house, where they discuss music and literature and express their feelings by reading poetry from a 1775 volume of the German journal "Mercure", among them Von Reitzenstein's poem "Charlotte at the grave of Werther" (*Lotte bei Werthers Grabe*).⁴ Amalia allows him to be an intimate friend, a position Heinrich, who has since returned from Kiev, regards with suspicion. The protagonist and Heinrich cannot get along: they disagree on everything, engaging in bitter discussions on politics, philosophy and morals. Once the protagonist catches Amalia and her husband quarrelling, after which he pays Heinrich a visit and accuses him of maltreating his wife. When the protagonist presents him a pair of pistols and challenges him to a duel, Heinrich becomes frightened and seemingly promises to yield his wife to her lover. Delighted with the prospect that Heinrich will divorce Amalia, the protagonist discontinues his visits while waiting for the case to be settled. However, everything turns out to be just one of Heinrich's stratagems. Taking advantage of her lover's absence, he forces his wife to leave with him for St. Petersburg. The protagonist is thrown into despair and leaves for the countryside, cursing the fatal effects of passion. There he spends most of his time indulging in melancholic reveries on graveyards shaded by autumnal trees. As reported in a short editorial note, he dies from an unspecified illness shortly thereafter.

Nature symbolism

The entire story is told in 22 letters written by the protagonist to a friend, who later becomes the editor. The collection of letters is divided into two parts of 10 and 12 letters, respectively. The 10 letters of the first part, published in the last quarter of 1794, depict the development of the hero's love for Amalia. The letters are lengthy and include long episodes and detailed descriptions of nature that have no direct relation to the central love story. Some letters show clear affinities with narrative structures popular in Russian sentimentalism, like "the rambling" (*progulka*) with its arbitrary order of objects encountered and the erratic sequence of associations evoked

⁴ Cf. Zhirnunskii 1981: 41-49.

by them.⁵ The 12 letters that constitute the second half of the novel, published in the first quarter of 1795, are short and some of them have suffered cuts by Podshivalov. The rapid succession of short letters reflects the swift development of the action. They start with Heinrich's arrival and relate the events that culminate in the catastrophic end of the protagonist's love.

As in Sushkov's "Russian Werther", the letters are dated following regular intervals of three and four days or their multiples, reflecting the timetable of the contemporary Russian postal service. As we have mentioned, the correspondence spans a period from July until October 1787. The dates not only give the impression of authenticity, but also evoke symbolic meanings: the progression of time and the seasons accompanies changes in the protagonist's moods: autumn runs congruent with the decline in the protagonist's health and subsequent death, while spring serves as the image for his eventual resurrection.

Nature plays an important part in the novel. As we have seen, images of nature offer analogies for psychological conditions: the "physical and the moral world" reflect each other (IV, 147). The association with nature also defines ethical positions. While Moscow is a "swamp" in moral terms, Amalia's private rooms, decorated with landscape paintings and souvenirs from the countryside, reveal that she retains the purity of her soul, her "good nature" (*dobrodushie*) (IV, 157-159; 164). The protagonist draws up the "balance sheet" (*balans*) (IV, 138) between the town and the countryside or "nature". The former is the realm of vanity, flattery, servility and rigid hierarchy, while the latter stands for moral, sentimental qualities like simplicity, tranquillity, freedom, honesty and equality in human relationships.

The greater significance of nature here in comparison with the other Russian epistolary novels becomes obvious in Letter III, written after the protagonist's first departure from Moscow for the countryside to escape the object of his growing passion (IV, 137-153). The letter is actually composed in several sessions during a long walk on a hot day in July. It is true that the forest and the fields with the little village on the slope of the hill are painted with some realistic detail. However, their description is never independent of symbolic functions. All objects in nature become emblems of moral values. Associating himself with nature, the protagonist distances himself from the town and modern civilisation. As he is "a son of nature", he is subordinate to the same laws, changing with the weather and the seasons (cf. V, 384). The

⁵ Cf. Hammarberg 1989.

soul of the passionate protagonist is as erratic as a "garden of Nature" (*sady Prirody*) (IV, 141), as an "English grove" (*Aglinskaia roshcha*) (IV, 137-138). He further expresses his union with nature through irrational, non-classicist metaphors no longer based on direct analogy. Like Werther imagines himself "a beetle" (*Mayenkäfer*), the hero of "Some letters" says: "I am becoming an insect myself" (*Ia sam delaiu nasekomym*) (IV, 143).⁶ This union is also expressed through metaphors endowing nature with human qualities. As a result, the protagonist is capable of communicating with inanimate objects; for example, his soul "converses" (*beseduet*) with the sun (IV, 143). All objects in nature from insects to celestial bodies are his friends, which implies that, in contrast to the world of men, God's creation is an egalitarian community. It is only upon entering the community of nature that man finds his true destination where he can reach perfection and become "like a righteous man" (*podbno pravedniku*) (IV, 143).⁷

The Russian peasants are part of nature, too. Like the German Werther, the protagonist of "Some Letters" interacts with village boys as an equal, and participates in their games. He minglest his tears with those of the peasant family lamenting the recruitment of one of two brothers. The hero sees in Russian peasant life the image of those blessed patriarchal times "when brotherly love reigned among mankind" (*kogda tsarstvovalo mezhdu liud'mi bratskaia liubov'*) (IV, 149; 137-138). Nevertheless, he declares that in those days "leadership was provided by the wisest and most experienced men" (*nachal'stvo soedineno bylo s starshimi i opytneishimi*), that is, those educated men among whom the protagonist includes himself (IV, 149). In addition, the informal address he employs with the peasants, who for their part remain reserved and rather formal, reveals the limits of his sentimental egalitarianism. It can be argued that images of past equality only served his secret dreams of social elevation. While the town is the setting for the young nobleman's humiliation, the countryside serves as the stage on which he himself can play the leading part of the benevolent patriarchal landlord.

The protagonist also uses nature to legitimise his transgression of existing social and moral boundaries; to warrant changing the rules to suit his own desires. While rambling he encounters Russian village boys playing blind man's bluff and recalls the emblematic poem "Children's games" (*Kinder-spel*) by the seventeenth-century Dutch author Jacob Cats. He discovers in the blindfolded little boy a true image of himself, forgetting all

⁶ Goethe 1948: IV, 269 (*am 4. May 1771*).

⁷ Sauder 1974: 212-225.

the moral consequences of his passion (IV, 149-150; 155).⁸ However, he argues that man may be blind and irrational, but still follow truth. He asserts that those who follow the impulses of nature are actually obeying “divine inspirations” (*bozhestvennym vnušeniiam*) (IV, 137-138). He sings the praises of human emotions, whether moral or not, for they are “the Angels of our soul” (*Angelov dushi nashei*) (IV, 156).

Disagreement among friends

Despite the clear predominance of the protagonist’s letters and opinions, the epistolary novel “Some Letters from My Friend” cannot simply be defined as ‘monologic’. Although there are two inserted *billets* from Amalia, they do not contradict the protagonist’s point of view. However, a truly dialogic element, i.e. a point of view divergent from that of the protagonist, is represented by the recipient of the letters, the protagonist’s confidant and eventual editor. This editor-friend expresses his viewpoint not only in letters that, although omitted, can be indirectly ascertained from the protagonist’s words, but he also appears directly in the introduction and the epilogic closing lines of the novel.

Unlike in Goethe’s novel, the confidant and the fictional editor in “Some Letters” are one and the same person. What is more, he is a person with a clearly defined character, as can be seen in his own introduction and in the letters from his friend. It has been suggested that the protagonist and his confidant form a traditional pair of antithetical characters: the sanguine, immoderate ‘poet’ on the one hand and the phlegmatic, rationalist ‘philosopher’ on the other (IV, 127; 154-155; 161). These complementary traits form the precondition for their mutual attraction and friendship. In the spirit of the sentimental cult of male friendships, the other is called “a part of my own self, the most indispensable part enlivening my being” (*chasti samago sebia, nuzhneishei, zhivivshei sushchestvo moe chasti*) (IV, 128). The other is a ‘guardian angel’, a moral supervisor, and the essential party in their reciprocal moral education. As in the spirit of Masonic brotherhood, the other has the right and the duty to give advice, to prevent his friend’s “inner fall” (*vnutrennee padenie*) (IV, 136). It is important to note that the physical absence of the other is both the precondition for the novel’s letter exchanges and the cause of the friend’s fall into error.

⁸ The author of “Some Letters” probably knew the French translation by Feutry, see: Cats 1764.

The opposition in characters also motivates their divergent points of view. The dialogic structure characteristic of many epistolary novels again leads to the interpretative problem. Where to locate the position of the author: in the words of the protagonist, or in those of his confidant, the fictional editor? Some critics of "Some Letters" discern the voice of the author in the statements of the protagonist, while the confidant-editor's moralising is disparaged as "just external". From this perspective, the novel "Some Letters from my Friend" appears as a defence of romantic irrationality, which is seen as the essence of sentimentalism.⁹ However, it should be noted that in an epistolary novel the letters of the protagonist do not always express the author's point of view. As the protagonist often transgresses the boundaries of the morally acceptable, his statements are not the ideology of sentimentalism but, on the contrary, the very sophistries of passion that sentimentalism condemns. Although these outbursts of passion are not severely reproached, they are nevertheless discredited in many ways.

For example, the protagonist of "Some Letters" thinks at first that his love for Amalia will not imply an intrusion into her marriage or an infringement on the rights of her husband because Amalia has given him the "sweet title" (*sladostnoe nazvanie*) of "friend" (IV, 163; 168). Believing that his love is not physical and that he does not desire possession of Amalia, he believes that a harmonious relationship between him and the two spouses is possible. Sitting at Amalia's card table together with some of her mundane guests, he imagines himself to be fostering nothing more than "the most tender friendship" (*nezhneishago druzhestva*), and that "in order to crown these Platonic thoughts..." (*k uvenchaniiu Platonicheskikh myslei...*) (IV, 169). At this point his reverie is cruelly interrupted by a request to join in the game of cards, an interruption that can be seen as an ironic intervention by the author, who in this way debunks his protagonist's faith in the theory of platonic love.

The antithetical structure of the action is another means by which the author discredits his protagonist's point of view. The structure of "Some Letters" is based on contradictions: between characters, spaces (town and countryside), the mounting and falling curve of the love affair and between the protagonist's moods. At the turning point of the plot, the end of the first part, the protagonist describes his emotional life as a fountain, which rises high, but also, falls in minuscule drops (IV, 186). While once feelings of love were "angels", after the failure of his love affair he calls them "the devils of our soul" (*d'iyavoly dushi nashei*) (V, 382). Love is no longer a gift

⁹ Pavlovich 1974: 118.

from heaven, but a “serpent” (*zmeia*) (V, 382). The contradictions within the protagonist belie the objectivity of his expressions and discredit the validity of his character.

Furthermore, Amalia’s husband Heinrich cannot hide his suspicions regarding the pure intentions of his wife’s new “friend”. The joyful reaction of the protagonist when Heinrich offers to divorce Amalia confirms that his love was not platonic, but always aimed at possession. The journal’s editor Podshivalov also expressed his doubts about the hero’s intentions. When shortening some of the letters, he retained only those fragments that contain a discussion on the morals of those who desire the possessions of their fellow men or a self-discrediting lament by the protagonist calling himself “a victim of my own sensibility” (*zhertva svoei chuvstvitel’nosti*) (V, 375-376).

In this way, the author’s point of view cannot be detected in the sententious maxims within the text. The author of “Some Letters” must use other means to make his intentions clear. He does this through contradictions in the protagonist’s character and words. In fact it is not the protagonist but his confidant who seems to be the fictional persona of the author and representative of the authorial point of view. The confidant-editor expresses his views in the introduction and in the closing lines stating: “O youth, o youth!” (*O iunost’, iunost!*) (V, 384). In fact, the words of the protagonist are embedded in those of the confidant-editor. What is more, his point of view is also contained in the title of the novel so that we are constantly obliged to see the protagonist through his confidant’s moralising perspective.

The compassionate reader

However, the protagonist asks his confidant not to moralise but to show pity. When calling: “Pity me, but don’t reproach me!” (*Zhalei tol’ko obo mne, no ne delai uprekov!*) (IV, 155), he designs a role for his confidant, who as a reader of his letters, should be “a friendly companion” (*druzheliubnyi sputnik*) (IV, 155). And indeed, the confidant reacts not as a cold and harsh moralist or a defender of stoic virtues, but as a man of compassionate feelings. The confidant-editor not only serves as the author’s representative, but also as an example of the ideal reader.

Eliciting compassion was one of the moral objectives of eighteenth-century first-person narrative. This desire to make the reader identify compassionately with the protagonist also determined the inner structure of the sentimental novel. During her reading session with the protagonist, Amalia sums up those works she considers “sentimental novels” (*roman*

trogatel'noi), naming among others "Werther" and "Miss Sternheim" by Sophie Laroche (IV, 174). It is no coincidence that these are novels in letters, as it is the letter that affords the highest possible degree of identification with the characters. Amalia confesses that when reading these novels she sheds tears, "empathizing with the feelings of the poor sufferer, projecting myself in his place" (*vkhodia v chuvstvovaniia strazhdushchago, postavliaia sebia na ego mesto*) (IV, 174).¹⁰ Amalia opposes these novels to literary works such as the ancient and "mouldered Don Quixote" (*zaplesnevelago Don Kishota*) (IV, 173). According to her, Cervantes is not a compassionate author but a "satirist" (*Satirik*): he is merciless towards human weaknesses, while the source of his inspiration is not love for mankind but "gall" (*zhelch'*) (IV, 179; 176). For this reason his work is rightfully cast into the fireplace. Amalia's literary judgements reflect the eighteenth-century debate on the value of the novelistic genre. By that time, the epistolary novel had overcome the old arguments of improbability and immorality. The aim of inspiring compassion had elevated the genre, bestowing upon it the same prestige as the classic epic enjoyed within the hierarchy of literary works. Novels had now become the epic's "brothers in prose" (*prozaicheskikh ikh brat'iev*) (IV, 175).

As suggested in the metaliterary discussion between Amalia and the protagonist, the compassionate reader is supposed to share for a moment the desires of the protagonist. These desires are transgressive in the sense that they offend the existing social order. Like the other Russian epistolary novels discussed so far, the plot of "Some Letters from my Friend" is based on a conflict resulting from the protagonist's desire for a woman who not only belongs to another man, but to one of a higher social class than himself. Amalia is the wife of a German member of Catherine II's court. The inferior status of the nameless lover - apparently an ennobled commoner - seems to indicate that his adulterous love for Amalia is indissolubly intertwined with secret ambitions for social advancement. One could say that his love is actually the disguise for these ambitions, or that his desire for social advancement is unconsciously eroticised. To strengthen his claim to Amalia, the protagonist casts doubts on Heinrich's rights, invalidating the motives of their marriage as concluded only for "vile metal" (*podtoi metal*) and denying the value of the religious wedding ceremony (V, 377). Heinrich, who represents the existing social order and the status of the socially privileged, defends his position by continuously referring to "civil laws" (*grazhdanskie*

¹⁰ Cf. Sauder 1974: I, 82; 183-192.

zakony), the inviolability of his rights as a husband and the lack of legal grounds for the protagonist's claims (V, 376; 378).

Although the reader is required to feel compassion and identify with the protagonist, this does not entail total agreement with the transgressive nature of the latter's desire. Although the sentimental hero is the necessary focus of the compassionate reader's experience, he is not the conveyer of truth or an example for the reader to emulate. The epistolary exchange on which "Some Letters from my Friend" is based goes beyond being a special form of narration and an incentive for identification by the reader. It also provides the occasion to reflect upon desire and to allow for a critique of the protagonist's actions and beliefs. By means of editorial comment, as well as through the tragic conclusion to his story, the author distances himself from the desires of his protagonist.

The reading session in "Some Letters" acts as a model of the way the reader interacts with the novel. Just as Amalia and the protagonist find an expression for their own feelings in a German journal, the reader can find the expression of his or her own desires in the novel as a whole.¹¹ The first person narrative of epistolary novels like "Some Letters from my Friend" thus supplied the reader with a fictional outlet for his or her own desires that could not be satisfied in reality. Furthermore, by identifying with the desires of the protagonist, the reader also shared the moral lesson implicit in the story's tragic ending. The assumption is that the failure of such desires would provoke a kind of catharsis within the reader, thanks to which sentimental novels like "Some Letters" could therapeutically alleviate the social frustrations of many Russian middle-ranking noble readers.

¹¹ Cf. Kochetkova 1994: 156-189.

CHAPTER EIGHT

N.N. MURAV'EV'S "VSEVOLOD AND VELESLAVA"

The epistolary novel “Vsevolod and Veleslava” (*Vsevolod i Veleslava*) appeared in 1807, making it one of the first Russian novels of the nineteenth century. In a retrospective twenty years later the self-conscious author claimed that his work, together with Karamzin’s story “Marfa the Governess” (*Marfa posadnitsa*) (1803), constituted the true beginning of the Russian novel.¹

“Vsevolod and Veleslava” is the only novel by Nikolai Nazar’evich Murav’ev, who at the time of its appearance was a young civil servant in a governmental department. Unlike his desk job would suppose, Murav’ev had already lived an adventurous life. Born in 1775, he joined the navy as a teenager and took part in the Swedish war of 1788-1790, during which he was taken prisoner. He then served some ten years on Russian and English navy vessels within the framework of the Anglo-Russian alliance against Napoleonic France. In his late twenties, Murav’ev exchanged the ship for the quiet office probably in order to settle down and start a family. In 1803 he obtained a post at the Moscow branch of the Ministry of Education as first secretary under his relative, the elderly poet Mikhail Murav’ev. In 1806 he made acquaintance with Nikolai Karamzin and, conversing with men of letters, started to practise literature himself.² He published pieces of didactic prose as well as translations of English poets like Alexander Pope and James Thomson, and at the same time worked on a novel. This novel touches mainly on problems of love and marriage, not solely “out of didactic purposes” (*ot umysla*), but as he later wrote, also “because of his own feelings” (*ot sobstvennykh moikh chuvstv*), for he was then courting the daughter of vice-admiral N.S. Mordvinov, Ekaterina Mordvinova, who would soon become his wife.³ When his father died in 1807, Murav’ev temporarily resigned from service and moved to the family estate in the district of Novgorod. His son Nikolai, the future statesman Murav’ev-Amurskii, was born here in 1809, the eldest of no less than fifteen children. After the death of his first wife in 1819, Murav’ev remarried the daughter of naval minister Moller.

¹ Batiushkov 1886: III, 630.

² Karamzin 1848: III, 695.

³ Murav’ev 1828: IX, 2.

Nikolai Murav'ev had a very successful career as a public servant. He started out as governor of the Novgorod district and then became secretary to Alexander I's powerful minister Arakcheev. In 1826 he served as head of the personal chancellery of Nikolai I. At the height of his career, Murav'ev began re-editing all the works he had written over the years and presented these to the public as "Some Pleasant Fruits of Leisure" (*Nekotoryia iz zabav otdokhnoveniia*). At the time, this collection was generally considered an atavistic work. Vasilii Zhukovskii sent the first three volumes containing the re-edition of "Vsevolod and Veleslava" to his friend Aleksandr Turgenev for the latter's "special delight", as he ironically explained.⁴ All thirteen volumes (a fourteenth appeared posthumously) were published from 1828 to 1839 and consisted of essays on subjects varying from religious contemplation to botany; from meteorology to old Russian numismatics. In 1832 Murav'ev retired to the estate he had bought in the St. Petersburg area and occupied himself with agricultural experiments. He died there in the early days of 1845 at the age of sixty-nine.

The problem of invention

Despite the high opinion he held of his own novel "Vsevolod and Veleslava", Nikolai Murav'ev acknowledged that he had "no talent for imagination and didn't like it, and just kept to the already invented novel "The New Heloise"" (*ne imel sposobnosti i ne liubil vymyshliat' nebylitsy, a potomu prosto priderzhalsia uzhe vymyshlennago romana "Novoi Eloizy"*).⁵ Indeed, like Rousseau's Saint-Preux, Murav'ev's main character Vsevolod serves as a tutor at the house of an aristocrat and falls in love with the girl entrusted to his care, Veleslava. However, her father Gostomysl has destined Veleslava for a rich and well-born nobleman and eventually forces her into the arranged marriage. Thus far Murav'ev repeats the basic triangle conflict of Rousseau's novel, but the subsequent development of the plot departs significantly from its model. Shortly after Veleslava's official betrothal, Vsevolod fights a duel with the groom, prince Vladislav, and injures him seriously. Although Vladislav seems to recover, he eventually suffers a fatal collapse toward the end of the wedding ceremony. Veleslava, the "most virtuous of widows" (*neporochneishuiu iz vdovits*) (270) because she has managed to preserve her virginity during her short-lived marriage, retreats to a monastery. In the meantime, Vsevolod pretends that he is going into exile,

⁴ Zhukovskii 1895: 248.

⁵ Murav'ev 1828: IX, 2.

disguises himself and enters the service of Gostomysl. Gostomysl has not only begun to suffer from old age, but has also become so blind that he does not recognise his son-in-law's murderer. Acting as a devoted servant, Vsevolod succeeds in expiating his guilt and obtains the old man's grace, enabling him to safely reveal his true identity at Gostomysl's deathbed. He is forgiven and married to Veleslava.

Many individual motifs in Murav'ev's novel, such as the duelling between groom (or husband) and lover, the beloved woman who keeps her virginity while married and the lover disguised as a servant in the beloved's house, are all reminiscent of Nikolai Emin's epistolary novels.⁶ Although Emin's work was still well known in the early nineteenth century, it is hard to prove any direct influence on the works of Murav'ev. If Murav'ev had indeed used Emin's novels to bolster his own failing imagination, then this would indicate that in addition to foreign models he had also drawn on models from the native literary tradition. This would seem to indicate the beginning - albeit tentative - of an independent genre tradition for the Russian epistolary novel. However, it is also possible that similarities between the novels of Murav'ev and Nikolai Emin are due to the fact that both explored commonly known dramatic situations.

Unlike Emin, Murav'ev cannot refer to Rousseau without the risk of anachronism: "*Vsevolod and Veleslava*" is set in the Middle Ages. For this reason, he refers not to the new Heloise, but to the old one: during their lessons Vsevolod and Veleslava read the story of Abelard and Heloise (190). When Veleslava later writes to her beloved teacher from the monastery, using her austere environment as a source for passionate metaphors, she repeats a situation found in Alexander Pope's popular epistle "Eloisa to Abelard" of 1717. This had been translated into French by Charles-Pierre Colardeau in 1758, and from the French into Russian by Vasilii Ozerov in 1794 and Zhukovskii in 1806 (275-279). As we know, references to a model or predecessor render the nature and structure of a conflict immediately recognisable, and when this conflict is placed within familiar categories it can take on universal meaning. Thus, Murav'ev's reference to literary models is not simply an acknowledgement of imitation, but a means of creating a familiar context for the reader while broadening the significance of the motifs.

⁶ To these could be added motifs such as the heroine painting a portrait of her lover (92; 173) (cf. Emin N. 1788b: 98) and the disguised lover expressing emotion when present at a conversation of the heroine with her father or husband (294; 322) (cf. Emin N. 1789: 112).

In his retrospective of 1828, Nikolai Murav'ev emphasises that apart from the plot, all the incidents and thoughts expressed in the letters are “completely his own” (*moi sobstvennye sovershenno*) and most of all: “They are all Russian” (*Oni vse russkie*).⁷ It was his aim to write a truly “Russian” novel, by which he meant a novel that would paint a true picture of Russian reality. With his search for Russianness, Murav'ev followed the “*romanesque patriotism*” (*romanicheskim patriotizmom*) that Karamzin had proposed for the arts in his 1802 essay “On the Events and Characters in Russian History that may be the Subject of Artistic Depiction” (*O sluchaiakh i kharakterakh v rossiiskoi istorii, kotorye mogut byt' predmetom khudozhestv*), and which the future historian realised in his story “Marfa the Governess”.⁸ Nikolai Murav'ev saw himself as the creator of the first true Russian novel, and by ‘Russian’ he also meant ‘historical’, for true Russianness could no longer be found in a contemporary reality so heavily tainted by European influences. As Karamzin put it in the introduction to his historical tale “Natal'ia the Boyar daughter”, if one wanted to find true Russianness, one had to turn to those times “when Russians were still Russian” (*kogda russkie byli russkimi*).⁹

Murav'ev was following an example set by many eighteenth-century authors when he set his novel in an early period of history. As a rule, Neoclassicist dramatists chose mythological or historical themes. From the very beginning their tragedies explored old Russian history, as for example in one of the most popular Russian plays of the eighteenth century, Sumarokov's “Sinav and Truvor” (*Sinav i Truvor*) (1750). In Sumarokov's play the legendary boyar of Novgorod, Gostomysl, promises his daughter Il'mena to the Viking prince Sinav despite the fact that she prefers the latter's brother Truvor. Murav'ev seems to have adopted motifs from Sumarokov, such as Il'mena calling for the wedding to be postponed, Sinav's suspicions and revengeful attitude toward his successful rival Truvor, and Truvor teaching Sinav true citizenship.

The popularity of pseudo-historical themes in eighteenth-century Russian drama led to a characteristic onomastic habit: the creation of aptronyms from Slavic roots. Murav'ev follows this practice, giving his characters names like Svetima (“Shined-Upon”), the doctor Zdravodar (“Giving-Health”) (214), the grandmother Miloserda (“Tender-Heart”) (273), and so forth. The style of the letters in Murav'ev's novel is influenced by

⁷ Murav'ev 1828: IX, 2.

⁸ Karamzin 1964: II, 198.

⁹ Karamzin 1964: I, 622.

Russian epic folk songs (*byliny*), which is especially noticeable in the many dactylic and hyperdactylic clause endings that lend a "truly" Russian atmosphere to the work. They are a well-known stylistic features used in sentimentalist pseudo-historical tales such as Karamzin's story "Natal'ia, the Boyar Daughter" (*Natal'ia, Boiarskaia doch'*) (1792) and the poem "Il'ia Muromets" (1794), from which Murav'ev borrowed the name of his heroine Veleslava.

Without doubt, Murav'ev's choice of a historical theme was mainly determined by the old Russian epic "The Campaign of Igor" (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*). The publication of this ancient text in 1800 had an enormous impact on early nineteenth-century Russian culture, as it coincided with the ongoing war with Napoleonic France, which encouraged hostility toward Enlightenment cosmopolitanism as well as a growing interest in the national heritage. Russians were seeking a distinct place for themselves among the European nations and were trying to formulate a national identity. A crucial part of this search for identity was the reassessment of their early history. While the Enlightenment had viewed early Russian history negatively as an age of barbarism, the discovery of "The Campaign" affirmed a new, romantic image of old Russia as an age untainted by Western influences. "The Campaign" sparked a fashion for prose and poetry on themes of the Kievan period, of which Murav'ev's novel forms part. Murav'ev uses a setting taken from this ancient text in an attempt to recreate the image of virtuous and sensible medieval Slavs. He most likely took the name of his hero, Vsevolod, from "The Campaign" and certainly that of the Vsevolod's friend Boian, a relative of the legendary Kievan bard.

Murav'ev's predecessor for using a historical setting in an epistolary novel was the German best-selling author August Lafontaine. Lafontaine's novel in letters "Fedor and Maria, or Faithfulness till Death" (*Fedor und Marie, oder Treue bis zum Tode*) (1802) was translated into Russian in 1805. It was based on the court intrigues surrounding the young Russian emperor Peter II (1728-1730), and most of the characters are indeed historical, such as Mariia Menshikova, daughter of the once all-powerful and then exiled favourite of Peter the Great. However her lover, Fedor Dolgorukii, the son of Menshikov's rival following her to Siberia, has no historical antecedent.

Unlike Lafontaine's plot, set against a background of historical facts that lend a degree of authenticity to the letters, Murav'ev's story is pure fiction, with no references to historical events. His recreation of Old Russia did not reproduce authentic detail: architecture, dress, utensils and even social interaction have little to do with medieval reality. Murav'ev's old Russians use

gunpowder long before it was introduced in Europe: they go hunting with dogs and rifles (122; 141-142; 147-158) and fight duels with pistols (222). The title “prince” (*kniaz'*), which in the Kievan period denoted the ruler of a town or a district, is continuously equated with that of courtier or “boyar” (*boiarin*), in line with its degraded status in Muscovite times, as in the phrase “this young prince boyar” (*sego iunago Kniazia boiarina*) (273; cf. 142; 166; 170; 183; 200). In a critical essay on the 1828 re-edition of “Vsevolod i Veleslava”, Sergei Shevyrev, the future historian of old Russian literature, was astounded by the author’s lack of historical awareness.¹⁰ Yet it was clearly not Murav’ev’s goal to paint an accurate picture of the mores and customs of medieval Rus’, but rather to allude to the social problems of contemporary Russia.

Smoothing out ambiguity

Although Nikolai Murav’ev evidently borrowed the epistolary form of his novel from Rousseau, he did not take advantage of all the formal possibilities of the genre used in “The New Heloise”. For example, Murav’ev does not explore the device of the found manuscript. It is true that the subtitle defining the novel as a history “preserved in letters” (*sokhranivshie v pis'makh*) may be understood as a claim to authenticity. This claim is supported by the main characters themselves, who anticipate that their letters may be passed on to successive generations (264; 287). However, other elements emphasise the work’s fictional nature. Murav’ev does not distance himself from the text by purporting to be its editor: his name follows after the subtitle, concealed in a complex numerical code. At the end of the novel a character called Murav’ appears who is a distant ancestor of the author. He acts as go-between in the correspondence of the hero Vsevolod and Boian and represents the function of the author within the novel (303). Although there is one small footnote by a so-called “editor” (*izdatel'*) to explain the absence of some letters, this is a far cry from the opinionated editors of Rousseau and Goethe. Here the footnote is more the remnant of a device Murav’ev did not choose to elaborate further in his own work (218). As we have mentioned, Murav’ev does not try to paint a historical picture of old Kiev, which would have made the letters seem much more authentic.

Murav’ev follows Rousseau’s model of a ‘polylogic’ epistolary novel, i.e., a novel containing the letters of more than one character. In Murav’ev’s novel there are six letter-writing characters divided into three pairs: two

¹⁰ Shevyrev 1828: 347-348.

protagonists (Vsevolod and Veleslava), two confidants (Svetima and Boian) and two antagonists (father Gostomysl and fiancé Vladislav), forming a constellation very similar to those of the characters in Rousseau's novel.

The polylogic structure makes it possible to view the same event from divergent points of view. Like Rousseau, Murav'ev juxtaposes letters in which the two lovers express opposite reactions to the same erotic encounter (letters LVI-LVII; XCV-XCVI). Different descriptions are given of the hunting scene (letters XLVIII-XLIX), the secret rendezvous during which they are caught by Veleslava's father (letters LXVIII-LXX) and of the death of Vladislav (letters LXXX-LXXXI). An original device explored by Murav'ev is having two characters write one letter so that their separate perspectives merge (letter LXXXV). The blind Gostomysl dictates a letter for his daughter to Vsevolod, who is disguised as his servant, with the result that, as Vsevolod himself later comments, the tender expressions of a father are fused with those of a lover (291).

Although there are different accounts of the action, there are no diverging interpretations of it. Whereas in Rousseau's novel Bomston and Claire criticise the thoughts and actions of the main characters Saint-Preux and Julie, in Murav'ev's the confidants Boian and Svetima only endorse the points of view and desires of the protagonists. At the same time, the antagonists Gostomysl and Vladislav are not allowed to impose their perspective on the reader. For example, Vladislav's letters are not presented independently, but are inserted into the letters of the positive characters, which enables the latter to add their negative commentary (letters L; LIX). Similarly, Vladislav's speech is embedded within the narration of the positive characters, whose accompanying commentary renders his statements harmless. With Murav'ev the polylogic structure does not lead to relative viewpoints and ambiguity, as it did with Rousseau.

What is more, in the course of Rousseau's novel Saint-Preux and Julie express constantly changing feelings and aspirations that seem inappropriate toward the end. Within the novel as a whole, the individual letters express only relative, transient positions.¹¹ In contrast, Murav'ev's heroes Vsevolod and Veleslava never retract their previous statements; their initial desires never appear inappropriate, and the aspirations that they fostered at the beginning are eventually confirmed by the novel's happy end. The characters lack psychological development and relativity. Murav'ev's epistolary novel has no changeable characters, no unfinished thread of action or open ending motivated by the mutability and openness of empirical reality. It provides

¹¹ Cf. Picard 1971: 34-35.

only fixed characters and a closed course of events, a fact stressed by the regular structure of the novel, which consists of exactly 100 letters.

Fiction as a love dream

While his predecessors wrote stories with open or tragic endings, Nikolai Murav'ev's novel closes with a happy end: the wedding of Vsevolod and Veleslava. Murav'ev does not depict a harsh reality that thwarts the ambitions of the protagonists, but a world that in the end yields completely to their wishes.

Murav'ev saw the function of fiction as fulfilling the reader's need for a dream come true. He makes Boian, a descendant of the legendary old-Russian poet, declare: "In imitation of my ancestor, I satisfy all the tender inclinations of my fantasy, filling songs and invented incidents with images of human happiness, the one more perfect than the other. And together with my imagination, I proceed from one joy to the other" (*Podrazhaia svoemu pradevu, ia udovletvoriaiu vsem nezhnostiam moego voobrazheniia, spletaia v pesenkakh i vydumannykh proizhestviakh, chelovecheskoe blagopoluchie, odno sovershennee drugago, i sam, vmeste s svoim vymyslom, perekhozhu ot odnogo shchastiia k drugomu*) (84-85). Murav'ev's novel on the whole is one such "invented incident", satisfying the desires of its author and readers by using the realm of fiction to fulfil their dreams of happiness and love.

While in the first half of the century Russian Classicists such as Aleksandr Sumarokov viewed the novel as mere fantasy and a stimulant for unbridled passions, at the end of the century, Sentimentalist authors like Nikolai Karamzin valued the novel positively as the image of true human nature. According to most Sentimentalists, the novel might be a fantasy, but it was one about more sensitive and perfect people, which therefore deserved to be realised. From this perspective, they considered the love of *romanesque* heroes no longer a state of insanity and error, but an endeavour to fully realise human potential and a reflection of the emancipatory ideals of the individual.

The positive value they put on the love novel led Russian Sentimentalists like Nikolai Murav'ev to infuse traditional romantic phraseology with new meaning, directing it against the eighteenth-century ideologies of self-repression like neo-stoicism. Vsevolod, for example, exposes stoic discourse as a belief that only justifies an oppressive class system. The "stoic principles" (*Stoicheskie pravila*) of suppressing one's passions only serve the purpose of confining man to the "circle" (*krug*) in which he is born and "from which he should not escape whatever his motivations may be" (*iz*

kotorago ne dolzhen on vykhodit' ni po kakim pobuzhdenniam) (41-44; cf. 65). Such an ideology keeps a man satisfied with his humble station in life and makes sure he will not attempt to rise above it, for higher aspirations would disrupt the social order. Vsevolod's individual aspirations - his love for the daughter of a boyar - offend the social status quo and turn him, so to speak, into a "criminal, a disturber of civil security and peace" (*prestupnikom grazhdanskoi bezopasnosti i spokoistviia*) (216). When Veleslava indulges in her passion for her lover after having retreated to a monastic cell as a widow, she acknowledges that she is: "violating the customs instituted by a wise society" (*prestupaiu obriad, blagorazumiem obshcheshitiia ustanovalennyi*) and admits she is going against "law itself" (*samyi zakon*) (276).

However, according to the two lovers, law and order are no longer inviolable institutions: they will soon have to yield to the demands of the individual. "Life in society" (*obshchestvennaia zhizn'*) is oppressive and forces man to ignore his feelings, but if the reins of society "are loosened" (*oslabiatsia*), then "hearts and wishes will regain their natural freedom" (*serdtsa i zhelaniia poluchat prirodniyu im svobodu*) (90). It may seem proper to conform to society's demands, and Veleslava's filial obedience to her father's will can be regarded a virtue, but it is a secondary virtue because "it appeared in man's mind perhaps only when he began to live a social life" (*priniavshaia svoe nachalo v chelovecheskom razume, ne prezhe, mozhet byt', nachala ego obshchestvennoi zhizni*) (47-48). The virtue of filial obedience is nullified by love, which is a primary virtue "that has its origin in nature, is inspired in man's breast by heaven itself" (*prirodnaia, samim nebom vdokhnovennaia v chelovecheskuiu grud'*) (47-48). In short: love is more important than social values.

The positive reappraisal of love is phrased in the discourse of religion and natural law. Vsevolod speaks of love as "a right of the heart" (*serdechnago prava*), "a natural right" (*po pravu estestvennomu*) (40; 41). While the husband, Vladislav, only has a right according to human law, as a lover he can appeal to a higher authority, "to divine law itself" (*samomu bozhestvennomu pravu*) (216; cf. 107). Following this line of reasoning, love acquires both moral and religious values. Love is not, as "the common idea" (*obshchee suzhdenie o liubvi*) (216) would have it, a volatile and therefore worthless emotion, but an immutable, sacred feeling and an agent of man's greatness - his immortality (14; 43; 98; 138). Love lifts man to a higher level in the great chain of living creatures, for if one abstains from direct physical gratification, it "cleanses man to the greatness of celestial beings" (*ochishchaet cheloveka do velichiia nebesnykh bytii*) (195). The beloved is an

angel sent by God to help the lover reach this divine state. Love is “the purest union like of angels” (*samoiu chistoiu, angel'skoiu sviaz'iu*) (29), filling lovers with “a heavenly warmth” (*teploty nebesnoi*) (106). Murav'ev's characters imbue the petrified metaphors of romance with new meaning and consistently present an eighteenth-century vision of the world as a logical system of hierarchies and life as a continuous march toward perfection.

Although love is said to have moral and religious aspects, it is not exclusively a spiritual feeling. Vsevolod and Veleslava try indeed to control their sexual drive, but do not deny love's physical side. Love is “something that by the sole gaze of the beloved enflames the heart, the soul and all the bodily senses” (*nechto vosplameniaiushchee serdtse, dushu i vsiu chuvstvennost' edinym bleskom liubimago vzora*) (180). When Veleslava indulges in the imagined presence of her lover, no longer noticing the “holy walls” of her monastic cell, as once did the passionate nun Heloise, she writes to him: “you excite all the senses of my body” (*toboiu dvizhima vsia chuvstvennost' tela moego*) (276). Murav'ev provides extensive descriptions of erotic scenes with regular intervals: kisses, embraces, Veleslava's heaving breasts and the disorder of her dress (70-71; 170; 191; 225; 346-349).

According to Murav'ev, it is the design of nature and the will of God that love be both physical and spiritual. Lovers who put love above all else are children of nature (49), and by obeying the inspirations of nature they follow the path of God (239). God and Nature are the protectors of their love (29; 71; 98). Veleslava exclaims that: “God gives His blessing to her love” (*Strast' eia Bog blagoslovliaet*) (138). God is the one who determines the course of the action, not the characters. It is suggested that Vladislav's death is actually caused by Providence and not by a bullet from Vsevolod's gun, which would make him guilty (258; 272; 276). The wisdom and justice of Providence would also appear to be responsible for the various turns of the action as well as the happy ending (367). This implies that Murav'ev no longer thought that God's plan for the world coincided with the existing order of society, but rather with the natural - though subversive - aspirations of the individual. Not the world as it is, but the world as desired by individual men and women is a truly rational world (35; 40; 101). The God of Murav'ev's fictional universe appears as a liberalist deity, benevolent towards the welfare and interests of the individual.

The discourse on marriage

Like Rousseau, Goethe and most Russian authors of epistolary novels, Murav'ev based his plot on a love triangle conflict. The solutions to this conflict offered by the authors before Murav'ev's time were quite diverse, but they all had one thing in common: a tragic end. The individual aspirations of the lovers were forced to bow to the demands of society represented by the father and the husband of the beloved woman. Unlike his predecessors, Murav'ev offered a happy solution to the conflict. This time the father and the husband lose out and the two lovers literally triumph over their dead bodies.

Furthermore, in the epistolary novels of Rousseau, Goethe and Russian authors prior to Murav'ev, love was a secret and even illegal matter, not condoned by society. In Murav'ev's novel, however, Vsevolod and Veleslava eventually succeed in legitimising their secret passion through the bonds of marriage - a success widely applauded by the people of Kiev. Here, love and marriage cease to oppose each other, and the private domain is no longer at loggerheads with the demands of society. The struggle between protagonists and antagonists shifts from a conflict over the rights of the lover and those of the husband to a conflict over a marriage based on love and one based on economic motives.

The defence of the love match is the subject of an essay incorporated into a letter by Boian (Letter XCIII) as well as of many remarks scattered throughout the novel. These remarks argue against the aristocratic and rationalistic concept of marriage, which only serves "the vain fancies of covetousness" (*suetnykh prikhotei korystoliubiia*), that is: the increase of wealth and social status (149). The so-called "happy or advantageous match" (*shchastlivoe ili vygodnoe brakosochetanie*) based solely on considerations of wealth and social prestige is no guarantee that marital life will be indeed "happy" (*blagopoluchnoiu*), as shown by Svetima's negative experience (102). For Veleslava and Boian, the only legitimate basis for marriage is love. Only love can make marriage more than a legal contract; only love makes the marital bond sacred (263). The combination of love and marriage fosters social cohesion not only by safeguarding morals and guaranteeing the mental health of the spouses, but also by raising the birth rate and creating a secure and stable environment for children whose legitimacy fathers no longer have reason to doubt (35; 201). Naturally, favouring the 'democratic' principle of love authorised those Russians without money or status to aspire to marriage with persons of higher stations.

Furthermore, for Nikolai Murav'ev's characters marriage for love means creating a private world, a family home. They reject the aristocratic habit of spouses leading separate public lives, a habit generally considered to be the principal cause of social disturbances such as adultery and divorce. In its stead they promote a new but private concept of the family. In his essay on marriage, Boian draws a picture of the new noble family, assigning distinct roles to both sexes, with "outside business" (*vneneshnee khoziastvo*) as the male domain and the "internal housekeeping" (*vnutrennee domovodstvo*) as the female domain (332).¹²

Murav'ev's characters uphold the ideology of private life as espoused by both the western-European bourgeoisie and, with significant variations of course, by the middle ranks of the Russian nobility. The righteous husband and wife "love society, but their home above all" (*liubiat obshchestvo, no dom svoi bolee vsego*) (103), a preference that does not contradict social demands because "a good husband and father cannot be but a good citizen and state subject" (*dobryi suprug i otets ne mozhet byt' inakov, kak takovyи zhe grazhdanin i poddanyi*) (338). In principle, only modest people, in this case the Russian middle nobility that claimed moderation as its inherent moral quality, are able to put the true meaning of marriage into practice, for: "Nature presented this to people of moderate fortunes, alien to wealth and idleness, the most noble part of the nation" (*Priroda predostavila sie liudiam umerennago sostoianiia, chuzhdym roskoshi i suetnosti, blagorodneishim iz tselago naroda*) (201).¹³

The image of the father

The conflict between the values of social harmony and individual aspirations to happiness had its impact on the image of the father figure in the Russian epistolary novel. It can be argued that the patriarchal nature of Russian society in the eighteenth-century accorded the father figure an even more significant place than in other European literatures. In eighteenth-century pre-Revolutionary France parental authority lasted until children reached the age of 25. However, the Russian father's power over his offspring knew no age limit. Aleksandr Radishchev, in his "Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow"

¹² Cf. Wirtschafter 1997: 16-17.

¹³ Cf. the second letter "To Naisa" (*K Naise*), a treatise on marriage in Ivan Pnin's "St.Petersburg Journal": "Only in the bosom of happy mediocrity does one find contented spouses" (*v nedrakh schastlivoi tokmo posredstvennosti nakhodiatsia blagopoluchnye suprugi*) (SPZh 1798: IV, 62).

(*Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*) (1790), fulminates against the type of father who “regards his son as one of his serfs and bases his power on the execution of the law” (*v syne svoem vidiit svoego raba, i vlast' svoiu ishchet v zakonopolozhenii*). He contrasts this with the example of the ideal father, a nobleman from the village of Krest'tsy, who addresses his sons as his “friends” and grants them their freedom when they come of age.¹⁴ However, as Iakov de Saint-Glin wrote in his memoirs, the son was actually always “a minor” (*synedorosl'*) in his parents’ eyes.¹⁵ Certainly in marital affairs children remained under parental jurisdiction and had little to say, a circumstance reflected in the absence of a statement of consent (the “I do”-formula) in the Orthodox wedding ceremony.¹⁶ In 1693 patriarch Adrian issued regulations requiring the consent of the bride and groom, followed in 1702 by Peter I. Nevertheless, the precedence of parental initiative and final approval in marital matters, reaffirmed by Catherine II in her “Instruction” of 1767, prevented marriages based solely on free choice and love from taking place.¹⁷ Marriages without parental approval would not only cause the non-obligatory share of the child’s inheritance to be retained, but also effectively block the son’s career prospects. Without his father’s letters of recommendation to old friends, and burdened with a reputation for disobedience, the son could not obtain lucrative civil service posts.¹⁸ In the case of army officers and soldiers, the father’s authority in marital affairs could be assumed by the regiment’s commander, and in the case of courtiers, by the emperor or empress. Given that the absolutist Russian monarch assumed a parental role towards his subjects, it is legitimate to draw parallels between the nature of authority within the state on the one hand and within the family on the other.¹⁹

Authors who questioned infallible parental authority would depict the father as a weak person, unmindful of the true welfare of his children. Russian authors of epistolary novels found such a negative father figure in baron d’Etange, the father of Rousseau’s heroine Julie. He was the embodiment of parental despotism in a rigid class society. Fedor Emin had managed to turn this negative father figure into a positive one, thus confirming his conformist stance. However, his son Nikolai doubted the wisdom of parents: the fathers of his heroines Roza and Plenira choose the wrong partner for their daughters.

¹⁴ Radishchev 1938: I, 296-297.

¹⁵ Saint-Glin 1882: 455.

¹⁶ Levin 1989: 99.

¹⁷ Freeze 1990: 726.

¹⁸ Cf. the story about a certain Aleksandrov who married against his parents’ will, as told in Zhigarev’s diary June 30th, 1806 (Zhigarev 1934: I, 298-302).

¹⁹ Hunt 1992: 17-52.

The same is true for the parents of Maria and Amalia, the beloved women of the two Russian Werthers.

The tendency to discredit the father culminates in Murav'ev's depiction of Gostomysl. Although Gostomysl has the legal right to force his daughter into marriage, going against her wishes will make him the opposite of a loving father (124). His right over his daughter is said to be sacred, but it is still secondary to the right that God and nature have granted her lover (186). Gostomysl is further discredited by the negative character traits ascribed to him: thanks to a superficial, worldly education he is weak and cannot control his temper. Like the legendary Gostomysl, the governor of Novgorod who is said to have invited foreign (Viking) princes to marry his daughters, Murav'ev's Gostomysl wants to marry his daughter to a Francophile prince. Last but not least, he confesses to the same worldly values as Vladislav (278; 281; 288-289).

A significant characteristic shared by the heroes of Rousseau, Goethe and their Russian counterparts is that they are fatherless. The protagonists have no family from which they might expect a rich inheritance or other social advantages; therefore they seek their fortune elsewhere, a situation reflecting the state of affairs of many Russian mid-ranking nobles. The absence of a father also implies that the protagonists are unrestricted by authority and free to foster transgressive desires.

However, the woman they love is always shielded from them by a father figure, who together with her husband, functions as an obstacle to their desires. In order to gain the object of his love, Vsevolod must transgress the existing social order and override the authority of the father.

Hypergamic plots

In Rousseau's "The New Heloise", as well as in most Russian epistolary novels, the protagonist appears as poor and of humble origin while the heroine is rich and well born. The realisation of their love presupposes that the male will rise to the social status of the female. As a consequence, the female becomes the focus not only of the male's erotic desires but also of his aspirations for social success. One can argue that the aspirations of the lower social ranks find their expression in novels portraying 'hypergamic' love, that is: a romance between lovers belonging to different classes.²⁰

Murav'ev's hero Vsevolod is of unknown descent, "a sprout of a low branch" (*otpryskom nizkago steblia*) (158) and lacks noble lineage (164).

²⁰ Watt 1983: 174.

There is an enormous social gap between him and Veleslava, the daughter of a boyar (120). Thanks to "such an inferior social position" (*stol' maloznachushchee mesto*), Vsevolod cannot nurse any hope of ever "reaching a civil post of great merit" (*vzoiiti na stepen' Gosudarstvennago otlichiiia*), even though he possesses "qualities that would be admirable even among persons of the highest station" (*dostoinstvami, dazhe vyshemu sostoianiiu prilichnymi*) (126).

In Russian society the aristocratic elite had an enormous advantage over lower ranking nobles when it came to the pursuit of the most prestigious positions in the army and the bureaucracy. It is no wonder then that in Murav'ev's novel it is prince Vladislav who initially seems to surpass the poor Vsevolod in winning Veleslava's hand.²¹

In the meantime, Vsevolod tries to discredit his rival in every way he can, arguing that Vladislav has no right to the position he occupies, having gained it improperly by dint of flattery and bribes (55). Vladislav is greedy, jealous and uncontrolled - traits that can be ascribed to his worldly, European-style education (130-131). As Vsevolod's confidant Boian writes, aristocrats like Vladislav are harmful to Russia. They slavishly imitate foreign examples and, as the most visible members of society, encourage the lower classes to renounce their native religion, language, habits and ultimately, to despise their own country (310-314). For Murav'ev there is no doubt that this logic was behind Russia's defeat by Napoleon at Austerlitz in 1805. Finally, prince Vladislav is not fit for marriage because he lacks a very basic virtue: for "where is the desire to serve society?" (*gde zhelanie byt' poleznu obshchestvu*) (161). In short: Vladislav has no personal merit.

The aristocrat Vladislav receives lessons in civic duty and patriotism from the humble teacher Vsevolod, a representative of the middle ranks of the Russian civil service class that claimed to be the guardian of moral values (144). Vsevolod's merit includes knowledge, professional skills, good manners, simple and frank behaviour and modesty (54; 61). These positive traits make him more able to serve and "more noble than noble, more generous than generous and richer than rich through his goodness and mind" (*blagorodnee blagorodnago, velikodushee velikodushnago, i bogat, chrezmerno bogat svoiu dobrotoiu i razumom*) (26). Veleslava consoles her poor lover Vsevolod, saying: "your soul makes good for the rank of your family and ancestors" (*dusha tvoia zameniaet vysotu roda i predkov tvoikh*) (203). While prince Vladislav was destined for Veleslava by birth, the poor Vsevolod can claim a right to her by merit, as he writes, comparing Vladislav

²¹ Jones 1973: 10-11.

with himself: “He is proud, because he is a Boyar, but I am steadfast, as an honest man who seeks his fame through his own deeds” (*On gord, kak Boiarin, ia tverd, kak chesnyi chelovek, sniskivaiushchii slavu svoiu delami sobstvennymi*) (170). Therefore, the novel rightfully ends with the worthless Vladislav being eliminated while the worthy Vsevolod succeeds in obtaining the hand of Veleslava and is promoted to the status of Gostomysl’s son-in-law.

Vsevolod represents the meritocratic ideology of Petrine society: the idea that the social status of a citizen should be decided by his ability to serve the state. This ideology was strongly favoured by the middle ranks of the nobility and by the many ennobled commoners in the Russian army and civil service. The institutionalisation of this ideology was the Table of Ranks, which was intended to give all public servants a more or less equal chance to climb upward along the social ladder. However, this system was continuously challenged by widespread nepotism and favouritism, as well as by members of the elite who wanted to secure their privileges by closing the noble class to newcomers.²² From this perspective it becomes clear that the conflict in Murav’ev’s novel between the parvenu Vsevolod and prince Vladislav over the best match in Kiev actually reflects the struggle for prestigious positions within Russian society between the middle ranks of the Russian civil service class and the aristocratic elite.

The outcome of Murav’ev’s novel shows that the unknown servant deserves the favours of the autocratic father more than the aristocratic prince does. The father does not know what is good for him and his estate. Only someone like Vsevolod, serving in disguise, is able to restore peace and bring order to Gostomysl’s house (291). By identifying himself completely with the needs of the father and displaying total dedication and subordination, “through the most severe and harsh serfdom” (*samym strogim i trudnym rabstvom*) (359), Vsevolod finally receives the latter’s grace and the hand of Veleslava. Letter LXXXV, dictated by Gostomysl but written by Vsevolod, is revealing in this respect (284). The letter shows both Vsevolod’s willingness to be Gostomysl’s mouthpiece and his love for the latter’s daughter, and thus can be construed as an image of the public servant’s voluntary instrumentalisation on the one hand, and his secret hopes of favours from the autocrat on the other. If we assume that the author couched his own secret hopes of social success in the form of a love novel, and particularly in such images as this ‘double-voiced’ letter, then Murav’ev succeeded in realising his aspirations in a strikingly similar way. Twenty years later he achieved his ultimate goal by

²² Jones 1973: 6-7.

becoming head of Nikolai I's personal chancellery and as such responsible for the emperor's correspondence.

The content of Nikolai Murav'ev's novel seems to be inseparable from the contemporary issues of social advancement through merit and the legitimisation of class mobility. One should note that in the case of most eighteenth-century Russian authors, the transgressive desires of their heroes only rebel to a certain degree against the existing social order, and that their ideology of class mobility is not a claim to usurpation. The ideological tendency of Murav'ev's novel remains affirmative in the sense that it only demands the endorsement of Petrine principles as institutionalised in the Table of Ranks, i.e., the right to social elevation within the framework of the existing autocratic state.

Nikolai Murav'ev uses the same type of conflict as Rousseau, Goethe and the other Russian authors of epistolary novels, but diverges in some significant areas. Their works tragically depict dreams destroyed by reality, and have a realistic aspect in the sense that they veer away from the ideal. However, Murav'ev's novel is anything but tragic: his fiction is one long wish-fulfilment dream set in a world remote from contemporary reality. By removing the reality-principle, the action can develop according to the wishes of the protagonist without interference from antagonistic forces. Murav'ev also removes any sense of doubt about the value of desire. The confidants do not discuss desire and take no critical distance from the main characters; they are merely their helpers. This non-critical, wish-fulfilling aspect may be what lies behind Murav'ev's choice of a *romanesque*, pseudo-historical setting.

The choice is noteworthy given that the modern eighteenth-century novel, especially the epistolary novel, sprang from a critique of pseudo-historical seventeenth-century romances. The form of the epistolary novel was originally meant to express an aversion to the heroic, the ideal and the historical by pretending to consist of authentic, intimate letters written by ordinary persons living in times not far removed from the present. What Murav'ev does is to transform the epistolary novel into a love story set in the idealised sphere of the Kievan court, drawing on the older romance tradition that authors like Rousseau had rejected. In short, it would seem that Murav'ev ignores the original motive behind the epistolary form in favour of a *romanesque* formula.

CHAPTER NINE

“THE SUICIDE”

Russian sentimentalist authors preferred short prose works which they generally published for the first time in one of the literary journals that abounded at the time. A good example of this is the epistolary novel “The Suicide” (*Samoubiistvo*) - totalling just 33 pages in octavo - published in the journal “Aglaia” in August 1810.¹ This journal was edited by prince Petr Shalikov and borrowed its name from Karamzin's well-known almanac of the 1790s. From 1808 until 1812 it served as a forum for the Moscow circle of Karamzin's followers, which included such minor poets as Mikhail Makarov, Boris Blank and Vasilii Raevskii. The future novelist Ivan Lazhechnikov published his first stories here.

The anonymous short novel “The Suicide” consists of eighteen letters. The first letter is unsigned and functions as an introduction to the seventeen letters written by the two main characters, Julia (actually *Iuliia*) and her unnamed male friend. The letters contain fragments of poetry by Karamzin, Aleksei Merzliakov, Iurii Neledinskii-Meletskii and others, perhaps by the unknown author himself.² These poetic fragments serve as the expression of the characters' feelings and, having been slightly modified for this purpose, are carefully woven into the course of the epistolary dialogue. With their alternation between prose and poetry, the letters seem to follow the contemporary Russian literati's practice of writing familiar letters.

The third person

The first letter tells how Julia's correspondence was discovered and situates her story in contemporary Russia. The author of the letter, who we can identify as the fictional editor, claims that he received the correspondence from a female acquaintance of Julia's. As he is planning to send the letters to one of his friends, he tries to explain the context within which they should be

¹ Aglaia 1810: XI, ii, 3-36.

² The novel contains fragments from Karamzin's “To an Unfaithful Lady” (*K nevernoi*) (Karamzin 1966: 205), from Merzliakov's “Werther's Letter to Charlotte” (*Pis'mo Vertera k Sharlotie*) (Merzliakov 1958: 219-229), and from his translations of Deshoulière's idylls *Les Fleurs* (*Tsvety*), and *Le Tombeau* (*Grobnitsa*) (Merzliakov 1807: 41-45; 66-70), as well as a fragment from Neledinskii-Meletskii's translation of Panard's *Le Ruisseau de Champigny* (*Ruchei, tekuchii v sei doline*) (Neledinskii-Meletskii 1850: 160-162).

understood by summarising Julia's entire story. Such a summary preceding letters written by the characters is quite exceptional for an epistolary novel.

In the summer of 1809, Mrs K*'s eighteen-year old daughter is married to Mr O*. The young couple seems very happy until Mr O* has to leave their provincial Russian town for St. Petersburg to settle a protracted court case. Her husband leaves in December and promises to return in March, so Julia spends the winter at her mother's estate. It does not take long before she sinks into a deep depression that others ascribe to her husband's absence. However, in February, as the day of his return approaches, Julia's depression grows only more severe. One Thursday morning, as the house is being prepared for the Russian "carnival" (*maslenitsa*), Julia leaves a note on the dressing table in her mother's bedroom. Then she walks into the garden towards the ice-covered pond where peasant boys play winter games. In front of the bewildered children, she makes the sign of the cross and throws herself into a hole in the ice. Julia's sudden death shocks everyone. The carnival guests, expecting a house full of joy, find a place of mourning instead. For some reason Julia's mother hides her last note; however, the letters found in her daughter's bedroom somehow end up in the hands of the author of the introductory letter (5-8).

The correspondence consists of seventeen letters by Julia and an elderly man, who, as the fictional editor points out, was apparently "more her friend than her lover" (*byl bolee eia drugom, nezheli liubovnikom*) (8). The unnamed man lives somewhere in her neighbourhood, as the dates of the letters - from the 5th until the 25th of February 1810 - show that sometimes he and Julia exchanged letters twice a day. In their letters they also refer to meetings between letters.

As already mentioned, the introductory letter summarises the action of the novel in its entirety. As a result, the letters written by the characters no longer have a narrative function. Rather, they must complement the narration of external events by bystanders with the inner perspective of the main characters. Their inner perspective is responsible for explaining these events and elucidating Julia's motives for suicide. The novel can thus be divided into two parts that narrate the same action: first, the external action told from a third person perspective (the introductory letter); second, the internal developments related from a first person perspective (the collection of seventeen letters).

In an article from 1806, Iakov de Saint-Glin, lector in German literature at Moscow University, distinguished between the task of the historian, who had to restrict his narration to verifiable external facts, and that of the

novelist, who should focus on man's inner life. The true subject of the novel was the human heart; according to de Saint-Glin, a novelist "should perform, so to say, autopsy on it and reveal its secret motives" (*on dolzhen raskryt' tak skazat' onoe, obnaruzhit' tainyia ego pobuzhdeniiia*).³ The persuasive depiction of human psychology - for which the character's inner voice narrated in the first person was thought the most convenient instrument - should in the end serve the moral goal of self-knowledge. De Saint-Glin's article, undoubtedly reflecting the courses he had read at Moscow University, indicates the general awareness of the nature and function of first-person narrative as it emerged in eighteenth-century literature. The author of "The Suicide" proves to be a faithful student of contemporary literary theory, carefully assigning the third and first persons to the narration of external and internal events, respectively.

Mystery and suspense

A remarkable feature of "The Suicide" is the fact that the presence and even the exact nature of many motifs remain indeterminate. This contrasts with most eighteenth-century novels, in which actions and objects are usually clear and definite. A useful concept for understanding these indeterminate and enigmatic motifs is Tynianov's "private semantics" (*domashniaia semantika*), i.e., the use of allusions whose point of reference remains concealed from a third person. For example, Julia thanks her male friend for a small gift and promises to wear it, but it remains unclear what this object actually is (32). She mentions that she has a "treatise" (*traktat*) among her papers, but the subject of the text remains unknown to the reader (10). In addition, there are seemingly meaningless references to characters who play no part in the action, such as Julia's friend Alina (19-20). The presence of these motifs and characters performs no apparent function within the story.

These superfluous references puzzled the editor of "Aglaia", Petr Shalikov. In her first letter Julia rebukes her confidant, who had delivered a letter to her from another unknown person, for opening a letter not addressed to him. Here Shalikov adds a footnote to express his bewilderment: from whom is the letter she mentions (9)? One might think that these indeterminate motifs represent unfinished narrative 'threads' and are a mark of the author's artistic awkwardness. However, it is also possible that they functioned as 'clues', intelligible only for the few contemporary readers.

³ Saint-Glin 1806: II, 157.

Whatever the case, these indeterminate motifs help create an overall sense of mystery and suspense.

Suspense, or in this case the state of uncertainty, anticipation and curiosity as to the true motivation of Julia's actions, is the real force that propels the narrative forward. Since the summary of the story in the introductory letter has precluded any tension regarding the development of the plot, all that remains is suspense surrounding the disclosure of Julia's secret and the cause of her depression.

Her anonymous confidant asks her to clarify the obscure lines in her letters, bidding her: "Reveal to me the secret of your soul" (*Otkroi mne tainu dushi tviei*) (14). Julia promises that within two months, i.e., the end of March when her husband is supposed to return, everything will become clear and that "the veil of all mysteries" (*zavesa vsekh tainostei*) will be torn away (9). Only then will her confidant learn why she is so depressed and longs for death, and why she ultimately kills herself. In every new letter, Julia comes closer to revealing her secret, but in the end she never actually does. In her next-to-last letter she announces that she will make her confession to her friend in person the following week. Tension over the immanent disclosure rapidly mounts. However, in her last letter she cancels this meeting because of something that has happened. Then the letter exchange breaks off: Julia commits suicide without explaining herself.

The action in "The Suicide" is built on purely psychological processes. The only action performed by Julia and her anonymous confidant consists of making allusions and venturing guesses. Furthermore, the undefined nature of many motifs and the ambiguity of Julia's situation characterise the author as a restrained psychologist who constructs the inner world of his characters with complicated clues instead of explicit descriptions of psychological states. The anonymous author of this short but intriguing epistolary novel leaves it to the interpretative skills of the reader to decipher his code, uncover Julia's secret and reconstruct the true motives for her suicide.

These vague references indeed make the reader suspicious about the nature of Julia's secret. From remarks scattered throughout her letters it would appear that she put her trust in a certain person who then cruelly abused this trust, luring her to take a fatal step that has thrown her into misery, or, as she says, "ruined me beyond return" (*pogubil menia nevozvratno!*) (17). She declares that she has lost her honour (32), and that she might be thought of as one of those who are "sinful" (*porochny*) (33). These expressions are recognisable euphemisms for female sexual transgression; in fact Julia's words are periphrases of adultery. In addition,

other indications suggest that Julia's melancholic mood, which started shortly after her husband left for St. Petersburg, is actually a sign of her desperation in her marriage and the fatal moment of transgression. She writes: "It was only disappointment and desperation in what I considered to be the most precious thing for me, that forced me toward these irrational acts" (*odno ogorchenie i otchaianie v tom, chto ia pochitala dlia sebia dorozhe vsego, vovleklo menia v bezrazsudnye postupki!....*) (34). Her feelings of guilt about her unfaithfulness to her husband deepen her depression as his return approaches. Julia feels too burdened with guilt to confront him and therefore kills herself.

Within this context, the apparently senseless reference to a an unknown third person in Julia's first letter, which prompted Shalikov's bewildered footnote, can be interpreted as a reference to the man with whom she had committed adultery.

Adultery and suicide

"The Suicide" can thus be classified as a tale of adultery. Moreover, the motif of suicide itself can be read as an indication that adultery actually took place. In sentimental stories about female sexual transgressions such as seduction, adultery and outright debauchery, death is the most common lot of the heroine. An example of this is Karamzin's drama "Sofia" (*Sofia*) of 1791. Karamzin based his play on motifs from Kotzebue's "Misanthropy and Remorse" (*Menschenhaß und Reue*), a performance of which he enthusiastically describes in his "Letters of a Russian Traveller".⁴ However, he does suggest here that he considers it rather bold of Kotzebue to give a play with an adulterous heroine and a happy ending. Karamzin bows to the demands of propriety in his play and bars his adulterous heroine from any return to honour despite her remorse and her husband's forgiveness. Sofia is left no other option than to put an end to her life by drowning herself in a river.⁵

The same could be said for a prose tale by Pavel L'vov also entitled "Sofia", published in "A Pleasant and Useful Passing of Time" in 1794. The heroine of this story, engaged to a poor but noble young man, is seduced by a libertine count who abandons her after she appears to be pregnant. Her father is so enraged by his daughter's behaviour that initially he wants to kill her, but relents when Sofia's fiancé offers to marry her regardless of her

⁴ Karamzin 1984: 40; 407-409.

⁵ Karamzin 1848: III, 283-313.

condition. Sofia, unaware of these developments, wanders desperately in the forest and drowns herself in a pond.⁶ Here again, although the woman's unfaithfulness is forgiven and her honour can be restored, the author cannot forgive her. The moral of his story obliges him to punish vice, so he is forced as it were to let his heroine execute poetic justice on herself. A similar narrative logic is still valid in later nineteenth-century adulteresses like Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina.

The argument that the motif of suicide is an indirect reference to adultery is supported by the example of Karamzin's story "Julia" of 1794. Although Karamzin's Julia is unfaithful, her transgression is not sexual, so her intact virtue is not beyond repair. Since she was not sexually unfaithful, she is eventually reconciled with her husband and restored to her former position of respectable wife. The reverse of Karamzin's narrative logic implies that a woman who commits adultery has no other prospect than despair and suicide. It would turn the moral order upside down if the adulteress were to live happily ever after.

In the epistolary novel "The Suicide", Julia herself feels that she deserves the most severe punishment for her crime: "I have to die within time.... and definitely with the most agonising remorse" (*ia dolzhna budu umeret' cherez neskol'ko vremeni!.... nepremенно с muchitel'neishim razkaianiем!*...) (30). Although the story provides no clear evidence to the fact, Julia's desperation and subsequent self-inflicted death can be interpreted as indications of real adultery.

Narrative and feminine decorum

We have seen that all the epistolary novels discussed so far focused on a male protagonist, despite the fact that in some cases the name of the beloved woman appears in the title. The provocative aspect of these novels as well as the motor behind their plots is one man's claim to the woman of another, but without sexual transgression actually taking place. In "The Suicide", the focus is on a woman, and as in many narratives with a female protagonist, the moment of sexual transgression in the form of seduction or adultery forms the catastrophic pivot upon which the plot revolves.⁷ Nevertheless, one can say that all Russian epistolary novels, whether focusing on a male or a female protagonist, centre round the same problem: the violation of a husband's rights and possessions.

⁶ PPPV 1794: II, 303-327.

⁷ Overton 1996: 1-17.

In the mind of many early nineteenth-century Russians, any such violation, and female adultery in particular, was equated with an attack on the very fabric of society. Female adultery was considered a negation of male authority and by extension, all authority. The adulteress thus represented a potentially disruptive energy that directly or implicitly threatened the existing balance of power. This threat lent a particular narrative urgency to stories of female adultery, one of which we have identified as "The Suicide".⁸

The theme of female adultery also earned its disruptive character from the political and ideological conflicts of the period. During the eighteenth century, French Enlightenment had developed a materialistic concept of sexuality, a secular view of marriage and a favourable attitude toward the emancipation of women from male authority. From this perspective, sexual liberties implied a rejection of all sorts of prejudice, including religious assumptions, and put a positive value on both earthly pleasures and the desire for personal happiness. These ideas resulted in the laws of the French Revolution, which defined marriage as a dissolvable civil contract and allowed for divorce when the marital bond no longer served individual well being.⁹

However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the link between a stable family hierarchy and a secure hierarchical state seemed axiomatic, and therefore the dissolution of the relationship between a man and a woman was associated with the possible dissolution of the social contract between the prince and his subjects.¹⁰ For this reason, Russians loyal to an autocratic system of government associated the Enlightenment's concepts of love and marriage with atheism, disrespect for authority and eventually revolution. They reacted to the secular French marital laws by emphasising the sacred aspect and indissolubility of marriage. Partly through such considerations, the Russian Orthodox Church, which traditionally had regulated marital affairs, began to reinforce its influence. Requests for divorce were viewed as attacks on religious purity, social stability and state security. Aleksandr Golitsyn, who chaired the Holy Synod from 1806 to 1818, ensured that for that time the dissolution of a marriage in Russia became practically impossible.¹¹

Early nineteenth-century Russians not only associated the Enlightenment's concept of love and marriage with revolutionary ideology, but above all with the national mores of a country with which they were at

⁸ Tanner 1979: 3-4.

⁹ Freeze 1990: 722.

¹⁰ Armstrong 1976: 15.

¹¹ Freeze 1990: 722-723.

war. Russian moralists formulated new concepts of sexuality, marriage and femininity based on a combination of modern national stereotypes and antagonisms dating from the schism of the Western and Eastern Churches. They reversed the Enlightenment concept of love as the product of a European-style refinement only attainable by the educated elite. In its stead they endorsed the Romantic image that placed true love in the native Russian tradition preserved by the unenlightened rural classes. They no longer depicted traditional Russian amorous customs as barbaric, but as uncorrupted and chaste. In this light, any sexual transgression could be seen as an un-Russian vice. In Pavel L'vov's "Russian Pamela" (*Rossiiskaia Pamela*) of 1789 - not an epistolary novel by the way – the traditional peasant girl Maria is depicted as more capable of true love than the Francophile princess Mnogosulova, who turns up her nose at a virtue like chastity because it "smells Russian" (*pakhnet Ruskim dukhom*).¹² A true Russian woman was by nature chaste and virtuous, so if she allowed herself to be seduced or was unfaithful, she not only showed disobedience to male authority and committed a mortal sin, but also perpetrated something akin to treason against national values.

The link between national loyalty and sexual mores provided an ideological incentive for strict feminine decorum, a trend that can be illustrated with the translation of a French article that appeared in the Russian journal "Pleasant and Useful Passing of Time" in 1794. The article, entitled "A Parallel Between Men and Women" (*Paralel' mezhdu mushchinami i zhenshchinami*), claimed that there were more betrayed and seduced women than men. Moreover, this injustice was aggravated by the fact that men were allowed to complain of their lot openly, while women had to remain silent and ashamed because their sex as such was subject to general censure and disdain.¹³ In reaction to this "Parallel", a female reader wrote a letter to the journal arguing that the article's complaint was not valid for Russian women, who were more pious, constant and less susceptible to seduction than the French.¹⁴ Showing a complete internalisation of expected female decorum, the author of the letter argued that restraint was not the product of social pressure, but the result of a woman's inherent virtue. A true Russian woman had nothing improper in her soul and felt no discrepancy between her inner life and the appearances society might force upon her. In a

¹² L'vov 1789: II, 88. Actually, the princess repeats the standard phrase used in Russian folk tales by Baba-laga when she suspects intruders in her house.

¹³ PPPV 1794: I, 223-227.

¹⁴ PPPV 1794: I, 296-298.

critical article on "The New Heloise" published in the "Herald of Europe" (*Vestnik Evropy*) in 1814, an anonymous female author emphatically calling herself "a Russian lady" (*Rossiianka*) claimed that by merit of her sex and nationality she was able to discover flaws and improbabilities in Rousseau's depiction of Julie's character that had gone unnoticed by French critics. She scorns Rousseau's Julie for her immorality because she responds to Saint-Preux's physical desires and writes openly about her passion.¹⁵ Since a true Russian woman was chaste, she would not speak of love, for merely speaking of love would amount to a transgression. The growing taboo on women revealing feelings of passion gives rise to the particularly enigmatic and sometimes puzzling narrative style of the epistolary novel "The Suicide".

With her actions and the narration of her actions under a taboo, Julia has no one to reveal her secrets to, not even her female bosom friends like Alina, whom she calls "the incomparable friend of my soul" (*nesravnennomu drugu dushi moei*), but who is also "a young lady of rare virtues" (*devitse redkikh dostoinstv*) (19-20). Therefore Julia chooses an elderly man as confidant, who because of his dubious reputation is unlikely to assume the role of moralist. Nevertheless, Julia is afraid to speak about what is really on her mind, and she writes: "I can't write this vile word down" (*Ia ne mogu napisat' sego uzhasnago slova*) (9).

Another possible reason for Julia to conceal her true feelings was the necessity to defend herself against attempts at seduction. Taking a man into her confidence would give him control over her, as she unfortunately had experienced in the past. Julia constantly complains about confidence abused by friends and confidences she now regrets (17). Her anonymous confidant might also misuse her confessions and bring her dishonour (30). She fears that her confidant "will misuse the trust of an unfortunate girl" (*vo zlo upotrebit' doverennost' neshchastnoi*) and "destroy her completely" (*sovsem pogubit'*) by revealing her crime to others (31; 32). "My honour and life" (*Chest', zhizn' moia*), she says, depend on his discretion (32). In exchange for her confession, her confidant offers the help and sympathy she indeed craves. Still she cannot succeed (32; 31). She writes: "For nothing in the world would I reveal myself to a man" (*ni za chto na svete ne otkrylas' by ia mushchine*) (33). One of the causes of Julia's tragedy lies in the fact that morally she is not allowed to express herself and thus cannot receive advice and help.

One can say that the narrative structure of the epistolary novel "The Suicide" is based on historically determined gender differentiations, i.e.,

¹⁵ VE 1814: LXXV, 36-39.

feminine behaviour as prescribed by early nineteenth-century Russian society. In this sense, "The Suicide" has some aspects in common with Richardson's epistolary novels. The element of suspense dominating "Clarissa" and "Sir Grandison" owes a great deal to the standards imposed upon women's behaviour at the time. Richardson's heroines cannot confess love or narrate sexual transgression. It is impossible for Clarissa to write about her rape by Lovelace, so the act is related by a third person, and the story of Clementina derives its intriguing quality from the fact that she cannot acknowledge her love for Grandison, which is what lies at the core of her severe melancholic fits.¹⁶ In a similar way, Julia cannot narrate her moment of transgression and the causes of her depression; just to speak of them would be a transgression. The central event can only be reconstructed from ambiguous euphemisms and cryptic references. Even after Julia's death, her mother conceals her last note from everyone, probably so that no one will know the true cause of her daughter's desperate act and Julia will not lose her reputation posthumously.

The platonic twilight zone

Julia complains that her friendship was abused, a situation that seems closely related to her fall (17). She suggests that the 'friendship' of the third man referred to in her first letter turned out to be sexual desire, and that he misused their intimacy to seduce her. She is reluctant to speak out to her male confidant for fear that the same thing may happen with him. There is a suggestion that Julia and her confidant also have a platonic love relationship. When Julia returns his letters to him, he recalls that she was once the one "who said and wrote that.... But no! I don't want to multiply the sorrows of my heart with memories of the happiest moments" (*kotorai nekogda govorila i pisala... No net! ne khochu vospominaniiami minut shchastliveishikh umnozhat' gorest' moego serdtsa*) (11). He then quotes a line from Karamzin's poem "To an unfaithful lady" (*K nevernoi*), implying that Julia is 'unfaithful' to him by having married Mr O*. Another remarkable aspect of their relationship is the frequency of their correspondence, often three times a day, which raises suspicion of a more than platonic intimacy. A female friend, Sofia, says to Julia's confidant: "I have read two of her notes and you still dare to proclaim your innocence" (*chitala dve zapiski eia, i ty eshche smeesh' uveriat' menia v bezvinnosti*) (27).

¹⁶ Beebee 1990: 126-139.

Sofia is a former beloved of the man, and he once received a love token from her: a little cross of cedar wood that he wore around his neck for many years until it broke. Now he asks Julia to give him a cross, but it must be one that she wears on her own bosom. Julia instantly fulfils his request (28-29). The replacement of the crosses symbolises the change in object of affection, a role that Julia all too willingly accepts. Although the little wooden cross ostensibly symbolises virtue, it is also a highly erotic object permeated with the memory of its original whereabouts. Furthermore, Julia's confidant sends her a handwritten album of his own poetry entitled "The Remembrance of Bliss" (*Pamiatnik blazhenstva*), a gesture that reflects real courting practices. In 1806, Vasilii Zhukovskii gave the object of his platonic love, Maria Protasova, an album of his own poems, entitled "The Remembrance of True Friendship" (*Pamiatnik priamoi druzhby*).¹⁷ Zhukovskii could not marry Protasova for reasons of close kinship, so he emphasised the platonic nature of his feelings in the title of his album, as does Julia's confidant, prefacing his poetry collection with an epitaph that should convince her that: "He loved me with his soul - and wished only to be my friend" (*Liubil menia dushei - i druzhby lish' zhelal*) (22). The relationship between Julia and her confidant is thus a platonic, though highly eroticised friendship.

Julia hints at the possibility that, like the other man who abused her trust, her confidant is also in a position to misuse the theory of 'true friendship' between men and women, and seduce her. The narrow twilight zone of platonic courtship easily threatens to become an open field for seduction and adultery.

The argument over the romanesque

Platonic love was continuously questioned for its ambiguous nature. The theory was denounced as the erroneous notion of those who were unaware of their true physical objectives or who consciously concealed them to seduce the object of their desire. Furthermore, it was debunked as a fanciful and illusory feeling born from novelistic fiction and was therefore deprecatingly labeled *romanesque*. In the novel "The Suicide", when Julia asks her confidant about his relationship with Sofia, the man denounces his past "enthusiasm of most pure love" (*entuziazm chisteishei liubvi*) (25) as "the romancing of youth" (*romanizm molodosti*) (24). The discussion about the authenticity of the *romanesque* is one of the central themes in the novel "The Suicide".

¹⁷ Veselovskii 1999: 101-102.

As we have already seen, the term *romanesque* originated from the Classicist and Enlightenment criticism of the novel, which defined the essence of this genre as contradictory to the ‘natural’: a harmonious, orderly reality governed by common sense. From this perspective, the world of the novel was populated with exceptional, impossible, or monstrous characters that committed extraordinary, improbable or immoral acts. As such, novelistic fiction appeared to be the opposite of an orderly civil society. For this reason, the reading of novels was regarded as dangerous and a possible source of inspiration for subversive acts.¹⁸

The denunciation of *romanesque* extravaganza, especially of overwrought heroism and fruitless platonic love, was part of a critical current in Russian Sentimentalism. For example, in his story “Modest and Sofia” (*Modest i Sofiia*), published in 1810 in the Petersburg journal “Tsvetnik”, Vasilii Perevoshchikov portrays the development of his sentimental protagonist from *romanesque* Platonism and heroic idealization to a truer, empirical vision of man and of love. At the end of the story the narrator can claim: “Experience blew apart his *romanesque* dreams. (...) Objects now appeared to him in their true nature: in men he discovered men, in love – its real end” (*opyt rasseial vse romanicheskie sny ego, (...). Predmety iavilis' emu v istinnom vide: v liudiakh uvidel on liudei, v liubvi - istinnuiu tsel' ee*).¹⁹

In contrast, there were also Russian Sentimentalists who viewed the novel and the *romanesque* in a positive light, as a critique of existing reality and the expression of a state of mind that in English is usually denoted as “romantic”. From their perspective, the only true reality was the imaginary, not yet realised world of novels. The novel showed man his human potential and offered him a model for self-perfection. In addition, by promoting the image of the ideal, the novel could serve as a means of education and eventually as an incentive for action. One of the partisans of the novel was Karamzin, who in his 1802 essay “On the Book Trade” (*O knizhnoi torgovle*) defined the genre not as contrary to enlightenment, but instead as one of its main vehicles: “Novels make the heart and the imagination... romantic” (*Romany delaiut i serdtse i voobrazhenie... romanicheskimi*), that is: more sensitive and civilised.²⁰ It is not “romantic hearts” (*romanicheskie serdtsa*) that cause evil in the world, but cold and rational souls.²¹

¹⁸ Jäger 1969: 57-64.

¹⁹ Orlov 1979: 297.

²⁰ Karamzin 1964: II, 176-180. Cf. Davidson 1974.

²¹ Karamzin 1964: II, 180.

Karamzin's admirer Petr Shalikov continued the defence of the *romanesque*, or the "romantic". For example, in his literary journal "Aglaia", Shalikov published poems and letters that allowed the public to follow the progress of his gallant courtship of a lady named El'vira. In one of the letters, which he had planned to include in an epistolary novel, Shalikov defends the genuineness of his platonic feelings for her, and he is not afraid to call these sentiments *romanesque*: "Do I degrade this woman-goddess, when I love her platonically or, what is the same, romantically?" (*oskorbliaiu li zhenshchinuboginiu, liubia ee platonicheski ili - chto vse odno romanicheski*).²² Continuing his defense, he complains: "I can't understand why one calls love and lovers *romanesque* when one wants to condemn them. Is perfection a vice in this case? Is it vicious to love like the heroes of novels, like the knights of king Arthur, or the peasants of Gessner?" (*Ne ponimaiu, dlia chego nazyvaiut liubov' romanicheskoiu i liubovnikov romanicheskimi, kogda khotiat osudit' liubov' i liubovnikov! Razve sovershenstvo v etom sluchae porok? Razve liubit' tak, kak liubiat geroi romanov, ot rytsarei Artusovykh do pastushek Gesneroverykh, porochno?*).²³ Shalikov uses the word *romanesque* to defend the truth and possibility of the ideal, "the perfect form" (*sovershenstvo*), as presented in novels. For him the *romanesque* is the equivalent of the ideal.²⁴

The notion of the *romanesque* is part of Shalikov's subjective idealism, an idealism that he not only defended in his journal "Aglaia", but also in exchanges of poetic epistles with his contemporaries, like with the poet Ivan Dolgorukov. Shalikov, with his subjective idealism, and Dolgorukov, who acknowledges he could be called a "materialist" (*mater'ialist*),²⁵ address as amateur philosophers one of the topics of the eighteenth-century philosophical debate: the primacy of inner or external realities. In a letter in verse to Dolgorukov that was published in "The Moscow Observer" (*Moskovskii zritel'*), Shalikov wrote that: "the days of mortal man are only good when he is dreaming" (*Dni smertnago v mechtakh lish' tol'ko*

²² Aglaia 1810: X, ii, 32-35.

²³ Aglaia 1810: X, ii, 32. Cf. McLaughlin 1972: 422.

²⁴ Cf. Shalikov in another letter to El'vira: "Even Rousseau, the great Rousseau, felt in his declining years the full force of this *romanesque* - and thus most perfect - passion" (*Russo, velikii Russo ispytal dazhe na zapade zhizni svoei vsiu silu strasti romanicheskoi - sledovatel'no sovershenneishei*) (Aglaia 1810: X, i, 61).

²⁵ Dolgorukov 1817: II, 110.

khoroshi!).²⁶ In his long bucolic poem, “The Cabin on the River Rpen” (*Khizhina na Rpeni*), Dolgorukov replied to this particular phrase, emphasising that “reality” (*sushchestvennost'*) is not that terrible. He called upon his friend to “Be happy with the Real” (*Bud' shchastliv Istinnoi odnoi!*), that is: to turn to the countryside and enjoy the good of the world.²⁷ Later, as the relationship between the two poets deteriorated, Dolgorukov’s tone toward Shalikov became more hostile, as in his “To Mr. Sweet-Pie” (*Serdechkinu*). Here Dolgorukov fulminates against all Shalikov’s articles on subjective idealism, such as platonic love, the supremacy of love over marriage and especially the notion of the novel as an example of ideal behaviour. He curses “the scribbler of empty books / Who first infected the blood [of his readers] with the smallpox of false morality / And after having clouded their minds, led their hearts / Toward a life we call sentimental” (*Da budet prokliat tot bezmozglykh knig pisets,/ Kto pervoi v krov' pustil iad ospy Izhemoral'noi, / I razum pomutia, napravil put' serdets / Ktoi zhizni, koiu my zovem sentimental'noi!*).²⁸ Later, in his memoirs, Dolgorukov disdainfully calls Shalikov a poet “of *romanesque* trifles” (*romanicheskikh bezdelok*).²⁹

Thus the word *romanesque* points to contradicting views on the novel. Some saw it as a distorted image of love, a false representation of reality, a misleading manual in morality and therefore a danger to a person’s virtue and mental health. For others, *romanesque* meant the representation of a better world filled with exemplary characters, ideal love and exalted virtues. This argument over the *romanesque* was a central part of Russian Sentimentalism. It was especially topical for Petr Shalikov, whose faith in subjective idealism had made him the laughingstock of his contemporaries. It seems that by submitting his epistolary novel to Shalikov’s journal, the anonymous author of “The Suicide” also wanted to participate in this debate.

Suicide and the probability of the novel

Romanesque (*romanicheskii*) is a keyword in the epistolary dialogue between Julia and her confidant. Within the context of the novel, it sometimes refers to platonic love, but primarily to the questionable

²⁶ MZ 1806: III, iii, 19-24, here: 23. Cf. Karamzin’s “To a Poor Poet” (*K bednomu poetu*) (1796): “Only when dreaming and yearning, do we experience happiness” (*V mechtakh, v zhelaniakh svoikh / My tol'ko schasiliy byvaem*) (Karamzin 1966: 194).

²⁷ Dolgorukov 1817: I, 246-247.

²⁸ Dolgorukov 1817: II, 107.

²⁹ Dolgorukov 1997: 135-136.

authenticity of Julia's feelings: is her desire for death genuine or just the product of *romanesque* fancy? When in her third letter, Julia expresses her wish to die, her confidant is shocked: "Could it really be the invented heroines of novels who served as a model and a source for your weariness of life?" (*ne uzhe li vymyshlennyia geroini romanov mogli sluzhit' dlia tebia obraztsom i predlogom v nenavisti k zhizni?*) (14-15). For Julia's confidant there can be no legitimate motive for suicide, and death-wishes only stem from melancholic reveries, the imagination and reading novels.

After Julia and her confidant have talked it through at a rendezvous, the air seems cleared and both speak with irony about her earlier thoughts of suicide, which they now call "a *romanesque* death" (*romanicheskuiu smert'*) (20). Her confidant mockingly asks her to wait until she has a fitting scenery for her act: "Then you can crown your *romanesque* fancies with more romanticism" (*Togda romanicheskiiia mechty mozhno bolee uvenchat' romanizmom*) (18). He thinks she is not properly prepared because she has not yet studied a sufficient number of literary suicide scenes, without which she cannot master "the art of dying romantically" (*iskustva umeret' romanicheski*) (20). Julia's quotations show her acquaintance with Merzliakov's rhyming version of Werther's suicide letter, which "with striking verses brings a young tender heart closer to a *romanesque* death" (*razitel'nyimi stikhami khotia i priblizhaet nezhnoe molodoe serdechko k romanicheskoi smerti*) (20). However, if she has not learned by heart literary apologies of suicide such as in Addison's "Cato", Saint-Preux's suicide letter and the anonymous novel "The Curse of Sentiment" (*Neshchastiia ot chuvstvitel'nosti*), she cannot call on death yet, that is, "not only on real death, but not even on the most tender, sentimental one" (*ne tol'ko nastoiashchei, no i samoi nezhnoi, sentimental'noi!....*) (20).³⁰ Julia's confidant makes jokes about the theatricality of suicide. Using some lines from Merzliakov's translation of Deshoulières, he forges an epitaph for her overloaded with sentimental epithets. Then continuing in a serious vein, he says that "Romanticism" (*Romanizm*) is dangerous and nothing more than "false sensibility" (*lozhnoi chuvstvitel'nosti*) (22). For Julia's confidant suicide is just a metonymy for the *romanesque*.

The author of "The Suicide" not only engages in a polemic with Shalikov over the latter's *romanesque* tendencies, but also makes an implicit comment on the most popular text of Russian Sentimentalism: Karamzin's "Poor Liza". Karamzin held a positive view of his heroine's suicide, which he emphasised with the poetic embellishment of her act. Liza's wrongdoings

³⁰ Cf. *Neshchastiia* 1791: 256-259.

- sacrificing her virginity to Erast and committing suicide - were not crimes or vices nor a loss of honour but, on the contrary, a proof of her willingness to give everything to her beloved. They exemplified her selflessness and benevolence, and the absolute value she placed on love, a quality that in Karamzin's words constitutes "the beauty of her soul". Hence Liza's death is an expression of her virtue and of her natural - thus authentic - feelings.³¹ In "The Suicide", Julia's act receives the opposite treatment. Like Liza, Julia drowns herself in a pond, but by contrast her death is presented as the result of her moral offence. Her suicide is not a heroic act, but a form of self-punishment for her crime against the hallowed institution of marriage. Moreover, any positive assessment of the act has been precluded by the doubts on the authenticity of suicidal feelings voiced by Julia's confidant.

Shalikov was known for his naiveté as an editor and seemed not to have noticed the critical content of the story he accepted for his journal. This was also the case of the young poet Vasilii Kozlov, who inspired by the anonymous epistolary novel, published a romance also entitled "The Suicide" (*Samoubiistvo*) in a later issue of "Aglaia".³² Kozlov's version about a girl who drowns herself in a lake is no longer ambiguous about the value of suicide and clearly follows the approving paradigm of "Poor Liza".

Although there is some critical distance vis-à-vis Shalikov's brand of sentimentalism, the novel "The Suicide" does not denounce the sentimental world-view as a whole. The work could better be defined as a sentimental self-critique. The opposition between Julia and her elderly male friend is not that of a sentimentalist versus an anti-sentimentalist, but rather that of passionate and moderate attitudes towards sentiment itself. As in the earlier epistolary novels we have discussed, the passionate protagonist is the object of criticism and mockery as well as sympathy and compassion, a circumstance that creates moral ambivalence. The author does not seem sure of his outward condemnation of subjective idealism: Julia claims that her feelings and her vision of reality are "not romanticism, but truth" (*ne romanizm, a istina!*...) (30). The failure to unambiguously endorse the point of view of one of the two letter-writers enhances the tragic aspect of the novel. The elderly confidant does not succeed in curing Julia of her *romanesque* fancy, and she dies, remaining true to her ideas.

The discussion surrounding suicide as a metonymy for romanticism becomes a debate about the novel itself. It is in suicide that the novel exercises its most fatal influence: self-annihilation as ultimate consequence

³¹ Fraanje 2000.

³² Aglaia 1810: XII, ii, 74-76.

of adhering to a *romanesque* world-view. This reproach sheds doubt on the ability of novels to express true feelings, depict authentic characters and serve as models for behaviour in real life. For this reason, the denunciation of suicide becomes closely associated with a critique on the moral standards and lack of probability in the contemporary novel. Suicide as a "*romanesque* death", a death characteristic of novels, can be seen as a metonymy for the entire genre. Thus "The Suicide" can be interpreted as referring to a metaliterary comment on the value of the novel itself.

CHAPTER TEN

THE EPISTOLARY NOVEL IN RUSSIA: CONCLUSION

Now that we have examined the individual epistolary novels written in Russia before 1812, we can draw some conclusions concerning the development of the genre as a whole. First, we can conclude that eighteenth-century Russian authors showed no awareness of the fact that the epistolary novel constituted a distinct genre. Russian authors never made any critical or theoretical remarks concerning the epistolary novel as such. Fedor Emin does not seem to have made any distinction between novelistic genres, eventually denouncing all novels as *romanesque*. However, his son Nikolai Emin started to differentiate between types of novels, opposing his own work to novels of adventure and gallantry that “suppress moral lessons and captivate solely with the magic thread of an enchanting love story” (*propuskaiut nravouchenie i pleniaut'sia odnoiu volshebnoiu nit'iu voskhishchaiushchago romana*).¹ Mikhail Sushkov underlined the difference between his work and seventeenth-century French heroic novels, whose main flaw was an overabundance of parallel narrative threads following multitudes of noble characters portrayed without any psychological depth. The anonymous author of “Some Letters from my Friend” sought to distance himself from comic novels like Cervantes’ “Don Quixote”, which did not encourage compassion.² Thus the Russian authors of epistolary novels saw their work as opposed to the heroic and the burlesque, the adventurous and the immoral. Their writings painted a serious picture of reality in accordance with the laws of probability, and encouraged the reader’s sympathetic involvement with the protagonist’s inner struggle. However, Russian authors of epistolary novels never explicitly mentioned the use of letters.

Coherence of the genre

Furthermore, in Russia the genre of the epistolary novel did not develop organically out of native literary forms. First, there is no sign that the Russian authors mentioned above were familiar with early eighteenth-century tales such as the “History of Aleksandr”, which with its many letters could be defined as an early stage of the genre. Second, these manuscript

¹ Emin N. 1788b: 28.

² Sushkov 1801: VI-VII. PPPV 1794: IV, 174-179.

tales were sharply distinguished from the more sophisticated printed novels and not considered a part of the *belles lettres*; hence they were not suitable objects for emulation, parody or other forms of literary treatment. Granted, Nikolai Emin made fun of high-ranking nobles reading chivalrous tales like "Francis of Venice" (*Frants Venetsian*), a printed version of which had appeared in 1787, in a way similar to Derzhavin's ridiculing the readers of "Bova" in his "Felitsa", but this was more a satire of unenlightened administrators than literary parody.³ It is also true that Russian epistolary novels contain references to other Russian literary texts, in particular to drama. Yet, although these other works brought significant changes to the way the epistolary form was applied, they did not provide a model for the novels themselves.

It is important to note that Russian authors of epistolary novels did not refer to the works of their Russian predecessors, which they had probably not even read. Nikolai Emin's two novels do not even show a trace of influence from his father's work. This would imply that the genre of the Russian epistolary novel lacks the internal coherence that would normally be the result of an uninterrupted, systematically developing literary tradition.

One way in which the coherence of the genre is most guaranteed is by a shared orientation toward foreign models. Close scrutiny reveals that Russian epistolary novels appear to be modelled mainly on two western-European works: Rousseau's "New Heloise" and Goethe's "Sorrows of Young Werther". This is clear from parallels in form and conflict, the constellation of characters, themes and individual motives and, above all, from explicit references to these two novels. Fedor Emin compiled his work by pasting together direct quotes and paraphrases from "The New Heloise". His younger colleagues inserted fragments from the novels of Rousseau and Goethe to describe their characters' reading habits. Nikolai Emin's Roza knows "Werther" by heart, while the heroine of his second novel, Plenira, reads "The New Heloise" and sees her fate reflected in a letter by Julie.⁴ The hero of "Some Letters" recites the German poem "Charlotte at Werther's Grave"; Julia in "The Suicide" quotes lines from Merzliakov's poetic translation of Werther's last letter.⁵ Russian authors also moulded their characters on these foreign heroes. Milon, the hero of Nikolai Emin's "Roza", is nicknamed "Werther", as is the nameless protagonist of Mikhail Sushkov's novel. Plenira is "a woman like Julie" (*Iullii podobnaia*

³ Emin N. 1789: 42.

⁴ Emin N. 1788b: 15. Emin N. 1789: 111-112.

⁵ PPPV 1794: IV, 184. Aglaia 1810: XI, ii, 12.

*zhenshchina).*⁶ Russian authors did not simply imitate foreign authors but used their texts to help explain the conflicts in their own works and emphasise the universality of the situation, characters and feelings they portrayed.

The short anonymous novel “The Suicide” also shares some aspects of the works of Richardson, in particular the Clementina episode in “The History of Sir Charles Grandison”. It resembles the English novel in its focus on a female protagonist, the correspondence between a young woman and a male tutorial figure and the significance of female decorum for the novel’s specific narrative structure. There are also thematic parallels, such as the connection between love and the *romanesque* and between depression and romanticism, as well as the critical reflection on the novelistic genre itself.

In this way, the reference to a limited number of foreign models lends the Russian epistolary novel a certain degree of coherence as a genre. Fedor and Nikolai Emin and Nikolai Murav'ev follow the polylogic model of Rousseau that alternates love letters and familiar letters. Mikhail Sushkov and the author of “Some Letters”, on the other hand, borrow Goethe’s monologic model of familiar letters to a friend linked by narrative passages by a fictional editor. “The Suicide” is a combination of both. Here there are two main letter-writers, and the editor fulfils an important narrative task by introducing the correspondence.

Although Russian epistolary novels share the same models, this does not mean that they interpreted them similarly. Different treatments of the same model could sometimes create noteworthy contradictions, as this comparison of the two Goethe imitations, “The Russian Werther” and “Some Letters From My Friend”, will show. Both Russian authors adopt the focus on one male letter-writer. Sushkov, however, suppresses all other voices than that of the main character, employing neither quoted and paraphrased dialogue or extensive descriptions from other characters. The author of “Some Letters” takes advantage of the device of a fictional editor to oppose his protagonist to a clearly present confidant-editor. Another example of the disparity in the reception of Goethe’s model lies in the unequal significance of nature. Both Sushkov and the author of “Some Letters” date the letters according to the timetable of the Russian postal service, and these consecutive dates coincide with the progression of the seasons, which in turn have symbolic implications. Yet in Sushkov’s novel, the transition from summer to winter is not reflected in descriptions of nature. Sushkov’s hero feels alienated from everything and is therefore insensitive to nature and its metaphysical

⁶ Emin N. 1789: 113.

mysteries. In contrast, the protagonist of "Some Letters" emphasises the symbolic meaning of summer sunshine and autumnal gloom for his state of mind. He also shares the pantheistic attitude of his German model and feels a mystical union with all living beings. While Sushkov's hero is a pleasure-loving man of the world, cut off from the lower classes and scornful of the awkwardness of Russian peasants, the hero of "Some Letters" rejects worldly distractions and exalts in the mores of the lower classes, sharing Werther's egalitarian attitude towards the peasants. The only aspect of Sushkov's novel that is closer to Goethe's original than the anonymous "Letters" is the hero's suicide. Despite his repeated death wishes, the protagonist of "Some Letters" does not die from suicide, but from an unspecified illness. In short, the contradictions between these two Russian imitations of Goethe's "Werther" are representative of the divergent ways the western-European epistolary novel was received and interpreted in Russia.⁷

Nevertheless, there are a few areas of consistency in the Russian reception of the epistolary novel. The Russian novels are short in comparison to those of Rousseau and Goethe, and the letters they contain are fewer and briefer. The Russian novels discuss fewer heterogeneous subjects and tend to restrict themselves to a single plot. Their structure is also simplified. The polylogic form of the novels by Nikolai Emin, Nikolai Murav'ev, and to a lesser degree Fedor Emin, seems to be markedly influenced by the predominant Russian eighteenth-century literary form: drama. The configuration of letter-writing characters in these epistolary novels follows an antithetical typology, which is accompanied by an opposition of stereotypical language modes, just as in Russian comedy. The monologic form of Mikhail Sushkov's novel and of the anonymous "Some Letters from My Friend" has been simplified as well. In Sushkov, the fictional editor loses his critical function, and his point of view coincides with the main character, while in "Some Letters" the role of editor and recipient of the letters are combined, and the stereotypical opposition of characters is emphasised.

The interest in the triangle conflict

As we have seen, the major element of coherence in the development of the eighteenth-century Russian epistolary novel is its orientation towards a limited number of foreign models. Curiously enough, the choice to imitate Rousseau and Goethe, but not Richardson, seems determined to a large degree by the content of the originals. The novels of Rousseau and Goethe

⁷ Cf. Zhirmunskii 1981: 30-60

are based on a triangle conflict in which two males compete for one female, while those of Richardson are based on the conflict between a male seducer and a woman demanding an honourable marriage. Richardson's female-oriented plots seem to have had little appeal for Russian authors, all but one of whom chose the male-oriented triangle conflict. It would appear that Russian authors felt attracted to the triangle conflict because it had the most potential to symbolise their own problems and social struggles. It is safe to say that within the context of Russian society, the conflict between two men competing for one woman represented the conflict between two groups within the Russian civil service class competing for prestigious social positions. More precisely, the conflict symbolised the rivalry between the aristocratic elite and the middle ranks of Russian nobility - the noble haves and have-nots.

This strife within the Russian noble estate constituted one of the many tensions smouldering below the surface of eighteenth-century Russian society. The noble elite consisted of ancient princely families and the monarch's favourites who often received the title of count. This elite could easily pass its wealth and privileges to offspring and relatives, maintaining the social status of its families and its hold on prestigious posts within the Russian state apparatus. The Russian noblemen serving in the middle ranks of the army and civil service looked upon these powerful aristocrats with resentment. The middle-ranking nobles, often recently ennobled commoners, had just enough money to provide themselves and their sons with a good education, but were too poor to afford a lifestyle in keeping with their self-image. Without influential relatives and acquaintances to help them, they had little chance of reaching the higher echelons of public service that would afford them the necessary wealth to rise above the poverty suffered by the majority of uneducated provincial nobles.⁸ Frustrated by the lack of real career prospects, this middle class of relatively poor, but well-educated nobles couched its dreams of success and wealth in love romances, eroticising their social pretensions. One can contend that the novelistic genre, and especially the epistolary novel as it appeared in Russia in the 1760s, came to serve as the vehicle for their emancipatory fantasies.

The triangle conflict of husband, wife and lover is thus a symbol of the competition between two groups of Russian nobles for social privileges. This symbolic elaboration of the triangle conflict is especially clear - in almost schematic simplicity - in the novels of Nikolai Emin, Nikolai Murav'ev and

⁸ Dukes 1967: 22-24. Jones 1973: 16. Wirtschafter 1997: 33-36.

the anonymous "Some Letters From My Friend". It is perhaps less clear but still present in the novels of Fedor Emin and Mikhail Sushkov.

In all these works the protagonist is a gentle, well-educated young man of humble birth who occupies a middle rank in the nobility. He lacks wealth, name and a prestigious position. He is a civil servant, like Ernest, a mid-ranking noble with a hundred serfs, like Milon and Vsemil, an aristocratic young man dependent on poor parents, like the Russian Werther, or a teacher of obscure descent, like Vsevolod.

His adversary, the man who initially obtains the woman and becomes her husband, is a count, like Vetrogon and Slabosil, a prince, like Vladislav, or a German courtier, like Heinrich. In short, he is a highly-placed and rich representative of the elite. Although successful in taking the prize, the antagonist does not deserve the woman. He has earned his position of husband unfairly, either through intrigue, because of his wealth or impressive-sounding family name, or thanks to an error in judgement on the part of the woman's father, but never on the basis of personal merit. In contrast, the poor nobleman's claim to the woman is legitimate because he is well-educated and abounding in moral qualities, such as a high sense of honour and a willingness to serve with total dedication. His many merits logically win the woman's love.

The poor noble lover thus represents the principle of nobility based on service to the state as laid down in Peter the Great's Table of Ranks. The rich noble husband, on the other hand, symbolises all those forces that oppose the meritocratic principle: the official privileges of the noble elite and their de facto advantages in civic and military service thanks to favouritism, nepotism and other forms of corruption. The protagonist, a middle-ranking noble or ennobled commoner, justly demands that the meritocratic principle be enforced to counteract the abusive power of the aristocracy.⁹

It is true that the symbolic elaboration of this strife in Russian epistolary novels finds many parallels in the novels of Rousseau and Goethe. Russian authors reworked the social antagonism between burghers and nobles underlying the conflict in "The New Heloise" into a rivalry between the middle ranks of the nobility and the aristocratic establishment. Like the bourgeois hero of the western-European novels, the Russian protagonist of middle rank emphasises his individual merit, education and moral lifestyle within the intimate circle of family and friends, while accusing his aristocratic adversary of a wide range of vices, such as non-patriotic Francophilia, superficial knowledge, a corrupted lifestyle in a world of

⁹ Dukes 1967: 146-152. Jones 1973: 6-9.

leisure where only appearances count. There is, however, a significant point of departure between the western-European bourgeois and the poor Russian nobleman. Saint-Preux and Werther are subversive figures; their individual desires go against the dominant principles of the societies they live in. Saint-Preux clashes with the mores of the governing French aristocracy, Werther with the restrictions of German burgher society. In contrast, the heroes of the Russian epistolary novels are not subversive, but support official ideology, that is: the meritocratic principle of Peter's Table of Ranks.

The dissimilarity between the psychological outlook of bourgeois western-European heroes and noble Russian protagonists becomes even more apparent in their attitudes toward duelling. As a bourgeois, Rousseau denounces the noble privilege of duelling, while Goethe ignores the subject altogether. In contrast, the duel plays a significant role in the plot of almost every Russian epistolary novel, and in most cases is valued positively. Noble Russian authors saw the duel as an affirmation of their individual integrity and their immunity from corporal punishment; it symbolised the equality of all nobles, whether rich or poor.¹⁰ The army officer Ippolit fights a duel for the shy philosopher Ernest. The Russian Werther kills a fellow officer in a duel and afterwards does not consider himself guilty of any crime. Nikolai Emin's Milon and the hero of "Some Letters" both challenge their adversary, the husband, to a duel. Nikolai Murav'ev's Vsevolod eventually kills the husband, significantly attributing the latter's death more to divine intervention than to his bullet. These lovers see no dishonour in fighting the husbands because they see themselves as equals and thus have an equally legitimate claim to the woman and all the social advantages she represents.

In short, the triangle conflict that characterises all but one of the Russian epistolary novels under discussion here is in essence a social one. In this light, these Russian epistolary novels can be seen as the fictional playground where the social aspirations of their authors, fused with erotic desires, are acted out. This does not mean that all their works are wish-fulfilling. Like their western-European counterparts, most heroes of Russian epistolary novels fail in their claim to the desired woman. They do not receive what they think they deserve, and their lives end tragically: the forces that oppose the meritocratic principle ultimately prevail. The outcome of the protagonist's struggle is indicative of how likely the author thinks his own desires are to be fulfilled. We can conclude that the tragic ending of most Russian epistolary novels reflects the social insecurity and lack of trust in

¹⁰ Reyfman 1999: 8; 55-56; 125-135; 153-154.

social justice that their authors, themselves all noblemen of middle rank, must surely have felt.

The dialogue on desire

The author expresses his views on the attainability of individual desire not only through the success or tragic failure of his protagonist, but also within the epistolary discussion. All Russian epistolary novels, whether polylogic or monologic, are based on a discussion between two letter-writers, the passionate hero and his moderate confidant. Their epistolary dialogue becomes a means to comment on the action and to reflect on the main force behind it: desire.

The protagonist's passion for a married woman and desire to obtain the possessions and privileges of another man, in other words his transgression of the existing social order, meets with criticism from his confidant, who calls him immoderate and immoral, and even questions the authenticity of the hero's desire. According to the confidant, the protagonist's desire is only a product of the imagination, the result of reading novels, in short: *romanesque*, and does not deserve to be satisfied. Ernest, although still in love, sees the impossibility of consummating his feelings and retreats into resignation. The Russian Werther and the anonymous hero of "Some Letters" fail to realise their desire and seek refuge in death. In addition, the confidant also questions platonic solutions to the problem of desire; he casts doubt on the possibility of 'pure', disinterested love, suggesting that 'tender friendships' with a married woman cannot be reconciled with virtue. By continuously disclaiming the legitimacy of the hero's desire, the confidant anticipates the latter's failure or denounces his eventual success, as is the case in Nikolai Emin's "An Irony of Fate". Although the final situation is favourable to Vsemil's desire, this outcome is challenged in a last critical statement by Nelest.

The confidant, representing the reality-principle as it were, has the author's conscious approval and serves as his *raisonneur*; but the passionate hero, representing the pleasure-principle, still receives the author's sympathy. The author's wavering between moral disapproval on the one hand and feelings of sympathy on the other hand makes the Russian epistolary novels complex. This is enhanced by the notably dramatic structure of the epistolary novel, in which the first person narrative fosters the reader's identification with the immoderate and sometimes immoral protagonist. Moreover, this particular narrative structure enables the

protagonists to assert their views just as cogently as their critical friends. Thus, the conflicting positions of protagonists and confidants seem to be equally valid, with the result that Russian epistolary novels cannot be reduced to one ideological tendency. With some simplification, we can say that the divergent points of view of protagonist and confidant reflect the psychomachy of the author. He has transferred his own dilemma between egoistic desires and social reality to his characters, whose words and deeds now reflect the struggle between the author's inclinations towards extravagant, transgressive, *romanesque* passion, and his conscious sense of moderation, self-containment and the need for conformism.¹¹

Similar oppositions can be found in nineteenth-century epistolary novels. The opposition between the *romanesque* hero and his 'realist' counterpart, between an absolute, desired ideal and forced conformity to the status quo, re-emerges in Dostoevskii's epistolary novel "Poor Folk" (*Bednye liudi*) (1846). The impractical idealism of the sentimental Makar Devushkin, who nevertheless has the author's sympathy, plays in counterpoint to the realistic Varvara, whose eventual choice of her rich seducer Bykov is somewhat dubious.

The device of textual authenticity

Besides the focus on the triangle conflict, another constant idiosyncrasy of the Russian epistolary novel is the absence of the device of textual authenticity. This device implied that a work of fiction was presented as an authentic document, and in the case of an epistolary novel, as a collection of genuine letters. Most western-European epistolary novels, like those of Rousseau and Goethe, pretend to be a collection of genuine letters, but five out of seven Russian epistolary novels fail to do so: they are emphatically fictional. Only the two anonymous epistolary novels, both published in journals, employ the device.

In the novels of Rousseau and Goethe, the claim of textual authenticity leads to a specific arrangement of the text. Footnotes and commentary by a fictional editor constitute an important part of the novel's structure. They produce a complex relationship between the points of view of the fictional editor and those of the letter-writing characters. However, most Russian authors of epistolary novels did not consider the footnotes and the so-called editorial commentary to be a significant part of the works upon which they modelled their own. They signed the introductions to their novels with their

¹¹ Cf. Simanowski 1998: 170.

own name and rarely added footnotes. Those that did use footnotes did so only to give their own authorial commentary. It is true that there are editorial passages in some of these novels, like for example the brief epilogue in "The Russian Werther", and the isolated footnotes in "Roza" and "Vsevolod and Veleslava" that explain a lapse in the correspondence. However, these elements are only the remnants of an editorial function that was crucial to the structure of the works of Rousseau and Goethe, and they have lost their original function of enhancing the claim of authenticity. Furthermore, Nikolai Emin and Mikhail Sushkov gave their novels the subtitle "a half-true story" (*poluspravedlivaya povest'*), emphasising the fictional nature of their work. In addition, Fedor Emin and Mikhail Sushkov used the foreword to defend their artistic choices. On the whole, Russian authors of epistolary novels claimed responsibility for the text and affirmed that they wrote fiction.

Authenticity and the critique of civilisation

The explicit reference to specific foreign models, the absence of the claim of textual authenticity and the subsequent emphasis on the fictional nature of the text demonstrate that the authors of most Russian epistolary novels did not perceive the original aesthetic basis of the genre.

In Western Europe the genre of the epistolary novel arose from a critical attitude toward contemporary culture and toward civilisation in general. The authors of the first epistolary novels in the late seventeenth century opposed the eloquence of true passion to the false rhetoric of gallantry in order to free love and literature from artfulness, rhetoric and the burden of culture. In the eighteenth century, the categories of gallant rhetoric and passionate eloquence were associated with class differences. Literati of the rising bourgeoisie took advantage of the epistolary form to contrast the stylised etiquette, theatricality and world of appearances of the aristocracy with the new aesthetic categories of honesty, immediacy and naturalness. The western-European epistolary novel reacted against baroque rhetoric, gallant artfulness and the rigid prescriptions of classicism in its strive toward originality, authentic feelings and a 'natural' - i.e. non-rhetorical - language. Furthermore, bourgeois authors like Richardson, Rousseau and Goethe replaced the aesthetic of imitation with that of originality.¹² Their epistolary novels were composed according to a non-normative aesthetic, or in

¹² Sauder 1974: 156-158.

Lotman's terms, an "aesthetic of opposition".¹³ This was not only reflected in the epistolary form of their novels, but also explicitly in their characters' deliberations on art. Rousseau expressed anti-normative aesthetics through the mouthpiece of Lord Bomston, while Werther defends the notion that true art is original and non-imitative.¹⁴ Rousseau and Goethe thought that true artistic imitation was no longer the imitation of other works of art, but the imitation of empirical reality, and to such a degree that all artistic elements should be concealed. In this sense the formal characteristics of the epistolary novel express the ambition to create an art that was indistinguishable from nature: "The New Heloise" and "The Sorrows of Young Werther" are works of fiction that claim to be non-fiction.¹⁵ The device of textual authenticity was part and parcel of this new aesthetic concept.

In contrast, we have seen that most Russian authors of epistolary novels emphasise the artificial aspect of their work, presenting it as fiction or the imitation of another work of art. They rejected the claim of textual authenticity and did not pretend to present an original work.

One has to see this particularity of the Russian epistolary novel against the background of the major cultural changes that were enacted in eighteenth-century Russia, starting with the reforms of Peter the Great. The fact that a European-style education had been set as a prerequisite for entrance into public service, and had subsequently become a precondition for social advancement, made the Russian civil service class zealously try to comply with the new standards. Their attempts to meet these so-called 'universal' standards, including aesthetic norms, made them view the notion of 'civilisation' and the products of science and art in a positive light. What is more, men of letters in eighteenth-century Russia saw themselves as specialists in and guardians of this 'universal' culture, as well as supervisors of the efforts made by other Russians to acquire the 'true' aesthetic norms. To a certain extent, they perceived their own literary work as an instrument through which a higher cultural level could be reached. Of course, in order to fulfil this function, their work had to represent the same aesthetic standards that were considered 'universal'. It had to comply with the existing notion of *belles lettres* and be immediately recognisable as literature. Simply put, literature had to look like literature. It is for this reason that Russian authors made their novels look like western-European ones, at the same time emphasising that what they were presenting to the public was not an original

¹³ Lotman 1970: 349-356.

¹⁴ Rousseau 1964: II, 125 (Letter 1, XLV). Goethe 1948: IV, 277-278 (*am 26. May*).

¹⁵ Starobinski 1971: 103; 137.

or authentic text, but a work of art, that is: fiction. One could say that most Russian authors still thought in terms of the normative aesthetic of *imitatio*, an “aesthetic of identity”, characteristic of the cultural acquisition process in which they were involved.¹⁶

In other words, the positive value placed on civilisation, together with the overall rejection of Rousseau’s critique of human civilisation and culture, run parallel with the positive assessment of artistic fiction and the rejection of Rousseau’s device of textual authenticity found in most Russian epistolary novels.¹⁷ Within the context of eighteenth-century Russia, preoccupied with the idea of cultural progress, the device of textual authenticity, together with the claim of originality or any other form of disobedience to ‘universal’ aesthetic norms, would have been associated with the ‘awkwardness’ of unenlightened Russians. It should be noted that as a consequence the Russian authors of epistolary novels perceived the non-normative works of Rousseau and Goethe paradoxically as normative, as manifestations of universal literary standards.¹⁸

The authenticity claim in early Russian literature

The suggestion of textual authenticity was not foreign to early modern Russian literary texts. For example, Russian authors had made use of the device of ‘forged’ documents throughout the centuries, fabricating mock correspondence between Cossacks and Ottoman sultans, self-exposing petitions from gluttonous monks and letters of instruction from awkward provincial noblemen to their disobedient offspring. However, these ‘forged’ documents served exclusively satirical purposes and did not pretend to be authentic or real. Their fictional nature was clear from the inadmissible travesty of formulaic phrases, their inappropriate content and grotesque exaggeration.¹⁹ The letter-writer’s deviation from linguistic norms was not a mark of authenticity, but a sign of his deviation from moral standards.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of authenticity became an accepted aesthetic category. In his “Letters of a Russian Traveller”, Nikolai Karamzin claimed that his carefully composed letters were actually authentic letters written spontaneously on the spot. This device had to account for Karamzin’s elegant, non-bookish literary style. However, an

¹⁶ Klein 1990: 255-256.

¹⁷ Lotman 1967: 223-226.

¹⁸ Klein 1993: 45. Bilinkis 1995: 84-85.

¹⁹ Likhachev 1984: 13. Romodanovskaia 1994: 90.

important difference between Rousseau and Karamzin's use of the authenticity claim is that the Russian traveller is not an innocent man from the provinces like Saint-Preux, untainted with worldly mores, but a man of letters who sees himself as a representative of Russian cultural progress and wants to display his cultivation and ability to write elegant prose. Furthermore, the device of textual authenticity does not efface the author from the text or conceal artistic elements of composition. The fact that the letters are supposedly authentic travel notes does not lessen the author's claim of cultural competence and artistic mastery.

The category of authenticity also became an important structural feature of the Sentimentalist stories of the 1790s. These third person narrations, often subtitled as "a true story" (*istinnaia* or *spravedlivaiia povest'*), claimed to be true in the sense that the events at the center of the story were said to have actually occurred. However, this claim of truth is not a claim of textual authenticity. Here again, the third person narrative mode offered the author ample opportunities to display his skills as a writer, despite his claims to be telling a 'true' story. This kind of claim to authenticity, therefore, did not imply a denial of the artificial nature of these texts.

Fiction and ambition

Taking this into consideration, one can argue that the desire to display literary ability provided another reason to reject the claim of textual authenticity in most Russian epistolary novels. Such a display could eventually procure the author a seat at the Parnassus of Russian letters, or at least put him on the payroll of the Russian government, a motive certainly valid for Nikolai Emin. Therefore, Russian authors tended to associate themselves unambiguously with their own literary work in an attempt to improve their social position. They had no use for anonymity or remaining hidden behind the device of textual authenticity.

Another possible explanation for the Russian authors' compliance with traditional literary standards and the emphasis on the fictional nature of their work can be found in their tendency toward political conformism. The emphasis on fiction took most of the subversive edge off novels filled with the emancipatory fantasies of their authors. In addition to critical commentary and a tragic ending, the Russian epistolary novel used the mediating force exercised by fiction to further undermine the subversive desires of its heroes. In other words, anti-social desires, such as hypergamic and adulterous love, and the demand for equality amongst nobles, were

ventilated within a controlled fictional sphere. In this way, the subversive nature of western-European authors like Rousseau and Goethe, whose claims of authenticity suggested the possibility of social conflict in the real world, were rendered harmless in their Russian counterparts, who held transgressive desires safely within the confines of fiction.²⁰

In conclusion, the idiosyncrasies of Russian epistolary novels, such as the predilection for the triangle conflict, the reference to literary models, and the absence of a claim to textual authenticity, can be explained by the social position of their authors and the specific cultural environment of eighteenth-century Russia. On the one hand, these authors were members of the middle nobility, which was competing with the powerful aristocratic elite for social privileges. At the same time, they were part of a society striving to raise its technological and cultural standards by following the example of Western Europe. As a result, Russian authors placed a positive value on the achievements of science and art, on imitation, and consequently, on fiction.

²⁰ Simanowski 1998: 386.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Эпистолярный роман представляет из себя одну из разновидностей романного жанра. Эпистолярный роман состоит из писем, которые пишутся персонажами по мере развертывания действия, что уподобляет их драматическим репликам. Отличительные черты эпистолярного романа, популярность которого приходится в Европе на конец XVII-начало XIX века, основывались на стремлении к аутентичности, к «правдивому» изображению внутреннего мира человека, и к непосредственному выражению переживаний персонажей. Именно эти черты, с одной стороны, способствовали отождествлению читателя с главным персонажем, с другой стороны, служили причиной моральной амбивалентности текста.

Перенесение жанра эпистолярного романа на российскую почву

С 1762 по 1812 год в России появилось семь эпистолярных романов: «Письма Эрнеста и Доравры» Федора Эмина (1766), «Роза» и «Игра судьбы» его сына Николая Эмина (1788 и 1789), «Российский Вертер» Михаила Сушкива (1792; опубликован в 1801 г.), «Всеволод и Велеслава» Николая Муравьева (1807), и еще два анонимных романа «Несколько писем моего друга» (1794) и «Самоубийство» (1810).

При внимательном рассмотрении этих русских романов можно заметить, что их жанровая специфика заимствована из европейских эпистолярных романов, например, таких как «Новая Элоиза» Жан-Жака Руссо (1760) и «Страдания молодого Вертера» Иоанна Вольфганга Гете (1774). Эти заимствования видны повсюду, и в форме романов, и в конфликтах, и в конфигурации персонажей, и в совпадении тем, и даже в отдельных мотивах. Более того, русские авторы подчеркнуто ссылаются на приведенных выше европейских авторов. Так что, ориентация на эти две европейские модели является главным условием для единства жанра русского эпистолярного романа.

Конечно, каждый русский эпистолярный роман содержит и «типовично» русские элементы: в нем отражаются черты русской действительности, имеются ссылки на другие русские литературные тексты. Благодаря очевидному факту, что все романы обращены к одному и тому же культурному контексту, жанр приобретает некоторое единство. Однако, русские эпистолярные романы не стоят в отношении зависимости друг от

друга, не имеют никаких генетических и сознательных диалогических связей между собой. Также нельзя сказать, что русский эпистолярный роман закономерно развивался из русской прозы первой половины XVIII века. Как жанр, он не включается в непрерывный, последовательный литературный ряд, или в самобытную национальную традицию.

Русские писатели по—разному использовали европейские модели эпистолярного жанра. Наблюдается большое разнообразие русских эпистолярных романов. Отклонения от европейских моделей, присущие всем русским эпистолярным романам, заключаются в уменьшении объема текста, упрощении структуры конфликта, склонении к стереотипной конфигурации персонажей. Кстати, последнее сложилось, по-видимому, под влиянием драматических жанров, господствовавших в русской литературе XVIII века.

Значение любовного треугольника и эпистолярного диалога

Важнейшим из элементов, разделяемых русскими эпистолярными романами, является структура конфликта. В большинстве романов это любовный треугольник: любовник и супруг соревнуются за полное обладание страстно желаемой женщиной. Кажется, что именно этот конфликт определил интерес русских писателей к романам Руссо и Гете, а не к произведениям Ричардсона, в которых такой тип конфликта отсутствует.

Можно сказать, что любовный треугольник имеет символическую потенцию: в муже можно видеть представителя общественного порядка, в любовнике - индивида нарушающего этот порядок в личных интересах, в женщине - олицетворение вожделенного счастья. Русские писатели используют этот конфликт для выражения важной для них социальной проблематики. Другими словами: любовный треугольник служил символом социальных противоречий между, с одной стороны, аристократической верхушкой, занимающей важнейшие общественные места, и с другой стороны, средними слоями дворянства, недовольными своим относительно незначительным статусом. Такая конкретизация конфликта подтверждается характеристиками, придаными различным персонажам. Мужем бывает князь, старый граф, генерал, или придворный, короче говоря, человек со значительным положением в свете, и поэтому обладающий желанной женщиной. Однако, он недостоин своей супруги, потому что свои звания приобрел с помощью интриг, денег, и громких имен предков. Он основывает свои претензии, опираясь на принцип родового дворянства. В противоположность супругу, любовник - молодой человек неопределенного происхождения, но зато благородный, хорошо воспитанный, образованный, и

поэтому заслуживающий любовь женщины. Имея личные достоинства, любовник представляет «дворянство по заслуге», то есть, такой меритократический принцип, который был установлен петровским «Табелем о рангах».

Итак, в русском эпистолярном романе любовный сюжет становится носителем эротизированного стремления к социальному продвижению. Герой, который, как и его автор, принадлежит к среднему звену русского дворянства, стремится к обладанию женщиной, которая благодаря своему происхождению и богатству открывает ему доступ к всевозможным личным благам и более высокому социальному положению. Однако, герою противостоит соперник - представитель аристократической элиты. Такое истолкование треугольника вполне приемлемо в отношении романов Николая Эмина, Николая Муравьева, и анонимного романа «Несколько писем моего друга». В несколько меньшей степени его можно отнести к произведениям Федора Эмина и Михаила Сушкива.

Трагическая концовка большинства русских эпистолярных романов отражает неуверенность их авторов в возможности добиться хорошего социального положения. Неуверенность авторов в осуществимости собственных желаний выражается также в эпистолярном диалоге между героем и его конфидентом, даже в том случае если письма последнего только предполагаются, как в романе монологического типа. Дело в том, что конфидент критически относится к герою и постоянно возражает ему, подчеркивая, что его желания либо порочные, либо нереальные и неосуществимые, одним словом: «романические».

Использование приема текстуальной аутентичности

Другой особенностью русского эпистолярного романа является отсутствие приема текстуальной аутентичности. Этот прием заключается в том, что фиктивный текст принимает вид подлинного текста, а в случае эпистолярного романа - собрания аутентичных писем. Западноевропейские эпистолярные романы, в особенности произведения Руссо и Гете, претендуют на статус собрания подлинных писем; однако, в пяти из семи русских эпистолярных романов не используется этот прием. Те два романа, в которых используется прием, «Несколько писем моего друга» и «Самоубийство», опубликованы анонимно в журналах.

У Руссо и Гете прием текстуальной аутентичности приводит к специфической структуре текста, в которой письма персонажей обрамляются критическими комментариями от лица так называемого фиктивного издателя,

что в свою очередь приводит к сложному взаимоотношению противоположных точек зрения. Большинство русских авторов эпистолярных романов не воспринимают издательское слово как существенную часть текста. Повествовательные части от третьего лица написаны не критическим издателем, как у Гете, а безличным рассказчиком, как у Михаила Сушкова. К тому же, Николай Эмин и Михаил Сушков придают своим романам обозначение «полусправедливая повесть», таким образом подчеркивая фиктивный характер своих произведений.

Особенные характеристики большинства русских эпистолярных романов, т.е. подчеркнутое указание на иноязычные модели, отсутствие приема текстуальной аутентичности, и подчеркнутый художественный характер, свидетельствуют о том, что русские авторы не доконца восприняли эстетические основы жанра.

Европейский эпистолярный роман возник в конце семнадцатого века на почве пессимистического взгляда на человеческую культуру, отрицая своими формальными особенностями рационалистические эстетические нормы, риторику, и искусственность. Эпистолярный роман стремился к оригинальности, аутентичности, к выражению «истинного» чувства, к естественному языку.

В большинстве же русских эпистолярных романов, в отличие от европейских, подчеркнут художественный характер. Они предлагаются читателям как фикция и подражание другому художественному произведению; при этом нет претензии на аутентичность. Их авторы не воспринимают антнормативную эстетику оригинальности, которую Руссо и Гете выразили в своих романах. Они не отрицают традиционные литературные нормы, а напротив, стремятся выполнить их требования. Русские авторы следовали нормативной эстетике *imitatio*, рассматривая в новейших произведениях западных авторов только другую литературную норму. Так что, в русском восприятии первоначальная антнормативная форма жанра стала нормативной.

Такое восприятие эпистолярного романа можно объяснить типологической особенностью русской культуры XVIII века. Вследствие реформ Петра I, вступление на государственную службу и вообще успешная общественная карьера стали зависеть от уровня личного образования. Последнее привело к тому, что русское служилое сословие всеми силами старалось «просветиться». В контексте петровской программы просвещения вполне понятно, что русские относились к плодам человеческой цивилизации положительно, не разделяя культурного пессимизма таких мыслителей как Руссо. К тому же, русский литератор XVIII века, чувствуя себя проводником

процесса просвещения, в который было вовлечено его отчество, осознавал себя знатоком эстетических норм, что и старался подтвердить своим собственными произведениями. Для того, чтобы его произведения узнавались как художественные, как литература, они должны были походить к «универсальным», т.е. европейским, образцам.

В итоге можно сказать, что главными особенностями русских эпистолярных романов являются: 1) выбор конфликта, основанного на любовном треугольнике; 2) явные ссылки на литературные образцы; 3) отсутствие приема текстуальной аутентичности. Эти особенности объясняются и социальной обстановкой в русском обществе XVIII века, принудившей неудовлетворенную часть дворянства облачить свои мечты о социальном продвижении в форму любовных романов, и культурным оптимизмом того же русского дворянства, которое, стремясь следовать «универсальным» эстетическим правилам, положительно относилось к подражанию, литературности, фикции.



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