

**David M. Bethea,**  
**Poetry and Prose**

Pushkin's Review of Sainte-Beuve's "Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme" and the Tat'iana of Chapter Eight of "Evgenii Onegin"

aus:

Analysieren als Deuten  
Wolf Schmid zum 60. Geburtstag

Herausgegeben von Lazar Fleishman, Christine Gölz und Aage A.  
Hansen-Löve

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# Inhalt

<b>Vom nicht abgegebenen Schuss zum nicht erzählten Ereignis</b> .....	11
Schmid'sche Äquivalenzen <i>Aage A. Hansen-Löve (München)</i>	
<b>Kein Elfenbeinturm für Wolf Schmid</b> .....	19
15 Jahre Alexander-Sergejewitsch-Puschkin-Preis <i>Ulrich-Christian Pallach (Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S., Hamburg)</i>	
<b>Critique of Voice</b> .....	31
The Open Score of Her Face <i>Mieke Bal (Amsterdam)</i>	
<b>Towards a Cognitive Theory of Character</b> .....	53
<i>Willem G. Weststeijn (Amsterdam)</i>	
<b>Literarische Kommunikation und (Nicht-)Intentionalität</b> .....	67
<i>Reinhard Ibler (Marburg)</i>	
<b>«Теснота стихового ряда»</b> .....	85
Семантика и синтаксис <i>Michail Gasparov (Moskau)</i>	
<b>О принципах русского стиха</b> .....	97
<i>Vjačeslav Vs. Ivanov (Moskau, Los Angeles)</i>	
<b>Эстетика тождества и «железный занавес» первого Московского царства</b> .....	111
<i>Marija Virolajnen (St. Petersburg)</i>	
<b>Семантический ореол «локуса»</b> .....	135
Выбор места действия в художественном тексте <i>Tat'jana Civ'jan (Moskau)</i>	

<b>Из истории сонета в русской поэзии XVIII века</b> .....	151
Сонетные эксперименты. Случай «двуединого» сонета <i>Vladimir Toporov (Moskau)</i>	
<b>Фантазия versus мимезис</b> .....	167
О дискурсе «ложной» образности в европейской литературной теории <i>Renate Lachmann (Konstanz)</i>	
<b>„Korinnas Reiz macht mir das Herze wund“</b> .....	187
Zum quasinarrativen Element in Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnins „Erotica“ (1779) <i>Rolf Fieguth (Fribourg)</i>	
<b>Zur Poetik von Schota Rustaweli</b> .....	219
<i>Winfried Boeder (Oldenburg)</i>	
<b>Литература по ту сторону жанров?</b> .....	231
<i>Igor' Smirnov (Konstanz)</i>	
<b>О поэтике первых переживаний</b> .....	259
<i>Jost van Baak (Groningen)</i>	
<b>Медленное чтение «Евгения Онегина» как курс введения в литературоведение</b> .....	277
<i>Aleksandr Ćudakov (Moskau)</i>	
<b>Поэзия как проза</b> .....	299
Нарратор в пушкинской «Полтаве» <i>Lazar Fleishman (Stanford, California)</i>	
<b>Poetry and Prose</b> .....	337
Pushkin's Review of Sainte-Beuve's "Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme" and the Tat'iana of Chapter Eight of "Evgenii Onegin" <i>David M. Bethea (Madison, Wisconsin)</i>	
<b>«Не бось, не бось»</b> .....	353
О народном шиболете в «Капитанской дочке» <i>Natalija Mazur (Moskau)</i>	

<b>Der frühe russische Realismus und seine Avantgarde</b> .....	365
Einige Thesen <i>Aage A. Hansen-Löve (München)</i>	
<b>Где и когда?</b> .....	407
Из комментариев к «Мертвым душам» <i>Jurij Mann (Moskau)</i>	
<b>Сатирический дискурс Гоголя</b> .....	417
<i>Valerij Tjupa (Moskau)</i>	
<b>Macht und Ohnmacht des (Ich-)Erzählers</b> .....	429
F. M. Dostoevskijs „Belye noči“ <i>Riccardo Nicolosi (Konstanz)</i>	
<b>“Les jeux sont faits”</b> .....	449
Money and Roulette as a Literary Communicative Device in “The Gambler” <i>Boris Christa (Queensland, Australia)</i>	
<b>Сцена из «Фауста» в романе Достоевского «Подросток»</b> .....	461
<i>Galina Potapova (St. Petersburg)</i>	
<b>От «говорили» к «как-как-фонии»</b> .....	483
Отчуждение языка в «Даме с собачкой» <i>Peter Alberg Jensen (Stockholm)</i>	
<b>Die anthropologische Bedeutung und der poetische Aufbau Čechov’scher Erzählungen am Beispiel von „Nesčast’e“</b> .....	499
<i>Matthias Freise (Salzburg, Göttingen)</i>	
<b>Narration als Inquisition</b> .....	513
Čechovs Kurzgeschichte „Novogodnjaja pytko. Očerk novejšej inkvizicii“ <i>Erika Greber (München)</i>	
<b>Рождение стиха из духа прозы</b> .....	541
«Комаровские кроки» Анны Ахматовой <i>Roman Timenčik (Jerusalem)</i>	

<b>Кубовый цвет</b> .....	563
Из комментария к словарю Набокова <i>Aleksandr Dolinin (Madison, Wisconsin)</i>	
<b>Подводное золото</b> .....	575
Ницшеанские мотивы в «Даре» Набокова <i>Savely Senderovich, Elena Shvarts (Ithaca, NY)</i>	
<b>Zur Kohärenz modernistischer Texte</b> .....	591
Schulz' „Nemrod (Sklepy cynamonowe)“ <i>Robert Hodel (Hamburg)</i>	
<b>«Доктор Живаго» Б. Пастернака и «Хождение по мукам» А. Н. Толстого</b> .....	617
К вопросу о судьбах русского романа в двадцатом столетии <i>Vladislav Skobelev (Samara)</i>	
<b>„Ja k vam pišu...“ – mediale Transformationen des Erzählens</b> .....	631
Tat'janas Liebesbrief in Puškins Versroman „Evgenij Onegin“, Petr Čajkovskijs gleichnamiger Oper und Martha Fiennes' Verfilmung <i>Rainer Grübel (Oldenburg)</i>	
<b>Пушкин как персонаж лирической поэзии «ленинградского андеграунда»</b> .....	665
<i>Vladimir Markovič (St. Petersburg)</i>	
<b>Das ABC der russischen Katastrophen</b> .....	689
Tat'jana Tolstajas Roman „Kys“ <i>Christine Gölz (Hamburg)</i>	
<b>Schriftenverzeichnis von Wolf Schmid</b> .....	719
<b>Autorinnen und Autoren</b> .....	735

## Poetry and Prose

### Pushkin's Review of Sainte-Beuve's "Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme" and the Tat'iana of Chapter Eight of "Evgenii Onegin"

David M. Bethea

In the 5 June 1831 issue of *The Literary Gazette* (*Literaturnaia gazeta*) Pushkin published a review devoted to the life and art of a young French poet, Joseph Delorme. Delorme, it turned out, had died prematurely and his friends had discovered among his papers poems and essays (*pensées*, "reflections") which they, after first supplying the texts with a biography, brought to the attention of the public. These poetic works, seeming to appear out of nowhere in Paris in 1829, created a stir on the continent. As Pushkin explained in his opening comments, Delorme's verse was striking for two reasons: first, because it presented exceedingly gloomy circumstances—thoughts of suicide by drowning, a visit to the bedside of a just deceased neighbor, the bloody hacking of a consumptive young woman—in a matter-of-fact lyrical voice ("never in any language has naked spleen been expressed with such dry precision"<sup>1</sup>); and second, because the author, who died in poverty and obscurity (again, as it turned out, from "une phtisie pulmonaire, compliquée, à ce qu'on croit, d'une affection de cœur"<sup>2</sup> that was, in a literary sense, too good to be true), seemed very much

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<sup>1</sup> *Pushkin A. S.* Poln. sobr. soch.: V 10 t. / Pod red. B. V. Tomashevskii. Izd. 4. Leningrad, 1977—1979. T. 7. S. 162.

<sup>2</sup> *Sainte-Beuve.* Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme / Ed. R. Kieffer. Paris, 1925. P. 29.

like one of the unfortunates in his poems. Despite “la vérité un peu crue” and “l’horizon un peu borné de certains tableaux”<sup>3</sup>—or was it because of them?—Europe had apparently found a new tragic idol.

After introducing Delorme to his Russian audience Pushkin cites several long extracts, all in the original French, from the deceased’s poetry. These extracts are so extensive and the framing commentary by Pushkin so enthusiastic (“Among these painful confessions, these musings about sad foibles and these tasteless imitations of the long since derided poetry of old Ronsard, we discover to our amazement poems full of freshness and purity”<sup>4</sup>) that the reader falls under the sway of the poet’s strange voice and sad story. We feel that, with Pushkin’s guidance, we are learning something significant about the art of his day and about his views of poetic biography. But then, the same author who enjoyed literary ruses and who turned anonymous “publisher” to give us the tales of the *late* Ivan Petrovich Belkin provides the punch line:

The public and the critics bewailed the premature end of so promising a talent when suddenly they learned that the deceased was alive and, thank God, healthy. Sainte-Beuve, already well-known for his *History of French Literature in the Sixteenth Century* [*Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVIe siècle* (1828)] and his scholarly edition of Ronsard, and probably fearing the reprimands and harsh treatment of the moral censorship, had taken it into his head to publish his first poetic experiments under the imaginary name of J. Delorme. The mystification, so based on sorrow, should have harmed the success Sainte-Beuve’s poems with its merry denouement. However, the new school ecstatically acknowledged and adopted as its own its new confrère.<sup>5</sup>

Once he has dropped his bombshell Pushkin finishes his review by making two points, both of which, as we might expect of a writer as sensitive to composition as Pushkin, relate back to his earlier statements about Delorme, but in subtle, implicit ways. First he criticizes the “pensées” of De-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P. 37.

<sup>4</sup> *Pushkin A. S.* Poln. sobr. soch. T. 7. S. 164.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. S. 167.



lorme that deal with the innovations of French romantic prosody, claiming that too much emphasis on the formal side of verse, on the obligatory use of caesura or the avoidance of rhyme partners that sound identical but look different (the issue of number), comes across to the non-French reader as the “rattles and diapers of infancy.”<sup>6</sup> Then, in the last section of the review Pushkin bemoans the fact that in Sainte-Beuve's next volume of verse, *Les Consolations*, published in 1830 under his own name, the lyrical speaker of the first volume has heeded his moral critics and has become more moderate in his religious pessimism (“now he no longer madly rejects the consolations of religion”) and less willing to flout social convention (“now he no longer visits Rose, but confesses to occasional bouts of sinful lust”), with the result that the “sincerity of his inspiration” (“iskrennost' vdokhnoveniia”) has disappeared.<sup>7</sup> The Delorme that existed as a ruse was more alive than the real Sainte-Beuve writing to please the keepers of the moral peace. “According to its higher, free essence,” poetry, concludes Pushkin, “should have no goal other than itself.”<sup>8</sup>

Now, what we know about Sainte-Beuve's first two collections of verse as they apply to Pushkin is that they were published in 1829 and 1830 and that Pushkin's review appeared in June 1831.<sup>9</sup> We do not know exactly when Pushkin read the volumes (although as early as May 1830 he asked Elizaveta Khitrovo to obtain a copy of *Les Consolations* for him in St. Pe-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. S. 167.

<sup>7</sup> Boris Tomashevskii, in his foundational study of Pushkin's knowledge of and interaction with French literary sources, notes that Pushkin's review of Delorme coincides in a number of details, including its singling out of “sincerity of inspiration,” with two articles published in *Le Globe* at the time (26 March and 11 April 1829) by the French critic Charles Magnin. See *Tomashevskii B. V. Pushkin i Frantsiia*. Leningrad, 1960. S. 362, 471.

<sup>8</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch.* T. 7. S. 168.

<sup>9</sup> According to Modzalevskii, Pushkin had two copies of Delorme in his library, the first (#864) published in 1829 and the second (#865) published, again in Paris, in 1830 (this latter referred to as “deuxième édition”). Both copies were cut but neither contained any markings by Pushkin. *Modzalevskii B. L. Biblioteka A. S. Pushkina (Bibliograficheskoe opisanie)*. Sankt-Peterburg, 1910. S. 221.

tersburg<sup>10</sup>) nor can we say for certain that, if he did read them soon after they came out, these works actually entered into his creative consciousness in productive ways. My aim in this brief essay is to present enough evidence to suggest that the “sincerity of inspiration” Pushkin perceived in the Delorme poems of 1829 (and that he seemed to demonstrate through his lengthy citations) could have been enough, given the right timing, to trigger something in his own thinking as he worked on certain key texts of the period, particularly the eighth chapter of *Evgenii Onegin* (wr. 24 December 1829—25 September 1830). By “sincerity of inspiration” I mean some quality in Delorme’s verse that struck Pushkin as authentic and moving in the present context of European letters. In this respect, Pushkin’s conclusion to the review comes close to being a kind of programmatic statement of poetry’s role in an age increasingly dominated by moralizing (which for Pushkin also equated with prosaic) concerns: “But to describe the foibles, mistakes and passions of humankind is not the same thing as immorality, just as anatomy is not murder. We do not see immorality in the elegies of the unfortunate Delorme, in the confessions tearing his heart to pieces, in the strained description of his passions and unbelief, in his laments at fate and at himself.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the honesty of Delorme’s feelings, coupled with the arresting specificity of his *aperçus*, which to some crossed the line into *le mauvais ton*, was for Pushkin the very essence of poetry, and therefore the mark of good taste. Pushkin’s “descent to prose,” officially inaugurated in 1830 with his writing of *The Belkin Tales*, showed him not so much leaving lyric poetry behind as coming to prose *through* and *in* the sort of lyric poetry he was now writing—a point made by Lidiia Ginzburg, Wolf Schmid, and others.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch.* T. 10. S. 226. Pushkin was in Moscow at the time and asked Khitrovo to find the Sainte-Beuve volumes for him. He returned to St. Petersburg on 19 July 1830. Pushkin often discussed his immediate impressions of the current scene in French literature in his correspondence with E. M. Khitrovo. For more on this, see *Tomashevskii B. V. Pushkin i Frantsiia*. S. 360ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch.* T. 7. S. 168.

<sup>12</sup> See, e. g., the discussion of “verse prosaism” (“stikhotvornyi prozaizm”) in *Ginzburg L. O lirike*. Leningrad, 1974. S. 172—242, esp. S. 210—218, and of the notions of the

Let us return for a moment to the four long passages from Delorme's elegies cited by Pushkin and to what they present. The first (36 lines, from the poem *Le Creux de la Vallée*) details the thoughts of the speaker who has found the ideal place to drown oneself (a pool under a birch tree by a quiet country stream) and who would like to sink into the water peacefully, fully attuned to his surroundings, like an animal that realizes it is no longer fit for the world and has gone off to die.<sup>13</sup>

L'alouette, en mourant, se cache dans les blés;  
 Le rossignol, qui sent défaillir son ramage,  
 Et la bise arriver, et tomber son plumage,  
 Passe invisible à tous, comme un écho du bois:  
 Ainsi je veus passer.<sup>14</sup>

When months later the corpse, now unrecognizable, is discovered by a shepherd looking for a lost goat or a hunting dog wandering off the path, it will give the townsfolk something to gossip about before they deposit it in a nameless grave. The second (52 lines, from the poem *La Veillée*) juxtaposes the overpowering joy coupled with feelings of vulnerability experienced by a father at the birth of his son (in this case Victor Hugo's child) against the scene of the speaker as he visits an elderly, gout-ridden neighbor who has just died a terrible death from "stones"<sup>15</sup> ("mort de la pierre") in the abdomen. Here the powerful feelings of new life are undercut by the awareness that, no matter how precisely and probingly the speaker examines the body recently wracked with pain for signs of life that he, a fellow human being, should want to see, he feels nothing: "Mais rien: nul effroi

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"prosaicizing of poetry" and the "poeticizing of prose" in *Schmid W. Proza kak poeziiia*. 2-e izd. Sankt-Peterburg, 1998. S. 11—35.

<sup>13</sup> Although I am not asserting an intertextual link, the situation and tone look forward in obvious ways to the blank verse musings ("Tak khorosho i vol'no umeret"—"It is so pleasant and so free to die") of the Blok of *Vol'nye mysli* (*Random Thoughts*).

<sup>14</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 7. S. 163; Sainte-Beuve. Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme. P. 155.*

<sup>15</sup> The "mort de la pierre" could be a blockage caused by stones in the kidney or gall bladder (the Russian translation gives "kamen' v pecheni", lit. "stone in the liver"); another possibility is an early nineteenth-century description of death by cancer.

saint; pas de souvenir tendre.”<sup>16</sup> The third (32 lines, from the poem *Ma Muse*) gives us a picture of Delorme’s “muse,” whose “melancholy charm” (“melankholicheskaiia prelest”) Pushkin clearly admires. In this section we proceed through (each time rejecting<sup>17</sup>) the various incarnations of muse appealing to modern taste—the raven-haired *odalisque* whose songs and dance movements are suffused with desire, the bewinged Peri who points the way to otherworldly dreams, the lovely widow who kneels on her husband’s grave and weeps out noble laments—until we arrive at the one fitting for Delorme’s strange elegiac mood. This last example is a young maid of a once good family now fallen on hard times; pretty in her own right, and remembering what it was to attend balls in carriages and be courted by handsome gentlemen, she now washes clothes in a ditch and tends to her blind, demented father in their forest hut. In a continuation of the medical theme, this choice of modern muse coughs up clots of blood as she tries to sing in her misery.

These first three excerpts have all been dominated by graphic scenes of death or dying—the drowned body; the disease-wracked corpse; the girl, in the last stages of tuberculosis, hacking up (“kharkat”) clots of blood. We might sum up the rising trajectory of these scenes (suicide + oblivion → birth + death → muse + death) as “the death of beauty,” or, in poetic terms, “the demise of the muse.” Against the background of the 1830 Pushkin preparing (very anxiously) to marry and saying his farewells to prior ghosts and lovers, this is the theme of the diseased or dying (or already dead) inamorata<sup>18</sup> and the “sentenced” inamorato: the speaker who silently embraces his beloved before entering prison (*Proshchan’e / Farewell*); the summoning from the grave of the dear “shade” (“ten”) who was, at the

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<sup>16</sup> *Pushkin A. S.* Poln. sobr. soch. T. 7. S. 164; *Sainte-Beuve*. Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme. P. 138.

<sup>17</sup> This rhetorical trope, called antenantiosis (“something is not this, not this, but that”), was used several times by Pushkin when presenting Tat’iana. See discussion in *Harkins W. E.* *The Rejected Image: Puškin’s Use of Antenantiosis // Puškin Today / Ed. by David M. Bethea.* Bloomington, 1993. Pp. 86–98.

<sup>18</sup> This topos is treated perceptively in *Murav’eva O. S.* *Obraz “mertvoi vozliublennoi” v tvorchestve Pushkina // Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii.* 24. Leningrad, 1991. S. 17–28.

moment of parting, “pale, cold like a winter’s day, | [her face] distorted in ultimate torment” (*Zaklinanie / Incantation*); the kiss still awaiting the speaker from the beauty who has become ashes in a faraway urn (*Dlia beregov otchizny dal’noi / For the shores of a distant homeland*); the “poor Ineza” in whose “sad gaze” and “deadly pale lips” Don Guan finds a “strange appeal” (*Kamennyi gost’ / The Stone Guest*); Mary’s song (with its corpses, graves, and ill-fated lovers), the “pure spirit” of the dead Matilda calling to the hero from beyond, and the disease-infested environment of the plague (*Pir vo vremia chumy / The Feast in the Time of the Plague*)—all works of the first (1830) Boldino autumn. This is what makes the final, and longest passage from Delorme (72 lines, the entire untitled *Toujours je la connus pensive et sérieuse*) most intriguing. It too describes a woman, presumably a continuation of the “muse” theme from the previous excerpt, but in it no one dies; in fact, if the verses are about anything, they are about how someone manages *to live*. That Pushkin feels this elegy is the most beautiful and poignant of the four is not left in doubt: “In our opinion, the most perfect poem out of the entire collection can be considered the following elegy, which is worthy of taking a place alongside the finest works of André Chénier.”<sup>19</sup>

The fourth excerpt describes the life of a young woman who has gone through adolescence, married, and become the mother of a small daughter. These are her salient traits à la Delorme’s elegiac style: she is “thoughtful and stern” and as a little girl does not participate in childhood games but prefers to watch out for her sisters; as she grows older she becomes physically lovely (“sous de beaux cheveux bruns une figure rose”) in a calm and reserved way; her behavior is always governed by duty (“le devoir”; in Russian, “dolg”) and she is not the sort to be carried away by dreams of handsome strangers and the secret squeezing of hands at balls; not impressionable or contemplative by nature, she forswears all the blandishments of romantic love in order to look after her family when her father dies; she seems immune to the compliments of the idle youth around her, although she remains keenly sensitive to the sufferings of others (“Mais qu’un cœur éprouvé lui contât un chagrin, | A l’instant se voilait son visage serein”);

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<sup>19</sup> Pushkin *A. S. Poln. sobr. soch.* T. 7. S. 165.

eventually she marries, but more out of calculation than love; in terms of age, her husband is better suited to be her father; she never experiences the passion of the honeymoon and “her eyes guard the chaste secrets about which a woman should be silent” (“ses yeux ont gardé le mystère | De ces chastes secrets qu’une femme doit taire”); and now her days pass by in a tranquil sea of duty, as she raises her own daughter and tends to the needs of others, all of which sends the speaker into a depressing swoon for his bygone days, “Turbulents, sans bonheur, perdus pour le devoir, | Et je pense, ô mon Dieu! Qu’il sera bientôt soir!” The epigraph to the original in Delorme comes from Dante’s *Vita Nuova* and, considering the poem’s final lines about a turbulent past, would have resonated powerfully with the pre-marital Pushkin: “Tacendo il nome di questa gentilissima”—“Not revealing the name of this most gracious one.” The woman is so pure of heart and the sinner so fallen that her name, like God’s own, should not be uttered from his lips. The “gentilissima” stresses that beauty that comes from within and that suggests harmony, integrity, centeredness.<sup>20</sup>

To any reader of Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin*, even the most casual, there emerge from this portrait qualities that immediately call to mind Tat’iana Larina. For example, this heroine does not play like other children; she seems much older and more self-contained, especially with the death of her father; she is unmoved by the fashionable young men who pay court to her in society; she marries, not out of love, a man much her senior; she seems chaste (even “virginal”) after marriage and the honeymoon; and her life proceeds under the banner of “duty,” “dolg.” At the same time, there are characteristics that obviously do *not* apply to Tat’iana. To begin with, this woman is not pensive and has never experienced the power of passion or the sickness of love (“ennui”; in Russian, “toska”):

Ce cœur jeune et sévère ignorait la puissance  
Des ennuis dont soupier et s’êmeut l’innocence.  
Il réprima toujours les attendrissements  
Qui naissent sans savoir, et les troubles charmants,

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<sup>20</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 7. S. 165—166; Sainte-Beuve. Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme. P. 142—144.*

Èt les désirs obscurs, et ces vagues délices,  
De l'amour dans les cœurs naturelles complices.

Moreover, absolutely all of the erotic energy in her being is, as the modern world would say, sublimated into love of the other—either her daughter or those who require her help and protection. She doesn't seem to need the greedy *touching* of self by the other, the elaborate physical and emotional foreplay as it were, that goes with erotic love: “Son paisible bonheur de respect se tempère”—her tranquil happiness is measured/moderated by respect. In effect, she epitomizes female love as motherhood, and indeed she first “mothers” her sisters, then her widow parent, then her husband, and finally her own daughter.

Following our logic at least two questions arise at this point, both of which, I would argue, go to the heart of the later (i. e., post-1830) Pushkin's artistic method. First, what is it about this particular portrait that elicited such a positive endorsement by Pushkin? And second, what, if anything, does this characterization have in common with the death-cum-muse crescendo of the previous elegiac passages from Delorme? The answer to the first question lies in Pushkin's profound unease as he entered into marriage with the virginal seventeen-year-old Natal'ia Goncharova: he was counting on her sense of “dolg” (the female version of honor) to get him through the travails of having, as an aging groom, a fabulous beauty as a young bride. He was hoping that this “most gracious one” (“gentilissima”), who could not love her new husband in a romantic / erotic way, at least might respect him and their new family life enough to serve out her duty as wife and mother peacefully. That is why he is drawn so much to those traits in the poem—the older husband, the absence of real attraction in the union, the notion of duty, the serene centeredness amidst the social world—that look forward to the Tat'iana of chapter eight. But Delorme's speaker is painfully aware of his own inadequacy (both the failure of his actions in the past and the ongoing difficulty of his temperament) in this marital equation: “I think about my long days now quickly passed | days turbulent, unhappy, lost to duty, | and I think, O God, that it will soon be evening!” This is the Pushkin of his own *Elegy*, written soon after he arrived in Boldino in September 1830: “The now extinguished riotousness of my mad years | weighs on me

like a vague hangover | [... But] perhaps on my sad sunset | love will shine with a parting smile.”<sup>21</sup> Perhaps it is not too late, given the power of her influence, to start a *vita nuova*.

The answer to the second question is less obvious. Pushkin himself understood that as he navigated the distance, both in the formal and psychological senses, from “silly” poetry to “stern” prose, and as he passed from turbulent bachelorhood to more stable (though at this juncture still very uncertain) married life he would need to turn away from the erotic battles of the past to a new set of expectations and challenges. The muse could no longer be a lovely young goddess often thought of as “playful” (“*rezvaia*”) and faithfully accompanying the poet on his adventures. Now, as we learn at the beginning of chapter eight, she has passed through all the incarnations of the 1820’s and is preparing to undergo her final metamorphosis, from village maiden (“*uezdnaia baryshnia*”) to society grande dame presiding over a *svetskii rout*. Moreover, she has to absorb the lessons of prose in life: she can’t always have what she wants but that doesn’t mean she is lacking either in desire or imagination. Now, in a fine stroke on Pushkin’s part, and very consistent with his artistic method, he takes the model (Delorme’s dutiful muse-mother) and he invests her with what she *doesn’t* have, all the while keeping her positive traits—fidelity, sensitivity to others, indifference to the world that makes her more attractive, a husband who is probably decent yet ordinary and whom she cannot love but can still respect—intact. In this regard, Pushkin both preserves Delorme’s muse and inverts her, challenges her, with the stuff, including genuine desire, of real life and real love: the *attendrissements*, the *troubles charmants*, the *désirs obscurs*, the *vagues délices*. In other words, Pushkin puts his favorite heroine, the one that Kiukhel’beker identified with the inner world and values of the poet himself,<sup>22</sup> in a position where she has to choose (as he knew

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<sup>21</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 3. S. 169*: “Безумных лет угасшее веселье | Мне тяжело, как смутное похмелье [...] | [Ho] может быть—на мой закат печальный | Блеснет любовь улыбкою прощальной.”

<sup>22</sup> See *Druz’ia Pushkina: Peregipska, vospominaniia, dnevniki: V 2 t. / Pod red. i komm. V. V. Kunin. Moskva, 1986. T. 1. S. 254*: “The poet in the eighth chapter is himself like Tat’iana: to a lyceum chum, to a person, like myself, who grew up with him and knows him in and out, everywhere one notices a feeling with which Pushkin is filled to over-



that Natalie would have to choose!) between “prose” and “poetry.” And she chooses the poetry of her imagination (the Onegin of her mind and heart as he once was and once could have been) over the prose of another high society erotic adventure. But Tat'iana's is a very prosaic sort of poetry, one of muted endings and sublimation back into duty and fidelity.

As Pushkin said goodbye to his erotic past, he placed the real-life women who had once inspired some of his finest lyrics, individuals like Elizaveta Vorontsova and Amalia Riznich, into a kind of otherworldly limbo. Either they had truly died (Riznich) or they had passed into the realm of permanent memory (Vorontsova). This is why the image of the beloved is so poignantly (yet not decadently) suffused with death and disease (“poor Ineza”) in these works, a trend that, strangely enough, continues for a time even after marriage, in a piece like *Osen' / Autumn* (1833), with its tenderly evoked *chakhotochnaia deva* (*tubercular girl*).<sup>23</sup> But Pushkin could not pass beyond the entire psychological state of erotic lyricism without completing the test (is this threshold into marriage worth it to me and am I worthy of it?) from all sides. The two erotic encounters (in verse) of the first Boldino autumn that were the most autobiographically freighted were the Tat'iana—Onegin reunion in chapter eight and the “duel” between Don Guan and Donna Anna in *The Stone Guest*. Recall that it is Tat'iana who has the last word in *Evgenii Onegin*—“I love you (why should I dissemble?), | but I am given to another; | I will be true to him forever”<sup>24</sup>—but it is Guan who is the aggressor in the drama and who forces the following response from the weakening heroine: “Diego [Guan], stop: I sin | listening to you. I am forbidden to love you; | a widow must be true even to the grave.”<sup>25</sup> If in *Onegin* Pushkin, as it were, takes the part of the absent hus-

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flowing, even though he, like his Tat'iana, doesn't want the world to know about that feeling.”

<sup>23</sup> Mentioned in this connection in *Murav'eva O. S. Obraz “mertvoi vozliublennoi”*. S. 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 5. S. 162*: “Я вас люблю (к чему лукавить?), | Но я другому отдана; | Я буду век ему верна.”

<sup>25</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 5. S. 343*: “Диего, перестаньте: я грешу, | Вас слушающая, — мне вас любить нельзя, | Вдова должна и гробу быть верна.” Recall that Pushkin wrote his future mother-in-law N. I. Goncharova on 5 April 1830 that “God is

band against the relentless suitor, in *The Stone Guest* he presents the duel mainly from the cynical Guan's perspective (with the insulted Don Alvar getting the last word in the finale). But now the erotic adventurer with countless sins on his soul experiences redemption—"Thus, of debauchery | was I for a long time an obedient pupil, | yet ever since I laid eyes on you, | it seems I have been entirely reborn"<sup>26</sup>—precisely at the moment he succeeds, in word if not yet in deed, in his seduction. So smitten is Pushkin by eros at this late date that he shows a hero being saved (just moments before he is to be destroyed) by romantic love and by a Donna Anna whose beauty, reserve, and chasteness are maximally arousing to him. Now we have erotic attraction growing out of maternal feeling and sympathy—Madonna<sup>27</sup> morphing into a Donna Anna who slowly but surely loves back. And for this connection we can, I would argue, return once again to Delorme whose view of the muse qua mourning widow is the epitome of beauty disciplining itself, seeking solidarity with the stone, becoming as it were "statuesque":

Elle n'est pas non plus, ô ma Muse adorée!  
 Elle n'est pas la vierge ou la veuve éplorée,  
 Qui d'un cloître désert, d'une tour sans vassaux,  
 Solitaire habitante, erre sous les arceaux,  
 Disant un nom; descend aux tombes féodales;  
 A genoux, de velours inonde au loin les dalles,  
 Et le front sur un marbre, épanche avec des pleurs  
 L'hymne mélodieux de ses nobles malheurs.<sup>28</sup>

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my witness that I am ready to die for her, but that I should die to leave a dazzling widow, free to choose a new husband—this idea is hell" (orig. in French). *Pushkin A. The Letters / Trans. and intro. by J. Th. Shaw. Madison, 1967. P. 406; Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 10. S. 218.*

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. S. 347: "Так, разврата | Я долго был покорный ученик, | Но с той поры, как вас увидел я, | Мне кажется, я весь переродился."

<sup>27</sup> See Pushkin's famous Madonna poem about/to his fiancée written on 8 July 1830, in *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 3. S. 166.*

<sup>28</sup> *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch. T. 7. S. 164—165; Sainte-Beuve. Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme. P. 127.*

Of course Delorme says his muse is *not* like this (the antenantiōsis); instead she is the tubercular girl washing clothes in the ditch. But this image of the lonely widow—the monastery setting, the repeated visits to the grave, the kneeling on the flagstones, the spreading out of her femaleness (the dress) as if in an embrace, the touching of the marble, the tears—is very close to the erotic evocation of Donna Anna given by Guan (disguised as a monk):

Only with reverence from afar do I  
 look at you when, bending over quietly,  
 you spread out your black hair onto  
 the pale marble; and it seems to me that secretly  
 this grave has been visited by an angel;  
 then in my confused heart I no longer  
 find prayers. I stand silently amazed  
 and think, happy is he whose cold marble  
 is warmed by her heavenly breath  
 and watered by the tears of her love ...<sup>29</sup>

Once again Pushkin has taken up Delorme's notion of female duty and fidelity—the widow praying and weeping for the dead husband, the sick girl looking after her helpless father, the mother and wife finding peace in self-denial—and eroticized, and problematized, it. Pushkin's widow, who is the daughter of the slain commander in the original Tirso de Molina and a sister in Molière, is not allowed to remain alone in the monastery but is confronted by a "monk" who sees her in other roles and who summons her to a duel of love. The "one name" that Delorme's widow speaks, the gesture of embracing the stones, touching the marble, weeping onto its inanimate breast is all transmuted in Pushkin into movements that arouse feelings in the recipient (the speaker imagines what it would be like to have this woman love him in that way). Guan's "strange speech" puts Donna Anna on her guard but it also begins its work. What would it mean to have this ideal of chasteness and controlled beauty (the "smirennitsa" or "meek

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. S. 333: "Я только издали с благоговеньем | Смотрю на вас, когда, склонившись тихо, | Вы черные власы на мрамор бледный | Рассыплете—и мнится мне, что тайно | Гробницу эту ангел посетил, | В смущенном сердце я не обретаю | Тогда молений. Я дивлюсь безмолвно | И думаю—счастлив, чей хладный мрамор | Согрет ее дыханием небесным | И окроплен любви ее слезами..."

one”<sup>30</sup>) experience erotic love, want in her own right? So just as Pushkin “protects” his favorite Tat’iana from the unworthy Onegin in the name of husband, family, duty, and “stern prose” (the muse lives, but she is no longer a participant in amorous adventures and the poetry she inspires is not romantic), he also subjects his beautiful widow to the temptation of erotic love from a Don Juan after the husband is gone.

Thus, based on the evidence, we can have little doubt that Delorme’s elegies gave Pushkin food for thought on the eve of his marriage. Of the fifty-five poems in the collection, including sonnets, lyrics organized in stanzas, etc., there are some twenty in this loose “elegiac” form of extended verse paragraphs of adjoining rhyme. That Pushkin fixed on these four examples with their prose-like appearance on the page and dark, almost proto-naturalistic thematics seems significant. It is of course still possible that he did not use the traits of the “most gracious one” to finish the portrait of Tat’iana in chapter eight, just as the widow weeping at her husband’s grave may not be an intertextual source for Donna Anna. Whatever the case, it is fair to say that Pushkin could not have cited these sources, even after the fact, without calling to mind his own creations. In this regard, even the “ma muse” of Delorme’s title, the young woman who, from a once good family, performs menial tasks and looks after her father while dreaming about how in another life she might be riding in carriages and appearing at balls, may be another heroine of that Boldino autumn—the Dunia who escapes her modest surroundings and seemingly gets the husband and good family denied her less fortunate counterpart. Again, Pushkin takes the prosaic situation, invests it with complicated desire, and, *mutatis mutandis* (this is now a “tale” and not a novel-in-verse or a dramatic sketch), produces a result where the prose, literally and figuratively, is poeticized. Dunia gets her man but she loses her father, and, as we gather from the last scene, this loss brings its own guilt and reality principle. If there are intertextual parallels between the foregrounded passages from Delorme and Pushkin’s own creative work of the period, they come down to this: life is always difficult, death is everywhere present, and beauty is more alluring, more touching,

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<sup>30</sup> See *Net, ia ne dorozhu miatezhnym naslazhdeniem* (*No, I do not prize stormy pleasure*), in *Pushkin A. S. Poln. sobr. soch.* T. 3. S. 356.

when it is “under sentence” and knows it. Of course what made such beauty most poignant in Pushkin’s case was not only its palpable evanescence but the fact that its observer, the poet, felt at some level, despite much inner struggle and protestations to the opposite, he was under sentence too. Tat’iana will always love Onegin, Donna Anna respects the memory of her dead husband Don Alvar, Dunia does not want to hurt Vyrin. Delorme gave Pushkin one set of circumstances defined by “musings” on disease, death, and duty. How Pushkin altered those circumstances without destroying their inherent poetry tells us something both about his mature artistic method and about his frame of mind before he married Natal’ia Goncharova on 18 February 1831.