

Remembrance of Former Things: Three Figures of Russian Elegiac Literature

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my parents—

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Don Houston (1932-2013)

—and to the memory of one of my first professors at UW-Madison,

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Abstract

This study examines Russian elegiac literature of the period 1790-1840, in particular the works of Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Karamzin, and Evgeny Baratynsky. It argues for a reading of the genre that views the elegiac text not merely as an expression of loss but also as a reflection on the problems that inhere in the act of writing. Among these, it identifies language itself as that which continually frustrates the elegist's attempt to delimit his concerns. Language ends up being, simultaneously, the only means of realizing an intent and the inevitable deviation from that intent. This study, then, traces some of the Russian elegy's figural "movements."

By way of surveying existing elegy criticism, the introduction sketches out one important point of intersection between two radically different critical traditions—namely, the attempt to make theory correspond to practice. Chapter 1 revisits the problem of repetition in Mikhail Lermontov's poetry, focusing on how the language of mourning casts suspicion on its own sincerity. Chapter 2 examines Karamzin's figures of interruption and tries to show how elegy issues from an interest in alterity—in this case, the dead other—even as it returns to underscore the other's artificial existence in elegy. In Chapter 3, I study the dialectic of homecoming and displacement in Baratynsky's long elegy, "Desolation," demonstrating that even as language gestures at the former, it inevitably produces the latter. Concluding with a reading of Belinsky's famous essay "Literary Reveries," I aim to show that the three figures persist not only in poetry and prose, but in criticism as well.

Note on Transliteration

I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration for all Russian-language bibliographical references. In the body of the dissertation, however, I opt for a more “readable” rendering of Russian names (e.g. “Belinsky” instead of “Belinskii”). The idea here is to reserve such monstrosities as “Lidiia” and “Vil’gel’m” for the footnotes.

Introduction

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

— Ecclesiastes 1:11, King James Version

I. Remembrance of Criticism: Two Approaches to the Study of Elegy

Although elegy criticism has proceeded along various lines of inquiry, I want to identify here at the beginning two seemingly different approaches that will be relevant to the present discussion. On the one hand, studies of the English elegy over the course of the twentieth century generally saw a transition away from descriptions of the genre toward interpreting its conventions, a transition announced in Peter Sacks's pathbreaking work, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (1985).¹ This shift in focus can be read in several different ways, either as a sign of growing dissatisfaction with traditional histories of genre, or as something of a "return" to ethics, a discourse that had been considered suspect at least since the advent of deconstruction.² In any event, the transition has a number of implications for the study of elegy and elegiac literature, not the least of which being the question it poses as to just how great the gap between descriptive and interpretive approaches really is.

Meanwhile, Russian-language scholarship during this same period never freed itself from the burden of genre theory, which was always treated as the most important, if not the sole, prism

¹ Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 1.

² David Kennedy, *Elegy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 50; Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Ethics and Literary Study," in *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 18-22.

through which to view Russian literary history of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³ For all its radical innovations in criticism and insights into literary evolution, the Russian Formalist heritage did not prove particularly helpful for the interpretation of elegy. If the Formalists and their students took an interest in the early nineteenth century's preoccupation with the genre, it was because that period provided them with the means of discussing, in "literary-historical" fashion, the transformation and collapse of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. In discussing "elegy" proper, subsequent scholars have had to come face to face with the limits of their own methodology as they pass through the nineteenth century. It is not surprising then that critical advancements by those few scholars who have attempted book-length studies of the Russian elegy—namely, Leonid Frizman and Kamsar Grigorian—have been modest.⁴ To say as much is not to deny that inroads have been made (they have), but it is to suggest that there may be something about the discourse of genre theory that has prevented any serious revisions in the study of elegy from being made.

What I will try to demonstrate in this introduction is that Russian and Western approaches to elegy might have more commonalities between them than is readily apparent: both approaches set out to do one thing and end by doing something quite different. I will argue, first, that in Russian-language criticism the descriptive approach to genre unmask itself as an

³ «Для классицизма литература не мыслится вне жанровой классификации» ("for classicism, literature is not conceptualized outside of genre classification") (Viktor Zhivov, "Jazyk i stil' A. P. Sumarokova," in Aleksandr Sumarokov, *Ody torzhestvennyia. Elegii liubovnyia.*, ed. Ronald Vroon [Moscow: OGI, 2009], 573).

⁴ In his initial work on the topic, Frizman made his position clear already in the subtitle of his book, *The Russian Elegy from Sumarokov to Nekrasov (Russkaia elegiia ot Sumarokova do Nekrasova*, 1973). The inclusion of Nekrasov was a polemical gesture aimed at scholars such as Tomashevsky, Korovin, and Shchepilova, who had argued that the Russian elegy had "ceased to exist" between 1830-1850. Though he claimed that the critical cliché according to which the "old system of strictly defined genres" was invalid insofar as such a system never existed in the first place, his own methodology offered little by way of alternative when he proposed doing nothing more than "describing" the genre in greater "typological" detail. L. G. Frizman, *Zhizn' liricheskogo zhanra: Russkaia elegiia ot Sumarokova do Nekrasova* (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), 13, 17. In a later essay, Frizman covered a two-century period of elegiac history, but claimed simultaneously that an "exhaustive" definition of elegy would not be forthcoming. See L. G. Frizman, "Dva veka russkoi elegii," in *Russkaia elegiia XVIII-nachala XX veka*, ed. L. G. Frizman (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1991), 5-48.

interpretive methodology, or what amounts to the same thing, the attempt to provide a literary history of elegy tends to become a form of genre theory in its own right; and second, that English-language criticism shows us how the move toward interpretation—out of history—remains haunted by the descriptive histories which made the move possible in the first place. In the second half of this introduction, I will discuss what I take to be a central feature of elegiac literature of the period 1790-1840 by focusing on three ways this particular feature is figured.

If one had to choose a representative work of scholarship that not only demonstrated genre criticism at its best but also exhibited an uncanny awareness of the problems with the story this type of criticism tries to tell, one could do worse than Grigory Gukovsky's essay, "The Eighteenth-Century Elegy" (1927).⁵ Though Gukovsky himself does not state the matter in these terms, one could say that the problem he outlines has to do with the complication that arises when a transhistorical conception of genre tries to efface its own historical specificity. This complication takes the form of an opposition between theory and praxis in which the former can never quite keep pace with the latter.

As Gukovsky tells it, Vasily Trediakovsky (1703-1769) faced a dilemma when he sought to publish his *New and Brief Method for Composing Russian Verse (Novyi i kratkii sposob k slozheniiu Rossiiskikh stikhov, 1735)*, complete with aesthetic guidelines and examples. Since the Russian elegy did not yet exist in its neoclassicist instantiation, it had to be invented on the model of other literary traditions. The problem lay not only in the fact that Greek and Latin elegy did not confine itself to any particular themes, being distinguished from other poetic forms only by meter (a distinction which could be approximated but not reproduced in most modern

⁵ G. A. Gukovskii, "Elegiia v XVIII veke," in *Rannie raboty po istorii russkoi poezii XVIII veka*, ed. Viktor Zhivov (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001), 72-116.

languages), but it was also exacerbated by the absence of any strong representation in recent French literature. This problem was quickly compounded by others, for the one French elegist who did draw Trediakovsky's attention, Comtesse de la Suze (1618-1673), wrote on the topics of unhappy *and* happy love (the latter would not be permitted by neoclassicist aesthetics but, as we will see, surfaced nevertheless later on). The aesthetic tradition to which Trediakovsky was heir insisted, even in the face of much historical evidence to the contrary, that elegy had to be sorrowful in cast. After all, Boileau had written:

D'un ton un peu plus haut, mais pourtant sans audace,
 La plaintive élégie, en longs habits de deuil,
 Sait, les cheveux épars, gémir sur un cercueil.
 Elle peint des amans la joie et la tristesse;
 Flatte, menace, irrite, apaise une maîtresse.

In a tone a bit more lofty [than that of eclogue—DH], but still without daring,
 Plaintive elegy, in long mourning dress,
 Hair disheveled, knows how to wail over a coffin.
 She paints the joy and sadness of lovers;
 Flatters, menaces, irritates, calms a mistress.⁶

For Trediakovsky, then, the trick lay in covering over and suppressing the contradictions of poetic history (that is, the thematic diversity from antiquity to the present) in order to legitimate a new aesthetic canon, passing off the latter as if it were something other than historically determined.⁷

⁶ Quoted in E. S. Burt, *Poetry's Appeal: Nineteenth-Century French Lyric and the Political Space* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), 232. Translation is Burt's.

⁷ Cf. Hegel's critique of Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and other "physicians of art" in G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. with an introduction by Michael Inwood, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin, 1993), 18-19.

One of the ironies of Trediakovsky's solution was that even as he delimited the thematic range of elegy to serve his own purposes, he also referred to a number of "authorities" who in fact did not support his claims.⁸ Trediakovsky writes:

The word "elegy" comes from the Greek *ἐλεγεία* and means "sad and sorrowful verse," as evidenced by the famous Roman poet Ovid, who, in one of his elegies, thus mourned the rapid death of his friend, the mellifluous Latin elegiac poet, Albius Tibullus:

Flebilis indignos Elegeia solue capillos,
 Ah! nimis ex vero nunc tibi nomen erit,
 that is:
 Sad elegy! Let down your unkempt hair;
 Ah! too truthfully now will you take your name from lament.

Though the topic be significant and amorous, elegy is written truthfully; however, it is always subjected to sad and sorrowful speech. Any Russian enthusiast may assure himself of this by reading the Greek elegies of Philetas; the splendid elegies of Ovid and—of no worse quality—Tibullus, as well as Propertius and Cornelius Gallus; and the quite plaintive and moving French elegies of the late Comtesse de la Suze.

Слово элегия происходит от греческого: *ἐλεγεία*, и значит: стих плачевный и печальный, по свидетельству славного пииты римского Овидия, оплакивающего в одной из своих элегий скорую смерть друга своего, сладкого элегического пииты латинского Албиа Тибулла, тако:

Flebilis indignos Elegeia solue capillos,
 Ah! nimis ex vero nunc tibi nomen erit,
 то есть:
 Плачевная элегия! распусти неубранные свои волосы,
 Ах! излишно по правде от плача ты ныне имя возынешь.

Подлинно, хотя важное, хотя что любовное, пишется в элегии; однако всегда плачевною и печальною речью то чинится. Можно о сем всякому российскому охотнику увериться от греческих элегий Филетасовых; латинских—Овидиевых преизрядных и, не хуже оных, Тибулловых; также Проперциевых и Корнелиевых Галловых; а от французских—весьма жалостных и умильных, покойной графини де ла Сюз.⁹

⁸ Gukovskii, "Elegiia v XVIII veke," 75.

⁹ V. K. Trediakovskii, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, ed. L. I. Timofeev (Moscow-Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963), 395.

Though Gukovsky passes over in silence a number of things here, it is worth pointing out that from one perspective Trediakovsky's argument is unassailable. To the reference to *Amores* 3.9 he could have added *Heroides* 15.7 which, using the same words, distinguishes elegy from lyric: "flendus amor meus est—elegiae flebile carmen" (I must weep, for my love—and elegy is the weeping strain).¹⁰ And the Roman poets indeed derived the etymology of the genre from "elegen," to cry woe (even if classicists today are less confident about the word's origin). Scholars often quip that Trediakovsky was a better philologist than a poet.

From another perspective, however, Gukovsky is surely right at least to appear to be skeptical of taking Trediakovsky's assertions at face value. Again, these are not arguments he makes explicit (in general, Gukovsky only hints at and intimates the deeper historical and theoretical problems of which Trediakovsky may or may not have been aware), but Gukovsky might have noted the oddity in Trediakovsky's selecting as normative, from the entire history of Western elegy, a tradition which has come to be seen as a radical deviation.¹¹ The failure to mention Propertius's reference to elegy as a "deceitful work" or "genre" (*fallax opus*)¹² is perhaps no great sin, even if Trediakovsky insists elegy is to be "truthful"; but that Trediakovsky cites one passage from the *Amores* at the expense of another in order to legitimate his conception of the genre, and that Gukovsky does not bother to note this, can be seen as a symptomatic moment when those who take genre theory at face value proceed to posit an impossible correspondence between theory and praxis. Gukovsky's essay will thus depend on the validity of

¹⁰ Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1921; reprint ed., 1931), XV.7, 180-181.

¹¹ See Paul Allen Miller, "What's Love Got to Do With It?": The Peculiar Story of Elegy in Rome," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 46-66.

¹² Propertius, *Elegies*, Book IV, ed. Gregory Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.1.135, 31.

a model that traces the deviation of poetic practice from aesthetic prescriptions assumed to be coherent.

So while Trediakovsky cites the definition of elegy given in *Amores* 3.9, he might also have drawn attention to another characterization of Elegy and the *Amores* as a whole. Any reader who remembers that in *Amores* 3.1.7-10 Elegy is said to have feet of unequal length will likely recall why this might be relevant to one's thinking on the entire collection. Here are the opening lines of Ovid's text:

Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam
 Edere, materia conveniente modis.
 Par erat inferior versus; risisse Cupido
 Dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.

Arms, and the violent deeds of war, I was making
 Ready to sound forth—in weighty numbers, with
 Matter suited to the measure. The second verse
 Was equal to the first—but Cupid, they say, with a
 Laugh stole away one foot.¹³

Ovid's persona makes explicit the connection between the meter—or feet—of his work and its theme. Later in the text, when one of Elegy's feet is said to be shorter than the other (*pes illi longior alter erat*), the echo of the opening lines is unmistakable. Of course, it does not really matter whether Trediakovsky noted the humor in these passages, or whether he simply used a more convenient passage from Ovid that had already been canonized in Western aesthetic theory and was not likely to be questioned. What is important here is the possibility of exclusion that might be said to trouble this act of canonization. One aspect of elegy can be privileged only if all the others are suppressed.

Now all of this might seem pedantic and benign and of strictly academic interest, were it not for the fact that Gukovsky, despite his reservations, has to assume the validity of

¹³ Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, I.1-4, 318-319.

Trediakovsky's theory, its unity and completeness, in order for the rest of the story to be told the way he wants it to be told. For what we find, in a gesture by now long familiar, is that the binary has been tilted in favor of the theory, while the praxis has to be scanned for its flaws, whatever they might be, so that it is then possible to arrive at a particular critical narrative, what is in fact *the* literary history of the eighteenth century. What is interesting is that Gukovsky treats as authoritative not the theory at hand—the passage on elegy in the *New and Brief Method* cited above—but rather a more general prescription of neoclassicist aesthetics, namely the so-called principle of unity (*printsip edinstva*), as his means of tracing a rupture at the very origins of elegy. In this way he is able to claim that the lyrical departures (*otstupleniia*) in Trediakovsky's elegies violate their own “unity,” their tendencies toward “description” compromising the poems' status not only as *lyric* works but even as elegies proper, since the descriptive moments are not maintained in a sorrowful mode.¹⁴ In their furthest implications, such violations mean that at the origins of the Russian elegy there was never a moment of correspondence between theory and praxis, no perfect balance which was subsequently ruined. The two poles of the binary thus were always, to use Fredric Jameson's favorite word, incommensurable with one another.

Those with even a passing familiarity with literary histories of neoclassicism know where this story is going. In general terms, the canonization or “birth” of a genre inaugurates the process of deviation, miscegenation, deformation, hybridization, or what you will, that must run its course and end with the transformation—or “death”—of the poetic form in question. Specifically, Gukovsky will trace the aberrant path of elegy to its point of extinction in the early 1770s. It will include a discussion of the correspondence between theory and practice achieved by Sumarokov at the price of channeling the elegy's course of development into a dead-end; then

¹⁴ Gukovskii, “Elegiia v XVIII veke,” 76.

explore the various modifications made by the Kheraskov circle, at all times gauging the progress of deviation by the degree to which the principle of unity has been violated. The essay ends by emphasizing the rupture between the eighteenth-century elegy and the poetic forms that arose in the 1790s, and goes so far as to suggest that not only did the Sumarokovian and Kheraskovian tradition “die,” but also that all memory of that tradition was subsequently effaced (*izglazhivalas*).¹⁵ As scholars such as Lydia Ginzburg and Vadim Vatsuro have shown, this assertion was something of an overstatement; what will be pertinent for our purposes is, of course, the way in which this model or allegory of literary history has to be reinscribed in discourse on the “elegiac school” (Batyushkov and Zhukovsky) and its aftermath.

I have tarried with Gukovsky’s essay not only to show how it manipulates a binary opposition by putting one pole in the service of another but also to indicate some of the problems Gukovsky himself must suppress or ignore in order to write this particular history. As has already been suggested, his entire procedure depends on the stability and perfection of the theory so that the aberrance of the praxis can be registered.¹⁶ But it might now be worth pausing over one more problem residing within the theory itself in order to assure ourselves that the matter has a historical complexity that cannot be resolved by any pretense to empiricism. I want to focus attention here on the manner in which discussion of elegy, in its attempt to be historical, literary-historical, or what you will, cannot keep the object of inquiry separate from its own modes of representation.

Trediakovsky defines elegy—ἐλεγεία—as “sad and sorrowful verse” (*stikh plachevnyi i pechal’nyi*), and at first glance there might seem to be little cause to object to this definition. The

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁶ The implications of the instability of eighteenth-century genre theory have not been fully explored by Slavists. Viktor Zhivov, however, has drawn attention to discrepancies between theory and practice in Trediakovsky and Lomonosov. See Viktor Zhivov, “Iazyk i stil’ A. P. Sumarokova,” 570-572.

only problem here is that there is no universally-accepted definition of “elegy” to which this assertion can be anchored. Indeed, there is no historical conception of elegy which can be “recovered” without contamination by one’s own method of inquiry. As classics scholar Duncan Kennedy notes, it is impossible to speak of a historical concept without assimilating it to our own terms of discourse. To speak of Roman *love* elegy, for instance, requires us to start by translating *amor*—and here the trouble begins, for we have to recognize not only that there are contending, radically different ideas informing a late twentieth-century, Anglophone conception of “love” on the one hand and equally disunified, ancient Roman conceptions of *amor* on the other; but also that to treat them as being mutually translatable and commensurable requires that we ourselves appear within the object of inquiry. That is to say, we cannot reconstruct the past, let alone claim to speak its language in good faith; we can only translate it to our own plane of cognition where we are able to make sense of it on our own terms. What Kennedy proposes then is “the concept of a discourse of Roman love elegy, in which the ‘text’ of elegy stands for, *means*, all the forces that moulded the text plus the appropriations that constitute its reception.”¹⁷ We have to be willing to resist the temptation to believe that we will ever be able to understand *elegia* or *amor* (or ἐλεγεῖα, for that matter) in the same way as, say, Ovid understood them. It should be clear by now that to entertain this suggestion means acknowledging the threat that is implicitly posed to any science or methodology that claims to “know” the past (and this would seem to be at least one of the lessons learned from the experiment in contextualism, namely that there is no bringing forward of the past without mediation or contamination).¹⁸ “The essential meaning of love,”

¹⁷ Duncan Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44.

¹⁸ See Martin Jay, “Historical Explanation and the Event: Reflections on the Limits of Contextualization,” *New Literary History* 42.4 (Autumn 2011): 557-571.

Kennedy writes, remains “essentially contested, essentially mobile”¹⁹—and, naturally, the same could be said for “elegy.”

It is at this point then that we might mention another dimension to the problem Trediakovsky faced in which the canonization of elegy led not only down the tortured path(s) of Western literary history but also back into native Russian traditions where an elegiac strain could be said, with certain qualifications, to be latent. Thus it was possible for Trediakovsky to look to the “solemn, panegyric elegies” of Simeon Polotsky as well as the authors of “sorrowful love songs” from the Petrine era²⁰ as another point of reference to legitimate his project. If pursued far enough in this direction, however, the burden of defining elegy quickly becomes even heavier than it already is, for at least one question scholars since Gukovsky have posed is whether one may speak of “elegy” when, “historically speaking,” the name itself might be absent.²¹ It is not only that one has to contend with different understandings of genre which might refer to the same name from great distances in time but also that one must make one’s own particular impressions of elegy transhistorical in order to then pursue their presence in the past. What opens up before the critic is a temporal chasm, the temptation to lapse into infinite regress. No wonder then that Kamsar Grigorian can entertain the possibility that an “elegiac principle” (*elegicheskoe nachalo*) can be discerned already in the so-called “Lament of Yaroslavna” from *The Lay of Igor’s Campaign*,²² however remote from that text generic monikers of any sort might have been.

¹⁹ Duncan Kennedy, *The Arts of Love*, 45.

²⁰ G. A. Gukovskii, “Elegiia v XVIII veke,” 75.

²¹ Not that this has prevented scholars from using a term (say, “realism”) to denote a period from whose discourse that very term was absent. See Lidiia Ginzburg, “K postanovke problemy realizma v pushkinskoi literature,” in *Pushkin. Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii*, vol. 2 (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1936), 387-401.

²² K. N. Grigor’ian, *Pushkinskaia elegiia: (Natsional’nye istoki, predshestvenniki, evoliutsiia)* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990), 6.

The point here is less that Trediakovsky reduced what he took to be all the contradictory and historically disparate definitions of elegy to the formula “sad and sorrowful verse” than that Gukovsky, in attempting to describe the genre’s course of development, must also fix in place a transcendental law of genre that can be repeatedly violated in order that time can be smuggled back into the equation and literary history can be written. As I have already mentioned, Gukovsky does not refer elegiac practice back to the prescriptions of the *New and Brief Method*—does not, in other words, measure every elegy by its degree of sadness and sorrow—but rather posits as authoritative the already-mentioned principle of unity which Trediakovsky does not discuss in his section on elegy. This displacement may explain why Gukovsky does not dwell on what is perhaps the biggest aberration in the history of eighteenth-century elegy: the twenty-fifth, and final, poem from Kozelsky’s *Elegies and a Letter (Elegii i pis’mo, 1769)*, with its generically “inadmissible” happy ending.²³ In this way, the conceptual differences in elegy between 1735 and 1772 (when the genre, for Gukovsky’s purposes, dies out) can be elided as each poetic work is described on the basis of its conformity to the principle of unity. “Elegy” becomes an understandable concept because in each use of the term difference as such, as Deleuze might say, remains tethered to a principle of identity. The attempt to *describe* the history of a genre must have recourse to an *interpretive* gesture which masks its own historicity.

As we turn now to non-Russian criticism of (primarily) the English-language elegy, we see that the methodologies employed since the 1980s have much to commend them. However problematic his writings might seem today, Freud’s works, particularly the meta-psychological

²³ Ronald Vroon writes that the ending to this particular text in which the two lovers are reunited had the effect of demonstrating how a collection of poems potentially could be treated as a “whole composition.” See Ronald Vroon, “‘Ody torzhestvennyia’ i ‘Elegii liubovnyia’: istoriia sozdaniia, kompozitsiia sbornikov,” in Aleksandr Sumarokov, *Ody torzhestvennyia. Elegii liubovnyia*, 451.

papers and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), have given a much-needed stimulus to elegy studies. One could say that Freud's distinction, between the normative and healthy response to grief he called mourning, and the darker, more disturbing phenomenon he termed melancholia, has served as the most important point of departure for critics such as Peter Sacks, Jahan Ramazani, and, to a lesser extent, R. Clifton Spargo (even if its interpretive potentials do seem to have been more or less exhausted).²⁴ The adaptation of Freud's writings to the study of elegy has, however, a number of implications which have not been thoroughly explored, at least one of which I wish to consider here in connection with our topic of genre theory.

In *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (1985), Peter Sacks announces a significant departure from previous studies of elegy in his intention not to describe but to "interpret the genre's conventions." In other words, rather than produce a literary history of elegy, describing the genre's transformations over time, Sacks chooses to approach English poetry by asking "how the traditional forms and figures of elegy relate to the experience of loss and the search for consolation."²⁵ To explore the various presuppositions informing this methodology would take us too far afield; here I simply want to see whether interpretation, as Sacks understands it, does not end up producing the kind of mystification of genre theory that we found in Gukovsky.

Though he draws on Greek and Roman literature as a way of demonstrating how he reads elegy's conventions, Sacks in a familiar gesture has to delimit the genre's thematic range, and to this end he cites the definition of elegy "that gradually gained currency, particularly after the

²⁴ Though I do not believe that his argument is entirely fair or reflective of a deep understanding of elegy, I am sympathetic to Nouri Gana's point that the relationship between elegy and mourning has come to be predictable. Nouri Gana, *Signifying Loss: Towards a Poetics of Narrative Mourning* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2011), 11.

²⁵ Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 1.

sixteenth century” as a “poem of mortal loss and consolation.”²⁶ It is precisely the insistence on viewing elegy as a poem of “consolation” that virtually all scholars have come to challenge, yet equally significant here is the sense of unity Sacks ascribes to the period in question: what makes possible discussion of poets as different as Spenser and Yeats is the sense that the poetry written over the course of some several hundred years enjoys a certain continuity. When we ask what criteria or conventions allow for this kind of continuity in which a poem from the sixteenth century can be read on the same terms as one written early in the twentieth, it becomes clear that something indeed has to remain historically overdetermined (or at least seem that way) and thus critically privileged. Or to put it otherwise, the poetry has to be read against a number of prescriptions for function: if an elegy does not console or reach consolation, it is treated as a violation of or departure from a norm. The therapeutic value of a text rivals, if it does not indeed eclipse, its aesthetic merits.

Sacks adapts to elegy several important Freudian paradigms, including the work of mourning in which libido is decathected from the dead other and reattached to a living substitute,²⁷ but most significant to his methodology is the way in which a mourner recapitulates the oedipal resolution. Whereas the oedipal resolution implies the child’s entry into language, that part of the resolution which the mourner repeats pertains to an acceptance of (or, in terms some have seen as politically questionable, submission to²⁸) language and its regulations i.e.,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷ One should note that Freud was not consistent on this point, admitting in a late letter: “Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute” (Sigmund Freud, “Letter to Ludwig Binswanger,” in *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, ed. E. L. Freud, trans. Tania and James Stern [New York: Basic Books, 1960], 386).

²⁸ “It is not, in my view, possible to speak of ‘submissions’ and ‘subjections’ and ‘renunciations’ as ‘health,’ as a ‘working through’ of grief. It is not possible to speak of the ‘acceptance’ of loss without simultaneously denying loss. That renunciation, acceptance, and closure are so commonly insisted upon both by the elegy and by theoretical

symbols, figures, codes, and so forth. Since we are speaking not of the “first” entry into language but of a period of skepticism which must be overcome, the elegy performs the work of mourning to the extent that faith in words can be *reestablished*. But this move toward consolation can involve a two-fold process, and so in one of the examples from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Sacks examines, Apollo pursues Daphne to the point at which she becomes a laurel tree but then proceeds to fashion from the laurel a wreath: a trope. Or as Sacks himself says, “What Apollo or the poet pursues turns into a sign not only of his lost love but also of his very pursuit—a consoling sign that carries in itself the reminder of the loss on which it has been founded.”²⁹ Apollo accepts his loss, realizes that he can never have Daphne *qua* nymph, and ultimately consoles himself, but not before he fashions a “consolation prize—a prize that becomes *the* prize and sign of poethood” i.e., the laurel wreath. The turn or troping away from the lost other toward an object that signifies (or symbolizes—Sacks uses these and other terms interchangeably) her, and thus consoles the mourner, itself becomes the sign of a “good” elegy in Sacks’s study.

What we find then is that throughout the period in question, elegy (or in genres which “shed light” on elegy, such as epic and revenge tragedy) exhibits a preoccupation with language which is supposed to end with “submission” to the latter’s codes. *Hamlet* comes to be read as a play in which the eponymous prince traverses the path from “vengeful to elegiac pursuits, from action to language,” and thus assumes a position “that seems to restore the fabric of belief and to

and critical treatments of the genre must, then, give us pause. Marcuse, in his essay on ‘The Ideology of Death,’ wrote that the inculcation of the acceptance of death has been the ground for all forms of domination; and though Marcuse is not overmuch in fashion now, we need to ponder his words. When ‘health’ is defined as submission to the rule of law [authoritarian rhetoric often used to keep the ‘symbolic order’ in place; psychoanalysts’ prohibition of ‘excessive’ grief and keeping the ‘substitute’ in place], a subjection for which we are to be compensated by figures that transcend immortality and individuality, then we need a political reading of the elegy, of theories of the elegy, and of elegiac theory” (Louise [Aranye] O. Fradenburg, “‘Voice Memorial’: Loss and Reparation in Chaucer’s Poetry,” *Exemplaria* 2.1 [March 1990]: 184).

²⁹ Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 5.

renew the power of a mourner's words."³⁰ Meanwhile, the ending of Yeats's elegy "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory"—"a thought / Of that late death took all my heart for speech," which could mean both that the thought "robbed Yeats's desire for further speech" and that the heart has been "fed" to the poem—is indicative of a "sacrificial movement from desire to language" that is profoundly elegiac.³¹ Sacks underscores the importance of the mourner's trust in language because it is through language that the elegy performs its role in consoling both mourner and reader. This particular function is jeopardized when the consolatory resolutions language offers come to be categorically denied or rejected.

There is much with which one could take issue here, and indeed many critics have. W. David Shaw, for one, argues that "psychological values are a poor criterion of aesthetic values," and if an elegy is to be judged on the basis of its ability to conduct the work of mourning, then such poems as Henry King's "The Exequy" and Robert Frost's "Home Burial" will have to be relegated to the category of interesting failures.³² This tendency to reclaim value for "unresolved mourning" in elegiac literature is taken even further by Jahan Ramazani, whose study begins where Sacks's ends: the twentieth century.³³ R. Clifton Spargo goes even further in claiming that resistance to healthy mourning has informed the genre from its origins onwards. Indeed, Spargo illuminates the political and ethical dimensions of mourning. A mourner who does not relinquish memory of the dead and refuses to "move on" dissents from "the status quo of cultural memory," thus retaining a value for the other which is not annulled by death—and this dissenting act

³⁰ Ibid., 89.

³¹ Ibid., 297.

³² See the chapter "Does Good Therapy Make Good Art? The Paradox of Strong and Weak Mourners" in W. David Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), 180-209.

³³ Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-31.

becomes the “sign of an irremissible ethical meaning.”³⁴ If this argument is at all valid, then it quickly turns Sacks’s reading of *Hamlet* on its head, for the play, far from demonstrating how one submits to a cultural practice of rapid grieving and forgetting of the dead, seems to suggest “that our cultural modes of continuity may depend upon the anti-ethical praxis of substitution [the point of reference here is the line delivered by the Player Queen, “None wed the second but who killed the first”—DH], thereby implicating us in injustices that structure our society even when or largely because they have not been explicitly recollected.”³⁵ The “healthy” work of mourning, in other words, is performed at the price of a larger ethical failure.

But what is especially important to note for our purposes is that Sacks’s version of literary history has to come face to face with its own limitations and to some extent rehearse the solution we have already seen in Gukovsky. Specifically, the twentieth-century American elegy poses a threat to the model of literary mourning Sacks has outlined in his readings of English elegies. In what ways do elegies by Allen Tate, Robert Lowell, and Amy Clampitt depart from their “English counterparts?” Sacks writes:

Taken together, these poems would seem to represent a distinctly elegiac age. And yet while this may be the case, how many elegies console more readers than the poet, the particular bereaved, and their immediate circle? The question suggests both a problem besetting the contemporary elegy and a criterion by which to judge its individual examples. Often, these poems are too narrowly based, too private in their expression of grief and too idiosyncratic in their use of anecdote, description, or recollection. Well crafted, scrupulous, and intense in feeling as they may be, such poems fail to connect their highly particularized worlds with a generic and hence more general frame of reference. They connect neither to the recognizable motifs and elements of the work of mourning nor to the myths and ceremonies associated with that work.³⁶

³⁴ R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁶ Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 325-326.

To be sure, the challenge to distinguish traditional from modern elegy has been taken up by some scholars, most notably Jahan Ramazani.³⁷ But the point I want to emphasize is that this is the moment at which Sacks's study encounters history. Though strictly speaking it begins with Renaissance elegy, the entire book has posited something like a literary continuity extending from antiquity down to the beginning of the twentieth century when it is terminated. To state this another way, the elegy Sacks is interested in can exist and conduct its consolatory work so long as the "generic" and "general frame of reference" remain intact. If we are dealing with a degenerate text, one which does not maintain a "connection" between its particular "world" and the "general" world of which it should be a part, then the resultant rupture is not merely a matter of aesthetics—after all, it is the very utility or use value of the poem that is now being called into question. A failed elegy is not simply a poem which frustrates artistic expectations but one which cannot be put into the service of therapy.

A less generous way of phrasing our criticism, of course, would be to say that the trouble Sacks experiences with American elegy, especially its twentieth-century form, results less from the temporal and geographical particulars of one poetic heritage than from the displacement of aesthetic theory by new (but just as historically limited) criteria of evaluation. Nor should it be overlooked at this point that Sacks has chosen to focus on one specific rupture in a literary history that is in fact riddled with them. To be more precise, Sacks has found something problematic with a modernity that can no longer be easily referred back to a theory or aesthetics of mourning. Now he could very well be correct in identifying the twentieth century as a critical turning point in his study, and there would surely be no shortage of thinkers of various intellectual persuasions who would agree with him. Fredric Jameson has long noted the

³⁷ "While modern elegists participate in a transgeneric attack on convention, they focus their antipathy on the psychological structures and literary devices specific to the elegy. Preeminent among their targets is the psychological propensity of the genre to translate grief into consolation" (Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, 3).

mystifications that are involved in any attempt to draw lines of continuity not only between peoples radically removed from one another in time, but also between peoples living before and after Marx. Hence the absurdity in thinking that those of us living in the age of “late capitalism” could have a “worldview” identical to that of a nineteenth-century nobleman, let alone that of a feudal serf.³⁸ In the present context, it is necessary to point out that just as the Romans may have meant something other than “love” when they said *amor*, so too might two poets, separated by space and time, have meant different things by “consolation” when speaking of “elegy” and “mourning.” Only if we can agree that any poet in any age would have sought “consolation” as Sacks understands it, and would have ended up rehearsing such moments as the oedipal resolution in order to achieve it (even if the name as such was still necessarily unknown)—only then can we ignore the discontinuities between past and present.

It is in this way, then, that two thinkers as different as Gukovsky and Sacks can be said to rely on the same presuppositions regarding literary history.³⁹ Both establish theoretical requirements which cannot be satisfied by a poetic praxis indefinitely if anything like the history of a genre is to be undertaken at all. In this case the difference between descriptive and interpretive approaches to elegy lies in the way one formulates the priority of theory. For Gukovsky, the rules are historically established first, specifically with the institutionalization of aesthetic precepts in the form of Boileau’s *Art poetique*, which can then be transposed to and rehearsed in a Russian context.⁴⁰ For Sacks, it is the theory, adapted from the writings of Freud

³⁸ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 68-69.

³⁹ For an investigation into the problems of writing literary history, see David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁴⁰ Recall that Sumarokov in his “Epistle on Versification” (1748) offered prescriptions for writing elegy years before he ever published his own.

and Lacan, that is posterior to the praxis (the English elegy from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century) and which obviously must be projected back in time in order to achieve the same effect. But to insist too stubbornly on methodological differences may risk missing the point—namely, that descriptive and interpretive approaches to literary history are more intricately bound up with one another than we might like to admit.

II. Three Figures of Russian Elegy

What seems to be lacking in Gukovsky and Sacks (and in the work of most elegy scholars, for that matter) is a sense of the referential instability of language. To be sure, both offer us approaches to elegy that are by no means simple. Language always gestures beyond itself, to genre, psychology, ideology, or what have you, a phenomenon Gukovsky and Sacks trace in sophisticated, if different, ways. But each has a tendency to situate language a bit too comfortably within broader systems of understanding, a move that inevitably subordinates praxis to theory. For Gukovsky, eighteenth-century poetic language is regulated by genre theory, the former with its “three styles” (high, middle, and low) essentially functioning as a microcosm of a society divided into classes. Any violation of register, any attempt to make language say what it should not say in a given genre, has to be seen as an error, something to be corrected. Language, for this very reason, could not be allowed to deviate from prescribed norms of use. Meanwhile, Sacks discerns behind the elegist’s words a struggle to “work through” grief, toward consolation. The individual elegy (but only if it is a successful elegy!) does little more than trace a psychological pattern assumed to be universally shared. It is something like an X-ray of the psyche, the way the psyche’s trauma is registered and recorded. In both instances, language

becomes problematic only when it disrupts or sends shocks through the system which supposedly regulates it.

The guiding conviction of this dissertation, however, is that the language of elegy might not be as stable or governable as has been previously assumed. To clarify: I am arguing that Russian elegiac literature, specifically of the period 1790-1840, gives us instances in which the text seems to be first and foremost a reflection on itself and its status as language. One of my tasks is to demonstrate that in the early nineteenth century there are moments when the Russian elegy anticipates its own ability (or vulnerability) to be appropriated and colonized, whether by ideology, genre, or some other interpretive framework. The implications here are far-reaching and will be explored later, but if we can agree that the expression of loss we find in elegy needs to be treated as a linguistic and thus semantic problem, we gain some sense of the extent to which the elegy cannot help but resist the kind of interpretations that have been imposed on it.

But we have sidestepped perhaps too long a more pressing and obvious question: what is elegy? The Formalist sympathizer Boris Tomashevsky once spoke of genre as a center of gravity (*sfera tiagoteniia k odnomu tsentru*), as a “point around which separate works are grouped.” Individual works can “approach this absolute type of genre and can retreat from it,” but, he hastened to add, the boundary separating members from non-members is always hard to determine.⁴¹ If finding the center of the Russian elegy, which historically has always been thematically more diverse than its English counterpart, sounds like a lost cause, we might at least note that many elegies, whether they focus on exile, aging, love, death, the other, or the self,

⁴¹ B. V. Tomashevskii, *Stilistika i stikhoslozhenie. Kurs leksii* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1959), 502. Tzvetan Todorov takes this position even further in “The Origin of Genres,” *New Literary History* 8.1 (Autumn 1976): 159-170. For a more recent study of the problems faced by genre theory, see Michael Prince, “Mauvais Genres,” *New Literary History* 34.3 (Summer 2003): 452-479.

seem to deal with the theme of loss in one way or another.⁴² But even if we agree that loss is the point of departure for most elegies, it is hardly where most elegies end. In fact, I would venture that to frame the question in this way risks beginning with a presupposition regarding elegy's necessary movement toward something, such as reparation, consolation, or even the very rejection of mourning. Thus, where previous studies of elegy proceed to chart a course from the experience of loss toward some sort of outcome, this inquiry tarries with those moments in which elegy seems to stall.

In the writings of Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Karamzin, and Evgeny Baratynsky, I discern a tendency to problematize loss, by which I mean that these figures can be said not only to represent loss in one way or another but also to interrogate it as an experience rendered through language. Specifically, I find that these three complicate our understanding of elegy to the extent that their literature betrays a preoccupation with things not directly concerned with the actual occasion of mourning, as understood in the broadest sense. Lermontov, Karamzin, and Baratynsky show us that elegiac loss may be little more than the *figuration* of an experience assumed to be universally meaningful. Elegy may very well be a sincere expression of feeling, but it might also be a highly self-reflexive and sophisticated rhetorical exercise.

Of course, when I use the word “figure” in the title of this dissertation and throughout I mean not so much a “person” or “writer” as a trope,⁴³ or language as representation, and I am

⁴² Cf. Lazar' Fleishman, “Iz istorii elegii v pushkinskuiu epokhu,” in *Ot Pushkina k Pasternaku. Izbrannye raboty po poetike i istorii russkoi literatury* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006, 5-30; David Powelstock, “Burying the Elegiac Corpse: Selfhood in Pushkin's Late Lyrics,” *Pushkin Review* 3 (2000): 92-93.

⁴³ It is true that I could just as easily be referring to three “tropes” of Russian elegiac literature, and given my project's affinities with the works of Kenneth Burke, Hayden White, Harold Bloom, and Paul de Man, to name a few, my choice to settle on “figure” might appear counterintuitive. In general, I use “trope” to invoke specifically the turn or deviation suggested in the word's very etymology. By “figure” and “figuration,” on the other hand, I mean that process by which ideas are transformed into images. Clearly, these processes do not occur separately. In emphasizing figure, I try not to neglect “the length of the rope,” to borrow the metaphor John Hollander uses in explaining Bloom's criticism: “Whereas formalist criticisms have concerned themselves with the trope in the text

particularly interested in the figures of repetition, interruption, and displacement. In chapter one, I revisit the topic of repetition and self-repetition in Lermontov's works, a topic which has long been familiar to critics and scholars but which has been neglected despite Boris Eikhenbaum's pathbreaking *Lermontov: A Study in Literary-Historical Evaluation* (*Lermontov: opyt istoriko-literaturnoi otsenki*, 1924). In that work, Eikhenbaum claims Lermontov pays less attention to genre and style than he does to expression. As a result, Lermontov can say the same thing in different genres. What this means for our purposes is that, if the poet makes no distinction between elegy and parody, he places his own sincerity in question. To pose the question in the simplest terms possible, does one text merely repeat another text and thus say nothing new, or do both texts fail to correspond on the level of meaning? In investigating the latter possibility, I attempt to show that repetition can be viewed as part of the "mechanics" of Lermontov's art only on the condition that his texts do not *differ* from one another, a condition which I do not believe is met.

But what exactly are we dealing with here? At first glance, it might seem that to insist on any difference (linguistic, semantic, semiological) between, say, the following excerpts of text would be to make much ado about nothing.

[...]
 Но что ему их восклицанья?
 Безумцы! не могли понять,
 Что легче плакать, чем страдать
 Без всяких признаков страданья.

(“Эпитафия”)⁴⁴

И ангел знал, – и как не знать?
 Что безнадежности печать
 В спокойном холоде молчанья,
 Что легче плакать – чем страдать
 Без всяких признаков страданья.

(“Ангел смерти”)⁴⁵

alone, Bloom's sees this kind of study as two-dimensional and paradigmatic at best. For him, a trope is a twisted strand of transformational process, anchored deep in a rock of expressive need, and stretched upward, taut, to a connection at the surface with a flat sheet of text." (Harold Bloom, *Poetics of Influence: New and Selected Criticism*, ed. John Hollander [New Haven: H. R. Schwab, 1988], xxx-xxxii).

⁴⁴ М. Иу. Lermontov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. Boris Eikhenbaum (Moscow—Leningrad: Academia, 1935-37), 1: 347. All Lermontov citations will be to this edition, hereafter abbreviated as PSS. Translations are my own.

[...]
 But what are their cries to him?
 Madmen! They couldn't understand
 That it is easier to weep than to suffer
 Without any signs of suffering.

("Epitaph")

And the angel knew, and how could he not?
 That the mark of hopelessness
 Is in the calm cold of silence;
 That it is easier to weep than to suffer
 Without any signs of suffering.

(*Angel of Death*)

For Eikhenbaum, of course, there would be no difference insofar as both texts aim at the same thing—*pointe*—which is at least one of the reasons why generic distinctions (here, between lyric and *poema*) can be said no longer to obtain. And it is true that as long as we do not *read* the fragments of text, the challenge to see any differences between the two is daunting indeed. But it also becomes clear at certain moments in *Lermontov* that Eikhenbaum cannot tarry forever with the isolated parts of text which he claims are reused for the purpose of attaining greater degrees of “expression”; he must also step back from the texts in order to discuss such a phenomenon as self-parody, as when Lermontov writes something assumed to be completely serious in one place only to travesty it in another. The tension between a mechanical view of Lermontov’s art and its “organic” alternative, in which the temptation to view texts as emerging from an idea or germ cell persists, is one that neither Eikhenbaum nor his successors have really been able to ease or resolve.

It is also clear, however, that before proceeding much further we need to specify what we are to understand by “repetition.”⁴⁶ As Gilles Deleuze once noted, repetition should not be confused with generality. Generality operates on a principle of exchangeability, “express[ing] a

⁴⁵ Lermontov, PSS 3: 153.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the Kierkegaardian notion of repetition in connection with elegy, see R. Clifton Spargo, “Elegy as Narrative: The Relation to the Other in the Work of Mourning,” Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1995, 94-111.

point of view according to which one term may be exchanged or substituted for another.” When Eikhenbaum speaks of the textual parts that Lermontov moves from one text to another as “repetitions,” without regard to matters of genre and style but still with the sense that some sort of difference is being achieved on another end, one gets the impression that he may be closer to the idea of generality. Repetition, on the other hand, “is a necessary and justified conduct only in relation to that which cannot be replaced.” Repetition cannot be based on a principle of resemblance or equivalence.

Repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself. It is not underneath the masks, but is formed from one mask to another, as though from one distinctive point to another, from one privileged instant to another, with and within the variations. The masks do not hide anything except other masks. There is no first term which is repeated, and even our childhood love for the mother repeats other adult loves with regard to other women, rather like the way in which the hero of *In Search of Time Lost* replays with his mother Swann’s passion for Odette. There is therefore nothing repeated which may be isolated or abstracted from the repetition in which it was formed, but in which it is also hidden. There is no bare repetition which may be abstracted or inferred from the disguise itself.⁴⁷

If there is one implication for Eikhenbaum’s understanding of repetition in all of this, it is the idea that “there is no first term which is repeated,” and thus no guarantee that the literary-historical hunt for origins—the repetend of the repetition—will be successful. It is not accidental that Deleuze writes that the “repetition of the work of art is like a singularity without a concept, and it is not by chance that a poem must be learned by heart.”⁴⁸

Another complication arises, of course, once the attempt is made to establish what constitutes a repetition *in text*, or what amounts to the same thing, what happens to repetition once intent becomes a serious matter of reflection. For in theory as in praxis, we find that the

⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

distinction between repetition and self-repetition becomes increasingly difficult to maintain so long as it depends on the validity of the distinction between allusion, in which intent goes unquestioned, and intertext, in which the textual coincidence exists outside of intent, as a fact of language.⁴⁹ To put it more simply, if it cannot be shown whom Lermontov repeats—himself or another—any more than it can be demonstrated that the re-petition issues from a re-petend or, even better, an initial petition, then surely there are consequences for any inquiry into the question of self-repetition. In its furthest and perhaps most disturbing implications, repetition is not merely a misnomer of sorts but the closest approximation we can manage with regard to the inherent redundancy of language.⁵⁰

What I attempt to show in chapter one then is that the distinctions that generations of Lermontov scholars have accepted at face value—between repetition and self-repetition, allusion and intertext, elegy and *poema*—may obscure as much as they illuminate. Through an extended reading of two texts, “To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky” and *Sashka*, I show how Lermontov’s use of repetition, whether it is oriented toward artistic improvement or not, cannot be reduced to a principle of identity. It is not enough, in other words, to view the texts as some kind of unity or “alloy” (*splav*—Eikhenbaum’s term) unless one can agree that there are no differences between them. This means less that generic distinctions are reinscribed when the texts are juxtaposed to one another than that there may be some play of *différance* that has gone unnoticed by virtually all Lermontov scholars. In other words, difference is there, but not necessarily in the forms prescribed by eighteenth- or nineteenth-century aesthetic theory. It may prove difficult or even impossible to indicate the specific differences between these texts, but the point will be to

⁴⁹ I take this distinction from Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵⁰ This is a question that pertains to the reception of Lermontov—see my discussion at the end of chapter one.

suggest a number of problems that need to be ignored or suppressed in order for the traditional view of self-repetition to hold.

Ultimately, then, the possibility that the two texts do not “say” the same things despite their mutual repetitions will have consequences for our understanding of elegy and the language of mourning. If the expression of grief that we find in “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky” is not taken seriously, or conversely, if the ironic mode of *Sashka* can run its course only to turn, or even revert back, to pathos, then we need to entertain the suspicion that elegy may always be “about” something other than loss. I will add in conclusion to the chapter that this suspicion is precisely what readers of elegy need to suppress in order to write elegy, which may imply that the “ethical” component assumed to be inherent to elegiac literature (but especially to Russian literature) should remain open to question.

For all the ease with which critics situate his works in their various literary histories and formulations of sentimentalism, Karamzin remains an enigmatic and difficult figure. This is due in part to the lack of studies that attempt to address the idiosyncrasies of Karamzin’s legacy without immediately subsuming his achievements under a greater critical narrative concerning the development of the Russian novel or short story or the cultivation of a “middle style” in the wake of the collapse of neoclassicist aesthetics. In chapter two, I linger over one aspect of Karamzin’s sentimental project precisely *because* of its absence in subsequent literary tradition.⁵¹ Specifically, I reconsider and explore the figure of interruption in its relation to elegy. I attempt to demonstrate how Karamzin’s tendency toward interruption suggests deeper problems than can be accounted for by theories of sentimentalism. In the context of elegy, this means at the very

⁵¹ The very idea that poetic legacies can be discontinuous with the narratives literary historians would write is also part of the reason why I eschew a chronological framework for this dissertation.

least that the relations between self and other, the ways these relations are figured, need to be reexamined. One finds traces of interruption on various levels of Karamzin's work, whether it emerges to terminate a lyrical digression (as in the unfinished *Ilya of Murom*) or comes as the very moment that signals a text's completion (recall the abrupt ending of the short story "Liodor"). Insofar as it reminds us of the other who cannot speak for herself but whose words can be appropriated and put back into circulation, interruption can tend toward a modality of figuration in its own right.

Like repetition, interruption can be broken down into related, yet distinct, rhetorical and poetic devices. The most pertinent for our purposes are aposiopesis (the mid-sentence halt), adynaton (the so-called "inexpressibility topos"), and paraposiopesis (the expression of emotion that interrupts a thought). But interruption also functions on various levels of meaning. As the editors of *The Book of Interruptions* state in their introduction, interruption "is a key to the expectable as well as a figure for the nostalgic, implying the loss of some notional ideal continuity or flow or oneness."⁵² Inter-ruption "breaks between," opening up a rift in a time or place previously thought to be continuous. The subsequent nostalgia and yearning for unity and wholeness, the sense that one's loss stands in need of reparation, makes clear interruption's relevance to the study of elegy. On the other hand, the same editors note that interruption may very well be normative, the already "fragmentary state of things" that it is called upon to cover up, being constitutive of life itself. Events occur by means of rupture, while "[a]ll theories of making—from making worlds to making poems to making babies—are descriptions of

⁵² David Hillman and Adam Phillips, "Introduction," in *The Book of Interruptions*, ed. David Hillman and Adam Phillips (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 8.

disruptive processes.”⁵³ Whether it is interruption that subsumes continuity or vice-versa, it is “worth wondering what the story is we are telling ourselves that would make death an interruption rather than of a piece with the rest of life.”⁵⁴

The relevance for all of this with regard to Karamzin’s writings has to do, first and foremost, with his treatment of pastoral and its relationship to counterpastoral, a term I borrow from Philip Roth.⁵⁵ The traditional reading of Karamzin’s “creative path” traces an initial fascination with pastoral literature in the vein of Salomon Gessner and others which, by the 1790s, lapses into anti-pastoral tendencies as Karamzin proceeds to more serious and indeed monumental forms of prose. In concrete terms, this means that such “innocent” works as the translation of Gessner’s “The Wooden Leg” (1783) and the adaptation “Palemon and Daphnis” are gradually supplanted by the more “realistic” and self-conscious “Poor Liza” and “Sierra Morena”; and the sentimental impulse is something that has to be lived through and overcome in order to arrive at such mature writings as “My Confession” (1802) and “Sensitive and Cold” (1803) and finally the *History* itself. It is not difficult to assimilate the various stages of Karamzin’s career to some theory of artistic continuity, even if Karamzin’s own redactional practice of excising sentimental rhetoric from his texts in preparing later editions of his work for publication hints at its own kind of discontinuity. The question is whether or not the opposition between pastoral and counterpastoral in the texts is really stable enough to allow this kind of

⁵³ Ibid., 10. Cf. Walter Benjamin: “[I]nterruption is one of the fundamental methods of all form-giving.” Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 2003), 19.

⁵⁴ David Hillman and Adam Phillips, “Introduction,” 11. See also Jacques Derrida, “Living On; Border Lines,” in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 75-176.

⁵⁵ “The daughter who transports him out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counterpastoral—into the indigenous American berserk” (Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997], 86). I elaborate on this distinction in my “Counterpastoral,” *Philip Roth Studies* 10.1 (Spring 2014): 125-139.

literary history to be written, and whether the role of interruption is merely to cause a rift in a continuity that goes unquestioned or if it involves more than this.

A typical instance of interruption in Karamzin's writings occurs when the narrator or "lyrical I," in bringing a text to the point beyond which it cannot proceed, draws attention to the inadequacies of his own narrative. Thus as the wreath is being presented at the end of "An Offering to the Graces" (*Prinoshenie gratsiiam*, 1793), the text is interrupted by a paraposiopesis (*No, akh! na nem sleza...*) when the "lyrical I" realizes that the Graces will see the tear he has shed on the wreath and so feels compelled to explain not only why it is there but also what he truly expects in return for the "offering."⁵⁶ The interruption reveals the motivation behind the offering—the request for consolation in grief—and requires that the text be read in this new light. The sense of continuity which the "lyrical I" has tried to maintain, namely in drawing attention to the ritualistic aspect of his gesture and the tradition of representation he invokes, is exposed as a cover or fig leaf for a deeper trauma. The text before the interruption is meant to conceal an intent the "lyrical I" finds embarrassing. We witness something like a dialectical reversal in which interruption represents the "fragmentary state of things" and thus stands in for a sense of continuity, while the ritualistic offering is exposed as an interference or barrier to the mourner's real needs. Standing behind the artifice of pastoral is a counterpastoral reality which is always already there.⁵⁷

Karamzin deploys the figure of interruption not merely as a rhetorical device (that is, as a way of breaking up narrative flow) but also as a means of constructing narrative itself. That is to say, interruption at times becomes not only the central theme of a text but also the principal

⁵⁶ Nikolai Karamzin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow-Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1966), 117-118.

⁵⁷ Structurally, "An Offering to the Graces" recalls the fragment "The Country" (1792) which ends its depiction of country life with a flash of lighting that illuminates graves and ruins and reprises a sentimental commonplace about the transience of earthly life.

mode by which characters interact with one another. In “Sierra Morena,” the consequences of such a mode of interaction are disastrous: the promise of idyllic harmony is never realized because no character is able to establish a stable relationship with another. While it could be argued that the narrator’s attempts to convert Elvira’s expressions of grief into expressions of love implicate him in her and Alonzo’s demise, it is also true that the young Spaniards’ relationship has been interrupted before the narrator’s arrival in Andalusia; pastoral has shown its counterpastoral countenance prior to the narrator’s appearance. One may speak of the “fall of the idyll,” which seems to be the story’s commentary on the genre, but once the cause of this fall can be shown to be displaced, then one has to reckon with the possibility of an absent causality, an absence I argue is more important than critics have realized.

The chapter ends with a rereading of Karamzin’s most famous story, “Poor Liza.” Where most critics have read “Poor Liza” in terms of its development of pastoral and contribution to “psychological prose,” I draw attention to the interruptions and incongruities of the text which belie deeper problems obtaining between self and other. I suggest that the attempt to make Karamzin’s demystification of pastoral correspond to a real-life disillusionment with the prospects of establishing a social or political utopia is misguided. Rather, the text seems to imply that one’s relationship to another is always already beset by discontinuities and disruptions which are never stable enough to allow for such easy transitions from pastoral to counterpastoral to come about in the first place. It is not that pastoral sows the seeds of its own destruction, but that pastoral already is its own destruction, is always already counterpastoral. Pastoral does not signify loss proleptically but rather exposes the illusion of plenitude.

The final chapter examines Baratynsky's figures of displacement. While exile was a theme Baratynsky began to develop explicitly in his "Finnish" poems of the early 1820s, questions of homecoming—what the home is, whether homecoming is possible—seem to loom over his entire poetic output, from his epicurean verse to his mature lyrics. One of Baratynsky's contributions to elegiac literature, I argue, lies in his treatment of the home as a place that endlessly obscures its own origins. To put it as simply as possible, if the physical home changes in one's absence, then the question as to what one can really come back to (and whether one may return at all) always seems to haunt the "lyrical I." The solution to this problem, which we find in "Excerpts from the Poema *Remembrance*" (*Otryvki iz poemy 'Vospominaniia'*) and "Desolation" (*Zapustenie*), is, of course, to relocate the physical home to the mind, or memory, a transposition which is obviously temporal in kind. The home thus is what one is always separated from, what always proves elusive in the attempt to return, or to put it another way, the home represents a situation in which the spatial has been superseded by temporality itself.

As described in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), displacement (*Verschiebung*) pertains to one of the processes by which dream-content and dream-thoughts fail to coincide. What is crucial to the former may be insignificant to the latter, and vice-versa. Thus, Freud's dream about a botanical monograph (dream-content) is, in terms of dream-thoughts, really concerned with workplace problems and the accusation that Freud devotes too much time to his "hobbies." Botany is related to the dream-thoughts tangentially, perhaps only to the extent that Freud admittedly did not care much for the subject.⁵⁸ In a broader sense, we can speak of displacement when "an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and

⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 233.

to pass on to other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations.”⁵⁹

Although the Freudian concept of displacement has some relevance to this project, I take my cue primarily from the fields of linguistics and rhetoric, particularly the premise concerning language’s ability to make absent things present. An inherently past-oriented genre, elegy relies almost exclusively on this basic mechanism, striving to salvage what it can of the past through representation, through language. What the elegist speaks of is no longer there, and so to speak of it at all, from the perspective of elegy, is to rearticulate the lost object’s absence. And while the Russian elegy of any period has never been restricted to the subject of death, I draw on those studies that discern a relationship between writing on the one hand and death on the other.⁶⁰ Indeed, as we will see, death figures even in elegies that seem to be, on the surface of things, about something else.

If homecoming is the quandary, then the name Baratynsky gives to displacement is Elysium, a place with a definition as elusive as its location, insofar as the word is used to mean different things. This is not to say that any sort of synthesis of the word’s different valences is out of the question; but it seems more important to explore first the implications of thinking Elysium as a home or perhaps its substitute. Although one might say that Elysium for Baratynsky signifies a displacement that has already taken place, the question as to whether or not one can be “placed back” into something normative or “homely” retains a certain amount of urgency, even as one moves into his mature lyrics.

⁵⁹ Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), 121.

⁶⁰ “Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament” (Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], 81); “All graphemes are of a testamentary essence” (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], 69). For this insight I am indebted to Jahan Ramazani, *Yeats and the Poetry of Death: Elegy, Self-Elegy, and the Sublime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 11-12.

Anyone with even a passing familiarity with Baratynsky's poetry will recall those moments in his works when the space of the home is contrasted to a memory of that same space. The failure of the two to coincide leaves one with the sense that the "lyrical I" may not be home, but rather elsewhere, and this failure can be subtle. Recall, for instance, the following passage in "Excerpts from the Poema *Remembrance*," a free translation of Gabriel-Marie Legouvé's "Les souvenirs, ou les avantages de la mémoire":

Счастлив, счастлив и тот, кому дано судьбою
 От странствий отдохнуть под кровлею родною,
 Увидеть милую, священную страну,
 Где жизни он провел прекрасную весну,
 Провел невинное, безоблачное детство.
 О край моих отцов! о мирное наследство!
 Всегда присутственны вы в памяти моей:
 И в берегах крутых сверкающий ручей,
 И светлые луга, и темные дубравы,
 И сельских жителей приветливые нравы.
 Приятно вспоминать младенческие дни...⁶¹

Happy, happy is he whom fate lets
 Relax under native roof from wanderings,
 And see his dear, sacred country,
 Where he spent the lovely spring of life,
 Spent his innocent, serene childhood.
 Land of my forebears! peaceful heritage!
 You are always present in my memory:
 On steep banks, the shimmering stream,
 And light meadows, and dark oak groves,
 And welcoming customs of country folk.
 It is pleasing to remember days of infancy...

In saying that the land of his fathers is always present in mind (*Vsegda prisutstvenny vy v pamiati moei*), the "lyrical I" momentarily closes the gap between home and memory, only to open it back up by referencing the pleasures of remembrance (*Priatno vspominat' mladencheskie dni...*). To remember the past is to save it momentarily from oblivion. Needless to say,

⁶¹ Evgenii Baratynskii, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, ed. E. N. Kupreianova (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957), 53. Hereafter referred to as PSS. Translations are my own.

Baratynsky could not have known that some fourteen years later in his poem “Desolation” he would anticipate a meeting with his dead father in the same vocabulary and even rhyme scheme.

Он убедительно пророчит мне **страну**,
 Где я **наследую** несрочную **весну**,
 Где разрушения следов я не примечу,
 Где в сладостной тени невянущих **дубров**,
 У нескудеющих **ручьев**,
 Я тень, **священную** мне, встречу.⁶²

He convincingly prophesies to me a country
 Where I will inherit everlasting spring;
 Where I will not see the traces of decay;
 Where, in the sweet shade of unfading woods,
 By streams that do not run dry,
 I will meet a shade sacred to me.

We will have more to say about these two poems in chapter three; suffice it to suggest here that when the texts are read side by side, the wish expressed by the “lyrical I” of “Excerpts” to see his home again («О, суждено ли мне увидеть край родной») is in some sense answered in “Desolation,” but by no means as a wish fulfillment. As the “lyrical I” of that poem surveys the ruins of his patriarchal estate, he must convince himself that despite its neglected condition, it is still home, still his Elysium: «Еще прекрасен ты, заглохший Элизей». But the ending of “Desolation,” which speaks not of a wish but of a prophecy («пророчит»), seems to displace the space itself in the anticipation of a “country” that is expressed in temporal terms: eternal spring. The earthly Elysium might still be in some sense beautiful, but its ability to produce the right kind of memories—of spring and youth—is now out of the question. To abandon one Elysium in order to obtain *the* Elysium means that memory itself, with all its pretences of preserving the past, must give way to a different perspective on time, one governed by anticipation and promise. When one Elysium is displaced by another, the very attitude toward loss itself has to be rethought if it is to be salvaged at all.

⁶² Ibid., 171.

If, in linguistic terms, displacement “refers to the ability of language to indicate or signify things not physically present,” then there might be reason to revise Baratynsky’s title as the “poet of thought” to the “poet of displacement.” Elysium signifies a place where the poet is not (though he may think he has been there at some point), whether it is in the mind or memory (“My Elysium”), the residence of dead poets (“Elysian Fields”), or whether it is the shore, as yet unseen, to which the poet is sailing (“Pyroscaphe”). The question I pose in this final chapter is whether or not the yearning for an Elysium past or future betrays some original sense of loss, or whether loss is symptomatic of something else; that is to say, whether it, too, is figural.

Two brief, final notes. First, Pushkin’s absence from this study of the nineteenth-century Russian elegy may strike some as provocative. My omission of the “sun of Russian poetry,” however, is informed by a somewhat banal reason, namely the saturation of critical literature on Russia’s greatest poet. While entire monographs have been written on individual elegies from Pushkin’s corpus,⁶³ nothing comparable has been done for the three poets discussed here. In the end, I chose to write on three poets rather than on just one.

Second, unlike most studies of elegy, this dissertation does not proceed chronologically. It eschews such an approach in the hope that it may avoid the tendency to historicize falsely and essentialize literature, a tendency characteristic of so many genre studies. The aim here is neither to tell a story about the metamorphoses of a genre during a period of time, nor to extract those features—necessary, atavistic, or otherwise—that would allow me to speak of a certain continuity in literary practice. Rather, the inquiry that guides the dissertation (and may be said to be elegiac in its own right) asks what has been left out of the story that all studies of the Russian

⁶³ I have in mind Savelii Senderovich, *Aleteiia: Elegiia Pushkina “Vospominanie” i problemy ego poetiki* (Wien: Institut für Slawistik der Universität Wien, 1982).

elegy try to tell. It may very well be that there is no remembrance of former things, as Ecclesiastes reminds us. Or it may be that what is remembered has little or no connection to what really did exist. In any event, it remains to be seen whether the figures I have identified find their way into future histories of the Russian elegy.

1: Tropics of Repetition

To forget the dead altogether is impious in ways that prepare their own retribution, but to remember the dead is neurotic and obsessive and merely feeds a sterile repetition.

— Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*⁶⁴

There is no first term which is repeated...

— Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*⁶⁵

I. Introduction

Though they might choose to ignore it, students of Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841) inevitably encounter that peculiarity of his poetics we have come to know, at least since Eikhenbaum, as self-repetition. Eikhenbaum posited the absence of “genuine organic *constructiveness*” in Lermontov’s poetry, by which he meant that Lermontov, rather than create from scratch, would “fuse” together fragments of earlier-written text into a different, if not altogether new and original, creation.⁶⁶ Displaying little sensitivity to matters of genre and style, Lermontov would strive for “intense lyricism” and “emotional eloquence” with the aid of “fixed verbal formulae,” those textual “parts” he gathered for future use. The circulation of these formulae within the poet’s oeuvre naturally precluded the observance of eighteenth-century

⁶⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 144.

⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 17.

⁶⁶ Boris Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov: A Study in Literary-Historical Evaluation*, trans. Ray Parrott and Harry Weber (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981), 19/20. Here and throughout I cite the English text first and then the Russian, separating the two with a slash. For the Russian text, see Boris Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov: Opyt istoriko-literaturnoi otsenki* (1924; reprint ed. München: Fink, 1967).

prescriptions for poetic form,⁶⁷ as a comparison of passages from “Epitaph” (1832) and *Angel of Death* (1831) illustrates.

[...]
 Но что ему их восклицанья?
 Безумцы! не могли понять,
 Что легче плакать, чем страдать
 Без всяких признаков страданья.

(«Эпитафия»)⁶⁸

[...]
 But what are their cries to him?
 Madmen! They couldn't understand
 That it is easier to weep than to suffer
 Without any signs of suffering.

(“Epitaph”)

И ангел знал,—и как не знать?
 Что безнадежности печать
 В спокойном холоде молчанья,
 Что легче плакать—чем страдать
 Без всяких признаков страданья.

(«Ангел смерти»)⁶⁹

And the angel knew, and how could he not?
 That the mark of hopelessness
 Is in the calm cold of silence;
 That it is easier to weep than to suffer
 Without any signs of suffering.

(*Angel of Death*)

In both texts, lexical considerations yield to delivery, the attainment of *la pointe*, in a move that sacrifices the whole to the part and thereby makes lyric and *poema* generically indistinguishable.⁷⁰ Eikhenbaum claimed that such “self-repetitions” (*samopovtoreniia*) belonged to no single work but were in fact the “elements” preserved for “new situations and themes.”⁷¹ In viewing this unusual artistic procedure as a response to aesthetic questions being raised in Lermontov’s time, Eikhenbaum discerned another factor in the equation that will be relevant for

⁶⁷ As David Bethea explains, “living the demoralizing lies of Nicholaevan Russia was [...] the acid that burned through the vessels of genre thinking [...]” (David Bethea, *Realizing Metaphors: Alexander Pushkin and the Life of the Poet* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998], 41).

⁶⁸ М. Иу. Лермонтов, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. Boris Eikhenbaum (Moscow—Leningrad: Academia, 1935-37), 1: 347. All Lermontov citations will be to this edition, hereafter abbreviated as PSS. Translations are my own.

⁶⁹ Lermontov PSS 3: 153.

⁷⁰ Although it might seem an extravagant claim, given that he deals only with sections of text, most scholars have followed Eikhenbaum in claiming that genre, in its eighteenth-century sense, ceases to function in any meaningful way in Lermontov.

⁷¹ Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, 69, 88/62, 74.

us: namely, he saw in Lermontov's poetic praxis a historical vocation which called for the complete transformation of the neoclassical elegy as such.⁷²

It is perhaps in the nature of things that *lermontovedy* willing to revisit the problem of self-repetition have done so, for better or for worse, at the price of reinscribing Eikhenbaum's basic presuppositions. Boris Udodov, for one, calls for a new critical vocabulary. He suggests thinking of Lermontov's self-repetitions not as "stylistic clichés" (Eikhenbaum's term) but as the "atoms" and "cells" (*kletki*) "from which his artistic universe is built." Now however innocent the reference to the smallest components of such a universe might be, it would be remiss of us not to note that atoms and cells are not quite the same thing; that they presumably imply different kinds of "structures" and "organisms" when taken together; and that, most importantly, in view of the proliferation of signifiers that haunts even Eikhenbaum's *Lermontov* (where self-repetitions are named, alternately, "clichés", "parts", and "formulae"), the study that draws attention to the problem of denomination would do well to remain aware of the risk it runs in borrowing a predecessor's terminology. As it happens, when Udodov refers to the "prefabricated parts" (*zagotovki*) of Lermontov's poetry,⁷³ he repeats, whether he knows it or not, the very

⁷² "The struggle of the ode and the elegy had to lead to the disintegration of both these genres [...] this disintegration led to the poetry of Lermontov, where the elegy lost its airy classical features and appeared in the form of a declamatory meditation or "reflection;" "Борьба оды и элегии должна была привести к разложению обоих этих жанров [...] к поэзии Лермонтова, где элегия потреяла свои воздушные классические очертания и предстала в форме декламационной медитации или "думы" (Ibid., 17/17-18).

⁷³ Boris Udodov, "Tvorcheskii protsess," in *Lermontovskaia entsiklopediia*, ed. V. A. Manuilov (Moscow: Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1981), 567, 566. In his earlier monograph, Udodov examines the various stages of the "creative process" in Lermontov's work, providing a more detailed analysis of the poet's use of *zagotovki*. Even here, though, Udodov remains interested in uni-directional development and does not indicate how the various instantiations of a work interact with one another. It is telling that his reading of "Pamiati A. I. Odoevskogo" does not go further than the first two stanzas, precisely where the repetitions in *Sashka* begin. Boris Udodov, *M. Iu. Lermontov: Khudozhestvennaia individual'nost' i tvorcheskie protsessy* (Voronezh: Izdatel'stvo Voronezhskogo universiteta, 1973), 132-163, especially 139-142 and 149-154.

morphology and by extension the line of thinking on which Eikhenbaum himself relies.⁷⁴ It comes as no surprise then that the prospects of developing a biological hermeneutics, as it were, are destroyed when Udodov leads us back to the mechanics of criticism he sets out to revise.

So too with Vadim Vatsuro. Though he maintains that “Lermontov did not repeat himself” but rather “perfected a concept (*zamysel*) and used his earlier-written work as draft material,” when Vatsuro also suggests that “the image of Mtsyri completed the evolution of the [Romantic] hero of Lermontov’s *poemy*,”⁷⁵ it turns out that with only a shift of emphasis he has restated Eikhenbaum’s conclusions regarding self-repetition in general⁷⁶ and *Mtsyri* in particular.⁷⁷ At least one reason behind such redundancy can be discerned in the manner in which a typical rehearsal of the “problematics” or so-called “creative path” of the artist slides back into

⁷⁴ “In the creative work of the type of artist who is ‘emotional’ (not by nature but by method), who is concerned not so much about the harmoniousness and originality of construction as about its expressiveness, not only the widespread use of ready-made material can be observed, but also the systematic repetition of one’s own earlier prepared segments; this lends a somewhat monotonous character to their style”; “В творчестве такого рода „эмоциональных“ (не по натуре, а по методу) художников, заботящихся не столько о стройности и оригинальности построения, сколько об экспрессивности, всегда наблюдается не только широкое пользование готовым материалом, но и систематическое повторение собственных, ранее **заготовленных** кусков, что придает их стилю несколько однообразный характер” (Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, 69 / 61).

And later: “While rejecting old works and inventing new situations and themes, Lermontov carefully preserves these elements, transferring them from one work to another and combining them. From this point of view the entire history of Lermontov’s poetic creativity represents a persistent and intense reworking of what he had prepared during the years of early youth”; “Отказываясь от старых вещей, изобретая новые ситуации и темы, Лермонтов тщательно сохраняет эти элементы, перенося их из одной вещи в другую и соединяя вместе. С этой точки зрения вся история Лермонтовского поэтического творчества представляется как упорная и напряженная переработка того, что было им **заготовлено** в годы ранней юности” (Ibid., 88/74).

⁷⁵ Vadim Vatsuro, “Khudozhestvennaia problematika Lermontova,” in *O Lermontove: Raboty raznykh let* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel’stvo, 2008), 574. To be sure, it is hard to imagine repetition being altogether unavoidable, even if Eikhenbaum’s essay of the same title, “Khudozhestvennaia problematika Lermontova” (1940), is not primarily concerned with the topic.

⁷⁶ Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, 70/62-62.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 108, 117/92, 100-101.

a Formalist methodology. “Purpose or aim,” Harold Bloom reminds us, “cleaves more closely to origins the more intensely it strives to distance itself” from them.⁷⁸

It can be said, then, with little exaggeration, that however much they take issue with Eikhenbaum’s terminology, scholars offer no serious discussion or rethinking of the topic of self-repetition.⁷⁹ And this is surely problematic, for if it does nothing else, repetition at least raises larger questions related to intertextuality, allegory, and tropology, or to put it more simply, the ways one text interacts with another. The neglect of these matters has meant that Eikhenbaum’s understanding of self-repetition has not been called into question. Rather than result in a degradation or loss of meaning and substance, self-repetition seems to proceed with significant aesthetic gains over time, indeed to approach a state of wholeness as Lermontov becomes increasingly satisfied with the product of his labor.

The critical procedure for nearly all scholars since Eikhenbaum calls for the relegation of the earlier work to the status of “experiment” or “draft material” (a move Vatsuro, for one, has made more than once in insisting on Lermontov’s commitment to “perfection”) and the suppression of those relations in which identical language between texts—“self-repetitions”—say different things. Indeed, the basic presupposition we will have to reconsider here implies that Lermontov’s use of language does not open itself up to anything like ambiguity or irony; nor is it in any way self-referential, insofar as each instantiation of a work supersedes its predecessors. Meanwhile, the same presupposition also privileges allusion over intertext as the dominant kind

⁷⁸ Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975), 62.

⁷⁹ Nor does it help matters when English-language critics broach the subject only to say nothing about it. See Vladimir Golstein, *Lermontov’s Narratives of Heroism* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1998), 105; David Powelstock, *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I’s Russia* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2005), 154-155; and Elizabeth Cheresch Allen, *A Fallen Idol Is Still a God: Lermontov and the Quandaries of Cultural Transition* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 53.

of textual relation and so prematurely delimits the field of reference.⁸⁰ And this, of course, is just another way of validating the study of authorial intent, for if allusion, or the intentional gesture toward an anterior text, can also be shown to be intertext, or accidental textual coincidence, then the distinction between self-repetition and repetition becomes harder to maintain. It should go without saying that the point of revisiting this distinction amounts to more than challenging the practice of commentary for its own sake (and to more than introducing a kind of criticism into a branch of Slavic studies simply for the sake of provocation); rather, what is at stake here is the question of whether or not mourning that takes place in language can be taken seriously if it cannot really be separated from its history of use.

In short, it may be time to explore the possibility that the practice of self-repetition might not be as benign as Eikhenbaum once intimated. In revisiting two rarely discussed works, “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky” (*Pamiati A. I. Odoevskogo*, 1839) and *Sashka* (1835-36, 1840?),⁸¹ I draw attention to one instance in which the classical view of self-repetition—namely, that its presence *merely* registers a migration from another text—is not exactly borne out. I want to suggest, with regard to the larger argument about elegy this thesis advances, that Lermontov’s representations of Odoevsky and *Sashka* do not repeat some original experience of loss (as in the

⁸⁰ I take my cue here from Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), esp. 17-51. In dealing perhaps a bit too neatly with the matter of intertextuality, I hope to show that the distinction between allusion and intertext can still serve as a productive starting point for rethinking repetition in Lermontov’s works. Other studies I have found helpful in addressing this topic include Andrew Reynolds’s articles, “Smert' avtora ili smert' poeta? (Intertekstual'nost' v stikhotvorenii “Kuda mne det'sia v etom ianvare?..”),” in *Otdai menia, Voronezh: Tret'i mezhdunarodnye mandel'shtamovskie chteniia: Sbornik statei*. Ed. O. E. Makarova et al. (Voronezh: Izd-vo Voronezhskogo un-ta, 1995): 200-214; and “Light Breathing: Osip Mandel'shtam's 'First' Poems, Pushkin, and the Poetics of Influence,” *Pushkin Review* 10 (2007): 103-127. See also David Bethea, “Whose Mind Is This Anyway? Influence, Intertextuality, and the Boundaries of Legitimate Scholarship,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 49.1 (Spring 2005): 2-17.

⁸¹ The date of composition of *Sashka* has not been determined conclusively, though scholars seem to agree on a *terminus post quem* of 1835-36. For the history of manuscript transmission, see E. E. Naidich, “O tekste i datirovke poemy M. Ju. Lermontova ‘Sashka’,” *Trudy gosudarstvennoi publichnoi biblioteki imeni M. E. Saltykova-Shchedrina* no. 5, issue 8 (1958): 201-208. In his much later study, Naidich suggests that Lermontov may have worked on *Sashka* even after the publication of *A Hero of Our Time* (in other words, through 1840). See E. E. Naidich, *Etiudy o Lermontove* (Saint Petersburg: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1994), 69.

Freudian paradigm outlined by Sacks), but rather show any search for an origin or repetend to be naïve and misguided. What this means, for all practical purposes, is that if neither text originates the other, then we have to decide in what relation the two texts actually stand. I argue that the texts illustrate different ways that elegiac language can be manipulated and put into the service of aesthetic ends whose relationship to some specific occasion of mourning might be only incidental. What Lermontov teaches us about elegy is that the language of grief can never be transparent for the reason that language is implicated in its history of use. Far from making repetition the backbone of elegiac literature, as many scholars suggest, Lermontov exposes repetition as being discontinuous with whatever text, tradition, or “repetend” it might be thought to bear relation.

II. Mourning and Tradition; or, Elegiac Déjà Vu

In his essay “The Critic as Host,” J. Hillis Miller discusses the problems we face in trying to keep our notions of parasitism neatly separated. It is not, he argues, that traditional criticism plays host to a parasitic deconstruction (or that nihilism necessarily arises in response to metaphysics), but that the roles are fluid and reversible, both can even be assumed at once (parasite is host and host is parasite)—an argument that is warranted at least etymologically: “A parasite was originally something positive, a fellow guest, someone sharing the food with you, there with you beside the grain. Later on, ‘parasite’ came to mean a professional dinner guest, someone expert at cadging invitations without ever giving dinners in return.” The concept of “host” has positive and negative valences, too. The host “contains in himself the double antithetical relation of host and guest, guest in the bifold sense of friendly presence and alien invader.” “Host” and “guest” share the “same etymological root: *ghos-ti*, stranger, guest, host.”

The point ultimately is that the “relation of household master offering hospitality to a guest and the guest receiving it, of host and parasite in the original sense of ‘fellow guest,’ is inclosed within the word ‘host’ itself.”⁸² The polemical edge of Miller’s argument aims at a particular effect: once it is possible to imagine one type of text or discourse (read: deconstruction) serving as host to “the obvious or univocal reading” (read: the standard or traditional interpretation), then the ways we understand and practice criticism have to be fundamentally reconsidered if they are to be taken seriously at all.

Hillis Miller’s interpretation of the relationship between host and parasite offers us a way of rethinking textual relations in Lermontov. Self-repetition can be seen to involve more than an act of cannibalization in which the salvageable “parts” of one work are used in another; the process can also suggest that each text opens up interpretive possibilities that one text, on its own, could never fully produce. How might this process look in practice? Realizing that this might seem self-evident, I want to propose distinguishing “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky” from *Sashka* on the basis of genre classifications, treating the former as an elegy, the latter as a *poema*. Because the two texts share the same language—“repeat” one another—the advantage here will lie in the possibility of viewing elegy from the perspective of an ironic *poema* and vice versa. The genre distinctions will ultimately fall away of themselves, and not simply because scholars from Lydia Ginzburg to David Bethea have agreed that genre loses all meaning in Lermontov, but also because elegy and *poema* in this instance will have to be seen as being one and the same.

Я знал его: мы странствовали с ним
 В горах востока, и тоску изгнанья
 Делили дружно; но к полям родным
 Вернулся я, и время испытанья

⁸² J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 217-226.

Промчалось законной чередой;
 А он не дождался минуты сладкой:
 Под бедною походною палаткой
 Болезнь его сразила, и с собой
 В могилу он унес летучий рой
 Еще незрелых, темных вдохновений,
 Обманутых надежд и горьких сожалений!

Он был рожден для них, для тех надежд,
 Поэзии и счастья... Но, безумный—
 Из детских рано вырвался одежд
 И сердце бросил в море жизни шумной,
 И свет не пощадил—и бог не спас!
 Но до конца среди волнений трудных,
 В толпе людской и средь пустынь безлюдных,
 В нем тихий пламень чувства не угас:
 Он сохранил и блеск лазурных глаз,
 И звонкий детский смех, и речь живую,
 И веру гордую в людей и жизнь иную.

(«Памяти А. И. Одоевского»)⁸³

I knew him: I traveled with him
 In the mountains of the east, and shared in concert
 The yearning of exile. But I returned to native fields,
 And the period of ordeal passed in due order;
 But he could not wait for the desired moment:
 Under a poor field tent
 He was struck down by sickness,
 And he took to the grave a fleeting swarm
 Of yet unripe and dark inspirations,
 Deceived hopes, and bitter regrets!

He was born for them, for those hopes,
 Poetry and happiness... But, a madman,
 He shed his swaddling clothes early
 And cast his heart into the sea of noisy life,
 And the world did not spare, and God did not save!
 But to the end, among trying agitations,
 In a crowd of people or in people-less wastelands,
 The quiet flame of feeling in him was not extinguished:
 He preserved the shine of his azure eyes,
 His sonorous child-like laughter, lively speech,
 And proud faith in people and another life.

⁸³ Lermontov PSS 2: 53-54.

("To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky")

The first two stanzas of "To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky" allegorize Lermontov's brief friendship with the exiled Decembrist poet, Alexander Ivanovich Odoevsky (1802-1839), and the history of the latter's social and political alienation. We know that the two first met (*Ia znal ego*) at the end of 1837 in the Caucasus (*my stranstvovali s nim / V gorakh vostoka*) where Lermontov had been exiled for writing "Death of a Poet" (*Smert' poeta*, 1837). The two became fast friends (*i tosku izgnan'ia / Delili druzhno*). Already by 1838, Lermontov was back in Petersburg (*no k poliam rodnym / Vernulsia ia*), where late in the following year he learned of Odoevsky's death in August (*Bolezn' ego srazila*). Lermontov, who tended to be socially awkward when he was not socially hostile, was more at ease with Odoevsky than with any of the other Decembrists then living in the Caucasus (it is said that Lermontov and the Decembrists experienced something like *nedoponimanie*—the failure to fully understand one another). I. A. Kubasov claims that Lermontov could say with every right: "I knew him."⁸⁴

One of the problems with the procedure by which Lermontov's poetry is scanned for the fragments of text in which he repeats himself stems from the lack of significance scholars attach to the question of content: the fact of repetition is presumed to be more important than what is being repeated. While most can agree that knowledge of a text's origins will inform whatever interpretation we might derive from that text, few have recognized the extent of the complication that arises when textual origins remain obscure. Thus, at first glance, when Lermontov enumerates the things Odoevsky "took to the grave," including his "deceived hopes" (*obmanuty nadezhdy*), he seems to be invoking the very tradition he is said to have inaugurated: the "Death of a Poet" cycle of Russian literature. In his poem of that name, written just two years earlier,

⁸⁴ See Kubasov's biographical essay in A. I. Odoevskii, *Stikhotvoreniia. Pis'ma. Vospominaniia ob A. I. Odoevskom* (Moscow: Novyi Kliuch, 2003), 73-74.

Lermontov had said of Pushkin: «И умер он—с напрасной жаждой мщенья, / С досадой тайною обманутых надежд» (And he died with a vain thirst for vengeance, / Secretly vexed at his deceived hopes). Now it may very well be that these two words alone do not constitute a self-repetition (and we might recall that Eikhenbaum himself tended to hedge his bets in this regard by identifying at least one or two lines of repeated text), that this is nothing more than a coincidence,⁸⁵ but if we entertain the possibility that the repetition is allusive and intentional, we may have to admit that there is a textual relation Lermontov wanted us to see. In this reading, then, repetition connects the two texts formally even as it posits a similarity on the level of content, Pushkin and Odоеvsky both now being seen here as victims of political tyranny or conspiracy whose “hopes”—poetic, political, or otherwise—went unrealized. If the repetition is meaningful, then we are already dealing with a tradition of mourning dead poets, a tradition in which the language of grief serves as a lexical reservoir to which any mourning poet has rights.⁸⁶ In this way, Lermontov’s poems on the deaths of Pushkin and Odоеvsky become something like chapters in a greater narrative about death that the Russian literary tradition wants to tell itself. Repetition is not only a “fact” or constitutive feature of this narrative but also a part of its meaning, since each new death serves as the reminder that death has occurred before.

But now consider the possibility that “deceived hopes” refers us not only to “Death of a Poet” but rather to *The Novice*, a text composed not long before “To the Memory of A. I.

⁸⁵ Cf. Mikhail Gasparov, “Literaturnyi intertekst i iazykovoii intertekst,” *Izvestiia Rossiiskoi akademii nauk. Seria literatury i iazyka* 61.4 (2002): 3-9.

⁸⁶ The foundational article on this topic is Georgii Levinton, “Smert’ poeta: Iosif Brodskii,” *Iosif Brodskii: lichnost’, tvorchestvo, sud’ba*, ed. I. Gordin (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal “Zvezda,” 1998): 190-215. For an excellent discussion of Tiutchev’s contribution to the cycle, see Aleksandr Dolinin, “Tsikl ‘smert’ poeta’ i ’29 ianvaria 1837’ Tiutcheva.” In *Pushkinskie chteniia v Tartu 3: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, posveshchennoi 220-letiiu V. A. Zhukovskogo i 200-letiiu F. I. Tiutcheva*. Ed. L. Kiseleva. Tartu: Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2004. 381-395.

Odoevsky.” The lexical similarities, which are not exhausted in the passages below, should at least give one pause.

Унести в могилу за собой
Тоску по родине святой,
Надежд обманутых укор,
И вашей жалости позор!..

(«Мцыри»)⁸⁷

To take to the grave
My longing for my sacred country,
The reproach of deceived hopes,
And the shame of your pity!..

(*The Novice*)

Болезнь его сразила, и **с собой**
В могилу он унес летучий рой
Еще незрелых, темных вдохновений,
Обманутых надежд и горьких сожалений!

(«Памяти А. И. Одоевского»)

He was struck down by sickness,
And he took to the grave a fleeting swarm
Of yet unripe and dark inspirations,
Deceived hopes, and bitter regrets!

(“To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky”)

With the possibility of an allusive reference to *The Novice* now open, one has to ask what sort of problem this poses with regard to the tradition described in the previous paragraph. However tempting it might be, the option of neutralizing the problem by referring *The Novice* to some “Death of a Poet” cycle is not really available to us, if only because the novice is not a poet. “Mtsyri” in Georgian means something more like “novice” or “lay brother” (in Russian, *poslushnik*), as Lermontov’s note to the text informs us. Almost a monk, the novice might almost be a poet, too, but his imminent death at the end of the text would seem to suggest that “almost” has to remain the operative word; the novice dies before there can be any legitimate discussion of a death of a poet. More importantly, however, his very predicament of being homeless, of not belonging, might also tell us something about the status of the language in question, namely that it too has no home or tradition outside of the one it imagines for itself. Despite his temporary escape from the monastery, we are never sure whether the novice finds his way back home, for while he thinks at one point that he sees his native village (*aul*), he comes to the conclusion that he can never get back to the place whence he came. Our hopes of finding a home or origin for

⁸⁷ Lermontov PSS 3: 447.

“deceived hopes” are always at risk of being deceived, if for no other reason than that the search for origins is terminal not with a given text but with the seeker himself. The inclusion of *The Novice* into any “Death of a Poet” cycle thus will always have to be more disruptive than consoling.

Eikhenbaum was explicit about the homelessness of self-repetitions, the impossibility of their belonging to any single text.⁸⁸ What stanza two reveals, however, is that the quest for origins is always problematic, for as we search for the repetend or source of the utterance, we not only realize that self-repetition at some point slides into repetition, but also discover that this search is prone to a kind of infinite regress.

Он был рожден для них, для тех надежд,
Поэзии и счастья... но, безумный—
Из детских рано вырвался одежд
И сердце бросил в море жизни шумной,
И свет не пощадил—и бог не спас!

(“Памяти А. И. Одоевского,” 1839)

He was born for them—for those hopes,
Poetry and happiness... But, a madman,
He shed his swaddling clothes early
And cast his heart into the sea of noisy life,
And the world did not spare, and God did not save!

(“To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky”)

Он был рожден для счастья, для надежд,
И вдохновений мирных!—но безумный
Из детских рано вырвался одежд
И сердце бросил в море жизни шумной;
И мир не пощадил—и бог не спас!

⁸⁸ “We have traced Lermontov’s main repetitions. As we see, they really are purely stylistic clichés which are not connected with the material of any one specific work, and that is why they roam through various works”; “Мы проследили главные Лермонтовские повторения. Как видим, они, действительно, представляют собой чисто-стилистические клише, не связанные с материалом одной определенной вещи и потому блуждающие по разным произведениям” (Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, 88/74).

(“Он был рожден для счастья, для надежд...,” 1832)⁸⁹

He was born for happiness, for hopes
And peaceful inspirations! But the madman
Shed his swaddling clothes early
And cast his heart into the sea of noisy life;
And the world did not spare, and God did not save!

(“He was born for happiness, for hopes...”)

Он был рожден для мирных вдохновений,
Для славы, для надежд;—но меж людей
Он не годился; и враждебный гений
Его душе не наложил цепей;
И не слышал творец его молений,
И он погиб во цвете лучших дней [...]

(“К*** [“Когда твой друг с пророческой тоскою...” 1830]”)⁹⁰

He was born for peaceful inspirations,
For fame, for hopes... But among people
He was of no use, and the hostile spirit
Did not place chains on his soul.
And the Creator did not hear his prayers,
And he died in the prime (*vo tsvete*) of his best days...

(“When your friend with prophetic yearning...”)

Кто был рожден для вдохновений
И мир в себе очаровал,
Но с юных лет пил желчь мучений
И в гробе заживо лежал [...]

(Одоевский, “Элегия,” 1829)⁹¹

Who was born for inspirations
And enthralled the world in himself,

⁸⁹ Lermontov PSS 1: 381

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1: 170.

⁹¹ A. I. Odоеvskii, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvoreniia* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1958), 79-80.

But from years of youth drank the bile of torments
And lay in the grave still alive...

(Odoevsky, "Elegy," 1829)

If we follow the road map suggested by Eikhenbaum, we arrive at the discovery that self-repetition originates as a repetition of someone else (though Eikhenbaum sidesteps this complication in what is supposed to be a discussion of self-repetition).⁹² More importantly, however, if we ask who the "he" in "he was born" is, we realize that the answer depends on which poem we are talking about. The "he" in the 1839 text is clearly (at least for now) Odoevsky, but in view of the other poems, it is an Odoevsky indistinguishable from what Lydia Ginzburg once identified as Lermontov's "lyrical hero," that figural composite of biographical and artistic features which may very well have been the "precondition" for the latter's entire poetic "system."⁹³ Each poem, using more or less the same language, conceivably has a different referent. The trajectory of the repetition might be traced thus: Lermontov appropriates the repetend, Odoevsky's utterance from "Elegy" (1829) and uses it in reference to himself, his lyrical hero, or whoever the "he" in the poems of 1830 and 1832 may be, then casts it as the signifier for Odoevsky in the 1839 text. So if we can agree that the lines originate with Odoevsky in 1829, the tantalizing question we might pose is whether or not Lermontov, when writing on the Decembrist's death some ten years later, considered the lines to be Odoevsky's or his own.

But if the texts cited above tell us anything, it is that repetition is never precise or pure, but prone to differentiation at every juncture. And once we recognize that these poems in no way direct us to a perfect repetition, that in fact we have to contend with lexical and syntactic difference every step of the way, then it might be in the order of things to ask, once we have

⁹² Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, 84/71.

⁹³ Lidiia Ginzburg, *O lirike* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974), 159-164.

arrived at Odoevsky's "Elegy," whether we have "hit bottom" after all. To put it another way, we have to establish criteria by which to determine how much linguistic variation or difference can be permitted without jeopardizing the concept of repetition.⁹⁴ After all, it would not be difficult to cite any number of precursors to the line "Who was born for inspirations" (*Kto byl rozhdennii dlia vdokhnovenii*) from the history of Russian poetry: one has only to recall a moment in Pushkin's "André Chénier" (1825)—"Born for love, for peaceful temptations" (*Rozhdennyi dlia liubvi, dlia mirnykh iskushenii*)⁹⁵—to suspect that when commentators treat Odoevsky's poem as the repetition of the repetition, it is an arbitrary critical maneuver that tries to suppress the threat that every intertext, or textual coincidence, poses to a science of allusion, or referential intent. Without criteria, we do not really know how far down the rabbit hole goes, only that each potential "origin" can be shown to be just another displacement. It is in this sense that one is tempted to read the poem less as a "complex alloy" or fusion of texts, as Eikhenbaum suggests,⁹⁶ than as a palimpsest or even an allegory in which poetic language is inescapably self-referential.⁹⁷ One familiar, but still disturbing, implication of all this—something that is often noted in scholarly literature on elegy—is the incommensurability that opens up between the

⁹⁴ It is probably worth pointing out here that the line, "and cast his heart into the sea of noisy life" (*И сердце бросил в море жизни шумной*), could be an echo from another Odoevsky poem, "Two Images" (*Dva obraza*): "I cast myself into the sea, and the stormy roughness whirled the swimmer far away on a noisy path" (*Я в море бросился, и бурное волнение / Пловца умчало вдаль по шумному пути*). Once again: are we dealing with intention or coincidence?

⁹⁵ See, among others, A. Iu. Nilova, *Zhanrovo-stilisticheskie traditsii v lirike M. Iu. Lermontova (poslanie, elegiia)* (Petrozavodsk: Petrazavodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2009), 139-143.

⁹⁶ Boris Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, 84/71.

⁹⁷ My use of the term "allegory" here has been informed in part by Paul de Man's discussion of the topic in his essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 187-228, esp. 200-204.

formal tautologies of language and the unrepeatable event that language is called upon to represent.⁹⁸

Stanzas one and two allow us to treat the problem of origins as a diachronic matter, but on the condition that we remain aware of the threat of infinite regress. Stanza three differs in this respect because it directs us unambiguously to another text, *Sashka*, which we will examine in a moment. Before doing so, however, it is worth saying a few words on how the scene of death in “To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky” is represented so as then to juxtapose it to the same passage in *Sashka*.

Но он погиб далеко от друзей...
 Мир сердцу твоему, мой милый Саша!
 Покрытое землей чужих полей,
 Пусть тихо спит оно, как дружба наша
 В немом кладбище памяти моей.
 Ты умер, как и многие—без шума,
 Но с твердостью. Таинственная дума
 Еще блуждала на челе твоём,
 Когда глаза закрылись вечным сном;
 И то, что ты сказал перед кончиной,
 Из слушавших тебя не понял ни единый...

И было ль то привет стране родной,
 Названье ли оставленного друга,
 Или тоска по жизни молодой,
 Иль просто крик последнего недуга,
 Кто скажет нам!...

(«Памяти А. И. Одоевского»)⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Lawrence Lipking suggests that what he terms the *tombeau*—a type of poem in which one poet writes on the death of another poet—“epitomizes a paradox that many modern linguists consider the essence of language: every statement is at once determined by innumerable constraints—the rules of grammar, the history of usage, the context in which speech occurs—and yet a wholly new creation. The poet, especially, must speak with a double voice. A destroyer and preserver, he cannot be less than the caretaker of language but cannot be less than original and free.” Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 161. We still await the study that puts Levinton and Lipking into dialogue with one another. David Bethea makes use of Lipking’s model in *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 146-173.

⁹⁹ Lermontov PSS 2: 54.

But he perished far from friends...
 Peace to your heart, my dear Sasha!
 Covered by the earth of foreign fields,
 May it sleep quietly, like our friendship,
 In the mute graveyard of my memory.
 You died, like many, without a sound, but with firmness.
 A cryptic thought still wandered about your brow
 When your eyes closed in eternal sleep;
 And that which you said before your death
 Was not understood by anyone who was listening to you.

And whether that [which you said] was a greeting to your native country,
 Or the name of a friend abandoned,
 Or yearning for youth,
 Or simply a cry of agony—
 Who can tell us!

(“To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky”)

There are several things going on here, including a subtle alteration of the rhyme scheme,¹⁰⁰ all of which can be easily overlooked if one focuses solely on the familiar romantic emplotment (to borrow Hayden White’s term): the other dies in foreign lands, while the absent mourner deflects attention from himself to the unsympathetic witnesses to the scene of death.¹⁰¹ The problem being staged here is well known: we not only encounter a commonplace of romantic poetry in which the lyrical figure voices the irremediable division between the individual and the world (*svet*) it perceives as hostile, we are also privy to a moment in which the emergency situation results in the complete breakdown of language. The wandering thought (*bluzhdaiushchaia дума*) never leaves the brow unaltered, speaker and listener do not establish a relationship in which the transmission of ideas can be sustained. Quite the contrary, just as the thought is supposed to become communicable, it is heard as noise (“and that which you said before your death / was not

¹⁰⁰ E. E. Naidich, “Pamiati A. I. Odoevskogo,” in *Lermontovskaia entsiklopediia*, 362-363.

¹⁰¹ As Peter Sacks reminds us, elegiac questions (of the sort we find in the fourth stanza) can serve to deflect attention from the mourner’s own sense of guilt: “The so frequent, formulaic Where were you? may [...] mask the more dangerous Where was I?” (Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 22). While the elegist in “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky” does not pose the question Where were you? explicitly, the questions that begin the fourth stanza at least hint at the possibility that if the elegist had been present, perhaps the final words would have been understood.

understood by anyone who was listening to you”). The failure of the thought to be understood is most disturbing in all of this, for it implies the radical difficulty in listening to the dying, when we may be unable to distinguish a greeting to one’s native country (*privet strane rodnoi*) from a cry of agony (*krik poslednego neduga*). Since the Greek for metonymy, *metonymia*, means a “change of name,” one could cite the four signifiers as instances of tropological movement—but one would also have to determine which name here is being changed: is the name of the friend being called by the greeting? Is the name even present here, or do we have only the change?

Lest we think, however, that the mourning subject is somehow in possession of a truth that was lost on those present at the scene of death, we do well to bear in mind that the third and fourth stanzas are presented as an imaginative act of witness, or putting it less generously, in bad faith. Odoevsky is said to have died far from friends (*No on pogib daleko ot druzei*), and if the elegist indeed considered himself a friend at one time (as intimated by variations on the root *drug*: *tosku izgnan’ia / Delili druzhno*), one of those counted among the absent, then it is fair to ask on what basis his own narrative is supposed to be seen as authoritative.

But the matter can be approached from a different angle and the question posed in another way: why does the elegist decline to speak, to make the disclosure that would illuminate past and present, choosing rather to consign the poet’s heart, and with it the friendship, to the mute graveyard of memory?

Мир сердцу твоему, мой милый Саша!
 Покрытое землей чужих полей,
 Пусть тихо спит оно, как дружба наша
 В немом кладбище памяти моей.¹⁰²

Peace to your heart, my dear Sasha!
 Covered by the earth of foreign fields,
 May it sleep quietly, like our friendship,
 In the mute graveyard of my memory.

¹⁰² Lermontov PSS 2: 54.

It could be, of course, that we are dealing with an aspect of mourning which tends toward silence anyway,¹⁰³ but it should not be forgotten that at the heart of the matter is a tropological procedure which displaces a conventional wish to the dead: “rest in peace”, or “peace to your remains” (*mir prakhu tvoemu*). The elegist may very well prefer this metonymic change of name by speaking of the heart (*mir serdtsu tvoemu*) rather than the ashes, by privileging one part over another (the ashes or remains being only a disfigured part of a previous whole, the living body), but in so doing he writes of something that can be internalized, something that can be interred and put to rest in place of the body proper. And so while the heart might lie covered by the earth of foreign fields (*Pokrytoe zemlei chuzhikh polei*), it is by recourse to a simile that the elegist can reclaim some part of the dead to conduct a burial of his own. The friendship resembles the heart in that both rest at peace, in muteness, but it is a similarity that can be maintained only because the radical division between them has been posited first. A comparison bordering on a metaphor is achieved only once the metonymic change of name has done its damage—once it is no longer possible to speak of the living Odoevsky or indeed of the living friendship, and once any connection implied by the sharing (or division?—the Russian *delili* contains both possibilities) of exilic experience (*tosku izgnan'ia / Delili družhno*) is rent by a more recent past (*No on pogib daleko ot družei*).

To summarize: in problematizing the question of origins, stanzas one and two show us not only that self-repetition cannot extricate itself from the history of repetition (or to put it another way, the allusion to one's own writings ends up invoking other texts and thus stamping a question mark over its own referent), but also that the meaning of a text can change depending

¹⁰³ “In all mourning there is a tendency to silence, and this infinitely more than inability or reluctance to communicate. The mournful has the feeling that it is known comprehensively by the unknowable” (Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, tr. John Osborne [London—New York: Verso, 1998], 224).

on the narrative one wants to situate it in, the tradition one wants to create. Meanwhile, stanzas three and four dramatize the very problem inherent in the act that presumably grounds any tradition: the *traditio* or act of handing over. The failure of the act of handing over—in this case, the conveying of the words that the dying poet attempts to speak but that the listeners are unable to understand—effectively marks the end of at least one tradition. The history of friendship between the two poets is also seemingly terminated with the elegist’s decision not to disclose the past. The question we still have to answer—why the elegist is silent—may be provided by *Sashka*.

III. *Sashka* and the Play of Mourning

Lydia Ginzburg notes that if the strain of irony going back to the Jena romantics (specifically, Friedrich Schlegel) is marginal to the history of nineteenth-century Russian literature, the influence of its Byronic counterpart can hardly be overstated. Byronic irony has a fundamentally political orientation, taking as a matter of course the validity of protest against existing ideological institutions. Having lost hope in the realization of its own political ideals, however, the Byronic subject turns back on itself, toward skepticism, and “devalues itself and all that is unattainable for it,” thus illustrating a dialectic in which the subject pathetically voices its values one moment only to travesty them the next. By way of example, observe the manner in which the speaker of *Sashka* at one point celebrates his hero in terms reminiscent of *Demon*, then promptly deflates his own pathos in the last two lines of the strophe:

О, если б мог он, как бесплотный дух,
 В вечерний час сливаться с облаками,
 Склонять к волнам кипучим жадный слух
 И долго упиваться их речами [...]
 О, если б мог он, в молнию одет,
 Одним ударом весь разрушить свет!..

(Но к счастью для вас, читатель милый,
Он не был одарен подобной силой.)

(«Сашка»)¹⁰⁴

Oh, if only he could, like an incorporeal spirit,
Merge with the clouds in the evening hour,
Incline his ear to the roaring waves
And take in their conversations at length...
Oh, if only, dressed in lightning, he could
Destroy the entire world with a single blow!..
(But fortunately for you, dear reader,
He was not endowed with such power).

(*Sashka*)

In this strophe ending, reminiscent of a characteristically Pushkinian procedure from *Eugene Onegin*,¹⁰⁵ the childhood fantasy is exposed for being what it is: an illusion that can be broken at the first contact with “reality.”¹⁰⁶ Ginzburg describes the passage from pathos to irony as a transition from “elegy to epigram,” when the poetic subject “laughs in order not to cry” and “tugs itself down” or “straightens itself out” (*odergivaet sebja*) after a dramatic flight of pathos.¹⁰⁷ In the end, she would seem to imply that once the turn to irony has been registered, the return to pathos can never be taken at face value again.

The distinction Ginzburg draws between two kinds of irony, however, is not unproblematic. In the first place, to proceed as if Schlegel’s various characterizations of irony

¹⁰⁴ Lermontov, PSS 3: 389.

¹⁰⁵ For a helpful discussion of Pushkinian influence (or lack thereof) on Lermontov, see G. P. Makogonenko, *Lermontov i Pushkin: Problemy preemstvennogo razvitiia literatury* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1987), 40-44. See also Vadim Vatsuro’s review of this work, “Otzyv na rukopis’ G. P. Makogonenko *Lermontov i Pushkin: Problema* [sic] *preemstvennogo razvitiia literatury*,” in *O Lermontove*, 671-677.

¹⁰⁶ It is not accidental that elsewhere Ginzburg sees the development of romantic irony as an intermediary stage on a literary tradition’s path to realism. See Lydia Ginzburg, “Pushkin i problema realizma,” in *Literatura v poiskakh real’nosti: Stat’i. Esse. Zametki* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1987), 58-74, esp. 67.

¹⁰⁷ Lidiia Ginzburg, *Tvorcheskii put’ Lermontova* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1940), 129-133.

constituted some coherent body of thought will be at best misleading, as anyone familiar with his contributions to the journals *Lyceum* and *Athenaeum* will recall. But given the degree of mastery and control Ginzburg exerts over her topic, one might also eventually wonder whether it makes sense in this context to speak of irony at all. For it needs to be said that in locating elegy and epigram as the two poles between which the Byronic subject shuttles, as if the two were absolutely separate and distinct from one another,¹⁰⁸ Ginzburg only substitutes sarcasm (saying one thing and meaning the opposite) for the most elementary understanding of irony (saying one thing and meaning another), which, even in this impoverished definition, opens the door to a certain amount of ambiguity unknown to sarcasm.¹⁰⁹ *Sashka* is ultimately seen as a comprehensible text, its “meaning” never doubted, since with the allowance made for sarcasm, the recovery of any “intent” becomes a straightforward affair.

Here I am interested less in seeking out a “Schlegelian” strain of irony—whatever that might be—in Lermontov’s *poema*, and thus in validating the choice between ironies Ginzburg offers us, than in asking a question which ought to precede everything else: is the language of the text as transparent as critics such as Ginzburg make it out to be? If not, what are the implications for the way we read it? The problem can be referred already to the *poema*’s opening lines.

Наш век смешон и жалок,—всё пиши
 Ему про казни, цепи да изгнания,
 Про темные волнения души,
 И только слышишь муки да страдания.
 Такие вещи очень хороши

¹⁰⁸ Or, as Jameson elaborates on the relationship of irony to the dialectic, “irony is the way in which a single side of the exchange views the dialectical reversal in which it changes place with its rival—the irony of defeat, the irony of victory: irony is in this sense an incomplete dialectic, and one whose only opposite is the non-ironic, the dumbfounded mesmerization by the empirical state of things, the stubborn belief—against all odds—in that law of non-contradiction which decrees that negative and positive, failure and success, are two distinct dispensations, separated from each other by reality itself, and to be kept that way!” (Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 42).

¹⁰⁹ On the problems of defining irony, see Paul de Man, “The Concept of Irony,” in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 163-184.

Тому, кто мало спит, кто думать любит,
 Кто дни свои в воспоминаньях губит.
 Впадал я прежде в эту слабость сам,
 И видел от нее лишь вред глазам;
 Но нынче я не тот уж, как бывало,—
 Пою, смеюсь.—Герой мой добрый малый.

Он был мой друг.

(«Сашка»)¹¹⁰

Our era is ridiculous and pitiful: write to it
 All about executions, fetters and exile,
 About the dark agitations of the soul,
 And all you hear is torment and suffering.
 Such things are good
 For one who sleeps little; who loves to think;
 Who wastes his days in remembrance.
 I myself succumbed to this weakness formerly,
 And from it saw only harm to my eyes.
 But today I am not the person I was in days gone by:
 I sing, I laugh [*poiū, smeius*']—my hero is a good chap.

He was my friend.

(*Sashka*)

The trope of a speaker declaring his turn from serious to comic or playful subject matter has precedents in Russian narrative poetry going back at least as far as Kheraskov's *Bakhariana* (1803),¹¹¹ but less often does one encounter so directly the contradictions involved in such a turn. Something happens mid-air as we leap from stanza one, with the assurance of a light-hearted theme on the other side (I sing, I laugh—*Poiū, smeius*'), but then land unexpectedly in the domain of the speaker's past (*On byl moi drug*), without quite knowing whether we have followed a course from elegy to epigram or from epigram to elegy. Or to phrase it otherwise, if the speaker is serious about his commitment to new themes, then the deployment of elegiac

¹¹⁰ Lermontov PSS 3: 364

¹¹¹ It is also important to note, however, that *A Fairy Tale for Children* contains a similar announcement in stanza three: "I used to sing a different kind of demon" («Я прежде пел про демона иного»). Lermontov PSS 3: 420.

language already in the second stanza (compare “He was my friend” to the first line of “To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky”: “I knew him”) ought to give us pause, for here we have the first instance in which the language of mourning is possibly being manipulated. Of course, our wavering over this question—is the speaker serious or not?—can also begin with the subtitle: “moral *poema*” (*nравственная поэма*). Are we to read *Sashka* as a joke in which the Lermontovian speaker views his former poetic themes askance, or do we rather take a cue from the subtitle itself and read the work as the “moral *poema*” it claims to be? Our inability to decide may suggest less that the terms of debate (elegy, *poema*, epigram) are no longer relevant to Lermontov (the position that virtually all critics after Eikhenbaum have taken), than that one genre (*poema*) already contains another (elegy), *is* already another, with the implication that we may need to start thinking about how we keep our meanings—and texts—separate. After all, it could be that the assumption that elegy is always supposed to be serious was in error from the start.

For the moment, at least, it is clear that one is strongly tempted to read *Sashka* ironically, to treat it as yet another example of that phenomenon in which we cannot emphasize one meaning without suppressing another. For this reason, it is instructive to read *Sashka* and “To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky” side by side, at least to see if our reading of one text will reshape our understanding of the other. Here are the third and fourth stanzas of each text.

Он был мой друг. Уж нет таких друзей...
 Мир сердцу твоему, мой милый Саша!
 Пусть спит оно в земле чужих полей,
 Не тронута никем, как дружба наша,
 В немом кладбище памяти моей.
 Ты умер, как и многие, без шума,
 Но с твердостью. Таинственная дума
 Еще блуждала на челе твоём,
 Когда глаза сомкнулись вечным сном;
 И то, что ты сказал перед кончиной,

Но он погиб далеко от друзей...
 Мир сердцу твоему, мой милый Саша!
 Покрытое землей чужих полей,
 Пусть тихо спит оно, как дружба наша
 В немом кладбище памяти моей.
 Ты умер, как и многие – без шума,
 Но с твердостью. Таинственная дума
 Еще блуждала на челе твоём,
 Когда глаза закрылись вечным сном;
 И то, что ты сказал перед кончиной,

Из слушавших не понял ни единый.

И было ль то привет стране родной,
 Названье ли оставленного друга,
 Или тоска по жизни молодой,
 Иль, просто, крик последнего недуга, –
 Как разгадать? Что может в час такой
 Наполнить сердце, жившее так много
 И так недолго с смутною тревогой?
 Один лишь друг умел тебя понять
 И ныне может, должен рассказать
 Твои мечты, дела и приключения –
 Глупцам в забаву, мудрым в поученье.

(«Сашка»)¹¹²

He was my friend. There are no such friends
 Now... Peace to your heart, my dear Sasha!
 May it sleep in the earth of foreign fields,
 Untouched by anyone, like our friendship,
 In the mute graveyard of my memory.
 You died, like many, without a sound,
 But with firmness. A cryptic thought
 Still wandered about your brow
 When your eyes were shut in eternal sleep;
 And that which you said before your end
 Was not understood by any of those listening.

And whether a greeting to your native country,

Or the name of a friend abandoned,
 Or yearning for youth,
 Or, simply, a cry of agony,
 Who can divine? Who in such a moment can

Fill a heart that lived so much
 And so long with vague uneasiness?

One friend alone was able to understand you
 And now can [and], should tell the story

Из слушавших тебя не понял ни единый...

И было ль то привет стране родной,
 Названье ли оставленного друга,
 Или тоска по жизни молодой,
 Иль просто крик последнего недуга,
 Кто скажет нам! твоих последних слов
 Глубокое и горькое значенье
 Потеряно... Дела твои, и мненья,
 И думы, все исчезло без следов,
 Как легкий пар вечерних облаков:
 Едва блеснут, их ветер вновь уносит...
 Куда они, зачем? – откуда? – кто их
 спросит...

(«Памяти А. И. Одоевского»)¹¹³

But he perished far from friends...
 Peace to your heart, my dear Sasha!
 Covered by the earth of foreign fields,
 May it sleep quietly, like our friendship,
 In the mute graveyard of my memory.
 You died, like many, without a sound,
 But with firmness. A cryptic thought
 Still wandered about your brow
 When your eyes closed in eternal sleep;
 And that which you said before your end
 Was not understood by anyone who was
 listening to you.

And whether a greeting to your native
 country,

Or the name of a friend abandoned,
 Or a yearning for youth,
 Or simply a cry of agony—
 Who can tell us! The profound and bitter
 meaning

Of your final words is lost... Your deeds,
 Opinions, and thoughts, all has disappeared
 without a trace,

Like the light steam of evening clouds:
 Just as they have shone, the wind takes
 them

¹¹² Lermontov PSS 3: 365.

¹¹³ Ibid., 2: 54.

Of your dreams, deeds and adventures—	Away again... Where are they going, and why?
Amusement for fools, a sermon for wise men.	And from where? Who can say...
<i>(Sashka)</i>	("To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky")

Although the texts share much the same language, they ultimately tell different stories. The story "To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky" would tell is that of the vanishing of the poet's deeds, opinions, and thoughts after death (*Dela tvoi, i mnen'ia / I dumy*), which will not even exist as inscription (*vse ischezlo bez sledov*). It is also worth noting that where the modality of figuration first seemed to be informed by metonymy (the wish of peace to the poet's heart, followed by the substitutions implied by the rhetorical questions), the representation of the poet's deeds, opinions, and thoughts relies on a metaphor, or at least something close to one, with the suggestion that these things have disappeared *like* the light steam of evening clouds (*Kak legkii par vechernikh oblakov*) which, as figures with neither origin nor direction, it would be pointless to interrogate (*Kuda oni, zachem?—otkuda?—kto ikh sprosit*). To achieve this figuration, the elegist makes a choice not to disclose anything, or in the language of the text itself, not to disturb either the heart or the friendship, the restoration of which might otherwise lead us to an integration of the metaphoric and metonymic interrelationships—a sense of the whole—and thus to a sense of closure.

By contrast, *Sashka* might be said to illustrate one of the practical consequences of doing what it is its countertext refuses to do: tell the whole story. For though the speaker, too, lays the heart to rest, he cannot leave it be, particularly when the question of testament is at stake: after all, what *did* the dying hero try to say to those around him (*Chto mozhet v chas takoi / Napolnit' serdtse, zhivshee tak mnogo / I tak nedolgo s smutnoiu trevogoi?*)? Muteness in this text is only nominally mute, and so it should come as no surprise that when the speaker announces his

intervention at the end of the fourth stanza, he hints at disclosing all. Indeed, where the elegist keeps mum on such matters as deeds, opinions, and thoughts, the speaker assumes the responsibility of narrating his hero's dreams, deeds, and adventures (*mechty, dela i prikliuchen'ia*)—a promise to recover what has been lost and to restore the whole. We can put this all another way: where the impulse in “To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky” is, figuratively speaking, to lay the dead to rest, to inter, the speaker's desire in *Sashka* is to bring the dead back, to make the absent present, to exhume—and the two stories can diverge only because they share a common “origin.”

Sashka could then be read as the threat to elegiac silence and omission, the interruption of the burial that seeks to bring the hero “back to life.” But though the contradiction between muteness and speech is supposedly resolved in favor of the latter, the last line of the fourth stanza puts us face to face with yet another interpretive dilemma. The paths of reading within the *poema* fork and lead nowhere: fools will receive the text as amusement (*Gluptsam v zabavu*), while wise men will take it as instruction or sermon (*mudrym v pouchen'e*). The choice seems obvious, since to read the text as something humorous rather than serious means taking at face value the speaker's claim to sing laughingly (*Poiu, smeius'*) and thus looking past the moments depicting, among other things, prostitution and the horrors of serfdom (to say nothing of the passages that seem to undermine any professed departure from older themes). And yet to choose “wisely” also has a cost, for it commits one to a reading of the text as if it were an instruction or religious sermon (*pouchen'e*), which, given the particular content which made the work unprintable in Lermontov's time, in one sense could be more foolish than the choice fools will make. The two modes of reception are not only inadequate when conceived in isolation, but also

mutually exclusive when taken together. *Sashka* can only be “read” with a sense that the reading one chooses is threatened every step of the way by another which must be suppressed.

But at this point we might also take stock of the condition on which this interpretation has proceeded, namely on the assumption of an essential difference between the texts. While this difference was assumed to be generic—one text being an elegy, the other a *poema*—the procedure of reading side by side now needs to be taken to a new level of critical self-awareness. Since the two texts “share” the same language, can we really be so confident in maintaining a separation between them? To phrase this reservation more specifically, should we not consider the possibility of a reversal in which the “*poema*” can be said to host the “elegiac” parasite, who might only sit “beside the grain,” a fellow guest with the *poema*, but who might just as well be the one who takes without giving, a “professional dinner guest?”

Insofar as we are accustomed to think of irony as arising in response to seriousness, no one will be surprised at the suggestion that irony disrupts narrative or that *Sashka* threatens any elegy that would share its language in the capacity of fellow guest. After all, Lermontov’s “moral *poema*” is already illegible without a countertext, offering at least two readings—between old themes and new, between amusement and instruction—which continually disrupt one another. Nor can there be any doubt that once passages of *Sashka* are displaced to “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky,” the supposed elegy, any responsible criticism will have to treat the language of mourning with a certain degree of suspicion. But now imagine that this process is inverted, that the displacement of “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky” to the *poema* might have a disrupting effect of its own, one that may not be strictly speaking ironic but that in its own way complicates the work of irony. The intrusion of the elegy might in fact operate like anacoluthon, the displacement of one grammatical system by another, interrupting the story of interruption which

should be irony's domain. In this scenario, the very attempt to mourn ironically is under threat from an impulse to mourn seriously. The problem in this case would seem to turn on the question of anteriority: if elegy is already interruptive, can it ever be stable enough to be interrupted in the first place?

We can, of course, approach the matter from a different angle, one which may allow us to pose the question without resorting to a discussion of chickens and eggs (which came first: the elegy or the *poema*?) by positing their simultaneity. Interestingly enough, it was Eikhenbaum who noted that Lermontov, even in his early period, exhibited a tendency at once toward pathetic and comic styles, a suggestion which goes some way in explaining why he was able to develop the demon figure in “two plans”: thus in 1831, Lermontov conceived of a project concerning a “satirical” demon that coincided with the early redactions of *Demon*, a development that would culminate, on the one hand, in the eighth redaction of this latter work and, on the other hand, in the rather less pathetic *Fairy Tale for Children*.¹¹⁴ The suggestion that Lermontov, from his earliest work onward, alternated between two styles—and parodied the texts into which he invested the most pathos—may give us some indication of his procedure in “To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky” and *Sashka*, but the problem is that the tendencies Eikhenbaum describes are not really simultaneous: comic style can be seen as a transition away from pathos, but we are given no indication of the way by which the passage from comedy to pathos is supposed to take place.

¹¹⁴ Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, 137-138/119-120. It is, of course, somewhat curious that toward the beginning of his study Eikhenbaum writes that self-repetition is conducted without regard to genre and style (“without paying attention to distinctions of styles and genres”; “не обращая внимания на различие стилей и жанров”), but insists later that stylistic difference emerges with just the slightest violation in the unity of intonation or lexical material (“By taking conventional forms, and thereby losing motivation, the high pathetic element easily switches to the comic; all that is necessary is to violate slightly the unity of lexical material or the unity of intonation”; “Принимая условные формы и, тем самым, выпадая из мотивировки, высокая патетика легко переходит в комическое—стоит только слегка нарушить единство лексического материала или единство интонации”). *Ibid.*, 19, 137/20, 120.

This methodological limitation stems in part from Eikhenbaum's unwillingness to address any theory of irony worth its weight—something he surely could have done, particularly insofar as his opposition of styles already recalls the “constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction” by which Schlegel characterized irony in *Athenaeum* fragment 51.¹¹⁵ In any event, I will suggest that, insofar as we are dealing with ambiguity, this discussion of Lermontovian repetition may benefit from at least one reference to Schlegel. This is by no means to raise the question of influence¹¹⁶ but only to consider the possibility that one of Schlegel's lesser-known formulations of irony may help us elucidate things. I want to point out in addition that I am not interested in rehearsing the debate over whether or not irony can be “defused.”¹¹⁷ The more important question for our purposes concerns the transformation of irony as such. In other words, what, if anything, happens to irony once it becomes “perfect” and “absolute?” Does irony ever stop being itself? One passage from Schlegel's private notebooks seems to suggest as much: “Perfect, absolute irony ceases to be irony and becomes serious” (Die vollendete absolute Ironie hört auf Ironie zu seyn und wird ernsthaft¹¹⁸).

The implications of this thought are far-reaching, insofar as theorists of trope and rhetoric have long thought irony to signal the point of no return for literature and discourse. For Hayden White, irony marks a descent into skepticism and disbelief after which there can be no renewed

¹¹⁵ “[S]tete Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung” (Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Hans Eichner [München: Paderborn, 1967], 2: 172). All Schlegel translations are taken from Ayon Roy's helpful article, “Hegel contra Schlegel; Kierkegaard contra de Man,” *PMLA* 124.1 (2009): 107-126.

¹¹⁶ Cf. A. S. Nemzer and L. M. Shehemeleva, “Ironiia,” in *Lermontovskaia entsiklopediia*, ed. V. A. Manuilov (Moscow: Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1981), 199-200.

¹¹⁷ For this, see Paul de Man, “The Concept of Irony,” 163-184.

¹¹⁸ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Hans Eichner (München: Paderborn, 1981), 16: 144.

commitment to language and its representational systems.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, many will recall that it is one of Schlegel's other formulations of irony that guides Paul de Man's studies: "Irony is a permanent parabasis" ("Die Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbase"¹²⁰), an intrusion so violent it prevents narrative from ever finishing what it has started. But when de Man writes of the "seriousness" with which we must understand "absolute irony," one senses that he and Schlegel might be speaking of slightly different things.

When we speak, then, of irony originating at the cost of the empirical self, the statement has to be taken seriously enough to be carried to the extreme: absolute irony is a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness; it is a consciousness of a non-consciousness, a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself. But this reflection is made possible only by the double structure of ironic language: the ironist invents a form of himself that is "mad" but that does not know its own madness; he then proceeds to reflect on his madness thus objectified.¹²¹

For de Man, then, absolute irony, taken to the extreme, "is a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness," with emphasis falling here on the end or limit. Yet Schlegel discerns a critical change taking place at another sort of extreme—"Perfect, absolute irony ceases to be irony and becomes serious"—where a transformation so radical occurs that irony ceases to be what it is. We do not yet know if this means a transformation *back* into seriousness—but it does suggest that irony's metamorphosis is possible.

The point of this digression has been less to suggest that "To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky" and *Sashka* illustrate in practice the transformation of irony into seriousness than to

¹¹⁹ "Irony presupposes the occupation of a 'realistic' perspective on reality, from which a nonfigurative representation of the world of experience might be provided. Irony thus represents a stage of consciousness in which the problematical nature of language itself has become recognized. It points to the potential foolishness of all linguistic characterizations of reality as much as to the absurdity of the beliefs it parodies" (Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1973], 37).

¹²⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, 18: 85.

¹²¹ Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," 216. To be sure, de Man has been discussing Baudelaire at this juncture.

complicate what we already know about irony, namely that it leaves us without a means by which to negotiate meaning. When we read the texts side by side, we see that differences on the level of *sujet* begin to emerge from the repetitions or language the texts share; we see that the texts tell different stories, but we cannot really tell which text interrupts the other, or whether they are both ironic and thus both interruptive. Schlegel's formulation helps us recognize another dimension to this problem, which is not so much that irony somewhere ends or is defused, as that its transformation may have taken place without our knowing it. Juxtaposing the texts to one another, we no longer have to decide which text repeats the other or which genre or modality of figuration responds to the other;¹²² we can see them as presenting multiple interpretive possibilities at once, though without indication of how to choose between them.

It should be noted that this problem persists up through stanzas 136 and 137 of *Sashka*, where that text intersects with “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky” for the last time. In the supposedly ironic *poema*, the representation of disappearing clouds is a subject unto itself that precedes the simile (the clouds' disappearance is likened to the love and dream of a poet¹²³), while in “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky,” the process is more complicated: the deeds, opinions, and thoughts prepare the transition to the figure of transitory clouds, the tracelessness of which is then compared to the love and dream of a child.

И, наконец, [облака] одетые туманом,
Обнявшись, свившись будто куча змей,
Беспечно дремлют на скале своей.
Настанет день,—их ветер вновь уносит:

[...] Дела твои, и мненья,
И думы, все исчезло без следов,
Как легкий пар вечерних облаков:
Едва блеснут, их ветер вновь уносит...

¹²² In any event, as Kenneth Burke taught us long ago, it does not matter which “master trope”—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—we start out with: if we have one, we can find the others: “[T]he four tropes shade into one another. Give a man but one of them, tell him to exploit its possibilities, and if he is thorough in doing so, he will come upon the other three” (Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969], 503).

¹²³ Commentators including Eikhenbaum and Naidich have suggested Odoevskij as the apostrophized poet.

Куда, зачем, откуда?—кто их спросит?

И после них на свете нет следа,
 Как от любви поэта безнадёжной,
 Как от мечты, которой никогда
 Он не открыл вниманью дружбы нежной.
 И ты, чья жизнь как беглая звезда
 Промчалася неслышно между нами,
 Ты мук своих не выразишь словами;
 Ты не хотел насмешки выпить яд,
 С улыбкою притворной, как Сократ;
 И, не разгадан глупою толпою,
 Ты умер чуждый жизни... Мир с тобою!

(«Сашка»¹²⁴)

And finally, (clouds) dressed in fog,
 Embracing, winding together as a pile of snakes,
 Carelessly doze on their cliff.
 When the day comes, the wind takes them away

Again: where, why, whence? – Who can say?

And after them on earth there is no trace,
 As from the hopeless love of a poet,
 As from a dream which he never
 Disclosed to the attention of tender friendship.

And you, whose life like a racing star
 Rushed between us unnoticed,
 You cannot express your torments in words;

You did not want to drink the poison of derision,
 Like Socrates, with a feigned smile;

And, still mysterious to the stupid crowd,
 You died, a stranger to life... Peace be with you!

Куда они, зачем?—откуда?—кто их
 спросит...

И после их на небе нет следа,
 Как от любви ребенка безнадёжной,
 Как от мечты, которой никогда
 Он не вверял заботам дружбы нежной!...
 Что за нужда!... пускай забудет свет
 Столь чуждое ему существование:
 Зачем тебе венцы его вниманья
 И терния пустых его клевет?
 Ты не служил ему, ты с юных лет
 Коварные его отвергнул цепи:
 Любил ты моря шум, молчанье синей
 степи—

(«Памяти А. И. Одоевского»¹²⁵)

Your deeds, and opinions, and thoughts,
 Everything has disappeared without a trace,
 Like the light steam of evening clouds
 Just as they have shined, the wind takes
 them away

Again... Where are they going, and why,
 And from where? Who can say...

And afterward there is no trace of them in
 the sky,
 As from the hopeless love of a child,
 As from a dream which he never
 Entrusted to the concern of tender
 friendship!...

What need!... Let the world forget
 An existence so foreign to it:
 Why would you want the wreath of its
 attention

And the thorns of its empty slander?
 You did not serve it, from your youngest
 years you

Rejected its treacherous chains:
 You loved the sound of the sea, the silence
 of the blue steppe...

¹²⁴ Lermontov PSS 3: 410-411.

¹²⁵ Lermontov PSS 2: 54-55.

(*Sashka*)

(“To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky”)

It goes without saying that at this juncture we could read both texts with ironic skepticism, seeing in the clouds only a convenient figure for mourning, but we might also take note of another tropological moment at play here. If we read from *poema* to elegy, we see that the passage in “To the Memory of A. I. Odoevsky” serves as a metonymy of cause-for-effect according to which the poet’s attributes precede the clouds. And yet when read in the other direction, it is still not clear whether the reflection on clouds in *Sashka* should precede the address to the dead. In other words, while both texts might be ironic, they might also be metonymic figurations of one another. In the end, our ignorance regarding irony can be extended to tropological systems in general: metonymy might enable the emergence of irony, but irony in turn might slide back into a modality of figuration that is, at its heart, metonymic.

Of course, since we are dealing with the topic of repetition, it would be completely appropriate to ask where the figure comes from, as if identifying a “source” would somehow clarify everything. Anyone with even a passing familiarity with Lermontov’s work, however, knows that his poetry and prose abound with such figures; and yet, as I have stated before, if we pursue the source long enough, we will eventually come upon that moment when self-repetition slides into repetition. In the present instance, we find that moment, unsurprisingly, in Odoevsky’s “Elegy,” to which I have referred above.

Что вы печальны, дети снов,
Летучей жизни привиденья?
Как хороводы облаков,
С небес, по воле дуновенья,
Летят и тают в вышине,
Следов нигде не оставляя,
Равно в подоблачной стране
Неслися вы!¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Odoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, 79.

Why are you mournful, children of dreams,
 Ghosts of a fleeting life?
 As round dances of clouds
 Fly from the heavens by the will of the wind,
 And vanish in the ether,
 Leaving traces nowhere—
 In like manner you have been borne across the country
 Under the clouds!

Because the elegist has claimed that such things as deeds, opinions, and thoughts ultimately vanish without a trace, like clouds, we would be right to expect that not even poetry, into whatever category it falls, is exempted from this general fate. But the figure does not disappear irrevocably, it reappears from one poem to the next, wandering without precise origins or directions. Poetry, too, will have to be said to be capable of return—the validity of any science of allusion depends on it—which tells us that the figure is not really like what it is said to be like. We could pursue the origin of the figure, either in Lermontov’s work or in Russian literature more broadly, but as both texts indicate, there is not much point in interrogating clouds.

IV. An Afterthought on Mourning’s Tautologies

I want to conclude this chapter by revisiting a lesser-known moment from the history of Lermontov reception. It is a moment which exemplifies a number of concerns central to discourse on elegy, the most important for our purposes being an awareness of the end of repetition. In the 1830s and 1840s, Eudocia Rostopchina (1812-1858) wrote poems on the deaths of several Russian poets, including Lermontov, in whose memory she addressed such lyrics as “To Our Future Poets” (*Nashim budushchim poetam*), “I know I have not long to live” (*Ia znaiu, ne dolgo mne zhit’ ostaetsia*), “A Poetic Day” (*Poeticheskii den’*) and “Blank Album” (*Pustoi al’bom*—a poem that, incidentally, takes its epigraph from “To the Memory of A. I. Odоеvsky”). As we know, this period witnessed the decline of Russian poetic culture, a decline marked not

only by the rise of prose but also by the deaths of the poets themselves, and so it is not surprising that Rostopchina and her contemporaries registered their awareness of this transitional period in various ways. The particular passage I am interested in is a prose entry from Rostopchina's album dating to June 19, 1852. While she seems initially only to have been copying Alexander Odoevsky's "On the Death of Griboedov," the entry develops into a broader reflection on death and mourning.

Serving as a Russian envoy at the Persian court in Tehran, Griboedov was slaughtered by the Persians and perished. Prince Odoevsky, involved in the December 14 conspiracy, was kept in the [Peter and Paul] Fortress under arrest; was sentenced to penal servitude in eternal exile in Siberia, with loss of rank and nobility status; he was then pardoned, and died in the Caucasus while serving as a private (*riadovym*). Lermontov's beautiful verses—"Peace to your ashes, my dear Sasha" (*Mir prakhu tvoemu, moi milyi Sasha*)—refer to him.

A strange convergence (*Strannoe sblizhenie*): in the course of twelve years the exiled Odoevsky writes on the death of Griboedov, then dies himself, and is sung by Lermontov. In two years Lermontov perishes, shot by Martynov in a duel, in Piatigorsk in the Caucasus, and Countess Rostopchina writes verses on his death, as if to conclude with a woman's hand the series of victims of violent death!..

NB. I would like to know: who is fated to mourn my death with a poetic remembrance?.. and more importantly: will my death be mourned and sung [*vospeta*] by anyone?..

Грибоедов, бывши посланником России при Персидском дворе, в Тегеране,—погиб, зарезанный персианами; князь Александр Одоевский, замешанный в заговоре 14-го Декабря, был в крепости, под судом, и приговорен к вечной ссылке на каторжные работы в Сибири, с лишением чинов и дворянства; потом прощен, и умер на Кавказе рядовым. К нему относятся прекрасные стихи М. Лермонтова: „Мир праху твоему, мой милый Саша“.

Странное сближение: в течение 12 лет сосланный Одоевский пишет на смерть умерщвленного Грибоедова,—потом сам умирает, и воспет Лермонтовым; через два года Лермонтова погибает, застреленный Мартыновым на дуэли, в Пятигорске, на Кавказе,—и на смерть его стихи писаны графинею Ростопчиною, как будто для того, чтобы женскою рукою заключить ряд этих жертв насильственной смерти!..

NB. Желала бы я знать, кому суждено оплакать мою смерть поэтическим воспоминанием?.. и главное,—будет ли моя смерть оплакана и воспета кем-нибудь?..»¹²⁷

Of course, the “strange convergence” (*strannoe sblizhenie*) Rostopchina identifies proves to be a formulation of the “Death of a Poet” cycle, *tombeau*, or what you will, long before it was theorized by Levinton and Lipking. What makes the convergence particularly Russian is the acknowledgement and acceptance of the high stakes of commemorating poets who have died violent deaths: to write “on the death of” a poet such as Griboedov is to expose yourself to the risk that you, too, may meet a violent end. To situate this difference in broader discourse on elegy, one could say that the tradition Rostopchina delineates shifts emphasis away from questions of poetic inheritance—and the struggle over who has the “right” to mourn, about which Lipking, Sacks, and before them, Bloom, have written—toward the sheer cost of mourning.

But Rostopchina seems to imply that there are further complications that have arisen in the wake of her discovery. As she recognizes that her role in stopping the series of deaths owes something to gender, she is also aware that she has halted only the violence, and not death itself. Hence her hesitation at the end of the entry: the question Who will mourn me? is corrected to the more sobering Will I be mourned? And here we have that well-known gesture, noted by critics of elegy as well as elegists themselves, in which concern for the lost other(s) proves to be a displaced thought for the self, in which mourning begins its ineluctable slide into self-mourning.¹²⁸ This is not to say that the memory of Griboedov, Odoevsky, and Lermontov only serves as the pretext for Rostopchina’s self-pity, but it does underscore yet another aspect of the

¹²⁷ Cited in M. Gillel’s son, “Poslednii priezd Lermontova v Peterburg,” *Zvezda* 3 (1977): 193-194.

¹²⁸ See Joseph Brodsky, “Footnote to a Poem,” in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986), 195-267; and Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy*, 1-37. This is a critical presupposition which R. Clifton Spargo, in *The Ethics of Mourning*, interrogates in order to redirect attention to the other’s alterity.

double-bind or dialectic of mourning of which one of the epigraphs to this chapter is a variation: to stop death is to pass from the scene of mourning, to write oneself out of mourning's commemorative act, but to be mourned means that death is still very much in the picture, a woman's protective hand, in this case, reversing into the hand that serves to perpetuate death.

Now the fact that Rostopchina's death was not, in the end, met with any sort of poetic remembrance poses something of a problem for any theory of elegy which would locate mourning as the site where ethics is born; or, if one prefers, it becomes at least slightly more difficult to argue that elegists, who are entrusted with the task of remembering, are always *a priori* on the "right" side of ethics if they allow one of their own to be forgotten. In any event, the communal forgetting of Rostopchina reveals an aspect of elegy and mourning not mentioned often enough, namely that, *pace* Bloom, one always chooses whom one mourns. Insofar as one person can be selected at the exclusion of another, elegy might be said to be less ethical than elitist, in the etymological sense of the word. And this applies no less to the elitist herself: by commemorating another you in no way guarantee that you yourself will be remembered.

I would argue, however, that the most important—if also seemingly least significant—moment in all this concerns Rostopchina's misremembrance of the line, "Peace to your heart, my dear Sasha" (*mir serdtsu tvoemu, moi milyi Sasha*). I have already noted that the line displaces the idiomatic "peace to your ashes" or "peace to your remains" (*mir prakhu tvoemu*) and implied that the reference to Odoevsky's heart becomes more personal precisely because it is less conventional. Yet even if the wish of peace is also used verbatim in *Sashka*, a fact of which Rostopchina presumably could not have known, it serves as a reminder of one of mourning's tautologies, namely the tendency of language to return to itself without concern for any original context which may have given rise to it. Rostopchina's intent is to refer to a specific line from a

specific poem, but what is expressed ends up forfeiting its claim to specificity: because “peace to your ashes,” the equivalent of the English-language “rest in peace,” could refer to anyone, it tells us nothing about the dead. Where there is commemoration, obliteration is not far behind.¹²⁹ It is as if language had a mechanism for forgetting that all mourning, unbeknownst to the mourner, is at risk of triggering.

¹²⁹ Susan Stewart, “Discandied,” *The Nation* (12 September 2011): 52.

2: Imagined Interruptions

Gift most worthy of the heavens,
Source of joy and tears,
Sensitivity! How beautiful you are,
How kind—but how unfortunate in your workings!”

О дар, достойнейший небес,
Источник радости и слез,
Чувствительность! сколь ты прекрасна,
Мила,—но в действиях несчастна!..

— N. M. Karamzin, “Alina”¹³⁰

It is from [the] very illusion of the imagination, that the foresight of our own dissolution is so terrible to us [...]

— Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*¹³¹

I. A Sentimental Introduction

As strange as it may sound, Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin (1766-1826) has been something of an embarrassment for critics past and present. From a career that spans an apprenticeship with the Novikov circle in Moscow (1785-1789), a “Grand Tour”¹³² that passes through France in the wake of the Revolution (1789-1790), a decade or so of intense writing and editing as the chief spokesman for a new literary school up through the accession of Alexander I (1791-1803), and then the “conservative” turn, that final phase of activity culminating in the

¹³⁰ N. M. Karamzin, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, ed. with introduction and commentary by Iurii Lotman (Moscow—Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1966), 84. Hereafter referred to as Karamzin PSS, followed by page number. Translations are mine.

¹³¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759], ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 16.

¹³² As several scholars have noted, in the eighteenth century the Russian *zaganichnoe puteshestvie* and the European Grand Tour did not have quite the same purpose—hence the quotation marks. See, for instance, Ioakhim Klein, *Russkaia literatura v XVIII veke* (Moscow: Indrik, 2010), 365ff.

(completed?¹³³) twelve-volume *History of the Russian State* (1803-1826)—from all this, critics have generally felt obligated to reconcile the “good” aesthetic achievements with the “bad” moral conscience when approaching Karamzin’s life and art.¹³⁴

This embarrassment, of course, is inseparable from a broader discomfort with the legacies of Sentimentalism, the Russian counterpart (roughly) and heir of that moment known in Europe as the Age of Sensibility. The two periods obviously diverge in important ways, but critics skeptical of the rhetoric of sentiment have discerned in the representatives of both a certain ethical failure. To give one example, Robert Markley connects Laurence Sterne’s celebration of sentimental virtue to his unwillingness to represent “social and economic inequalities” in all their crudeness. The sentimentalist’s goodwill is ideologically motivated. Thus at one point in *A Sentimental Journey* when Yorick gives money to a French chambermaid, encouraging her to “be but as good as thou art handsome, and heaven will fill it [her purse],”¹³⁵ the gesture, Markley argues, implies a close relationship between virtue and money, “good nature” being viewed as a “commodity.” And if we are given little insight into the historical conditions that made possible this conception of virtue, it is because Sterne “attempts both to assert the ‘timeless’ nature of a specific historical and cultural construction of virtue and to suppress his reader’s recognition of the social and economic inequalities upon which this discourse of seemingly transcendent virtue

¹³³ Though the twelfth volume was published only posthumously in 1828, Lotman argues somewhat against the grain that the *History* was more or less finished at the time of Karamzin’s death. See Iu. M. Lotman, *Sotvorenie Karamzina* (Moscow: Kniga, 1987), 303, 313.

¹³⁴ I hasten to add that the embarrassment or hesitation over Karamzin’s political views, such as they were, has occasionally spilled over into evaluations of his texts; and even among his most sympathetic readers one finds that commentaries on Karamzin’s various achievements are followed by asterisks. Lotman’s remarks in his essay “Karamzin’s Poetry” (*Poeziia Karamzina*) are symptomatic. Always generously inclined to assume an excess rather than a dearth of meaning in texts, Lotman nevertheless does not find enough that is formally original to prevent him from excluding his subject from the ranks of first-tier poets, granting him only the consolation prize of having paved the way for the truly talented Zhukovsky and Batiushkov, as well as the young Pushkin. See Karamzin PSS 27, 50-51.

¹³⁵ Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, ed. Gardner Stout, Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 188.

is based.” Money is equated with virtue in such a way that the text fails to “demythologize the genealogy of sentiment,” an undertaking that would demonstrate “how one acquires the wealth to be able to afford one charitable act after another” in the first place.¹³⁶ The expression of sentiment, in short, masks a conservative ideology intent on protecting the status quo.

Meanwhile, literary histories from the Soviet era put most of the Russian Sentimentalists, including Karamzin, at a disadvantage precisely because a figure dedicated to social and economic change *can* be found in their ranks: Alexander Radishchev. This is why Karamzin’s aristocratic or “noble” Sentimentalism, when viewed as a retreat from social problems into aesthetics, tends to come up short when measured against the “democratic”—and indeed “revolutionary”—version Radishchev practiced.¹³⁷ According to P. A. Orlov, one version of Sentimentalism displayed its commitment to attaining human equality by depicting the horrors of serfdom, horrors that the other version was all too eager to dismiss as aberrations or shy away from altogether. To be sure, not all critics have qualified their judgments of Karamzin to this extent (though it may have seemed at times that Yuri Lotman was Karamzin’s sole apologist). But the very practice, evident even into the late 1970s, of separating “democratic” from “noble” (*dvorianskii*) Sentimentalism testifies to an unabated need to keep the former safely apart from the latter.¹³⁸ If it seems at first glance that the elevation of a “democratic” and “revolutionary”

¹³⁶ Robert Markley, “Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue,” in *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne*, ed. Melvyn New (New York: G. K. Hall, 1998): 270-271.

¹³⁷ At least one scholar, however, has argued that the division of Sentimentalism into two “wings” of the same movement tends to obscure rather than illuminate matters. See G. S. Smith, “Sentimentalism and Preromanticism as Terms and Concepts,” in *Russian Literature in the Age of Catherine the Great: A Collection of Essays*, ed. A. G. Cross (Oxford: Willem A. Meeuws, 1976): 176-178.

¹³⁸ Hence the guarded reappraisal of “noble” Sentimentalism in P. A. Orlov, *Russkii sentimentalizm* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1977), 29-30.

aesthetics exposing the brutality of serfdom was primarily a Soviet concern, one could point to the persistence of that tradition's critical vocabulary in recent Western scholarship.¹³⁹

At least one reason why the literature of sentiment remains susceptible to these and other criticisms has to do with the seeming incompatibility between the ideologies of that period (and particularly the focus on the self as a source of knowledge) and the obsession with alterity characteristic to various fields of thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is not surprising, insofar as the common wisdom holds that Russian Sentimentalism is inherently solipsistic.¹⁴⁰ Though the Sentimentalist might claim to seek another with whom to “sympathize,” the discourse of sentiment only simulates interest in alterity. The Sentimentalist is not genuinely concerned with other people for their own sake. Rather, as I. R. Titunik notes, the “sentimentalist author writes either directly or at least indirectly and ultimately about himself.”¹⁴¹ As a consequence, every represented “object” in a Sentimentalist text, from landscapes to characters, can be referred back to an authorial consciousness.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ “At no point, neither on his travel through Europe nor in later life, did it occur to him that the peasants in Russia were suffering a similar fate as the oppressed, tax-burdened Jews [in Frankfurt am Main—DH] or the restrained creatures [of the Versailles menagerie—DH] serving their master's amusement. If one were allowed to deduce attitudes from manifest later actions then the certain lack of *chiaroscuro* in Karamzin's Letters cannot be excused with his young age... but it was ingrained in the author's character by his aristocratic upbringing during the era of Catherine II. Serfs were a commodity for dowries, heritages or other property transactions, their toils a sinecure for the leisurely life of the gentry” (Gerda S. Panofsky, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin in Germany: Fiction as Facts* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010], 71).

¹⁴⁰ G. Gukovskii, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi literatury i obshchestvennoi mysli XVIII veka* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1938), 235-314, esp. 270-271.

¹⁴¹ I. R. Titunik, “Russian Sentimentalist Rhetoric of Fiction (“Image of Author”), *Semiosis: Semiotics and the History of Culture*. In *Honorem Georgii Lotman*, ed. Morris Halle et al (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984): 231.

¹⁴² This position cannot help but overlook one of the primary insights made by Erich Auerbach and Lydia Ginzburg, namely that any writer's style always reveals the limitations of the writer's perception of history and social relations—in a word, of reality itself. See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953), 24-33 and passim; V. G. Benediktov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, ed. with an introduction by Lidiia Ginzburg (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1939), xviii.

Karamzin in all this is no exception. Indeed, his comments on the connection between ethics and aesthetics seem to tell us as much. In his short essay, “What Does a Writer Need?” (*Chto nuzhno avtoru?* [1793]), Karamzin famously answered his own question by suggesting that in addition to talent a writer also needed to have a “kind, gentle heart.” The ability to commiserate with others is said to be one of the prerequisites of the vocation: “Do you want to be a writer? Read the history of mankind’s misfortunes, and if your heart does not bleed, set aside your pen—otherwise, you will show us the cold gloom of your soul.”¹⁴³ But there is a twist here: to be sensitive to the sufferings of others is good for a writer precisely because it is the writer’s own sensitivity that will be conveyed; or, in Karamzin’s own formulation, “the artist is always depicted in the art.”¹⁴⁴ The writer may betray his good or bad qualities when depicting others, but they remain his, the writer’s, either way—hence the solipsism. Knowing the other is the illusion that makes knowing the self possible. It is presumably this subordination of ethics to aesthetics (feeling bad for others makes good art) that so jars with contemporary sensibilities.

I will contend, however, that the charge of solipsism, which has admittedly yielded much insight into the Sentimentalist project, may be overly simplistic. I think we can all agree that an artist who represents characters in his own likeness and then endlessly announces his sensitivity to those characters’ misfortunes is suspect. At the same time, though, the significance of the other in Karamzin’s writings has not been adequately examined precisely because a basic presupposition has not been put into question. Indeed, scholars have been too eager to accept the syllogism—all Sentimentalists are solipsistic; Karamzin is a Sentimentalist; therefore, Karamzin is solipsistic—at face value. This problem is compounded by the tendency of scholarship to

¹⁴³ «Ты хочешь быть автором: читай историю несчастий рода человеческого—и если сердце твое не обольется кровию, оставь перо,—или оно изобразит нам хладную мрачность души твоей» (N. M. Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, ed. G. P. Makogonenko [Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984], 2: 61).

¹⁴⁴ «Творец всегда изображается в творчестве» (Ibid., 2: 60).

assume a view of the Sentimentalist text as nothing more than an expression of Sentimentalist aesthetics, however vaguely theorized. The very “things” we are accustomed to think of as being “Sentimental”—the pastoral setting, the affected rhetoric, the exclamations, and, most importantly for this chapter, the interruptions¹⁴⁵—are automatically referred back to a theory of Sentimentalism without further consideration of their significance. In short, correspondence between theory and praxis is assumed *a priori*.

In this chapter, I will argue that the figure of interruption in Karamzin’s elegiac writings is not merely a Sentimental topos but a sign of the author’s preoccupation with alterity. In the works I examine below, I will show that interruption frequently occurs in conjunction with a thought for the dead other, whether that other is a beloved, a mother, or a figure altogether unknown to the narrator. What makes these occurrences “elegiac” is not simply their presence in a genre or mode Karamzin explicitly references¹⁴⁶; it is also their designation of loss as a problem of language. By this I mean that when a poetic or prosaic narrative suddenly breaks off, there is always some question regarding the extent to which the interruption has been “built into” the text (and this applies even when we speak of a seemingly unfinished work such as “Liodor”). The possibility of planned interruption, in turn, raises questions regarding the sincerity of Karamzin’s interest in the other, namely whether the other is a planned or staged presence in the service of artistic ends. Rather than try to resolve this problem, I will attempt to demonstrate that the relationship between interruption and alterity, and the extent to which that relationship presides over Karamzin’s narratives, should at least give one cause to reconsider the view that the Sentimentalist is exclusively solipsistic. I begin by establishing the relationship between

¹⁴⁵ E.g. Gitta Hammarberg, *From the Idyll to the Novel: Karamzin’s Sentimentalist Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 153, 155, 212.

¹⁴⁶ Though this does happen, as in the reflection on elegy in the essay “Something about the Sciences, the Arts, and Enlightenment,” and in the subtitle to “Sierra Morena”: “An Elegiac Fragment” (*elegicheskii otryvok*).

interruption and alterity in Karamzin's musings on original poetry. From there I examine two ways interruption is figured as a mode of interaction in the poem "Epistle to Women" and the short story "Sierra Morena." Finally, I revisit Karamzin's most famous text "Poor Liza" and illustrate how the interruption of mourning coincides with the interruption of the figural imagination.

II. First Poetry; or, Something about Elegy

Ostensibly a response to Rousseau's *First Discourse* (*Discours sur les sciences et les arts* [1751]), "Something about the Sciences, the Arts, and Enlightenment" (*Nechto o naukakh, iskusstvakh i prosveshchenii* [1794]) can be read as Karamzin's intervention not only into discussions of Rousseau's legacy, particularly in the wake of the French Revolution and his own so-called "crisis" of 1793-1794, but also more broadly into questions that had long troubled eighteenth-century thought.¹⁴⁷ From musings on the "first poetic creation" and reflections on how the sciences and arts came into being, to discursive comments on human "sentiments" (behind which Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Moses Mendelssohn, and others seem to loom large¹⁴⁸), Karamzin's essay is very much a product of its time. In its own way, "Something" could be said to demonstrate that "progressive-regressive method" typified by Rousseau, which might not necessarily begin like the *Second Discourse* by "setting all the facts aside," but which still requires thinking one's way back to a time of origins, only then to reverse course toward the present by tracing the ways our institutions and "morals" have developed, how the former have

¹⁴⁷ See Iurii Lotman, "Evoliutsiia mirovozzreniia Karamzina (1789-1803)," in *Karamzin* (Saint Petersburg: Iskustvo—SPB, 1997), 322.

¹⁴⁸ Though he engaged with a number of eighteenth-century philosophers of sentiment, an important figure who is conspicuously absent from Karamzin's purview is Adam Smith, particularly the early Smith who authored *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). There seems to be no indication that Karamzin was familiar with this work. It is possible that he knew of it through M. N. Muravev's mediation. See N. D. Kochetkova, *Literatura russkogo sentimentalizma (Esteticheskie i khudozhestvennye iskaniiia)* (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 1994), 132-134.

determined the latter.¹⁴⁹ In this section I simply concentrate on the ways original poetry emerges from an interruption caused by the death of another human being.

Important for this purpose is the passage in which Karamzin both defines the arts and touches on the origins of poetry in an accompanying footnote. With regard to the former, Karamzin writes:

What are the arts? *The imitation of nature*. Thick branches grown together were the model for the first hut and the foundation of architecture. Wind blowing into the aperture of a broken cane (*trosti*) or against the strings of a bow, and singing birds taught us music, the shadow of objects—drawing and painting. The turtle-dove, lamenting to the branches over its dead mate, was instructor (*nastavnitseiu*) to the first elegiac poet. Like the turtle dove, the elegist wanted to express his grief when he had lost his sweetheart. And all the songs of primitive peoples (*mladenchestvennykh narodov*) begin as a comparison to nature's objects and actions.

Что суть искусства?—Подражание натуре. Густые, сросшиеся ветви были образцом первой хижины и основанием архитектуры; ветер, веявший в отверстие сломленной трости или на струны лука, и поющие птички научили нас музыке; тень предметов—рисованью и живописи. Горлица, сетующая на ветви об умершем дружке своем, была наставницею первого элегического поэта; подобно ей, хотел он выразить горесть свою, лишась милой подруги,—и все песни младенческих народов начинаются сравнением с предметами или действиями природы.¹⁵⁰

In defining the arts as the imitation of nature, Karamzin of course follows a long line of thinkers from antiquity down to his own present. Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, when the Aristotelian view of mimesis began to be revised, Karamzin found a way to reconcile traditional and modern perspectives on the matter. Thus where Karl Philipp Moritz could suggest in 1785 that in art the “principle of the imitation of nature” had been superseded by or “subordinated” to

¹⁴⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 222-223.

¹⁵⁰ N. M. Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2: 47-48.

the “principle of *pleasure*,”¹⁵¹ Karamzin argues that the two go hand in hand: the “fine arts” (*iziashchnye iskusstva*), which presuppose the imitation of nature, come into being precisely because “man wants to live *pleasantly*.”¹⁵² Karamzin remained essentially committed to the “principle of imitation” as the primary function of art even as other thinkers of his time, such as Moritz, were beginning to recognize art as being fundamentally non-representational and without purpose.

But what strikes one about the passage is the ambiguity or even confusion that arises in distinguishing nature's accidents from its intentions. The branches grown together and the wind blowing into the broken cane were presumably not intended to teach or inspire anything, while, on the other hand, the rhetoric of pedagogy (cf. the birds who “taught” us [*nauchali*] music and the turtle-dove as “instructor” [*nastavnitsa*]) implies an intent or motive behind nature’s activities, activities that can be learned and transmitted. We face another, related problem in deciding whether nature's accidents are meant to be seen as the inspiration of or stimulus to human enterprises (the branches that will inspire the building of a hut or the foundation of something grander), or whether in the act of mimesis (*podrazhanie*) man consciously “walks the same road” as nature (cf. the etymology of *podrazhat*: *po*, “along,” and *draga*, or “way” [*doroga*]) and thus settles for an imitation or copy.¹⁵³ In any event, the implications will be

¹⁵¹ Karl Philipp Moritz, “An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of *That Which is Complete in Itself*,” trans. with an introduction by Elliott Schreiber, *PMLA* 127.1 (January 2012): 97. To be sure, Moritz himself did not see in the “principle of pleasure” art’s purpose. He was rather one of the first to articulate the idea that all art is non-representational.

¹⁵² «Но что ж заставило нас подражать природе, то есть что произвело искусства? Природное человеку стремление к улучшению бытия своего, к умножению жизненных прятностей» [...] «Он хочет жить приятно: являются так называемые изящные искусства, которые усыпают жизненный путь его» (N. M. Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2: 48).

¹⁵³ Reference to Karamzin’s other writings will not clarify matters much. On the one hand, in 1787 he could still say that art is inferior to nature. Recall the letter of April 20 to Johann Kaspar Lavater: «Искусство всегда уступает Природе, и копия всегда хуже подлинника» (“Art always yields to Nature, and the copy is always worse than the original”) (N. M. Karamzin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, v vosemnadtsati tomakh* [Moscow: TERRA—Knizhnyi

different depending on the reading one chooses to emphasize. To stress the primacy of intent is to restrict the artist's role to that of an imitator, whereas to underscore accident is to discern a break or rupture between the activities of nature and those of the artist. And though nothing has been said explicitly at this juncture, it would seem that a break with nature would also carry some implications for the artist's perception of others.

If we can agree that accident appears to play at least some role in the original development of art, then this would seem to be the place to note that Karamzin's reference to the wind and the broken cane that provided some of man's early instruction in music might itself be not so accidental. By way of comparison, recall the episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which, following his frustrated pursuit of Syrinx, Pan, the patron god of elegy and pastoral, invents the pipes.

... Fugisse per avia nympham,
 Donec harenosi placidum Ladonis ad amnem
 Venerit; hic illam cursum inpedientibus undis
 Ut se mutarent liquidas orasse sorores,
 Panaque cum prensam sibi iam Syringa putaret,
 Corpore pro nymphae calamos tenuisse palustres,
 Dumque ibi suspirat, motos in harudine ventos
 Effecisse sonum tenuem similemque querenti.
 Arte nova vocisque deum dulcedine captum
 "Hoc mihi concilium tecum" dixisse "manebit,"

klub, 2009], 18: 242. Hereafter cited as Karamzin PSS[a] with volume and page number). On the other hand, in his poem "Gifts" (*Darovaniia*, 1796), Karamzin argues that art as mimesis can exceed nature's beauty even to the extent that we begin to prefer the former to the latter: «Все прелести изящных Искусств суть не что иное, как подражание Nature; но копия бывает иногда лучше оригинала, по крайней мере делает его для нас всегда занимательнее: мы имеем удовольствие сравнивать» ("All the charm of the fine Arts is nothing more than the imitation of Nature. But the copy is sometimes better than the original—at least, it makes the original more interesting for us: we have the pleasure of comparing them") (Karamzin PSS, 219). One of the earliest commentators on Karamzin's aesthetics, A. A. Petrov in 1787 discerned a certain theoretical problem in Karamzin's distaste for the countryside and posed the question directly: «Позволь только спросить у тебя: как может находить вкус в беллетрах, в искусственном подражании прекрасной природе тот, кто в самом оригинале не находит приятностей, когда оный представляется ему в лучшем своем виде?» ("Allow me to ask you: how can one fancy literature and the artificial imitation of nature when one does not find the very original pleasing, when it is presented to him in its best form?") (Karamzin PSS[a], 18: 269). In all of Karamzin's writings there is perhaps no better statement or allegory of his occasional preference of art to nature than his sketch "The Countryside. A Fragment" (*Derevnia. Otryvok*, 1792), in which the narrator depicts himself in the midst of nature, not observing it immediately, but rather too engrossed in Thomson's *Seasons* to notice it.

Atque ita disparibus calamis compagine cerae
Inter se iunctis nomen tenuisse puellae”

...The nymph, spurning his prayers, fled through the pathless wastes until she
Came to Ladon’s stream flowing peacefully along his sandy banks; how here,
When the water checked her further flight, she besought her sisters of the stream
To change her form; and how Pan, when now he thought he had caught Syrinx,
Instead of her held naught but marsh reeds in his arms; and while he sighed in
Disappointment, the soft air stirring in the reeds gave forth a low and complaining
Sound. Touched by this wonder and charmed by the sweet tones, the god
Exclaimed: “This union, at least, shall I have with thee.” And so the pipes, made
Of unequal reeds fitted together by a joining of wax, took and kept the name of
The maiden.¹⁵⁴

In Peter Sacks’s reading of this passage, Pan’s consolation depends on his willingness to acknowledge that he will never possess Syrinx and thus must find a substitute for his desire. This substitute, however, can be procured only after her initial transformation has taken place. By the time Pan reaches her, Syrinx is no longer a nymph, but marsh reeds (*calami*), and because the reeds themselves do not give consolation (note that the god sighs—*suspirat*), Pan fashions them into a “consoling sign,” the pipes, thus trading his “erotic pursuit” for a “figure of consolation.” Sacks writes that in this story “we have a clear example of how the sexual impulse is continued yet displaced onto a symbol of itself, and onto an instrument for assuaging the sorrow of that displacement.” According to Sacks’s optimistic interpretation, the episode represents the paradigm “by which interruption and loss is followed by a figurative or aesthetic compensation.”¹⁵⁵ What he does not remark on is the sheer cost that the birth of art exacts: elegy

¹⁵⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1916; reprint ed., 1960), 1.701-712.

¹⁵⁵ Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 5-7. Seeing the episode as an instance in which loss is followed by a consolation may in fact tell us something about the structure of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole. For the Ovidian metamorphosis is not necessarily a random event but one that can be explained “rationally”: behind every transformation there is a principle of commensurability (*soizmerimost*) that not only points out inherent similarities between seemingly different objects (the logic of metaphor), but also works to maintain equilibrium in the Ovidian world. See the third appendix in Iurii Shcheglov, *Opyt o “Metamorfozakh”* (Saint Petersburg: Giperion, 2002), 255-271.

and the means of consolation come into being only after the body of the other (here: Syrinx) has been transformed and disfigured. Art calls for the sacrifice of the other.

What unites Ovid and Karamzin is the way in which the passages privilege the role of accident in the development of art by eliding the stage of instruction. Pan need only hear the sounds which issue fortuitously from the reeds in order to invent music and the means of producing it (and it is probably worth noting that the term for reed, *calamus*, is also proleptically the word for pipe). Meanwhile, when Karamzin imagines the sounds made not by reeds (*trostnik*) but by something at least graphically similar (the broken cane—*trost*'), the ability to imitate nature goes unquestioned—and this despite the fact that the very instrument which presumably helps man to *podrazhat*' or “walk with nature” has been broken. The intent to teach may be absent, while the realization of the intent to learn or invent depends on a chance coincidence of events. All this is to say that accident would seem to precede any intentional act of mimesis, implying in this instance that elegy theoretically could have originated in a very different way.

While the implied violence in Pan's fashioning of reeds from Syrinx's altered body is absent in Karamzin, it is clear that both he and Ovid must at least initially limit the role of the other in the story of poetry's origins (one imagines that there must have been innumerable unsung dead before the arrival of the “first elegiac poet,” who just happened to hear a turtle dove at the same time he himself was grieving). The first elegist thinks not of the other but of himself. In Karamzin, however, it is the reappearance of the other that explodes the sorrowful poet's solipsism and puts him face to face with other people and, consequently, other forms of art. The footnote indicated after the line “was instructor to the first elegiac poet” reads as follows:

I think that the first poetic creation was nothing other than the effusion of a languorous and sorrowful heart; that is, that the first poetry was elegiac (*elegicheskaia*). A merry person is so engaged by the object of his own merriment, his joy, that he cannot be bothered to depict his own feelings; he is

delighted and thinks no more about anything else. Opposite him, the sorrowful friend, the sorrowful lover, having lost the dear half of his soul, loves to think and talk about his sorrow, to pour out and describe his feelings. He selects all of nature as a confidante in his sadness. It seems to him that a babbling rivulet and a murmuring tree sympathize [with him] in his loss. The state of his soul is already, so to speak, poetry. He wants to alleviate his heart and he alleviates it with tears and song. All cheerful (*veselye*) poems arose in later times when man began to depict not only his own feelings, but also those of others; not only the present, but also the past; not only the actual (*deistvitel'noe*), but also the possible or probable.

Я думаю, что первое пиитическое творение было не что иное, как изливание томно-горестного сердца, то есть что первая поэзия была элегическая. Человек веселящийся бывает столько занят предметом своего веселья, своей радости, что не может заняться описанием своих чувств; он наслаждается и ни о чем более не думает. Напротив того, горестный друг, горестный любовник, потеряв милую половину души своей, любит думать и говорить о своей печали, изливать, описывать свои чувства; избирает всю природу в поверенные грусти своей; ему кажется, что журчащая речка и шумящее дерево соболезнуют о его утрате; состояние души его есть уже, так сказать, поэзия; он хочет облегчить свое сердце и облегчает его—слезами и песнию.—Все веселые стихотворения произошли в позднейшие времена, когда человек стал описывать не только свои, но и других людей чувства; не только настоящее, но и прошедшее; не только действительное, но и возможное или вероятное.¹⁵⁶

Serving on one level as an apologia of the pathetic fallacy (though it is interesting that the turtle-dove in its role as “instructor” has somehow disappeared, while a different aspect of nature is now seen to be responsive to the elegiac poet’s sorrow), the passage also breaks with an entire line of eighteenth-century thinkers (e.g. Herder, Marmontel, Lowth, Blackwell, Dennis, Gottsched) who saw not the elegy but the ode as the “fountainhead of poetic art.”¹⁵⁷ Even more, Karamzin’s treatment of the elegiac poet here is directly opposed to the version Schiller will develop a year or so later in his work on *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* in which satire, elegy and idyll all exemplify man’s alienation from nature. The idea that the state of the elegist’s soul is

¹⁵⁶ Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2: 47-48ff.

¹⁵⁷ “The firstborn child of sensibility, the fountainhead of poetic art, and the germ cell of its life is the *ode*” (Johann Gottfried Herder, “Fragments of a Treatise on the Ode,” in *Selected Early Works*, 35, 244f).

already poetry would have been problematic for Schiller, primarily because the elegist *qua* sentimental poet ought to be sufficiently self-aware to reflect on his art before producing it—a requirement not met in Karamzin.¹⁵⁸

When read together, these two passages imply the importance both of interruption and of the other to Karamzin's speculations, though neither is fully articulated. Karamzin first posits a time when man was too absorbed in his own happiness to convey his feelings poetically—a time, in fact, of radical solipsism, when the “object of happiness” (a person? a thing?) exclusively governed man's thought (“[he] thinks no more about anything else”). Then, with a single stroke, there is a break in the narrative: the beloved other dies (“[he loses] the dear half of his soul”). The coincidence of the death of the other on the one hand and the mourning turtle-dove and the responsive tree and rivulet on the other transform the “sorrowful friend” into an elegiac poet. Insofar as he “loves to think and talk about his sorrow,” the elegiac poet indulges, perhaps anachronistically, in one of those so-called mixed sentiments which eighteenth-century thought had valorized under the name of melancholy.¹⁵⁹ In any event, it is clear that although the death of

¹⁵⁸ “Since the naïve poet only follows simple nature and feeling, and limits himself solely to imitation, he can have only a single relationship to his subject and in *this* respect there is for him no choice in his treatment. The varied impression of naïve poetry depends... solely upon the various degrees of one and the same mode of feeling... The case is quite otherwise with the sentimental poet. He *reflects* upon the impression that objects make upon him, and only in that reflection is the emotion grounded which he himself experiences and which he excites in us... The sentimental poet is thus always involved with two conflicting representations and perceptions—with actuality as a limit and with his idea as infinitude; and the mixed feelings that he excites will always testify to this dual source. Since in this case there is a plurality of principles it depends which of the two will *predominate* in the perception of the poet and in his representation, and hence a variation in the treatment is possible. For now the question arises whether he will tend more toward actuality or toward the ideal—whether he will realize the former as an object of antipathy or the latter as an object of sympathy. His presentation will, therefore, be either *satirical* or it will be... *elegiac*; every sentimental poet will adhere to one of these two modes of perception” (Friedrich von Schiller, *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime; Two Essays*, trans. Julius A. Elias [New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966], 115-117).

¹⁵⁹ “Anger and grief are not by any means as pleasant as jokes and cheerfulness, and yet, for someone who believes himself justified in feeling angry or grieved, they have a charm so inexpressible that more than stoic self-control is needed to get rid of them. Nothing is more gratifying to an angry person than his indignation; someone mourning the loss of a friend retreats into solitude in order to indulge his sense of grief without being disturbed. It is readily apparent to everyone that grief is a mixture of pleasant and unpleasant sentiments” (Moses Mendelssohn, “Rhapsody or additions to the Letters on sentiments,” in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom

the other interrupts a period of happiness, it also facilitates the birth of poetry—something the state of happiness on its own was incapable of doing. This first elegiac poetry is, to be sure, still solipsistic, but certainly less so than the “poetry” that preceded it.

How exactly poetry developed from its elegiac origins is left unclear, but what we know with certainty (at least according to Karamzin’s version of events) is that the emergence of a poetry of joy (*veselye stikhotvoreniia*) became possible only after the rediscovery of the other. For the other was always there, even if her role at the beginning of the story Karamzin wants to tell was diminished. If the first elegiac poetry was contingent upon the death of the other and the interruption of man’s happiness, the rediscovery of the other opens up new horizons for the poet and his art: now he begins to depict not only the feelings of others, but also the past (and not merely the present) and the possible and probable (not merely the actual or real). It follows from this that elegy’s mode of representation was oriented toward the real and the present; it could even be called the mimetic genre par excellence, were it not for the fact that the other is registered only by his or her effects: by supplying the joyful individual with the object of his joy, or by providing the sorrowful lover the occasion for mourning. And yet poetry can be realized as a multitude of forms only once the other comes back. The poet’s interest in alterity not only opens up a new world for representation by shifting focus from the self to the other; it also allows the poet to introduce ambiguity to art by reflecting on what *could* happen and what the other *might* feel. To put it otherwise, the rediscovery of the other serves as the catalyst for the birth of imagination.

[Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 143). Cf. “In the second half of the eighteenth century, melancholy became the reigning mood in Western poetry, prose, philosophy, and even in the private life of the educated elite.” (Ilya Vinitsky, “‘The Queen of Lofty Thoughts’: The Cult of Melancholy in Russian Sentimentalism,” in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol [DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011], 18).

By none of this do I wish to suggest some notion of correspondence between Karamzin's theoretical and elegiac writings—to imply, for instance, that Karamzin recapitulates the birth and development of poetry in one form or another in his elegiac praxis. What I do want to suggest, however, is that Karamzin's musings on original poetry can be viewed as being strictly solipsistic only if we suppress the fact that the causes of interruption in the story, the very catalysts of change, are nothing less than the life and death of the other. For Karamzin, art that deals strictly with the self is insufficient: indeed, the elegist's solipsism is shattered by the rediscovery of the other. While “Something” seems to understate the role of the other, my readings below will show that the figure of the other is precisely that presence which cannot be ignored in Karamzin's elegiac writings.¹⁶⁰

III. Is There a Dialectic in This Text? “Epistle to Women” (1795)

Fredric Jameson once described the dialectic in the following terms:

The basic story which the dialectic has to tell is no doubt that of the dialectical *reversal*, that paradoxical turning around of a phenomenon into its opposite of which the transformation of quantity into quality is only one of the better known manifestations. It can be described as a kind of leap-frogging affair in time, in which the drawbacks of a given historical situation turn out in reality to be its secret advantages, in which what looked like built-in superiorities suddenly prove to set the most ironclad limits on its future development. It is a matter, indeed, of the reversal of limits, of the transformation from negative to positive and from positive to negative; and is basically a diachronic process.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the connection between interruption and alterity in Levinas's philosophy: “In Levinas, since the most consistent figurative value attributed to the stranger is a remoteness suggesting transcendence, the practical interruptive force within human relationship occurs via an unpredictable, proximate neighbor. Even more so than the stranger, perhaps only because the opportunity or occasion is always so near, the neighbor becomes the one who signifies interruption rather than order” (R. Clifton Spargo, *Vigilant Memory: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust, and the Unjust Death* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006], 214).

¹⁶¹ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 309.

While at first glance it might seem counter-intuitive to scan the elegiac predicament for such unexpected moments of transformation (how indeed might loss become gain, and vice-versa?), I want to note at the beginning here that elegiac theory may already lend itself to this type of critical procedure. As Peter Sacks claims, in order for the elegist to perform the work of mourning, the loss of the other must be counterbalanced by a gain, namely by a “consolation prize” such as a trope or figure of mourning. Clearly, Sacks is speaking of something more than the prospect of a silver lining, for as we recall in the case of Pan, this prize amounted to nothing less than the invention of elegy. Meanwhile, the transformation from positive to negative might be discerned in the process by which Karamzin’s first man, who in the state of happiness does not describe his feelings, is compelled precisely to express those feelings in an unfamiliar mode following the death of the other. Once again, though, the means of self-expression are subsequently converted to a positive valence when the poet rediscovers happiness in the form of alterity. Given the course of events all caused by the death of the other, elegy may in fact be the perfect testing ground for dialectical criticism.

I will try to show that Karamzin’s “Epistle to Women” (*Poslanie k zhenshchinam*) can be read as a text preoccupied with that basic story the dialectic tells, of the reversal of phenomena into one another, but with a twist: the Karamzinian figure who tells this story anticipates the mobility and fluidity of phenomena. He knows, for instance, that positive can become negative, that success can always be transformed back into failure, and with this foresight he interrupts the moment of transformation. This is not to say that he is always successful or that he always remains in control in such interventions. After all, in the middle of the text there is a moment when the “odic” celebration of women suddenly turns elegiac, a moment that the Karamzinian figure himself recognizes as interruptive. Nevertheless, in demonstrating its concern with the

reversal of limits, the text also shows us that the interruption of this process signals the presence of elegy, which is nothing if not the preoccupation with loss. Interruption reminds us that the avoidance of the dialectical reversal is also the symptom of an elegiac problem, the deferral of gain being unthinkable without an abiding concern for the other.¹⁶²

The text is primarily a celebration of women and an allegory of Karamzin's relations with them. The lyrical persona begins by noting that early in life he sacrificed his peace of mind and freedom (*spokoistvie i vol'nost'*) and performed various feats on behalf of women, including chasing butterflies, climbing trees in pursuit of a bird's nest, going to war, and finally becoming a poet—all of this with the expectation of gaining a reward. What is striking about these activities is that once the ends are brought into view, they are immediately obscured or elided: we do not know whether there was any reciprocity on the women's part, an ambiguity implied by the frequent use of ellipses in the text.

We are given the first clue as to why the lyrical persona leaves such episodes unfinished when he discusses the three passions that are said to govern the world (*Tri strasti praviat svetom*). There is a qualitative difference between the first two passions, honor or ambition (*chest'*) and wealth (*zoloto*), and the third, awkwardly described as the life we live for women's eyes (*a tret'eiu zhivem / Dlia vashikh milykh glaz*) and obviously meaning love. The first two are alike in that they dialectically revert to their opposites if pursued far enough. Thus *chest'* drives the hero to bloodshed so that he may say: "I have conquered, and through my heroism I have

¹⁶² It would be remiss of us not to note the significance of this text and indeed two others ("To One Unfaithful" and "To One Faithful") to literary history in general, for "Epistle to Women" not only intertwines autobiographical and conventional motives of elegy in unexpected ways, it also marks the return of a genre whose pulse had hardly been registered for decades. See Vadim Vatusro, *Lirika pushkinskoi pory: "Elegicheskaia shkola"* (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 1994), 8-11; and G. A. Gukovskii, "Elegiia v XVIII veke," in *Rannie raboty po istorii russkoi poezii XVIII veka*, ed. with an introduction by Viktor Zhivov (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001), 115-116. On the role of Karamzin's poem in the development of epistle, see Liudmila Pastushenko, "Stanovlenie zhanra družheskogo poslaniia v russkoi poezii kontsa XVIII veka (M. N. Murav'ev i N. M. Karamzin)," *Vestnik Kraunts* 2.20 (2012): 85-86.

earned the honor of immortality!” (“*Ia pobedil / I chest’ bessmertiiia geroistvom zasluzhil!*”).¹⁶³

But though he initially acquires the honor he seeks, the hero realizes that ambition does not bring glory but rather something more like shame. Now, haunted by the cries of his victims, he wishes only to flee into the woods to escape his conscience.

[...] не часто ли хотел
Укрыться в *сень* лесов, чтоб жертв, его рукою
Сраженных, не видать,
Их вопля не слышать?¹⁶⁴

...And did he not often want
To take refuge in the woods in order not to see
The victims struck down by his own hand
Or to hear their screams?

The conqueror eventually has to be conquered himself.¹⁶⁵

The pursuit of wealth has a similar outcome. The miser who invests his soul in “gold” ultimately finds himself soulless: “He still does not acquire a soul, either in gold or... in himself!” (*Eshche dushi ne obretaet / Ni v zlate, ni... v samom sebe!*).¹⁶⁶ Far from bringing security, the accumulation of wealth leads only to a perpetual anxiety that precludes the possibility of happiness. The miser fears that every rustle of a leaf is the sound of an approaching thief, every spark in the night the blade of a murderer. Acquisition in one area becomes deprivation in another, as the miser with all his gold spends his life yearning for peace of mind (*I sei bezumnyi chelovek / S toscoiu na chasakh provodit ves’ svoi vek*). What is supposed to

¹⁶³ Karamzin PSS, 171.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ I take a cue here from Horace, *Epistles* II: “Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis / Intulit agresti Latio” (“Greece, the captive, made her savage victor captive, and brought the arts into rustic Latium”). Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Arts Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heineman, 1926; reprint ed., 1961), *Epistles* II. I. 156-157; 408-409. One should note that the Karamzinian persona may unwittingly align himself with the warrior. When he suggests that the “path of glory does not lead to heartfelt rest” (*Put’ slavy ne vedet k serdechnomu pokoiu*), we should bear in mind that in pursuit of love he himself sacrificed calmness (*spokoistvie*), both of which, along with freedom, he considers most dear.

¹⁶⁶ Karamzin PSS, 172.

provide security (money) proves to be the greatest source of anxiety. Both the hero and the miser experience a dialectical reversal from positive to negative, according to which the satisfying of a desire is ultimately converted into something undesirable. Such are two examples of that “basic story which the dialectic has to tell.”

Meanwhile, the third passion influences the first two in showing us how the passage from negative to positive can be effected. The presence of love casts hero and miser in a new light. Thus when the lyrical persona suggests that the perfect king would be one who loves women so tenderly and passionately that the world would in turn be happy, he gives us the warrior once more.

Ах, самый лютой воин,
Который век на ратном поле *жил*
(И *жизни* был едва ль достоин!),
Смягчается душой, восчувствовав любовь;
Услышав имя той, которою пылает,
Щадит врагов сраженных кровь
И меч подъятый... опускает.¹⁶⁷

The most brutal warrior
Who lived his life on the battlefield
(And was hardly worthy of life!)
Softens in his heart when he has felt love;
When he hears the name of her who sets him ablaze
He spares the blood of enemies crushed
And lowers his raised sword.

Commentators have noted the echo from Lomonosov here,¹⁶⁸ but more importantly one also notices that the warrior need only *feel* love and *hear* the name of the one he loves in order to deviate from his martial activities. Women can influence men even in absentia. The miser, too,

¹⁶⁷ Karamzin PSS, 173.

¹⁶⁸ «Великой похвалы достоин, / Когда число своих побед / Сравнить сраженьям может воин / И в поле весь свой век живет» (M. V. Lomonosov, “Oda na den’ vosshestviia [...] Elisavety Petrovny 1747 goda,” in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, ed. A. A. Morozov [Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1986], 118).

begins to act differently when he thinks of obliging the one he loves and hopes to earn her pleasing gaze and smile (*Priiatnyi vzor ee, ulybku zaslužhit'*): he becomes the friend of orphans and the benefactor of the destitute (*Byvaet sirykh drug i nishchikh blagodetel'*). It is typical for the Karamzinian “lyrical hero” not to address the implications of such statements, not to pause long enough to ask just how long-lasting the effect of love might be. One wonders to what extent Karamzin’s traditional caution when putting his ideas to paper may have been in effect here.¹⁶⁹ In any event, love would seem to be the power that transforms the two negative passions into something positive, that is, itself.

The example of the three passions indicates the lyrical persona’s awareness of the transformation of phenomena. However, one also finds evidence of ways in which the dialectical reversal is anticipated and interrupted.

While the lyrical persona focuses largely on the ways women influence men’s behavior in a romantic context, he also comments on the beneficent role a mother assumes for her child. As he touches on the topic of maternal love, however, he brings the poem’s narrative to a halt.

Ах! я не знал тебя!.. ты, дав мне жизнь, сокрылась!
 Среди весенних ясных дней
 В жилище мрака преселилась!
 Я в первый жизни час наказан был судьбой!
 Не мог тебя ласкать, ласкаем быть тобой!
 Другие на коленях
 Любезных матерей в веселии цвели,
 А я в печальных тнях
 Рекою слезы лил на мох сырой земли,
 На мох твоей могилы!..
 Но образ твой священный, милый
 В груди моей напечатлен
 И с чувством в ней соединен!
 Твой тихий нрав остался мне в наследство;
 Твой дух всегда со мной.
 Невидимой рукой

¹⁶⁹ Vadim Vatsuro, “‘Podvig chestnogo cheloveka’,” in *Skvoz' “umstvennye plotiny”* (Moscow: Kniga, 1986), 70.

Хранила ты мое безопытное детство;
 Ты в летах юности меня к добру влекла
 И совестью моей в час слабостей была.
 Я часто тень твою с любовью обнимаю
 И в вечности тебя узнаю!..

Простите мне, что я о мертвой вспомянул
 И с горестью вздохнул!¹⁷⁰

“Ah! I never knew you!.. after you gave me life, you hid yourself!
 In the middle of bright, vernal days
 You resettled in the abode of gloom!
 In the first hour of life I was punished by fate!
 I could not cherish you or be cherished by you!
 Others, on the knees
 Of amiable mothers, blossomed in merriment,
 But I in sorrowful shadows
 Shed tears like a river on the moss of the damp earth,
 On the moss of your grave!..
 But your image—sacred, kind—
 Is imprinted in my heart
 And joined in it with feeling!
 Your gentle disposition remained my inheritance;
 Your spirit is always with me.
 With unseen hand
 You protected my inexperienced childhood;
 In years of youth you led me to good
 And were my conscience in moments of weakness.
 I often embrace your shade with love
 And will recognize you in eternity!..

Forgive me for remembering the dead
 And sighing with grief!

This is of course a classical example of paraposiopesis, a figure of interruption in which a narrative suddenly breaks off and the “tone” is abruptly modulated.¹⁷¹ In this case, the celebration of women suddenly becomes mournful. A thought for the dead is staged as an

¹⁷⁰ Karamzin PSS, 174-175.

¹⁷¹ Such moments abound in Karamzin’s writings, and he may have learned the technique from any number of sources. It is worth pointing out, however, that one finds a textbook example of aposiopesis in *Julius Caesar* (when Antony interrupts his own speech at Caesar’s funeral), which Karamzin translated and published in 1787.

interruption and must run its course before the narrative proper can be resumed.¹⁷² There can be no doubt that the topic of maternal love was raised precisely to be interrupted, and indeed this is not the only time in his works that Karamzin will give voice to the trauma he experienced by the death of his own mother.¹⁷³ Here I only want to comment on the implications the interruption has for the lyrical persona's approach to relationships in general.

If it does nothing else, the transformation of ode into elegy suggests that the threat of loss is always present. The very presence of an infant's mother is also the reminder that she might unexpectedly disappear and thus leave the infant an orphan, like the Karamzinian persona. The greatest possession, a mother's care, can turn into the greatest deprivation. Meanwhile, the orphan described in the text responds to the death of the mother in a manner reminiscent of Sacks's paradigm according to which loss needs to be compensated. For instance, he preserves her image (*obraz*) even after her death. The difference, however, is that the consoling trope or sign the orphan discovers is nothing but a shade or shadow: "I often embrace your shadow with love" (*Ia chasto ten' tvoiu s liubov'iu obnimaiu*). Pan at least was left with pipes, the means of producing elegy, while the orphan must imagine his mother presiding over his actions in the form of a spirit (*dukh*) or shade that can even be embraced. He has not a material sign of his loss

¹⁷² This preoccupation with the mother cannot help but invite a Freudian interpretation, and so this is perhaps the place to recall that moment in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) when Freud suggests one of several ways that the pleasure principle can be displaced by the reality principle: "In the course of things it happens again and again that individual instincts or parts of instincts turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego. The former are then split off from this unity by the process of repression, held back at lower levels of psychical development and cut off, to begin with, from the possibility of satisfaction. If they succeed subsequently, as can so easily happen with repressed sexual instincts, in struggling through, by roundabout paths, to a direct or to a substitutive satisfaction, that event, which would in other cases have been an opportunity for pleasure, is felt by the ego as unpleasure" (Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Pelican Freud Library Vol. 11: On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984], 279). Later in the same essay, Freud provides the now famous description and interpretation of the *fort-da* game in which the child, in attempting to deal with his mother's departure, is said to move from a passive to an active position in the game that allows him "to revenge himself on his mother for going away" (Ibid., 285).

¹⁷³ Cf. "A Knight of Our Time" (*Rytsar' nashogo vremeni*).

(e.g. pipes) but only a form of memory. Moreover, when this form is imagined or recalled it is interruptive, suggesting a condition closer to Freud's category of melancholia, the state of unresolved grief, than to mourning. I will return to this topic in the next two sections of this chapter—here I simply want to emphasize that the interruptive moment at the center of “Epistle to Women” may provide us with insight into why the lyrical persona now seems to avoid all relationships with women.

As mentioned before, the Karamzinian persona carefully avoids mentioning how his various amorous pursuits developed. We are unable to envision the beginning of love, let alone its termination. It is as if the persona wanted to prevent a dialectal relationship from ever taking shape. He proceeds to describe his activities without addressing their outcomes. Thus when he mentions Rose, the girl on whose behalf he retrieved a bird's nest and who indeed looked like a rose (*Podobnoi v samom dele roze*—the identification of women with flowers will be made again at the end of the text), we do not know how she responded because the text trails off. The narrator says that he brought the nest to Rose so that she might be obligated to him (*chtob Roza mne byla / Obiazana svoei zabavoi*), but then abruptly proceeds to discuss his term of duty in the army. The clause that *chtoby* introduces implies only an intent (he sacrificed in one area so that he might gain in another), not that the ends were attained. Indeed, the very discontinuity in the means used to achieve particular ends might be read to suggest a series of failures.¹⁷⁴ Aware that the satisfaction of desire might revert to its opposite, the lyrical persona carefully avoids telling the whole story by dwelling too long on any particular episode.

¹⁷⁴ At one point, after suggesting that he went to war in order to return with laurels and thereby earn a kiss, the lyrical persona draws attention to his own retirement: “[...] *chiny voznenavidia, / Vlozhil svoi mech v nozhny* (*‘Rossiia, torzhestvui,— / Skazal ia,—bez menia!’*)” (“Despising rank, I put my sword in its sheath and said: ‘Russia, exult without me!’”) (Karamzin PSS, 170). Women were his reason both for going to war and for leaving.

The poem ends with the persona exempting himself from further amorous activities, since he is apparently now too old to enjoy them. He encourages women to “blossom” and shower men with flowers (*Tsveti, o nezhnyi pol! i syp' na nas tsvety!*) as he trades love for friendship.

Сказав любви: *прости!* я дружбою святою
Живу и жить хочу. Мне резвый Купидон
Отставку подписал—любовник с сединою
Не может счастлив быть; таков судьбы закон,—
Но истинных друзей я в вас же обретаю.¹⁷⁵

Having said farewell to love, I live and want to live
For sacred friendship. Playful Cupid
Has tendered my resignation. A gray-haired lover
Cannot be happy (such is fate's decree),
But in you I acquire true friends.

That he invokes “fate’s decree” to justify a particular action should not take us by surprise (he has been doing this throughout) nor should we take the departure too seriously, insofar as the poem ends by addressing his “friend” Nanina, a nickname for A. I. Pleshcheeva, with whom Karamzin had been in love for several years.¹⁷⁶ What we need to remember is that in arresting the satisfaction of a desire, the persona hopes to avoid the dialectical reversal which he has demonstrated with the examples of the hero and miser. To be loved one moment would imply the end of love in the next, or what amounts to the same thing, the realization that one is too old to love and be loved.

It could be argued that Nanina is invoked to perform the services the lyrical persona could not receive from his mother except by imagining her presence. After all, he refers to himself here as an “orphan” to whom Nanina has provided consolation. The problem with such

¹⁷⁵ Karamzin PSS, 178.

¹⁷⁶ Lotman discusses the interchangeability of the words “love” (*liubov'*) and “friendship” (*druzhiba*) among Karamzin and the Pleshcheev household in *Sotvorenie Karamzina*, 265-268. Contemporaries, too, seemed to notice that something was amiss in the way Karamzin used the words “love” and “friend.” Derzhavin, who was generally impressed by “Epistle to Women,” found the final line—“He was a tender woman’s most tender friend”—inappropriate. G. R. Derzhavin, *Sochineniia*, in 9 vols. (Saint Petersburg, 1864-83), 6: 51. See also A. G. Cross, *N. M. Karamzin*, 173.

an interpretation lies in the fact that the substitution of friendship does not work, for it too has to be deferred to a time after death, lest friendship in life revert to its opposite. His desire has been to see not gain converted to loss, but rather loss converted to gain, a utopian sentiment since the death of the mother meant that perhaps happiness was never in the cards for this particular “lyrical I.” This is why, I think, he suggests that though he has acquired much in life, he would prefer a humble existence with Nanina.

Но знай, о верный друг! что дружбою твоей
 Я более всего горжуся в жизни сей
 И хижину с тобою,
 Безвестность, нищету
 Чертогам золотым и славе предпочту.
 Что истина своей рукою
 Напишет над моей могилой? *Он любил:*
*Он нежной женщины нежнейшим другом был!*¹⁷⁷

Remember, faithful friend, that more than anything
 In this life I am proud of your friendship
 And would prefer poverty, anonymity
 And a little hut for us to live in
 To golden palaces and fame.
 What will truth write
 On my grave? *He loved:*
He was a tender woman's most tender friend!

The persona remains wishful to the end, since life in a golden palace is no more realistic than life in a hut,¹⁷⁸ and so the place where the two will have to meet (if it can be called a meeting) will be in an inscription or epitaph, one which ambiguously stresses love (*On liubil*) and friendship (*nezhneishim drugom byl*) at once. The relationship is deferred until that time when it will no longer make sense to speak of relationships at all. Ending as an epitaph, the poem once more unexpectedly turns elegiac.

¹⁷⁷ Karamzin PSS, 179.

¹⁷⁸ The hut (*khizhina*) will be revisited, as it were, by the next generation of poets—recall Batiushkov's “My Household Gods” (*Moi penaty*, 1814).

Interruption proves to be a mode of interaction preferable to one in which the dialectical reversal remains a threat. By interrupting his own relationships the lyrical persona can prevent loss, but he must renounce gain as well. If one were to unravel the text's *syuzhet* into its chronological story or *fabula*, one would find an elegy at both ends, one dealing with the mother, the other with Nanina. The first elegy is an interruption from without, beyond the lyrical persona's control, while the second one (and indeed everything else in between) signals his unwillingness to risk loss. The first one motivates the rest, which is why the subsequent interruptions occur before any relationship with the other can commence. It turns out that there may very well be a dialectic in this text (or at least some awareness of dialectical activity), but it is a dialectic that remains unrealized and interrupted to protect the lyrical persona's vulnerability in human relationships. The fear of loss going back to the death of the mother is never adequately resolved.

IV. Girl, Interrupted: "Sierra Morena" (1793)

If in "Epistle to Women" interruption can be seen largely as a choice the lyrical persona makes in avoiding a prolonged encounter with the other, then in Karamzin's short text "Sierra Morena" (*Sierra-Morena*) the figure serves first and foremost as the frustration of desire. Each character proves instrumental in disrupting the relationships pursued by the others. The connection here between interruption and elegy is indicated not only by the text's subtitle, "An Elegiac Fragment from the Papers of N" (*Elegicheskii otryvok iz bumag N*),¹⁷⁹ which points at once to the text's incomplete state and to its generic orientation, but also by the fact that each interruption seems to inaugurate a new elegiac scenario.

¹⁷⁹ The subtitle was removed in subsequent publications. N. M. Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 664-665.

Despite their many insightful readings of “Sierra Morena,” critics tend to emphasize a “no fault” view of the text, according to which each of the three characters—Alonzo, Elvira, and the narrator—plays a role in the tragic denouement while essentially remaining on this side of guilt. Indeed, however “guilty” the characters might be, they are nonetheless to be thought of as victims of fate.¹⁸⁰ In this reading, the narrator, due to his heightened sensitivity, cannot help falling in love with Elvira while she is still mourning the death of Alonzo; Elvira breaks her oath not to love again only because she believes Alonzo is dead; and Alonzo may have at least some right to “punish” Elvira by killing himself when he returns to find her marrying another. Though she too remains committed to this interpretive framework, Gitta Hammarberg makes a persuasive case for reading “Sierra Morena” as a “description of the fall of the idyll,” as a text that dramatizes “the spiritual death of the Sensitive Person.”¹⁸¹ While I appreciate this particular insight, I think that Hammarberg’s argument rests on a mistaken assumption, namely that the narrator really is the positive figure in whom the text’s rhetoric of sentiment would have us believe. I will try to show that on closer inspection the narrator’s motives, if not altogether deceptive, are at least less than innocent.

The traditional reading suggests that the narrator simply happens to fall in love with the mourning Elvira *after* commiserating with her first. Whatever else scholars might say about the

¹⁸⁰ See Rudolf Neuhäuser, *Towards the Romantic Age: Essays on Sentimental and Preromantic Literature in Russia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 183; and Vadim Vatsuro, “‘Sierra-Morena’ N. M. Karamzina i literaturnaia traditsiia,” *XVIII vek* 21 (1999): 335-336. The persuasiveness of this reading, however, will depend on the validity of the assumption that the narrator is “faultless” to begin with.

¹⁸¹ Gitta Hammarberg, *From the Idyll to the Novel*, 160, 166. I would just add to this that one occasionally discerns on the margins of Karamzin’s idylls the threat that the outside world poses to the inner world of pastoral, be it the shipwreck in “Palemon and Daphnis,” the city’s contamination of the countryside in “Poor Liza,” or even that moment at the end of “The Country” when the flash of lightning illuminates the ruins of an old church and overgrown graves.

narrator, they all agree that he is at least initially the “expected Sentimental hero.”¹⁸² The narrator is assumed to commiserate sincerely with the mourning Elvira before any romantic feelings develop. Surprisingly, no scholar to my knowledge has pointed out that when the narrator describes his first interactions with Elvira, sympathy and eroticism are already intertwined. The text reads: “I mixed my tears with her tears. She saw in my eyes the reflection of her own sorrow, in the feelings of my heart she recognized her own feelings and called me a friend. A friend!.. How delightful was this name on the lips of the dear one (*liubeznoi*)! I kissed her hand for the first time then.”¹⁸³ This could indeed be some form of sympathy (after all, the narrator does cry, if we wish to take him at his word), but if so, it is a sympathy that coexists perhaps a little too comfortably with erotic attraction. Elvira does not see exactly what she thinks she sees in the narrator’s eyes (“the reflection of her own sorrow”), nor does she feel exactly what he feels. She sees her own reflection but does not see through to the narrator. The weakness of the traditional reading of “Sierra Morena” is precisely in the willingness of scholars to see the narrator as Elvira does: as a Sentimental figure whose ability to sympathize is beyond suspicion. The passage above, however, suggests that alongside sympathy there is another feeling or impulse, and the text overall seems to raise the question as to whether feelings of sympathy are readily separable from one’s desire for another. For the traditional reading to work we have to be able to say to ourselves that, when the narrator rejoices at being named a “friend” and does not fail to note the very moment when he first kissed Elvira’s hand, he is *only* reflecting Elvira’s grief. In other words, we have to believe that the expression of sympathy is not made in bad

¹⁸² A. G. Cross, *N. M. Karamzin*, 116.

¹⁸³ «Я смешал слезы мои с ее слезами. Она увидела в глазах моих изображение своей горести, в чувствах сердца моего узнала собственные свои чувства и назвала меня другом. Другом!.. Как сладостно было имя сие в устах любезной!—Я в первый раз поцеловал тогда ее руку» (Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 530).

faith. Revising William Empson's formulation, we would have to demonstrate that there is no act of feigning, that the narrator does not "feign" sympathy simply "because he would fain possess her."¹⁸⁴

The narrator of course does not view his intervention in Elvira's mourning as interruptive—quite the contrary, he credits himself with providing her consolation and joy (*uteshenie, otradu, nakhodimuiu serdtsem ee v milom druzhestve*) and thus with helping her complete the work of mourning. Moreover, he does not present Elvira and Alonzo's romance as if it were simply on hiatus, but rather treats it as a finished relationship.

Elvira loved the young Alonzo, Alonzo loved Elvira and soon hoped to be her spouse, but the ship from Majorca (where his father lived) on which he sailed was lost in the waves of the sea. This awful news struck down Elvira. Her life was in danger... Finally, despair turned into gentle sorrow and languor. She erected a monument of marble to the beloved of her soul, and every day she wept ardent tears over it.

Эльвира любила юного Алонза, Алонзо любил Эльвиру и скоро надеялся быть супругом ее, но корабль, на котором плыл он из Майорки (где жил отец его), погиб в волнах моря. Сия ужасная весть сразила Эльвиру. Жизнь ее была в опасности... Наконец отчаяние превратилось в тихую скорбь и томность. Она соорудила мраморный памятник любимцу души своей и каждый день орошала его жаркими слезами.¹⁸⁵

If Alonzo is dead, then the narrator cannot be said to interrupt anything: his relationship with Elvira can begin without the bad conscience of infidelity. At the same time, though, the retrospective cast of the narrative once again problematizes what Robert Markley calls the "genealogy of sentiment." That is to say, if one were to ask what the narrator first felt on beholding the mourning Elvira, one would get the sense that he was attracted to her precisely because she was grieving. He gives her the epithet of "beautiful one" (*prekrasnaia*) before

¹⁸⁴ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 138.

¹⁸⁵ Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* 1: 530.

describing the circumstances under which he saw her.¹⁸⁶ The act of mourning is thus from the outset eroticized. My point is that although the narrator need not indicate that he was interfering in an unfinished relationship (even with the benefit of hindsight), his reference to Elvira as “beautiful” may betray his motive for approaching her in the first place. He did not know when encountering Elvira that Alonzo was still alive, but he obviously did by the time he wrote the story. So while the narrator would like to show that he merely glimpsed Elvira and promptly felt compassion for her, his representation of her is colored by his true feelings. He takes advantage of a convenient narrative loophole: in retrospect, he knows that his interactions with Elvira will prove disruptive, but the narrative, which is supposed to proceed chronologically, does not require at this juncture that he disclose this.¹⁸⁷

The tension between an emerging love on the one hand and a mourning hastily finished is underscored by the fact that Elvira and the narrator routinely meet near Alonzo’s grave. Both initially suppress their feelings for one another. When the narrator learns that his feelings are reciprocated, he deploys another strategy for absolving himself of guilt. Elvira apostrophizes the dead Alonzo thus:

“Shade of amiable Alonzo! Will you forgive your Elvira?.. I swore to love you forever and will not cease to love you forever, your image will be preserved in my heart, every day I will adorn your monument with flowers, my tears will always be mixed with the morning and evening dew on this cold marble! But I swore also not to love anyone other than you... And [yet] I love!.. Alas! I trusted my heart and saw the danger too late. My heart languished, it was alone in the vast world, it sought consolation—friendship appeared to it in the crown of innocence and virtue (*v ventse nevinnosti i dobrodeteli*)... Ah!.. Amiable shade! Will you forgive your Elvira?

¹⁸⁶ «...» там увидел я прекрасную, когда она в унынии, в горести стояла подле Алонзова памятника «...» (Ibid.).

¹⁸⁷ To be sure, one finds instances of overt foreshadowing in the text, but this does not happen to be one of them.

«Тень любезного Алонза! Простишь ли свою Эльвиру?.. Я клялась вечно любить тебя и вечно любить не перестану, образ твой сохранится в моем сердце, всякий день буду украшать цветами твой памятник, слезы мои будут всегда мешаться с утреннею и вечернею росой на сем хладном мраморе!— Но я клялась еще не любить никого, кроме тебя... и люблю!.. Увы! Я надеялась на сердце свое и поздно увидела опасность. Оно тосковало—было одно в просторном мире—искало утешения,—дружба явилась ему в венце невинности и добродетели... Ах!.. Любезная тень! простишь ли свою Эльвиру?»¹⁸⁸

Riddled with interruptions, the address uneasily posits a theory of continuity in Elvira's affection by appealing first to a rhetoric of compensation (despite her new feelings, she continues to love Alonzo) and then to one of justification, framed at both ends by an admission of betrayal ("Will you forgive your Elvira?"). She insists that she will always observe the rites of mourning even as she admits that she has broken a previous oath. Elvira aims to convince herself that her rhetoric has not been compromised by the interruption of her mourning. Passing over in silence the narrator's confession, Elvira assumes all guilt by suggesting that "friendship" appeared to her heart in the aura of innocence and virtue. Once again, it is not just that Elvira presents the narrator as the Sentimental hero she wants him to be (and as the narrator wants to be seen), but that the narrator can make her say anything he likes. In his own text, he does not have to convince anyone that he is the embodiment of virtue and innocence when Elvira can attest to this for him. One imagines that if the narrator were to speak at this juncture, not only would the claim to innocence look disingenuous, but his role in interrupting Elvira's mourning would be laid bare. It is not accidental that the narrator does not actually speak in this text.¹⁸⁹

The references to Alonzo's shade also frame the passage above and reveal Elvira's hesitation in addressing him. In the first reference she appeals to Alonzo's goodwill, addressing

¹⁸⁸ Karamzin, "Sierra-Morena," 1: 532.

¹⁸⁹ The only direct speech in "Sierra Morena" is that of Elvira and Alonzo. In assuring us of his persuasiveness ("My love was eloquent: I calmed the dear one, and all the clouds disappeared from her angelic eyes"), the narrator in essence requires us to take him at his word.

his shade but hoping that the man's virtues have survived death (*Ten' liubeznogo Alonza!*). In the second, however, she addresses the shade as if it had already performed services which might warrant its being called amiable—*liubeznyi*. The shade, now recognized as being separate from the man, is assumed to be just as obliging and amiable (*Liubeznaia ten'!*). Without pressing the point too far, I want to suggest that Elvira's confusion as to whom the epithet belongs once again underscores the need to suppress the threat of interruption. If the shade possesses the same qualities as Alonzo, if there is no separation between shade and substance in terms of character traits, then perhaps she can count on some measure of sympathy. The shade, in other words, should act just as Alonzo would in life. Elvira's rhetoric tries to gloss over the fact that death changes everything, including the ways one observes one's vow (*kliatva*) and the ways another might respond to the breaking of a vow.

When Alonzo returns and disrupts Elvira and the narrator's wedding, he not only draws attention to Elvira's betrayal (calling her "perfidious," or literally, one who breaks faith—*verolomnaia*), but lays bare the truth by manipulating her rhetoric. At one point Elvira says:

I swore to love you forever and will not cease to love you eternally [...]
But I also swore not to love anyone other than you... And [yet] I love!..

Я клялась вечно любить тебя и вечно любить не перестану «...» Но я
клялась еще не любить никого, кроме тебя... и люблю!..

Later, at the wedding, Alonzo echoes her thus:

You swore to be forever mine and forgot your vow! I swore to love you
until the grave: I die...and I love!..

Ты клялась быть вечно моею и забыла свою клятву! Я клялся любить тебя
до гроба: умираю... и люблю!..¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 532.

Elvira implies that she broke her vow only in part: she still loves Alonzo, but she now loves the narrator as well. At least one part of the vow has not been compromised. From Alonzo's perspective, however, the matter is perfectly clear: Elvira's marriage to another suggests that she has completely "forgotten" the vow and thus deserves to be punished by the spectacle of his suicide. When Alonzo kills himself during the wedding ceremony, he attempts to demonstrate how the terms of a vow can be manipulated. To Elvira's "But I also swore not to love anyone other than you... And [yet] I love!.." Alonzo responds¹⁹¹: "I swore to love you until the grave: I die... and I love!.." If Elvira implies that it is possible to love more than one person despite one's vow, Alonzo seems to suggest that the traditional vow to love until the grave can also mean something quite different. In echoing her statement "I love," he shows her that he too can alter the meaning of the vow, assuring her of his feelings to love "until the grave" at the moment he commits suicide. The entire episode sets in relief the absurdity of Elvira's betrayal and her rationalization of it. Perhaps the only thing more ridiculous than killing yourself at a wedding is falling in love with a stranger in view of your fiancé's tomb.

To my knowledge, no scholar has noted that Elvira's rejection of the narrator following Alonzo's suicide reprises a scene already discussed, namely the first interactions. The difference lies in the narrator's inability to see his own reflection in Elvira's eyes.

My grief, my despair did not move her. Elvira buried the wretched Alonzo in the place where she had once mourned his sham death, then locked herself up in the strictest of convents. Alas! She did not want to see me again! (*Ona ne khotela protit'sia so mnoi!*) She did not want me to embrace her one last time with all my passionate love or to see in her eyes the smallest regret over my fate!

Моя горестъ, мое отчаяние не могли тронуть ее—Эльвира погребла несчастного Алонза на том месте, где оплакивала некогда мнимую смерть

¹⁹¹ Properly speaking, Alonzo does not know that he is "responding" to or echoing Elvira. Elvira's address is delivered at Alonzo's monument, whereas Alonzo's lines are spoken at the wedding. Alonzo, presumably, is not present when Elvira addresses his shade.

его, и заключилась в строжайшем из женских монастырей. Увы! Она не хотела проститься со мной!.. Не хотела, чтобы я в последний раз обнял ее со всею горячностью любви и видел в глазах ее хотя одно сожаление о моей участи!¹⁹²

This short passage reveals much. In the first place, it calls into the question the narrator's sympathy for Elvira and Alonzo. Alonzo matters to the narrator only to the extent that he influences Elvira's behavior. When Alonzo is thought dead the narrator is able to explore his attraction to the mourning—and thus beautiful—Elvira. Alonzo's return, however, interrupts whatever reciprocity the narrator and Elvira might have enjoyed. By all indications, the narrator is completely untouched by Alonzo's suicide. Not only does he not mourn with Elvira, but he seems to imply that Alonzo's death has indirectly compromised his ability to sympathize: his sensitive heart has turned to stone (*iskal v sebe chuvstvitel'nogo serdtsa, no serdtse, podobno kamniu, lezhalo v grudi moei*).

Elvira refuses to see the narrator one last time and thus let him see in her eyes what he wants to see reflected: regret. The supposed Sentimental hero, sensitive by nature to the suffering of others, finds himself capable of addressing only his own disappointment. The narrator wishes to console only himself and needs Elvira to the extent that she can show him that someone sympathizes with him. When he realizes that any display of regret or sympathy is not forthcoming, he refers to her as being “cruel” (*zhestokaia*). In all this the narrator fails to note that for Elvira the entire romance was an event that should not have happened and amounted to something like a sin—hence the references to punishment and the decision to join a convent. This procedure by which the other's perspective is lost is indicative of the story as a whole. When Elvira could see herself in the narrator's eyes she called it friendship; when the narrator is unable to see himself in her eyes, he calls it cruelty.

¹⁹² Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 533.

Elvira's withdrawal to a convent, finally, signals a conjuncture of several different things. It means, first and foremost, that her mourning is over, since she apparently no longer visits Alonzo's monument. In addition, it obviously marks the end of her romance with the narrator. But of special interest is the manner in which Elvira continues to inform the narrator that she has no intentions of returning to him. She announces to him from the convent, "For you there is no Elvira!" (*Dlia tebia uzhe net El'viry!*), a phrase that in Russian could be understood to mean that she does not exist for him in that former romantic capacity or that she is dead to him. If one entertains the latter possibility, then one might say that the termination of the relationship initiates the narrator's own period of mourning. Interruption potentially indicates an elegiac event.

"Sierra Morena" is one of Karamzin's most problematic texts not necessarily because it dramatizes the "spiritual death of the Sensitive person," but rather because it exposes and demystifies him. The Sensitive person proves to be curiously insensitive from the beginning. The text shows us one way by which self-interest passes for sympathy. Sentimentalism is laid bare as deception.¹⁹³ Regardless of whether Karamzin would have us believe in the virtue of his narrator, his text seems to suggest that the interruption of mourning comes with a cost.

¹⁹³ If one still doubts that the narrator's acts are deceptive, it might be worth recalling that in the text on which "Sierra Morena" is modeled, Schiller's "The Seer of Ghosts" (*Der Geisterseher*)—deception plays a major role. As Vatsuro tells us, Karamzin reworks the passage from Schiller's text known as the "Sicilian's tale." See Vadim Vatsuro, "'Sierra-Morena,'" 333-336. Although he identifies a different source for "Sierra Morena," Zorin too recognizes the theme of deception. See A. L. Zorin, "Zametiki o povesti N. M. Karamzina 'Sierra-Morena,'" in *Kul'turologicheskie aspekty teorii i istorii russkoi literatury*, ed. L. A. Kolobaeva (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1978), 70-73.

V. Cold Pastoral: Rereading “Poor Liza” (1792)

At first glance, “Poor Liza,” Karamzin’s most famous short story, does not seem to lend itself to a discussion of interruption. In fact, if anything the text seems to affirm continuity, at least if one judges by the opening lines.

Perhaps no one living in Moscow knows the environs of the city as well as I do because no one happens to be in the field as often; no one more than I wanders about without plan or aim, wherever my feet take me: across meadows and groves, across hills and plains. Every summer I find pleasant new places or new beauty in old places.

Может быть, никто из живущих в Москве не знает так хорошо окрестностей города сего, как я, потому что никто чаще моего не бывает в поле, никто более моего не бродит пешком, без плана, без цели—куда глаза глядят—по лугам и рощам, по холмам и равнинам. Всякое лето нахожу новые приятные места или в старых новые красоты.¹⁹⁴

The narrator begins by insisting on his familiarity with the places where his story will be set, his expertise stemming from his repeated visits. He often goes to the hill from which Simonov monastery overlooks the city, while the story that most often draws him to the monastery’s walls happens to be the tragic fate of Liza. The text is thus framed by a description of the narrator’s activities in terms of greatest frequency and pleasure.¹⁹⁵ So not only has he returned to the setting of “Poor Liza” more than once, but, one assumes, he has also rehearsed the story before.

It is interesting, therefore, that despite this knowledge of Moscow’s environs where one of his most memorable stories occurred, the narrator’s text is prone to the occasional interruption, which seems to draw unnecessary attention to the act of writing. When the narrative suddenly stops, we are meant to take it as if the narrator himself were overcome by emotion and unable to continue in the same mode. Scholars have been inclined to refer such moments to the

¹⁹⁴ Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 506.

¹⁹⁵ «Но всего приятнее для меня то место, на котором возвышаются мрачные, готические башни Си...нова монастыря» «...» «Но всего чаще привлекает меня к стенам Си...нова монастыря—воспоминание о плачевной судьбе Лизы, бедной Лизы» (*Ibid.*, 1: 506, 507).

“inexpressibility topos” of Sentimentalism according to which an object necessarily passes beyond representation when a narrator can no longer speak. This approach to interruption makes it easy for scholars to sidestep one of the deeper issues that “Poor Liza” seems to raise, namely that the appropriation of another person’s story does not guarantee a narrative free of interruption. “Poor Liza” allows us to ask what exactly we are to understand by the interruption of imagination.

One such moment of interruption occurs when Liza has been daydreaming about Erast and the latter suddenly appears. Liza imagines wishfully that if Erast were not a nobleman but a peasant-shepherd, she would invite him to let his flock graze near her. Erast in turn “would glance at me fondly, perhaps would even take my hand and... A daydream!”¹⁹⁶ The shepherd onto which she has projected this fantasy passes beyond view. Anticipating the narrator’s own story-telling gesture, Liza interrupts her own fantasy before anything has happened. But at this point Erast unexpectedly comes ashore in a boat, walks up to Liza and, as the narrator notes,

her daydream in part came true, for he *glanced at her fondly, took her by the hand...* [...] Ah! He kissed her, kissed with such fervor that the whole universe seemed to her ablaze! “Dear Liza!” said Erast. “Dear Liza! I love you!” And these words echoed deep in her heart, like delightful, heavenly music. She hardly dared to believe her ears and... But I throw my brush aside. I will only say that in this moment of ecstasy Liza’s timidity vanished. Erast learned that he was loved, loved passionately by a new, pure, sincere [*otkrytyim*: “open”] heart.

мечта ее отчасти исполнилась: ибо он *взглянул на нее с видом ласковым, взял ее за руку...* «...» Ах! Он поцеловал ее, поцеловал с таким жаром, что вся вселенная показалась ей в огне горящею! «Милая Лиза!—сказал Эраст.— Милая Лиза! Я люблю тебя!», и сии слова отозвались во глубине души ее, как небесная, восхитительная музыка; она едва смела верить ушам своим и... Но я бросаю кисть. Скажу только, что в сию минуту восторга исчезла

¹⁹⁶ «Он взглянул бы на меня с видом ласковым—взял бы, может быть, руку мою... Мечта!» (Ibid., 1: 511). Orlov argues that the narrator interrupts Liza’s “Sentimental idyll” with the sober declaration that her fantasy is a daydream. Strangely, he does not comment on the partial realization of the daydream in the lines that follow. P. A. Orlov, *Russkii Sentimentalism*, 211.

Лизина робость—Эраст узнал, что он любим, любим страстно новым, чистым, открытым сердцем.¹⁹⁷

Liza's own daydream has to remain incomplete so that the real-life fulfillment can commence.

However, not only does Liza interrupt her own daydream, but the narrator interrupts the realization of her dream ("he *glanced at her fondly, took her by the hand...*), thus repeating Liza's own gesture. The transition from daydream to reality passes through at least two interruptive moments.

The narrator notes that Liza's daydream came true "in part" (*mechta ee otchasti ispolnilas'*) and then echoes the words she had just been thinking. At first glance, it appears that the reference pertains to Erast's noble origins. After all, Liza laments more than once that Erast was not born a peasant, which would have allowed them to entertain the possibility of marriage.¹⁹⁸ The complete fulfillment of Liza's dream would have required a completely different narrative. Yet it is possible that *otchasti* refers to the very juncture where Liza and the narrator's texts break off: both end when Erast takes Liza's hand. Where Liza's daydream ends altogether, though, the narrator's description continues, at least until it is interrupted again, as the narrator "throws his brush aside." The narrator explicitly calls attention not only to the unrealizability of Liza's fantasy (Erast cannot become a peasant-shepherd and thus a potential fiancé) but also to the unfinished state of the narrative itself. The interruption of Liza's daydream marks the point beyond which the narrative cannot proceed without risking further interruption. Hence the narrator's decision to paraphrase—rather than to "paint"—the rest of the scene ("I will only say that in this moment of ecstasy," etc.).

¹⁹⁷ Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 511-512.

¹⁹⁸ Notice that one of these moments occurs precisely as interrupted speech. When Liza's mother expresses her hope that Liza's fiancé will be like Erast, Liza replies: «Матушка! Матушка! Как этому стать? Он барин, а между крестьянами...»—Лиза не договорила речи своей» (Ibid., 1: 510). See also below.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the viewpoint according to which the Sentimentalist author, when writing about others, ultimately writes about himself. From this perspective it would be generous even to say that Sentimental characters are reduced to the status of imitators able to repeat only what the narrator has said first. What is curious about the passage just cited is that this relationship seems to have been at least temporarily inverted. The narrator not only repeats the words that Liza has just spoken but also imitates the manner in which she interrupts her own speech. Without pressing the point too far, I want to suggest that the passage problematizes what we thought we knew about the Sentimentalist author, namely that the text in the final analysis is referable to the author himself. In other words, we realize that it is not so easy to determine *kto komu*, who imitates whom—and this is a dilemma that persists throughout “Poor Liza.”¹⁹⁹

“Poor Liza” is not merely a text that interrupts itself but one that incorporates interrupted narratives into its very structure. The most obvious example of this is Liza’s mother who tries to “script” Liza into the narrative she wants her daughter to live out.²⁰⁰ Her mother suggests early on that although she would like to see her dead husband in the next life (*na tom svete*), she cannot yet abandon Liza: “Only right now I don’t want to die. What would become of you without me? [...] No, God willing, I’ll settle you into place first. Perhaps a good man will be found for you soon. Then, dear children, I’ll give you my blessing, cross myself, and calmly lie

¹⁹⁹ Recall by way of comparison that Liza’s mother’s hope that she will be happy when she sees her husband in the afterlife (Ibid., 1: 508) precedes the narrator’s declaration that he will recognize Liza after his own death (Ibid., 1: 519).

²⁰⁰ I take the concept of “scripting” from Sarah Young, *Dostoevsky’s The Idiot and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 10-27.

in the damp earth.”²⁰¹ The mother perceives Liza’s resistance to this narrative as a personal injury. When Liza explains to Erast that a suitor has been found for her, she conveys to him her mother’s position: “[S]he weeps and says that I do not wish her peace, that she will die in torment if she does not marry me off while she is still alive.”²⁰² The mother’s concern for Liza is inseparable from her own self-concern insofar as the well-being of the first determines that of the latter. Yet either through marriage or refusal to marry, Liza becomes instrumental in her mother’s death since the outcome of both choices will be the same. The extent to which this narrative has been determined may be suggested by the text’s ending, for even as Liza attempts to find in suicide a third way out of her predicament, her own death instantly kills her mother as well.²⁰³ Not only will Liza, through whatever action she takes regarding marriage, be implicated in her mother’s death, but her decision to disregard the either/or situation and end her life has similar consequences. Although it might sound strange to suggest as much, Liza’s suicide can be read as her attempt to interrupt and altogether arrest the narrative her mother has prescribed for her.

Of course, we should not lose sight of the fact that the few times Liza and her mother converse with one another occur precisely as interruptions. Recall the mother’s response when Liza reports on her first encounter with Erast in Moscow: “‘You did well not to take a whole rouble. This may have been some sort of bad person...’ ‘Oh no, mother! I don’t think so. He had such a kind face, such a voice...’ ‘However, Liza, it’s better to live by your own labor and not

²⁰¹ «Только теперь не хочу умереть—что с тобою без меня будет? «...» Нет, дай бог прежде пристроить тебя к месту! Может быть, скоро сыщется добрый человек. Тогда, благословя вас, милых детей моих, перекрещусь и спокойно лягу в сырую землю» (Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 508).

²⁰² «она плачет и говорит, что я не хочу ее спокойствия, что она будет мучиться при смерти, если не выдаст меня при себе замуж» (Ibid., 1: 514).

²⁰³ «Лизина мать услышала о страшной смерти дочери своей, и кровь ее от ужаса охладела—глаза навек закрылись» (Ibid., 1: 519).

take anything for free.”²⁰⁴ It is more or less clear in both cases what the two would have gone on to say. Liza’s mother presumably would have proceeded to imagine Erast’s bad qualities and to compare him to other such individuals, while Liza would have been carried away in extolling Erast’s appearance and behavior. Both characters restore balance to the other’s judgments through interruption. Erast may very well be as virtuous as Liza thinks, but she has not encountered enough “bad” people to know them when she sees them. On the other hand, Erast is not quite the villain Liza’s mother imagines he might be: his heart is by nature kind, as the narrator tells us, even if it is also “weak and flighty.”²⁰⁵

In another exchange, Liza interrupts herself, a fact to which the narrator explicitly draws attention. After Liza’s mother has met Erast for the first time, she says to her daughter: “‘Liza! How handsome and kind he is! If only your fiancé is like him!’ Liza’s heart fluttered. ‘Mother! Mother! How could that be? He’s a nobleman, and between peasants...’ Liza did not finish what she was saying.”²⁰⁶ Liza’s mother does not see Erast as a potential suitor—or as a threat to her daughter, now that she has seen him in person—and thus praises his good qualities only as a way of imagining the kind of fiancé Liza might have. Liza on the other hand almost willfully misinterprets what her mother says, thinking that the reference to Erast’s virtues and a future fiancé can only mean one thing. When she leaves her thought unfinished, she of course expresses her anxiety over the impossibility of marriage between different classes, but she also exemplifies

²⁰⁴ «Ты хорошо сделала, что не взяла рубля. Может быть, это был какой-нибудь дурной человек...»—«Ах нет, матушка! Я этого не думаю. У него такое доброе лицо, такой голос...»—«Однако ж, Лиза, лучше кормиться трудами своими и ничего не брать даром» (Ibid., 1: 509).

²⁰⁵ «Эраст был довольно богатый дворянин, с изрядным разумом и добрым сердцем, добрым от природы, слабым и ветреным» (Ibid., 1: 510).

²⁰⁶ «Ах, Лиза! Как он хорош и добр! Если бы жених твой был таков!» Все Лизино сердце затрепетало. «Матушка! Матушка! Как этому статься? Он барин, а между крестьянами...»—Лиза не договорила речи своей» (Ibid., 1: 510).

a common moment in which interrupted speech directs attention to an action which may or may not have happened. In her mind a peasant girl's marriage to a nobleman is unrealistic, beyond representation, and Liza interrupts herself before fully articulating the dilemma, let alone imagining its resolution.²⁰⁷

Liza's interactions with her mother are in some ways indicative of her interactions with others, for even when speaking with Erast at certain moments, and Anyuta at the end, Liza interrupts herself. The difference here lies in the fact that Liza's self-interruptions occur after an action—the unspeakable—has taken place. Recall Liza's attempts to collect herself after she has consummated her relationship with Erast: “‘Oh, I'm afraid!’ said Liza. ‘I'm afraid of what has happened to us! It seemed like I was dying, like my soul... No, I can't say it!..’”²⁰⁸ For Liza the experience has amounted to something like a death, not only of the physical body but of the soul as well. This may be a reference to an earlier passage when Liza's mother surmises that if human beings were perpetually happy they would likely “forget” their souls. Yet one should not forget that Liza's happiness has already been interrupted by the news that her mother has found her a suitor. Her interactions with Erast in fact have proven to be a source of an anxiety. In any event, what seems to be most significant in this passage is that, once again, Liza does not give expression to what is impossible or too painful to imagine. Liza almost gives us a perspective from the other side, as it were, even if this vantage can only be paradoxical: she speaks of her own dead body and, presumably, of her own dead—or forgotten—soul. It only “seems” of course that she is dying (*Mne kazalos' , chto ia umiraiu*), but the fact that she cannot complete

²⁰⁷ Orlov argues that the self-interruption underscores Liza's foresight regarding the nature of her own demise (the result of social conflict). Orlov, *Russkii sentimentalizm*, 211.

²⁰⁸ «Ах, я боюсь,—говорила Лиза,—боюсь того, что случилось с нами! Мне казалось, что я умираю, что душа моя... Нет, не умею сказать этого!..» (Ibid., 1: 515). It is worth noting in passing that this scene looks forward to the moment in *Anna Karenina* when, after Vronsky and Anna have consummated their affair, Vronsky feels like a murderer.

her thought suggests once again the impossibility of imagining such a thing as the death of the soul.

In the last instance of self-interruption, Liza asks her friend and neighbor Anyuta to explain to her mother what has happened only to stop herself mid-sentence.

“Kind Anyuta, kind friend! Take this money to my mother (it isn’t stolen) and tell her that Liza is guilty before her, that I hid from her my love for a cruel man, for E... Why say his name? Tell her that he betrayed me, ask her to forgive me. God will help her. Kiss her hand the way I am kissing yours—tell her that poor Liza told you to kiss her. Tell her that I...” At this point she threw herself into the water.

Любезная Анюта, любезная подружка! Отнеси эти деньги к матушке—они не краденые—скажи ей, что Лиза против нее виновата, что я таила от нее любовь свою к одному жестокому человеку,—к Э... На что знать его имя?—Скажи, что он изменил мне,—попроси, чтобы она меня простила,—бог будет ее помощником,—поцелуй у нее руку так, как я теперь твою целую,—скажи, что бедная Лиза велела поцеловать ее,—скажи, что я...» Тут она бросилась в воду.²⁰⁹

Note that even as Liza seems to be confessing the truth, she deliberately fails to reveal everything. For instance, she does not disclose Erast’s name to Anyuta, as if hoping that her mother would not be able to determine who is behind the “betrayal.” In so doing, Liza essentially asks her mother to take the money which she herself does not accept. Erast gives Liza the money in exchange for giving him up, and now Liza repeats the gesture by offering the money as a kind of consolation for her own imminent suicide. Perhaps without quite knowing it, Liza rejects the conditions of the exchange only to rehearse them in a different context.

This passage differs from the ones we have examined so far in that it leaves us less certain as to the things Liza does not say. It is clear of course that she is delivering something on the order of a will (the one hundred roubles) and suicide note (the explanation), but one also senses that the point at which she stops speaking could have been continued in any number of

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 1: 519.

ways. When her speech comes to an end at the moment she drowns herself, it is as if Liza herself has understood—and in a sense, rehearsed—the idea that language cannot pass beyond the boundaries of death.²¹⁰ Recall that only moments before her suicide both Liza and the narrator find themselves confronted by the unrepresentable, the sublime. Erast has just had her escorted from his home. “Liza found herself on the street, in the sort of position no pen can describe. ‘He, he turned me out? He loves another? I’m lost! [*Ia pogibla*—I have perished]’ These were her thoughts and feelings! A violent fainting spell interrupted [*pererval*] them for a time.”²¹¹ First the narrator suggests that Liza is in a state or position (*polozhenie*) that cannot be described—and then proceeds to describe it. Meanwhile, Liza faints at the moment she realizes she is dead or “lost.” Just as the words pass through her mind and the event becomes representable, she loses consciousness. The manner in which the fainting spell interrupts her thoughts and feelings anticipates the moment at which her spoken language will be abruptly cut short by the act of suicide.

How should one interpret the interruption of imagination in “Poor Liza,” and what light does this interpretation shed on the traditional view of Karamzin as a solipsist? To answer this question, it may be helpful to revisit the explanation of the text’s origins that the narrator provides in the last paragraph of the text: “Erast was miserable until the end of his life. When he learned of Liza’s fate, he was inconsolable and thought himself a murderer. I met him one year before his death. He himself told me this story and brought me to Liza’s grave. Perhaps now they

²¹⁰ As W. David Shaw reminds us, elegy often confronts the sheer difficulty of representing death: “The comfortable framework of art confines the reader to a knowable universe. But death is an unmanageable, mind-expanding event” (W. David Shaw, *Elegy & Paradox: Testing the Conventions* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1994], 224).

²¹¹ «Лиза очутилась на улице и в таком положении, которого никакое перо описать не может. «Он, он выгнал меня? Он любит другую? Я погибла!»—вот ее мысли, ее чувства! Жестокий обморок перервал их на время» (Ibid., 1: 518).

have been reconciled with one another!”²¹² Scholars often assume that, since the events took place thirty years before,²¹³ the narrator’s acquaintance with Erast must have occurred twenty-nine years after the fact, and one year before Erast’s death. Another year would seem then to separate Erast’s death from the time of narration. As Gitta Hammarberg has pointed out, however, Erast’s death “could have occurred at any time within the thirty year span (minus the summer of the story) which separates the narrator from the story.”²¹⁴ And since, as we recall, the narrator has visited Simonov monastery on multiple occasions—both in spring and fall²¹⁵—it would be safe to assume that Erast has died not so recently. In any event, this ambiguity in the text’s chronology perhaps inadvertently draws attention to yet another gap or rupture, specifically the point at which the story was transferred from an oral to a written medium.

Most scholars, however, have been puzzled less by the chronology than by the narrator’s excess of information. The narrator seems to be too far removed from events to know so much. Vladimir Toporov, for instance, questions the narrator’s account on the following grounds: since the narrator never knew Liza but rather heard everything through Erast, himself not a witness to the final moments of Liza’s life, where in fact did the story come from? Toporov provides an alternative explanation that features Anyuta as the initial narrator of Liza’s suicide. In this reading, Erast’s version of events owes at least some of its credibility to Anyuta’s first-hand

²¹² «Эраст был до конца жизни своей несчастлив. Узнав о судьбе Лизиной, он не мог утешиться и почитал себя убийцею. Я познакомился с ним за год до его смерти. Он сам рассказал мне сию историю и привел меня к Лизиной могилке.—Теперь, может быть, они уже примирились!» (Ibid., 1: 519).

²¹³ «В этой хижине лет за тридцать перед сим жила прекрасная, любезная Лиза с старушкою, матерью своею» (Ibid., 1: 507).

²¹⁴ Gitta Hammarberg, *From the Idyll to the Novel*, 296ff.

²¹⁵ «Часто прихожу на сие место и почти всегда встречаю там весну; туда же прихожу и в мрачные дни осени горевать вместе с природою» (Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 506-507).

knowledge.²¹⁶ Meanwhile, J. G. Garrard complains of feeling “cheated” when the narrator switches from first-person to omniscient narration without advance notice, and then again at the end when Karamzin fails to “frame the story and create an epic situation for the narrator.” As Garrard sees it, the narrator of “Poor Liza” cannot be an objective, first-person narrator and a subjective, omniscient one simultaneously—otherwise, the “frustrated” critic will have no choice but to relegate poor Karamzin to the road-pavers of literary history.²¹⁷ Finally, and perhaps closest to the mark, Gitta Hammarberg refers the ending to her Bakhtinian reading of Karamzin’s use of the narrator-narratee dynamic, suggesting that “the epilogue functions as a postpositive reporting clause, laying bare the complex narrative structure of the tale as a whole.” The epilogue thus “is revealed as an utterance of a trivocal structure: a personal utterance (Erast, Liza, and Liza’s mother speak), Erast’s subsequent oral narration-confession to the narrator, and the narrator’s written re-narration to the narratee.”²¹⁸

What I want to add to these readings is that the extent to which “Poor Liza” reveals itself at the end as an act of imagination cannot be exaggerated. Presumably, we can all agree that however much Erast might have known, he could not have known everything, and therefore the narrator must have imagined a great deal for himself. Yet what is missing in the discussions mentioned above is the sense that the narrator’s act of imagination borders on a kind of voyeurism that at times seems to be almost out of control. Recall at the beginning when he

²¹⁶ V. N. Toporov, ‘*Bednaia Liza*’ *Karamzina. Opyt prochteniiia (K dvukhsotletiiu so dnia vykhoda v svet)* (Moscow: RGGU, 1995), 82, 223-224ff.

²¹⁷ J. G. Garrard, “Poor Erast, or Point of View in Karamzin,” *Essays on Karamzin: Russian Man-of-Letters, Political Thinker, Historian, 1766-1826*, ed. J. L. Black (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 47-49.

²¹⁸ Gitta Hammarberg, *From the Idyll to the Novel*, 142.

imagines to himself the monks who lived in the cells of Simonov monastery.²¹⁹ The monks are not there, nor can the depiction he presents be verified, a fact he makes clear when he says that he “represents” those who must have lived in the monastic cells (*predstavliaiu sebe tekhn, kotorye v nikh zhili*). The most outrageous example of the narrator’s voyeurism comes at the end as he asserts that when he and Liza meet in the afterlife, he will recognize her (*Kogda my tam, v novoi zhizni, uvidimsia, ia uznaiu tebia, nezhnaiia Liza!*).²²⁰ The narrator’s imaginative attachment to the story is so strong as to risk all sense of proportion.

This is not to say that the narrator’s capacity to imagine Liza’s suffering is all bad, nor is it to imply that he lacks all self-restraint. In the first instance, one sense that the narrator’s attempt to write Liza’s story has to coincide with an act of vicarious mourning in which he tells the story that Erast himself, for whatever reason, is unable to tell.²²¹ It is true that the narrator receives pleasure from stories that move him and that he may be the only “lucky” character in his own text, but at the same time his willingness to sympathize with Liza’s fate even to the extent that he routinely visits her grave may suggest a positive dimension to his representation.

With regard to the second matter, we have already examined a number of passages in the text where imagination is limited. Recall, for instance, when the narrator opts to “throw his brush aside” rather than admit us to the scene of Liza and Erast’s first kiss, or when Liza is unable to

²¹⁹ «Иногда вхожу в келии и представляю себе тех, которые в них жили,—печальные картины! Здесь вижу седого старца, преклонившего колена перед распятием и молящегося о скором разрешении земных оков своих, ибо все удовольствия исчезли для него в жизни, все чувства его умерли, кроме чувства болезни и слабости. Там юный монах—с бледным лицом, с томным взором—смотрит в поле сквозь решетку окна, видит веселых птичек, свободно плавающих в море воздуха, видит—и проливает горькие слезы из глаз своих. Он томится, вянет, сохнет—и унылый звон колокола возвещает мне безвременную смерть его» (Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 507).

²²⁰ As Zorin and Nemzer have noted, Karamzin was taking his chances with the censorship when he implied that Liza and Erast could be reconciled after death, insofar as suicide is a sin condemned by Russian Orthodoxy. See A. L. Zorin and A. S. Nemzer, “Paradoksy chuvstvitel’nosti: N. M. Karamzin ‘Bednaia Liza,’” in “*Stolet’ia ne sotrut...*”: *Russkie klassiki i ikh chitateli*, ed. A. A. Il’in-Tomich (Moscow: Kniga, 1988), 17.

²²¹ It is worth recalling that the Karamzinian persona in *Letters of a Russian Traveller* performs a similar act when he sets the story of “Alina,” a girl he never knew, to verse. See Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1: 415-420.

express—and thus represent—the death of the soul. It is the figure of interruption then that keeps imagination in check, but it does more than this. Interruption also suggests that not everything can or should be subject to representation. If the Karamzinian narrator allowed himself to depict every aspect of Liza's existence, to bring everything under his gaze, then we would indeed have every right to speak of a kind of solipsism. For solipsism implies that the self can know nothing but itself, and if the narrator were a solipsist, Liza would indeed be only a projection of the narrator and not an autonomous being. What the different kinds of interruption tell us, however, is that not everything can be known, that something must reside outside of the self. Interruption preserves Liza as an autonomous being: she cannot be completely represented and thus never completely known. To some extent, however limited, her autonomy goes untouched.

Finally, what justifies our calling "Poor Liza" an elegiac text is the way in which loss, figured as interruption, is brought into focus as a problem. Already at the early stages of Russian prose, Karamzin seems to have intuited the limitations of narrative, the authorial self's epistemological limitations regarding the other. He shows us that the impulse to imagine, in its attempt to refer the outer world back to oneself, can be regulated by an interruptive counterimpulse.

3: Elysium Deserted, Remembrance Abandoned

You will lead me into your gardens thick,
You will tell me the names of the trees and flowers.

Ты поведешь меня в сады свои густые,
Деревьев и цветов расскажешь имена.

— Evgeny Baratynsky, “Native Land”²²²

I. Introduction

Nikolai Mikhailovich Konshin, one of Baratynsky’s comrades in the Nyslot regiment and a fellow poet, reflected thus on the latter’s particular brand of homesickness:

Cherishing the hope of soon being promoted to the rank of officer, he [Baratynsky] boldly revealed to us his desire to leave the service immediately and take up residence at home. [...] I never knew anyone more attached to his birthplace. Like the Swiss, he was simply afflicted with the disease, almost unknown among us, that the French call *mal du pays*.

Питая надежду на скорое производство в офицеры, он обнаруживал смело перед нами желание тотчас оставить службу и поселиться дома [...] Я не знавал человека, более привязанного к месту своего рождения; он, как швейцарец, просто одержим был этой, почти неизвестной у нас болезнью, которую французы называют *mal du pays*.²²³

The poem Konshin goes on to mention, “Native Land” (*Rodina*, 1820-1821), is one of several works on the theme of homecoming that already contains those images of the estate²²⁴ we know

²²² Evgenii Baratynsky, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1957), 69. Hereafter referred to as Baratynskii PSS.

²²³ N. M. Konshin, *Vospominaniia o Baratynskom, ili Chetyre goda moei finliandskoi sluzhby s 1819 po 1823*, ed. P. S. Beisov, *Kraevedcheskie zapiski Ul’ianovskogo oblastnogo kraevedcheskogo muzeia*, vol. 2 (Ul’ianovsk, 1958), 393-394.

²²⁴ For more on estate poetry, see T. M. Zhaplova, *Usadebnaia poeziiia v russkoi literature XIX veka* (Orenburg: Izd-vo OGPU, 2004).

from such lyrics as “Stanzas” (*Stansy*, 1827) and “Desolation” (*Zapustenie*, 1832-1833).²²⁵ The importance Baratynsky attached to the home (understood in the broadest sense and in all its various figurations) as an object of representation is not really in doubt here. At the same time, commentators have noted that “My Native Land,” like other poems from Baratynsky’s early period, clearly betrays a specific literary orientation—that is to say, it is as much an exercise in Russian “Tibulliana”²²⁶ as it is a mimetic representation of the Mara estate.²²⁷ Indeed, one finds already in this text all the requisite topoi of the genre: the return to ancestral fields, the celebration of horticulture, references to ploughs and spades, and so forth. Baratynsky may indeed have suffered from *mal du pays*, but his poem might also be little more than a literary exercise. Whatever the case may be, the suggestion that the text may just as well refer to other texts as it does to a real place puts us close to the primary concern of this chapter, namely the role language plays in the poem of homecoming.

Of course, one of the commonplaces of the nineteenth-century Russian elegy claims that you can never go home. The place you return to is not the place you left, and if it is not immediately clear to what extent the home as a space has changed in your absence, the home,

²²⁵ The most recent scholarly edition of Baratynsky’s works (E. A. Boratynskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 2002-present, hereafter identified as PSSP) follows redactional policies that will be slightly disorienting to those familiar with earlier editions. One important change has to do with the titles of poems. The editors’ guiding principle is to identify Baratynsky’s intent based on the last redaction of a text during his lifetime (and this extends even to the spelling of the poet’s surname, which he signed as “Boratynsky” on his last collection of verse, *Twilight*). Thus, “Native Land” is identified by its opening line (“*Ia vozvrashchusia k vam, polia moikh otsov...*”), the way the poem appeared for the last time in the 1835 collection. To avoid confusion, I cite all poetic texts from the 1957 edition. However, I will reference changes made by the new edition and its vast commentaries when they have bearing on the texts I discuss. The first of these pertains to the dating of “Desolation,” traditionally thought to have been written in 1834. As the editors of the PSSP point out, Baratynsky had already begun work in 1833 on the proofs to what would be his 1835 collection. Insofar as that collection included “Desolation,” the date of 1834 must be incorrect.

²²⁶ By “Tibulliana,” I mean the intersection of elegiac and pastoral themes that came to be identified with the corpus of Tibullus in Russian poetry. See I. Pil’shchikov, “‘*Ia vozvrashchusia k vam, polia moikh otsov...*’: Baratynskii i Tibull,” *Izv. AN SSSR* 53.2 (1994): 29-47; idem., “Iz istorii russkoi tibulliany: (‘Sel’skaia Elegiia’ Baratynskogo),” *Colloquia Classica et Indogermanica* 3 (2004): 477-494.

²²⁷ *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii E. A. Boratynskogo*, ed. M. L. Gofman, 2 vols. (Saint Petersburg, 1914-1915), 1: 223; PSSP, 1: 394.

understood as a temporal phenomenon, is surely gone and by its very absence lends itself to a reflection on loss. The poem of homecoming tends to register this sense of loss by juxtaposing structures of continuity against objects which by their altered and deteriorated state suggest rupture and discontinuity. It is easy to forget the extent to which the “lyrical I,” too, has changed over time, even when the poem explicitly calls attention to this. Thus in Pushkin’s “...Again I visited” (...*Vnov’ ia posetil*, 1835—a poem that begins like Baratynsky’s “Desolation”: *Ia posetil tebia, plenitel’naia sen*’),²²⁸ the “lyrical I” tells us that much has changed in his ten-year absence, including himself. We learn that even the house has fallen out of favor (*dom opal’nyi*), though this is, of course, a transferred epithet referring back to the speaker, the poet who had been “exiled” to Mikhailovskoe some ten years before.²²⁹ The home still stands, while the poet has long been freed from house arrest. But the process by which time supersedes space in importance can also be brought back into balance, as when Pushkin’s “lyrical I” predicts that his grandson will remember him as he passes by the young grove that he, the grandfather, will not live to see grow tall.²³⁰ In such a reconciliation, the space of the estate will always be there, while time theoretically can accommodate any number of future recollections.

At first glance, Baratynsky’s “Desolation” would seem to follow this same general trajectory. It begins by juxtaposing representations of spring and fall and of past and present. The “lyrical I” surveys the landscape of the estate, registering the degree of change not only by the

²²⁸ It would be interesting to do a comparative analysis of the two poems, particularly insofar as it is Baratynsky who anticipates Pushkin. For a comparison of the lexical similarities between the two poems, see V. Toporov, “Vstrecha v Elizii: Ob odnom stikhotvorenii Baratynskogo.” In *Themes and Variations: In Honor of Lazar Fleishman*. Ed. Konstantin Polivanov et al. Stanford Slavic Studies. Vol. 8 (Oakland: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994), 200-201.

²²⁹ I am grateful to Emily Klenin for pointing this out to me at the 2011 AATSEEL conference.

²³⁰ By way of comparison, recall the end to Rostopchina’s “Selo Anna” (1840): «А ты, затерянный, безвестный уголок, / Не многим памятный по моему изгнанию,— / Храни мой скромный след, храни о мне преданье, / Чтоб любящим меня чрез сто лет ты мог / Еще напоминать мое существование!» (Evdokiiia Rostopchina, “Selo Anna,” *Poety 1840-1850-kh godov*, ed. E. M. Shneiderman [Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1972], 94).

estate's advanced stage of deterioration but also by his inability to recollect the past in the face of what he sees. Though saddened by the disjuncture between his memories of the past (or rather, what remains of them—more on this below) and a present characterized by neglect, the “lyrical I” manages to tell himself that the home he has christened “Elysium” is still “beautiful” (*Eshche prekrasen ty, zaglokhshii Elizeti*). The poem's ending tries to strike a hopeful note as it looks to the future,²³¹ even if the “lyrical I” here speaks less about his progeny than about the spirit of his dead father. It is the father, after all, who commands the son to praise the “forests, valleys, and waters,” i.e., the very things that the father had initially landscaped and that have now changed the face of the estate and themselves been changed. Prophesying (*prorochit*) a home (*stranu*) that will not be subject to decay, the father in essence speaks of a place no longer subject to time and memory. The “lyrical I,” it would seem, is tasked with transcending his own yearning for a home, even if such transcendence requires nothing less than the death of the poet.

But when we look more closely at the poem Joseph Brodsky once called the “best poem in Russian poetry,”²³² we find that the whole matter of reading the text, either as an early instance of lyrical “realism” or as allegory, may be more complicated than we had initially thought. For in order for the poem's most basic “procedure” to work (which lies in convincing the reader of the need for a transcendent conception of home), the recollections of the “lyrical I” cannot really be put into question. To say as much is obviously to imply more than just the impossibility of verifying whether the Mara of yesteryear has fallen into a state of neglect to the point of being almost unrecognizable. What makes things problematic, rather, is the

²³¹ For more on the topic of hope and futurity in the Russian elegy, see Alyson Tapp, “From the Elegy to the End of the Novel: Literary Experiences of Emotion” (Ph.D dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2011), 7-51.

²³² Solomon Volkov, *Conversations With Joseph Brodsky: A Poet's Journey Through the Twentieth Century*, trans. Marian Schwartz (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 213; *Ibid.*, *Dialogi s Iosifom Brodskim* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2013), 301. It is remarkable that despite Brodsky's praise “Desolation” has received such little scholarly attention.

defectiveness of memory itself, for as the “lyrical I” in several places intimates, memory is reliable only to the extent of its ability to recognize. If the “lyrical I” cannot locate the objects he associates with memories, on which memory itself is dependent, his very ability to remember is compromised. And if the workings of memory are openly said to be deficient, then it becomes easy to see how both the allegorical reading (which implies at least some remembrance of earlier texts) and the mimetic one (which implies the remembrance of former things, but in any case posits a past that cannot be verified) leave us with an unresolved tension.²³³

In this final chapter, I approach Baratynsky’s elegy²³⁴ as a meditation of sorts on the problem of displacement. As mentioned in the introduction, inscribed in the idea of displacement is that very elementary procedure of language that permits us to speak of things that might not be directly in front of us, or to use a more well-known formula, that mechanism that allows us to make “absence present.” To the extent that an elegy specifically and self-consciously reflects on loss to salvage what it can of the past, one could claim that any discussion of elegy implies at least some awareness of the operation of displacement. But if language by its very existence and use means that whatever we are speaking of is not necessarily immediately to hand (so that when we resort to language we seem to be dealing with absence), then there might very well be a problem in the attempt to rectify displacement, to be placed back into a “normative” state, that is made through language. The event of homecoming cannot happen in language if only because

²³³ For this opposition, I take a cue from Paul de Man’s essay on Derrida’s reading of Rousseau: “Diachronic structures such as music, melody, or allegory are favored over pseudo-synchronic structures such as painting, harmony, or mimesis because the latter mislead one into believing in a stability of meaning that does not exist. The elegiac tone that is occasionally sounded does not express a nostalgia for an original presence but is a purely dramatic device, an effect made possible and dictated by a fiction that deprives the nostalgia of all foundation” (Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida’s Reading of Rousseau,” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 132-133.

²³⁴ That Baratynsky conceived of “Desolation” as an elegy is not in doubt: the poem was originally published with this generic moniker. Boratynskii PSSP, 2: 305. That Baratynsky redacted his poems to efface their generic specificity is, of course, another matter. See Igor’ Pil’shchikov, “Iz nabliudeniia nad genezisom i poetikoi elegii Baratynskogo,” *Izvestiia Rossiiskoi akademii nauk. Seriiia literatury i iazyka* 66.3 (2007): 57-64.

language always already signals the gap between itself and the thing for which it substitutes. One can say “I’m home” without ever actually being there, let alone without stopping to consider what exactly one means by “home.” Language is in fact the barrier to recovering any origin or source, which is precisely what homecoming is about.

At the same time, however, the only medium through which any sort of homecoming remains possible seems to be linguistic in nature. If one cannot physically go back in time to restore the original home, such a return appears tantalizingly possible in language. I am not simply saying that the home exists solely as figure (and thus can be summoned forth at any moment); I am implying that the yearning for and announcement of transcendence (the “country” that is prophesied at the end of “Desolation”) cannot really break out of the economy of the home. Or to put it another way, just as we begin to visualize the “country” Baratynsky’s “lyrical I” imagines will be his, and just as we begin to entertain the idea of a place beyond space, time, and memory, we realize not only that this place remains tethered to another text—remains allegorical, in other words—but also that the anterior text, far from proclaiming the end of memory, in fact affirms it. The original home can never be recovered even as it persists as the very thing from which one cannot escape.

II. Mara Revisited

Я посетил тебя, пленительная сень,
 Не в дни веселые живительного мая,
 Когда, зелеными ветвями помавая,
 Манишь ты путника в свою густую тень,
 Когда ты веешь ароматом
 Тобою бережно взлелеянных цветов,—
 Под очарованный твой кров
 Замедлил я моим возвратом.²³⁵

5

²³⁵ Baratynskii PSS, 169.

Seductive canopy, this visit I have paid,
 Not in the cheerful days of sweet vivacious May time,
 When your green branches complement the daytime
 And lure the passer-by into your grateful shade,
 When you exude that scent benumbing—
 Distilled most artfully from all your cherished
 Flowers—
 Into your dark enchanted bowers
 I still delayed my tardy coming.²³⁶

What strikes one, already in the opening lines of “Desolation,” is that the “lyrical I” is not describing what he sees before him. Even as he establishes the fact of his return (*Ia posetil tebia*), he transitions almost seamlessly to a composite memory of the estate at a different time. But though he has arrived late, not during the days of spring, he refers to the estate positively. If the estate is “captivating” (*plenitel’naia*), then, it is presumably so for reasons in addition to those mentioned. The “lyrical I” will develop this initial juxtaposition (and indeed, mutual dependence) between present and past in more intricate ways—here one simply needs to note in the conferral of the name the attempt to close the distance between two chronotopes. Mara is said to be “captivating” despite the time of arrival.²³⁷

Memory of the past is expressed on several different levels. The epithet “shade” or “shelter” (*sen’*) recalls the lines from “Stanzas” (1827), about Baratynsky’s return to Mara in spring 1827: “*Privel pod sen’ tvoiu sviatuiu / Ia souchastnitsu v mol’bakh.*”²³⁸ In the preceding stanza, the grove is also called a roof or shelter (*krov*): “*Molit’ khranitel’nogo krova / K tebe*

²³⁶ E. A. Baratynsky, “Desolation,” in *An Age Ago: A Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry*, intro. Joseph Brodsky, trans. Alan Myers (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988), 58.

²³⁷ E. V. Kapinos, “‘Negativnye opisaniia’ kak sredstvo sozdaniia obrazov v poezii Baratynskogo i Mandel’shtama,” *Gumanitarnye nauki v Sibiri* 4 (2000): 18-24.

²³⁸ “I’ve brought beneath your sacred shelter / My companion in prayer”; Baratynskii PSS, 133.

prishel ia ne odin.”²³⁹ Though it might seem that it is precisely the Mara of spring that Baratynsky’s “lyrical I” remembers at the beginning of “Desolation,” the lexical continuity suggests that we are dealing as well with another text or group of texts. “Desolation” might even be said to respond to “Stanzas” in the very way it asserts the time of arrival: the return takes place not in spring, but, as we learn, in autumn, when the estate no longer provides the same kind of “protection” and “shelter” it once did. The point is not merely that the “lyrical I” has returned home for different reasons, but also that the language of the past is already inscribed in the homecoming. It is not accidental that the poem begins by invoking the past rather than the present; in fact, the gesture seems to be symptomatic of the inability to arrive at the present through language.

That the “lyrical I” continues to find images of the springtime estate alluring is made clear in both the lexicon and meter. The wood grove is said to be captivating (*plenitel’naia*) and the shelter provided by the trees charmed (*ocharovannyi*); the grove beckons (*manish’*) to the wayfarer with its fragrant flowers. Meanwhile, in the intermixing of tetrameter and hexameter lines one detects not only the semblance of an elegiac poetic form (as in Baratynsky’s own “There is a dear land, there is a place on earth...”[1834]), but also a certain union of meter and meaning.²⁴⁰ The long hexameter lines keep the potentially brisk, iambic tetrameter ones from proceeding too quickly. Thus, just as he mentions the fragrance (*aromatom*) in line five, the “lyrical I” retards our reading with the missed iambic beats, on both sides of the caesura, of line six:

∪ ′ ∪ ′ ∪ ∪ | ∪ ′ ∪ ∪ ∪ ′
 Тобою бережно взлелеянных цветов

²³⁹ “To ask for protective cover / I have come not alone”; *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Michael Wachtel, *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

The meter slows down over the words “carefully” (*berezhno*) and “nurtured” (*vzleleiannykh*) before we learn that the “lyrical I” is speaking of the fragrance of flowers. And just as the opportunity arises to increase the pace in line seven, our reading is again arrested by the observance of the caesura in line eight, which coincides with the “lyrical I”’s own tardiness (*zamedlil ia*—a verb that contains the root for “slow” [cf. *medlenno*]). The “lyrical I” has indeed tarried in his return, as if his reflections on the springtime estate were the cause of his late arrival in autumn.

The next eight lines form something of a stanzaic break (although, properly speaking, there are no breaks in the text), giving us the poet’s impressions of the estate in autumn.

В осенней наготе стояли деревья	
И неприветливо чернели;	10
Хрустела под ногой замерзлая трава,	
И листья мертвые, волнуясь, шумели;	
С прохладой резкою дышал	
В лицо мне запах увяданья;	
Но не весеннего убранства я искал,	15
А прошлых лет воспоминанья. ²⁴¹	

In autumn now the trees stood naked, branch and
 Root,
 Aloof and silent, black negation;
The frozen blades of grass crunched soft beneath my
 Foot,
The dead leaves rustled in a sudden agitation;
 Through frosty coolness then I caught,
 Full-on, the reek of leaves decaying;
But springtime’s pristine garb was not the thing I
 Sought,
 My thoughts to former years were straying.²⁴²

Virtually every line here can be contrasted with one of the initial eight: the trees’ green branches which once beckoned to the traveler now darken unwelcomingly (*neprivetlivo cherneli*); the once

²⁴¹ Baratynskii PSS, 169.

²⁴² Baratynsky, “Desolation,” 58.

“thick shade” appears in its autumnal nakedness (*v osennei nagote*); and the scent of fragrant flowers now gives way to the scent of decay (*zapakh uviadan'ia*). To be sure, images of fall are not infrequent in Baratynsky's poetry: one thinks immediately of the early translation of Millevoye's "La chute des feuilles" (*Padenie list'ev*, 1823) or even of the magisterial "Autumn" (1836-37).²⁴³ In neither text, however, does Baratynsky offer such a sharp distinction between the two seasons, even as he insists that what he seeks is not dependent on the time of year. Lines fifteen and sixteen, in fact, to some extent problematize the equation, found so often in Baratynsky, between the seasons of the year and the periods of man's life (e.g. spring = youth), for not only does the "lyrical I" hint at some continuity between past and present (the autumnal estate is still "captivating"), but the primacy of spring is seemingly demoted in importance: the speaker makes it clear that what he seeks is not spring, but remembrance of former years (*proshlykh let vospominan'ia*). The equation "spring = youth," in other words, may no longer apply.

Given the importance of remembrance to Russian elegiac literature on the whole, and to "Desolation" in particular, this may be the place to say a few words on the broader elegiac tradition to which Baratynsky is both heir and contributor. Specifically, I have in mind Baratynsky's own "Excerpts from the Poema, *Remembrance*," a free translation of Gabriel-Marie Legouvé's "Les souvenirs ou les avantages de la Mémoire." Here Baratynsky / Legouvé assert the creative power of memory. History and the texts of the past are insufficient for the curious mind—one must also be able to envision the past for oneself and in fact converse with the ruins that have survived time.

²⁴³ G. R. Barratt, "C. H. Millevoye in Russia," *Revue de littérature comparée* 53.2 (1979): 159-162; V. N. Toporov, "Mladoi pevets i bystrotechnoe vremia: (k istorii odnogo obraza v russkoi poezii XIX veka)," in *Russian Poetics: Proceedings of the International Colloquium at UCLA, September 22-26*, ed. Thomas Eekman and Dean S. Worth (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1983), 409-439.

Но любопытный ум в одной ли тьме преданий
 Найдёт источники уроков и познаний?—
 Нет; всё вокруг меня гласит о прежних днях.
 Блуждая странником в неизвестных краях,
 Я всюду шествую, минувшим окруженный.
 Я вопрошаю прах дряхлеющей вселенной:
 И грады, и поля, и сей безмолвный ряд
 Рукою времени набросанных громад.²⁴⁴

But will the inquisitive mind in darkness alone
 Find the sources of lessons and knowledge?
 No. Everything around me speaks of former days.
 Wandering a stranger in unknown lands,
 I stride all over, surrounded by the past.
 I question the dust of the decrepit universe:
 The cities, the fields, and this silent row
 Of ruins [*gromad*] thrown about by the hand of time.

It goes without saying that there is more at work here than simple translation: one hears in the references to the “enfeebled universe” (*driakhleiushchaia vseleennaia*) and the “hand of time” (*ruka vremeni*) echoes of Derzhavin, whose importance to Baratynsky as both a thinker and a poet is beyond question.²⁴⁵ But what I really want to emphasize is the epistemological value ascribed to memory (or imagination—the poet elides the distinction): the poet is transported to distant times by virtue of being able to converse with ruins (*vse vokrug menia glasit o prezhnikh dniakh*). He interrogates what is left of the aging universe. And what is more, the ruins talk back.

Событий прежних лет свидетель молчаливый,
 Со мной беседует их прах красноречивый.²⁴⁶

Silent witness to the events of former years,
 Their eloquent dust converses with me.

²⁴⁴ Baratynskii PSS, 52.

²⁴⁵ One cannot, for instance, fully appreciate Baratynsky’s “Autumn” without going back to Lomonosov and Derzhavin. Irina Semenko, *Poety pushkinskoi pory* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1970), 267-270.

²⁴⁶ Baratynskii PSS, 52.

The ruins are eloquent, even to the point of allowing the poet visual access to the past. He not only hears about the passage of time, but sees it: «Мелькают предо мной события веков».²⁴⁷

So memory not only serves as a supplement of sorts, taking us back to the sources of knowledge (*istochniki urokov i poznanii*); it also, by implication, becomes a source of knowledge itself, thanks to the poet's insistence that interaction with the past is possible. Memory intervenes even when written texts and stories are no longer heeded—one simply needs to understand the *language* of ruins.

Но неужель для нас язык развалин нем?
Нет, нет, лишь понимать умеете их молчанье,—
И новый мир для вас создаст воспоминанье.²⁴⁸

But can it be that the language of ruins is mute to you?
No, no—just learn to understand their silence,
And remembrance will create for you a new world.

The poet maintains, at once, that this language is not mute (*nem*), but that one has to be able to apprehend silence. The ruins speak and yet do not speak. If the condition of making sense of silence is met, remembrance becomes capable of world creation (*I novyi mir dlia vas sozdist vospominan'e*).

In a rather un-elegiac sense, “Excerpts” posits the complete recovery of the past through memory's intervention (though the fact that the text claims to be a *poema* may tell us something about the reason why).²⁴⁹

О память! ты одна беседуешь со мной,
Ты возвращаешь мне отъятое судьбой.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 53.

²⁴⁹ Without delving into the various debates over genre categories, I will simply note here that “Excerpts,” true to the spirit of epic (historically, the “omnibus” genre), incorporates several different generic modes into its narrative, including elegy and idyll. Incidentally, the question as to whether or not a *poema* could in fact be an epic was critical to the reception of *Dead Souls*.

Memory! You alone converse with me,
You return to me what fate has taken away.

But if the possibility of conversing with ruins surely stands as an elegiac conceit, then one should also note the role landscape plays in this form of discourse. For as we shall see in “Desolation,” memory depends in multiple ways on landscape and can falter and break down if the latter is altered beyond recognition. In “Excerpts,” as in other elegiac texts from the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the landscape of ruins tends to inspire rather than hinder memory. Interspersed throughout “Excerpts,” however, are idyllic passages in which the poet speaks less of ruins than of the home, a place where remembrance serves as a source of pleasure and comfort.

Забытый от людей, блажит уединенье,
Где от забот мирских нашел отдохновенье;
Но любит вспоминать он были прежних лет [...]
Милее кажется ему родная сень,
Покой отраднее, приятней рощи тень,
Уединенная роскошнее природа [...]²⁵¹

Forgotten by people, he [the weary traveler—DH] indulges in solitude,
Where he has found relaxation from worldly cares.
But he loves to recall the stories of former years...
His native canopy seems to him more dear,
His peace more joyful, the shade of the grove more pleasant,
Solitary nature more exquisite.

Where ruins allow the poet to reconstruct—and indeed create—the past according to the dictates of memory, the ancestral home simply becomes more attractive when the poet’s own past is remembered. The past is always accessible, but that access has preconditions; it is not immediate. One can speak and listen to ruins only if one knows the language of silence, while it is the ancestral home that provides the poet refuge from the world and makes pleasant even

²⁵⁰ Baratynskii PSS, 49.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 50.

remembrance of unfortunate personal events. It is at the home, in other words, that the poet can imaginatively recall things that might otherwise remain unpleasant.

With regard to “Desolation,” then, we need to bear in mind that the representation of homecoming makes use of both these moments. On the one hand, the “lyrical I” looks on his home in the way another elegiac poet might have surveyed the ruins of an ancient civilization. On the other hand, this home presumably cannot participate in the mode of interaction, mutually beneficial, whereby the home inspires memories and the memories in turn make the home more attractive than it really is. As we shall see, “Desolation” complicates the relationship between landscape and memory on which “Excerpts” and other texts rely. The “lyrical I” does not recollect simply because he happens to be in the right place; rather, the remembrance of former years (*proshlykh let vospominan'ia*) must be sought out.

III. The Elusive Familiar

Душой задумчивый, медлительно я шел
С годов младенческих знакомыми тропами;
Художник опытный их некогда провел.
Увы, рука его изглажена годами!²⁵²

20

With soul preoccupied thus, pensively I strolled
Those paths well known to me from youthful years
Long vanished,
Laid out by cunning hands, some artist skilled of old—
His craft, alas, by time eroded now and banished.²⁵³

Line fifteen, in which the “lyrical I” states what he is not looking for (*No ne vesennego ubranstva ia iskal*), begins a series of lexical echoes that will continue throughout the text. The repetition of key words (e.g. *iskal*, *znakomyi*) and roots creates a web of intertexts, as it were,

²⁵² Ibid., 169.

²⁵³ Baratynsky, “Desolation,” 58.

requiring us to read back and forth to establish the range of meanings being evoked. Thus, when the “lyrical I” tells us that he walked “slowly” (*medlitel’no*—which can also mean “sluggishly” and “tardily”) along the estate’s paths, we are meant to recall the manner of arrival, namely that he was late or tardy in his return (*Zamedlil ia moim vozvratom*). The pace of the return, as well as that of the ensuing walk across the estate, is symptomatic of the pace of the poem itself, which proceeds slowly and meditatively as the poet seeks remembrance. In contrast to “Excerpts,” where remembrance is not viewed as something one looks for, “Desolation” makes it clear that remembrance is the result of work and exertion. And repetition—the re-presentation of the past through language—is one of the ways the “lyrical I” attempts to remember.

Lines seventeen-twenty already anticipate the problem the “lyrical I” faces in attempting to find remembrance, namely that the deterioration and neglect of the estate may have implications for the search. The poet knows and recognizes the trails, but he does not fail, at the same time, to register the degree of change that has occurred in his absence. Although at this point in the text we do not know who the skilled artist is (*khudozhnik opytnyi*—the father’s death is mentioned explicitly only later), lines nineteen and twenty can be read in two different ways. The hand (*ruka*) can refer synecdochically to the man himself or metonymically to his labor. Indeed, one can entertain both possibilities at once: the poet’s father, the skilled artist who originally landscaped Mara,²⁵⁴ is now gone, erased, as is his work (*ruka ego izglazhena godami*). If the landscape, in other words, is to play any role in prompting remembrance, it, too, stands in need of restoration. Paradoxically, the estate must be remembered in its former splendor before it can provide the conditions for remembrance.

²⁵⁴ Klimkova, M. A. “Boratynskie na Tambovshchine.” *K 200-letiiu Boratynskogo. Sbornik materialov mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, sostoivsheisia 21-23 fevralia 2000 g. (Moskva-Muranovo)*. Ed. I. A. Pil’shchikov (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2002), 205.

There may be another problem, too, that issues directly from the poet's choice of words, namely the short form participle *izglazhena*. Taken on its own, *izgladit'* means "to efface" or "to erase." The fixed expression *izglazhivat' / izgladit' iz pamiati*, however, means "to blot out" or "to erase from one's memory." Although the word *pamiat'*, memory, is not used until later in the text, the etymologically related *vospominan'e*, remembrance, was mentioned already in line sixteen. Without pressing the case to far, I want to suggest not only that the architect and his work on the estate have been effaced, but also, given the choice of words, their position in the text and the overall theme, that memory itself may have been compromised, if not altogether "blotted out," by the passage of years. Indeed, the reference may in fact be a metonymy for writing, the hand, and the fear of not leaving a trace.

The "lyrical I" proceeds to juxtapose his expectations to the reality he encounters.

Стези заглохшие, мечтаешь, пешеход	
Случайно протоптал. Сошел я в дол заветный,	
Дол, первых дум моих лелеатель приветный!	
Пруда знакомого искал красивых вод,	
Искал прыгучих вод мне памятной каскады;	25
Там, думал я, к душе моей	
Толпою полетят виденья прежних дней...	
Вотще! лишённые хранительной преграды,	
Далече воды утекли,	
Их ложе поросло травюю,	30
Приют хозяйственный в нем улья обрели,	
И легкая тропа исчезла предо мною.	
Ни в чем знакомого мой взор не обретал! ²⁵⁵	

The paths were barely traced, as if some other, once,
 Had wandered here. At last I found the vale I
 Cherished,
 Dear vale, which my first dim and halting thoughts
 Had nourished,
 And sought the gracious waters of the well-known
 Ponds,
 Sought out the once-familiar surge of water leaping;

²⁵⁵ Baratynskii PSS, 170.

Once there, I thought, my soul will be
 Soon overwhelmed with crowding visions dear to
 Me...
 Great God! The stout-built dam had broken down
 And, seeping,
 Its waters wandered far and wide,
 Its bed now covered up in couch grass,
 Where sets of beehives squatted side by side;
 The lightly marked-out paths now petered out in
 Impasse.
 In nothing could my eye descry the known!²⁵⁶

The degree of repetition increases here, as if indicating the extent to which the poet wishes his memories or “visions” to reflect Mara in its current state. In a short space, the poet not only mentions more than once the physical attributes of the estate, namely the vale (*dol*) and the water (*vody*), but also implies his attempt to link past and present through morphological variations on the root *dum*. Once the dale is said to be something like the nurse of his first thoughts (*pervykh dum moikh leleiatel' privetnyi*), the poet thinks (*dumal*) that visions of his past will come rushing to him. Note, too, that the poet reiterates his search (*iskal*) for something familiar (*znakomoe*) four times between lines fifteen and thirty-eight. Read simply in terms of lexical variation, “Desolation” may very well be Baratynsky’s most repetitive poem.

Yet no amount of incantation—words being the only form of continuity between past and present—results in remembrance. Deprived of reinforcement along its banks, the pond has not so much dried up as simply flowed away, its basin (*lozhe*) now overgrown with grass. What the beehives have gained and what the poet has lost is signaled by the same verb: the former have acquired a shelter for their activities (*Priiut khoziaistvennyi v nem ul'ia obreli*) while the poet is unable to recover anything familiar (*Ni v chem znakomogo moi vzor ne obretal!*). Repetition

²⁵⁶ Baratynsky, “Desolation,” 58-59.

proves deprivative in various ways: one sees this in the difficulty of thinking one's thoughts back to some prior existence as well as in the assumption of the familiar by what is alien.

On the one hand, in describing the pond now overgrown with weeds and inhabited by bees, the “lyrical I” depicts a reality not necessarily confined to this particular estate. Built at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Mara reflects a broader shift in the taste for architecture and gardens. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a turn from the construction of French gardens—“with straight alleys, trimmed hedges, and abundant use of statuary”²⁵⁷—to English models, which were defined by, among other things, non-linear paths and asymmetrical landscaping. The “lyrical I” registers the lack of a pattern to the paths he takes when he notes: «Стези заглохшие, мечтаешь, пешеход / Случайно протоптал». Indeed, unlike its French counterpart, the English garden tended to blur somewhat the boundaries separating the garden from its environs.

In “Desolation,” of course, there is far more at work than just the evidence of a historical shift in garden construction. On the one hand, as T. M. Zhaplova notes, the “lyrical I” seems to realize that the boundary between the garden and its surroundings, which once was simply muted, has now completely “disappeared.” This is why the pond's basin is now covered in weeds and why, metaphorically speaking, the family *gnezdo* or nest has been overtaken by beehives. Having been abandoned and neglected, the estate has begun to merge with nature. From this perspective, one understands why Zhaplova insists that the paths the “lyrical I” repeatedly

²⁵⁷ Andreas Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden: Politics and Landscape Design in Imperial Russia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 19.

mentions are not merely a trope but a very real “feature” of the estate. That they have come to be effaced and exist only in the poet’s “memory” only underscores the fact that they once existed.²⁵⁸

On the other hand, the inability of the “lyrical I” to rely on memory to represent the past also points to a transitional moment in the history of elegiac literature. It is difficult to say which is more true: whether the failure of memory signals some crisis in the genre or whether that very failure intensifies the genre’s effect.²⁵⁹ In any event, if we are speaking strictly in terms of the function of memory, we clearly see a difference between the “elegiac school” of Zhukovsky and Batiushkov on the one hand and the new praxis that their successors developed on the other.

Recall that the “lyrical I” of that quintessentially elegiac text, Batiushkov’s “On the Ruins of a Castle in Sweden” (1814), only has to see the ruins—the “traces of fame and years gone by” (*Sledy protekshikh let i slavy*)—in order to reimagine scenes of the past. It is worth pausing over the rhetoric of remembrance.

Все тихо: мертвый сон в обители глухой.
 Но здесь живет воспоминанье:
 И путник, опершись на камень гробовой,
 Вкушает сладкое мечтанье.²⁶⁰

All is quiet: dead sleep in the remote abode.
 But here lives remembrance,
 And the traveler, leaning on a tombstone,
 Enjoys the sweet reverie.

²⁵⁸ T. M. Zhaplova, *Obraz russkoi usad'by v poezii XIX-nachala XX veka* (Orenburg: Izdatel'stvo OGPU, 2006), 236-237.

²⁵⁹ Frizman claims that the elegy of the 1830s and 40s begins to deny the possibility of country solitude (*sel'skoe uedinenie*), a possibility that had been crucial to an earlier generation of elegists. Frizman identifies this change within Baratynsky's own poetry, pointing to the celebration of the countryside in “Native Land” (1820-21) and then to the line in “The Last Poet” (1835) in which the poet asserts that there is “no solitude on earth.” L. G. Frizman, “Elegicheskaia traditsiia v russkoi lirike 1830-kh godov,” *Problemy literatury i estetiki*, ed. Z. M. Salagaeva (Ordzhonikidze, 1979), 113-126, esp. 121-122.

²⁶⁰ K. N. Batiushkov, *Opyty v stikhakh i proze*, ed. I. M. Semenko (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 202.

What the poem makes patently clear is that remembrance requires no effort, if only because it “lives” (*zhivet*) independently of the observer. Memory is impersonal: insofar as we learn nothing about the traveler, it does not seem to matter who does the remembering. One simply has to be present at the scene to experience or “taste” the past (*Vkushaet sladkoe mechtan'e*). Remembrance lives, of course, in a particular place, and one assumes that it cannot be accessed from just anywhere. But the point seems to be that it is sufficient to be standing among ruins and graves to visualize the past.

Batiushkov’s traveler’s vision shuttles between past and present several times over the course of the elegy, insisting on the link between the scenes depicted and the ruins that inspire them. Even as the traveler maintains, in the final three strophes, that the vision no longer corresponds to the present, the ruins *and the runes* retain their restorative power by narrating their own provenance.

Погибли сильные! Но странник в сих местах
 Не тщетно камни вопрошает
 И руны тайные, останки на скалах
 Угрюмой древности, читает.²⁶¹

The powerful have perished! But the wanderer in these parts
 Questions the rocks not in vain,
 And reads the mysterious runes,
 The remnants of dark antiquity, on the crags.

Remembrance, it turns out, is mediated through acts of questioning and reading. Moreover, interrogation does not necessarily lead to an unguided flight of imagination, but is directed by language, the runes. It may be, as Jacob Emery suggests, that the “implication” here “is that these arcane symbols contain the text itself, a quoted skaldic poem.”²⁶² Whether the runes are simply

²⁶¹ Ibid., 205.

²⁶² Jacob Emery, “Repetition and Exchange in Legitimizing Empire: Konstantin Batiushkov’s Scandinavian Corpus,” *Russian Review* 66.4 (Oct. 2007): 616.

characters or entire poems inscribed in stone is perhaps less important than the fact that they are as much the source of remembrance as the ruins of the castle. So like Baratynsky in “Excerpts,” Batiushkov posits a mode of communication between traveler and ruins: that the traveler questions “not in vain” (*Ne tshchetno*) suggests that he receives a response.

Although written only several years later and obviously oriented toward “On the Ruins of a Swedish Castle,”²⁶³ Baratynsky’s “Finland” (1820) already gives us some indication of how the concerns of elegy were starting to change. Most important for our purposes is the theme of remembrance. In Batiushkov, the past is still accessible: one can learn of the “deeds of the fathers” thanks to the still legible runes.²⁶⁴ However distant “antiquity” might be in time, it can still be represented through remembrance. In Baratynsky, by contrast, Finland’s history appears to be so discontinuous as to require another national tradition’s mythology to fill in the gaps. Hence the reference to the “fatherland of Odin’s children” (*Tak vot otechestvo Odinyokh detei*). Commentators never fail to note Baratynsky’s substitution of Norse for Finnish mythology here, even though the text on the whole was inspired by Baratynsky’s term of stay in Finnish territory annexed by the Russian Empire. We can speak of a kind of remembrance in “Finland,” but only on the condition that remembrance is more than a vision or product of collective memory; it is a displaced tradition.

But the reference to Norse mythology may be more than just poetic license: it may be symptomatic of the text’s treatment of remembrance on the whole. For the past, in this text, seems threatened by oblivion:

²⁶³ Geir Kjetsaa, *Evgenii Baratynskii: zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973), 347.

²⁶⁴ It is also appropriate to speak of a certain “living” memory of the ancestors in Batiushkov’s elegy. Recall that at the end of “At the Ruins,” it is the ploughman who reminds the traveler that he is at the site of a graveyard: «Опарай ближних сел, склонясь на посох свой, / Гласит ему: «Смотри, о сын иноплеменный, / Здесь тлеют праотцев останки драгоценны: / Почти их гроб святой!» (Batiushkov, *Оруту*, 205).

Умолк призывный щит, не слышен скальда глас,
 Воспламененный дуб угас,
 Развеял буйный ветер торжественные клики;
 Сыны не ведают о подвигах отцов
 И в дольном прахе их богов
 Лежат низверженные лики!²⁶⁵

The inviting shield has grown silent, the skald's voice is inaudible,
 The flaming oak is extinguished,
 The vehement wind has dispersed the festive cries.
 The sons know not of the deeds of the fathers
 And the overthrown icons of their gods
 Lie in earthly dust.

The lines are so resonant with Batiushkov's text, in terms both of rhetoric and meaning, that it is easy to overlook just how far Baratynsky has departed from his source. For we need to remember that "On the Ruins" is very much concerned with the theme of cultural transmission. Recall the warrior, the "brave grandson of Odin" (*Odena khrabryi vnuk*), who adjures the son to follow the path of his ancestors, or the ploughman at the end, who urges the foreign traveler to honor the graves of the ancient warriors. The tradition Batiushkov describes may have died, but its legend lives on. Meanwhile, Baratynsky implies a rupture in the transmission of memory: the sons are unaware of the deeds of the fathers (*Syny ne vedaiut o podvigakh ottsov*). What is unknown cannot be remembered, or rather, the unknown requires an altogether different figuration, a mythology that can stand in for what has been forgotten or lost. Even if it were possible to restore the images of the fallen gods now reduced to dust (*I v dol'nom prakhe ikh bogov / Lezhat nizverzhenные liki!*), it is in no way clear that doing so would provide the "sons" with any knowledge of their "fathers." There is an epistemological gap that, by the end of the poem, Baratynsky's bard comes to celebrate.

And here we are given some indication of the direction the Russian elegy is going to take: what survives into the present may in fact frustrate or hinder remembrance. In "Finland," of

²⁶⁵ Baratynskii PSS, 63.

course, the remnants of the past are altogether effaced. Batiushkov's traveler can still represent the past through remembrance and reading—indeed, the past remains legible. But in Baratynsky, the warriors' deeds have vanished with them. There is no trace or rune left to narrate the past (*Vash sled ischez v rodnoi strane*), and the very names of the warriors have been effaced (*I vashi imena ne poshchadilo vremia!*). There is no signifier, let alone a signified, or rather, if there is a signifier (the landscape of Finland? The effaced runes?), it must be tethered to a foreign signifier (Norse mythology) to be represented at all. In “Finland,” the extent to which remembrance has been compromised has not yet been fully explored, if only because something, even a displaced past, can still be recollected. Later elegiac practice, however, will demonstrate the radical disjuncture between ruins and artifacts and the things they would signify; in fact, this practice will trace a failure within memory itself.

Although it might seem counterintuitive, if not altogether absurd, to cite it as an example of a new development in elegy, I refer to Gogol's *Hans Küchelgarten* (1829). Somewhat redundantly subtitled an “idyll in scenes,” the text is in fact a patchwork of genres and includes an excursion into elegy that helpfully illustrates how memory fails to extract the past from ruins. Recall what happens when Hans walks among the ruins of Athens: he has nothing like the experience of Batiushkov's traveler.

Все тихо: мертвый сон в обители глухой,
 Но здесь живет воспоминание:
 И путник, опершись на камень гробовой,
 Вкушает сладкое мечтанье.

(«На развалинах замка в Швеции»)²⁶⁶

Печальны древности Афин.
 Туманен ряд былых картин.
 Облокотясь на мрамор хладный,
 Напрасно путник алчет жадный
 В душе бывшее воскресить.

(«Ганц Кюхельгартен»)²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Batiushkov, *Опыту*, 202.

²⁶⁷ N. V. Gogol', *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1953), 1: 251.

All is quiet: dead sleep in the remote abode.
 But here lives remembrance,
 And the traveler, leaning on a tombstone,
 Enjoys the sweet reverie.

The antiquities of Athens are sorrowful.
 The row of bygone scenes is hazy.
 Leaning his elbow on the cold marble,
 The avaricious traveler vainly desires
 To resurrect the past in his soul.

(“On the Ruins of a Swedish Castle”)

(*Hans Küchelgarten*)

At first glance, it would seem that all the prerequisites for the elegiac experience Hans seeks have been met. We have a traveler (*putnik*) in foreign lands, ruins and antiquities, and elegiac rhetoric. Indeed, in leaning his elbows on the cold marble (*Oblokotias' na mramor khladnyi*), Hans even adopts the pose proper for meditations on the past. What is more, Hans visits not just any ruins, but famous monuments in Athens where his imaginative restoration of the past ought to proceed unencumbered. Hans, in a word, has an abundance of texts to which he can refer, on the level both of content (the various histories, legends and mythologies associated with Athens) and of form (the poetic formulas going back at least as far as Karamzin and sentimentalism) in his quest for remembrance.

But the possibility of the past being in some way transmitted to the present that we find in Batiushkov's text is absent in Gogol's. In Batiushkov, remembrance simply “lives,” there to be “tasted” by the traveler. Hans, meanwhile, is unable to satiate his hunger, a point underscored by the references to Hans's avaricious craving (*Naprasno alchet putnik zhadnyi*) for scenes of antiquity. The obvious implication of Hans's inability to resurrect (*voskresit'*) the past (*byloe*) is that the past is dead.²⁶⁸ Additionally, Gogol slightly revises elegiac tradition even on the level of rhetoric. *Tumanen* (“foggy,” “hazy”) is, of course, a key word from Zhukovsky's poetic register

²⁶⁸ Apropos of the vanity of reviving the past, recall the end of “On the Ruins” when the traveler questions the stones “not in vain” (*Ne tshchetno*).

and the one Küchelbecker identified as one of the clichés of elegiac poetry.²⁶⁹ *Tuman*, however, is usually part of the elegiac setting. When Gogol's speaker says that the series of bygone scenes (*riad bylykh kartin*) is hazy (*tumanen*), he is describing not so much the atmosphere of Athens as the visual quality of the architecture. Virtually everything Hans sees betrays a state of neglect; the "trace of weary years" (*sled vekov ustalykh* i.e., the fragments and ruined monuments) is said to be "dismal" (*pechalen*). In their fallen state, the antiquities of Athens do not inspire poetic visions but rather evoke in Hans a kind of homesickness, prompting him to leave the scene. Hans cannot imaginatively restore the "hazy" antiquities, cannot correlate what he sees with any sort of text. The ruins do not provide a bridge back to their source; they merely hint at a lost world.

By the time we get to "Desolation," then, the relationship between memory or remembrance and the things on which they are dependent (ruins, fragments, artifacts, traces) has been significantly revised. Baratynsky does not rehearse the scenario in which the encounter with traces of the past is enough to inspire a poetic vision. Nor does the poet give any indication that memory simply "lives" or inhabits the place where it was made. For one thing, remembrance, as the text makes abundantly clear, is labor—it does not make itself readily accessible to the traveler, but must be actively sought. More than this, the very places of which memory is supposedly a reflection must have remained unaltered in order for memory to work. To put it another way, the past cannot have become present. This is the point the "lyrical I" seems to suggest when he descends into the vale: should he see the familiar pond and cascade, his "visions" will shortly follow. But the "lyrical I" finds nothing familiar, and the visions do not come; the condition for memory has not been met. Baratynsky seems to be implying that if the

²⁶⁹ «Прочитав любую элегию Жуковского, Пушкина или Баратынского, знаешь все. «...» Картины везде одни и те же. «...» туман: туманы над водами, туманы над бором, туманы над полями, туман в голове сочинителя» (Wil'gel'm Kiukhel'beker, "O napravlenii nashei poezii, osobenno liricheskoi, v poslednee desiatiletie," In *Puteshestvie. Dnevnik. Stat'i*, ed. N. V Korova and V. D. Rak [Leningrad: Nauka, 1979], 456-457).

space which creates memory in the first place is altered too much, memory's subsequent ability to function is altogether compromised.

At the same time, though, memory persists—if it were otherwise, the poet would be unable to register any degree of change. He knows what once existed and where it once existed, and so we cannot speak of a complete failure of memory. What the poet sees is all elusively familiar: enough has remained unchanged to remind him that he is home, yet what he seeks is not home but the memory of home. In other words, he seeks what is elusive in the familiar. As I will try to show in the rest of this chapter, the attempt to stabilize the elusive is what prompts the poet by the text's end to his renunciation of memory.

IV. Elysium Deserted

As the “lyrical I” continues to mark signs of neglect and decay, it is easy to overlook the moment when we cross over the center of the text in lines 34-35.

Ни в чем знакомого мой взор не обретал!	
Но вот по-прежнему, лесистым косогором,	
Дорожка смелая ведет меня... обвал	35
Вдруг поглотил ее... Я стал	
И глубь нежданную измерил грустным взором,	
С недоумением искал другой тропы.	
Иду я: где беседка тлеет	
И в прахе перед ней лежат ее столпы,	40
Где остов мостика дряхлеет.	
И ты, величественный грот,	
Тяжело-каменный, постигнут разрушеньем	
И угрожаешь уж паденьем,	
Бывало, в летний зной прохлады полный свод! ²⁷⁰	45

In nothing could my eye descry the known!
 But here the way led on across a wooded hillside
 And boldly drew me forth, then suddenly... was
 Gone,

²⁷⁰ Baratynskii PSS, 170.

A landslip swallowed it... Alone
 I stood and measured out the depth and, gloomy-eyed,
 In some bewilderment sought out another route.
 I walked on: where the arbor rotted—
 And in the dust before it lay its columns mute,
 The framework of a bridge still tottered.
 And you, O queen of grottoes all,
 Though built of heavy stone, now touched with ruin's
 Finger,
 Seeming to crumble as I linger,
 Were once, in summer heat, a cool and ample hall.²⁷¹

From a strictly formal perspective, one should note that virtually every line of the poem's 69 can be placed into a quatrain. The exceptions are two couplets at 50-51 and 64-65, and, curiously, an extra line of verse at 33-37, from which we get the poem's odd number of lines. The extra line, whether one takes it to be 35 or 36 (both provide rhyme pairs for *obretal*), also designates the sole instance of two consecutive enjambments, a feature underscored by the text's punctuation (the ellipsis in the middle of each line). The text thus observes a de facto caesura before the last foot.

∪ ` ∪ ` ∪ ∪ ∪ ` ∪ ` | ∪ ` ∪ `
 Дорожка смелая ведет меня... обвал
 ∪ ∪ ∪ ` ∪ ` | ∪ ` ∪ `
 Вдруг поглотил ее... Я стал

This is the only place in the poem where the lines essentially end where we do not expect them to. The ellipses require that we start reading the two lines a foot early, as the lines spill over, as it were, and to read too quickly is to follow the bold path (*dorozhka smelaia*) straight into the landslip (*obval*). By pausing on the last foot, we avoid stepping on the wrong word, over the collapse, and being swallowed up like the path that “guides” us.

Given that we are speaking literally of a landslide, it may not be entirely inappropriate to think of this juncture as a kind of epicenter: we are, after all, at the very center of the text and in

²⁷¹ Baratynsky, “Desolation,” 59-60.

the very midst of the poet's quest. The poem itself pauses twice before the ellipses, as does the "lyrical I." *Ia stal*: I stood. He stands on the path that leads into the abyss, which is to say, nowhere. Before this, the paths seem to have led somewhere, even if the poet had been unable to find along them anything familiar. Now, however, the path—and whatever promise of remembrance it may have held—runs out, consumed by the landslip. Here, at the center of the text, the poet is forced to stop and take measure (*izmeril*) of the depth that lies before him—the extent to which the estate has been altered—and to chose another path.²⁷²

This change of course, which redirects the poet from the landscape proper to the architecture of the estate, is also registered by a shift in verbal tense and aspect. If earlier the poet had used past-tense verbs to mark his progress, alternating between imperfective and perfective, now we begin to discern the transition to the present, as if the poet were still "in the moment." That the transition occurs perhaps as the result of confusion should not be overlooked: perplexed and presumably disoriented, the poet seeks another path (*S nedoumeniem iskal drugoi tropy*). In the space between lines 38 and 39—between the decision to change direction and the announcement of a new tense (*Idu ia*)—the poet seems to have rediscovered familiar territory, for he does not walk *to* the pavilion (*k besedke*), but rather is already there, in the same proximity (*Idu ia: gde besedka tleet*). Here, ruination takes place in the present: the pavilion is in a state of decay (*tleet*), its columns lie (*lezhat*) in dust, and the bridge's framework grows decrepit (*driakhleet*). In contrast to the pond which has been reclaimed by nature, the structures of the estate are in the process of decomposition. And in at least one instance, this process is close to completion: the stone-built grotto, touched by destruction, is on the brink of collapsing (*I ugrozhaesh' uzh paden'em*). The transition into the present is perhaps meant to recall the scenes

²⁷² Or trope (the Russian is «тропея»)? It is tempting to see this transition as a metapoetic statement, or at least pun, on Baratynsky's part.

of spring at the beginning, with the difference that now we are given not a generalized vision of a time and space, but its concrete representation. It is as if the poet witnesses the desolation as it is happening.

Insofar as the mention of the grotto effectively marks the end of the poet's search for remembrance and resignation with the failed quest, we might pause to consider what exactly is missing from the representation we have been given. After all, it is curious that in a poem supposedly about homecoming the poet does not refer to the house (*dom*) at all. This is all the more striking in light of the fact that the house tends to feature in at least some capacity in Baratynsky's other poems of homecoming. In "Stanzas" (1827), for instance (an earlier poem about Mara), the poet is specific about the pleasure he receives upon seeing his home from afar:

Но мне увидеть было слаще
Лес на покате двух холмов
И скромный дом в садовой чаще—
Приют младенческих годов.²⁷³

But it was sweeter for me to see
The forest on the slope of two hills
And the modest house in the orchard thicket,
The refuge of infant years.

Granted, Baratynsky deploys the same rhetoric in "Desolation" (e.g. *S godov mladencheskikh znakomymi tropami; Priiut khoziaistvennyi v nem ul'ia obreli*), a rhetoric certainly expansive enough to allow for some overlap between the notions of "home" and "refuge." And yet in "*Est milaia strana, est' ugol na zemle...*" (1834), written in the same year as "Desolation" but about a different estate, the poet does not fail to mention the house in his representation of the landscape.

Я помню ясный, чистый пруд;
Под сению берез ветвистых,
Средь мирных вод его три острова цветут;
Светлея нивами меж рощ своих волнистых,

²⁷³ Baratynskii PSS, 132-133.

За ним встает гора, пред ним в кустах шумит
И брызжет мельница. Деревня, луг широкий,
А там счастливый дом... туда душа летит,
Там не хладел бы я и в старости глубокой!²⁷⁴

I remember the clear, pure pond;
Under the canopy of ramous birches
Among its peaceful waters three islands flower;
Bright in fields between its wavy copses,
A mountain stands behind it, while in front of it in the bushes
A windmill murmurs and splashes. The country, wide meadow,
And them the fortunate home... there the soul flies,
There I would not grow cold even in old age!

As in “Desolation,” the poet mentions the pond first, and then proceeds to enumerate everything else. But whatever else we might say about “Desolation,” it is clear that the poet’s soul does not “fly” toward the house, wherever it might be. If the house, as Zhaplova reminds us, is indeed the “foundational poetic image and center” of estate poetry,²⁷⁵ its omission from Baratynsky’s text is all the more perplexing. In eliding the house, Baratynsky may be taking the elegiac commonplace that one can never go home to its logical conclusion: can there be homecoming without a house?

Whatever the case may be, we have reached the conclusion of the poet’s search. The poet states succinctly what the estate still means to him, despite the impossibility of recovering the past.

Что ж? пусть минувшее минуло сном летучим!
Еще прекрасен ты, загдохший Элизей,
И обаянием могучим
Исполнен для души моей.²⁷⁶

What then? Let past things fade, a fleeting summer

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 166.

²⁷⁵ T. M. Zhaplova, *Obraz russkoi usad'by*, 18-28.

²⁷⁶ Baratynskii PSS, 170.

Hour,
 You are still beautiful to me, Elysian field;
 Though choked, your charm still holds its power,
 Compels my willing soul to yield.²⁷⁷

In a maneuver worthy of Pushkin, Baratynsky, in the space of two lines, transitions from an intentionally redundant and clichéd sentiment about the past (*pust' minuvshee minulo snom letuchim!*) to an unexpectedly beautiful epithet: Elysium deserted (*zaglokhshii Elizei*). The past may have passed, but enough of the estate remains to warrant calling it beautiful and enchanting. The poet no longer expects to be guided to remembrance. Rather, he internalizes it, convincing himself that some continuity between past and present exists (Mara is *still* beautiful). With the search for remembrance now aborted, the poet begins, in the last twenty lines of the poem, to envision a home not subject to the passage of time, an attempt at escaping memory altogether.

The reference to the estate as Elysium, however, raises a number of questions. In Baratynsky's time, to say that one had gone to the Elysian fields, that place in the afterlife where "eternal spring" reigns, meant that one had died. If Baratynsky's poet is already there, in Elysium, can we assume he is dead? And if he is dead, what sort of journey or visit are we witnessing in "Desolation"? Meanwhile, to suggest that this Elysium is deserted or overgrown (*zaglokhshii*) implies the absence of any sort of governing agency. What, then, does it mean to find oneself in an Elysium where not only is it not "eternal spring" but where the afterlife itself hints at its own fall from grace (you are still beautiful but clearly not what you once were)? And finally, insofar as the poet seeks remembrance of former years, does it make sense to think Elysium in terms of time rather than space?

Baratynsky, as we have already seen, played fast and loose with his references to mythology, deriving much of his poetic register and topoi from French and Russian elegy. To be

²⁷⁷ Baratynsky, "Desolation," 60.

sure, Elysium was not a static concept, located at one time at the earth's western frontier (Homer and Hesiod), and later in the underworld (Vergil). So it is not surprising that "Elysium" and "Elysian Fields," terms one finds only a half dozen times in Baratynsky's *oeuvre*, have several valences, a review of which may give us some idea as to how we should read the figure in "Desolation."²⁷⁸ In his earliest poetic reference, "Elysian Fields" (*Eliziiskie polia*, 1821), Baratynsky clearly draws on the tradition which located Elysium in the underworld (Cf. *Ne izmenias' v podzemnon mire*).²⁷⁹ In this text, which quickly transitions from elegy to friendly letter, nothing changes for the poet after death, aside from his place of residence. He even promises to visit the friends he leaves behind (*Ia naveshchu, o drugi, vas*) and to meet them in the afterlife (*My vstretim vas u vrat Aidesa*). Although the poem was not meant to be taken seriously, demonstrating elements of parody and self-parody,²⁸⁰ "Elysian Fields" already contains the theme of reunion after death that anticipates the end of "Desolation."

More pertinent for our purposes is "Lethe" (*Leta*, 1823), a text based on Millevoeye's "Le Fleuve d'oubli" (1808). "Lethe" shows the poet rejecting the prospect of memory's lapse into oblivion after death.

Душ холодных упованье,
Неприяженный ручей,
Чье докучное журчанье
Усыпляет Элизей!
Так! достоин ты укора:

²⁷⁸ Toporov also gives an overview of the "Elysian theme" in Baratynsky's poetry, but he comes to a difficult conclusion regarding its significance. Toporov argues that when Baratynsky suggests that his Elysium is still beautiful, the "remembrance of former years" remains for the poet the "most reliable, most real, and strongest connection to the past" (Toporov, "Ob odnom stikhotvorenii," 211). By contrast, I have been trying to argue that remembrance is the very thing that the "lyrical I" tries to abandon.

²⁷⁹ Baratynskii PSS, 65.

²⁸⁰ Baratynsky himself referred to the text as a "French trifle" appropriate only for literary almanacs. Igor' Pil'shchikov, "O 'frantsuzskoi shalosti' Baratynskogo," *Trudy po russkoi i slavianskoi filologii. Literaturovedenie. Novaia seriia* 1 (1994): 85-111.

Для чего в твоих водах
 Погибает без разбора
 Память горестей и благ?
 Прочь с нещадным утешеньем!
 Я минувшее люблю
 И вовек утех забвеньем
 Мук забвенья не куплю.²⁸¹

Hope of cold souls,
 Unkind river,
 Whose irksome gurgling
 Lulls to sleep Elysium!
 So! you are worthy of reproach:
 Why is it in your waters
 Perish without distinction
 Memories of sorrows and blessings?
 Away with your unmerciful consolation!
 I love the past,
 And never will I purchase the oblivion of my torments
 At the price of forgetting my pleasures.

In the first four lines, the poet addresses not so much Elysium as Lethe, the “unkind river” that lulls Elysium to sleep. Lethe is said to be the “hope of cold souls,” that is, the desire of those who do not cherish the past to forget. Although in line five Baratynsky uses the masculine form of “worthy” or “deserving” (*dostoin*), which raises the possibility that he is referring to *Elizei*, it seems more logical to conclude that he has in mind the stream or *ruchei*—hence the reference to “your waters” (*v tvoikh vodakh*). The poet asks rhetorically why Lethe salvages nothing of the memory of sorrows and blessings (*pamiat' gorestei i blag*), why both the good and the bad are forgotten indiscriminately (*bez razbora*). Attaining the desired afterlife comes at a cost (or to be more precise, “an unmerciful consolation”), one the poet refuses to pay. The poet loves the past (*Ia minuvshee liubliu*), and since one cannot erase one part of memory without sacrificing the whole, the poet returns his ticket, as it were, and declines the consolation of forgetting.

²⁸¹ Baratynskii PSS, 91.

“Lethe” adds several things to Baratynsky’s conception of Elysium. For one, the text indicates that the poet rejects less Elysium than Lethe, less the place than one of its features. One assumes that Baratynsky could accept this particular afterlife if it did not have this particular river. Secondly, the poem links Elysium to the theme of remembrance. The prospect of being lulled to sleep and thereby of forgetting the past is distasteful to the elegist because recollecting history—and especially painful events—is precisely the stuff of elegy.²⁸² To cease to remember means to cease writing poetry, or at least elegiac poetry. (We should note here that in “Desolation” the poet will, at least implicitly, reverse course and seek something like the renunciation of memory in the final lines) Finally, the poet announces his love of the past, *minuvshee*, that neuter, past active participle that contains good and bad and that will find its way into “Desolation” and precede the reference to Elysium by a single line (cf. *pust’ minuvshee minulo snom letuchim*). “Lethe” anticipates the idea that Elysium and the past are incompatible, though the poet privileges the latter. In “Desolation,” however, the poet will resign himself to the loss of both.

However abstract it might seem, Elysium in “Lethe” still appears as a place, just as it does in “Elysian Fields.” But we find Baratynsky’s most radical and significant contribution to the figure’s range of meanings in his poem “My Elysium” (*Moi Elizii*, 1831), where the poet locates Elysium in his memory.

Не славь, обманутый Орфей,
 Мне Элизийские селенья:
 Элизий в памяти моей
 И не кропим водой забвенья.
 В нем мир цветущий старины
 Умерших тени населяют,
 Привычки жизни сохраняют
 И чувств ее не лишены.

²⁸² “Lethe” was published in Baratynsky’s 1827 collection in his “second book” of elegies. Boratynskii PSSP, 2: 37.

Там жив ты, Дельвиг! там за чашей
 Еще со мною шутишь ты,
 Поешь веселье дружбы нашей
 И сердца юные мечты.²⁸³

Don't praise to me, Orpheus deceived,
 The Elysian settlements:
 Elysium is in my memory
 And is untouched by the water of oblivion.
 In memory the shades of the dead populate
 The world of old still blooming;
 They preserve their habits from life
 And are not deprived of its feelings.
 There you are alive, Delvig! there with a chalice
 You still banter with me,
 Singing the joy of our friendship
 And young dreams of the heart.

Bracketing off the reference to Orpheus and the question as to why he might be “deceived,” we see that the poet has created his own inviolable Elysium. The Elysium Orpheus praises is decidedly not the one the poet wants: once again, finding oneself there results in the loss of memory. Baratynsky figures his Elysium in the mind, in memory, where it has been not so much as sprinkled by Lethe’s waters (*I ne kropim vodoi zabven'ia*).²⁸⁴ We found a similar gesture in Lermontov’s “To the Memory of Odoevsky,” where the dead poet’s heart was interred in the mute graveyard of memory and thus kept safe from the passage of time.²⁸⁵ Here, however, the poet provides a more hopeful vision of what awaits the poet after death: not a universal forgetting, as in the Lermontov elegy, but a continuation of earthly activities. In this regard, “My Elysium” recalls the vision of the afterlife presented in “Elysian Fields,” though in a more serious vein.

²⁸³ Baratynskii PSS, 148.

²⁸⁴ One wonders if the absence of water in “Desolation”—*Daleche vody utekli*—was a prerequisite for identifying Mara as Elysium in this new sense.

²⁸⁵ And it is worth noting that “My Elysium” was written after the death of Baratynsky’s close friend, Anton Delvig.

To be sure, this will all be relevant to the conclusion of “Desolation,” but what pertains most to our discussion is the new figuration of Elysium. In the two earlier texts, Baratynsky follows the traditional figuration of Elysium as a place that awaits one in the afterlife. Represented both positively and negatively, the toponym was synonymous with death and forgetting. In “My Elysium” and “Desolation,” by contrast, Elysium is past-oriented. Not a place to which one expects to depart, this Elysium has always been accessible to memory. This is due to the fact that it is less a place than a time, one that can be immediately recalled. In these texts, the poet has already been to Elysium, already seen it, and insofar as it can be recollected it is a function of memory itself. One does not go to Elysium (it is not an anticipated place), one summons it forth and represents it. It is, therefore, the copy of something no longer extant.

The reference to Elysium in “Desolation” complicates matters to the extent that it suggests that the poet cannot find what he seeks: remembrance. At the same time, he can say that the estate is “still beautiful” only on the condition that memory “still” functions to provide a comparison of past and present. The poet remembers Mara before its desolation—otherwise the adverb “still” would make no sense. And memory here persists in at least one other way, too: Elysium (*Elizei*) is rhymed with the possessive pronoun “my” (*moei*), which, though properly speaking belongs with “soul” (*dushi*), by its placement cannot help but recall the poem in which the idea of Elysium as past-oriented is first formulated, “My Elysium.” So even though the poet ends his search for remembrance with the announcement of the past being passed (*minuvshee minulo*), memory, and by extension remembrance, have been operating the whole time behind the scenes, as it were.

To synthesize all of this then, one may read Elysium as being synonymous with displacement. Wherever the poet is, he is never in Elysium. Though he may have been there

before, Elysium remains a figure, a word referring to a vanished or altered world.²⁸⁶ But there is another dimension to this problem, one which has to do with reference itself. For it is clear that “Elysium” in Baratynsky’s poetry means several things, and we would not understand entirely the specific reference in “Desolation” without recourse to the other poems. When the poet claims that his Elysium continues to be beautiful, he also implies that the meaning he ascribes to the word (Elysium as a place memory figures) has also remained the same. The return home (if we can call it that) is dependent on a previous return, even if the return is solely linguistic. To say that Elysium exists in memory is only to *imply* that one has been there, at a previous time, but not to confirm that presence. The poet can never be home so long as he remembers the home as it was. I will try to demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter that Baratynsky’s poet, aware of this dilemma, attempts something like an escape from memory in order to envision a new kind of home—an attempt which necessarily fails.

V. Shade and Shadow Redux

The last twenty lines of “Desolation” recall the father’s relationship to Mara and the poet’s memory of him, and end by suggesting how father and son are to be reunited. The poem proceeds from past to present to future.

Тот не был мыслию, тот не был сердцем хладен,	50
Кто, безыменной неги жаден,	
Их своенравный бег тропам сим указал,	
Кто, преклоня слух к таинственному шуму	
Сих кленов, сих дубов, в душе своей питал	
Ему сочувственную думу.	55
Давно кругом меня о нем умолкнул слух,	
Прияла прах его далекая могила,	
Мне память образа его не сохранила,	

²⁸⁶ To be sure, some ten years later in “Pyroscaphe” (1844), the meaning of “Elysium” has changed once more: the poet expects to see it in this life, and soon: «Завтра увижу Элизий земной!» (Baratynskii PSS, 201). Could the various figurations simply have been a dry run for what was in fact a real hope of finding an earthly Elysium?

Но здесь еще живет его доступный дух;
 Здесь, друг мечтанья и природы, 60
 Я познаю его вполне [...] ²⁸⁷

He could not have been cold of heart or understanding
 Who, exquisite delights commanding,
 Gave all these winding paths their own peculiar bent,
 Who lent a ready ear to the mysterious keening
 Of maples, these old oaks, and, knowing what it meant,
 Preserved an empathy, a leaning.
 For long, concerning him no rumor reached my ear,
 Some far-off grave no doubt contained a rich
 Possession,
 My mem'ry had preserved no picture, no impression,
 And yet his spirit lives, still palpable, still here;
 A friend to reverie and nature,
 I sense him fully within [...] ²⁸⁸

The text contains overt references to Baratynsky's biography. The period when the poet's father Abram Andreevich Baratynsky, the *khudozhnik opytnyi* mentioned in line 19, designed the estate's orchard and park (*Ikh svoenravnyi beg tropam sim ukazal*) dates to 1804-1807.²⁸⁹ As already mentioned, the paths, which the poet remembers since childhood (*S godov mladencheskikh*), seemed to the poet to have an accidental course (*mechtaesh', peshekhod / Sluchaino protoptal*) insofar as they were conceived in the English style rather than the French. Hence the poet's sense that their pattern is wayward (*svoenravnyi*). Abram Andreevich died in 1810, not in Mara but in faraway Moscow (*Priiala prakh ego dalekaia mogila*), which is why the poet does not remember what he looked like (*Mne pamiat' obraza ego ne sokhranila*). And, finally, the father's death, having taken place over twenty years before "Desolation" was written, explains why no one speaks of him anymore (*Davno krugom menia o nem umolknul slukh*).

²⁸⁷ Baratynskii PSS, 170.

²⁸⁸ Baratynsky, "Desolation," 60.

²⁸⁹ *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva E. A. Baratynskogo*, ed. A. M. Peskov (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998), 426.

This passage, however, refers not only to details from Baratynsky's biography but also to literary tradition. One finds echoes both within the text and without. Thus the reference to the father's faraway grave is as much a recollection of a topos as it is of a personal event. Consider the lines from Dmitriev's 1798 "Elegy," addressed to his own brother: «Не буду твоего и праха даже зреть: / Далеко от своей ты родины скончался».²⁹⁰ And from here it is no great distance to Lermontov: «Но ты погиб далеко от друзей...». Baratynsky's text differs from these examples in the additional dimension it discerns in the adjective *dalekaia*—the father's death is remembered both at a spatial and temporal distance.

One could easily add to the number of allusions and intertexts here, but there might be a less obvious form of reference at play as well. Indeed, what is missing from the text might be as important as what is there. Thus, in the interplay of sound, silence, and memory, one cannot help but recall, once again, Batiushkov's "On the Ruins of a Castle in Sweden," particularly the way that text sets the stage for memory's entrance. Everything is silent or dead, and the surroundings bear witness to a past that might seem altogether inaccessible.

Все тихо: мертвый сон в обители глухой.
Но здесь живет воспоминанье.

Давно кругом меня о нем умолкнул слух [...]
Но здесь еще живет его доступный дух.

(«На развалинах замка в Швеции»)

(«Запустение»)

All is quiet: dead sleep in the remote abode.

For long, concerning him no rumor reached my
ear...

But here lives remembrance.

And yet his spirit lives, still palpable, still here...

(“On the Ruins of a Swedish Castle”)

(“Desolation”)

One text asserts that remembrance still lives, the other that spirit is still accessible (*dostupnyi*). I will return to the semantic difference Baratynsky's poem suggests in a moment—here I want to

²⁹⁰ I. I. Dmitriev, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1967), 333.

point out that Baratynsky could have omitted *eshche* and substituted *vospominan'e* for *ego dostupnyi dukh*, and retained the meter.

∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪
 Но здесь живет воспоминанье.

 ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪
 Но здесь еще живет его доступный дух.

But aside from violating the rhyme scheme, such a change would have missed something else taking place on the level of metrics. Given his tendency to use adjectives and epithets, rhythmic departures from the meter are not infrequent in Baratynsky's poetry. Such is also the case in "Desolation," so the hexameter line here, which observes every stressed syllable, ought to give us pause. The formula *no zdes' zhivet* leads us to expect *vospominan'e*, but Baratynsky accentuates *ego dostupnyi dukh*, a combination that observes each iambic stress. This does not mean that remembrance is altogether absent. Rather, Baratynsky's solution allows us to think of both at once. The "spirit" assumes privilege of place even as remembrance continues to loom in the background.

Semantically, of course, choosing *vospominan'e* would have reasserted the importance of remembrance at the very moment it is being renounced. One should not forget that the failure of memory, which the poet has traced from the beginning, takes a new turn here. For not only has the father been forgotten (*Davno krugom menia o nem umolknul slukh*), memory no longer proves capable of representation. The perfective verb *sokhranit'* indicates that, at some point, memory did not preserve any figure or image of the father (*Mne pamiat' obraza ego ne sokhranila*). In Batiushkov, remembrance mediated between past and present by offering a representation of the former. In Baratynsky, by contrast, the past is relegated to a different role, one with implications for the value of memory. When the poet renounces the past (*pust' minuvshee minulo snom letuchim!*), he also implies that memory no longer performs its most basic function. With memory incapable of creating any sort of image, figure, or representation,

the poet locates the past in the present by troping the father as spirit. The poet does not recall the father, but recognizes him completely in what he sees (*Zdes', drug mechtan'ia i prirody, / Ia poznaiu ego vpolne*. Like remembrance in Batiushkov, spirit in Baratynsky is immediate, recognizable, “accessible” (*dostupnyi*). Baratynsky underscores this immediacy in his rhetoric of completion. Note the repetition of the root *poln-*: just as Elysium is still full of charm (*I obaianiem moguchim / Ispolnen dlia dushi moei*), spirit is still perceivable entirely (*vpolne*). Having sought and failed to find remembrance, the poet insists that he only needs to be present at the site of the former home to sense something of the past. And this “something,” spirit, leads the poet to a vision not of the past but of the future—to a place beyond memory.

The last eight lines then attempt to reestablish a kind of continuity, but on a different temporal plane, an attempt with implications for the way we read the spirit, the grammatical subject.

Он вдохновением волнуется во мне,
 Он славить мне велит леса, долины, воды;
 Он убедительно пророчит мне страну,
 Где я наследую несрочную весну, 65
 Где разрушения следов я не примечу,
 Где в сладостной тени невянущих дубров,
 У нескудеющих ручьев,
 Я тень, священную мне, встречу.²⁹¹

He inspires my soul in ecstasy to sing,
 He bids me hymn the woods, the streams, and every
 creature;
 He firmly gives his word that there will be a land
 Where one day I shall find a springtime without end,
 Where no trace of decay exists for me to see there,
 And where the shady oaks, forever fresh and green,
 By never-failing waters lean,
 That shade most dear to me will be there.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Baratynskii PSS, 171.

²⁹² Baratynsky, “Desolation,” 60-61.

If one reads the text of “Desolation” as it was published in the 1957 edition of Baratynsky’s poems, these eight lines appear on a separate page. Though entirely accidental, this particular graphic layout makes it easy to forget that, on the previous page, the father appears as a living subject, in the nominative case (*Tot ne byl mysluu, tot ne byl serdtsem khladen*). But when the poet refers to his father after the latter’s death, he refers to him in different cases (e.g. *Davno krugom menia o nem umolknul slukh, Mne pamiat’ obraza ego ne sokhranila*). When we arrive at the final eight lines, we might almost think that the *on* mentioned three times and doing the commanding and prophesying might be the father, until we remember that the pronoun is not “he,” the father, but rather “it,” the spirit (*dukh*), which grammatically is masculine. And most startling here is that after the almost incantatory lines in which it is absolutely clear that the spirit is masculine, the poem closes with the poet meeting not the spirit but rather the grammatically feminine shade (*ten’*), in the shade or shadow of the unfading oak woods (*v sladostnoi teni nebianushchikh dubrov*). If the sentence begins with a masculine subject (*On*), it ends by prophesying its own displacement into the position of object (note the accusative ending of *ten’ sviashchennuiu*).²⁹³ Not only have we passed into a vision of the future, but the father during this same time has undergone a series of transfigurations.

If the final lines have far-reaching implications, they also raise a number of questions. For instance, what does the father hope for the son? And does the son look forward only to reuniting with the father, or does the poem also hint that he yearns for immortality? What seems certain is that spirit inspires the poet (*On vdokhnoveniem volnuetsia vo mne*) and prompts him to write (*On slavit’ mne velit lesa, doliny, vody*). If the spirit tells the son to glorify the trees, valleys

²⁹³ In case there was any doubt, we know that Baratynsky is speaking of the father’s shade from another redaction of the poem where the last line reads: «Я тень отеческую встречу!» Boratynskii PSSP, 2: 304.

and waters, then the poem we have been reading is, of course, the fulfillment of the command, for the poem praises these very things in its insistence that it, Elysium, is still beautiful.

Meanwhile, the spirit prophesies a country (*stranu*) that will be revealed in three successive moments, as indicated by the perfective aspect of each verb: the poet will inherit everlasting spring (*Gde ia nasleduiu*²⁹⁴ *nesrochnuii*²⁹⁵ *vesnu*); he will witness there no signs of decay (*Gde razrushniia sledov ia ne primechu*); and finally, he will meet the shade that is sacred to him (*Ia ten', sviashchennuii mne, vstrechu*). E. V. Kapinos discerns behind the epithet *nesrochnaia* a connection with the first eight lines of the poem, which also depict spring. Having reached the end, we are meant to think back to the beginning and to realize that spring does not serve as a kind of “elegiac contrast” with autumn, but may in fact be near at hand, everlasting.²⁹⁶

Scholars often note Baratynsky’s unique use of epithets and the not entirely unrelated tendency toward negative representation.²⁹⁷ Although the final lines of “Desolation” are certainly no exception, I want to underscore the relevance this tendency has to our theme of remembrance. The poet speaks of a spring that is interminable (*nesrochnaia*), of oak trees that do not wither (*neviaushchikh*), and of brooks that do not run dry (*neskudeiushchikh*). In a word, the poet envisions a space free of time and time’s effects, a place where spring never lapses. But if there is no time, or, to use Baratynsky’s own rhetoric, if nothing is touched by ruination, there are

²⁹⁴ To be sure, *nasledovat'* can be both imperfective and perfective. We can infer the aspect from the context, namely the other perfective verbs.

²⁹⁵ The epithet *nesrochnaia* is apparently a textological variant, one that has not only gone uncorrected in many editions of Baratynsky’s words but that has also been reflected in the broader literary tradition. Recall, for instance, Bunin’s short story “Nesrochnaia vesna” (1923), inspired in part by “Desolation.” See Igor’ Pil’shchikov’s review of the 2000 edition of Baratynsky’s works in *Philologica* vol. 6, no. 14/16 (1999/2000): 377-390, esp. 379; and Boratynskii PSSP, 2: 305. For a discussion of Baratynsky and Bunin, see E. V. Kapinos, “Elegiia v proze: ‘Nesrochnaia vesna’ I. A. Bunina,” *Kritika i semiotika* 14 (2010): 197-201.

²⁹⁶ E. V. Kapinos, “‘Negativnye opisaniia,’” 18-24.

²⁹⁷ Cf. L. G. Frizman, *Tvorcheskii put' Baratynskogo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), 37-38; I. Semenko, *Poety pushkinskoi pory*, 240-242; Lazar’ Fleishman, “Ob odnom prieme Baratynskogo,” in *Quinquagenario. Sbornik statei molodykh filologov k 50-letiiu prof. Iu. M. Lotmana* (Tartu, 1972), 147-153.

immediate implications for memory and the poetic mode that represents it: specifically, there can be no memory without change and by extension no elegy. Baratynsky's way out of the "Elysium of the past," as Bunin phrased it, leads to the Elysium of the afterlife, where the categories of past and present no longer prevail.²⁹⁸ The spirit's prophecy thus proves to be, in some measure, compensatory: what the son lacks in temporal experience will be more than made up for in space. Perhaps the poet is willing after all to erase the memory of suffering at the price of forgetting his pleasures, too.²⁹⁹

It is surprising then, to say the least, that just as the poet glimpses the country that awaits him, just as he is envisioning his rendezvous with the "sacred shade" and implying the end of memory and elegy, his rhetoric remains firmly anchored in the past, in text. For the ending of "Desolation" echoes a work we have already discussed, namely "Excerpts from the Poema *Remembrance*."

Счастлив, счастлив и тот, кому дано судьбою
От странствий отдохнуть под кровлею родною,
Увидеть милую, **священную страну**,
Где жизни он провел прекрасную **весну**,
Провел невинное, безоблачное детство.
О край моих отцов! о мирное **наследство!**
Всегда присутственны вы в памяти моей:
И в берегах крутых сверкающий **ручей**,
И светлые луга, и темные **дубравы**,
И сельских жителей приветливые нравы.
Приятно вспоминать младенческие дни...

(«Отрывки из поэмы «Воспоминания»)³⁰⁰

Happy, happy is he to whom fate lets

Он вдохновением волнуется во мне,
Он славить мне велит леса, долины, воды;
Он убедительно пророчит мне **страну**,
Где я **наследую** несрочную **весну**,
Где разрушения следов я не примечу,
Где в сладостной тени невянущих
дубров,
У нескудеющих **ручьев**,
Я тень, **священную** мне, встречу.

(«Запустение»)³⁰¹

He inspires my soul in ecstasy to sing,

²⁹⁸ Remember that in virtually every reference to Elysium in Baratynsky's works, we find the idea of communing with the dead as if they had never died.

²⁹⁹ See the discussion of "Lethe" above.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 53.

³⁰¹ Baratynskii PSS, 171.

Relax under native roof from wanderings,
 And see his dear, sacred country,
 Where he spent the lovely spring of life,
 Spent his innocent, serene childhood.
 Land of my forebears! peaceful heritage!
 You are always present in my memory:

On steep banks, the shimmering stream,
 And light meadows, and dark oak groves,
 And welcoming customs of country folk.
 It is pleasing to remember days of infancy...

He bids me hymn the woods, the stream, and
 every creature;
 He firmly gives his word that there will be a
 land
 Where one day I shall find a springtime
 without end,

Where no trace of decay exists for me to see
 there,
 And where the shady oaks, forever fresh and
 green,
 By never-failing waters lean,
 That shade most dear to me will be
 there.³⁰²

(“Excerpts from the Poema *Remembrance*”)

(“Desolation”)

One hardly needs to point out the irony here, in which one text that seems to suggest the liberation from memory recalls another text that openly glorifies remembrance. “Desolation” even retains the “country / spring” (*stranu / vesnu*) rhyme pair in the same case (accusative). Whether the combination represents one of those essential rhymes on the order of Pushkin’s “will / fate” (*volia / dolia*) and stands in for an entire worldview,³⁰³ or whether it is simply fortuitous,³⁰⁴ the rhetoric of the spirit’s prophesy depends on an earlier text. In fact, the sacred shade the poet hopes to meet may also be little more than text remembered from Andrei Turgenev’s “Elegy.”³⁰⁵ True liberation from memory, it would seem, presupposes liberation from language.

³⁰² Baratynsky, “Desolation,” 60-61.

³⁰³ Abram Tertz, *Strolls With Pushkin*, trans. Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy and Slava Yastremski (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 64-67. See also David Bethea, *Realizing Metaphors*, 64-65.

³⁰⁴ The latter possibility seems less likely, given that the rhyme pair occurs in other poems. Cf. the lines written in 1819: «Ты помнишь милую страну, / Где жизнь и радость мы узнали, / Где зрели первую весну «...». Boratynskii PSSP, 1: 340.

³⁰⁵ «И время быстрое блаженства твоего, / И тень священная, и образ вечно милый / Воскреснут, оживут в душе твоей унылой» (Andrei Turgenev, “Elegiia,” in *Poety 1790-1810-kh godov*, ed. M. G. Al’tshuller [Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1971], 243).

Coda: Belinsky's "Elegy in Prose"

One of my aims in this dissertation was to trace a “moment,” as it were, that comes to be figured in rather different ways in Russian elegiac literature of the early nineteenth century. This moment is the elegist’s awareness of a problem in the expression of loss, namely that one cannot write in isolation from the history of text, of language. In Lermontov, we saw that the rhetoric of mourning can be put in the service of different—and even mutually exclusive—ends, a procedure that leaves us with little faith in the sincerity of mourning. Meanwhile, Karamzin’s explicit gesturing toward the “literariness” of his own representations opens up new avenues for exploring sentimentalism’s “other” even as it shows us the extent to which we fictionalize alterity. Finally, Baratynsky teaches us the impossibility of a poetic transcending of memory (and by extension, elegy) insofar as memory is based in language.

This conclusion cannot help but raise several questions regarding our understanding of elegy, literary history, and writing in general. Indeed, how do we know when mourning is sincere? How can narratives about elegy (e.g. the “death of a poet”) be written when it is unclear who or what the subject of elegy is? Does not all writing, as Derrida suggests, at once differ and defer, resulting in a play of *différance*?³⁰⁶

The answer to any of these questions might easily require a separate dissertation, and so, by necessity, my concluding remarks have to be more modest and limited in scope. Here I would simply like to bring our discussion back to criticism as a way of showing yet another dimension to the problem I have delineated. These final pages should at least hint at the challenge the questions above pose to anyone who seeks an easy answer.

It is somewhat puzzling, to say that least, that Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), Russia’s first literary critic of any significance, inaugurated his career with an elegy, if only because elegy

³⁰⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-27.

was associated with a “period” (the Karamzin era) that had not produced “literature” as Belinsky understood the term. And yet Belinsky unmistakably conceived his sprawling, programmatic essay “Literary Reveries” (*Literaturnye mechtaniia*, 1834) as a particular genre, specifically “An Elegy in Prose” (*Elegiia v proze*).³⁰⁷ What exactly makes this text elegiac is not explicitly disclosed until the end, at a point when Belinsky also admits that he has deviated from his initial purpose, and not quite in the best possible way (*Nachal za zdравie, a svel za upokoi*).³⁰⁸ Even before this, however, one discerns generic markers on the level of rhetoric.

Belinsky begins thus:

Do you remember [*Pomnite li vy*] that blissful time when, in our literature, a breath of life was about to be awakened, and talent after talent appeared, *poema* after *poema*, novel after novel, journal after journal, almanac after almanac; that exquisite time when we took such pride in the present, nursed ourselves on the future, and, proud of our reality and even more so of our sweet hopes, we were so confident that we had our own Byrons, Shakespeares, Schillers, and Walter Scotts? Alas! Where are you, o bon vieux temps; where are you, pleasant dreams; where are you, seductive hope! How everything has changed in such a short time!

Помните ли вы то блаженное время, когда в нашей литературе пробудилось было какое-то дыхание жизни, когда появлялся талант за талантом, поэма за поэмою, роман за романом, журнал за журналом, альманах за альманахом; то прекрасное время, когда мы так гордились настоящим, так лелеяли себя будущим, и, гордые нашею действительностию, а еще более сладостными надеждами, твердо были уверены, что имеем своих Байронов, Шекспиров, Шиллеров, Вальтер Скоттов? Увы! где ты, o bon vieux temps, где вы, мечты отрадные, где ты, надежда-обольститель! Как всё переменилось в столь короткое время!³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ Herbert E. Bowman suggests that Belinsky intended his essay to be a counterpart to *Eugene Onegin*: “But an elegy, even in prose, remains in spirit a work of poetry, a song. At the outset the suggestion is thus made that if Belinski was to write of Russian literature in a mood of melancholy regret, he was also able to express his regret with a lyrical enthusiasm for his subject. [...] The earnest style demonstrates more effectively than an argument the critic’s hope for the national literature even while he expresses his dismay at its contemporary state. The lyrical outburst within the analytical dissection sounds the note of idealism throughout the elegy of negative criticism” (Herbert E. Bowman, *Vissarion Belinski, 1811-1848: A Study in the Origins of Social Criticism in Russia* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954], 54). See also Edward J. Brown, “So Much Depends... Russian Critics in Search of ‘Reality,’” *The Russian Review* 48.4 (October 1989): 356-357.

³⁰⁸ V. G. Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, in 13 vols. (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1953-1959), 1: 103.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 20.

From the opening lines we are in the world of elegy. For one thing, Belinsky invites us to “remember,” a gesture that foregrounds the past, a better and “blissful” time from which we are now disconnected. The past Belinsky invokes held great promise for the future of literature, and indeed, an age that teemed with creative talents and was convinced it had its own Byrons and Shakespeares is being presented to underscore our present deprivation. To be sure, the rhetoric is slightly misleading: to say that the Russian readership of that time was “convinced” (*uvereny*) that its literary heritage could already count geniuses among its ranks implies a delusion, however slight. In any event, the elegiac cast is unmistakable, and readers of this essay will remember how the first “installment” ends, namely with the announcement that Russia has no literature (*u nas net literatury*).

What is more, he invokes this time with the rhetoric of elegy. Reveries (*mechtaniia*), remembrance (*pomnite*), awakening (*probudilos'*), bliss (*blazhennoe*)—these are all words that would have been at home in any elegy by Zhukovsky or Batiushkov. Belinsky’s use of a generically-specific vocabulary to invoke the past underscores the metaliterary dimension of his essay. At first glance, then, it would seem that the choice of medium (prose over poetry) comprises the primary difference between Belinsky and his predecessors.

But it is also readily apparent from the same opening lines that elegy might not be Belinsky’s sole generic orientation, that in fact elegy might be competing with an epic impulse. For “Literary Reveries” is ultimately a list, not merely of literary figures (Byrons and Shakespeares) or even of genres (novels and *poemy*), but of periods and definitions of literature, too. These lists are occasionally of such length that Belinsky dramatizes his own fatigue after finishing them.³¹⁰ To say that Belinsky, in true Romantic fashion, is simply mixing genres does

³¹⁰ «Уф! устал! Дайте перевести дух» (Oh, I’m tired! Let me catch my breath) (Ibid., 1: 23).

not tell us much about where this elegy is going or what its purpose *qua* elegy might be. What it might suggest, however, is that Belinsky has discerned that tendency of elegy to be something other than itself; or to put it another way, he too may have recognized the disjuncture between the intention to write elegy and the result of that intent. It remains to be seen just what Belinsky's contribution to the genre will be.

Without rehearsing all the arguments Belinsky brings in defense of his central claim—namely, that Russia has had literary talents, but nothing that amounts to a tradition or “literature” writ large—it is worth pausing over one passage in particular that implies that a national literature cannot, or at least should not, be elegiac. Regarding his three definitions of literature, Belinsky argues that Russia meets the requirements for the first two, but not for the third. The third kind of literature requires writers who, among other things, “completely express and reproduce in their elegant creations the spirit of that people among whom they are born and raised, the life of whom they live and the spirit of whom they breath”; writers who express their people's “inner life down to its most concealed depths and pulsations.”³¹¹ Genuine literary traditions arise organically; they are the reflections of a specific people, or to be more precise, of a people's “spirit” and “inner life.”³¹² Literature develops gradually (*bez skachkov*) and naturally (and presumably, without interruption), which is why there can be no discussion of “foreign” influence or transplantation of one tradition to another (in other words, there can be no

³¹¹ «Но есть еще третье мнение, не похожее ни на одно из обоих предыдущих, мнение, вследствие которого литературою называется собрание такого рода художественно-словесных произведений, которые суть плод свободного вдохновения и дружных (хотя и неусловленных) усилий людей, созданных для искусства, дышащих для одного его и уничтожающихся вне его, вполне выражающих и воспроизводящих в своих изящных созданиях дух того народа, среди которого они живут и духом которого дышат, выражающих в своих творческих произведениях его внутреннюю жизнь до сокровеннейших глубин и биений» (Ibid., 1: 24).

³¹² Belinsky will also say that literature should be a “symbol of the inner life of a people” (Ibid, 1: 29). It is curious that Russia's foremost proponent of realism should describe literature in these terms, for it implies that art should strive for a kind of symbolism. See Matthew Walker, “Gogol's Ghosts: On the History of Nikolai Gogol in Russian Literary Criticism,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010), 99 and elsewhere.

displacement). Rather, if there is a governing trope behind the representation of a people's spirit and inner life, it is more likely repetition, for writers here are called upon to reproduce (*vosproizvodit'*) spirit rather than produce it. Even when they express (*vyrazhat'*) inner life, writers essentially repeat what is already given.

It would seem that the kind of literature Belinsky envisions for Russia cannot be elegiac, and not merely because he associates elegy, at least in part, with "tearfulness" (*slezhivost'*) and "maudlinism" (*plaksivost'*). A people cannot be defined as being fundamentally lachrymose: such a description tells us more about that writer than the people he describes. Karamzin, properly speaking, does not "express" the eighteenth century because maudlinism did not comprise the age.³¹³ It does, however, characterize to some extent Karamzin's writings. To express adequately a people's spirit, one must be natural and sincere, a prerequisite Karamzin, with his tendency toward verbiage (*frazeologiya*), cannot meet. The idea that it was unbecoming for a grown man to weep over the minutiae of reality was a recurrent criticism of elegy in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Here the more important implication for our purposes is not so much that one person cannot represent an entire people, but that language, simply put, gets in the way. Karamzin, according to Belinsky, was far from sincerity; in fact, the former's references to tears and suffering amounted to nothing more than "coquetry" and "walking on stilts." Rhetoric was a game, and one to be deplored, at that.

But one should also bear in mind at this point that if elegy typically proceeds from a loss, or at least the sense of one, then it is slightly bewildering to think about what Belinsky himself might be lamenting. After all, his claim that Russia has no literature hides an ambiguity. The Russian is: «У нас нет литературы». To say that someone is absent or is dead (*ego net*) can

³¹³ «Характер осьмнадцатого столетия отнюдь не состоит в одной пласивости» (Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 1: 59).

mean both) has unmistakable elegiac overtones; the central claim makes it sound as though literature is deceased and no longer among us. This is, of course, not quite what Belinsky is saying, and in the case of “Literary Reveries,” there is no such presumption of a former existence. Rather, Belinsky appears to be mourning something that never was. It is not that Russia had literature at one time and now lacks it but that each “period” of Russian “literature”³¹⁴ proved an illusion, failing to deliver on its promises. And each representative of his respective period, in different ways, could have done more for this inchoate tradition.³¹⁵ Russian literature, as Mandelstam might say, has yet to be born.

It is only at the end of his essay that Belinsky offers some concrete idea as to what he means by calling “Literary Reveries” an elegy.

Having begun this article, I intended to scoff at our contemporary literature, and I myself do not know how I wound up in such a great expanse. I started off well, but ended badly (*Nachal za zdравie, a svel za upokoi*). This happens not infrequently in our careers. And so, I admit openly: do not look for strict logical order in my elegy in prose. Elegists were never known for their great soundness of thinking. I intended to express a few truths—some already said by others, some I myself have noticed—but I lacked the time to think through and polish my article. I love truth and desire the common good, but perhaps I lack thorough knowledge.

Начав писать эту статью, я имел в предмете позубоскалить над современною нашею литературою, и сам не знаю, как зашел в такую даль. Начал за здравие, а свел за упокой. Это нередко случается в делах жизни. Итак, признаюсь откровенно: не ищите в моей элегии в прозе строгого логического порядка. Элегисты никогда не отличались большою правильностью мышления. Я имел целию высказать несколько истин, частию уже сказанных, частию мною самим замеченных, но не имел времени хорошенько обдумать и обработать свою статью; у меня есть

³¹⁴ Belinsky alternately uses two words to refer to Russian “literature”: *literatura* and *slovesnost*. He tends to favor the latter.

³¹⁵ Regarding Karamzin: «Теперь другой вопрос: столько ли он сделал, сколько мог, или меньше? Отвечаю утвердительно: *меньше*»; regarding Pushkin: «Я верю, думаю, и мне отраднo верить и думать, что Пушкин подарит нас новыми созданиями, которые будут выше прежних...» (Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 1:59, 74).

любовь к истине и желание общего блага, но, может быть, нет основательных познаний.³¹⁶

Belinsky himself admits to the disjuncture between intention and execution,³¹⁷ or at least to the change that occurred during the process of writing: he started off well, but ended badly. Of course, the Russian *Nachal za zdравie, a svel za upokoi* contains several possible meanings: to start off cheerfully and end on a melancholy note, or to change one's viewpoint entirely. We can rule out the first, but the second possibility is relevant to our thesis. To be sure, it seems, if anything, that Belinsky, having made his point regarding the paucity of "artists by vocation," now strikes a hopeful note for the future, a time when Russia will have "literature." This transition may not constitute a change in perspective, but neither does it have to be considered part of the original design, at least if we are going to take Belinsky's assertion seriously. In any event, it is clear that some sort of deviation (displacement?) has occurred and that this deviation has something to do with the chosen genre.

But there is another moment to be considered here. We are advised not to look for logical consistency in this elegy in prose because elegists have never been known for precision of thought. In titling his essay an "elegy in prose," did Belinsky know in advance that he would depart from his original intention? Or is the advice not to seek "logic" yet one more result of writing elegy, an unintended consequence? The answer to these questions depends on whether

³¹⁶ Ibid., 1: 103.

³¹⁷ Compare this to Paul de Man's remarks on the "disjunction" between *das Gemeinte* (what is meant) and the *Art des Meinens* (the way in which language means) in Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator": "The way in which I can try to mean is dependent upon linguistic properties that are not only [not] made by me, because I depend on the language as it exists for the devices which I will be using, it is as such not made by us as historical beings, it is perhaps not even made by humans at all. Benjamin says, from the beginning, that it is not at all certain that language is in any sense human. To equate language with humanity—as Schiller did—is in question. If language is not necessarily human—if we obey the law, if we function within language, and purely in terms of language—there can be no intent; there may be an intent of meaning, but there is no intent in the purely formal way in which we will use language independently of the sense or the meaning" (Paul de Man, "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" in *The Resistance to Theory* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986], 87).

Belinsky's definition of elegy has been consistent from the beginning. If it has, then the detour has been part of the plan all along, and we can assume that this "laying bare of the device," not unlike Karamzin's figure of interruption, is not so much an apologia necessitated by the direction the essay has taken as an integral part of the text. By contrast, to entertain the other possibility—that Belinsky settled on a genre without anticipating the exact consequences of that decision—raises important questions about elegy, not the least of which being whether one ever knows exactly what one is doing when one attempts elegy.

Belinsky's somewhat ambivalent association with elegists amounts to an exercise in truth telling, one that is said to be lacking in certain respects. Professing his love for truth and desire for the common good, Belinsky admits that he might not have foundational knowledge. The idea that one can attempt to proclaim truths without a foundation is itself curious, for it suggests that truth has to be taken on faith.³¹⁸ More importantly, however, these truths are not all his own; some have been mentioned before. "Literary Reveries" not only has a specific generic orientation, it is inextricably bound up with the very rhetoric of the tradition from which it takes its cue. By his own admission, some of what Belinsky writes has already been said, which is only another way of saying that part of his essay is informed by repetition. A thorough commentary might go some way in distinguishing the old from the new in Belinsky's text, but my point is that Belinsky himself calls attention to the "citational" dimension of his truths. Once again, he reveals one of the primary mechanisms by which elegies are made.

To synthesize all of this then, one might say that Belinsky, in a single passage, has discovered a great deal more about elegy than the genre's supposed absence of logic. Indeed, he

³¹⁸ Belinsky suggests a page or so earlier that if he has not made his point, the failure is due to his own inability rather than to falsity of the claim: «Я начал мою статью с того, что у нас нет литературы: не знаю, убедило ли вас в этой истине мое обозрение; только знаю, что если нет, то в том виновато мое неуменье, а отнюдь не то, чтобы доказываемое мною положение было ложно» (Ibid., 1: 101).

has touched on three of the figures that informed elegiac practice from at least 1790 to the time of “Literary Reveries.” However, a separate study will be needed to determine whether the figures of repetition, interruption, and displacement continued to define elegiac literature after Belinsky’s discovery, or whether they merely comprised a moment in Russian literature’s period of incubation.

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